

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8 November 2022

- * Councillor Paul Spooner (Chairman)
- * Councillor James Walsh (Vice-Chairman)

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| Councillor Chris Blow | Councillor Tony Rooth |
| * Councillor Guida Esteves | * Councillor Will Salmon |
| Councillor Graham Eyre | Councillor Deborah Seabrook |
| * Councillor Angela Goodwin | Councillor Fiona White |
| * Councillor Maddy Redpath | |

*Present

Councillor Julia McShane (Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Community and Housing) was also in attendance, with Councillors Tim Anderson (Lead Councillor for Resources) and John Redpath (Lead Councillor for Economy) in remote attendance.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 23(i), Councillor Ruth Brothwell attended as a substitute for Councillor Deborah Seabrook.

OS25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Committee was advised of apologies for absence from Councillors Chris Blow, Graham Eyre, Tony Rooth, and Deborah Seabrook and a substitution as detailed above.

OS26 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT AND DECLARATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

OS27 MINUTES

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 18 October 2022 were agreed.

OS28 UPDATE ON GUILDFORD-WAVERLEY COLLABORATION

The Joint Chief Executive of Guildford and Waverley Councils advised the meeting that the Joint Executive Heads had taken office on 1 October and attended meet-and-greets with Councillors at both Councils. The Joint Chief Executive indicated that the two vacant roles within the joint management team had been filled on an interim basis and permanent recruitment to the posts progressed. He informed the meeting that the appointment of the Monitoring Officer role would be overseen by the Joint Appointments Committee and subject to full Council approval.

The Committee was reminded that the next steps agreed in the Guildford-Waverley collaboration were the preparation of business cases for further collaboration. The Joint Chief Executive indicated that the criteria for such business cases would be discussed by the joint management team and the executives of both Councils and provided to the Committee for its consideration.

The Committee was advised of an upcoming meeting of the Joint Governance Committee to review the Inter Authority Agreement and the collaboration risk assessment.

There were no questions or comments from Councillors.

The Chairman thanked the Joint Chief Executive and indicated that the briefing note provided to him would be circulated to Committee members.

OS29 BOROUGH RESPONSE TO REFUGEES

The Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Community and Housing introduced the item. She praised the Council teams involved in the refugee schemes and, drawing on examples from within the Borough, advised the meeting of the impact of the Council's work on those being supported. In addition, the Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Community and Housing thanked those residents who had been able to help host and support refugees.

The Joint Executive Head of Community Services advised that the Council had become involved in issues relating to the bridging hotel in the Borough due to the hotel's location and impact on the wider community. She indicated that further information on the funding from central government for the various refugee schemes could be provided at the meeting if members desired.

In response to questions, the Head of Regulatory Services advised the meeting of the challenge of finding accommodation for refugees under the Homes for Ukraine once the arrangement of Host and Guest ended. She informed the Committee that 34 refugees from Ukraine had moved into private rented accommodation and 19 had returned to their home country.

A member of the Committee queried the availability of mental health support for refugees and their hosts. In reply, he was advised of pressures on such services and of the need for Council staff to use referral pathways for mental health professionals or adult social care. With reference to the distribution of funding from refugee schemes, the Joint Executive Head of Community Services indicated that the NHS and Surrey County Council were aware of the demands experienced by districts and boroughs within the county.

A member of the Committee advised the meeting of the Mental Health Improvement Fund at Surrey County Council.

In response to a question asking about the greatest needs, the Joint Executive Head of Community Services spoke of the additional pressures on housing locally and of the value of adult social care support for those refugees who had experienced trauma.

In reply to a question about raising concerns with central government over the long-term transition funding within the Homes for Ukraine scheme, the Committee was advised of both the Council's participation in the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration and the role of Surrey County Council's Ukraine group in co-ordinating such concerns.

The Joint Executive Head of Community Services advised the Committee of the difficulties of both relocating refugees from areas in which they have settled and re-purposing accommodation.

In reply to questions, the Joint Executive Head of Community Services indicated that while much of the work required to respond to refugees had been absorbed by Council staff in housing, regulatory services, and family support, there were insufficient staff for this work and that recruiting to fill extra posts was difficult. She advised that the administration of elements of the refugee schemes could be as challenging as operational delivery.

The Joint Executive Head of Community Services outlined the tensions caused by the establishment of a bridging hotel in the Borough, including greater support within the local community for refugees from Ukraine than for the asylum dispersal process and shortcomings in the management of the hotel.

RESOLVED: (I) That the Committee's support for the Council's response to refugees be noted.

(II) That an update on the Borough's response to refugees be provided to the Committee within 6-12 months.

OS30 COMMUNICATIONS REVIEW

The Lead Councillor for Resources introduced the report requested by the Committee. He advised the meeting of the role and size of the Council's communications team, indicated the Council had sought a more proactive approach to external communications, and praised the communications team.

A member of the Committee asked how residents unable to access the internet could engage with Council communications. In response, the Joint Executive Head of Communications and Customer Service advised that the information sent out digitally by the Council was used by partners in newsletters and other printed media and some Council communications were non-digital. She advised the meeting of an accessibility audit of all documents on the Council's website to maximise the availability of information.

The Lead Councillor for Resources suggested that increasing use of the Council's website would improve the availability of Council staff to deal with telephone queries. The Lead Councillor for Economy reiterated the value of the internet as a method for the Council to issue information.

In reply to questions and comments, the Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Community and Housing advised the meeting of the importance of residents being able to contact the Council and measures taken by Council services to communicate with people known to be unable to access information digitally.

A member of the Committee requested details of the pickup of Council press releases, the open rate for Council newsletters, and evidence that people found the information they were seeking on the Council's website. In response, the Joint Executive Head of Communications and Customer Service indicated that a breakdown of press release pick-ups, the open rate of a recent newsletter, and search and user journey information from the Council's website would be provided to Committee members. In addition, the Joint Executive Head of Communications and Customer Service indicated that national benchmarking rates could be provided to Committee members.

With reference to appendix 1 of the report submitted to the Committee, a member of the Committee questioned the static number of press release output in some service areas. In response, the Joint Executive Head of Communications and Customer Service confirmed that a more proactive approach to press releases was being introduced.

In reply to a question, the Joint Executive Head of Communications and Customer Service informed the meeting that the communications team had an ongoing tracker of upcoming events to aid planning Council communications.

The Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Community and Housing encouraged Councillors to share the social media posts produced by the Council.

The Chairman thanked the Lead Councillor for Resources and the Joint Executive Head of Communications and Customer Service.

OS31 ANNUAL REPORT: MODERN SLAVERY MOTION

The Lead Councillor for Resources introduced the item. He advised the meeting that the Modern Slavery Charter was adopted by the Council in February 2020 and implementation of the policy through procurement and contracting was reported annually.

RESOLVED: That the annual update report on the Modern Slavery Motion for the financial year ending 31 March 2022 be noted.

OS32 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Senior Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) advised the Committee of a change to its work plan since the publication of the papers for the meeting; namely, confirmation of Guildford's Air Quality Strategy item for January 2023.

RESOLVED: That, subject to the addition of Guildford's Air Quality Strategy to the January 2023 meeting, the work programme attached at appendix 1 to the report submitted to the Committee be approved.

The meeting finished at 8.09 pm

Signed

Date

Chairman