

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – SERVICES**

3 February 2025

- \* Councillor James Walsh (Chair)
- \* Councillor Bilal Akhtar (Vice-Chair)

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| * 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 Catherine Houston (Lead Councillor for Commercial Services), Julia McShane (Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing), and George Potter (Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change) were also in attendance, with Councillors Angela Goodwin (Lead Councillor for Engagement and Customer Services) and Richard Lucas (Lead Councillor for Finance and Property) in remote attendance.

**OSS27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

The Committee was advised of apologies from Councillors James Jones, Steven Lee, Sandy Lowry, Maddy Redpath, and Katie Steel.

**OSS28 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

There were no disclosures of interest.

**OSS29 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2024 were approved.

**OSS30 LEAD COUNCILLOR QUESTION SESSION**

The Chair introduced the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change, Councillor George Potter, and invited him to make a statement about his portfolio.

The Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change thanked Committee members for sharing question areas in advance of the meeting. With reference to environmental services and climate change portfolio responsibilities, he indicated his overall satisfaction with progress achieved over the past year and praised the work of officers.

During the ensuing discussion several questions were asked, and points raised:

- A member of the Committee requested the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change commit to review and update Guildford's Surface Water Management Plan, which dated from 2014. In response, the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change advised that while the Plan had been produced by the Council, it was commissioned by Surrey County Council as the flood authority for Surrey. He informed the meeting that the Plan supplemented Surrey County Council's work on flood prevention and its county-wide flood risk management strategy, for which annual reports were produced. The Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change indicated that delivery of the county-wide flood risk management strategy was overseen by the Surrey Flood Risk Partnership Board and he suggested enquiries be directed to the Board or the relevant member of Surrey County Council's Cabinet.
- In response to a question on progress over the SANG at Wood Street Village, the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change suggested that while the responsibility for the SANG had been transferred to the Council, the funding for the SANG from the developer had not yet been. The Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change advised that as he did not have advance notice of the question area he was unable to provide a detailed answer, and he requested that further questions on the issue be in writing to himself and the Joint Assistant Director of Environmental Services.
- A member of the Committee asked if the current schedule of street cleaning was the same level as the previous year. In reply, the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change advised the meeting that the level of resource for street cleaning was unchanged and that there had not been a scheduled programme of street cleaning since the

implementation of the Council's Future Guildford transformation programme and the halving in size of the street cleaning team. The Committee was informed that the Council had a reactive model of street cleaning, with a proactive roaming approach depending on the season and the availability of staff, but no longer had a fixed schedule.

- A Committee member asked about the likelihood and consequences of the Council missing its emission reduction targets for net-zero by 2030. In reply, the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change indicated that although the Council was not currently on course to meet the target of net zero by 2030, the report submitted to the Committee and to full Council [in October 2024] made clear that the 2030 target was not out of reach, and he believed the target was achievable. The Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change advised the Committee of the likely impact on Council emissions from decarbonising both the Spectrum leisure centre and the Council's fleet.
- With reference to improving recycling rates in the Borough by learning from other councils in Surrey, the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change advised that kerbside collections operated to the same schedule in Guildford as elsewhere in the county. He suggested that different household types within the Borough and natural variation explained any minor differences in the recycling rates of local authorities in Surrey. The Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change indicated that legislative changes that introduced the obligation to have a separate collection of paper and card would boost recycling rates. In addition, he suggested the merit in improving recycling rates by potentially reducing the amount of space available in black bins for residual waste. He indicated that proposals affecting household waste and recycling could be brought before overview and scrutiny prior to its consideration by the Executive.
- In response to a question on the development of webpages for climate change on the Council's website, the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change advised that the current webpages were being reviewed by the member of the Council's communications teams with responsibility for climate change and sustainability. The Climate Change Officer outlined the scope of this review and indicated that an update

should be available for the March meeting of the Climate Change Board. The Lead Councillor for Engagement and Customer Services requested that a link to the webpages be shared with all councillors once the review was complete.

- With reference to helping Carbon Zero Guilford remain in a town centre location, the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change indicated that Council properties in the town centre was within the portfolio of the Lead Councillor for Finance and Property. He advised that the Council did not have a significant amount of empty retail space in the town centre and was not able to subsidise Carbon Zero Guildford financially through a peppercorn rent or a grant to enable the renting of a private retail space. The Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change indicated that his understanding was that Carbon Zero Guildford lacked town centre event spaces and he suggested that the Council might be able to help by using existing council owned spaces, such as the castle grounds or the Guildhall.
- In reply to a query, the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change updated the meeting on the reduced availability of bin collection calendars due to the decision to cut the budget of Surrey Environmental Partnership. He confirmed that some calendars were available from libraries and the Council's offices.
- In response to a question, the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change confirmed that the Council did not currently compile a directory of recycling information and organisations, but such material might be added to the Council's website following the review of its climate change webpages.
- In reply to a question ,the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change confirmed that the Council expected to run out of capacity for burials within its cemeteries within the next few years, but there was not a shortage of burial capacity overall in the Borough. In contrast he suggested the importance of the Council continuing to operate its cremation services.

The Chair thanked the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change for attending and answering questions from the Committee.

**OSS31 CARBON EMISSIONS AND SUSTAINABILITY PROGRESS REPORT 2022-23**

The Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change introduced the report submitted to the Committee, noting similarities to the report considered by full Council in October 2024. He advised that the report gave an overview of the Council's progress towards its net zero target date of 2030 and included a summary of the reduction in carbon emissions for 2022-23 and progress following the introduction of the Climate Change Action Plan in March 2023.

The Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change advised that the Climate Change Action Plan involved 305 actions, with 46 completed and 114 in active development. He advised that the Council recorded a net carbon reduction of 13% for 2022-23 compared to the baseline year of 2019. The Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change highlighted the gas usage at the Spectrum leisure centre and the emissions of the Council's fleet. He informed the Committee of the ongoing decarbonisation of the national grid and the resulting reduction in the Council's carbon emissions from electricity usage. The Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change advised the Committee of two growth bids in the Council's budget proposals: for a bidding officer post and for the equivalent of a utility officer post to help optimise energy usage.

The Climate Change Officer informed the Committee that the Climate Change Action Plan had laid the groundwork for the projects that were necessary to reduce the Council's carbon emissions.

With reference to key risks identified in the report, a Committee member asked the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change whether he was confident in the Council's IT systems to collect and manage the emissions data. In response, the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change acknowledged the importance of IT in collecting Scope 3 emissions but suggested that procurement policies and processes were a more significant area of risk to manage. The Climate Change Officer outlined work on including climate change requirements within new procurement contracts and advised that further work was required on existing contracts. He confirmed that scope 3 emissions were outside the 2030 net zero target.

In reply to a question, the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change indicated that the resourcing of the Council's actions to reach net zero by 2030 was adequate and that through the Corporate Strategy net zero had been embedded as a core priority of the Council.

In response to a question on efforts to tackle the emissions from the operation of the Spectrum leisure centre, the Lead Councillor for Commercial Services advised the meeting of the retendering of the leisure management contract, the commissioning of a decarbonisation report for the Spectrum, and the introduction of energy reduction initiatives. She stated that the current operator of the Council's leisure facilities, Freedom Leisure, had committed to aim for net zero by 2030.

In reply to a question on stakeholder engagement, the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change indicated that the Council's capacity and resources to engage with the general public was an area of relative weakness. He suggested the value of a dedicated engagement officer or engagement resource within the Council and reminded the meeting that one of the actions within the Climate Change Action Plan was the creation of a Climate Change Engagement post.

In reply to a question from the Chair, the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change indicated that the carbon emissions report for 2023-24 should be able to be scrutinised by overview and scrutiny prior to its consideration by full Council in 2025.

The Chair thanked the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change and everyone else that had contributed to the discussion.

### **OSS32 Q2 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT**

The Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager introduced the report submitted to the Committee. He advised that there were thirty Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) reported on in quarter two, three of which were red rated, and four to be confirmed due to delays in performance data and confirmation of targets from some service areas.

The Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager invited questions and comments on the content and presentation of the report.

In response to a query on the reporting of Council housing voids, the Strategic Director for Housing, Communities, and Environment outlined what might constitute a major void. He informed the Committee that the average time for other councils to let non-major voids was approximately 40 days. He advised the Committee of the need to ensure voids were at a suitable standard before being re-let. The Strategic Director for Housing, Communities, and Environment stated that the average time to re-let a Council property was currently greater than 45 days. He suggested a future aim would be to reduce the re-let time to approximately 42 days, while recognising that the standard of the work completed was important.

A member of the Committee questioned the red rating of COUNC 4, the performance indicator for the Council's payment of invoices on time. In response, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager indicated that this was due to the interface between the housing management system and the finance system. He undertook to provide a written response to the question of whether the Council was at risk of sanction for late payments.

A member of the Committee asked about the delay in the reporting of KPIs and suggested the Committee might have expected to be considering quarter 3 information at the meeting, rather than quarter 2. In reply, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager referred to the process of validation of KPIs, Committee timescales and meeting dates, and Christmas leave. He confirmed that the aim was to present information to stakeholders in a timelier manner and referred to the possible use of tools such as Microsoft Power BI to help facilitate this.

In reply to a question on local government reorganisation and the reporting of performance, the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager advised that performance reporting by councils was relatively standardised and would continue following reorganisation.

A member of the Committee asked if there was a measure for staff performance. The Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager advised that the KPIs should be outcome-focused and that they reflected the effort of staff. He suggested that information from performance indicators would be used to manage issues and perhaps address issues such as staff capacity or resources. The Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager indicated that HR might be

able to provide metrics to report on staff performance and he undertook to provide a written response to Committee members.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager for attending.

With reference to the previous item of business, the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change advised the meeting of Guildford Green Day on 8 June and Clean Air Week in September.

### **OSS33 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair invited comments on the Committee's work plan.

A member of the Committee proposed adding flood prevention measures to the work plan. The Chair indicated that the suggestion might be explored further. Another member of the Committee advised that there was a Guildford Flood Alleviation Scheme drop in event for the public at the Electric Theatre on 22 February and then an online event on 26 February.

The timetabling of the carbon emissions report for 2023-24 was discussed and a provisional Committee date in September 2025 agreed.

In response to a request from a member of the Committee to scrutinise the issues relating to the Heminsley Law report and to housing [Extraordinary Council, Senior Staff Investigation, 22 January 2025] the Chair undertook to liaise with group leaders and the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Resources. The Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing indicated that the item at the Extraordinary meeting of Council on 22 January was a report into senior staff, rather than an investigation into housing as such. She advised that the matter could be added to the overview and scrutiny work programme session with the Executive that week.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) advised that a meeting of both overview and scrutiny committees was to be held on 6 May 2025 to consider the Corporate Strategy delivery plan.

The Chair thanked Councillors and officers before closing the meeting.

The meeting finished at 8.32 am



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3 FEBRUARY 2025

Signed .....

Date .....

Chair