

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 January 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 Graham Eyre | Councillor Will Salmon |
| * Councillor Angela Goodwin | * Councillor Deborah Seabrook |
| * Councillor George Potter | * Councillor Fiona White |

*Present

Councillors Tim Anderson (Lead Councillor for Resources), Joss Bigmore (Leader of the Council), John Redpath (Lead Councillor for Economic Development), and James Steel (Lead Councillor for Environment) were also in attendance.

OS49 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Committee was advised of apologies for absence from Councillors Chris Blow and Will Salmon.

OS50 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT AND DECLARATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

In relation to item 7, Review of the Implementation of Future Guildford, Councillor George Potter disclosed a non-pecuniary interest as an employee of CIVICA. He indicated that some software for Future Guildford had been provided by a division of CIVICA to which he had no connection and stated that the interest was non-pecuniary and would not affect his objectivity.

OS51 MINUTES

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 9 November 2021 were agreed.

OS52 COVID-19 RESPONSE - UPDATE

The Leader of the Council introduced the item before 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 14 January was 858.9 per 100,000, lower than the national rate of 972.9 per 100,000. The meeting was informed that the South East rate was 865.7 per 100,000, while Guildford's rate was 741.6 per 100,000. The Director of Service Delivery added that Guildford's rate had recently decreased to 738.9 per 100,000. The Director of Service Delivery advised that in the previous week there had been 10,306 new cases in Surrey, of which 1,115 were in Guildford. The meeting was informed that as at 16 January there were 3,150 registered COVID-related deaths in Surrey, with 274 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 although the

infection rate in Guildford was falling, the most recent rate in Guildford of 741.6 per 100,000 compared with 315.9 per 100,000 when the Committee last met in November 2021. The Director of Service Delivery confirmed that cases were associated mainly with schools and leisure and health facilities.

The Director of Service Delivery indicated that vaccination rates for Guildford were higher than for England and in line with the rates for Surrey and the South East. The Committee was advised that third vaccination levels for Guildford were 62 per cent, compared with a rate for England of 55 per cent. 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 upcoming Thursdays on the Rotunda.

In response to a question from a Committee member about the impact of Covid on Council staff, the Director for Service Delivery stated that since November 2021 there had been 45 cases of Covid among staff. He indicated that many staff isolating due to Covid had continued to work from home.

The Chair thanked the Director for Service Delivery and the Senior Specialist Public Health for attending.

RESOLVED: That the Committee continue to receive updates on the response to COVID-19.

OS53 GUILDFORD AND WAVERLEY COLLABORATION UPDATE

The Leader of the Council informed the meeting of the formal appointment of Tom Horwood as Joint Chief Executive of Guildford and Waverley Borough Councils. In addition, the Leader advised the Committee that a joint working group had begun to design an Inter-Authority Agreement (IAA). He indicated that the first meeting of the working group had discussed finance and that the cross-party group would be meeting weekly for the next two months. The Leader of the Council stated that the Inter-Authority Agreement, alongside a more thorough risk-register, would be submitted to full Council.

The Joint Chief Executive of Guildford and Waverley Councils updated the Committee on the collaboration programme, including his appointment, the progression of governance arrangements through the formulation of the IAA, and the establishment of a shared joint management team. The meeting was informed that an independent consultant would be helping to design a new joint senior management structure. The Joint Chief Executive indicated that no formal HR processes would commence until the heads of terms of the IAA were agreed or near to agreement. In addition, the Committee was informed that through bilateral discussions officers had begun to identify collaboration opportunities and that these would be subject to a process of prioritisation by senior management.

The Joint Chief Executive indicated he would welcome invitations to meet Councillors in their own wards.

In response to a question from a Committee member, the Joint Chief Executive confirmed that the end point of collaboration between the two Councils would be determined by Councillors. He advised the meeting that the current mandate agreed by both Guildford and Waverley Borough Councils was to establish shared governance and a joint management team and bring forward business cases for service collaboration.

In reply to questions from members of the Committee, the Joint Chief Executive indicated that the creation of a shared senior management team for Guildford and Waverley Borough Councils was anticipated in months rather than years. In addition, he outlined to the meeting

how different provision of the same services presented potential future challenges and opportunities for both Councils.

The Chair thanked the Joint Chief Executive for attending and answering questions.

RESOLVED: That the Committee continue to receive updates on the collaboration between Guildford and Waverley Borough Councils.

OS54 LEAD COUNCILLOR QUESTION SESSION

The Chair introduced the Lead Councillor for Resources and reminded the meeting of Councillor Anderson's areas of responsibility: finance; commercial asset management; procurement; and communications.

The following information and responses were provided during the ensuing discussion:

- In reply to a question about the most difficult part of the Budget process, the Lead Councillor for Resources referred to the uncertainty over the future of local government funding and local authorities being given single year finance settlements by central government.
- In response to a question on his priorities for communications and for commercial asset management, the Lead Councillor for Resources advised the meeting that although communications had only been recently added to his executive portfolio he felt the Council's newsflow could be improved. With reference to commercial asset management, the Lead Councillor for Resources advised the Committee that the Council had a property acquisition fund of £50 million but there was a lack of suitable properties on the market. He indicated that a change in EPC (Energy Performance Certificates) regulations meant older properties came with cost and resource complications, while adjustments to the Public Works Loan Board prevented investment purely for income return. The Committee was advised that because of these issues the refurbishment, intensification, and re-development of existing stock was a priority, along with potential land assembly options.
- A member of the Committee questioned whether the Council's communications could be improved to ensure fuller information was provided to the public, particularly in relation to the Council's spending. In reply, the Lead Councillor for Resources outlined his past experience of communications in the private sector. With reference to the Council's recent investment of £24.5 million in social housing as an example, the Lead Councillor for Resources questioned the disclosure of information through Executive Advisory Boards and suggested the value in improved media and communications plans.
- With reference to the recent announcement by the Council of £24.5 million investment in social housing, the Lead Councillor for Resources was asked whether the evaluations for such repairs or refits were robust. He advised the meeting that the proposed investment of £24.5 million arose as a result of the initial findings of a full stock condition survey by independent surveyors. The Committee was informed that full details of the proposed works were included within the capital and investment strategy report to be considered by the Executive the following week.
- A member of the Committee asked if the Council had a specific budget for climate change and, if not, why not. The Lead Councillor for Resources stated that spending on climate change appeared fragmented. He advised the meeting that the gross budget for climate change was approximately £191,000 for 2021-22. The Lead

Councillor for Resources indicated that there were a number of specific energy efficiency projects within the Council's approved capital programme of £163,000, a further £768,000 within the provisional capital programme, and budgets for projects such as Guildford West railway station and the Sustainable Movement Corridor which would have an impact on climate change. The Committee was advised that some of the project work had been delayed due to vacant posts in the climate change team. In addition, the Lead Councillor for Resources referred to the £120,000 installation of solar panels on Farnham Road car park and the Council's Millmead offices. In conclusion, the Lead Councillor for Resources suggested that questions on the lack of a comprehensive budget for climate change should be directed to the Lead Councillor for Climate Change when she attended the Committee.

- The Lead Councillor for Resources was questioned on the Council's asset disposal policy, including its status, the communication of disposals, and the availability of a plan of the intended asset disposals. In response, the Lead Councillor for Resources advised the Committee that asset disposal was at the appraisal stage, that is to say, maximising the return from an asset or considering whether disposal would be a better option. The meeting was informed that a sub-programme of the Council's Savings Strategy aimed to save between £1 million and £1.5 million from asset disposal or increased income from operational assets, with any assets considered for disposal going to the Property Review Group for consideration and then reported through the Savings Strategy Programme. The Lead Councillor for Resources indicated that investment assets were reviewed regularly by surveyors with outcomes reported to the Property Review Group and the Investment Property Funds Management Group. He stated that the asset disposal process was at such an early stage that he was not able to give a timeframe for the provision of information to the Council.
- In response to a question on the potential impact on the Council's finances from section 106 agreements and monies, and the monitoring of compliance, the Lead Councillor for Resources suggested that topic fell within the remit of the Lead Councillor for Development Management. The Committee was informed that the Council's planning team monitor section 106 agreements and ensure monies are received and passed on to the spending department or organisation. The Lead Councillor for Resources advised the meeting that a section 106 monitoring report would be considered by the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee in March 2022. The Chair and a member of the Committee advised the meeting that after consideration of the initial report in March the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee would receive section 106 monitoring reports on a regular basis.
- In response to questions about difficulties with the software introduced by the Council for its budget monitoring, the Director for Resources advised the meeting that workarounds were being used to produce the required information for budget monitoring by the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee. She indicated that the Council was considering migrating to a newer budget monitoring module.

The Chair thanked the Lead Councillor for Resources for attending and answering questions from the Committee members.

OS55 REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FUTURE GUILDFORD

The Leader of the Council introduced the item and suggested that analysis of the Future Guildford transformation programme was complicated due to the pandemic occurring within the implementation period. He suggested the difficulty of introducing culture change during

a period of remote working. With reference to the £6-8 million of savings produced by Future Guildford and the difficulties of the pandemic, the Leader of the Council indicated the complexity of assessing the transformation programme.

The Director of Resources advised the meeting that the report submitted to the Committee was intended as the post-implementation review of the core project and the final report on the implementation of the Future Guildford transformation programme. She summarised the aims of the programme, referred to the information attached as appendices to the report submitted to the Committee, and advised that Future Guildford had ended four months previously with the conclusion of the external consultants' contract.

The Director of Resources informed the Committee that aspects of organisational development and training needed to be held face-to-face, rather than remotely. She indicated that the findings of a recent KPMG internal audit on the governance of Future Guildford had been reported to the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee. In addition, the Director for Resources indicated to the Committee that a staff survey and customer engagement survey would not be held until operational changes were embedded and a post-pandemic, new normal had arrived.

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

- In reply to a question from a Committee member about identifying issues and concerns, the Director of Resources indicated that there were no plans to do a light-touch survey before holding the staff and customer engagement surveys later in the year.
- The Director for Service Delivery confirmed that although there was a focus on advising customers to use other channels to engage with the Council, face-to-face service at the Council's reception in Millmead remained an option for members of the public. In reply to further questions and suggestions, the Resources Services Case Manager indicated that improving the ease of use of the Council's telephone automation service could be reviewed further.
- In response to a question about significant and continuing cultural resistance to change from some Council staff, the Director of Resources referred to a fear of change and resultant negativity toward Future Guildford by Council staff. She indicated the benefits of addressing such resistance ahead the changes to working likely to come from the collaboration between Guildford and Waverley Borough Councils. The Director of Service Delivery indicated that cultural development work with staff had been delayed slightly by the pandemic.

[At this point in the meeting the Lead Councillor for Environment tendered an apology and left.]

- The Director of Service Delivery confirmed that the Resources Services Case Manager was progressing guidance on the digital and service support for Councillors.
- A member of the Committee asked for an indication of the timescale for reducing a reported backlog of 2,000 Council Tax cases. The Director of Resources advised the meeting of staff recruitment and capacity difficulties and indicated that the complexity of Council Tax cases was an issue in the backlog. She advised the meeting that the aim was to clear the backlog over the next month or two.

- The Director of Resources confirmed that Future Guildford had ended and implementation of outstanding systems and service changes and improvements was now to be regarded as business as usual. She suggested further reports could be provided to the Committee on specific services and issues, rather than further updates on the overall transformation programme.
- In reply to a query about how the Council would track the value delivery of the transformation programme, the Director of Resources informed the meeting that savings would be monitored through the Council's budget monitoring processes.
- The Government Digital Service Standard was outlined to the meeting.
- In response to a question relating to appendix 5 of the report submitted to the Committee, the Resources Services Case Manager offered to provide Committee members with regular performance updates on contacts to customer services.
- The Chair indicated that while Future Guildford had ended formally, there were a number of issues outstanding that might require a further update to the Committee. The Director of Resources and the Director of Service Delivery suggested updates might be provided to the Committee on specific services and issues, rather than on the overall transformation programme. The Chair indicated that some issues might be reviewed by the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee.

The Committee members agreed the merit in periodically considering the return on investment achieved from the Future Guildford transformation, and the value in scrutinising specific issues and services.

The Chair thanked the Director of Resources and the Director of Service Delivery for attending.

OS56 UPDATE ON GYPSY, ROMA AND TRAVELLER UNAUTHORISED ENCAMPMENTS AND A POTENTIAL TRANSIT SITE IN SURREY

The Leader of the Council introduced the item. He stated that the topic of unauthorised encampments was a controversial one in the Borough. The Leader of the Council indicated that the Council dealt with travellers humanely. He confirmed that further work remained in relation to the proposed transit site in Tandridge and a second transit site in the west of the county.

The Compliance Lead, Environmental and Regulatory Services, summarised the report submitted to the Committee. The meeting was advised of a fall in unauthorised encampments in 2021 due to travel restrictions during Covid lockdowns. The Compliance Lead, Environmental and Regulatory Services, indicated that the proposed site in Tandridge would be the first transit site in the county since the early 1990s and should significantly reduce the number of unauthorised encampments in the county. She advised the Committee that the single transit site would be insufficient to meet demand, particularly during the summer months. In addition, the Compliance Lead, Environmental and Regulatory Services, informed the meeting of ongoing legal challenges to the issuing of final injunctions against unnamed defendants.

A member of the Committee questioned whether there were plans for a system of transit sites around Surrey. In response, the Compliance Lead, Environmental and Regulatory Services, indicated that she was unsure of the longer-term plans for the county but could enquire further.

The Chair thanked the Compliance Lead, Environmental and Regulatory Services, for attending and indicated that Committee members would discuss scheduling a further update.

OS57 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair introduced the item and reminded Committee members that the next work programme meeting of the chairmen and vice-chairmen of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Executive Advisory Boards would be held the next day.

With reference to a closure at Dray Court, a member of the Committee proposed adding Older People's Services to the overview and scrutiny work programme. In response, the Chair stated that whether the issues were considered by the Committee or by an Executive Advisory Board would be discussed at the work programme meeting the following day.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) indicated that suggestions and proposals for work plan items could be put forward to the Chair, Vice-Chair, or himself at any time.

The Vice-Chair of the Affordable Housing task and finish group updated the Committee on the group's work and advised that the group was in its evidence gathering stage.

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

The meeting finished at 9.34 pm

Signed

Date

Chairman