

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 September 2020

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

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|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| * Councillor Dennis Booth   | * Councillor George Potter    |
| * Councillor Colin Cross    | * Councillor Jo Randall       |
| * Councillor Angela Goodwin | * Councillor Tony Rooth       |
| * Councillor Tom Hunt       | * Councillor Deborah Seabrook |
| * Councillor Ramsey Nagaty  | * Councillor Fiona White      |

\*Present

Councillors Tim Anderson (Lead Councillor for Resources), Angela Gunning, Jan Harwood (Lead Councillor for Climate Change), Julia McShane (Lead Councillor for Community), John Redpath (Lead Councillor for Economy), Caroline Reeves (Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing and Development Control), and Catherine Young were also in attendance.

### **OS14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

There were no apologies for absence.

### **OS15 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT AND DECLARATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

### **OS16 MINUTES**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 7 July 2020 were agreed.

### **OS17 COVID-19 RESPONSE – UPDATE**

The Leader of the Council introduced the item. She indicated the importance of remaining attentive and the continuing communication of key messages during the current phase of the pandemic. The Leader of the Council advised that the Council was not involved in the COVID-19 local test sites. In addition, she indicated that a rethink of the Council's priorities would be required in light of the impact of COVID-19 on the organisation's finances and the Borough's residents.

The Managing Director gave a presentation updating the meeting on the Council's response to COVID-19. The Committee was advised of activities between April and July 2020, including food parcel deliveries, community helpline calls to vulnerable residents, meals on wheels, and prescription deliveries.

The Managing Director advised the meeting of the new rules on public gatherings and undertook to circulate details to Committee members.

The Managing Director stated that in Surrey the COVID-19 infection rate had increased to 16.1 per 100,000 and in Guildford the rate had increased to 10.7 per 100,000. He indicated that there had been 1,339 COVID-19 related deaths registered in Surrey as at 10 September 2020, of which 96 were in Guildford. He advised the meeting of the new rules on public

gatherings, the local COVID-19 testing arrangements, and the Surrey Local Outbreak Control Plan. In addition, the Managing Director indicated that the HIVE project had been re-opened to assist those in need of clothing and household goods.

The Managing Director indicated that service demand at the Council's offices was low and he suggested that the reception area would likely not re-open until the coronavirus alert level moved to 2. He stated that the current alert level was 3, showing the virus was in general circulation.

The Committee was informed that COVID-19 would affect Council income beyond the current financial year. The Managing Director confirmed that the Council would be submitting a claim under the local government income compensation scheme for lost sales, fees and charges.

The Chairman thanked the Managing Director for his presentation and invited questions from Committee members.

In reply to a question, the Director of Resources advised the Committee of the timescale for submission and payment of claims made through the local government income compensation scheme for lost sales, fees and charges.

In response to a question, the Managing Director undertook to provide Councillors with written details of the Council's administration of Surrey County Council grants for the voluntary sector for people in need of food during the winter or second wave of COVID-19.

In answer to a question, the Corporate Public Health Co-ordinator advised that there were plans to improve the COVID-19 testing capability and that local availability should increase within two weeks. In relation to a question about the robustness of the infection rate given the difficulties of obtaining tests, the Corporate Public Health Co-ordinator indicated her confidence that people in Surrey with symptoms were able to get tested.

In reply to a Committee member's question, the Managing Director assured the Committee that Council staff had correct PPE.

## **OS18 LEAD COUNCILLOR QUESTION SESSION**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Jan Harwood, the Lead Councillor for Climate Change. The Chairman advised that several question areas had been identified and shared for Councillor Harwood in advance of the meeting, too many for one session. The Chairman indicated that the Lead Councillor had agreed to attend the Committee's October meeting to address climate change questions. He advised the meeting that the focus of the current session would be planning policy and the Planning for the Future White Paper.

The following information and responses were provided by the Lead Councillor for Climate Change:

- In response to a question asking for identification of the most significant impacts of the *Planning for the Future* White Paper and the *Changes to the Current Planning System* consultations, the Lead Councillor for Climate Change indicated that much of the detail for implementing the proposals was absent. He advised the meeting of the difficulty of gauging the impact of imprecise proposals. The Lead Councillor for Climate Change indicated that the proposed reform and simplification of planning policy would have more impact in areas without an adopted Local Plan than in others, such as Guildford, which had one in place.

- The Lead Councillor for Climate Change indicated that the Council's submission to the *Planning for the Future* White Paper consultation would be the response agreed by the Executive. He advised that the final version of the response could be shared with all councillors ahead of submission and noted that the government's consultation process was open to everyone.
- The Lead Councillor for Climate Change advised that it was unlikely that the Local Plan would be reviewed in response to the *Planning for the Future* White Paper and the *Changes to the Current Planning System* proposals. He advised that a Local Plan had to be reviewed every five years. The Lead Councillor for Climate Change indicated that the proposals would make the housing target within Local Plans binding. He confirmed that in the absence of detailed information from the government about the proposed planning policy changes the Council's work on its development management policies would continue.
- In reply to a question about protecting Guildford's environment given the proposed expansion of permitted development, the Lead Councillor for Climate Change indicated the probable importance of the zoning planning system proposed by the government. In addition, the Lead Councillor for Climate Change indicated that the implications of the proposed zoning system for protecting biodiversity were unclear.
- In response to a question about resourcing the development of mandatory design codes and master plans, the Lead Councillor for Climate Change advised as to the difficulty of planning and assigning resources until the nature of the change was clear. A member of the Committee suggested the merits of reacting quickly and securing suitable resources before other planning authorities did so.
- With reference to planning policy changes proposed by the government, a member of the Committee asked if existing character studies for Guildford were out of date and if so when they might be replaced. In reply, the Lead Councillor for Climate Change advised the meeting that existing development management policies had a degree of flexibility about local character considerations and that such matters could be subjective. He indicated the importance of future Council resources in this policy area.
- In reply to a question, the Lead Councillor for Climate Change informed the Committee that the Council would not waive Section 106 or Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments on any strategic sites. The Lead Councillor for Climate Change undertook to confirm that no such payments had been waived in relation to the development at Manor Farm.
- In response to questions about the provision and delivery of windfall development across the Borough, the Lead Councillor for Climate Change indicated that the Council did not record the number of windfall applications. He offered to circulate details of the windfall permissions granted for previous years and indicated that the number for 2019-20 was approximately 74. He advised that the numbers of windfall permissions granted broken down by ward were not readily accessible but that such information would be available for future permissions. He cautioned against year on year comparisons of windfall development and suggested any deviations in windfall projections from those utilised in the Local Plan were minimal.
- In reply to a suggestion from a Councillor that information collated within the Annual Monitoring Report should be published quarterly, the Lead Councillor for Climate Change indicated that such a change would encourage short-termism.

- In response to a request from a Councillor for the establishment of a task group to investigate reasons for delays or non-development of approved planning applications, the Lead Councillor for Climate Change indicated this would duplicate the role of the Housing Delivery Board.

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

## **OS19 SAFER GUILDFORD PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT**

The Chairman welcomed the Lead Councillor for Community, Inspector Andy Hill, and the Council's Senior Policy Officer (Strategy and Communications), and advised that the Managing Director was attending as Chair of the Safer Guildford Partnership (SGP).

The Lead Councillor for Community introduced the item. She praised the work of the SGP over the past year and noted the impact and challenge of COVID-19 on all partners. The Lead Councillor for Community advised the meeting of the changing nature of crime, anti-social behaviour, and community safety issues over the past five months, resulting in an increase in Community Triggers. She indicated that the SGP had refocused and streamlined its priorities. The Committee was advised of the continuing importance of effective communication by the SGP, including with ward councillors.

The Council's Senior Policy Officer (Strategy and Communications) gave a presentation summarising the content of the report submitted to the Committee. She confirmed that the purpose of the report was to provide the Committee with an opportunity to examine the activities of the Partnership during 2019-20 and to comment on the appropriateness of the draft priorities for 2020-21. In addition, the Committee was advised that the draft priorities for 2020-21 had been discussed by the SGP Executive the week previously and the wording changed from the ones within the report submitted to the Committee:

- Recovery
- Domestic abuse
- Vulnerable people
- Public Spaces Protection Orders
- Junior Citizens Scheme review
- Communications
- SGP 3-year plan, 2021-24

The Senior Policy Officer (Strategy and Communications) indicated that the action plan for delivery of SGP priorities would reflect only those activities that were above and beyond the remit or resources of individual partners.

In reply to a question, the Committee was advised that the ASB interventions in Ash listed within section 6.4 of the report had been the result of a referral to the SGP's Joint Action Group (JAG) from Ash Parish Council. The Senior Policy Officer (Strategy and Communications) She indicated that the expectation was for information about such actions to be circulated by representatives attending the JAG. The Managing Director advised the meeting that communication with ward members had been identified within the Council as an area for improvement.

The meeting was informed that the Ash Safer Partnership was a community safety initiative involving the Joint Enforcement Team and Ash Parish Council.

Responding to a question about the lack of expected and achieved outcomes within the report and the difficulty of evaluating the effectiveness of SGP actions, the Senior Policy Officer (Strategy and Communications) acknowledged the difficulties of evidencing the impacts and outcomes of the SGP. She undertook to provide the Committee with more performance monitoring information in future.

The Senior Policy Officer (Strategy and Communications) advised the Committee that issues could be referred to the SGP through [communitysafety@guildford.gov.uk](mailto:communitysafety@guildford.gov.uk) and that further details of the process could be circulated to all Councillors. The Lead Councillor for Community suggested members visit the Surrey Police website to obtain further information, including details of the Safer Neighbourhood Teams. She advised that details of the SGP were available on the Council's website.

The Committee was advised that the Junior Citizens scheme was under review in terms of value for money, content, target audience, and method of delivery.

Inspector Hill confirmed that County Lines remained an issue across the Borough and the county. He indicated that Guildford town was a focus for efforts by the police.

RESOLVED: That, subject to the comments and actions agreed above, the activities and achievements of the Safer Guildford Partnership for 2019-20 be welcomed and its priorities for 2020-21 as presented to the Committee be supported.

## **OS20 AIR QUALITY STRATEGY ACTION PLAN UPDATE**

The Regulatory Services Manager introduced the item, summarising the report submitted to the Committee.

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

The Compton Air Quality Management Area, referred to in section 8 of the appendix to the report, would be monitored but it was too soon to establish the impact of banning the right turn into Down Lane. The Regulatory Services Manager undertook to progress the issue of the no-right turn signage being obscured.

A member of the Committee suggested a park and ride for Shalford would help tackle air quality in that locality. The Regulatory Services Manager indicated that such a proposal had been explored previously and the rationale for it had been judged insufficient.

The Committee asked the Regulatory Services Manager for details of the decline in levels of public transport use during COVID-19 and how its use might be encouraged and car-use discouraged. In response, the Committee was advised that confidence in the COVID measures on buses and trains would grow and changes in working from home might maintain some of the recent improvements in air quality seen during COVID.

The Regulatory Services Manager undertook to investigate the availability of data for public transport usage during the pandemic.

The Committee was advised that the £30,000 grant awarded to the Council by Highways England had been used to employ consultants to look at potential measures to improve emissions along the A3. The Regulatory Services Manager confirmed that pre-COVID-19 data was being used to inform this work.

With reference to breaches of air quality standards along the A3, the Committee was advised that Highways England would be legally required to implement measures to achieve compliance by 2021.

The Committee was advised that it was hoped the anti-vehicle idling campaign would be implemented by its target date of 2021.

RESOLVED: That the progress achieved implementing the Air Quality Strategy be noted.

#### **OS21      PROPERTY INVESTMENT STRATEGY**

The Lead Councillor for Resources introduced the item. He informed the meeting that at the end of 2019 the Council's budget projections showed a budget shortfall of £10.4m over the three-year period till 2022-23. The meeting was advised that in February 2020 the Council approved the creation of a £40m Property Acquisition Fund to help plug the budget gap. The Lead Councillor for Resources indicated that the proposed Property Investment Strategy set out investment criteria and the process for acquiring, selling, and managing properties to help reduce the Council's budget gap.

The Committee members asked if when deciding which properties to invest in the usage of the property was taken into account. The meeting was advised that the strategy aimed to provide a balanced portfolio and ensure the Council was protected from under-performance in a single sector. The Interim Deputy Head of Asset Management advocated a flexible strategy rather than one which prescribed the amount of each sector within the portfolio. The meeting was informed of the disadvantages of setting a weighting or criteria for a specific property sector within a long-term strategy.

In reply to questions, the meeting was advised that a Strategic and Operational Property Acquisition Strategy would be brought forward to address concerns other than investment return (such as town centre regeneration, development sites, and affordable housing sites).

The Chairman reminded the meeting that on 22 September 2020 the Executive would consider approving the Property Investment Strategy, the transfer of £20m from the provisional budget to the approved budget, and delegation of authority for property acquisitions within the parameters of the Strategy.

RESOLVED: That the recommendations to the Executive as laid out within the report submitted to the Committee be noted.

#### **OS22      MATTERS OUTSTANDING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

The Chairman advised the Committee of three matters outstanding from previous meetings: information relating to Future Guildford; traveller strategy and policy; and the Walnut Bridge project.

With reference to the information provided by the Chief Internal Auditor and Ignite Consulting and circulated to Councillors, the Chairman informed the meeting that the view from Committee members was that the highlight reports and business process information was a partial response. The Chairman indicated that a clearer explanation accompanying more targeted information would have been more easily understood. Committee members endorsed the Chairman's observation. In response, the Managing Director advised that a covering report would be prepared by the Chief Internal Auditor and provided to Committee members.

The Managing Director confirmed there was nothing to add at this time to the written update on the traveller strategy and policy provided to the Committee.

The Committee agreed the Chairman and Vice-Chairman consider the issue as to whether the Walnut Bridge Project remain as an outstanding matter or be moved to the Committee's work plan.

### **OS23      OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chairman introduced the item and advised that the October question session with the Lead Councillor for Climate Change would be added to the work programme.

The Chairman advised the meeting that a proposal to look at Mental Health Provision in the Borough had been considered at a work plan meeting the previous week. He indicated that it was proposed in the first instance to evaluate the outcomes of an overview and scrutiny mental health task group at Surrey County Council (SCC). He advised that the task group was due to present its report and recommendations on 15 October 2020. In addition, the Chairman thanked Councillor Angela Goodwin, a member of the SCC task group, for providing an update on this. Councillor Goodwin confirmed that the report would contain numerous recommendations relating to mental health provision across the county.

The Chairman proposed, and the Committee members agreed, that following the publication of the SCC study the Committee would review the proposal for an investigation of mental health provision in the Borough further with a view to establishing a task group by the end of 2020.

The meeting finished at 9.45 pm

Signed .....

Date .....

Chairman