

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – RESOURCES**

4 June 2024

\* Councillor Philip Brooker (Chairman)

\* Councillor Dominique Williams (Vice-Chairman)

\* Councillor Phil Bellamy

\* Councillor Dawn Bennett

\* Councillor Honor Brooker

Councillor Jason Fenwick

\* Councillor Stephen Hives

\* Councillor Vanessa King

\* Councillor Masuk Miah

Councillor Richard Mills OBE

\* Councillor Katie Steel

\* Councillor Sue Wyeth-Price

\*Present

Councillors Richard Lucas (Lead Councillor for Finance and Property), Julia McShane (Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing), Carla Morson (Lead Councillor for Community and Organisational Development), and Howard Smith were also in attendance, with Councillors Amanda Creese, Catherine Houston (Lead Councillor for Commercial Services), James Walsh, and Fiona White (Lead Councillor for Planning) in remote attendance.

**OSR1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

The Committee was advised of apologies from Councillors Jason Fenwick and Richard Mills OBE. There were no substitutes.

**OSR2 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT AND DECLARATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or disclosures of non-pecuniary interests.

**OSR3 FINANCIAL MONITORING – PROVISIONAL 2023-24 OUTTURN POSITION**

The Strategic Director of Finance advised the meeting that the Council's draft accounts for the last financial year were published on 31 May 2024 and that this was the first time in the last four or five years that the statutory deadline for publication had been achieved.

The Strategic Director of Finance advised that the 2023-24 year had started with a £3m deficit. The Committee was advised of the financial recovery plan process and other measures enacted during the year, and an outline was provided of how a corporate underspend had been used to date. The Strategic Director of Finance indicated that he would be proposing using some of the remaining underspend on invest-to-save actions.

The Strategic Director of Finance confirmed that a written report on the outturn for 2023-24 would be submitted to the Committee's next meeting, including all budget variances and impacts on the Council's reserves and balances. He indicated that reports detailing the development of the Budget and its proposals would be submitted to the Committee in July, September, November, and January for scrutiny prior to consideration by full Council. The meeting was informed that briefing sessions would be held prior to full Council meetings to enable Councillors to receive and question information in private.

In response to a question, the Strategic Director of Finance referred to the four sessions before full Council meetings where officers would be available to answer questions. He indicated that in addition to opportunities at Committee meetings, Councillors could contact members of the finance team direct with their queries.

The Lead Councillor for Finance and Assets referred to the financial progress and improvements achieved in the previous 12 months, including the finance recovery plan and the establishment of monthly expenditure reporting.

In reply to a question, the Strategic Director of Finance confirmed the four financial reports scheduled for the next meeting of the Committee and that members of the finance team would be present to respond to questions from the Committee.

The Chairperson thanked the Strategic Director of Finance for his update and the Lead Councillor for Finance and Property for attending.

#### **OSR4 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT 2023-24 QUARTER 4**

The Chairperson welcomed the Lead Councillor for Community and Organisational Development, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager, the Policy Officer, Strategy and Performance, and the Assistant Director of Organisational Development.

The Lead Councillor for Community and Organisational Development introduced the report submitted to the Committee. She advised the meeting that the report was part of the Council's performance monitoring framework and presented an overview of performance against key performance indicators (KPIs) at the end of Quarter 4. She noted that performance monitoring involved the collection, analysis, and use of information to manage performance, maximise positive impacts, and minimise risk of adverse impacts. The Lead Councillor for Community and Organisational Development indicated that the KPIs would be reviewed and rolled out from Quarter 1 of 2024-25, to ensure that were fit for purpose, meaningful, and aligned to the key themes and objectives of the Corporate Strategy. In addition, she advised that the reporting template would be reviewed to make it more visual and demonstrative of trends. The Lead Councillor for Community and Organisational Development concluded by inviting questions from the Committee.

The Chairperson indicated that the question order would follow the four headings within the report Environment, Homes and Jobs, Community, and Council, and finish with general questions and suggestions about the reporting of performance.

During the ensuing discussion a number of points and questions were raised:

- The Chairperson referred to a query raised at a previous meeting of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee; namely, the lack of a target for the household waste KPIs ENV1 and ENV2 and the lack of a response to members to explain why. In reply, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager agreed that a target should be allocated and advised that the Council was a signatory to the Surrey Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy. He indicated that the county level target was sixty percent, and it was under review and anticipated to increase in line with the requirements of the recently passed Environment Act. The Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager informed the meeting that a KPI target for household waste would be included within future performance monitoring reports.

- With reference to a query raised at a previous meeting of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee concerning H&J11, the percentage of affordable housing units granted planning permission on eligible sites, the Chairperson asked why an explanation of the quarterly variations had not been provided to Councillors as requested. In addition, in relation to H&J 10, the percentage of vacant town centre retail units, the Chairperson referred to an earlier request for information on what the Council could do to encourage occupancy of the town centre shops. In response, the Policy Officer, Strategy and Performance, advised that the external company that had provided H&J10 data was no longer able to do so, and the Council was looking to other sources. The Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager indicated that a written response concerning H&J11 would be provided to Committee members.
- A Committee member questioned the target of 768 for H&J2, the number of empty homes across the Borough, and asked how that figure had been decided upon and why it was considered acceptable. In addition, the Committee member queried what were the plans for the 858 empty homes in the Borough and how many do not meet the Decent Homes Standard. In reply, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager indicated that H&J2 tracked all types of tenure and he suggested that KPIs should align with what was within the Council's gift to control. He concluded by indicated that a full written response concerning H&J11 would be provided to Committee members.
- In response to a further question on H&J2 and the recruitment of an Empty Property Officer, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager indicated that a written response would be provided to Committee members.
- A Committee member asked for a breakdown of the number of empty homes for public and private sector across the whole of the borough to show the number of empty homes within just the GBC housing stock. In reply, the Policy Officer, Strategy and Performance, advised that the Council's Housing department had advised it was too difficult to provide a figure, but estimated the number to be 100-110 empty homes and this

was due to various reasons, for example, major repairs, legacy voids, and recently vacated properties.

- With reference to a question on H&J5, the number of homeless families placed in B&B, a Committee member questioned why there was no action plan and for the average length of these for families placed within B&B. In reply, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager indicated that the query needed to be followed up with the service and that a written response would be provided to Committee members.
- In reply to questions on H&J12, the percentage of homes that do not meet the Decent Home Standard, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager indicated that a written response would be provided to Committee members.
- In response to a question from the Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing, the meeting was informed that queries about specific performance indicators had been submitted to the Policy Officer, Strategy and Performance, prior to the meeting, but were very close to the meeting.
- With reference to the issue of empty homes within the Borough, the Strategic Director of Finance advised the meeting of a future increase in the Council Tax on empty properties to encourage bringing them back into use.
- In response to a question on H&J3, the number of net new additional homes, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager indicated the difficulties of setting a meaningful target on a quarterly basis and suggested that the presentation of the information could be improved to better illustrate fluctuation and overall trajectory of delivery.
- In reply to a question on the lack of data for H&J4, the number of affordable new homes completed each year, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager indicated that a written response would be provided to Committee members. Councillors suggested the value in

specifying within the performance monitoring reports the reasons for a lack of any data.

- A Councillor noted that performance for H&J7, the time taken to assess new applications on the housing register, had advanced with a significant reduction in processing times and asked for details of the improvements. In reply, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager indicated that fuller information could be included within subsequent reports to the Committee and that a written response would be provided to Committee members.
- The Assistant Director of Organisational Development drew attention to the request within the report submitted to the Committee for queries about specific performance indicators to be shared with the Policy Officer, Strategy and Performance, at least two days in advance of the meeting to enable detailed answers to be provided at the meeting itself, rather than the provision of written answers subsequently.
- The Chairperson referred to a query raised at a previous meeting of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee; namely, the proposed change to the target for performance indicator COU5, the time taken to assess new Housing Benefit claims. He informed the meeting that he would still like to see performance comparisons with other councils and to know how long waits impacted claimants and whether interim payments were offered if claims were not processed within a certain timescale. In response, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager indicated the value in benchmarking and undertook to follow up the Committee's enquiries. The Strategic Director of Finance confirmed that such benchmarking data was available.
- In reply to a question, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager informed the meeting that his understanding was all new Housing Benefit claims were included within COU5, but he would confirm this with the service.
- In reply to questions on COU16, average phone wait times, and COU13, percentage of contact via the phone into the Council's Customer

Services Centre, the Lead Councillor for Community and Organisational Development indicated that written responses would be provided to Committee members.

- In answer to a question on staff sickness absence, the Committee was advised that the Council was not directly comparable to the private sector due to the number and variety of services provided. The Policy Officer, Strategy and Performance, indicated that benchmarking data from other councils in Surrey would be provided to Committee members after confirmation that councils were happy to release the information.
- With reference to COU14, a member of the Committee asked how the Council was utilising social media streams and whether it could more effectively engage with residents. In addition, the example of email subscriptions at Somerset Council and the need to improve the Council's online forms for reporting waste or noise issues was suggested. The Lead Councillor for Community and Organisational Development undertook to arrange a written response to Committee members and share the suggested improvements with the relevant service. The Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing encouraged Councillors to sign up and share the information on the Council's digital communications.

The Chairperson invited the Committee members to comment on performance monitoring reporting to overview and scrutiny. Members suggested the merit in reviewing the five percent tolerance on RAG ratings, identifying priority indicators for scrutiny from within the thirty-five quarterly KPIs presented to the Committee, and improving the presentation and use of data within the report. The use of hyperlinks and summaries within the report was praised by a Committee member. The Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager and the Lead Councillor for Community and Organisational Development welcomed the suggestions proposed.

Councillors questioned who would be involved in the review of KPIs and changes to the performance monitoring reporting ahead of their introduction for Quarter 1 of 2024-25. The Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager advised that the review of performance monitoring would take place alongside

and align with the Council’s new Corporate Strategy. He indicated that following consultation with key officers and with relevant Councillors a scope for the proposed performance monitoring changes would be shared with the two groups.

The Chairperson thanked the Lead Councillor for Community and Organisational Development, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager, the Policy Officer, Strategy and Performance, and the Assistant Director of Organisational Development for attending.

**OSR5 GUILDFORD AND WAVERLEY TRANSFORMATION AND COLLABORATION UPDATE**

The Chairperson reminded the meeting that this item had been deferred due to the heightened political sensitivities of the pre-election period.

The meeting finished at 8.05 pm

Signed .....

Date .....

Chairman