

MINUTES  
OF A MEETING OF THE  
**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

held on 21  
Present:

Cllr J R Sanderson (Chairman)  
Cllr S Hussain (Vice-Chair)

Cllr J Brown	Cllr R Mohammed
Cllr S Dorsett	Cllr E Nicholson
Cllr A Kirby	Cllr M I Raja
Cllr R N Leach	

Also Present: Councillor K. Davis

Absent:

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies for absence were received.

**2. MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Monday, 24 January 2022 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

**3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES OSC22-009**

The Chairman went through the list of matters arising and noted the actions which had been closed since the last meeting, as well as the two actions still outstanding since the September meeting.

**4. URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business to discuss.

**5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Director of Legal and Democratic Services, Joanne McIntosh, declared a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning the Thamesway Group of Companies of which she was a Council-appointed director. The interests were such that Mrs McIntosh could advise the Council on those items.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Director of Planning, Giorgio Framalico, declared a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning the Thamesway Group of Companies of which he was a Council-appointed director. The interests were such that Mr Framalico could advise the Council on those items.

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor Hussain declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 9 – Woking Borough Council's Support of Local Businesses During Covid-19 - owing to him being a small business owner. The interest was such that speaking and voting were permissible.

## **6. WORK PROGRAMME OSC22-010**

The Chairman introduced this item and went through the work programme for the forthcoming meetings. The Chairman noted that the work programme now provides an overview of the work the Committee will be carrying out in the next municipal year.

RESOLVED

That the Work Programme be noted.

## **7. ENTERPRISE M3 OSC22-012**

Stephen Martin from Enterprise M3 presented to the Committee a comprehensive overview of the work Enterprise M3 was carrying out in and around Woking. The presentation highlighted the investments that the organisation had made in the area, such as the Woking Town Centre Transport Infrastructure Package and the Woking Sustainable Transport Package. The presentation also highlighted some of the measures taken to support businesses including the provision of guidance, support and funding during the pandemic, the investment in loans and equity for high growth SMEs and the new net zero business support service. The presentation went on to explain the high potential sectors that EM3 were focussing on which were space, animal health and gaming. The presentation closed with a view looking forward being provided, particularly around future funding and the Levelling Up White Paper review.

Members were invited to ask questions and discussions took place on business recovery, loans, the levelling-up white paper, net-zero and measures to support the transition to low-carbon, supporting less-affluent areas and the governance structure, where the structure was discussed in the context of SME's. On the discussions around supporting less-affluent areas Councillor Davis highlighted that the Sheerwater access road, which was a LEP funded initiative in conjunction with the Council, had unlocked congestion issues and enabled new businesses to enter the area.

Following a question from the Chairman on EM3 and their involvement with schools Stephen said that this information would be provided outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED

That the Enterprise M3 presentation be noted.

**8. LESSONS LEARNT THROUGHOUT THE COVID RESPONSE OSC22-004**

The Committee were presented this report by Emma Bourne and Andy Calfe on behalf of Geoff Mcmanus. Information was provided to Members about the various initiatives and actions that were carried out as a result of the pandemic including the establishment of the Borough Emergency Control Centre and the dedicated support to residents who were deemed as vulnerable.

Members were invited to ask questions and the discussions focussed on the Council's ability to meet the challenges of any future emergencies, with points centred on engagement with residents, established relationships with partners and stocks of personal protective equipment (PPE). Officers advised Members that the Council has strategies in place to ensure that the needs of the Borough can be met during an emergency of this scale and that the Council could respond swiftly to any sudden changes.

Thanks was extended by Members to the work of Woking Borough Council staff and the volunteers during this unprecedented time period.

**9. WOKING BOROUGH COUNCIL'S SUPPORT OF LOCAL BUSINESSES DURING COVID-19 OSC22-005**

Chris Norrington presented this report which drew highlighted some of the measures Woking Borough Council took in order to support local business during the Covid-19 pandemic. Attention was drawn to the quick distribution of grants and how this in turn had impacted the number of businesses which closed in Woking, with the total being relatively low and a significant number of new businesses opening up, with around half being food-related.

Chris commented that around 1300 business engagement actions had taken place and work had been done to help support businesses in understanding how to manage cashflows. It was also highlighted that work was being carried out to help support the hospitality sector, which had particularly struggled during this period, through actions such as the creation of the Woking Hospitality Alliance.

Councillor Davis, the Portfolio Holder, shared some of the additional actions that were carried out, such as the webinars which were hosted with business experts and outlined how efforts were made to ensure that businesses in Woking were given a good chance of surviving and mitigating the impact of the pandemic.

Members were invited to ask questions and a number of points were discussed. One question that was asked was what action was being taken to address grant fraud and it was noted that due diligence action was taken to avoid this. There was a discretionary grant available which was to help address the challenges some businesses faced in relation to recovering from the impact of covid. 'MyTown Woking' was discussed and it was noted that there were close to 50 businesses on the platform however challenges around changing the buying behaviour of the public were highlighted, it was noted that the Council's involvement in MyTown Woking ended in January. The Digital Centre of Excellence was discussed and it was noted that the search for a partner for this project was still ongoing.

Thanks was extended to Chris Norrington and his team for the work they had carried out in supporting local business during the pandemic.

#### **10. OVERVIEW OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED ANNUAL UPDATE OSC22-011**

Joanne McIntosh introduced this report, noting that the report sets out brief details of the complaints received by the Council, New Vision Homes and Joint Waste Solutions. It was highlighted that the purpose of the report was for the Committee to identify any areas they wish to scrutinise in the future.

It was stated that complaints some explanations for the increase in complaints were: some service areas were impacted due to departments suffering from staff shortages due to Covid-19, some complaints related to the same issue, such as a traffic issue relating to the Mcdonald's on Goldsworth Road. It was noted that it was not unusual that some areas had been receiving complaints given these areas take enforcement action. Joanne stated that based on the data there was not a recommended area for the Committee to conduct further scrutiny on.

Following a discussion on New Vision Homes it was stated that in the long-term it is expected that the number of complaints relating housing services would decrease when the service is brought in-house however in the short-term they could rise given the contract with New Vision Homes is coming to an end and therefore there are difficulties in performance managing such a contract. Joanne added that a review was taking place on the complaints system to ensure everything was in place and noted that, with the permission of the Head of Housing and the Chairman, a report on the review may be brought to the Committee in the future.

It was stated that if there was a service failure which was the fault of the Council then the Council would in the first instance seek to rectify the service failure. Joanne added that in some cases an apology is issued and compensation is provided however this is done on a case-by-case basis.

Following a question on complaints relating to the Breyer group Joanne stated the issue may be a current issue but is not likely going forwards given where the Council is in the housing services process.

Councillor Davis provided some insight on explanations for missed collections, noting that there are areas that do get missed and the causes typically relates to crews not having extensive local knowledge, as was the case during the pandemic when alternative crews were used to cope with staff shortages. It was also added that some issues relating to missed collections were due to local access issues and said that crews would return the next day where a collection could not be made. Councillor Davis added that when there are repeated missed collections officers from Joint Waste Solutions would monitor the issue and take actions to resolve the issue.

A request was made for the Committee to be provided with the previous years' data for New Vision Homes to allow for comparison and a further request was made for the Joint Waste Solutions data to be simplified so that trends could be identified.

Following a discussion in the Committee on the frequency of the report it was resolved that changing the report to be a biannual report would be a decision to be taken by the 2022/2023 Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED

That (i) The Overview of Complaints Received Annual Update be noted.

(ii) Changing the report to a biannual report be added as a potential addition to the work programme for the 2022/2023 Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**11. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUESTS ANNUAL REPORT OSC22-013**

Joanne McIntosh introduced this item and briefly went over the paper, explaining the processes involved in FOI's and areas where requests are high such as housing. It was noted that Democratic Services had a high number of FOI's, in part due to some of the requests not being within the remit of Woking Borough Council and as such, Democratic Services as the area that administers the system closes the request and provides the enquirer with the guidance on how to have their request answered by the appropriate body. She highlighted that whilst some requests had 'breached' all requests were responded to and she added that during the pandemic responding to the requests was not identified as a corporate priority by the Council during the Covid-19 pandemic, a decision supported by the ICO. Joanne stated that acknowledgments were sent out on receipts to highlight that there may be a delay in response.

Following a question on providing benchmark data Joanne stated that the data can be provided where possible, noting the FOI system had been introduced in the last few years.

In response to a question on how to address common enquiries it was noted that some information is published on the website if repeat questions are asked but this was done on a case by case basis.

RESOLVED

That the Freedom of Information Requests Annual Report be noted.

**12. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING INFORMATION**

The Chairman commented that the carpark data for the festive period had been provided outside of the meeting. Councillor Kirby flagged that he was still awaiting further comment on the inclusion of postal vote data. Councillor Hussain stated that it was positive to see the number of affordable housing that was delivered over the time period.

RESOLVED

That the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information (November 2021) be noted.

**13. FINANCE TASK GROUP UPDATE OSC22-014**

The Chairman briefly went through the report and noted that a number of items had been covered already by the meeting of the Executive and Full Council. The Chairman noted that at the next meeting they are anticipating that the group will receive an update on the Victoria Square Financial Model.

RESOLVED

That the Finance Task Group Update be noted.

**14. HIF HOUSING OUTPUT TASK GROUP UPDATE OSC22-015**

Councillor Kirby stated that it was hoped to have two or three more meetings, subject to timings, and that some of the key next steps were to have an overall SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) for the housing element and it was hoped to have a summary of how Woking's HIF project compares to other HIF projects across the Country.

RESOLVED

That the HIF Housing Outputs Task Group Update be noted.

The meeting commenced at 7:00pm  
and ended at 9:25pm

Chairman: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_