

## **REVIEW OF THE TASK GROUPS REPORTING TO THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

### **1. Councillors' Development Steering Group**

#### Current members:

Cllr Pauline Searle (chair)  
Cllr Colin Cross  
Cllr Angela Gunning  
Cllr Jo Randall  
Cllr Catherine Young

#### Current Terms of Reference:

"To continue to support councillors in their ongoing development and training needs through a clear, structured Action Plan for councillor development that responds to the corporate priorities of the Council."

#### Details of general progress and work still to be undertaken:

#### Progress:

- The Steering Group has continued to lead on helping the Council meet the standards of the South East Charter for Elected Member Development.
- At each meeting, the steering group reviews:
  - the councillors' training and development programme
  - evaluation forms completed after each training/seminar session and recommends changes to the organisation of future events where required
  - the councillors' training and development budget.

#### Work to be undertaken:

- To review and update the Councillor Development Policy Statement
- To commence the process of seeking re-accreditation under the South East Charter for Elected Member Development in 2023
- To continue to develop the councillor training programme including identifying shared training and development opportunities with neighbouring councils
- To explore alternative (remote) ways of learning for councillors
- To develop the new councillor induction programme for 2023

### **2. Corporate Governance Task Group**

#### Current members:

Cllr Deborah Seabrook (chair)  
Cllr Nigel Manning  
Cllr Ramsey Nagaty  
Cllr Will Salmon  
Cllr James Walsh  
Murray Litvak (co-opted independent member of the Corporate Governance & Standards Ctte)  
Julia Osborn (co-opted parish member of the Corporate Governance & Standards Ctte)

### Current Terms of Reference:

To examine, review, and report back initially to this Committee on the following matters:

- (a) the Councillors' Code of Conduct, including the policy on acceptance of gifts and hospitality by councillors;
- (b) the best practice recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life contained within its Report on *Local Government Ethical Standards*
- (c) the Council's guidance on the use of social media by councillors;
- (d) the revised draft Protocol on Councillor/ Officer Relations
- (e) the effectiveness of internal communications between officers and councillors; and
- (f) proposals to promote transparency, and effective communications and reporting, including the Council's Communications Protocol.
- (g) review of anomalies in the Constitution

### Suggested amendment to the terms of reference:

*“(h) Any other matter within the terms of reference of the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee and which the Task Group considers should be addressed”.*

### Details of general progress and work still to be undertaken:

Since the Task Group was established, it has reviewed and made recommendations to the Committee/ Executive/ Council on (a) to (d) referred to in the terms of reference above.

### Progress:

- The Task Group has commenced work on (e) and (f) in the terms of reference. In June 2021, the Committee agreed that the following matters be added to the work currently being undertaken by the Task Group in respect of (e) and (f):

To discuss and consider:

- (i) the Council's Constitution regarding the definition and processes for 'Key Decisions' so that any bids, tenders or other activities that may lead to key decisions in future are included in the Forward Plan or communicated to relevant Ward Councillors in a sufficiently timely manner for transparency;
- (ii) how we can ensure that any meetings involving lead councillors, officers and the private sector are minuted and available in the public domain; and
- (iii) steps we can take to ensure that any failings in transparency or procedure are communicated to the public by the Council as soon as identified.

These matters had been recommended by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee following its consideration of the findings of the investigation on behalf of the Council relating to an application submitted for a 'Garden Village' at the former Wisley Airfield.

The Task Group considered these matters at its meetings in July and August 2021. With regard to (i) above, the Task Group had discussed and understood the definition of a Key Decision and the way in which the decision had to be included on the Forward Plan at least 28 days prior to the decision being taken. The matter of communications with ward councillors was covered by the Protocol for Councillor/Officer Relations with reference to paragraph 10.9.

With regard to (ii) above, the Task Group heard evidence from Councillor John Rigg (Lead Councillor for Regeneration), Claire Morris (Director of Resources and Chief Finance Officer) and Dawn Hudd (Director of Strategic Services). The Task Group noted that no other council in Surrey made available to the public notes or minutes of meetings that lead councillors or officers held with the private sector.

Mindful of the practicalities in terms of resources of ensuring all meetings involving lead councillors, officers and the private sector were minuted, it was also clear that such meetings invariably involved varying degrees of formality, and discussions at certain meetings would inevitably involve commercially sensitive matters not for the public domain.

The Task Group acknowledged that keeping formal minutes of such meetings would be an administrative burden, but felt that the creation of a simple log of meetings recording who was present, the date of the meeting, and what was discussed could be an outcome. A public interest test could be carried out in respect of whether the log was made available for public inspection. It was suggested that maintenance of a log itself may also be burdensome due to the level of business undertaken by the Council, with fewer staff available.

The Task Group felt that meetings involving the attendance of lead councillors and/or directors/service leaders should be logged. It was suggested the log could be published quarterly on the transparency pages of the website. The Task Group noted that there may need to be a resource to ensure compliance and there would need to be an evaluation undertaken by the Monitoring Officer prior to any publication to ensure the Council was not including any exempt or commercially sensitive information. In addition, permission would also be required from any third party named in the register prior to publication. It was noted that business needed to have trust in the Council as did the public.

With regard to Point (iii) the Task Group had a general discussion about the Wisley bid specifically. It was suggested that the Council might have communicated with the public over the matter more openly and at an earlier juncture. It was speculated that this could be due to organisational cultural reasons and there might be some benefit from discussing Point (iii) and transparency in general in a workshop scenario amongst officers and councillors rather than attempt to propose any formal procedure.

- The Task Group considered a discussion paper prepared by the Task Group chair on Openness and Transparency at Guildford Borough Council, which focused amongst other things on how the Council might improve its openness and transparency in how it conducts meetings, communications, and procurement. There was also discussion on the need for confidentiality in respect of certain legal matters. The Task Group heard from, and questioned, the Council's Strategy & Communications Manager, and senior procurement and legal specialists in that regard. Arising from those discussions, the Task Group considered how the transparency agenda could be taken forward and suggested that a workshop involving councillors and officers (including the Data Protection Officer and Communications Team) be held to examine various scenarios, including the practicalities of introducing the proposed meeting log referred to above.
- The Task Group's discussions on the proposed 'openness and transparency workshop' included:

- a presentation by Ian Crocker, Organisational Development Manager in the context of the Council's Organisational Culture Framework that covered values, behaviour and culture, which was being reviewed in the light of the newly adopted Corporate Plan and the collaboration work with Waverley Borough Council
  - asking stakeholders to answer questions on openness and transparency at GBC using Survey Monkey in advance of the workshop
  - defining the overarching objectives of the workshop, which should tie in with the Corporate Plan Mission of being a trusted, efficient, innovative and transparent Council.
  - the need for an external facilitator
- In August 2021, the Task Group considered guidance for councillors on email signatures which was approved by the Executive on 21 September 2021.
  - In September 2021, and at the request of the Leader of the Council, the Task Group reviewed the Protocol relating to the appointment, role, status, rights and obligations of Honorary Freemen and Honorary Aldermen, with particular regard to the restrictions placed on Aldermen by the Council in respect of making public statements which were critical of the Council. The Task Group made recommendations to the Committee for a number of amendments to the protocol, and these were adopted by the Council in October 2021.
  - The Task Group has also discussed and drafted a protocol to follow when the Council or individual councillors were approached by companies in the commercial sector wishing to present their early ideas and proposals to councillors before submission of a planning application. It was felt that such a protocol might be appended to the Council's Probity in Planning Councillors' Handbook (this matter will be referred to the Committee in July).
  - At the request of the Committee in March 2022, the Task Group has reviewed the Committee's terms of reference (see separate item on this agenda).

Work to be undertaken:

- To review the Probity in Planning Councillors' Handbook and make recommendations as appropriate to the Committee.
- To complete work in respect of (e) and (f) in the terms of reference and report findings and recommendations to the Committee
- To consider (g) in the terms of reference