

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1 March 2022

- \* Councillor Paul Spooner (Chairman)
- \* Councillor James Walsh (Vice-Chairman)

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|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Councillor Chris Blow       | * Councillor Maddy Redpath    |
| * Councillor Guida Esteves  | * Councillor Tony Rooth       |
| * Councillor Angela Goodwin | * Councillor Will Salmon      |
| * Councillor Jan Harwood    | * Councillor Deborah Seabrook |
| * Councillor George Potter  | * Councillor Fiona White      |

\*Present

Councillors Joss Bigmore (Leader of the Council), Tom Hunt (Lead Councillor for Development Management), Julia McShane (Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Community and Housing), Ramsey Nagaty, John Redpath (Lead Councillor for Economy), John Rigg (Lead Councillor for Regeneration), James Steel (Lead Councillor for Environment), Cait Taylor (Lead Councillor for Climate Change), and Catherine Young were also in attendance.

### **OS58 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

The Committee was advised of an apology for absence from Councillor Chris Blow.

### **OS59 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT AND DECLARATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

### **OS60 MINUTES**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 18 January 2022 were agreed.

### **OS61 COVID-19 RESPONSE - UPDATE**

The Chair indicated at the outset of the item that the Committee would receive an update on the response to COVID-19 at its next meeting.

The Senior Specialist Public Health gave a presentation on the current COVID-19 situation and the Council's response, beginning with an update on local cases. She advised that the COVID-19 infection rate in Surrey was falling rapidly but remained high and higher than the rates for England and for the South East. The meeting was informed that for the week ending 25 February the rate for Surrey was 521.7 per 100,000, the national rate was 374.5 per 100,000, and the South East rate was 491.5 per 100,000. The Senior Specialist Public Health stated that Guildford's rate was currently 453.6 per 100,000, while England's rate was 303.7 per 100,000. The presentation provided to the meeting indicated that as at 25 February there were 293 registered COVID-related deaths in Guildford.

The Senior Specialist Public Health advised that vaccination rates in Guildford were in line with the average across Surrey and higher than the average rate for England. The meeting was informed of efforts to increase vaccinations locally and changes to the distribution of lateral flow tests, including the door-to-door supply of test kits in Ash and in Stoke.

The meeting was advised of the four key principles of the government's Living with COVID plan: removing any domestic restrictions; protecting the most vulnerable through targeted vaccination and testing; maintaining resilience, through ongoing surveillance and contingency planning; and securing innovations and opportunities from the COVID-19 response. The meeting was advised of a return to the office for Council staff in line with the Council's agile working policy and the return of services such as intergenerational activities in Community Services.

In response to a question, the Senior Specialist Public Health advised that the ability to scale back up the response to COVID-19 would be maintained. The Regulatory Services Manager indicated that councils would manage outbreaks under the Living with COVID plan.

In reply to questions from Committee members, the Senior Specialist Public Health confirmed that the vaccination rates for Guildford were the average for Surrey. She advised the meeting of possible popup vaccination sites, including a nightclub in Guildford town centre, and undertook to continue providing information updates to Councillors.

The Chair thanked the officers for attending.

#### **OS62 GUILDFORD AND WAVERLEY COLLABORATION - UPDATE**

The Joint Chief Executive of Guildford and Waverley Councils updated the Committee on the collaboration programme, including progress with both the Inter-Authority Agreement (IAA) and a shared joint management team. The meeting was informed that the heads of terms of the IAA should be submitted to both Councils for agreement in April. The Joint Chief Executive advised that the options for the joint shared management team, including a timetable for implementation, would be presented to him at the end of March and then communicated more widely.

In addition, the Joint Chief Executive informed the Committee that he was working with the executives of both councils to summarise the partnership's joint vision statement agreed the previous summer and advised of his involvement in monitoring the milestones of the collaboration project. The Joint Chief Executive indicated that opportunities for shared services and improved use of properties were being identified as the collaboration programme progressed.

There were no questions from Councillors and the Chair thanked the Joint Chief Executive for his update.

#### **OS63 QUESTION SESSION WITH LEAD COUNCILLOR FOR REGENERATION**

The Chair introduced the Lead Councillor for Regeneration and reminded the meeting of Councillor Rigg's areas of responsibility: the Town Centre Master Plan; infrastructure; major projects; and strategic asset management.

The following information, clarifications, and responses were provided during the ensuing discussion with the Lead Councillor for Regeneration.

- A member of the Committee asked for a summary of the current projects that the Lead Councillor for Regeneration was most worried about and those he was most pleased with. In response, the Lead Councillor for Regeneration indicated he was worried about several major projects: Ash Road Bridge at £37.7million; Weyside Urban Village Development at £350 million; Guildford Park Road at £100 million; Guildford West and Guildford East railway stations; North Street redevelopment at £250 million; and Walnut Bridge at £5 million. He stated that his worries related to outside agencies, internal resources, budgets, construction cost inflation, planning

policies, and opposition to change. In addition, he advised the meeting he was concerned about the St Mary's Wharf Development.

- With reference to Ash Road Bridge, the Lead Councillor for Regeneration informed the meeting of concerns and cost price inflation due to a delay in Network Rail approving a bridge design. The Lead Councillor for Regeneration stated that delivery of the Weyside Urban Village project was being affected by Surrey County Council's delay in approving road improvements. With reference to the Guildford Park Road project as an example, he advised of difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff to project manage the Council's major projects and questioned whether the Council should be acting as the housing developer of the site.
- The Lead Councillor for Regeneration advised that the current two-week delay to the Walnut Bridge project would increase, and he expected the project to be over-budget at £5.5 million and completed in July 2022. North Street development was put forward by the Lead Councillor for Regeneration as an example of a project he was pleased with.
- In reply to a question, the Lead Councillor for Regeneration updated the meeting on the flood alleviation scheme in Guildford town centre. He emphasized the importance of flood alleviation to Guildford town centre to protect existing homes and businesses and to release for development land that was currently used for surface car parking. The Lead Councillor for Regeneration praised the assistance of the Environment Agency and advised the Committee of a grant application to Surrey County Council for £480,000 from the empty homes fund towards modelling options. He indicated that the scheme would consist of upstream storage and flood defence walls, implemented in a zoned approach.
- A member of the Committee referred to the flooding responsibilities of Surrey County Council and asked which resources the County Council was targeting to Guildford. The Lead Councillor for Regeneration indicated that the Council was funding the flood alleviation plan in anticipation that Surrey County Council would contribute to its implementation costs.
- In reply to a question, the Lead Councillor for Regeneration undertook to provide Committee members with the Council's expenditure on the flooding scheme to date. In addition, he agreed to provide to Committee members the cost details of external consultants and expertise procured for the Council's major projects.
- The Lead Councillor for Regeneration informed the Committee that a shortage of resources at Network Rail was causing the delay in the Ash Road Bridge project
- The Chair questioned whether the involvement of the Council in matters that were the responsibilities of other organisations indicated a change in approach by the Lead Councillor for Regeneration.
- A member of the Committee observed that the bulk of the Shaping Guildford's Future project appeared to be focused on a riverside corridor and asked what was envisaged for the rest of the town centre. The Lead Councillor for Regeneration spoke of the importance of including the historic core of the town centre, transportation routes and modes, and potential brownfield housing sites within the scope of Shaping Guildford's Future.

- In response to a question about the deliverables from the next stage of the Shaping Guildford's Future project, the Lead Councillor for Regeneration suggested that there was a lack of town centre policies aiming to deliver regeneration and agreed that a series of site allocations with supporting policies would be an outcome of the project.
- In reply to a query about the consultancy cost of the Shaping Guildford's Future project, the Lead Councillor for Regeneration advised the meeting that phase 1 had cost approximately £1 million, phase 2 £1.5 million, with an additional £3 million allocated for next year. He indicated that outputs of the project would include flood studies and reports on infrastructure and land titles, and an updated Town Centre Master Plan. The Lead Councillor for Regeneration suggested that the project would identify sites with an overall capacity for 3,000 homes.
- With reference to a recent presentation given to Councillors by Grainger plc on a partnership between a private developer and the Council to deliver affordable homes for rent, the Lead Councillor for Regeneration indicated that this was part of a process of identifying housing options.
- In reply to questions about the redevelopment of the bus station in Guildford, the Lead Councillor for Regeneration stated that the operation of the station had been the first consideration and that the pocket park was the last element identified. In addition, he stated that the order and sequence of discussions about the redevelopment of the bus station was correct.
- In response to a request for the budget for the Shaping Guildford's Future consultation, the Lead Councillor for Regeneration suggested that the information might be commercially sensitive but undertook to provide it to the Committee members.
- The Lead Councillor for Regeneration referred to the complexities and issues of the Weyside Urban Village project and indicated his satisfaction with the internal and external teams in place for the project.

The Chair thanked the Lead Councillor for Regeneration for attending and answering questions.

#### **OS64 QUESTION SESSION WITH LEAD COUNCILLOR FOR DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT**

The Chair welcomed the Lead Councillor for Development Management and reminded the meeting that Councillor Hunt's areas of responsibility were Development Control and Enforcement. The Chair advised the meeting that Councillor Hunt had requested to make an opening statement.

The Lead Councillor for Development Management referred to the high number of planning applications facing Local Planning Authorities, including Guildford. He indicated that when he had taken on his executive portfolio in March 2021, he had been warned by officers that the backlog in applications would not be remedied quickly. He advised the meeting that recruitment of planners was challenging and the Council's team of 18 planners was supplemented by contract resources. He announced that the pre-application service suspended in April 2021 would be reinstated for all categories of applications from 1 March 2022.

The Lead Councillor for Development Management advised the meeting of the introduction of significant management information concerning planning applications, although he stated

that such information was not yet in report form. He advised that the monthly average of applications received each month over the previous year was 228, with an average of 217 validated and 175 determined each month. The Lead Councillor for Development Management indicated that in January 2022 the backlog of planning applications was 918, compared with 514 in January 2021. He suggested the Council should consider increasing the size of the planning team. In addition, the Lead Councillor for Development Management indicated that resourcing challenges had affected the planning application validation process and the publishing of applications on the Council's planning portal.

The Lead Councillor for Development Management advised the meeting of the increase in the planning enforcement team because of the Future Guildford transformation programme. He stated that the number of new planning enforcement cases had increased from an average of 35 each month in 2020 to 43 each month in 2021.

During the following discussion a number of points were made and clarifications offered:

- In response to a request from a Committee member, the Lead Councillor for Development Management indicated he would see if he could prepare an update summarising his opening statement to share with Councillors and members of the public.
- In reply to a question, the Lead Councillor for Development Management stated that non-determination appeals were not recorded specifically within the overall numbers of appeals. The Chair suggested the value of obtaining such information.
- A member of the Committee asked for details of the availability and sharing of information on section 106 agreements and monies. In reply, the Lead Councillor for Development Management advised that a report on section 106 contributions was scheduled for consideration by the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee in April 2022. He agreed to consider the cadence and content of reporting section 106 information.
- With reference to planning enforcement, the Regulatory Services Manager advised of actions to lessen the caseloads of officers, including a review of older cases.
- A member of the Committee noted that the monthly summary reports of planning enforcement cases had limited information and requested that Councillors have greater access to information. In reply, the Lead Councillor for Development Management outlined the data protection and legal difficulties of allowing Councillors to access planning enforcement information and suggested that Councillors continue to contact relevant officers as necessary.
- The Lead Councillor for Development Management advised the meeting that the criteria for prioritising enforcement was set out within the Local Enforcement Plan on the Council's website.
- In reply to a question, the Lead Councillor for Development Management confirmed that compliance with section 106 agreements was tracked by the Council's Specialist - Development Management (S106 & Community Infrastructure Levy) Officer. The Director for Service Delivery indicated that the Council had a duty to report on section 106.
- The Lead Councillor for Development Management indicated that the skillset and structure of the planning team was satisfactory.

- In response to a question, the meeting was advised by the Director for Service Delivery that when the Council had to enforce against itself openness and transparency were important, and he suggested that the corporate management team should monitor such instances.
- In response to a request from a Councillor, the Lead Councillor for Development Management undertook to investigate the delay in approval of two Conservation Area Character Appraisals, for Effingham and West Horsley respectively.

The Chair thanked the Lead Councillor for Development Management for attending and answering questions.

#### **OS65 REVIEW OF THE ANNUAL REPORT AND MONITORING ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE OPERATION OF THE G LIVE CONTRACT 2020-2021**

The Lead Councillor for Environment introduced the item and provided a brief overview of the tenth contract year. The Committee was advised that due to the pandemic the G Live venue had been operational for less than six weeks of the contract year; the Lead Councillor for Environment confirmed that G Live was used as a vaccination centre for the remainder of the contract year to deliver 175,000 jobs.

The Lead Councillor for Environment referred to the Key Performance Indicators within the report submitted to the Committee and indicated that the restricted operation of the venue due to COVID-19 had affected performance significantly. The meeting was advised of the acquisition of HQ Theatres by Trafalgar Entertainment and the extension of the current contract for a three-year period at a reduced yearly management fee of £275,000.

The Lead Councillor for Entertainment advised that 2020-21 had resulted in a loss of almost £200,000 to the operator. In addition, the Lead Councillor for Environment advised that the builder of G Live had undertaken remedial works during the year, including correcting defects discovered during a routine inspection.

The Head of Culture, Heritage and Leisure Services advised the meeting that due to restrictions on G Live operating it was inappropriate to compare the tenth contract year with previous years.

In response to questions from a Committee member, the Head of Culture, Heritage and Leisure Services advised the meeting that HQ Theatres received a grant payment of £20,000 a month for hosting the vaccination centre and he indicated that the cloakroom had now re-opened.

In reply to a question, the Head of Culture, Heritage and Leisure Services informed the Committee of the reasons that the contract had been extended for a three-year period, including the uncertainty created by the pandemic and the need for confidence to return to the marketplace before the operation of the venue was re-tendered. The Head of Culture, Heritage and Leisure Services advised that the baseline subsidy for running G Live in the extended three-year period was £275,000 per annum.

The Head of Culture, Heritage and Leisure Services was asked about improving the catering performance at G Live and the potential impact of higher fuel costs. He stated that HQ Theatres had proposed expanding the catering at G Live, including the installation of a finishing kitchen and increasing restaurant capacity, and that higher energy costs would be met by the operator.

The Head of Culture, Heritage and Leisure Services informed the Committee that hospitality income did have a direct impact on the surplus that was divided between the operator and the Council.

In response to a question, the Head of Culture, Heritage and Leisure Services advised that he was not aware of any customer complaints about changes in car parking charges.

The Chair thanked the Lead Councillor for Environment and the Head of Culture, Heritage and Leisure Services.

RESOLVED: That the report submitted to the Committee be commended.

**OS66 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair advised the meeting that the Committee members had discussed potential items for the overview and scrutiny work programme at its pre-meet.

Members of the Committee suggested the management of community assets, older people's services, and the visibility and transparency of asset disposals, including open spaces, as suitable topics for the overview and scrutiny work programme.

RESOLVED: (I) That the overview and scrutiny work programme attached at Appendix 1 to the report submitted to the Committee be approved.

(II) That the viability of scrutinising the issues of management of community assets, older people's services, and the visibility and transparency of asset disposals, including open spaces, be progressed.

The meeting finished at 9.28 pm

Signed .....

Date .....

Chairman