

COUNCIL – 21 JULY 2022

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT
RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE
DISCUSSIONS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Executive Summary

At its meeting on 11 July 2022, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered two items which had been / were to be discussed by the Executive before being recommended to Council. Set out below are the relevant extracts from the minutes of the meeting. The Committee did not make any recommendations to Council, but Members may be interested in the discussions held.

7. SCRUTINY TOPIC PROPOSAL - ARRANGEMENTS FOR GRANTS - COUNCILLOR DAVIS OSC22-035.

The Chairman advised that this item would be brought forward as Rebecca Bowden and Peter Cluff from the Community Foundation for Surrey had been invited to attend, welcoming them to the meeting. The item had been included on the agenda following a request by Councillor Davis to consider the proposals for Community Grants following the recent meeting of the Executive on 16 June and prior to a decision being taken by Council on 21 July.

Louise Strongitharm, Director of Housing, provided a presentation to the Committee which highlighted the reasons for adopting a new approach; the proposal for the current Community Grants funds to be replaced by Service Level Agreements with selected groups; the Woking Community Fund; and Endowment Fund Match Funding, the latter two operated by the Community Foundation for Surrey.

Community groups could apply to the Woking Community Fund throughout the year and, following consideration by quarterly meetings of a Panel, would invoice the Council when grants were awarded. The Endowment Fund would include match funding of 50% from the Council to new donations from the private sector to incentivise growth and sustainability. The Portfolio Holder and Lead Officer would sit and vote on the Panel, with the criteria based on Council strategic priorities, and it would be chaired by an independent person recruited by the Foundation. An Annual Report would be submitted from the Foundation to the Council on the benefits of community grants and wider community support.

Rebecca Bowden introduced the work of the Community Foundation of Surrey, stating that the organisation matched donors with those that were applying for funding and that 89 funds were operated in the County alongside national programmes. Last year, a total of just under £3m was awarded in grant funding, with an average grant of £7,000. Peter Cluff added that as a Trustee of the Foundation and Chair of Guildford Philanthropy, he had overseen the increase in funding available over the past few years from £150,000 to £550,000 by involving the local population and businesses.

Councillor Davis stated that he had no issues with the Community Foundation for Surrey as a respected organisation operating within the County; however he raised concerns regarding the ability of Councillors to be involved in the process and democratic transparency, noting that the proposal was for the Portfolio Holder to be the only Member appointed to the Panel. Councillor Davis added that the Panel meetings would not be held publicly and asked whether

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there would be a ceiling for Council match funding. An error in the report was highlighted as charitable funding from businesses could be used to offset their corporation tax, instead of being applicable for Gift Aid which applied to donations from individuals.

Councillor Forster, Portfolio Holder for the Voluntary Sector, stated that the proposals would be driven around the outcomes with the Council having full control of the budget and criteria, which would be centred around the priorities within the Corporate Strategy. Other local authorities in Surrey with similar arrangements were Guildford, Reigate and Spelthorne. Rebecca Bowden added that the Council could increase the number of Members or Officers appointed to the Panel and that the Foundation welcomed assistance from Panel members throughout the year.

Councillor Kemp advised that he would be supportive of the setting up of Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for selected groups and expressed concern over the involvement of Councillors in determining the applications. It was suggested that further charitable organisations operating within the Borough – MASCOT, the Lighthouse, the Maybury Centre and Shopmobility – be considered for possible SLAs.

Councillor Sanderson asked for some further detail to be considered, for example whether the Council match funding was capped and the overall budget to be set for the Woking Community Fund.

Members noted the sad news that Woking Mind would be closing shortly and the excellent work the Charity had undertaken in the Borough.

The Chairman stated that that further consideration should be given to increasing the number of Members on the Panel to improve the democratic transparency, adding that it could be made proportional across the political groups. The annual report provided could also be received by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It was agreed that the debate would continue when the item was considered at the next meeting of Council.

The Chairman thanked Rebecca Bowden and Peter Cluff for attending the meeting.

6. COMPANY GOVERNANCE OSC22-031

Joanne McIntosh, Director of Democratic and Legal Services, introduced the report on Company Governance which was to be received by the Executive at its meeting on 14 July 2022 and was being considered by the Committee as pre-decision scrutiny. It was highlighted that officers had been undertaking a review of the governance of its subsidiary companies as part of the medium term financial resilience assessment produced by the professional services firm EY. The report before the Committee outlined the proposals to modernise the governance arrangements with respect to its oversight of the wholly or part owned companies.

Members noted that the proposals included the creation of a Shareholder Advisory Group (SAG) which the Leader of the Council would be appointed to, for which the draft Terms of Reference were included in the report, alongside the establishment of the Shareholder Liaison Service and recruitment to two new posts: Head of Shareholder Liaison Service and Project Officer.

Following questions by Members, it was noted that Members would no longer be appointed to the Boards of subsidiary companies; Members would be able to attend meetings as Observers and be able to access the agenda papers; the objectives of the Group companies were aligned with Council priorities; and greater emphasis should be placed on promoting the excellent outcomes which the companies had generated in the Borough.

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The Committee was advised that the SAG would consider Thamesway, Victoria Place and other company matters in three separate meetings, each taking place once a quarter. If in time the number of subsidiary companies reduced, the number of meetings could be amended correspondingly.

Members expressed concern over the proposal to appoint just the Leader of the Council to the SAG, with the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee attending as an Observer, and it was requested that further consideration be given to the involvement of Members in the process during the forthcoming meeting of the Executive.

RESOLVED

That the report be received.

Background Papers: None.

Reporting Person: Julie Fisher, Chief Executive
Email: julie.fisher@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3333

Contact Person: Frank Jeffrey, Head of Democratic Services
Email: frank.jeffrey@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3012

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ann-Marie Barker
Email: cllrann-marie.barker@woking.gov.uk

Shadow Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ayesha Azad
Email: cllrayesha.azad@woking.gov.uk

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REPORT ENDS

