

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

7 June 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 Tim Anderson (Lead Councillor for Resources), Ruth Brothwell, Julia McShane (Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Community and Housing), John Rigg (Lead Councillor for Regeneration), James Steel (Lead Councillor for Environment), and Cait Taylor (Lead Councillor for Climate Change) were in attendance, with Councillors Ramsey Nagaty, John Redpath (Lead Councillor for Economy), and Catherine Young in remote attendance.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 23(i), Councillor Masuk Miah attended as a substitute for Councillor Angela Goodwin.

OS1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Committee was advised of apologies for absence from Councillors Chris Blow and Angela Goodwin and a substitution as detailed above.

OS2 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT AND DECLARATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

OS3 MINUTES

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 25 April 2022 were agreed.

OS4 LEAD COUNCILLOR QUESTION SESSION

The Chairman welcomed the Lead Councillor for Climate Change and reminded the Committee of Councillor Cait Taylor's areas of responsibility: Climate Change, Air Quality, and Sustainable Transport. The Chairman indicated that several question areas had been passed along to the Lead Councillor for Climate Change in advance of the meeting and advised that other questions relevant to the portfolio would naturally arise.

During the ensuing discussion with the Lead Councillor for Climate Change a number of points were made and clarifications offered:

- In response to a question about monitoring air quality in Stoke ward and pollution from road traffic, the Lead Councillor for Climate Change advised that nitrogen dioxide monitoring across the borough targeted residential areas near to heavily trafficked roads. The Lead Councillor for Climate Change advised that monitoring for nitrogen dioxide at one site on Woking Road in Stoke ward had been discontinued after 2018 due to a low annual mean level. The meeting was advised that a

modelling report commissioned by the Council in 2019 suggested neither nitrogen dioxide nor particulates were a concern in the Stoke ward. The Lead Councillor for Climate Change indicated that a link to the report could be sent to the Committee members. She expressed her surprise that the area of Stoke ward close to the A3 and other roads did not exceed the annual mean level of $40 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. In addition, the Lead Councillor for Climate Change advised the Committee how air quality was considered as part of the planning process across the Borough. She concluded by indicating that any particular areas of concern identified by Councillors could be reviewed as potential sites for monitoring.

- The Lead Councillor for Climate Change was asked about the impact of the one-way trial at Walnut Tree Close and collaboration between the Council and Surrey County Council on the project. In reply, the meeting was informed that during the six-month trial, traffic and air quality would be collected to assess the impact on Walnut Tree Close and the surrounding road network, as well as the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in Guildford. The Lead Councillor for Climate Change advised the Committee that officers from the Council and Surrey County Council, together with contractors, had met to assess the air quality impact of the trial. The meeting was informed that Council officers had set up additional nitrogen dioxide diffusion tubes to help monitor air quality, particularly in the areas of Woodbridge Road and Stoke Road where it was anticipated diverted traffic would go.
- In reply to a query from a member of the Committee, the Lead Councillor for Climate Change indicated the importance of sustainable transport to reducing air quality and congestion. In response to questions about the definition of sustainable transport, the Lead Councillor for Climate Change indicated that she would respond after considering the detail within the questions.
- In reply to questions on the role of bus services in Guildford, the Lead Councillor for Climate Change indicated her support for more buses, particularly electric, and indicated she would respond further after considering the detail of the questions.
- A member of the asked for information on the amount of power generated by weirs and rivers in Guildford, and whether there were plans to increase this. In reply, the Lead Councillor for Climate Change undertook to arrange for the information to be provided to the Committee.
- A Councillor asked for further details of measures to address the air quality issues that had necessitated the declaration of AQMAs in Shalford and Compton and whether a park and ride on Council owned land adjacent to the A281 was worthwhile. In reply, the Lead Councillor for Climate Change advised the meeting that park and ride services had traditionally been used by commuters and as such had been impacted by Covid and subsequent changes to working arrangements. She informed the meeting that park and ride usage was approximately half of the pre-Covid level, and the operator had suspended services from the Spectrum and was unlikely to re-start at Onslow when the site was returned from the Covid testing programme later in 2022. The Committee was advised that the site at Artington was under capacity and in close proximity to the Council owned land adjacent to the A281. The Lead Councillor for Climate Change advised that it would be worthwhile re-visiting the viability of currently suspended sites and routes, and additional sites, if demand levels increased. In conclusion, the Committee was advised of the merit in a comprehensive solution to air quality, with a wider focus than park and ride.

- A Councillor questioned the pricing for park and ride for two adults compared with charges for parking in the town centre and was advised that park and ride charges were set by the bus operator and regulated by Surrey County Council. The Lead Councillor for Climate Change advised the meeting of the park and ride prices and suggested they compared well against the costs for longer stays in car parks. In conclusion, the Lead Councillor for Climate Change indicated that the pricing situation would continue to be monitored.
- In response to questions, the Lead Councillor for Climate Change outlined her past and planned community engagement on climate change. She advised the meeting of the development of a Climate Change Action Plan to be submitted to the Council's Climate Change Board and the value in revisiting the idea of a climate assembly in Guildford. With reference to discussion of the use of parish council liaison meetings to promote community engagement with climate change, a member of the Committee noted that the residents in non-parished parts of the Borough should be involved too.

The Chairman thanked the Lead Councillor for Climate Change for attending and answering questions.

OS5 GUILDFORD AND WAVERLEY COLLABORATION – UPDATE

The Joint Chief Executive of Guildford and Waverley Councils advised that since his last update to the Committee the heads of terms for the Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) had been agreed by both Councils. He indicated that the creation of a joint shared management team of Directors and Heads of Service was proceeding. The Joint Chief Executive advised that in the period between his updates to the Committee he would keep all Councillors informed of progress.

There were no questions from Councillors and the Chairman thanked the Joint Chief Executive for his attendance.

OS6 REVIEW OF VISITOR STRATEGY

The Chairman invited the Lead Councillor for Environment to comment on the report submitted to the Committee.

The Lead Councillor for Environment introduced the item. The Strategy and Communications Manager drew the Committee's attention to the priorities and activities of the Visitor Strategy 2014-20 as summarised in the report submitted to the Committee. In addition, he advised the meeting of actions taken since the end of the Strategy in 2020, including administering grants schemes to help the visitor sector during the pandemic.

A number of points were covered and questions asked in the ensuing discussion:

- In reply to questioning about the need for a destination marketing strategy and the approach possible with limited Council resources, the Lead Councillor for the Environment stated the importance of collaboration with partners such as the University of Surrey and Visit Surrey. The Lead Councillor for Environment indicated that single-centre stays were rare for Guildford's visitors. The Strategic Services Director advised that the University of Surrey, Visit Surrey, Surrey Hills Enterprises, and Experience Guildford were keen to collaborate with the Council. She indicated that the visitor economy would be important as part of the Council's new economic development strategy.
- A member of the Committee asked for the terms of reference and scope of the new economic strategy and the role of Councillors in its development. In response, the

Strategy and Communications Manager advised that the specification for development of the strategy was drafted in consultation with Lead Councillors and was out for tender. He outlined the requirements for councillor involvement required in the development of the strategy and undertook to circulate the tender specification to Committee members.

- In response to a question about resources, the Strategy and Communications Manager informed the Committee that the marketing function at the Council was centralised as part of the Future Guildford transformation programme and was now performed by the Council's communications team.
- In reply to questions, the Strategic Services Director advised the meeting of arrangements for the Visit Guildford brand and webpages on the Visit Surrey website. In addition, she indicated that the traditional income streams for tourism information centres had declined as people increasingly used online alternatives to access or promote services. The Strategic Services Director confirmed that the Council was looking at tourism initiatives in other localities and was keen to collaborate with partners. The Strategy and Communications Manager reminded Committee members that the future of the Tourist Information Centre was considered and commented on by an Executive Advisory Board and would be considered next by the Executive. He indicated that the issue of whether a future tourism strategy could be self-funding might be an approach considered in the development of the economic strategy.
- A member of the Committee suggested the value in using elements of the 2014-20 Visitor Strategy and questioned the use of resources in any possible re-branding. In response, the Strategic Services Director indicated that a review of existing strategies would be one of the first roles of the consultant tasked with developing the economic strategy.
- In reply to a question about the scope and size of the Council's communications team and the use of Guildford Tourist Information Centre to sell tickets, the Lead Councillor for Environment indicated the importance of the Visit Surrey website and the use of self-ticketing platforms such as Eventbrite. The Strategic Services Director indicated that there was not currently a demand for a function to sell tickets for events, although this might change as demand increased further after the pandemic. She advised that the Council's communication teams were multi-functional, with none dedicated to tourism or the visitor economy.
- The meeting was advised that many of the priorities of the 2014-20 Visitor Strategy were delivered by approximately 2017.
- In reply to a question from a Committee member about growth areas beyond heritage for the visitor economy, the Lead Councillor for Environment referred to the video gaming industry.
- In reply to a question from a Committee member about digital marketing skills such as SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) within the Council's communications team, the meeting was advised that digital content editors were currently part of the team.

The Chairman thanked the Lead Councillor for Environment and officers for attending and answering questions.

OS7 UPDATE REPORT: SPEND ON CONSULTANTS AND AGENCY WORKERS

The Lead Councillor for Resources introduced the report submitted to the Committee. He advised the meeting that total spend on agency and consultants in 2021-22 was almost unchanged from 2020-21, the spend on consultants had fallen by sixteen percent in the same period. He indicated that the net cost to the Council had reduced by almost £10 million to approximately £5 million. The Lead Councillor for Resources noted that the Council's preferred supplier for agency workers accounted for fifty-two per cent of agency spend in 2021-22, up from twenty-four percent in the previous year.

The Interim Senior Specialist Procurement outlined to the Committee the progress in controlling consultant and agency spend, improvements in the governance process, and the work of the Corporate Procurement Board.

During the ensuing discussion a number of questions were raised and responded to:

- In response to a question about the forecast spend for 2022-23, the Lead Councillor for Resources advised the Committee of £700k budgeted for agency staff, referred to capital spending of £99 million approved by full Council in February 2022, and advised that there would be an increase in staff in the Council's procurement service. The Lead Councillor for Resources advised that the details of the consultancy spend on projects were set out in the business case reports submitted to the Executive or full Council. The Director for Resources confirmed that forecast spend was normally included in budget reports.
- A member of the Committee noted that the £2.1 million reduction in revenue spending in 2021-22 compared to 2020-21 was impressive. The same member of the Committee suggested that the report submitted to the Committee might in future be considered annually by the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee rather than the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Chairman indicated that the suggestion was best discussed outside the meeting.
- The Lead Councillor for Resources indicated that the governance changes targeted improvements in procurement and contractual arrangements for consultancy and agency spending. He stated that the Council were recruiting permanent staff whenever possible, rather than using agency staff.
- The Lead Councillor for Resources praised the detail provided within the report submitted to the Committee. In response to a request from a Committee member for more information to be provided within a future version of the report, the Director of Resources outlined the governance structure for reporting and monitoring the budget for each project and questioned the appropriateness of adding such major project details to reports considered in public. The Director for Resources indicated that details of major projects would be shared with any Councillor requesting them. A member of the Committee suggested that the inclusion of additional information in future versions of the report would lead to duplication of work undertaken elsewhere in the Council.
- A member of the Committee asked what the target was for agency spend with the Council's preferred supplier and was advised by the Interim Senior Specialist Procurement that 100 per cent was unrealistic as certain skillsets were unable to be delivered through the Comensura framework used. In addition, the meeting was advised that further consolidation of the suppliers of agency workers was unrealistic.

- In reply to a question from a Councillor about the lack of planning officers available through the Council's preferred supplier for agency workers, the Lead Councillor for Resources referred to the difficulties of recruiting and retaining staff in Guildford and the south-east generally. In response to a suggestion from a member of the Committee for a more flexible approach to staff remote working, the Director of Resources indicated that the Council's agile working policy could be expected to be reviewed periodically.

The Chairman noted the clearness of the information presented in the report submitted to the Committee and the ability of Councillors to obtain further details from the Director of Resources and other officers.

The Chairman thanked the Lead Councillor for Resources and officers for attending and answering questions.

RESOLVED: (I) That the 2021/22 spend position on consultants and agency workers as presented in the report submitted to the Committee be noted. (II) That an Update Report on Spend on Consultants and Agency Workers be provided annually to the Committee.

OS8 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Senior Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) advised the meeting that since the publication of the agenda the next work programme meeting of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and the Executive Advisory Boards had been set for 30 June 2022. He indicated that the unscheduled items on the Committee's work plan were being progressed.

A member of the Committee noted items on the unscheduled list were not being progressed according to how long ago they had been requested.

RESOLVED: That the draft work programme attached at Appendix 1 to the report submitted to the Committee be approved.

The meeting finished at 9.08 pm

Signed

Date

Chairman