

GUILDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Guildford Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Millmead House, Millmead, Guildford, Surrey, on Tuesday 5 December 2023

* The Mayor, Councillor Masuk Miah

* The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Sallie Barker MBE

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| * Councillor Bilal Akhtar | * Councillor Steven Lee |
| * Councillor Phil Bellamy | * Councillor Sandy Lowry |
| * Councillor Dawn Bennett | * Councillor Richard Lucas |
| * Councillor Joss Bigmore | * Councillor Julia McShane |
| * Councillor David Bilbe | * Councillor Richard Mills OBE |
| * Councillor Honor Brooker | * Councillor Carla Morson |
| Councillor James Brooker | * Councillor Danielle Newson |
| * Councillor Philip Brooker | * Councillor Patrick Oven |
| * Councillor Ruth Brothwell | * Councillor George Potter |
| * Councillor Yves de Contades | * Councillor Maddy Redpath |
| * Councillor Amanda Creese | * Councillor Merel Rehorst-Smith |
| * Councillor Geoff Davis | Councillor David Shaw |
| * Councillor Jason Fenwick | * Councillor Joanne Shaw |
| Councillor Matt Furniss | * Councillor Katie Steel |
| * Councillor Angela Goodwin | * Councillor Howard Smith |
| * Councillor Lizzie Griffiths | * Councillor Cait Taylor |
| * Councillor Gillian Harwood | * Councillor Jane Tyson |
| * Councillor Stephen Hives | * Councillor James Walsh |
| * Councillor Catherine Houston | * Councillor Fiona White |
| * Councillor Tom Hunt | * Councillor Dominique Williams |
| * Councillor Bob Hughes | * Councillor Keith Witham |
| * Councillor James Jones | Councillor Sue Wyeth-Price |
| * Councillor Vanessa King | Councillor Catherine Young |

*Present

Honorary Freeman Keith Churchouse was also in attendance.

CO66 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Matt Furniss, Sue Wyeth-Price, and Catherine Young; and from Honorary Aldermen Catherine Cobley, Jayne Marks, Tony Phillips, and Lynda Strudwick.

CO67 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest.

CO68 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 10 October 2023 were approved as a correct record. The Mayor signed the minutes.

CO69 MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor and the Council welcomed Councillor Fiona White back to the Chamber, following her recent injury.

The Mayor thanked councillors, Honorary Freeman and Aldermen, and others who responded to his appeal for poppy sellers for this year's Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal, and was pleased to announce that the poppy sellers collected over £18,000 in central Guildford. The Mayor particularly thanked local Poppy Appeal coordinator, Mr Danny Skillman for dedicating his time to organise the collections.

Following the collection, Guildford's Remembrance events on Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday had been well attended, and the Mayor was honoured to join others in Remembrance and laid a wreath at the War Memorial on behalf of the people of Guildford.

The Mayor was very pleased and enjoyed meeting everyone who turned out to celebrate the start of Christmas in Guildford at the Festive Fun Day, and thanked all those involved in delivering such a fun, and free day out for all the family.

The Mayor was delighted to announce that his last fund raising event, which was the charity night at The Shahin restaurant had sold out, and was likely to raise over £1,000 for his chosen charity The Fountain Centre, and the Mayor's Local Support Fund.

The Mayor announced that over £1,000 had been collected recently for The Fountain Centre from the audience attending a concert given by "From The Jam" at G Live, and thanked everyone who donated on the night, for their kindness and generosity.

With Christmas fast approaching, the Mayor was delighted to be joined by British Sign Language Interpreter Sammil Villabon, as he recorded a short Christmas message.

CO70 LEADER'S COMMUNICATIONS

Termination of Housing Maintenance Contracts

The Leader reminded the Council that, at the last meeting, a new procedure was agreed in connection with reporting matters where key decisions had to be taken under the special urgency provisions set out in Access to Information Procedure Rule 16. Whereas these used to be reported to the Council annually in the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report, details of those decisions were now reported to Council by the Leader at the next ordinary meeting of the Council.

In early November, the special urgency provisions had to be used to enable an urgent decision to be taken by the Strategic Director Community Wellbeing to terminate two housing maintenance contracts as a result of the housing investigation which had flagged that they had been significantly overspent. Although, the Public Contract Regulations 2015 provided for modifications of contracts without the need for a new procurement in certain circumstances, none of those provision applied to these particular contracts, and it was therefore necessary for them to be terminated both in accordance with the Regulations and to protect the Council's position. Given the value of the contracts, the decision to terminate had been a key decision, notice of which should have been published on the Forward Plan at least 28 days prior to the decision being made.

However, action needed to be taken with immediate effect, so the urgency provisions were utilised which involved obtaining the consent of the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee before the decision was taken.

Memorial Christmas Trees

The bereavement service now had its memorial Christmas trees at the crematorium until 6 January for any bereaved families that would like to place a tag on a tree.

Guildford Design Awards 2023

The Leader was very pleased to report that the Council had won two awards at this year's Guildford Design Awards, one for Walnut Bridge and another for the Guildhall restoration. These awards recognised and rewarded excellence in architecture, urban design, planning and public art across the borough.

Housing Update

The Council had recently held two drop-in sessions for housing tenants, one in

Ripley and one at The Hive, which had been led by the Executive Head of Community Services, Sam Hutchison.

If anyone was unable to attend these sessions, any thoughts, ideas, concerns or questions could still be sent to the Tenant Engagement Panel:

Chair.TEG@hotmail.com

Review of Local Plan

On 4 December 2023, the Joint Executive Advisory Board had discussed what a review of the Local Plan (Strategy and Sites) 2019 would cover, which had to be undertaken at least every five years.

A report to Full Council on the matter was scheduled for February 2024. If Full Council agreed to update the Local Plan, a timetable, budget, and actions would be prepared before proceeding. The existing Local Plan would remain in place whilst this process was ongoing.

Guildford Lido update

Works were continuing by Freedom Leisure's appointed contractors to investigate and resolve the leaks. Updates on progress with the works would be posted on [Freedom Leisure's website](#) and social media channels.

North Street update

The Leader informed the Council that the Section 106 Agreement associated with the St Edward Homes' plans for the mixed-use redevelopment of North Street had been completed and the planning permission approved by the Planning Committee in October 2023 had been issued on 4 December 2023.

As a result, the planning appeal of the application refused in January 2023 (22/P/01336) had now been formally withdrawn and the public inquiry scheduled to start on 7 December 2023 had been cancelled.

In response to a question, the Leader agreed that the entire planning team, and particularly the Executive Head of Planning, deserved this Council's and the community's thanks in helping to avoid the potential cost of an appeal.

CO71 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no questions or statements from the public.

CO72 QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

(a) **Councillor Philip Brooker** asked the Lead Councillor for Finance and Property, Councillor Richard Lucas, and the Lead Councillor for Housing, Councillor Julia McShane, the question below. (The Lead Councillors' response to each element of the question is set out in **red type** below).

"In relation to the stated overspend on housing maintenance contracts since 2021, Group Leaders were given a briefing on 15 September 2023 and Councillors a briefing on 21 September 2023. At both these meetings, the global sums of money involved were confidentially reported, and at both meetings these figures remained constant. Importantly, the sums reported were stated to have been spent i.e., transferred from a GBC bank account to a recipient's bank account.

At the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee held on 16 November 2023 the Housing Revenue Final Accounts 2022-23 were reviewed and recommended to be noted by the Executive. During the discussions leading up to the vote, councillors asked whether the figures in the report were "factual" or some form of "provision" and were told that they were factual. Figures in the report for Responsive and Planned Maintenance showed expenditure over budget of £2.1M. This figure is considerably smaller than the figures of overspend briefed to councillors at the above September meetings.

Therefore:

(i) Are both the figures reported at the above September meetings and in the Housing revenue Final Accounts 2022-23 accurate? (Accepting that the September meetings were stated in "rounded" millions).

The figures reported at both meetings were accurate and relate to both Revenue and Capital expenditure on Responsive and Planned Maintenance. The overspend on revenue was £2.101m as stated. The capital R&M expenditure for 2022-23 was £20.314m against a budget of £24.5m. The "overspend" reported in September was on the housing maintenance contract in place, not against the approved budget.

(ii) If the figures have altered, when will councillors be confidentially briefed on the new figures?

The figures have not altered.

(iii) Where has the difference between the figures (original or altered) been accounted for in GBC accounts? And if not in the HRA accounts, why not?"

Expenditure is included in either the HRA capital account or HRA revenue accounts.

In response to a supplementary question which sought confirmation of the budgetary provision that was made for the housing maintenance contract and the payments actually made against it, and also whether the contract covered more than one accounting period and more than one budget, the Leader indicated that she would come back to Councillor Brooker in respect of his supplementary question.

(b) Councillor Richard Mills OBE asked the Lead Councillor for Regeneration, Councillor Tom Hunt the question below. (The Lead Councillor's response to each element of the question is set out in **red type** below).

"The Executive's decision not to support further funding for work on the Town Centre Master Plan ('Shaping Guildford's Future') makes it important to ensure that the Council is able to take account of any results and lessons from the work already undertaken when further addressing the urgent strategic policy needs of the Town Centre.

Accordingly, will the Executive Portfolio Holder for Regeneration clarify the following in respect of the final phase (Phase 3) of the programme, which was approved by the Executive on 22 September 2022 and is due for completion at the end of this month:

(i) how much of the £3.1 million expenditure then approved (over and above the £2.359m committed to earlier phases) has been spent up to the latest available date?

None – ongoing activity has been funded through the Empty Homes Fund grant that was secured from Surrey County Council. This has financed GBC's contribution to the Environment Agency's work on the Flood Alleviation Scheme (FAS) and supporting consultancy activity commissioned by the Council. To date £444,550 grant has been claimed with £117,450 outstanding.

(ii) what if any under-spend or over-spend is projected on this phase of the project?

None – a revised scope and budget for Shaping Guildford’s Future will be brought forward in the coming months as part of the Council’s Budget update. This will reflect the Council’s current financial position balanced with the Executive’s commitment to the aspirations of the work undertaken to date.

(iii) how much of the expenditure was for external consultants?

Of the £444,550 grant claimed to date, £49,550 has been for external consultant support. The remaining £395,000 comprises the Council’s contribution to the FAS work being led by the Environment Agency.

(iv) in respect of the deliverables from the work, whether the conditional in principle agreements with the Courts Service, Police, National Trust, Legal and General, Odeon, Royal Mail and others specified in the approved report and due for completion by the end of June this year are now complete?

The Council had held early discussions with the Parties referenced and the intention of the next phase of work was to move towards agreed Heads of Terms over the 12-month period. This has not progressed due to the work on the programme being paused.

(v) whether the ‘Strategic Transport Update Report – Principles and Strategies as agreed with SCC’, due in July this year, has been completed and issued and what further consultations with SCC on the programme have taken place?”

No – this has not been completed as work has been paused due to the £3.1m capital funding allocation being ineligible for spend on revenue activity. However, work has been ongoing with SCC to progress feasibility work on the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan which complements work undertaken to date on SGF transport.

A briefing for all Councillors will be held in the New Year, outlining the work that has been completed to date on Shaping Guildford’s Future and the continuing scope of work on the Flood Alleviation Scheme that the Council is supporting the Environment Agency with.

Councillor Mills indicated that he had a number of further questions covering a range of issues in respect of this matter which he would like to put to the Deputy Leader outside of this meeting. The Deputy Leader responded by welcoming

Councillor Mills' questions and gave assurance that a report on Shaping Guildford's Future would be coming back in the New Year.

(c) Councillor Philip Brooker asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Julia McShane and the Lead Councillor for Finance and Property, Councillor Richard Lucas, the question below. (The Leader/Lead Councillor's response to each element of the question is set out in **red type** below).

“At the Executive Meeting on 23rd November 2023 it was noted that the joint Waverley and Guildford Management Teams had already made savings in costs of nearly £900,000 and anticipated further savings and efficiencies over time.

(i) Was the £900,000 saving direct costs i.e. salaries plus costs of employment exclusively? If not, what other savings were included in this sum?

This was reported to Full Council in March 2023. The figure of £861,000 across the partnership is the comparison of the Joint Management Team's annual cost with the combined annual cost of the two former management teams. It comprises full employment costs to the councils at that point. In addition to that £861,000 recurring annually, there have been 5 temporary staff-sharing arrangements agreed under the Section 113 delegations, which result in further savings to the partnership of £172,800, which will not recur annually as they are temporary, but start to indicate that there will be future scope for significant savings.

(ii) Has a cost-benefit analysis or similar been carried out to assess whether the increasing workload for the individuals concerned had impacted on their efficiency and abilities to provide a level of productivity that had been achieved prior to the collaboration? If so, what did this reveal and if not, why not and when will this be done?

A cost-benefit analysis has not been undertaken. However, the efficiency and effectiveness of the JMT structure is being kept under review. Whenever a new management structure is put in place it is good practice to monitor its effectiveness, seek feedback from members of the team and others and to look at whether any adjustments might be needed to ensure it is functioning as planned. This is the approach being taken with regards to the Joint Management Team for Guildford and Waverley. The published risk

register for the collaboration (which is kept under review by the Waverley and Guildford Joint Governance Committee, comprised of councillors from both authorities) notes this point that the JMT structure will be kept under review. That commitment to keeping the structure under review is just one of a number of ongoing and future mitigating actions to reduce risks relating to the collaboration between the two authorities.

(iii) What are the “anticipated further savings and efficiencies over time”? And of what magnitude of cost saving is this anticipated to be?”

Initial benefits realisation work with the joint Executive Heads of Service has been carried out by the Organisational Development and Finance Teams, with a rough order of magnitude for savings through collaboration projects at £700,000. This is comprised of £200,000 for each authority in 2024/25 and £150,000 for each authority in 2025/26. This figure is expected to increase over time as the detail of more plans is developed and in accordance with the level of investment in Programme Management, Human Resources and Business Transformation to which the two authorities are collectively able to commit.

In response to a supplementary question which sought assurance from the Executive that an impact assessment or risk benefit analysis would be carried out immediately to ensure that rushed decision taking had not resulted in increased costs elsewhere within the Council, the Leader indicated that she would discuss this with the Executive.

CO73 CAPITAL AND INVESTMENT OUTTURN REPORT 2022-23

The Council considered the Capital and Investment Outturn report for 2022-23, which had set out:

- a summary of the economic factors affecting the approved strategy and counterparty updates
- a summary of the approved strategy for 2022-23
- a summary of the treasury management activity for 2022-23
- non-treasury investments
- capital programme
- compliance with the treasury and prudential indicators
- risks and performance

- Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)
- details of external service providers
- details of training

In total, expenditure on the General Fund capital programme had been £35.4 million against the original budget of £158 million, and a revised budget of £169 million. Details of the revised estimate and actual expenditure in the year for each scheme were set out in Appendix 3 to the report. The budget for Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) had been £1.5 million and the outturn was £1.38 million. This was due to slippage in the capital programme in 2021-22.

The Council noted that Officers had reviewed the programme and had determined that there were schemes that were no longer required, that no longer met the original business case or had been removed pending a new business case in light of the Council's ongoing budget deficit. These schemes were detailed in the Financial Recovery Plan within the capital programme workstream. Removing these schemes would reduce the Council's underlying need to borrow for capital purposes and generate a saving to the revenue account in respect of MRP and interest.

The Council's investment property portfolio stood at £178 million at the end of the year. Rental income had been £9.5 million, and income return had been 5.7% against the benchmark of 4.7%.

The Council's cash balances had built up over a number of years, and reflected a strong balance sheet, with considerable revenue and capital reserves in the HRA. Officers carried out the treasury function within the parameters set by the Council each year in the Capital and Investment Strategy. As at 31 March 2023, the Council held £98 million in investments, £295 million in borrowing of which £147 million related to the HRA, £32 million related to the Weyside Urban Village project (WUV), and £115 million was short term borrowing resulting in net debt of £197 million.

The Council had borrowed short-term from other local authorities for cash flow purposes in the year, and had taken out a loan for WUV under the infrastructure rate. This borrowing interest was capitalised to capital schemes using the pooled interest rate of the Council, so whether the Council was borrowing short or long term the borrowing associated with the capital programme expenditure was capitalised against the project and not charged to the General Fund as interest payable.

The report had confirmed that the Council had complied with its prudential indicators, treasury management policy statement and treasury management

practices (TMPs) for 2021-22. The policy statement was included and approved annually as part of the Capital and Investment Strategy, and the TMPs were approved under delegated authority.

Interest paid on debt had been lower than budget, due to less long-term borrowing taken out on the General Fund because of slippage in the capital programme. The slippage had resulted in a lower CFR than estimated.

The yield returned on investments had been lower than estimated, but the interest received was higher due to more cash being available to invest in the year – a direct result of the capital programme slippage. Officers had been reporting higher interest receivable and payable and a lower charge for MRP during the year as part of the budget monitoring when reported to councillors during the year.

The report had also been considered by the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee at its meeting on 16 November 2023. The Committee had commended the report to the Executive, subject to a number of comments which were set out in the report to Council. At its meeting on 23 November 2023, the Executive had also considered the report and had commended the report's recommendation to the Council for adoption.

The Lead Councillor for Finance & Property, Councillor Richard Lucas proposed the motion to note the capital and investment outturn report and approve the actual prudential indicators reported for 2022-23, which was seconded by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Julia McShane.

During the debate, the following points were made by councillors:

- The proposed reduction of £96 million from the approved capital programme was money that was never going to be spent.
- The Council's property investments had been performing well. It was also noted how particularly well the light industrial sector in Guildford was performing, and the local economy generally.
- In response to a request, the Leader of the Council agreed to organise a briefing for councillors on North Downs Housing to provide an update on its work and future plans.

Having debated the item, the Council

RESOLVED:

(1) That the capital and investment outturn report for 2022-23 be noted.

(2) That the actual prudential indicators reported for 2022-23, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report submitted to the Council, be approved.

Reasons:

- To comply with the Council's treasury management policy statement, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice on treasury management and the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities.
- As per the treasury management code although the scrutiny of treasury management (and indeed all finance) has been delegated to the Corporate Governance & Standards Committee ultimate responsibility remains with full Council, this report therefore fulfilled that need.

CO74 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (MTFP) AND FINANCIAL RECOVERY PLAN - NOVEMBER UPDATE REPORT

The Council received a report setting out an update on the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and progress with the Financial Recovery Plan.

Councillors noted that the Council had agreed the 2023-24 budget in February 2023 with a £3.3m shortfall requiring further work to remove this gap, with the fallback position being the deployment of usable reserves.

An updated MTFP position had been presented to full Council on 25 July 2023 which set out the key issues and the position in which the Council was now left. In summary, this had been a remaining in-year deficit of £1.7m and a budget gap of £18.3m over the MTFP period to 2026-27.

A Financial Recovery Plan had been presented to full Council at its extraordinary meeting on 30 August and updated at its last meeting on 10 October. This had set out the immediate and medium-term actions being taken to address both the in-year and medium-term budget gaps.

In October, the Interim s151 officer had concluded that sufficient progress had been made to avoid the need for a s114 report to be issued but that significant work was still required to produce a balanced budget for 2024-25 and beyond.

In addition to providing an update on the MTFP position, potential funding changes, and progress on the Recovery Plan workstreams, the report presented to the Council had also set out the outcome of the review of the Capital Programme. If approved, this would remove £96.6m from the Approved and

Provisional Capital programmes which, in turn, would reduce the Council's projected borrowing needs.

The report had also provided a high-level update on the potential remaining budget gap to be addressed and the actions ongoing to address this. The work to date on the Financial Recovery Plan had reduced the July MTFP gap of £18.3m to £7.3m. Although excellent progress had been made, significant further work was still required to produce a balanced budget for 2024-25.

Prior to their formal consideration of the report, the Interim Section 151 Officer commented the government had issued a policy statement that afternoon regarding the Local Government Funding Settlement, which had set out some of the high-level expectations around council tax and funding for next year. The statement had confirmed that the council tax rise would actually be 2.99% maximum. It had also confirmed a 3% funding guarantee for the Council that there would be another single year allocation of New Homes Bonus and also that the revenue support grant would increase by RPI. All of these were in line with the assumptions in the report.

The Lead Councillor for Finance & Property, Councillor Richard Lucas proposed, and the Leader of the Council, Councillor Julia McShane seconded the adoption of a motion to approve the changes proposed to the Approved and Provisional Capital Programmes described in the report.

The Council noted that the report had also been considered by the Corporate Governance & Standards Committee at its meeting on 16 November 2023. The Committee supported the proposed changes to the Approved and Provisional Capital Programmes, subject to a number of comments which were set out in the report to Council. At its meeting on 23 November 2023, the Executive noted the updated MTFP position and the further work ongoing to produce a balanced budget for 2024-25, and also commended the proposed changes to the Council for adoption.

During the debate, councillors made a number of points, which are summarised as follows:

- There had always been doubts over whether the full capital borrowing programme was ever going to be accomplished, but it was worth noting that the only significant change in the capital programme over the past four years had been the addition of Shaping Guildford's Future.

- Welcome the fact that since July, the Medium-Term Financial Plan deficit had been reduced by £11 million to £7.3 million, which represented huge progress, and had avoided a Section 114 notice.
- It would have been helpful to have provided a calculation of the MRP per project. Whilst the reduction in the capital programme of £96 million was noted, the actual impact on the General Fund position was relatively small at £2.5 million over three years.
- In response to concerns over continuing uncertainty in respect of key projects such as the Council's climate change commitment to be Net Zero by 2030 and the Master Plan, the Leader of the Council reminded councillors that the Lead Councillor for Regeneration had already indicated that there would be a briefing for all councillors in the New Year on Shaping Guildford's Future and was happy to agree that a climate change briefing for councillors should be arranged.

The Council

RESOLVED: That the proposed changes to the Approved and Provisional Capital Programmes set out in Appendix 1 to the report submitted to the Council, be approved.

Reason:

To enable the Council to protect the current level of reserves and to set a balanced budget and a robust Medium-Term Financial Plan.

CO75 REVIEW OF COUNCILLORS' ALLOWANCES 2023

The Council considered the report and recommendations of the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) on its recent review of Councillors' Allowances, together with the separate recommendation of the Executive. The Council had appointed the IRP for the purpose of reviewing the existing scheme of allowances, including making recommendations on the types of allowance and amounts to be paid.

The report has also been considered by the Executive, at its meeting on 23 November 2023. The Executive felt that in view of the Council's current financial position, it would not be appropriate to consider any increase in councillors' allowances.

Upon the motion of the Lead Councillor for Finance and Property, Councillor Richard Lucas, seconded by the Lead Councillor for Regulatory and Democratic

Services, Councillor Merel Rehorst-Smith, the Council commended the IRP's very thorough report and some of the innovative proposals therein, and

RESOLVED: That the Council:

- (1) defers consideration of the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel on the review of councillors' allowances for a period of 12 months;
- (2) retains the current scheme of allowances without indexation, which effectively freezes councillors' allowances at their current level for the 2024-25 financial year; and
- (3) thanks the Independent Remuneration Panel for their work.

Reason:

In view of the Council's current financial position and the Council's determination to resolve those difficulties, now was not the right time to be increasing councillors' allowances.

CO76 REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2023

The Council was informed that a statutory review of polling districts and polling places had been undertaken by the Electoral Services Manager.

The Council considered a report which set out recommendations arising from the review, including details of the 58 responses to the consultation which had taken place between 13 October and 17 November 2023.

Although no changes to any of the existing polling districts had been recommended, changes to designated polling places in the Stoughton North and Clandon & Horsley wards were proposed which would have the effect of relocating polling places away from local schools.

Upon the motion of the Lead Councillor for Regulatory and Democratic Services, Councillor Merel Rehorst-Smith, seconded by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Julia McShane, the Council

RESOLVED:

- (1) That no changes be made to existing polling districts.
- (2) That the following proposed changes to designated polling places be approved:
 - (a) That the designated polling place in polling district SN2 Stoughton North (North-West) within Stoughton North Ward be changed from

Stoughton Infant School to Stoughton Methodist Church, Stoughton Road, Guildford, GU2 9PT.

- (b) That the designated polling place in polling district C&H6 West Horsley (North) within the Clandon and Horsley Ward be changed from the Raleigh School to The Wheelhouse, 82 East Lane, West Horsley, Leatherhead, KT24 6LQ.

Reason:

As a result of this statutory review, the new designated polling places will improve elector polling experience, improve access, and further reduce the necessity for schools to close on polling days.

CO77 TIMETABLE OF COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS 2023-24

The Council considered a report on the proposed timetable of Council and Committee meetings for the 2024-25 municipal year.

The proposed timetable had been drafted in consultation with Waverley Borough Council to avoid, as far as practicable, diary conflicts for the Joint Management Team.

The Executive had also considered the report at its meeting on 23 November 2023 and had recommended approval of the timetable as appended to the report.

Upon the motion of the Lead Councillor for Regulatory and Democratic Services, Councillor Merel Rehorst-Smith, seconded by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Julia McShane, the Council

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the timetable of Council and Committee meetings for the 2024-25 municipal year, attached as Appendix 1 to the report submitted to the Council, be approved.
- (2) That the Executive Head of Legal & Democratic Services be authorised, in consultation with political group leaders, to approve the Timetable of Council and Committee Meetings in future years.

Reason:

To assist with the preparation of individual committee work programmes.

CO78 MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Council received and noted the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 5 October 2023.

CO79 NOTICE OF MOTION DATED 23 NOVEMBER 2023: ANTI-SEMITISM AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11, Councillor James Walsh proposed, and Councillor Howard Smith seconded the following motion:

“Recent figures released by the Community Security Trust (CST) and Tell MAMA reveal that cases of antisemitism and Islamophobia are on the increase in the UK, fuelled by events in the Middle East.

Between 7 October and 9 November, for example, Tell MAMA reported 701 cases of anti-Muslim behaviour across the country - a sevenfold increase in Islamophobic attacks on the same period in 2022. The CST also reported the highest number of cases of antisemitic attacks since their records began in 1984, with 1,019 cases recorded between 7 October and 3 November.

Recent incidents of antisemitism have been reported here in Guildford, with some individuals and families having already left the borough, planning to leave the borough in the near future, or living under protection as a result. Local representatives of the Jewish community in Guildford have stated that the situation is “unprecedented” and reflects a growing and unacceptable intolerance and division in national and international society.

The Labour Group believes that we must unite against the forces that seek to divide communities and sow division and hatred between people from different backgrounds or who share different faiths or beliefs. It believes that tolerance, understanding and respect are cornerstones of democracy and that violence, intolerance and prejudice only serve to corrode them. Therefore, it asks that:

- (1) The Council be reminded of its resolution dated 12 July 2016 and reaffirmed on 11 April 2017 condemning racism, xenophobia and hate crimes, as follows:*

“We are proud to live in a diverse and tolerant society. Racism, xenophobia and hate crimes have no place in our country. Guildford Borough Council condemns racism, xenophobia and hate crimes unequivocally. We will not allow hate to become acceptable. We are

pleased to note the strong stance that Surrey Police have taken against these issues.

Guildford Borough Council will work to ensure local bodies and programmes have support and resources needed to fight and prevent all these anti-social acts, and reassures all people living in Guildford borough that they are valued and welcome members of our community.”

- (2) The Council condemns all forms of discrimination, intolerance and division that some in our communities are facing and pledges to work together with partners, including Surrey Police and faith/religious organisations, to address issues and provide reassurance as it is made aware of them.*
- (3) The Council condemns antisemitism in all of its forms and regrets the incidents that have been reported in Guildford in recent months. It pledges to work with partners and local communities to address areas of concern and provide reassurance and support to the Jewish community wherever possible.*
- (4) The Council condemns Islamophobia in all of its forms and pledges to work with partners and local communities to address areas of concern and provide reassurance and support to the Muslim communities wherever possible.”*

Under Council Procedure Rule 15 (o), Councillor Walsh as the mover of the original motion, indicated that, with the consent of his seconder and of the meeting, he wished to alter his motion as follows:

Alteration:

In the first sentence of the third paragraph of the motion, add “*to community leaders*” after “*Recent incidents of antisemitism have been reported...*”.

If altered, the first sentence of the third paragraph would therefore read as follows:

*“Recent incidents of antisemitism have been reported **to community leaders** here in Guildford, with some individuals and families having already left the borough, planning to leave the borough in the near future, or living under protection as a result.”*

The Council agreed to accept the alteration to the original motion, as indicated above. The motion, as altered, therefore became the substantive motion for debate.

Having debated the substantive motion, the Council

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Council be reminded of its resolution dated 12 July 2016 and reaffirmed on 11 April 2017 condemning racism, xenophobia and hate crimes, as follows:

“We are proud to live in a diverse and tolerant society. Racism, xenophobia and hate crimes have no place in our country. Guildford Borough Council condemns racism, xenophobia and hate crimes unequivocally. We will not allow hate to become acceptable. We are pleased to note the strong stance that Surrey Police have taken against these issues.

Guildford Borough Council will work to ensure local bodies and programmes have support and resources needed to fight and prevent all these anti-social acts, and reassures all people living in Guildford borough that they are valued and welcome members of our community.”

- (2) That the Council condemns all forms of discrimination, intolerance and division that some in our communities are facing and pledges to work together with partners, including Surrey Police and faith/religious organisations, to address issues and provide reassurance as it is made aware of them.
- (3) That the Council condemns antisemitism in all of its forms and regrets the incidents that have been reported in Guildford in recent months. It pledges to work with partners and local communities to address areas of concern and provide reassurance and support to the Jewish community wherever possible.
- (4) The Council condemns Islamophobia in all of its forms and pledges to work with partners and local communities to address areas of concern and provide reassurance and support to the Muslim communities wherever possible.

CO80 NOTICE OF MOTION DATED 24 NOVEMBER 2023: PROPOSED SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO RECEIVE INTERIM REPORTS ON THE INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGED FRAUD RELATING TO HOUSING MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11, Councillor Philip Brooker proposed, and Councillor Bob Hughes seconded the following motion:

“Council notes the report about irregularities in HRA expenditure considered by the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee on 29 November 2023.

The report advises that:

- *An external team of experts are investigating any potentially fraudulent activity and that an internal “Strategic Project Group” is monitoring and co-ordinating the work of various workstreams.*
- *A “Strategic Board” will be set up imminently which will eventually report to the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee.*
- *Monthly reports will be prepared, but not available for public scrutiny.*
- *The first public report will not be available for “approximately six months”.*
- *Additional external support will be brought in to assist.*

Council notes that, whilst it is welcome that some more information is now in the public domain, it considers it to be inadequate considering the magnitude of the sums involved, in light of the clear public interest in the detail of these irregularities being made public much earlier than now proposed.

Council further notes that many of the “facts” could be made public without jeopardy to any other ongoing investigations, yet Council have not been provided with any specifics on what should be withheld under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. This should be fully scrutinised immediately in the interests of transparency.

Council notes that it rejected, at its meeting on 10 October 2023, a motion for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to send in a Best Value Commissioner to carry out an independent investigator to examine the issues, which would certainly have speeded up the process, but now, two months later, seems to think that something similar is a good idea in order to proceed “in a timely manner”.

Therefore, this Council resolves:

- (1) Using the powers given to this council, immediately establish a Special Committee to receive interim reports from each investigating team, no later than at monthly intervals.*
- (2) That, in the interest of transparency, the special Committee be chaired by a member of a political party other than one of those in coalition at the time the irregularities commenced (2021), and that the composition of the committee be representative of the composition of the Council.*
- (3) That the Special Committee must have full access to all official information held by GBC as a public authority.*
- (4) That in the interest of openness and transparency, the Special Committee be authorised to decide how much information can be revealed to (a) Members in confidence and (b) the General Public”.*

Having debated the motion, the Council

RESOLVED: That the motion be not supported.

The meeting finished at 8.52 pm

Signed

Mayor

Date