

GUILDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of an extraordinary meeting of Guildford Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Millmead House, Millmead, Guildford, Surrey GU2 4BB on Wednesday 22 February 2023

* The Mayor, Councillor Dennis Booth

* The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Masuk Miah

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| * Councillor Paul Abbey | Councillor Julia McShane |
| * Councillor Tim Anderson | * Councillor Ann McShee |
| * Councillor Jon Askew | * Councillor Bob McShee |
| Councillor Christopher Barrass | * Councillor Richard Morris |
| * Councillor Joss Bigmore | * Councillor Marsha Moseley |
| Councillor David Bilbé | * Councillor Ramsey Nagaty |
| * Councillor Chris Blow | * Councillor Susan Parker |
| Councillor Ruth Brothwell | * Councillor George Potter |
| Councillor Colin Cross | * Councillor Jo Randall |
| Councillor Guida Esteves | * Councillor John Redpath |
| * Councillor Graham Eyre | * Councillor Maddy Redpath |
| * Councillor Andrew Gomm | * Councillor John Rigg |
| Councillor Angela Goodwin | * Councillor Tony Rooth |
| Councillor David Goodwin | * Councillor Will Salmon |
| * Councillor Angela Gunning | * Councillor Deborah Seabrook |
| * Councillor Gillian Harwood | * Councillor Pauline Searle |
| Councillor Jan Harwood | * Councillor Paul Spooner |
| Councillor Liz Hogger | * Councillor James Steel |
| * Councillor Tom Hunt | * Councillor Cait Taylor |
| Councillor Diana Jones | * Councillor James Walsh |
| Councillor Steven Lee | * Councillor Fiona White |
| * Councillor Nigel Manning | * Councillor Keith Witham |
| * Councillor Ted Mayne | * Councillor Catherine Young |

*Present

Honorary Freeman Keith Churchouse and Honorary Alderman David Wright were also in attendance.

CO127 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Christopher Barrass, David Bilbe, Ruth Brothwell, Colin Cross, Angela Goodwin, David Goodwin, Liz Hogger, Diana Jones, Steven Lee, and Julia McShane and also from Honorary Aldermen Catherine Cobley, Jayne Marks, Tony Phillips, Lynda Strudwick and Jenny Wicks.

CO128 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest.

CO129 MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor was pleased to report that Crowdfund Guildford Funding was open, which would provide up to £100,000 to help fund projects over the next two years. From this pot up to £10,000, or 50% of the project's funding target, was available to help each project reach its target. The deadline for receipt of applications was 29 March 2023. The Mayor asked councillors to draw this to the attention of local communities and encourage applications.

As mentioned previously, the national monument for anti-aggression otherwise known as the Knife Angel was due to arrive in Guildford next week and would be erected outside of the Cathedral. The Mayor urged councillors to visit it and promote the surrounding events especially to older students in our secondary schools.

CO130 LEADER'S COMMUNICATIONS

In the absence of the Leader, the Deputy Leader reported the following:

- (a) Local Plan Development Management Policies: In view of the positive response from the Planning Inspector, the Council would be able to consider the adoption of the Development Management policies at the scheduled extraordinary meeting of the Council on 22 March, which was before start of the pre-election period. The Deputy Leader also informed councillors that the public consultation in the Greenbelt SPD had started today and would end before the pre-election period.
- (b) #weloveGuildford campaign: The Deputy Leader congratulated the Communications team for the successful campaign, as part of the Council's aim to try to find new ways to engage with residents. The campaign had managed just over 17,000 interactions with residents across the borough who shared what they loved about Guildford.

CO131 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There had been no questions or requests to make statements from the public.

CO132 QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

No questions had been received from councillors.

CO133 GUILDFORD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Councillors noted that the Council had a number of economic strategies that had now reached their expiration and needed to be updated.

Major economic shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit and the cost-of-living crisis had brought changes and uncertainties to the economic landscape requiring a reassessment of challenges, opportunities and priorities. Coupled with the borough's relatively weak economic performance compared to other locations - a trend preceding the COVID-19 pandemic - there was impetus to set out a refreshed strategy and action plan to reinvigorate Guildford's economy and ensure it was a place where businesses and residents could continue to thrive.

In light of the changes to the economic landscape, and in line with the Council's Corporate Plan 2021 - 2025, the Council considered a report which presented a new Economic Development Strategy and accompanying draft action plan for the period up to 2040, outlining a renewed vision and priorities to support the local economy.

At its meeting earlier in the day, the Executive had also considered the report on this matter and had endorsed the recommendation therein.

Upon the motion of the Lead Councillor for Regeneration, Councillor John Redpath, seconded by the Deputy Leader of the Council, and lead Councillor for Finance and Planning Policy, Councillor Joss Bigmore, the Council

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Economic Development Strategy 2023-2040 and the supporting evidence base, attached as Appendices 1 and 3 respectively to the report submitted to the Council, be adopted.
- (2) That the draft Economic Development Action Plan, attached as Appendix 2 to the report, which will be subject to further consultation with strategic partners, be noted.

Reason:

To support the reinvigoration of Guildford's economy, the new Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan:

- Sets out the case for action in light of changes to the international, national and regional economic landscape.
- Gives an updated analysis of Guildford's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
- Identifies key strengths and opportunities to for the Council and its partners to harness, such as sector specialisms and economic assets (e.g. commercial spaces).
- Highlights the importance of mitigating the environmental impact of economic activity to reflect climate change and sustainability issues.
- Identifies the levers that the Council can utilise to address priority interventions that can help deliver significant positive impact for our economy.

CO134 REVIEW AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE PEER REVIEW - FINDINGS OF THE WORKING GROUP

The Council considered a report on the findings of the Planning Committee Review Working Group, which had been established by the Executive in 2021, to consider the LGA/PAS Planning Committee Peer Review recommendations and other improvement needs, and to make recommendations as appropriate to the Executive, Planning Committee and full Council.

The working group had met on six occasions to consider the 12 recommendations. The report included details of the working group's discussion against each recommendation and their own recommended response to each of the recommendations.

As most of the recommendations arising from the review affected the operation of the Planning Committee, the report had been referred initially to that Committee for comments at its special meeting held on 7 February 2023. The Committee's response to each of the working group's recommendations was also included in the report.

At its meeting earlier in the day, the Executive had considered the report on this matter and had endorsed the wording of the motion proposed by the Lead Councillor for Planning Development, Legal and Democratic Services, Councillor Tom Hunt, and seconded by the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Joss Bigmore, which was set out in the Order Paper.

During the debate, some councillors expressed concerns over:

- the proposed revised process for referral of applications to the Planning Committee and consequential increase in councillors' workloads
- availability of planning officers to meet with ward councillors to discuss planning applications
- the absence of an automatic speaking slot for parish councils at Planning Committee
- the inability of a ward councillor to raise concerns after the 21-day period has expired

- the possibility that Chairman of the Planning Committee and Executive Head of Service could refuse almost every referral request without any means of challenging any such refusal

Following the debate, the Council

RESOLVED: That, taking into account the comments and recommendations made by the Planning Committee Review Working Group and the Planning Committee in response to the recommendations of the Planning Committee Peer Review undertaken by the Local Government Association with the Planning Advisory Service, the Council agrees the following actions:

- (1) That, in response to the LGA/PAS Recommendation **R1: (Provide greater certainty in planning process by ensuring decision making conforms with planning policies and material planning considerations acting on behalf of the whole Guildford community and ensuring that there is clear separation between ward level responsibilities and decision-making role on Committee)**, a regular (monthly) planning training programme, be reinstated via MS Teams, subject to the proviso that whilst the planning training programme would be regular, there might not on all occasions be training every month.
- (2) That, in response to the LGA/PAS Recommendation **R2: (Explore ways to rebuild trust and confidence between officers and Members. Consider running an independently facilitated workshop to be held between officers and Members, separate to the Planning Committee meeting, to better understand their roles, issues, and concerns)**, an Officer/Member Workshop be held following the elections in May 2023.
- (3) That, in response to the LGA/PAS Recommendation **R3: (Examine ways for Planning Committee and relevant officers to discuss and learn from appeal decisions to ensure that decisions on planning applications are undertaken, on behalf of the whole Guildford borough community, in a fair, impartial, and transparent way. The present system tagged onto the end of often long Planning Committees is not conducive to creating a learning atmosphere)**, quarterly appeal review sessions be held via MS Teams and facilitated by the Executive Head of Planning Development, noting that details of Appeal Decisions would continue to be included on Planning Committee agendas.
- (4) That, in response to the LGA/PAS Recommendation **R4: (Review Planning Committee reports to see if further explanation can be given on the weight to be afforded to the Local and Neighbourhood Plan policies as well as material planning considerations such as the National Planning Policy Framework)**, appropriate mechanisms were in place already through which councillors could query policy weight afforded to particular proposals, noting that weight to be afforded to Local and Neighbourhood Plans and other material planning considerations would be covered in the training programme.
- (5) That, in response to the LGA/PAS Recommendation **R5: (Ensure planning officers and Committee members are more aware of the impact of what a lack of housing delivery has on the weight given to Local Plan policies and kept appropriately updated on the work of the Housing Delivery Board)**, the topic of housing delivery be addressed as part of the Planning Committee training programme, which should include an overview of the Land Availability Assessment.
- (6) That, in response to the LGA/PAS Recommendation **R6: (Review the opportunity for further guidance in the form of a supplementary planning document to help guide new high quality and sustainable development)**, in view of the current progress being

made with SPDs and DPDs, no further action in response to this recommendation is required.

- (7) That, in response to the LGA/PAS Recommendation **R7: (Review the Planning Committee referral system focusing particularly on the Member referral process (7-day procedure) and householder referral system to ensure that applications are not unnecessarily delayed and Planning Committee can focus on the strategically more important applications)**, the proposed process for Councillor Call-up (referral) to Planning Committee as set out in Appendix 3 to the report submitted to the Council, be approved.
- (8) That, in response to the LGA/PAS Recommendation **R8: (Revisit the site visits protocol with particular emphasis on who attends and on ensuring a consistent approach of officers and conduct of members during the site visit)**, no changes be made to the current site visit protocol on the basis that councillors were aware of the need to ask for a site visit ahead of time rather than at the meeting itself which was noted to be useful for councillors in assessing the planning merits of a scheme.
- (9) That, in response to the LGA/PAS Recommendation **R9: (Review the member overturns process so that alternative motions are raised by Members and advice is provided by officers prior to the officer recommendation vote being made)**, the proposed procedure for councillors overturning officer recommendations at Committee, set out in Appendix 4 to the report submitted to the Council, be approved.
- (10) That, in response to the LGA/PAS Recommendation **R10: (Undertake bespoke probity in planning and appeals training for members with a neutral facilitator, for example, someone who has direct experience of being a Planning Inspector)**, the Probity in Planning training be incorporated into the annual training programme.
- (11) That, in response to the LGA/PAS Recommendation **R11: (Review public speaking opportunities for Parish councils and special interest groups)**, the current public speaking arrangements be retained, but for the Chairman to retain the existing discretion to allow additional speaking slots for significant applications.
- (12) That paragraphs (1) to (5), and (10) above be implemented following the Borough Council Elections in May 2023, and paragraphs (7) and (9) above be implemented with immediate effect*.
- (13) That the Executive Head of Planning Development be requested, in consultation with the relevant lead councillor and Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Planning Committee, to undertake a review of the processes and practices referred to above after 12 months' operation, or sooner if deemed necessary.

Reasons:

To modernise the operation of the Planning Committee and to review and update all associated processes and procedures.

(*In response to a request for clarification as to when the revised Planning Committee referral process would be introduced, the Council was advised that it would be as soon as possible, subject to making the necessary changes to the system, but would not be introduced retrospectively. All councillors would be notified by email of the effective date of implementation.)

CO135 REVIEW OF PROBITY IN PLANNING LOCAL CODE OF PRACTICE HANDBOOK FOR COUNCILLORS AND OFFICERS

The Council noted that the Probity in Planning - Local Code of Practice Handbook, which was last reviewed in April 2019, formed part of the Council’s Constitution and provided guidance for councillors and officers on their role and conduct in the planning process. The guidance included how councillors and officers should manage contact with applicants, developers and objectors or supporters. The purpose of the guidance provided in the document was to ensure that decisions made in the planning process were not biased, were taken openly and transparently and based only on material planning considerations.

As part of its ongoing work reviewing various aspects of the corporate governance of the Council, the Corporate Governance Task Group, which had been appointed by the Corporate Governance & Standards Committee, had conducted a thorough review of the Handbook.

The draft revised Handbook, as recommended by the Task Group, had been considered by both the Corporate Governance & Standards Committee, at its meeting on 19 January 2023, and by the Planning Committee on 7 February 2023.

In summary, the key changes proposed were in respect of the following:

- Section 16: Pre-Application Discussions including Planning Performance Agreements
- Section 19: Councillor ‘call-up’ to Planning Committee
- Section 21: Planning Committee (particularly the procedure for dealing with Member overturns)

The various comments and recommendations from the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee and the Planning Committee were set out in the respective draft minutes from those meetings, copies of which were appended to the report submitted to the Council.

The changes to the Handbook proposed by both committees had also been incorporated into the revised version of the handbook appended to the report.

Upon the motion of the Lead Councillor for Planning Development, Legal and Democratic Services, Councillor Tom Hunt, seconded by the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Joss Bigmore, the Council

RESOLVED: That the revised ‘Probity in Planning Local Code of Practice Handbook for Councillors and Officers’, attached as Appendix 2 to the report submitted to the Council, be adopted.

Reason:

To provide revised, up to date and fit for purpose Probity in Planning guidance to councillors and officers, together with other relevant information on the planning process at the Council in a helpful handbook.

CO136 COMMON SEAL

The Council

RESOLVED: That the Common Seal of the Council be affixed to any documents to give effect to any decisions taken by the Council at this meeting.

The meeting finished at 8.30 pm

Signed

Mayor

Date