

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

9 November 2021

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

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Councillor Chris Blow | * Councillor Maddy Redpath |
| * Councillor Guida Esteves | Councillor Tony Rooth |
| * Councillor Graham Eyre | Councillor Will Salmon |
| Councillor Angela Goodwin | * Councillor Deborah Seabrook |
| Councillor George Potter | * Councillor Fiona White |

*Present

Councillor James Steel (Lead Councillor for Environment) was also in attendance.

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

OS39 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Committee was advised of apologies for absence from Councillors Chris Blow, Angela Goodwin, George Potter, and Will Salmon. In addition, the Committee was informed of a substitution as detailed above. [An apology for absence was subsequently received from Councillor Tony Rooth.]

OS40 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT AND DECLARATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

OS41 MINUTES

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

OS42 RESPONSE TO COVID-19 – UPDATE

The Director of Service Delivery gave a presentation on the current COVID-19 situation and the Council's response, beginning with an update on local cases.

The Director of Service Delivery advised the meeting that the COVID-19 infection rate in Surrey for the week ending 2 November was 418.6 per 100,000, higher than the national rate of 392.2 per 100,000. The meeting was informed that the South East rate was 426.6 per 100,000, while Guildford's rate was 315.9 per 100,000. The Director of Service Delivery added that Guildford's rate had recently decreased to 288 per 100,000. The Director of Service Delivery advised that in the previous week there had been 5,023 new cases in Surrey, of which 475 were in Guildford. The meeting was informed that as at 7 November there were 3,028 registered COVID-related deaths in Surrey, with 261 in Guildford.

The Director of Service Delivery updated the Committee on two key COVID-19 issues: vaccination and testing; and track and trace. The meeting was advised that while Guildford currently had the lowest rate of cases in the county, infection rates could change quickly and it was only a couple of weeks since Guildford was near the top. The Director of Service Delivery indicated that cases were still mainly associated with schools and leisure facilities.

He informed the Committee that information on third vaccination rates was currently only available at a national level and that up to 3 November the number of people who had received their third vaccination was 7,536,909. The Committee was advised that local information on third vaccination levels would be included in Covid updates as soon as possible.

The Director of Service Delivery indicated that the Council continued to support testing in the Borough through regular mobile testing units at Sutherland Memorial Park and lateral flow testing being arranged for Thursdays on the Rotunda.

The Director of Service Delivery advised that Surrey County Council would monitor the effect of government guidelines requiring those entering a care home to be double vaccinated; he indicated that the impact was unknown but considered by Surrey County Council to be manageable.

The Committee was advised that the Council continued to support track and trace, with 21 face to face contact tracing cases completed in the past month, of which 13 cases were successfully contacted and resolved.

In response to a question from a Committee member, the Senior Specialist Public Health confirmed that the Council had been supporting educational initiatives about the importance of vaccinations for young people.

OS43 GUILDFORD AND WAVERLEY COLLABORATION – UPDATE

The Chair advised the Committee that the Director of Resources was unable to attend the meeting and the update would be by the Director of Service Delivery.

The Director of Service Delivery read an update provided by the Director of Resources. He stated that on 6 July 2021, Full Council had agreed to collaborate with Waverley Borough Council and commenced the process of appointing a Joint Chief Executive. The meeting was informed that Full Council received further reports on 28 July, 5 October, and 1 November providing an update on the progress of the appointment and the costs and savings associated with appointing a Joint Chief Executive. The Committee was reminded that Tom Horwood was appointed as the Joint Chief Executive by Council on 1 November.

The meeting was informed that Council was in the process of finalising Mr Horwood's employment contract and it was envisaged he would start his role and that the Managing Director, James Whiteman, would finish on 1 December 2021. The Committee was advised that Mr Horwood had written a message to Councillors and staff and held initial informal one to one meetings with the Managing Director, Directors, and some Executive Councillors as part of an informal transition ahead of 1 December.

The Director of Service Delivery advised the Committee that to facilitate the operation of a Joint Chief Executive various legal documents would be required. He indicated that currently it had not been possible to develop a formal full intra-authority agreement, but the Council had drafted a data sharing agreement and a section 113 agreement under the Local Government Act 1972 to allow the two councils to enter into an agreement to place officers employed by the council at the disposal of each other subject to the terms of the agreement. The Committee was informed that the agreement had been drafted in line with the Heads of Terms agreed by Full Council on 28 July 2021. The Director of Service Delivery stated that an intra authority agreement would be required once further services were added into the collaboration arrangement.

In reply to a question, the Director of Service Delivery confirmed that an informal handover process had been underway for some time. In response to a question about data sharing, the Director of Service Delivery indicated that operational data would not be shared. The Lead Specialist – Legal and Council’s Monitoring Officer clarified the reasons for the formal change from a Managing Director to a Joint Chief Executive occurring on 1 December and stated that the data sharing agreement was GDPR compliant.

OS44 LEAD COUNCILLOR QUESTION SESSION

The Chair indicated that the item had been withdrawn because the portfolio responsibilities of the former Lead Councillor for Climate Change had been taken on by the Leader of the Council only a few days earlier. The Chair indicated that the question session would be held at a subsequent meeting of the Committee.

OS45 OPERATION OF LEISURE MANAGEMENT CONTRACT 2020-21

Prior to introducing the report submitted to the Committee, the Lead Councillor for Environment apologised for mistakenly advising the Committee at its September meeting concerning the project timetable for Spectrum 2.0. He indicated that in September he had stated that the results of surveys of Spectrum should be available in early or mid-2023 [Minute OS29 refers], whereas the results would be available in the spring of 2022 and a report presented in the summer of 2022.

In introducing the report submitted to the Committee, the Lead Councillor for Environment noted that Freedom Leisure had not provided all the information that would normally be included within the Annual Report. He indicated that the scrutiny working group were broadly happy with the day-to-day operations of the leisure facilities, but had expressed some reservations over the lack of detail and context around some of the figures on customer feedback. The Lead Councillor for Environment stated that the underspent Covid support funding was carried forward into 2021/22 while the business recovers to recover. He indicated that the Client team were broadly happy with the operations of the venues. He concluded by thanking the scrutiny working group for their contribution.

The Head of Culture, Heritage and Leisure Services indicated that he had nothing to add to the opening remarks from the Lead Councillor for Environment.

In response to questions, the Head of Culture, Heritage and Leisure Services confirmed that for convenience the Covid support that Freedom Leisure had received for the three leisure facilities had been declared under Spectrum’s income, with the exception of the furlough payments which have been attributed across the three sites.

In reply to a question about the conclusion within the report that the operation of the leisure venues had been broadly within the acceptable parameters of the contract, the Head of Culture, Heritage and Leisure Services suggested that the sites had previously been run in his opinion better by the Council. He indicated that while operationally the facilities were well run, the asset management and the availability of investment funding were issues.

The Head of Culture, Heritage and Leisure Services indicated that the Council was in the process of extending the ten-year contract with Greenwich Leisure Limited for a further two years. He advised that, in conjunction with Waverley Borough Council, an evaluation of options for running leisure facilities across both boroughs was underway. The Committee was informed that an initial, high-level report on options was being produced by an external consultant procured jointly by the Council and Waverley Borough Council.

In reply to a question, the Head of Culture, Heritage and Leisure Services outlined to the meeting the customer feedback during 2020-21, indicating that an initial wave of

compliments when facilities re-opened was then followed by a higher level of complaints per visitor than would normally be the case. He indicated that the Covid restrictions made direct comparison to a typical year very difficult due to the unique circumstances.

A member of the Committee asked for an update on the leisure venues for the period covered since the completion of the Annual Report. In reply, the Head of Culture, Heritage and Leisure Services indicated that demand for swimming lessons was especially strong, exercise classes were in demand, but gym memberships were not at pre-Covid levels; he indicated this situation was typical of venues nationally.

In reply to a question, the Head of Culture, Heritage and Leisure Services indicated that the number of staff at the Spectrum gym had reduced and customer engagement had lessened.

RESOLVED: That the list of Leisure Partnership Agreement objectives detailed at paragraph 3.4 of the report submitted to the Committee be noted.

OS46 GUILDFORD CREMATORIUM AIR QUALITY AUDIT

The Director of Service Delivery introduced the report submitted to the Committee. He referred to the conclusions and recommendations of the audit by SLR Consulting Limited and mentioned three: that the D1 calculation submitted with the tender submissions was not considered in the scoring of the submissions and was not material in the eventual commissioning of the contractor; the apparent slowness of the complaints procedure that was attributed by the Council to the effects of the pandemic; and a requirement for an audit procedure and documented audit trail, with contractors required to have a quality assurance system certified to a recognised standard. The Director of Service Delivery acknowledged delays in the complaints procedure prior to the pandemic and welcomed the advice for contractors to have a quality assurance system certified to ISO 9001.

The Chair welcomed a member of the public, Mr Mark Westcott, who had registered to speak on the item and reminded Committee members that they had already received a copy of Mr Westcott's statement the previous evening.

Mr Westcott addressed the meeting, questioning the accuracy of the information provided to the Committee and the Council's response to his requests for information about the calculation of the crematorium stack height. He began by thanking the Director of Service Delivery for acknowledging that delays had occurred prior to the pandemic in responding to requests for information. Next, Mr Westcott detailed the timeline for his requests for information since 2017, the responses received, the eventual resolution of the stack height issue in 2020, and the lack of criticism of the Council within the reports submitted to the Committee.

The Chair thanked Mr Westcott. In addition, the Vice-Chair of the Committee and the Chair both remarked on the email from a Council officer that Mr Westcott had provided to the Committee and offered their apologies. A member of the Committee assured Mr Westcott of efforts by Councillors to promote openness and transparency within the Council and ensure mistakes were admitted and learnt from.

The Director of Service Delivery expressed his gratitude to Mr Westcott and another member of the public, Mr Harvey, for their continued efforts to highlight an error with the stack height that required correction.

In reply to a question from a Committee member about the redaction of company names within the report submitted to the Committee, the Lead Specialist – Legal and Council's

Monitoring Officer indicated that the Council did not have the consent of the companies to name them.

RESOLVED: (I) That the SLR audit at Appendix 1 of the report submitted to the Committee be noted.

(II) That the recommendations within section 3 of the SLR audit at Appendix 1 of the report submitted to the Committee be endorsed.

OS47 UPDATE ON PROJECT & PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT (PPM) GOVERNANCE

With reference to presentation slides included within the Committee's agenda, the Strategy and Communications Manager provide an update on changes to the Council's governance of its project and programme management (PPM). He began by summarising the PPM governance issues identified prior to the changes: including, the absence of mandates, stage gates, robust business cases, and an audit trail of decision-making, a want of standardised methodologies; and a lack of strategic context, direction, and consensus. The Strategy and Communications Manager advised the Committee of the new processes and products introduced to improve PPM at the Council and the benefits desired. In addition, the Committee was advised of the next steps to improve PPM, such as the mapping of capacity and resources towards the Council's priorities, and the development and implementation of more transparent reporting arrangements.

The Strategy and Communications Manager concluded his presentation by offering to provide further and more detailed explanations of the PPM products to Councillors in small workshops.

In reply to a question from the Chair, the meeting was advised that the Lead Councillor responsible for the PPM changes was the Leader of the Councillor and Lead Councillor for Customer Service and that he had been unable to attend the meeting.

A member of the Committee noted the merit in a simplified system to manage large numbers of projects and the importance of timely information, before requesting a briefing for Councillors on the details of the PPM changes.

A member of the Committee welcomed the PPM changes and suggested that the improvements presented to the meeting appeared to be standard PPM. She asked for information about the reporting tool the Council would be using and was advised that an evaluation of the various options had been undertaken. The Strategy and Communications Manager suggested the value in a demonstration to Councillors of the chosen reporting system. In response to a further question, the Strategy and Communications Manager indicated that the Enterprise Portfolio Management (EPM) system was being trialled in Corporate Programmes until March 2022 before it was applied to other programmes across the Council. In reply to a Committee member, the Strategy and Communications Manager agreed the merit in organising drop-ins for Councillors to find out more about the EPM tools.

A member of the Committee indicated the importance of project closure and post-project evaluation stages. She alluded to the disadvantages of a person self-assessing their own project work and the need for the lessons learned report and the post-project evaluation to be written by someone unconnected to the project.

RESOLVED: (I) That the Executive be requested to ensure that in relation to the closure and evaluation stages of Council projects the author of both the lessons learned report and the post-project evaluation be someone unconnected to the project.

(II) That further training and information on the Council's project and programme management be organised for Councillors.

OS48 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a report containing the overview and scrutiny work programme for 2021-22.

In response to questions from members of the Committee, the Senior Democratic Services Officer – Scrutiny undertook to circulate the notes of the Affordable Housing task and finish group to all Committee members. In addition, the meeting was advised that unscheduled items, such as the Visitor and Tourism Strategy, would be progressed.

RESOLVED: That the overview and scrutiny work programme attached at Appendix 1 to the report submitted to the Committee be noted.

The meeting finished at 8.13 pm

Signed

Date

Chairman