

Executive

25 January 2024

* 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 Philip Brooker, Vanessa King, Joanne Shaw, Howard Smith, Dominique Williams and Catherine Young were also in remote attendance.

EX46 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Carla Morson.

EX47 Local Code of Conduct - Disclosable Pecuniary Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

EX48 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 January 2024 were confirmed as a correct record. The Chairman signed the minutes.

EX49 Leader's Announcements

The Leader made no announcements.

EX50 Review of the Guildford borough Local Plan: strategy and sites (2015-2034)

The Council was required to review the Local Plan: Strategy and Sites (LPSS) within five years of adoption to decide if an update to the Plan was required. Having considered changes in national planning policy, associated guidance and relevant legislation, as well as changes in circumstances affecting Guildford

borough since the LPSS was adopted, it was officers' view that the Local Plan should be updated.

The report was introduced by the Lead Councillor for Planning who explained that the Local Plan was not only concerned with housing need and housing numbers, but also addressed the business and employment needs of the borough as well. Workplace arrangements and shopping habits had changed greatly since the adoption of the Local Plan in April 2019, and it was anticipated the evidence base would now look quite different. There would also be a review of open spaces and recreational places. If approved, an update of the Local Plan would completely reappraise the evidence base in these key areas. The update would be a large piece of work for the Council to undertake and would take some time to complete. Should the Executive agree the recommendations in the report and forward to Full Council for approval, then a second report would be submitted to the Executive setting out in detail the timetable, process and financing for the update of the Local Plan.

It was noted that during the course of the update it was expected that the Government would announce some substantial changes to planning policy. In addition, a General Election would be held and it was anticipated that significant changes to national planning policy could be introduced by a new government. Officers would be closely monitoring the situation and the Council would need to be prepared to adapt as and when new policy was announced.

It was possible that some of the policies in the Local Plan could become outdated during the course of the update if legislation and/or the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) were to change. The adopted Local Plan would remain the primary consideration until such a time as a new plan was adopted by Full Council, but any such policy affected in this way would carry less weight.

It was explained that because the existing Local plan was adopted on 25 April 2019 and not prior to 01 April 2019, there could be an argument made at any appeal that the existing plan should remain in place with 2019 Land Availability Assessment (LAA) numbers for an additional year. However, it was to be expected that this argument might not be supported by the development industry. The matter was beyond the scope of the submitted report but would be kept under observation.

It was observed that slow progress nationally to update population statistics, NPPF and the Standard Method of the local housing need calculation meant it had not been possible to review the Local Plan at any earlier point in time. It was further suggested that the Council might need to apply the existing Standard

Method to its new evidence base if national planning policy were not updated during the period of the review.

The borough presented substantial constraints as to where new building might be located due to flood risk and designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) alongside a challenging infrastructure picture. It was emphasised that a revised plan would be built upon the evidence base alone and that the Council should endeavour to always be clear with local people in this regard.

There was currently no time limit by which any Council should adopt a new local plan. The existing Guildford Borough Local Plan took seven years to adoption in which time the Council undertook three rounds of public consultation, including a Regulation 19 consultation, and processed around 90,000 consultation replies. The Executive heard that the Government was indicating a 30-month period to adoption in future. It was unclear if, under such circumstances, there would be a requirement for less evidence and/or public consultation process and what, if any, penalty there might be for failing to adopt within a set period.

It was commented that although plan-making was challenging here was an opportunity to collaborate with local people to make improvements in a number of areas.

The Executive, in noting all comments and questions thanked the Planning Policy team for its report and,

RESOLVED:

To recommend to Full Council, meeting on 21 February 2024:

1. That the Guildford Local Plan: strategy and sites (2015-2034) be updated following the findings of the review undertaken in accordance with Regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).
2. That a further report be submitted to the Executive at a later date to clarify the appropriate timing for and budgetary requirements of the Local Plan update, and that such report should follow the national planning reform legislation and consider its implications for the update process.

Reason(s):

1. There is a statutory requirement to review the LPSS within 5 years of its adoption. This is to assess whether it needs updating. The review findings set out in this report indicate that an update of the LPSS would be an appropriate

course of action to ensure that the Council's Local Plan remains effective into the future.

2. There are a range of uncertainties which impact on the context for the preparation of a new / updated Local Plan, some of which relate to the lack of clarity regarding the detail of proposed Government reforms to the planning system which guide plan-making. It is necessary that these are fully considered in order to set out recommendations regarding the scope and timing of a new plan-making process.

EX51 Capital and Investment Strategy 2024/25 - 2028/29

The capital and investment strategy gave an overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contributed to the provision of local public services. The strategy also detailed how associated risks were managed and any implications for future sustainability.

The Executive considered the report that included details of the capital programme. It was noted that £96.9 million had been removed from the capital programme by Full Council in December 2023 which left around £212 million of capital investment remaining. There was just under £10 million worth of new bids/mandates submitted for approval. The report set out the requirements of the Prudential Code and the investment strategy covering treasury management investments, service investments and commercial investments.

In terms of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), £121 million of capital investment was proposed for the next five years to support development projects to build or acquire new housing (including Weyside Urban Village).

The report also covered the requirements of the Treasury Management Code and the prevailing DLUHC Statutory Guidance. Treasury Management income for the coming year was £3 million which was slightly down on what had been expected as interest rates had fallen.

The flexible use of capital receipts had been extended for the coming year should the council wish to do so.

The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) remained unchanged from last year's budget.

The report had been considered by the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee on 18 January 2023 and the comments arising from that meeting were set out in the Supplementary Information Sheet. A typo (missing words 'budget process') was noted on page 9 of this supplementary paper which would

be corrected before the report was submitted to Full Council. The sentence referred to an individual councillor's observational comment of the existing scrutiny process in regard to the budget. The Executive was informed that the scrutiny process for the present budget was in line with that conducted over the previous 4-5 years. There could be future recommended changes to this process as a result of the Council's ongoing close monitoring of all expenditure.

It was observed that close monitoring of expenditure and the actions undertaken by the Council to manage its budget had resulted in a significant reduction in projected expenditure of £200 million. However, the portfolio holder for Finance and Property acknowledged that there was still much work to be done to further reduce the Council's outgoings.

The Executive,

RESOLVED:

1. To approve the new bids set out in Appendix 2 to the report submitted to the Executive for inclusion in the capital programme as indicated, subject to Council approval.
2. To approve the removal of the Bright Hill scheme on the HRA approved and provisional programmes as previously reported to Councillors.
3. To recommend (to Full Council meeting on 7 February 2024):
 - (a) That the General Fund and HRA capital estimates, as shown in appendices 3 to 12, as amended to include the new bids referred to in 1. above, be approved.
 - (b) That the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy, referred to in section 9 of the report submitted to the Executive, be approved.
 - (c) That the capital and investment strategy, specifically the investment strategy and Prudential Indicators contained within the report and Appendix 1, be approved.
 - (d) That the updated flexible use of capital receipts policy, as set out in Appendix 8, be approved.

Reason(s):

To enable Council, at its budget meeting on 7 February 2024, to approve the capital and investment strategy for 2024/25 to 2028/29, and the funding required for the new capital schemes proposed.

EX52 Housing Revenue Account Budget 2024-25

The S.151 Officer introduced the report that outlined the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget for 2024/25, which had been built on the estimates and assumptions in the updated 2023 HRA Business Plan.

It was noted that the HRA was a completely separate account to the General Fund. The surplus remained but was reducing year on year.

The Direction on the Rent Standard 2019 required the Regulator of Social Housing to set a rent standard for social housing which came into effect from 2020, which would have been CPI +1% from the preceding September rate, this equated to 7.7% and was the recommended rent increase for the year that would also apply to those in Shared ownership. The Leader reminded the meeting that around 92% of the Council's tenants were on social rent. Of those around 60% were in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

A 5% increase in garage rents was proposed which was in line with the wider Council policy on fees and charges.

The report included the overall details of the proposed investment programme for the properties that were managed within the HRA.

The comments arising from the meeting of the Joint Executive Advisory Board held on 9 January 2024 were set out in the Supplementary Information Sheet.

The Executive received those comments and,

RESOLVED:

To recommend to the Council meeting on 7 February 2024:

1. That the proposed HRA revenue budget for 2024/25, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report submitted to the Executive, be approved.
2. That a rent increase of 7.7%, be implemented.

3. That the fees and charges for HRA services for 2024/25, as set out in Appendix 2 to the report, be approved.
4. That a 5% increase be applied to garage rents which is in line with the wider Council policy on fees and charges.

Reason(s):

To enable the Council to set the rent charges for HRA property and associated fees and charges, along with authorising the necessary expenditure to implement a budget, this is consistent with the objectives outlined in the HRA Business Plan

EX53 General Fund Revenue Budget 2024-25 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2024-25 to 2026-27

The S.151 officer introduced the report that set out the draft General Fund Budget for 2024/25 and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2024-25 to 2026/27. The Executive was reminded that all of the proposed actions to achieve a balanced budget for next year were set out in the appendices to the report.

An underspend of just under £1.1 million was projected for the current year and this would be directed towards a number of actions to achieve a balanced budget for next year. It was confirmed that the Council was currently no longer at risk of declaring a S.114 notice.

The detail of the Local Government funding settlement was yet to be announced, but it was estimated that Guildford would receive an additional £165,000. Nationally, it was thought that higher awards would be directed towards upper tier authorities with responsibilities for schools and social care.

The Executive was referred to the S.25 report and heard that workstreams had been continuing on the 2024-25 budget and the £18.3m MTFP gap as part of the Financial Recovery Plan agreed in August 2023, including the capital expenditure review and the proposed asset disposal programme. The outputs from the various workstreams had reduced the budget gap by £15.9m. The MTFP set out the key work streams for the Council to focus on over this period which, aimed to address the remaining £2.4m budget gap across the MTFP period and to prepare for future capital financing costs and funding risks.

The Executive was advised that strengthened financial reporting and processes needed to be embedded to form the foundations of a financially resilient council.

The Executive noted that considerable progress had been made since reporting to Council in July 2023, but the agreed savings plans needed to be delivered and the remaining budget gap still needed to be addressed.

The Executive thanked the Financial Services team and officers across the Council who had worked collaboratively to reduce the budget gap, and

RESOLVED:

To recommend the following to Council (at its Budget Meeting on 7 February 2024):

1. That the General Fund Budget for 2024/25 as summarised in Appendix 1, incorporating the budget variations included at Appendix 2, be approved.
2. That a 2.99% increase in Guildford Council's Band D Council Tax Charge for 2024/25, be approved with resultant increases to the other council tax bands.
3. That the Council's existing Local Council Tax Support Scheme, with uprating as set out in Appendix 6 and the £40,000 discretionary hardship fund that runs alongside it, be continued.
4. That, from 1 April 2025, the Council varies its determination of 26 February 2019 under Section 11B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, so that the long-term empty dwelling levy starts after a property has been empty and unfurnished for one year.
5. That, from 1 April 2025, the Council will charge a premium (levy) of 100% on periodically used dwellings as defined by section 11C of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
6. That the schedule of Fees and Charges, as set out in Appendix 3 to this report, be approved.
7. That the use of the 2023-24 underspend as set out in paragraph 8.5 of this report, be approved.

Reason(s):

1. The General Fund Budget is a major decision for the Council and setting a balanced budget is a statutory requirement.
2. Scrutiny of these MTFP and Budget proposals demonstrate transparency and good governance.
3. The Council has been well positioned to respond to these challenges and whilst the latest MTFP for the subsequent years ending 2026/27 continues to project future financial pressures, and opportunities, the Council is able to take action to ensure sufficient funding is in place to deliver and maintain services.

EX54 Guildford Borough Council Whistleblowing Policy

The Lead Councillor for Regulatory and Democratic Services introduced the report.

Guildford Borough Council encouraged staff and others to report any cases of suspected wrongdoing or misconduct, illegal acts, or failure to act within the council as part of its commitment to act with integrity and openness in the best interest of its residents and communities. To govern any such disclosures, the council had a Whistleblowing Policy. That Policy had been reviewed and updated and was set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

The Executive heard that it was proposed Guildford Borough Council and Waverley Borough Council attempt to align their respective Whistleblowing Policies as far as it was appropriate to do so, whilst accepting there might be local differences. Proposals similar to those contained in the report were due to be considered at Waverley Borough Council shortly.

The report had been considered by the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee on 18 January 2024 and the comments and recommendations arising from that meeting were set out in the Supplementary Information Sheet at Appendix 2. Those recommendations included correcting two factual errors in the draft policy and to propose a delegation to the Monitoring Officer to make minor amendments as appropriate for the purpose of keeping it up to date.

The Executive agreed that the council must be an open and transparent organisation and the Joint Chief Executive, in particular, was commended for his work in developing this approach. An annual report was proposed. The revised Whistleblowing Policy was considered fit for purpose with the changes recommended by the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee incorporated. Consequently, the Executive:

RESOLVED:

To adopt the policy set out in Appendix 1 to the report incorporating the recommended amendments from the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee.

Reason(s):

1. It was right and proper to uphold the principles of transparency to encourage individuals to make any disclosures and raise any concerns where they suspect wrongdoing.

2. It is important that the Council has a policy in place to govern such disclosures and that such policy is kept under regular review.

The meeting finished at 7.02 pm

Signed

Date

Chairman

Executive

22 February 2024

* 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 Yves de Contades, Joanne Shaw and James Walsh were also in attendance.

EX55 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Carla Morson.

EX56 Local Code of Conduct - Disclosable Pecuniary Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

EX57 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2024 were confirmed as correct. The Chairman signed the minutes.

EX58 Leader's Announcements

Crowdfund Guildford free workshop

Another free Crowdfund Guildford virtual workshop would take place on Friday, 8 March. Residents could access support and funding for their ideas and projects, learn about available resources, the application process, and how to bring community initiatives to life. Residents and local groups were encouraged to attend. More information was available on the website

www.spacehive.com/movement/guildford.

Pride in Surrey announcement

The Leader was proud to announce Guildford would be the location for the 5th anniversary celebration of Pride in Surrey, set to unfold at Stoke Park on Saturday, 21 September 2024.

Tickets for the event were available via the [Pride in Surrey website](#) and were offered on a 'pay what you can basis' keeping Pride accessible for as many people as possible.

Guildford museum retains Arts Council Accreditation

The museum had retained its Full Accreditation from Arts Council England in recognition of the work the heritage team had put into every aspect of the museum from looking after the collection of objects to meeting relevant standards for policies and procedures.

Congratulations were expressed to the team.

Public inquiry for planning appeal at land at Guildford Cathedral

An appeal would be determined by public inquiry. The inquiry would open on 5 March 2024 and was due to last 10 days. Times and dates were subject to change as advised by the Planning Inspector. More information was available on the council's newsroom webpage.

EX59 O&S Recommendations to the Executive - Modern Slavery

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (O&S) made recommendations to the Executive from time to time as it saw fit and the Executive was required to consider any such recommendations within a two-month period. Set out in the paper were recommendations arising from the O&S meeting held on 19 December 2023. The recommendations related to the council's obligations towards tackling modern slavery. The council was required to monitor its own performance in this regard via an annual report which was received by O&S. The Executive was asked to agree to progress certain actions within sections 7.5-7.8 of the Annual Report on the Modern Slavery Motion which specifically related to the council's procurement processes and these were set out in the paper along with suggested responses.

The Leader of the Council introduced the paper and welcomed the Chairman of the O&S, Councillor James Walsh, who was in attendance online. Cllr Walsh commended officers and the quality of the annual monitoring reports that had been received by O&S since Council's adoption of the Modern Slavery Motion in 2018.

The Executive echoed the comments from Cllr Walsh. The recommendations were welcomed and described as sensible and would provide positive additions to the council's robust approach to tackling Modern Slavery. It was noted that the council's adopted standards in this regard extended externally via the procurement process to partners and service providers and so ensured the safeguarding of residents across the council's activities.

The Executive expressed its gratitude to the O&S for bringing the recommendations and its commitment to a positive working relationship between the two bodies. Consequently, the Executive,

RESOLVED:

That the proposed responses and the reasons for those responses, as set out in the table at item 5, be approved.

Reason(s):

Modern slavery was a serious crime that violated human rights. The Council as a public body had a duty to ensure that it was not complicit in modern slavery practice by utilising contractors who were breaching the Act. Implementation of the recommendations would make the council's processes more effective in that regard.

EX60 Freehold Disposal of Old Manor House, East Horsley

Old Manor House comprised a large, detached Grade II Listed building providing eight residential flats that were previously leased to persons of state pensionable age. The building had been unoccupied for some time and required complete refurbishment and modernisation, including fabric replacement and renewal. The capital cost to refurbish the property to bring it into occupational use for housing was significant and was further exacerbated by the necessary reconfiguration of the existing internal layout and the energy performance upgrades required.

The Lead Councillor for Finance and Property introduced the item. The asset was held in the General Fund. Occupation of the property was not possible in its current condition. In view of the budgetary impact to the council, Housing Services had determined it was not suitable for development and surplus to support their service. With all alternative options for property explored, it was recommended the Executive agree to a freehold disposal of the property on the open market.

It was confirmed that access to Lovelace Cottages would have to be safeguarded by any future owner of Old Manor House.

The Executive noted that despite its commitment to providing housing for local people, the extent of the dilapidation of the property and the necessary reconfiguration to bring it back to use would not be the best use of council resources. It was explained there were significant damp issues, rewiring was needed and the internal reconfiguration for a listed building would be complex and costly. It was suggested that given the building's protected status, disposal to a new owner to bring the building back into habitational use would be the best option for the community and for the building itself as a local heritage asset.

The Executive heard that to delay a decision in regard to the future of the building would result in a greater decline of its condition and increased future costs, therefore, it was

RESOLVED:

That the Executive Head for Assets and Property be authorised to auction sale the property or negotiate terms for a disposal at best consideration on the open market via private treaty, and to enter into all relevant legal documentation required to complete the transaction of the Council owned land comprising Old Manor House in return for a capital receipt.

Reason(s):

To generate a capital receipt and remove void property costs from future revenue budgets.

The meeting finished at 6.24 pm

Signed

Date

Chairman

Executive

18 April 2024

* 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:

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