

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – SERVICES

4 November 2024

* Councillor James Walsh (Chair)

* Councillor Bilal Akhtar (Vice-Chair)

* The Mayor, Councillor Sallie Barker MBE	* Councillor Maddy Redpath
Councillor Geoff Davis	Councillor Joanne Shaw
Councillor James Jones	Councillor Katie Steel
Councillor Steven Lee	* Councillor Jane Tyson
Councillor Sandy Lowry	* Councillor Catherine Young

*Present

Councillors Tom Hunt (Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Regeneration), Richard Lucas (Lead Councillor for Finance and Property), Julia McShane (Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing), and Howard Smith were also in attendance, with Councillors Amanda Creese, Angela Goodwin (Lead Councillor for Engagement and Customer Services), and Catherine Houston (Lead Councillor for Commercial Services) in remote attendance.

OSS21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Committee was advised of apologies from Councillors Geoff Davis, James Jones, Steven Lee, Sandy Lowry, Joanne Shaw, and Katie Steel. Councillor Vanessa King attended as a substitute for Councillor Joanne Shaw.

OSS22 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT AND DECLARATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

OSS23 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2024 were approved.

OSS24 LEAD COUNCILLOR QUESTION SESSION

The Chair introduced the Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Regeneration, Councillor Tom Hunt, and invited him to make a statement about his portfolio.

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Regeneration outlined his regeneration and economic development portfolio. He referred to the range of capital projects and the economic development element of his area of responsibility. The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Regeneration advised the meeting of the governance arrangements for the Council's capital projects and noted that some councillors present in the meeting were members of the cross-party Boards involved in delivery of these projects. He indicated that over the previous 18 months or so officers had improved programme and project governance and that in future any projects the Council committed to were aligned to its Corporate Strategy.

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Regeneration indicated that the Council had not had an economic development team for some time and stated that he and the new Joint Strategic Director for Economy, Planning, and Place would be reviewing this.

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

- In response to a request for an update on the former House of Fraser site in Guildford town centre, the Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Regeneration advised that the building was owned by Canada Life. He indicated that Canada Life and Fenwick had been unable to agree a deal for the site and the building was now on the market for offers in excess of £10m. The Committee was informed that the listed status of the Jellicoe gardens on the roof of the building complicated its use for anything other than as a large retailer.
- The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Regeneration confirmed that a report on Shaping Guildford's Future would be considered by the Executive within the next month or so.
- In reply to a query about the possible development of the brownfield site at Woodbridge Meadows, the Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Regeneration advised of work to enable housing at sites such as Woodbridge Meadows and Bedford Wharf. He indicated the importance of appropriate flood defences for housing on such sites.

- With reference to the St. Mary's Wharf development, a member of the Committee questioned the whether the footbridge to the Yvonne Arnaud theatre and beyond was still planned. In response, the Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Regeneration confirmed that a covenant in the section 106 agreement outlined £1m towards delivery of works considered necessary by the Council to improve pedestrian and cycling access along the riverway and in the vicinity of the site, and that these improvements might include a pedestrian bridge.
- The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Regeneration and the Assistant Director for Regeneration and Economic Development provided an update on the Bright Hill car park. The meeting was informed that discussions with the developer of the former Robin Hood pub site were ongoing around the principle of a disposal of part of the adjacent Bright Hill car park site to enable the proper operation of the remainder of the car park.
- In response to a query about the Guildford Park Road development, the Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Regeneration advised the Committee of progress following the July 2024 decision to appoint Wates as the Council's development partner. He indicated that discussions with the Local Planning Authority would commence soon and that an engagement strategy identifying stakeholders and activities had been created. The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Regeneration stated that the plan was to deliver approximately 100 affordable homes, split between thirty percent shared ownership and seventy percent affordable rent.
- With reference to the finances of the Weyside Urban Village (WUV) project, the Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Regeneration confirmed that reducing the volume of affordable housing was one of the options being considered to mitigate the projected financial deficit. He informed the Committee that other options were being explored, including reducing costs and finding additional sources of funding, such as receipts from the Council's asset disposal programme. In addition, the Lead Councillor for Finance and Property indicated that the Council's Treasury Management strategy was being examined.

- In reply to a question, the Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Regeneration indicated that where the Council did not have the necessary expertise for the WUV project it would engage specialists as required.
- In response to a query about the timeline to reduce the projected financial deficit for the WUV project, the Assistant Director for Regeneration and Economic Development referred to the need to satisfy the Homes England grant commitments deadlines and the Council's desire for financial certainty. The Chair reminded the meeting that WUV was the focus for the 2 December meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Resources.

The Chair thanked the he Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Regeneration and the Assistant Director for Regeneration and Economic Development for attending.

OSS25 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT 2024/25 QUARTER 1

The Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager introduced the item. He acknowledged that Quarter 1 of the current financial year had concluded some time ago and that the report had been scheduled to be considered by the Committee in September. The Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager indicated that due to the need to align the report format and performance indicators with the Council's new Corporate Strategy, it had not been possible to complete the report in time for the September meeting.

The Committee was advised that of the thirty-seven key performance indicators (KPIs) reporting on in Quarter 1, three were red rated and four yet to be confirmed.

A number of questions were raised by Councillors:

- A member of the Committee queried how many missed bin collections were caused by collection vehicles not being able to access properties. In response, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager indicated that the data within the report submitted to the Committee reflected service failures rather than access issues. He advised that the service had been asked to provide information on the incidence of access issues.

- In reply to a query on major planning applications, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager indicated that a written answer would be obtained and provided to Committee members giving the latest information on the determination of major planning applications.
- With reference to the processing of new housing benefits claims, a member of the Committee asked if performance had improved over Quarters 2 and 3 and how long were people waiting to receive benefits. In response the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager indicated that the performance had improved since Quarter 1 and he would provide a written answer on when people actually received their money after a claim had been processed.
- In response to questioning on the red rating for the Decent Homes Standard, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager informed the meeting that contractors were being appointed to undertake necessary works. He suggested that although a property had not met the Decent Homes Standard it did not mean there was a live risk in the home.
- In reply to questions about the rate of improvement for housing repairs and the number of voids in Council housing, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager advised that the Council was in the process of appointing six additional contractors to support the work of the repair team. He indicated that void contractor work was stopped at the end of last year due to the investigation in the housing service.
- A member of the Committee referred to questions on air quality that had been circulated in advance of the Committee's meeting. In response, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager confirmed that the information within the report on the number of sites not meeting the air quality target indicated the number of locations not the number of Air Quality Management Areas. The member questioned why Guildford had three Air Quality Management Areas but only one site with an air quality exceedance. In reply, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager advised that the clarification provided by the service was quite technical and a written answer could be circulated to Committee members.

- In response to further questions on air quality, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager clarified the terminology used and confirmed that further clarification would be obtained from the service and whether it affected the RAG rating.
- A member of the Committee welcomed the measurement of the Level of Overall Economic Activity in the borough and questioned which decisions the information informed. The Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager indicated that the indicator was a headline metric and that the performance management framework was to be developed further. In addition, he indicated the use of comparing data, such as Gross Value Added, with the Council's statistical neighbours.
- A member of the Committee noted the improvement in development management performance shown within the report submitted to the Committee. The Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager advised that the planning applications targets were set nationally.
- In response to a question on the selection of the key performance indicators INCL5-7, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager indicated the likely importance of the contract arrangements with the operator of the facilities but undertook to provide a full written answer to Committee members.
- The Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager advised that information on the areas of current and past demand for community meals usage should be included within the performance monitoring report for quarter 2 of 2024-25.
- With reference to sundry debt collection, a member of the Committee suggested that additional resources might be invested to improve performance. In reply, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager indicated that overdue debt tended to be higher in quarter 1 before improving and reducing through the year. The Lead Councillor for Finance and Property advised the meeting of the ongoing budget service challenge sessions, including the questioning of outstanding debt.

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- In reply to questions on the rates of staff sickness and staff turnover, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager undertook to obtain further information relating to the causes of staff sickness and staff leaving.
- A member of the Committee questioned why the setting of a target for housing repairs completed on time was to follow a benchmarking exercise of comparable local authorities, rather than perhaps being linked to tenants' expectations, why performance was reported as fourteen percent off-target, and how reliable were the assessments of successfully completed repairs. The Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager confirmed that 2,649 repairs were carried out in quarter 1 of 2024-25, of which 2,287 were completed on time. He indicated that satisfaction with a repair could be a better measure of performance than comparisons to other social housing providers. The Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager stated that repairs of work were verified and recorded in the housing management system. In reply to a further query, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager advised the Committee of the information on target variances for different repair categories.
- A member of the Committee asked if the Council had a register of its housing stock that detailed the condition of each property. The Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager advised he would liaise with housing services and provide information to the Committee members.
- In response to a question from a Councillor, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager advised that future performance monitoring reports would state the number and percentage of properties that did not meet the Decent Homes Standard.
- In reply to queries from a Councillor about the adequacy of resourcing within the housing service and obtaining information from the housing service, the Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing indicated that the issues identified by the SOLACE reports and being addressed by the Council were significant. She advised that as much information as possible was provided at meetings of the Housing Operations Board.

- In response to a Councillor’s statements about housing conditions he had witnessed, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager asked for details to ensure that housing services were aware of the issues.
- A member of the Committee suggested that the number of people on the Council’s housing register should be a key performance indicator. The Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager indicated he would liaise with the Executive and the relevant portfolio holder on the matter.

The Chair thanked officers for attending.

OSS26 WORK PROGRAMME

The Senior Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) invited questions on the work plan attached as Appendix 1 to the report submitted to the Committee.

The Chair noted the items scheduled for the Committee’s next meeting on 16 December.

RESOLVED: That the Committee work plan attached as Appendix 1 to the report submitted to the Committee be approved.

The meeting finished at 8.16 pm

Signed

Date

Chair