

**SERVICE DELIVERY EXECUTIVE ADVISORY BOARD**

19 May 2022

- \* Councillor Angela Goodwin (Chairman)
- \* Councillor Ramsey Nagaty (Vice-Chairman)

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|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Councillor Paul Abbey   | * Councillor George Potter |
| Councillor Dennis Booth | * Councillor Jo Randall    |
| Councillor Andrew Gomm  | * Councillor Tony Rooth    |
| * Councillor Ann McShee | Councillor Pauline Searle  |
| * Councillor Bob McShee | * Councillor Fiona White   |

\* Present

Councillors Tim Anderson, Julia McShane, John Redpath and James Steel were also in attendance.

**SD60 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andrew Gomm and Pauline Searle. Councillor Masuk Miah was present as a substitute for Councillor Pauline Searle.

**SD61 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT AND DECLARATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary or non-pecuniary interests.

**SD62 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Service Delivery Executive Advisory Board (EAB) held on 10 March 2022 were confirmed as a correct record, and would be signed by the Chairman at the earliest opportunity.

**SD63 TOURISM AND TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE**

The Strategy and Communications Manager introduced and presented a mandate in respect of local tourism and the Council's Tourist Information Centre (TIC). The mandate addressed the following areas:

- Introduction
- Strategy
- Options
- Considerations
- Resources
- Risks, Assumptions and Issues
- Dependencies, Constraints and Opportunities
- Internal Stakeholders
- Next Steps

The Executive Advisory Board (EAB) was advised that the TIC was located in Guildford House, High Street, Guildford. Pre-Covid, the service had opened on Mondays to Saturdays plus Sundays from the beginning of May until the end of September. However, the TIC was currently operating reduced hours and this was under review. The TIC provided the following services:

- Information and advice to visitors to the Borough.
- Promotion of Guildford to encourage visitors to the Borough.
- Shop offering a mix of souvenirs and local products.

(A Box Office providing ticketing services for local events had been discontinued.)

The most common requests received by the TIC were for bus timetables and maps and the most frequently asked questions included 'what's on', where to eat and the location of particular shops. Many of the functions performed by the TIC aligned with the responsibilities of Experience Guildford in the town centre area.

As part of Phase B of the Future Guildford transformation programme, the tourism and heritage marketing functions and associated budgets transferred to the Strategy and Communications Team which became responsible for leading an online visitor economy and marketing function. Therefore a new approach would need to be developed, including:

- Closer collaboration with Visit Surrey and other partners, such as Experience Guildford and Surrey Hills Enterprises.
- An improved online offering to replace Visit Guildford (which was now unstable and unsupported).
- Utilising expertise from the University's Centre for Digital Transformation in the Visitor Economy.
- Increased targeted promotional campaigns.

As it was facing a substantial projected budget deficit over the next four years, the Council needed to identify savings across its discretionary services. Therefore, this mandate considered options for changes to the future delivery of visitor information services that would also secure financial savings as part of the Council's Savings Strategy. The strategic Options available to the Council to deliver a solution were:

- (a) Do Nothing - Continue with the current TIC and service in-situ at Guildford House.
- (b) Do Something (1) - Move the TIC and staff to another location.
- (c) Do Something (2) - Remove the physical TIC and provide an alternative digital and online communications and marketing service, incorporating increased targeted promotional campaigns. This would be accompanied by a review of future strategy / approach and required resources.
- (d) Do Most - Close the TIC and end the visitor service offered by GBC.

When the Executive / Management Team Liaison Group considered the mandate at its meeting on 16 February 2022, it expressed in principle support for Option (c) and requested that opportunities be considered for the continued provision of visitor information at Guildford House and other town centre locations in consultation with Experience Guildford.

The Lead Councillor for Environment gave a brief overview of the mandate and highlighted two key areas in the field of tourism, namely, the move to an online digital internet age and the closer collaboration and resource sharing between smaller tourism companies.

The EAB's views in respect of the Options were sought and the following points arose from related questions, comments and discussion for forwarding to the Executive:

1. Whilst the proposed move to online digital tourism services was acknowledged, it was felt that some alternative provision should remain to cater for those members of society, usually older people, who did not necessarily utilise the internet. This alternative provision, which could consist of information leaflets and town maps

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available at appropriate locations such as transport gateways or the Museum, should be fully accessible for all including braille and easy read versions. The provision of improved signposting to attractions or location plans dispensing tourists maps and guides delivering a reduced service employing fewer staff.

2. The contracting out of the TIC to an organisation such as Experience Guildford or Visit Surrey was suggested as a further possible future option for delivery of the tourism service. However, it may be necessary for the Council to provide a financial subsidy to support such an approach.
3. Whilst some queries and concerns were raised regarding the location of the TIC and the future use and accessibility of Guildford House, the EAB was advised that the purpose of this mandate was to focus on modernising the tourism service, promoting Guildford in collaboration with partners and meeting the requirements of the Savings Strategy. The future use of Guildford House would be addressed as part of a separate Heritage mandate which included the Museum and other heritage assets. Although the process in pursuing the Heritage mandate had temporarily stalled for various reasons, work was now continuing and options were being formulated. However, councillors expressed a preference for the two mandates to be combined in the interests of comprehensive, joined up, holistic working.
4. The need for a holistic approach to consider all heritage assets in the town centre and services provided from them to investigate how best to deliver value for money facilities and savings was highlighted.
5. There was a national trend of falling visitor numbers to TICs owing to the internet and Covid. Although the exact visitor numbers to the local TIC were currently unavailable, it was felt that they could be obtained as a door counter mechanism was in operation at Guildford House.
6. The savings in the region of £70,000 - £80,000 identified in Option (c) were annual savings of a rough order of magnitude. Any redundancy costs arising from the loss of the physical presence in the TIC would be one-off costs although re-deployment would be pursued prior to any redundancies being made.
7. There was a view that the mandate did not contain sufficient information or data concerning visitor numbers, service running costs, anticipated savings or costs relating to an alternative provision to enable the EAB to offer any meaningful advice in this regard.
8. With regard to the utilisation of expertise from the University's Centre for Digital Transformation in the Visitor Economy, the need to work more closely with partners such as the University, Experience Guildford and Visit Surrey had been recognised and contact with key partners had been made to discuss the establishment of a Visitor Economy Forum to consider the approach to supporting the visitor economy in the future. Although Experience Guildford and Visit Surrey had been consulted in respect of the mandate, responses had not been received in time for reporting to this meeting.
9. Apparently, some other district and borough councils had closed their TICs in order to achieve budget savings, however, closure could have a negative impact on their local economies. Others had adopted a modernised digital approach or contracted their TICs to a company or organisation, such as a Business Improvement District (BID), and offered some financial support. BIDs usually consisted of approximately 400 businesses who were keen to improve customer footfall and support any initiatives that would assist with achieving that. Reference was made to the tourism provision at Winchester although it was not thought to be funded by the local council.
10. There was a cost attached to the provision of online tourism services as they required frequent updating. Consideration would need to be given to the allocation of responsibility for providing and updating information.
11. To demonstrate the importance of retaining and promoting tourism to the Borough, in 2019 the South-East Tourism Board had estimated that tourism in Guildford was worth approximately £300 million. Although local authorities often provided tourism services, they rarely received any income to do so as it was retained by businesses. However,

there was a possibility of seeking financial contributions from some of the key financially secure outlets in Guildford which benefited from the service.

By way of summary and conclusion, the EAB agreed that:

- i. The mandate currently contained insufficient information and data to enable the EAB to express support for a particular Option(s).
- ii. The Tourism and TIC and the Heritage mandates should be combined to facilitate a holistic approach to pursuing related service changes and savings.
- iii. In the event that the tourism service was reduced or the TIC closed, consideration should be given to alternative forms of service provision, particularly for visitors unable to access online services. This could include exploration of the possibility of unstaffed delivery of information such as distribution of leaflets, guides and maps; improved signposting; and promotional video screens at transport hubs or other key sites around the town centre.
- iv. Information was sought in respect of the operation of the tourism service in Winchester to establish whether there was any good financial and / or operational practice which could be pursued for adoption in Guildford.

#### **SD64 SHAWFIELD ROAD SITE, ASH**

The Executive Advisory Board (EAB) was invited to consider the mandate in respect of the Shawfield Road Site, Ash.

The Council previously had two purpose-built day centres providing care and support services for elderly residents, namely, The Hive at Park Barn in northern Guildford and the Shawfield Day Centre in Ash. Following a consultation exercise, a decision had been reached to consolidate day care services at The Hive, with clients of the Shawfield Day Centre being transferred to the former. With the improved facilities and services available at The Hive and by consolidating staffing, it was considered that clients would receive improved support and care whilst the decision also generated financial savings to the Council as part of its Savings Strategy.

Following the transfer of all day care services to The Hive, the Shawfield Road site was no longer required for its former purposes and had remained unutilised for approximately two years. The mandate considered options for future alternative uses of the site. However, it was noted that there was a charge on the title of the land requiring it to be used as a 'day centre' and this would have implications in respect of the viability and feasibility of some options. The charge was the result of an NHS agency contributing £280,000 towards the construction of the day centre and could form part of the basis of the valuation for a removal of the charge, which gave the NHS an entitlement to 60% of any sale of the site, including the rental income from an associated lease.

The mandate addressed the following areas:

- Introduction
- Strategy
- Options Evaluation
- Considerations
- Resources
- Potential costs to proceed to the next stage to develop the Strategic Outline Case
- Issues, Assumptions and Risks
- Dependencies, Constraints and Opportunities
- Next Steps

- Reviewer List

The Options Evaluation identified the following five potential strategic options to deliver a solution:

1. Leave the site and premises vacant.
2. Redevelop the site for affordable housing.
3. Redevelop the site for alternative uses such as key worker or extra-care housing (including discussions with other health and social care providers).
4. Explore options for potential community uses of the site.
5. Sell the site.

Options 2-4 would be subject to successful negotiation and resolution of issues relating to the charge on the title of the site involving the relevant NHS agency, which may have a financial cost.

Having considered the mandate at its meeting held on 2 March 2022, the Executive / Management Team Liaison Group expressed a preference for the options relating to redevelopment of the site for affordable housing or to meet other housing needs, such as key worker or extra-care housing. Community use of the site was also felt to be an acceptable option, subject to there being a demonstrable need for community facilities in Ash and there being no ongoing costs to the Council.

The following points arose from related questions, comments and discussion for forwarding to the Executive:

- a) A councillor expressed the view that there had been considerable residential development in the Ash and Tongham area in recent years without the provision of sufficient infrastructure to support the new housing or facilities to cater for existing residents. Accordingly, it was felt that no further housing in the area was needed.
- b) There was a belief that the Shawfield site had been closed against the wishes of local residents and that Surrey County Council's (SCC's) intention to close the Abbeyfields Centre in Ash in the longer term would have a further negative impact on care services available to local residents. A day centre in Leatherhead which had previously provided dementia respite care had also closed.
- c) It was felt that there was a Borough-wide shortage and need of day care services, discharge assessment facilities for those leaving hospital, and respite care to support people with dementia and their carers, which were required to reduce the need for residential care.
- d) As it could be a lengthy and costly process to negotiate the release of a covenant, councillors requested that the Executive explore the possibility of pursuing a provision including an element of day care at the site jointly with partners such as SCC, the NHS and the voluntary sector to conserve the Council's funds. There was a possibility of charities or voluntary organisations obtaining funds via SCC's 'Your Fund' initiative for this purpose. A long lease of the Shawfield premises to other organisations to provide care services was also a possibility.
- e) In the event that the site was redeveloped in part as a day centre with a shared use, any element of affordable housing included should be social rented housing and not for home ownership. As there were a number of sites being developed in Ash which included affordable housing provision, a preference for the construction of Council housing, which was in short supply, was expressed. However, it was acknowledged that Council housing would be subject to the Right to Buy scheme. Extra-care housing was also a possibility to form part of a redevelopment of the site.

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- f) As other community use facilities, such as a youth centre, in the Ash area were underutilised, it was not advocated that the Shawfield site be used for a similar community hall purpose. However, as the facility had been constructed utilising public funds and the related consultation results had indicated that the local community wished the facility to be retained, there was a view that the community should be canvassed to ascertain its wishes regarding the future use of the site. Such uses could include alternative care provision within the terms of the covenant, subject to available funding in respect of any necessary refurbishment or remodelling etc. depending on the intended use. However, as such a provision was likely to serve an area wider than Ash, consideration needed to be given to the extent of any related consultation exercise and to the managing of consultees' expectations. It would be preferable to explore these options before reaching any decision concerning the possible disposal of the site.
- g) An alternative to disposing of or leasing the site would be to consider transferring it to a community group, charity or Parish Council etc. in preference to allowing it to fall into disuse and disrepair.
- h) A further choice to utilise the Shawfield site for a police presence in the area to tackle local issues had been raised as a possible temporary rental use until a longer term solution could be identified and officers would investigate this possibility.
- i) Notwithstanding the above points, there was a view that it was premature to progress determining the future use of the Shawfield site before ascertaining the exact identity of the covenantee and the position regarding the surrender of the covenant and charge in respect of the site.

The Lead Councillors for Community and Housing and for Resources, respectively, thanked the EAB for its views and comments and acknowledged that they would be considered in the light of the need for facilities to support the growing number of people suffering from dementia and councillors' desire to consult the community regarding its wishes for the future use of the Shawfield site. The EAB was assured that every effort would be made to prevent the site from remaining vacant for any length of time and that the inclusion of social rented housing as part of any redevelopment of the site would also be a priority.

#### **SD65 EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN**

Attention was drawn to the absence of references in the Executive Forward Plan to some of the Council's major projects, such as the Town Centre Masterplan, the North Street Redevelopment and the Weyside Urban Village Development. The Service Delivery Director undertook to discuss this matter with colleagues with a view to identifying how best to incorporate such significant areas of work into the Forward Plan in a timely fashion to enable the relevant EAB to have an input at an early stage.

#### **SD66 EAB WORK PROGRAMME**

Although no items were currently scheduled in the EAB's Work Programme for its next meeting on 7 July 2022, the Chairman and Service Delivery Director had discussed the matter and suggested that two Heads of Service in the Service Delivery Directorate be invited to that meeting to share and discuss their top three service priorities and / or concerns. The EAB indicated its support for this broad approach and the proposal that the meeting focus on wider Community Services and on Environment and Regulatory Services.

It was requested that updates in respect of the two substantive items forming part of the agenda for this meeting, namely, Tourism and the Tourist Information Centre and the Shawfield Road site, be the subject of future reports to the EAB when those mandates had progressed.

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The EAB was invited to submit any further suggestions for future Work Programme items to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to pursue as appropriate.

The meeting finished at 8.54 pm

Signed .....

Date .....

Chairman