

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 July 2023

- * Councillor James Walsh (Chair)
- * Councillor Matt Furniss (Vice-Chair)

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| * Councillor Honor Brooker | * Councillor Maddy Redpath |
| * Councillor Jason Fenwick | * Councillor Katie Steel |
| * Councillor Lizzie Griffiths | * Councillor Fiona White |
| * Councillor Gillian Harwood | * Councillor Dominique Williams |
| Councillor Steven Lee | Councillor Sue Wyeth-Price |

*Present

Councillors Angela Goodwin (Lead Councillor for Engagement and Customer Services), Julia McShane (Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing), Howard Smith, Tyson, McShane and Goodwin were also in attendance, with Councillors Catherine Houston (Lead Councillor for Commercial Development) and Merel Rehorst-Smith (Lead Councillor for Regulatory and Democratic Services) in remote attendance.

OS1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Committee was advised of apologies for absence from Councillor Steven Lee, Councillor Sue Wyeth-Price, and Lead Councillor Carla Morson.

OS2 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT AND DECLARATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

OS3 MINUTES

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 28 February 2023 were agreed.

OS4 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT 2022-23 QUARTER 4

Committee members with queries about specific performance indicators in the report had been asked to submit these in advance to the Policy Officer,

Strategy, Performance and Events, to enable an explanation to be given at the meeting.

The Policy Officer, Strategy, Performance and Events, introduced the report submitted to the Committee. She indicated that the key performance indicators (KPIs) within the report included thirty-five quarterly and five annual KPIs. The meeting was advised that data not yet available for three annual KPIs would be included in future performance monitoring reports to the Committee. The Policy Officer, Strategy, Performance and Events, reminded the Committee of the RAG ratings for the quarterly recorded KPIs, and advised that the Joint Executive Head of Housing Services, the Joint Executive Head of Communications and Customer Services, and the Joint Executive Head of Organisational Development were in attendance to respond to questions.

The Joint Chief Executive advised the meeting that he had added an introduction to the report to highlight some matters that were worked on in 2022/23 and not often captured by KPIs, such as support for Ukrainian families and national and royal events during the year, along with areas of risk, for example, planning performance and the Council's finances.

During the ensuing discussion a number of questions were asked and clarifications offered:

- A member questioned the lack of a target for some KPIs within the report submitted to the Committee, and referenced the KPI for the number of affordable new homes completed each year as an example. In response, the Joint Executive Head of Housing Services indicated that setting targets for matters outside the Council's control was problematic. He suggested the feasibility of setting related targets for the Council's own new build housing but advised that the number of affordable new homes completed each year was outside the control of the Council and a related target would be of limited use.
- With reference to the targets for the number of net new additional homes (KPI H&J3) and the number of empty homes (KPI H&J2) as examples, another member questioned why targets were set for some KPIs outside the control of the Council and not others. In response, the Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing indicated the value in knowing if permissions for new homes were being granted and residential properties were not being built out.

- A member of the Committee queried the reduction of KPIs earlier in the year to the current thirty-five quarterly and five annual indicators and the decision to include some that apparently recorded processes and outcomes not within the control of the Council, and suggested the benefit of the Committee selecting performance indicators to monitor from those collected as part of the Council's service plan process. In reply, the Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing invited the Committee to advise further on possible changes to the KPIs in order to better enable service improvements. The Joint Executive Head of Organisational Development advised the meeting that the reduction in the number of KPIs was intended to bring more focus. He indicated that the inclusion of contextual KPIs, with or without associated targets, could be taken away and reviewed by officers and reported back to the Committee. The Chair of the Committee welcomed the response and suggested the value of members contributing to the process.
- The Joint Executive Head of Housing Services spoke of the importance of indicators that provided contextual information for the Council to raise awareness of issues and prompt action.
- A member of the Committee spoke to support the provision of performance information relating to matters directly outside the control of the Council and indicated that in some instances the local authority might be able to influence performance or delivery in some way. She suggested the value in adding the number of planning permissions granted to the commentary provided for the number of net new additional homes (KPI H&J3). The Joint Executive Head of Organisational Development advised that a detailed response to the inclusion of a target for H&J3 was best provided by the Joint Executive Head of Regeneration and Planning Policy. The Policy Officer, Strategy, Performance and Events, reminded the meeting that the KPI for the percentage of affordable housing units granted planning permission on eligible sites was included within the report submitted to the Committee.
- In respond to a question raised in advance of the meeting about the time lag in receipt of data for six KPIs, the Policy Officer, Strategy, Performance and Events, undertook to obtain a response from the relevant Joint Executive Heads of Service.

- In reply to a question about the breakdown of the number of empty homes in the Borough (KPI H&J2), the Committee was advised that further information would be provided by the Joint Executive Head of Regulatory Services. The Policy Officer, Strategy, Performance and Events, advised the meeting that the data for H&J2 was taken from the long-term empty list held and created by the Council Tax team and advised that further information would be provided to the Committee. A member of the Committee referred to the increase in empty homes in the housing stock held by the Council between 2019 and 2022.
- A member of the Committee asked about measures under consideration to achieve the Council's forty percent target for affordable housing units granted on eligible sites. In reply, the meeting was advised of policy compliant exceptions to the forty percent target within the Local Plan, including if a specific site could be shown as not economically viable due to abnormal costs. The Policy Officer, Strategy, Performance and Events, indicated that the Council had sought external advice to challenge viability assessments when necessary.
- In response to a general question about the upwards adjustment of targets and the consequent achievement of RAG ratings, and a specific query about increase in the staff turnover target, the Joint Executive Head of Organisational Development advised the meeting of the range of staff turnover figures for local authorities in Surrey. He indicated that the Council's staff turnover was broadly average for a local authority in Surrey. The meeting was informed that the staff turnover target was adjusted upwards after considering the current workforce situation at the Council and other benchmarking information.
- A member of the Committee suggested the merit in explaining changes to targets within the report itself. The Joint Executive Head of Organisational Development advised the meeting that details of changes would be shared with the Committee members.
- With reference to the time taken to assess new Housing Benefit claims (KPI COU5), a member of the Committee questioned the feasibility of training existing staff to become assessors. In reply, the Policy Officer, Strategy, Performance and Events, reported progress with filling assessor roles and explained that it took at least 6 months for an

assessor to be reasonably well trained. The meeting was informed that it had not been possible to recruit anyone to the role with experience and that there had been no capacity under the case model adopted as part of the Future Guildford transformation programme to train staff in this specialism. The Policy Officer, Strategy, Performance and Events, undertook to circulate to Committee members a detailed response provided by the Revenues and Benefits Lead.

- In response to a query from a Councillor, the Joint Executive Head of Housing Services advised that social rent homes were being built by some housing associations. He suggested introducing social rent targets within the Council's own new build housing and the merit in setting a rent rate within Guildford between affordable rent and social rent.
- In response to a question shared by the Chair in advance of the meeting, the Joint Executive Head of Housing Services advised the meeting that in the previous financial year twenty-six families had been housed in temporary accommodation and the longest stay had been forty-seven days.

The Chair thanked officers and the Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing for attending.

OS5 CUSTOMER SERVICES: PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS UPDATE

The Lead Councillor for Engagement and Customer Services introduced the item, highlighting the progress achieved by the Council's Customer Services since the previous update to the Committee in October 2022. The Lead Councillor for Engagement and Customer Services advised the meeting of the growth in the number of residents registered to use the MyGuildford portal, the accessibility of the Council's website, and the staffing levels within the Customer Service team. The Committee members were advised to use the councillor email address for customer service queries.

A member of the Committee suggested improving the communication with residents contacting the Council, especially those with inquiries relating to planning applications. The Joint Executive Head of Communication and Customer Service undertook to circulate the councillor email address after the meeting to ensure matters raised through Councillors were progressed.

A member of the Committee praised the reduction in call wait times and the increase in the percentage of calls answered shown within Appendix 1 of the report submitted to the Committee. In addition, the call back process was commended by the Committee member. The Joint Executive Head of Communication and Customer Service advised that the percentage of calls answered the previous week was 93%. She stated that the call back function was still deployed by customer services but not as often as previously.

In reply to questions from a Councillor, the Joint Executive Head of Communication and Customer Service confirmed arrangements for reporting common issues raised by residents to the relevant services and indicated that the three top issues raised by residents were Council Tax, refuse and recycling collections, and planning.

The Chair thanked the Lead Councillor for Engagement and Customer Service and the Joint Executive Head of Communication and Customer Service for attending.

RESOLVED: That a further performance update report on Customer Services be provided to the Committee in six months' time.

OS6 G-LIVE AND LEISURE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY WORKING GROUPS

The Chair introduced the item and asked if the Committee agreed the re-establishment of the two working groups to scrutinise the council's G-Live and Leisure Partnership Agreement contracts monitoring. The meeting was advised that overview and scrutiny had reviewed the contracts monitoring in this way for several years.

RESOLVED: That two working groups be established to scrutinise the Council's G-Live and Leisure Partnership Agreement contracts monitoring and report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting finished at 8.03 pm

Signed

Date

Chairman