

Executive

* Councillor Julia McShane (Chairperson)
Councillor Tom Hunt (Vice-Chair)

* Councillor Angela Goodwin	Councillor George Potter
* Councillor Catherine Houston	* Councillor Merel Rehorst-Smith
* Councillor Richard Lucas	* Councillor Fiona White
* Councillor Carla Morson	

*Present

Councillors George Potter and Yves de Contades were in remote attendance.

EX61 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tom Hunt and George Potter.

EX62 Local Code of Conduct - Disclosable Pecuniary Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

EX63 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 February were confirmed as correct. The Chairman signed the minutes.

EX64 Leader's Announcements

Guildford and Waverley businesses were invited to the second year of a free networking event organised by Guildford and Waverley Borough Councils. Business Question Time would take place on Monday 3 June at the University of Surrey from 5pm to 7pm. The keynote speech would focus on the national and regional economic forecast for local businesses. It would be followed by questions to a panel of business leaders. To obtain a free ticket, visit the Eventbrite website.

Over the past few months, the council had been working with Surrey Police and Experience Guildford to introduce changes to help make Guildford town centre safer for everyone.

- There were now additional police officers patrolling in Guildford town centre at the weekends and street marshals were present in the town centre on Saturdays and Sundays from 12:00pm to 8:00pm whose role was to:
 - Help reassure visitors and residents in Guildford town centre.
 - Work with police to enforce Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO) that are in place; and
 - Deal with other environmental and public realm issues, such as littering.
- Over the next few weeks, Surrey County Council's Targeted Youth Support (TYS) would begin a youth outreach project.

The street marshals and youth outreach project were initiatives funded through the Safer Streets Fund. In Guildford, this funding was being used to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in Guildford town centre. This would continue throughout 2024 and into 2025.

This month the council was encouraging residents to try something new to keep fit. There was a variety of sports places to visit around the borough such as Guildford Spectrum, the Lido, and the outdoor gyms to keep active during this month. More information was available on the website by searching for 'Spectrum', 'Lido' or 'outdoor gyms'.

EX65 O&S Recommendations to the Executive - Air Quality

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered an air quality update report on 5 March 2024. The report had provided the Committee with an update on progress of air quality projects and other statutory air quality priorities in fulfilment of Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 Local Air Quality Management, as amended by the Environment Act 2021. In conclusion of the Committee's consideration of the update report two recommendations for the Executive were agreed. Firstly, that the Executive adopt a Motor Vehicle No Idling policy for staff, contractors and visitors on council premises, and staff using a vehicle for conducting council business. Secondly, that the Executive improve the council's communications on air quality, particularly the air pollution concentrations in the Borough and the benefits of clean air.

The Lead Councillor for Regulatory and Democratic Services introduced the report and the Senior Specialist (Environment) Officer was in attendance.

The meeting heard that in the space of a few months an anti-idling draft policy would be submitted to the Executive for its consideration. Although the council had no formal powers to require drivers to switch off their engines when stationary, the policy would set out to deliver behaviour change wherever possible, but most certainly on its own estate. It would be expected that all council staff, unless there was a legitimate reason, would act in compliance when

carrying out their duties. Appropriate signage would be designed to be placed in suitable locations to raise awareness that engine idling was bad for the environment and for public health. It was suggested that local vehicle drivers who endorsed the council's message in this regard might be given car stickers to display to spread the message wider.

The response to the second recommendation was to propose a broader air quality communications campaign to engage with residents not just in the case of driver behaviour but, for example, lighting bonfires and burning solid fuel to heat homes. A particular target cohort for the programme would be young people and the council would be working with partners to deliver its message in schools. It was noted that the funding for the campaign had been ringfenced by the council and had not been externally sourced.

The Executive agreed it was correct for the council to lead by example in this matter and the target list for the campaign should include all councillors. It was important to enable residents to understand the levels and sources of air pollution, how to mitigate against pollution and how to become involved in tackling air quality issues or how to raise a concern. One key message to residents should set out that individual actions can and do make a difference to improve the quality of life for neighbours and the borough as a whole. Consequently, the Executive,

RESOLVED:

To agree the proposed responses and the reasons for those responses as set out in the table at item 5.

Reason(s):

1. In order to help improve air quality and reduce emissions.
2. To improve the Council's communications in regard to air quality, particularly the air pollution concentrations in the Borough and the benefits of clean air.

EX66 Option Agreement with Blackwell Park Limited in respect of purchase of Council-owned land - Outcome of call in of decision taken by the Strategic Director: Place

The Strategic Director: Place had taken a key executive decision on 29 February 2024 in relation to entering into an Option Agreement on 8 March 2024 with Blackwell Park Limited providing the option for them to purchase a small parcel of Council-owned land necessary to enable development on Blackwell Park. This decision was called in by a number of councillors for review by the Overview and

Scrutiny Committee (OSC). The OSC considered the call-in at its special meeting held on 19 March 2024. The purpose of the report before the Executive was to set out formally the outcome of the decision by the OSC. In the absence of the Lead Councillor for Regeneration, the Leader of the Council introduced the report.

The report minute of the OSC described the scrutiny process as having been robust and that the OSC had ultimately endorsed the officer decision. There had been a suggestion during the OSC debate that such a decision was of public interest and consequently should have been taken by the Executive itself in public session. The Leader noted this suggestion and would reflect upon this for future business. On behalf of the Executive, the Leader thanked the OSC for its thorough review of the matter.

The Executive,

RESOLVED:

To note the outcome of the call in by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee of the decision taken by the Strategic Director: Place on 29 February 2024 in respect of the Option Agreement with Blackwell Park Limited providing for the purchase of Council-owned land, which was to endorse that decision.

Reason(s):

The Executive was now aware of the decision and the outcome of the call-in.

EX67 Asset Disposal Strategy

In response to the recent cost of living crisis and high inflationary pressures, the Council was seeking to reduce its General Fund borrowing requirement. To achieve this goal, the council had already stripped back its capital programme and now sought to generate £50m (net) of capital receipts from the disposal of property assets held within the General Fund over the coming three years. This activity was an identified critical workstream within the Financial Recovery Plan endorsed by Full Council at its meeting on 30 August 2023.

A careful and considered strategic approach to identifying and progressing an accelerated volume of property asset sales was required and consequently a strategy had been drawn up and was appended to the Executive report for consideration and approval.

The Council's financial accounts identified General Fund property assets into two major categories that were in scope for consideration. Those were Investment

Properties held purely for income generation or value appreciation but which did not fulfil any service objective, and Land and Buildings assets held for operational or strategic reasons. Other categories also in scope were defined in the financial accounts as Surplus assets which were those no longer needed and surplus to requirement, and Community assets that included open space and land assets.

The Lead Councillor for Finance and Property introduced the report. It was emphasised that each individual asset identified through the process would be subject to a thorough strategic, commercial and operational evaluation and would be presented to the Executive on a case by case basis with its own detailed report setting out a clear rationale for disposal. Where appropriate, the council would consider disposal with planning permissions if this would maximise market value. This would be an ongoing process over the course of the coming three years to achieve the target income. The Executive would have regard to any political, operational or community sensitivities.

It was noted that the process had already commenced with the disposal of certain council properties in Castle Street and Quarry Street which had achieved a higher market price than the valuation had suggested.

The Executive was hopeful that during the course of the three-year period the national economic picture would improve, but in the meantime the draft strategy was well-drawn up and was fit for purpose.

The Leader thanked the members of the cross-party working group for consideration of, and feedback on, the draft strategy and noted that individual ward councillors would be consulted as appropriate.

The Executive,

RESOLVED:

To approve the draft Asset Disposal Strategy set out at Appendix 1 and to note the Equality Impact Assessment at Appendix 2 of the report.

Reason(s):

To set out a strategy to generate capital receipts through the sale of assets to meet the £50M (net) target as part of the Financial Recovery Plan to reduce Council debt to achieve a sustainable financial position.

EX68 UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural Prosperity Fund (REPF)

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) was a part of the Government's Levelling Up agenda with all areas of the UK receiving an allocation from the Fund. In 2022, as a Lead Local Authority, Guildford Borough Council was given £1 million with full discretion to spend over three years on capital and revenue projects so long as those projects aligned with the overarching ambition of the Fund. In the absence of the Lead Councillor for Regeneration, the Leader introduced the report.

To date the council had spent funds in support of local business and community groups; running local events, offering grant funding opportunities and developing a Local Cycling Walking and Infrastructure Plan.

In addition to the UKSPF, the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) launched the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) in 2023 which allocated Guildford £400,000 to spend on capital grants to support rural businesses and communities. During the past year the council had been working in partnership with a number of other local authorities to run a grant scheme to support rural businesses. There was £300,000 of REPF to distribute this year.

The report before the Executive set out proposed projects to benefit from the final tranche of UKSPF and REPF grant funding for 2024-25. Some UKSPF-funded projects were new, and some were ongoing from last year and included a new e-bike scheme for Guildford and the continuation of the Crowdfund Guildford programme. Amongst other projects there would be funding for play and open spaces, including the Youth Games and a play rangers' scheme that would run in six areas across the borough this summer.

Businesses and community groups in the borough were encouraged to apply as the funding must be awarded by the end of March 2025.

The meeting heard that when the vacancy for the Local Economic Development Officer post was filled then strands of the Economic Development Strategy, such as promoting Guildford as a film location could proceed.

The REPF funding opportunity was being promoted via the usual channels, LinkedIn, social media channels and the Rural Forum. Councillors were also encouraged to spread the word.

The Executive,

RESOLVED:

1. To agree the revised project allocations of Guildford's UKSPF grant funding for 2024/25, as outlined in the report.
2. To delegate to the Strategic Director of Place, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Regeneration, authority to enter into such contracts and legal agreements connected with the UKSPF and REPF as may be necessary in compliance with Procurement Procedure Rules and within the allocated grant funding budget.
3. To delegate to the Strategic Director, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Regeneration, authority to reallocate budget across projects as required in order to meet the grant spend deadline.

Reason(s):

The £790,320 total capital and revenue funding Guildford Borough Council had been allocated from the UKSPF for 2024-25 was a significant sum of money that could have a positive impact on the borough's local communities and businesses.

The projects put forward aligned with the borough's local priorities and it was intended to leverage collaboration with the Council's partners to maximise value for money.

EX69 Creation of new post of Head of Business Improvement

A new role of Head of Business Improvement was required at Guildford Borough Council and this role would report directly to the Joint Chief Executive. Because this new post would report directly to the Chief Executive, it was defined in law as a Non-Statutory Chief Officer, even though the role was below either Strategic Director or Executive Head level. Consequently, approval was sought from the Executive to authorise the funding for the role. The Lead Councillor for Community and Organisational Development introduced the report.

There were strategic, operational and governance improvements required at the council to improve efficiencies and effectiveness. Although the council had begun to address these matters in areas such as finance and updating the Constitution was underway, there was a need for a lead officer in this regard. The new role of Head of Business Improvement would lead this activity and drive forward an overall improvement plan to deliver better outcomes for residents and local businesses. The cost of the role would be covered by the savings arising from the recent retendering of the council's insurance provision. The role would initially be a Guildford-only role.

The Executive acknowledged that improvements were required across the council, some of which would be challenging. The commitment to a dedicated role to lead on this work was endorsed. Consequently, the Executive,

RESOLVED:

1. To note the Chief Executive / Head of Paid Services’ decision to revise his staff structure with the creation of the role of Head of Business Improvement; and
2. To approve the budget for the new role of £95,484 (which included on-costs) funded from the savings made on the insurance contract renewal which had recently been completed, which would be vired to cover the cost of the new post.

Reason(s):

To ensure resources are available to create and drive an improvement plan and to address governance challenges in the Council.

The meeting finished at 6.56 pm

Signed

Date

Chairman