

GUILDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Draft Minutes of a meeting of Guildford Borough Council held at Council Chamber, Millmead House, Millmead, Guildford, Surrey GU2 4BB on Tuesday 25 July 2023

* The Mayor, Councillor Masuk Miah

* The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Sallie Barker MBE

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| * Councillor Bilal Akhtar | * Councillor Steven Lee |
| Councillor Phil Bellamy | * Councillor Sandy Lowry |
| Councillor Dawn Bennett | * Councillor Richard Lucas |
| * Councillor Joss Bigmore | * Councillor Julia McShane |
| * Councillor David Bilbe | * Councillor Richard Mills |
| * Councillor Honor Brooker | * Councillor Carla Morson |
| * Councillor James Brooker | Councillor Danielle Newson |
| * Councillor Philip Brooker | * Councillor Patrick Oven |
| * Councillor Ruth Brothwell | * Councillor George Potter |
| Councillor Yves de Contades | * Councillor Maddy Redpath |
| * Councillor Amanda Creese | * Councillor Merel Rehorst-Smith |
| * Councillor Geoff Davis | * Councillor David Shaw |
| Councillor Jason Fenwick | * Councillor Joanne Shaw |
| * Councillor Matt Furniss | * Councillor Katie Steel |
| * Councillor Angela Goodwin | * Councillor Howard Smith |
| Councillor Lizzie Griffiths | Councillor Cait Taylor |
| * Councillor Gillian Harwood | * Councillor Jane Tyson |
| * Councillor Stephen Hives | * Councillor James Walsh |
| * Councillor Catherine Houston | * Councillor Fiona White |
| * Councillor Tom Hunt | * Councillor Dominique Williams |
| * Councillor Bob Hughes | * Councillor Keith Witham |
| * Councillor James Jones | Councillor Sue Wyeth-Price |
| * Councillor Vanessa King | * Councillor Catherine Young |

*Present

Honorary Alderman Keith Childs was also in attendance.

CO25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Dawn Bennett, Phil Bellamy, Yves de Contades, Jason Fenwick, Lizzie Griffiths, Danielle Newson, Cait Taylor, and Sue Wyeth-Price, and from Honorary Freeman Keith Churchouse, and Honorary Aldermen Catherine Cobley, Vas Kapsalis, Jayne Marks, Terence Patrick, Tony Phillips, Lynda Strudwick, Nick Sutcliffe, and Jenny Wicks.

CO26 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillor Joss Bigmore disclosed an interest in relation to agenda item 9, Appointments to External Organisations 2023-2027 (Minutes CO33) in that he was the Chair of the Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust to which the Council would be appointing a governor. As the governors were directly responsible for his employment in that capacity he would withdraw from the meeting during consideration of that appointment.

No other interests were disclosed.

CO27 MINUTES

The minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Council held on 1 June 2023 were approved as a correct record. The Mayor signed the minutes.

CO28 MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor reported that, on Sunday 23 July, he had been invited to the Castle Green Bowling Club's Centenary Celebration. He was accompanied by the Leader of the Council, and other guests.

On Sunday, 10 September, the Mayor would be hosting a charity Adult Football Tournament, in collaboration with Guildford City Boys and Girls Football Club, in aid of his chosen charity The Fountain Centre. Invitations to register had been sent to local men's and women's football teams.

CO29 LEADER'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Leader drew councillors' attention to the Executive membership details, including portfolio titles and responsibilities, attached at Appendix 1 to the Order Paper.

The Leader announced that the Community Wellbeing team had been named as a finalist in the prestigious BBC "Make a Difference Awards". Out of thousands of nominations, Community Wellbeing really stood out as a shining example of dedication and commitment to improving the lives of those around us. The Leader congratulated the team for this amazing nomination.

Residents would shortly be asked to check that their electoral registration details were up to date. From 4 August we would begin the annual canvass by emailing or writing to every household in the borough, encouraging residents to respond as soon as they could. In particular, we would like potential first-time voters to be aware of their right to register. This included 16-17 year olds who could register ahead of their 18th birthday.

The Leader noted that there was potential funding available for climate change projects, and organisations and community groups were encouraged to contact our Climate Change Officer nat.prodger@guildford.gov.uk to find out more.

Last month, the Surrey Environment Partnership (SEP) waste reduction scheme, Rethink Waste, was rolled out to the whole of Surrey. Any resident with a Surrey postcode could now join the scheme, take part and start receiving rewards for reducing their waste. Further details were available on the SEP website.

CO30 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No members of the public had registered to speak or ask a question at the meeting.

CO31 QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

Councillors noted that, at the Selection Meeting, the Council received three written questions from Councillors Brooker, Akhtar, and Hughes, all of which were directed at the Leader of the Council. As the Leader was elected at that meeting, no written response to the questions could be prepared for inclusion on the Order Paper for that meeting, and Council was informed that a formal response from the Leader to each of the questions would be circulated to all councillors.

That response was sent, by email, to all councillors on 1 June 2023.

As there had been no opportunity for the questioners to ask a supplementary question, the Mayor had agreed to allow this at this meeting.

(a) **Councillor Philip Brooker** asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

“Can the Leader confirm what her plans are to increase social housing in the Borough? How many social houses do you intend to provide on a year-on-year basis over the next four years, what sites have been allocated for this, and how will it be financed?”

The Leader’s Response:

“The Council’s Local Plan seeks delivery of affordable housing as defined by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The Plan includes a requirement for at least 40% of homes on qualifying schemes to be affordable housing provision, the delivery of which is generally secured via section 106 agreement. The quantum of affordable homes delivered through this mechanism is determined in the first instance by the number and size of schemes that the Council permits and that are subsequently delivered, and in

the second instance by whether the required 40% contribution is secured on these sites as part of the planning permission. In this regard, a range of sites, including several allocated in the Local Plan, already benefit from planning permission and will deliver required affordable homes over the coming four years. Further, the Council's Land Availability Assessment reflects several sites which may contribute to affordable housing delivery during the next four years, but are dependent on receiving planning permission in order to commence. We expect an increase in the annual delivery of affordable homes as qualifying sites are permitted and built out.

With regard to the Council's own development, the Housing Revenue Account Development programme was approved by the Council in February 2023 and details of this were set out within the Council's Capital and Investment Strategy 2023-24. This can be found on the agenda for the Council meeting on Wednesday 8 February 2023.

The Strategy confirms that the programme will be funded from the Housing Revenue Account Capital receipts and reserves with a current planned investment of £145m and currently includes 152 homes.

As for future plans, these will remain under review and will be brought forward as they develop. The official definition of affordable in Surrey is far above what is genuinely affordable, and we continue to be constrained by the Conservative government's Right to Buy policy. We are committed to providing council homes for rent and for shared ownership to help those needing an affordable place to live".

In response to a supplementary question asking what plans were in place to improve on the delivery of additional social housing, the Leader stated that the terms "social housing" and "affordable housing" were interchangeable and that the Council was already planning to provide affordable housing/social housing on Guildford Park Road as well as Weyside Urban Village, and within a small portfolio of other developments to be brought forward, details of which would be forthcoming.

- (b) **Councillor Bilal Akhtar** asked the Leader of the Council the following question:
"Can the Leader confirm the number of staff currently employed in the Council's planning enforcement team and also outline any intention to recruit additional staff to the Council's planning enforcement team?"

The Leader's Response:

"The current establishment within the Planning Enforcement team consists of 1 team leader/1 Senior Enforcement Officer and 4 Planning Enforcement Officers. The team has experienced both periods of staff sickness and periods of vacancies over the last 9 months. Following a recruitment campaign 2 vacancies (senior planning enforcement officer and enforcement planning officer) have been recruited to. One of the appointments was an internal appointment, and there is currently an advert for the vacant post. There is currently no approved funding, or plans, to recruit additional staff to the Planning Enforcement team."

In response to a supplementary question seeking a commitment to the Council that there would be no job losses in the Planning Enforcement Team in view of the current financial situation of the Council, the Leader indicated that she would not know the answer to that question until the work proposed in the financial recovery plan had been completed.

The Leader confirmed, in response to a further question, that the number of staff in the enforcement team had increased as a result of Future Guildford due to the pressure of work that the team was under.

(c) **Councillor Bob Hughes** asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

"Can the Leader please confirm how much the Council has so far spent on agency and temporary staff in 2022-23 across the organisation? What is the projected budget for 2023-24? And can you confirm how much the Council has spent so far on consultants in 2022-23? What is the projected budget for 2023-24?"

The Leader's Response:

"In 2022-23 the Council spent £4.18m on temporary staff and £28.68m on consultancy support. £25.3m of that consultancy spend related to capital expenditure. This data will not be fully validated until the Finance Team bring their Annual Agency and Consultancy Spend Report to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July. The projected costs of temporary and consultancy support for 2023-24 have not yet been calculated but these will be provided in future quarterly budget monitoring reports".

In response to a supplementary question asking whether the Leader:

1) would publish a breakdown of spending for temporary staff by department, and separately for consultancy support,

- 2) would outline in writing how the work was competitively tendered, and
- 3) was concerned that amounts paid to many consultants were much higher than usual industry rates?

the Leader indicated that this further information could be supplied.

- (d) **Councillor Maddie Redpath** asked the Lead Councillor for Planning, Environment, and Climate Change, Councillor George Potter the following question:

“The early summer has seen a larger number of Unauthorised Encampments than in recent years. The effects have been significant on the regular users of our Parks and Recreation Grounds, with events such as the Park Run cancelled, and anti-social and intimidating behaviour affecting the enjoyment of our award-winning green spaces. There are also significant management and clean-up costs that our Council Tax payers have to bear.

1. *What is the Lead Councillor doing to review and improve the physical deterrents around our parks and green spaces?*
2. *What is the latest update on the long-promised Surrey Transit Site?*
3. *It is also disappointing that the Police have not used the extra powers they have been granted to expedite the removal process, can you explain why?”*

The Lead Councillor’s Response:

1. *What is the Lead Councillor doing to review and improve the physical deterrents around our parks and green spaces?*

Unauthorised encampments are managed through Regulatory Services with the operational support of the department upon whose land an unauthorised encampment has occurred. Whilst we endeavour to respond to queries, we would generally update our website and follow published process for managing an unauthorised encampment. We would therefore ask concerned residents to check our website for information and updates first:

<https://www.guildford.gov.uk/article/26846/Find-out-more-about-Unauthorised-Encampments>

The Parks Team work hard to limit the opportunities for unauthorised access, and our defences are reviewed and updated following any unauthorised access. We have visited each park and created risk assessments for unauthorised access resulting in many improvements to upgrade and install defences over the years.

In most areas we use earth bunds as the most cost-effective measure, but also use other methods such as boulders, tree and hedge planting also drop-down posts behind gates. Examples of this approach in practice are Bellfields Green and Shalford Common. These sites are large open spaces with fine views without boundaries surrounded by housing. This was risk assessed and schemes were designed to protect the site boundaries that we consulted residents about. These open spaces were protected in 2020 by a combination of knee-high rails, bunds, new tree planting, timber bollards and wildflower planting. Recent unauthorised accesses have focused on legitimate and needed access points using a variety of means to defeat locked gates and barriers. As a result, the parks team are placing concrete blocks and procuring further bollards in vulnerable points, in particular access gates.

A balance needs to be struck between the general appearance of the site, cost, the need for legitimate access, including for emergency access such as an ambulance, and the potential deterrent. Unfortunately, there are no defences that are unbreachable and in the event of an unauthorised encampment we must follow due legal processes. Over recent years in Stoke Park the Parks Team have installed new earth bunds at the Wildwood Car Park, strengthened/ replaced earth bunds at London Road and near the Bowling Club. We also replaced the entrance gates from the Nightingale Road Car park adding height barriers and new Estate Fencing. At present, Stoke Park is surrounded by fencing, ditches and earth bunds in all locations except access points. These are protected by locked gates and barriers.

Following the most recent unauthorised access of Stoke Park through the grounds of Guildford High School, the Parks Team have placed concrete blocks at a number of access gates. We have met with Guildford High School who will also place additional bollards in front of this gate. We will be replacing these blocks with metal bollards to allow speedier legitimate access this month. Further bollards are in the process of being installed at all gates at Onslow Arboretum and Dann's Meadow in Ash.

- 2. What is the latest update on the long-promised Surrey Transit Site?**
*Surrey County Council has provided the following update:
"The Pendell Camp site (between Merstham and Bletchingley) is under review following further engagement with planning. The commitment*

to take forward remains, and the focus is on ensuring the planning application has the best chance of achieving approval. The specific work underway at the moment refers to works that are needed to the northern permanent site, which should make the planning application for the southern/transit site more acceptable in planning terms.”

3. *It is also disappointing that the Police have not used the extra powers they have been granted to expedite the removal process, can you explain why?*

We have asked the Police to comment on this, and their response is as follows:

‘In Guildford we have been very proactive in using our powers when they are proportionate and justified and have recently used them over May and June in removing Unauthorised Encampments (UEs) from Shalford, Guildford Spectrum and Onslow.

There are set criteria that need to be met to use these new powers to remove a UE and that threshold is not always met. If the threshold is not met then the UEs are kept under constant review by police and sometimes after a period of time the criteria is then met, and we will use powers available to us. The key point in the new legislation is they have caused, or are likely to cause, significant damage, disruption, or distress. This means that it would have to be significant rather than just an annoyance to the local community. In some cases, moving on a UE will cause more harm as they move to a less suitable/ safe site. We have no alternative site in Surrey so are unable to direct the UE to that location. Sometimes using these powers may cause a bigger impact on the community and we should ensure that the action we take is proportionate, justified, and necessary.

It is also important to point out that the offence is when the person fails to comply with the request to leave and not just by setting up a camp. The key part in the legislation is ‘The offence will be committed if a person who resides or intends to reside with a vehicle on land fails to leave the land or remove their property without reasonable excuse when asked to do so and they have caused, or are likely to cause, significant damage, disruption, or distress.’

In all cases of a reported UE police will as soon as possible attend the location and make an initial assessment, speak with those residents of the encampment, and issue a code of conduct. We work with the local authority and discuss our options and powers. Just because this legislation exists it does not mean it will always be the best option just like arresting someone is not always the only or most suitable option for a criminal offence.

In many cases removal of a UE is led by the local authority. Police regularly visit the UE throughout and conduct reassessments. Crime/ASB and disorder is monitored and anything that is linked to the UE is identified.

Key decisions need to be made by police around how we use this legislation. What we often find is that we may have complaints from residents about a UE but there is no evidence of damage, disruption or distress and nothing to support the use of these powers in showing it is significant. We encourage residents to report all incidents to Surrey Police via 999 in an emergency or 101 / online in non-emergency cases.

The guidance published by the home office in relation to this new legislation stipulates that police should liaise with local authorities and any action should be driven through a multi agency response. It does not state the police must lead. The guidance goes on to say that local authorities should take the lead and the police support this. Finally, the guidance stipulates the decision upon which these powers are used remains at the discretion of the police.

I understand a UE can cause concerns for residents and want to reassure them that when justified and proportionate police will robustly use powers available to us as we have done in the past. I am more than happy to discuss with councillors the legislation and why there are limitations on its use.'

In response to a supplementary question asking whether the hard work undertaken by council officers in this regard could be advertised more openly, the Lead Councillor confirmed that he would be very happy to

consider new ways of promoting and communicating the excellent work undertaken by officers.

- (e) **Councillor Keith Witham** asked the Lead Councillors for Planning, Environment, and Climate Change, and Regulatory and Democratic Services, Councillors George Potter and Merel Rehorst-Smith the following question:

*“Residents of Ash Road, Worplesdon are seriously concerned regarding the use of the premises “Greenways” on Ash Road, Fox Corner by “Applenet Care and Support” to house ex-offenders and others with mental health issues, despite the provider **NOT** having planning consent for that, or any other commercial use, and **NOT** having been licenced by GBC Licensing as an HMO (House in Multiple Occupation), with multiple incidents reported to the police of anti-social behaviour affecting the immediate area, including arson.*

Fox Corner is a small rural residential area, located in between Guildford and Woking. It is an isolated area with a limited bus service, and miles from community facilities such as food shops or any employment opportunities in either Woking or Guildford and totally unsuitable for such an establishment.

So would the Executive Members for Planning/ Enforcement and Regulatory Services please update the Council on the investigations carried out into the Planning and Enforcement situation, and the HMO licence, and the current position regarding Greenways, Ash Road, Worplesdon?”.

The Lead Councillors’ Response:

“The Council’s Private Sector Housing Team have been investigating the use of the building as a house in multiple occupation (HMO). They have been in discussion with Applenet Care and Support who work with Surrey County Council to re-integrate individuals back into the community. Whilst there have been issues reported by residents, Applenet Care and Support have taken steps to address issues such as the lack of boundary fencing, and they have installed CCTV on-site. Officers have also reviewed the company’s complaints procedure and ensured that procedures and processes are in place to control and respond to ASB including enabling local residents to report any issues directly to the company.

Officers have also worked with the Police in respect of the alleged arson and anti-social behaviour. We are advised that there was insufficient evidence to substantiate the alleged arson. There has been one other report

to the Police regarding insulting behaviour that was between individuals inside the property.

After a thorough evaluation, officers within Regulatory Services have advised that they have found there was not sufficient evidence of current and ongoing anti-social behaviour or other valid reasons to refuse to licence the property as a house in multiple occupation under the Housing Act 2004. The property has therefore now been licensed as a house in multiple occupation for up to 6 persons. The licence was issued on 17 July 2023 and is valid for 5 years. This licence simply confirms that the property is suitable to be occupied by up to 6 residents not forming a single household and imposes standards in respect of amenities, means of escape in case of fire and controlling ASB.

In terms of planning, the Planning Enforcement Team are of the opinion that the use currently happening at the property is within Use Class C2, which relates to residential institutions including residential care homes. The applicants are refuting this and are claiming the current use of the property falls within Use Class C3 (dwellinghouses) and specifically subsection b) which includes within the definition of a dwellinghouse the use by not more than six residents living together as a single household where care is provided for residents. The Planning Enforcement Team understand the applicants are currently collating a Certificate of Lawfulness to argue their point, providing the Local Planning Authority an opportunity to consider any further evidence they have and present a formal view on the use of the property through the lawful development certificate process.”

In response to a supplementary question the lead councillors confirmed that they would be very happy to meet with the residents and local ward councillors to discuss the matter further.

- (f) **Councillor James Walsh** asked the Lead Councillor for Commercial Services, Councillor Catherine Houston the following question:

“Grassroots football is an important “social glue” that binds communities, clubs and individuals together in many British towns. Our local club, Guildford City FC is 102 years-old this year and has played at the Spectrum since 1996. Unfortunately, its current venue is no longer fit for purpose and the club was denied promotion in 2012 because it failed a ground grading inspection that year. Can the Lead Councillor for Commercial Services tell the Council what discussions she has had, or plans to have, to help ensure

that Guildford City Football Club will have a ground and facilities within the borough fit for the 21st century?"

The Lead Councillor's Response:

"Thank you, Councillor Walsh, for your question around support for Guildford City Football Club, something we as an administration wish to continue. There has been a lot of activity on this matter over the last couple of months in an attempt to get to the crux of the issues you raise. Following a meeting with the Club in late May to discuss the state of the pitch, which the Leader and Ian Doyle, one of our strategic directors attended, a list of concerns and questions were raised by the Club. I am pleased to report that subsequently a tri-partite meeting took place at The Spectrum with Freedom Leisure, Guildford City Football Club and Guildford Borough Council earlier this month to look at the issues raised by the Club and agree a way forward. All issues raised at the earlier onsite meeting were discussed in detail and an action plan set out. As reported recently in the 'Guildford Dragon', the Club felt the meeting was both useful and productive.

The key challenge accepted by all parties is the dual use element of the ground and the lack of the Club's status on the site. They book the pitch annually, therefore there is no long-term arrangement, such as a lease, that would allow them to attract external funding. There are also definitely pinch points when athletics and football use collide. We will work hard with all parties to create a more effective way of operating going forward but some issues will be difficult to resolve by the very nature of the site, which has not changed since 1996 when the Club moved in. I have asked officers to keep me apprised of the actions being taken and report any feedback."

In response to a supplementary question asking whether any particular sites had been looked at as an alternative, more permanent, home venue for the football club, the lead councillor, noting the Council's difficult financial position, indicated that there had been an initial site meeting on 18 May 2023 involving the Council, the MP, Freedom Leisure and the Football Club to look at the issues, and a further meeting held on 3 July, at which it was concluded that finding a suitable, alternative venue would be a difficult problem to resolve. Councillors were asked, if they considered that a particular site in their own ward might be suitable for a football pitch and associated facilities, to come forward with possible suggestions. Once a suitable site had been identified, and planning permission secured, possible sources of external funding could be looked at.

(g) **Councillor Joss Bigmore** asked the Lead Councillor for Planning, Environment, and Climate Change, Councillor George Potter the following question:

“The Review of the Local Plan is due to be completed at the latest by the end of April next year. As things stand there have been no changes in the National Legislation which means that GBC’s Local Plan will be out of date as there is the more recent ‘Standard Method’ now used to calculate housing need.

Ceteris paribus this would mean GBC needing to find another 200 homes a year to justify having a robust 5-year Housing supply when assessing applications, failure to do that could see the resultant tilted balance allowing speculative unplanned development. This will be a concerning situation to many residents, already uncomfortable with the quantum of development we are seeing today.

Could the Lead Councillor for Planning, Environment and Climate Change please explain what preparations are being made so that GBC is ready with evidence to counter the housing need as calculated by the Standard Method?”

The Lead Councillor’s Response:

The Government has continued to signal their intention to revise the Standard Method given its reliance on now outdated 2014-based household projections. The latest announcement earlier this year indicated that they would publish a revised Standard Method in early 2024. This may bring Guildford’s figure down from the current figure of approximately 780 dwellings per annum closer to the current Local Plan annual requirement figure of 562.

Whilst planning practice guidance states that the Standard Method figure is not mandatory, an alternative figure is only expected to be found acceptable in exceptional circumstances with robust evidence that would be scrutinised at a local plan examination. In the meantime, if the review of the Local Plan concludes that the housing requirement figure requires updating, the future five-year land supply calculation will need to be assessed against the Standard Method figure for the entire period during which the local plan is being updated. Until there is greater clarity in terms of how the Standard Method will be amended and therefore what opportunities may exist for Guildford specific circumstances to justify deviation from this, it is neither possible nor appropriate to commission

what would otherwise be abortive work by the time an updated plan is submitted to the Secretary of State for examination (plan preparation would take a number of years). Thus, it is only as part of a Local Plan update that the Council will investigate the possibility of reducing the local housing need figure according to the Standard Method. Despite this, preparatory work will continue in order to inform the Formal Review of the Local Plan. This will include, when appropriate, gathering a proportionate and relevant evidence base to understand any changed circumstances affecting the borough. Work will be progressing to populate the templates created by the Planning Advisory Service in order to determine whether or not the local plan policies, and therefore the Plan itself, need to be updated.

In the meantime, the priority will remain the continued effort to bring forward existing allocations in a timely and sustainable manner to maintain future delivery rates. Doing so increases the possibility that Guildford may be able to continue to demonstrate a five-year land supply even when the current figure of 562 is no longer applicable and reduces opportunities for additional speculative unplanned development that may otherwise be permitted at appeal due to the tilted balance working in favour of the developer”.

Councillor Bigmore asked a supplementary question inviting the lead councillor to comment on why the Council was not preparing for a scenario of no change being made to the standard method and the Council being unable to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply after 30 April 2024. In response, the lead councillor denied that the Council was unprepared for that scenario. Based on current advice and guidance, the lead councillor confirmed that a review of the Local Plan would need to be completed by 30 April 2024, recognising that this was a difficult position to be in. The review would need to start before the end of the year and the Council would need to make a judgement at that time in terms of possible changes to the National Planning Policy Framework and the standard method. The five-year housing land supply would still exist on 30 April, but the emphasis would be on the delivery of allocated sites and keeping track of windfall developments. However, if the Council could not demonstrate a five-year housing supply, the immediate alternative would effectively be a choice between identifying new sites, or wait for the government to update the standard method.

In response to a further question inviting the lead councillor to consider urgently reconvening the Local Plan Panel, the lead councillor confirmed that

details of a new Planning Policy Board (which would replace the Local Plan Panel) would shortly be submitted to group leaders.

The lead councillor was also asked whether he thought Guildford would fall below the five-year housing land supply especially given that the Office for National Statistics had indicated the Guildford's population growth had been exaggerated and, if that was the case, it followed that housing need had also been exaggerated. In response, the lead councillor indicated that he would assess Guildford's housing land supply currently, as decent to good. However, the standard method as currently stated in the National Planning Policy Framework had a target of around 760 houses a year for Guildford, which was significantly in excess of the target adopted within the local plan. The Lead councillor accepted that this was not in line with the population growth projections for Guildford from the Office for National Statistics. As the standard method was set by the government, we were obliged to use it until it was changed. The Council can try to mitigate against it, and demonstrate reasons why it should not be applied in full. However, it was the starting point from which we had to work so therefore if the standard method did not change, then that would have a significant impact on our housing land supply, and whether or not it takes us down below the five-year level remained to be seen.

(h) **Councillor Catherine Young** asked the Lead Councillor for Planning, Environment, and Climate Change, Councillor George Potter the following question:

"In 2019 Guildford Borough Council declared a Climate Emergency. Climate Change is now at the heart of all that we do (or should be), and prior to the May Elections, the Executive signed off GBC's Climate Change 'Living Action Plan.

It is almost four months since the Climate Change Board (CCB) last met. Would the Lead Councillor please confirm that Climate Change remains a priority for this Council and indicate when the CCB will reconvene?

Additionally, it is noted that despite numerous training sessions and briefings arranged for new Councillors there has not been one scheduled on the Climate Change Action Plan. Would the Lead Councillor agree to arrange this before the Autumn so that all Councillors are up to speed on actions and progress to date?

With this in mind, can the Lead Councillor also commit to provide a full update on the Action Plan to Full Council at the meeting to be held on 10 October 2023."

The Lead Councillor's Response:

"Thank you, Councillor Young for your question. I am happy to confirm that tackling climate change remains a top priority for this Council.

Terms of reference for the Climate Change Board (CCB) have now been circulated to group leaders with a request for nominations to join the CCB. Once membership has been agreed the intention is to have an initial meeting as soon as possible and to put in place a regular schedule of meetings thereafter.

The delay in reconstituting the CCB following the election is regrettable, and as portfolio holder I wish to apologise for the delay. Whilst the delay in reconstituting the CCB has not delayed the implementation of the adopted Climate Change Action Plan by officers, it has deprived councillors of a chance to have cross-party oversight and input and I am sorry for that.

*I agree with you that training for councillors and officers is important and note that we have made a firm commitment, within action 2.14 of the climate action plan adopted by the Executive in February, to 'identify training needs for staff, councillors and other stakeholders on the climate emergency and the impact of decisions on carbon emissions'. As noted in the action plan, there will be a need to provide different types of training for different audiences, but I do agree that it is very important that councillors are offered training on this important area of work. I have asked officers to bring forward proposals for how this action can be delivered in the near future. Please note, a new climate change course has been developed and is available through **Surrey Learn**. The course aims to outline the fundamental issues regarding climate change and is accredited by The Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Standards Office with attendees receiving two CPD hours. The Climate Change Team are awaiting confirmation whether this course can be rolled out to both staff and Members. Further training development is required to provide a focus on Guildford and our response to climate change.*

In terms of future updates on the delivery of the climate action plan, the Executive resolved in February that updates would be brought forward by officers or the Climate Change Board on an annual basis; we are aiming to

bring the first of these to the Executive by the end of the calendar year at the latest”.

- (i) **Councillor David Bilbé** asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Julia McShane the following question:

“Can the Leader of the Council assure this Council and members of the public that stringent financial measures necessary to balance the budget now and in the medium term will not affect service to the public? If not, then what services will be affected?”

The Leader’s Response:

“The financial situation has been set out clearly in the report at Item 8 on the Council Agenda. The Council must take urgent action now to address its financial sustainability. This will require a significant reduction in the General Fund revenue budget and ultimately will impact on service provision. The Council, led by the task force, will be going through a process as set out in the report to identify and implement an action plan to achieve this objective. The Executive intend to ensure the most vulnerable within our borough are prioritised along with statutory services being delivered legally.

The challenge will be met through a genuine team effort involving members and officers in the decision making and every decision will be taken with the best interests of the residents of the borough at its core. There is a lot of work ahead of us and it cannot be stressed more highly that it is in everyone’s best interests to work together on this challenge”.

In response to a supplementary question, the Leader confirmed that it was proposed to establish an Executive Working Group, rather than the “informal cross-party councillor reference group” referred to in the Budget Update report.

- (j) **Councillor Philip Brooker** asked the Lead Councillor for Community and Organisational Development, Councillor Carla Morson the following question:

“Would the Lead Councillor for Community and Organisational Development advise what are the current staff absence rates and staff turnover rates for last available quarter? How do these compare with the same period last year and the same quarter in 2019? How do those figures benchmark against other Councils in Surrey?”

The Lead Councillor's Response:

- 1) *The current staff absence rates and staff turnover rates for the last available quarter:*

Quarter 1: 2023-24

All absence – 8.6 days

Short term absence – 5.9 days

Turnover – 16.5%

Note: Turnover in this period includes the TUPE transfer of 'on street' Parking Services staff to a contractor.

The figures for Q1 2023-24 with the exclusion of the TUPE transfer of 'on street' parking staff, are as follows:

All absence - 8.3 days

short term absence - 5.7 days

Turnover - 15.5%

- 2) *Comparison with the same period last year and the same quarter in 2019*

Quarter 1: 2022-23

All absence – 8.2 days

Short term absence – 5.6 days

Turnover – 15.1%

Quarter 1: 2019-20

All absence – 7.4 days

Short term absence – 4.1 days

Turnover – 10.5%

- 3) *Benchmarking data for Councils in Surrey will be provided direct to councillors as soon as we have permission from other councils to share their data."*

As a supplementary question, Councillor Brooker asked the lead councillor what measures were being put in place to improve on these outcomes and when would they be implemented, and noting the specific rises within Guildford since 2019, whether the lead councillor believed that the working environment had deteriorated and, if so, how that could be

rectified? In response, the lead councillor confirmed that sickness absence and turnover rates were measured on a quarterly basis for our corporate performance indicators, and this data was also provided to the Surrey Chief Executives' Benchmarking Group. The lead councillor stated that Guildford was a good place to work, and that the HR service was working to improve the situation.

In response to a further question, enquiring whether staff were interviewed on the reasons for their sickness absence and whether councillors could see some of the responses, appropriately anonymised, the lead councillor confirmed that staff were contacted by their line managers through periods of sickness absences, and that she would check whether the data requested could be anonymised and circulated to councillors.

- (k) **Councillor Bob Hughes** asked the Lead Councillor for Commercial Services, Councillor Catherine Houston the following question:

"Has the Lead Councillor for Commercial services written to the Cabinet of Surrey County Council to thank them for making a £3 million grant to the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre - the largest ever grant from Your Fund Surrey, thereby securing its future and facilitating the provision of a greater range of accessible services to the people of Guildford?"

Will she agree that in light of this and other significant community projects now funded by Your Fund Surrey, that the Conservative Council were right to ignore their political opponents and persist with this valuable scheme?"

The Lead Councillor's Response:

"I am pleased to see the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre being awarded some funding, even if it is less than half what they applied for. The Yvonne Arnaud not only makes excellent productions available to their main audience but also does a lot of very good work in the community which is not so widely publicised.

Having said that it is not appropriate for this Council to be discussing the merits of another Council's decision-making, especially when we have serious matters to discuss this evening, matters which will affect all our residents."

In response to a supplementary question enquiring as to whether there was a factual inaccuracy in the written answer given by the lead councillor on the basis

that it stated that the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre had been awarded some funding even if it was less than half of what they applied for. The total cost of the project for the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre was approximately £6 million and they asked for and received just under £3 million from Surrey County Council's Your Fund Surrey, which was the largest grant awarded. The balance of the cost was being raised, or had already been raised, by the Theatre from its own sources. In response, the lead councillor apologised if she had given inaccurate information, as she had been informed that the Theatre had applied for a grant in the sum of £8 million.

In response to a further question seeking assurance from the Leader of the Council, that this Council would continue to work constructively with Surrey County Council, the Leader indicated in the affirmative.

Although notice of the following additional questions had been received by the deadline for submission of questions for this meeting, they had not been forwarded to the Leader/relevant Lead Councillors until the day of the Council meeting. Accordingly, a written response to each of question would be circulated by the Leader/relevant lead councillors to all councillors after the meeting. The questioners would be afforded the opportunity of asking supplementary questions at the next Council meeting.

Question from Cllr. Richard Mills

Will the Leader of the Council indicate whether she will urgently bring forward proposals for a restriction on the maximum height for new buildings in the town, in the light of:

- the continuing development pressures that have driven a steady increase in permitted building height in particular in the Town Centre
- the evidence from recent years that the Council's planning procedures have not proved sufficient to control these pressures in line with the wishes of residents, and
- the evidence from the recent election campaign of wide support among residents from across the political spectrum for commitment to a maximum permitted building height, including from her executive portfolio holder for planning at election hustings.

Question from Cllr. David Bilbé

Will the Leader of the Council advise when will this Council see a fully costed plan for restoring the planning department to an improved level of competence with measurable timescales, targets and specific objectives?

Will the plan include a comprehensive set of proposals and staffing increases to improve the effectiveness of enforcement action, particularly to resolve significant planning infringements on Wanborough fields?

Question from Cllr. Bob Hughes

To ask the Executive Member for Community and Organisational Development: What measures are being taken by the Council to attract job applications from people with disabilities, and to sustain them in the workplace?

What input has the Council sought from organisations representative of people with lived experience of disabilities in order to take their advice to help the Council improve their recruitment and retention procedures and policies?

Questions from Cllr. Matt Furniss

1. Can the Leader of the Council confirm what is the valuation of the Council's commercial asset holdings in each year since 2019 to 2023?

In each year how much income was forecast to be generated and how much was actually generated?

2. In December 2020 Guildford, as one of the districts that commissioned a report by KPMG to look at opportunities for collaboration. Can the leader confirm:
 - a) The cost to GBC for producing the report?
 - b) An update as to what is the status of the KPMG report within GBC?
 - c) How many of its recommendations have been accepted and implemented?
 - d) Of the recommendations not accepted, why not?

Question from Cllr. Bilal Akhtar

Can the Leader Confirm the precise reasons for the three-year delay in opening the SANG and the car park in Frog Grove Lane in Wood Street, Worplesdon? The Car Park and Fences have been in place for over two years now.

According to the Officers, there is a delay in resolving an agreement with the landowner and the Council. What measures can be put in place to ensure that this matter can be resolved at the earliest possible time and what is the anticipated opening date?

CO32 GENERAL FUND BUDGET UPDATE

The Council considered a comprehensive report that set out a revised General Fund budget statement for 2023-24. The annual budget had been submitted to full Council in February 2023, at which point a deficit had been identified and the Joint Management Team had been asked to undertake a comprehensive financial review to identify a set of measures to address this deficit and to present a

restated budget for this meeting. A number of factors had been identified in the report as having influenced the Council's financial position and these were presently common to many other councils. Those factors included increasing demand for services, the state of the UK economy over the last year (with high inflation and rising interest rates), and a succession of government funding reductions over many years. For Guildford, a significant factor was the effect of rising interest rates in regard to borrowing in support of various infrastructure and regeneration projects that had increased the Council's overall debt.

The report had set out the findings of the comprehensive financial review and recommended actions to mitigate and reduce the risk of the Council reaching a declaration of a Section 114 notice and a financial recovery plan. A S114 Notice would require the Council to cease all non-essential expenditure and reduce operational and service delivery costs immediately. The report included recommendations to establish a task force to deliver the financial recovery plan.

The report had been considered by the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee (CGSC) at a specially convened meeting on 18 July and by the Executive on 20 July. The comments arising from those meetings were set out in the Order Paper including the provision of a business case for additional planning resources, which had been included on the Order Paper, and a suggestion that a cross-party Executive working group be created to operate in a support and councillor communication role to oversee the financial recovery process.

Upon the motion of the Lead Councillor for Finance & Property, Councillor Richard Lucas, seconded by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Julia McShane, the Council

RESOLVED:

- (1) To approve the restated 2023-24 General Fund Revenue budget including the business case for additional planning resources.
- (2) To approve the repurposing of earmarked reserves as detailed in the report submitted to the Council.
- (3) To endorse the findings in the report.
- (4) To note the response by the Chief Finance (Section 151) Officer to the S114(3) duty and his recommended immediate actions including a range of expenditure controls, which will be managed through a Financial Control Panel consisting of Senior Officers and chaired by the Section 151 Officer.

- (5) To note that a financial recovery plan is being developed by the Chief Finance Officer in liaison with the Joint Management Team, together with milestones and delivery targets, to be reported to October Full Council for approval.
- (6) To endorse the management action of establishing a task force to deliver the financial recovery plan at pace, to provide the capacity, skills, and capability to support recovery.
- (7) To note that the Executive will set up an executive working group for the following purposes:
 - a) to receive and comment on regular updates on the Council's preparations for the Medium-Term Financial Plan restatement in October and its implementation;
 - b) to provide a sounding board for the Executive and officers on the options that are coming forward to close the projected financial gap; and
 - c) to guide wider communication with councillors and beyond.
- (8) To note that expenditure controls as a feature of how the Council conducts its business will remain in place until such time that the MTFP is balanced, and that such controls shall be determined by the Chief Finance Officer and the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Finance and Property.
- (9) To authorise the Chief Finance Officer and Chief Executive to draw down earmarked funding to provide capacity to address and deliver the financial recovery plan and note that the Chief Finance Officer will continue to engage with expert external assistance and advice.
- (10) To endorse the proposal to develop an asset disposal strategy to optimise the revenue impact from the divestment (via sale or otherwise) of the Council's assets and address the need to pay off debt, utilising external advice and support to ensure that best value returns are achieved.

- (11) To agree that a revised Medium-Term Financial Plan be brought to the Executive and Council in October 2023 and then reported quarterly to the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee.

Reason:

To enable the Council to set a balanced budget, which was a statutory requirement and a robust Medium-Term Financial Plan.

CO33 APPOINTMENTS TO EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS 2023-27

The Council noted arrangements, following a review in 2017, for appointing councillors to various external organisations. Under these arrangements, the Council normally appointed councillors to such external organisations that:

- (i) supported the Council's Corporate priorities, and/or
- (ii) assisted in delivery of Council services, and/or
- (iii) were using Council facilities

Appointments would be for a four-year term up to the next Borough Council elections and all uncontested appointments would be confirmed by the Democratic Services and Elections Manager under delegated authority. In respect of appointments to external organisations that were normally reserved to full Council for confirmation, only those that were contested were referred to Council for determination.

Details of the contested 'Council appointments' and the respective nominees were set out in the Order Paper.

The Council noted at the meeting that:

- (a) Councillor Ruth Brothwell had withdrawn her nomination in respect of the appointment to Guildford Poyle Charities, which meant that Councillor Amanda Creese's nomination had been confirmed.
- (b) Councillor David Bilbè had withdrawn his nomination in respect of the appointment to the Council of Governors of the Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, which meant that Councillors Honor Brooker and Merel Rehorst-Smith were the remaining nominees.
- (c) Councillor Honor Brooker had withdrawn her nomination in respect of the appointment to the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre Management and Yvonne

Arnaud Theatre Trust, which meant that Councillor Steven Lee's nomination had been confirmed.

- (d) Councillor Bilal Akhtar had withdrawn his nomination in respect of the appointment to Oakleaf Enterprise, which meant that Councillor Angela Goodwin's nomination had been confirmed.

Each nominee had been given the opportunity to make either a written or an oral personal statement to the meeting in support of their nomination before the vote was taken. The Council noted that, where permissible under the relevant external organisation's constitution/ standing orders, the unsuccessful nominee would be the deputy to the appointee.

Having considered each nominee's representations, the Council

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Councillor Geoff Davis be appointed to the Farnborough Aerodrome Consultative Committee.
- (2) That Councillor Cait Taylor be appointed to Guildford Area Community Care.
- (3) That Councillor Merel Rehorst-Smith be appointed to the Council of Governors of the Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.
- (4) That Councillor Danielle Newson be appointed to Watts Gallery (Limnerslease Committee).

Reason:

To ensure that, in the best interests of local people, the Council maintains and develops its relationship with key local organisations.

CO34 APPOINTMENT OF PARISH MEMBERS TO THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Council noted that Article 10 of the Constitution provided that the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee shall be comprised, amongst others, of up to three co-opted members of parish councils within the borough.

Following the local elections in May, all parish councils in the borough had been invited to submit nominations in respect of the three parish member

appointments. Serving parish members were eligible for re-appointment. Four nominations were received as follows:

- *Julia Osborn – Send Parish Council
- Simon Schofield – Normandy Parish Council
- Penny Tompkins – Shere Parish Council
- *Tim Wolfenden – Shalford Community Council

(* serving parish members)

As there were more nominations received than there were places on the Committee, each nominee was invited to submit a personal statement in support of their nomination and copies of these were circulated to all parish clerks on 23 June 2023 (copies were also appended to the report submitted to the Council).

Each parish council was then asked to cast its vote as to its preferred three candidates. The results of the ballot, which were set out on the Order Paper, were as follows:

Nominee:	Total no. of votes cast by parish councils:
Julia Osborn (Send PC)	13
Simon Schofield (Normandy PC)	8
Penny Tompkins (Shere PC)	8
Tim Wolfenden (Shalford CC)	11

NB. The turnout was 61% (14 of the 23 parish councils in the borough having voted).

Article 10 of the Constitution also stated that the results of the ballot shall inform the Council's decision as to the co-option of parish members to the Committee.

Upon the motion of the Lead Councillor for Regulatory and Democratic Services, Councillor Merel Rehorst-Smith, seconded by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Julia McShane the Council

RESOLVED: That, taking into account the outcome of the ballot of parish councils and their respective personal statements, the Council appoints Julia Osborn and Tim Wolfenden as co-opted parish members of the Corporate Governance & Standards Committee for a term of office expiring in May 2027.

In relation to the third appointment, councillors noted that Simon Schofield and Penny Tompkins both received 8 votes from parish councils. The Council therefore took a

separate vote on this appointment taking into account the candidates' personal statements. The Council

RESOLVED: That Simon Schofield be appointed as a co-opted parish member of the Corporate Governance & Standards Committee for a term of office expiring in May 2027.

Reason:

To ensure the composition of the Committee included up to three co-opted parish members in accordance with Article 10 of the Council's Constitution.

CO35 MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Council received and noted the minutes of the meetings of the Executive held on 16 March, 20 March, and 22 June 2023.

CO36 NOTICE OF MOTION DATED 13 JULY 2023: 7 DAY PLANNING NOTIFICATION PROCEDURE

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11, Councillor Bob Hughes proposed, and Councillor Richard Mills seconded the following motion:

“Council notes that on 22nd February 2023, the Council voted to remove the Member reference process known as the 7-day procedure. This decision removed a key part of democratic decision making from the planning process.

Council further notes that the decision was taken without any consultation of the public, or Parish Councils. It is likely that many including newly elected Councillors will believe that this Ward Councillor consultation process is still in place as it is still happening with older planning applications.

Therefore, this Council resolves to:

- (1) Reinstate the Member reference process (7-day procedure).
- (2) Apply the process to all current applications which are still to be determined following the decision taken by the Council on 22nd February 2023”.

Following the debate, the Council

RESOLVED: That the motion be not supported.

CO37 NOTICE OF MOTION DATED 13 JULY 2023: NORTH STREET

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11, Councillor Matt Furniss proposed, and Councillor Richard Mills seconded the following motion:

“North Street

Background

Create Streets is an organisation that exists to help solve the housing crisis and to help neighbourhood, communities, landowners, councils and developers create and manage beautiful, sustainable places of gentle density that will be popular, are likely to be correlated with good wellbeing and public health outcomes and which are likely to prove good long-term investments based on the historical data of value appreciation and maintenance costs.

Create Streets was appointed by Surrey County Council to design The Healthy Streets for Surrey Guide, using their expertise to co-create beautiful, sustainable, prosperous, economically and socially successful places with strong local support.

On 25 October 2022, Surrey County Council’s Cabinet endorsed The Healthy Streets for Surrey Guide and agreed adoption of the guide as County Council policy for the design of streets in all new developments in the county. The digital version is now live <https://healthystreets.surreycc.gov.uk/> .

It is design guidance to create healthier and more sustainable streets for residents by prioritising air quality, physical activity and community wellbeing. The guidance discusses ways to achieve sustainable streets, such as developing safer walking and cycling routes, promoting public transport, and engaging with local communities.

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities showcased The Healthy Streets for Surrey Guide on 22 June as one of the 25 Pathfinder Councils for showing leadership at the local level. By using design codes, we will enter a virtuous cycle of regenerative development. Design coding is a linchpin in Government’s ambitions for changes to the planning system. It is proposed to be mandatory for all local authorities in the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Bill. Associated themes of placemaking and beautiful and sustainable design are already embedded in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Therefore, this Council resolves to:

- (1) Appoint Create Streets to act as a 'critical friend' to review and make recommendations on the new North Street application submitted by St Edwards to the Council.
- (2) Add their comments to the appealed scheme which can be used in the Council's evidence to defend the appeal.
- (3) Ask the Executive to endorse Surrey County Council's Healthy Streets for Surrey Guide".

Following the debate, the Council

RESOLVED: That the motion be not supported.

The meeting finished at 9.45 pm

Signed

Mayor

Date