

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2 February 2021

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

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

*Present

Councillors Tim Anderson (Lead Councillor for Resources), Joss Bigmore (Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Service Delivery), Richard Billington, Julia McShane (Lead Councillor for Community), John Redpath (Lead Councillor for Economy), Maddy Redpath, Caroline Reeves (Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing and Development Control), and Catherine Young were also in attendance.

OS53 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no apologies for absence.

OS54 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT AND DECLARATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

OS55 MINUTES

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 19 January 2021 were agreed.

OS56 RESPONSE TO COVID-19 – UPDATE

The Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Service Delivery introduced the item. He warned against complacency over COVID-19 and stressed the importance of continuing to adhere to guidelines.

The Managing Director gave a presentation on the current COVID-19 situation and the Council's response, beginning with an update on local cases. The Committee was advised that the COVID-19 infection rate in Surrey was 230.4 per 100,000 – similar to the rate for the South East (235.0) and lower than the national rate (260.0) – and the Guildford rate had decreased to 199.3 per 100,000. The Managing Director advised that in the previous week there had been 2,756 new cases in Surrey, of which 297 were in Guildford. The meeting was informed that as at 1 February there were 1,720 registered COVID-related deaths in Surrey, with 134 in Guildford.

The Managing Director advised the meeting of key COVID-19 issues: the national lockdown; support and services for the most vulnerable; business support; Council services; staff sickness; and mass vaccination. The Committee was advised of continuing help for the most vulnerable residents in the Borough. The Managing Director confirmed that the Council was administering eight grant schemes to support businesses. The meeting heard that all essential Council services were being maintained. The Managing Director referred to the work of the COVID safety marshals and the police. With reference to staff sickness, the

Managing Director advised that the rate was lower in 2020 than in 2019. The meeting was advised that there were four mass vaccination sites in the Borough: Superdrug, Direct Pharmacy, Royal Surrey County Hospital, and G Live. The Committee was informed that nearly 16,000 vaccinations had been delivered at Royal Surrey County Hospital by 27 January and 6,300 provided at G Live, with the first four priority groups on track to receive their vaccinations by mid-February.

In response to questions, the Director for Resources indicated that the Council's expenditure on COVID-19 response was in excess of the £1.8 million grant received from the government. She advised the meeting that the Council had so far spent £2.9 million on the response and was forecast to spend £5.4 million by 31 March 2021. She confirmed that local authorities had up until now spent significantly more on responding to the pandemic than they had received in government support.

In response to questions, the Corporate Public Health Co-ordinator stated that Surrey's Director of Public Health undertook in depth analysis of the variations in COVID rates locally and the information gathered informed the local response to the pandemic. She confirmed that all care homes in the Borough were expected to have received vaccination visits by mid-February.

In reply to a question from a Committee member, the Managing Director indicated that the value of consistent public communications about local vaccinations was being addressed. The Leader of the Council indicated that if Councillors had specific queries about the vaccination programme he and the Deputy Leader of the Council would be able to raise them at an upcoming meeting with Surrey Heartlands Clinical Commissioning Group.

The Chairman thanked the Managing Director and other officers for attending and answering questions.

OS57 UPDATE ON FUTURE GUILDFORD PHASE B

The Leader of the Council introduced the item and praised the Future Guildford transformation programme.

The Managing Director, the Director for Resources, the Director for Service Delivery, and the Senior Specialist Human Resources gave a presentation on Future Guildford. The Managing Director began by summarising the aims of the Council-wide transformation project. Next, the Director for Resources reminded the Committee members of Phase A of Future Guildford, including the staffing saving of £1.3 million. She indicated that two major technology projects were started in Phase A: the Net Helpdesk system and Business World, an integrated finance and HR system. The Committee was advised that Business World was implemented in 12 months to achieve savings and due to the imminent expiry of the old system.

The Director for Resources indicated that staffing savings from Phase B would be between £2.8 million and £3.1 million which combined with Phase A staff savings of £1.3 million and service challenge savings would achieve approximately £8.1 million of savings overall.

The Director for Service Delivery advised the meeting about Phase B of Future Guildford. He indicated that the learning from the Council's response to the pandemic had been taken into account when, after the initial national lockdown, work resumed on Phase B of Future Guildford.

The Director for Service Delivery outlined the consultation process undertaken with staff. The meeting heard that of the 50 requests for voluntary redundancy, twenty-eight were

accepted and twenty-two declined. The Director for Service Delivery indicated that Phase B was not complete and there remained a considerable number of roles to recruit to, including posts requiring external recruitment.

The Director for Service Delivery stated that lessons learned from Phase A of Future Guildford meant that service leaders had earlier inclusion and more support in the consultation process in Phase B. In addition, he indicated that in Phase B there had been more drop in and support sessions provided than in Phase A, together with more and earlier transition discussions.

The Senior Specialist Human Resources advised the Committee about staff turnover and wellbeing, including sickness absence levels. She advised that staff turnover for the 2020 calendar year was thirteen percent, compared with fifteen percent for the previous year. The Committee was informed that in 2020 there had been 89 leavers, with sixty-two percent voluntary resignations and twenty-six percent redundancies and settlements. The Senior Specialist Human Resources concluded that there were no major concerns over staff turnover rates. She advised the meeting that staff sickness absence rates were lower in 2020 than in 2019, although mental illness accounted for a higher proportion of absences in 2020.

The Committee was provided with a summary of responses to the wellbeing section of a staff survey undertaken in the summer of 2020. In addition, the Senior Specialist Human Resources advised that usage of the Employee Assistance Programme (providing counselling and advice) had doubled. She indicated that a stress audit survey of staff would be undertaken soon.

The Senior Specialist Human Resources indicated that post-lockdown an agile working policy would be introduced at the Council.

The Senior Specialist Human Resources stated that all Council staff were paid the Real Living Wage (RLW), with the exception of casual workers providing play schemes. With reference to the Committee's previous recommendation that the Council attain accreditation with the Real Living Foundation [minute OS5, 4 June 2019 refers], the meeting was advised that to become accredited the Council must aim for all its contractors to pay the RLW to their staff. The Committee heard that for Freedom Leisure to pay the RLW to staff at the Spectrum and other leisure facilities in the Borough would cost in the region of £200,000 annually, while for HQ Theatres to pay the RLW at G Live would cost an additional £43,000 per year. The Senior Specialist Human Resources advised that no other local authorities in Surrey had decided to become accredited with the Real Living Foundation due to the cost.

The Managing Director advised that Salesforce, a Customer Relationship Management System, was due to be launched at the end of March 2021. He stated that Open Vison / Open Portal would give residents access to their council tax information online for the first time and was on track to be launched at the beginning of April 2021. In concluding the presentation, the Managing Director suggested the Committee might continue to review the implementation of Future Guildford in the late summer/early autumn.

The Chairman thanked the Managing Director and other officers for their presentation and noted that several of the Committee's potential question areas shared with officers in advance of the meeting had been addressed.

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

- In reply to a question about possible change in councillor-officer relationships under Future Guildford, the Managing Director indicated that healthy working relationships between officers and councillors had continued across the Council.
- A member of the Committee requested that in light of the changes in personnel and structure caused by Future Guildford a paper telephone directory of Council officers be produced for Councillors. In response, the Managing Director undertook to investigate providing the contact information in a readily accessible format for Councillors.
- A member of the Committee expressed concern at the extensive workload and responsibilities of the heads of service in the new Future Guildford structure and suggested that updates on Future Guildford to the Committee include information monitoring this. In response, the Managing Director indicated that staff would be supported and if judged necessary then the new structure could be revisited and adjusted. The Director for Service Delivery stated that Future Guildford would build increased flexibility and resilience across the Council and enable better use of resources.
- In response to a question about services that would not be continuing at the same level due to Future Guildford, the Managing Director indicated that he was not aware of service reductions.
- A member of the Committee asked whether the implications of COVID-19 might lead to further changes at the Council perhaps not envisaged during the planning of Future Guildford. In reply, the Committee was advised of the positive response to the challenges of the pandemic by the services, particularly the redeployment of staff to assist the most vulnerable residents in the Borough. The Community Wellbeing Manager stated that due to the redeployment of staff then frontline delivery at the Council had not been affected adversely during the pandemic.
- In response to a question about the possible introduction of unitary local authorities in Surrey, the Managing Director indicated that Councillors would be able to discuss the issues relating to unitaries and closer working between existing local authorities at an upcoming meeting of the Joint Executive Advisory Board.
- In reply to a question about staff refused voluntary redundancy who then subsequently left the Council, the Managing Director indicated that decisions about whether or not to grant such redundancies were based on the needs of the Council.
- The Director of Service Delivery suggested that Future Guildford aimed for a change in working culture at the Council and a move towards more matrix working.
- Dave Mullin from Ignite advised the meeting of the rationale for some of the changes of Future Guildford, using the example of how all staff involved in running and maintaining key green sites were brought within the same team.
- The Managing Director indicated his support for the suggestion that Unison and representatives of the staff forum attend the Committee to offer their views on Future Guildford.
- The meeting was advised that the decision to add in an extra planning enforcement post had been informed by factors including consultation responses, likely future caseloads and efficiencies, and comparisons with other local authorities.

- The Director for Service Delivery confirmed that implementation of Future Guildford would be monitored continuously, including through service plans providing key performance indicators, and action taken as soon as necessary.

The Chairman summarised the discussion and asked members of the Committee to identify information required within the next update on Future Guildford. In response, members of the Committee commented on the need for details of staff wellbeing and staff experiences of the new IT systems, along with evidence of feedback from the public on the customer services element of the transformation, and the value in inviting Unison.

The Leader of the Council indicated that improvement in customer service was a key driver of the transformation programme and measuring public perceptions of Future Guildford's service changes through use of residents' surveys and more anecdotal information sources would be important.

The Chairman thanked the Leader of the Council, officers, and Dave Mullin from Ignite for attending and answering questions.

RESOLVED: That a further update on the implementation of Future Guildford be submitted to the Committee in late summer/early autumn of 2021.

The meeting finished at 9.00 pm

Signed

Date

Chairman