

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 17 October 2022

Present:

Cllr J R Sanderson (Vice-Chair as Chair)

Cllr H Akberali

Cllr A Caulfield

Cllr K Davis

Cllr PJT Graves

Cllr C Kemp

Cllr A Kirby

Cllr M Raja

Also Present: Councillors A-M Barker, G T Cosnahan and W P Forster

Absent: Councillors A Azad and J P Morley

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Azad and J Morley.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Monday, 26 September 2022 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES OSC22-048

The Chairman introduced the report on matters raised at previous meetings of the Committee, drawing the Committee's attention to actions undertaken subsequently.

Two items were noted as outstanding: determining the method of reporting housing complaints following the demobilisation of New Vision Homes; and the inclusion of the Suggested Additions to the Work Programme. It had been recommended that complaints be included in the Housing Facts and Figures report received by the Housing Task Group periodically. Of the Suggested Additions, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Communications Plan had been included on the Work Programme. The other Suggested Additions were being reviewed to ensure they were included when it was most appropriate.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

4. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business to discuss.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor James Sanderson declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 7 – Centres for the Community – arising from his position as Trustee and Chair of Lakeview Committee and Action Group. The interest was such that speaking and voting were permissible.

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor Peter Graves declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 7 – Centres for the Community – arising from his position as Trustee of the Maybury Centre. The interest was such that speaking and voting were permissible.

6. COMMUNITY LOTTERY PROPOSAL UPDATE OSC22-051

Frank Jeffrey, Head of Democratic Services, presented the update to the Committee.

The report fulfilled a request to reconsider a proposal to introduce a Community Lottery scheme that had been presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 January 2020 and that carried a recommendation to the Executive on 6 February 2020. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the introduction of the Community Lottery scheme had been delayed indefinitely.

At the inception of the Lottery scheme the Council would be required to pay the administrator, Gatherwell, an up-front cost of approximately £8,000 as well as annual costs of approximately £5,000, which was not considered viable due to the financial constraints of the Council. Additionally, it would require significant officer resource from several departments: Marketing and Communications, Community Services, and Legal teams. It was considered that none of those teams had sufficient capacity. The recommendation from Officers was not to consider introducing the Lottery scheme.

Gatherwell operated approximately 200 similar schemes across the Country including several Councils in Surrey. It was recommended seeking guidance from other Councils. It would be necessary to follow procurement to consider other providers.

Members were sceptical at introducing the scheme during the cost-of-living crisis. There was also concern that it would lead to reduced donations for charities if residents chose to purchase lottery tickets instead of donating directly to a charity.

Frank noted that a representative of Gatherwell had made a presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 20 January 2020 and it was recommended that a representative of Gatherwell be invited to attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to respond to Members' concerns.

Members raised specific concern over the potential negative impact to Woking Hospice, which ran its own lottery scheme. It was noted that Woking Hospice would be permitted to join the Council run lottery in addition to continuing its own.

The Committee thanked Frank for providing the update and agreed that it was not an appropriate time to consider the introduction of a Lottery scheme.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

7. CENTRES FOR THE COMMUNITY OSC22-050

Councillor Sanderson informed the Committee of an error in the public document pack that included the report for the Item 6, Community Lottery Proposal Update, instead of the Centres for the Community report. The correct report had been published as a supplement and Members were referred to that instead.

Adam Thomas, Head of Family & Community Services, was invited to make a presentation to the Committee.

In response to an Action from the Council's Woking For All strategy, the services at the Community Centres had been broadened to provide for all residents of the Borough. Adam updated the Committee with a selection of the broadened services that were accessible at the Centres. The overall use rate of the Centres had increased significantly over the last two years.

A large focus had been put towards forming partnerships with other organisations to provide services to residents from the Community Centres. Following questions from Members, Adam confirmed that partnerships between the Council and health providers were continuing to be developed. Adam highlighted the success of bringing health services into Moorcroft.

Over the past two years the Community Services team had changed the model by which the Community Centres were run. Previously, the Centres had mostly been funded directly by the Council. The model now promoted Social Entrepreneurship, whereby the cafés and kitchens were leased as opposed to the Council employing staff. Additionally, the administration of and care for the Centres had been centralised. The combined effect, once completed, was anticipated to save the Council approximately £300,000 per annum.

As part of the centralisation of administration, the bookings system had been unified. Members asked if it would be appropriate to have a centralised booking system online. A member of staff had been employed to handle bookings centrally via a phone system, which was deemed a highly effective method of handling bookings as frequently the circumstances of each booking had specific criteria.

Feedback had been gathered from staff and users of the regular day services run for older members of the Community at the Centres. The feedback highlighted the importance of the services in providing socialisation for users, and the impact that Covid-19 related lockdowns had on users when these services could not be provided.

Adam confirmed that there would be no service hiatus in the Sheerwater area due to the regeneration. It was planned that services continue to be run from Parkview until the new Community Centre was opened, at which point services would be transferred to the new Centre.

The café at Moorcroft had recently closed. The closure was due to the model used by the charity running the café not being viable. However, a new organisation that provided support care to adults had agreed to take over the café from January 2023.

Members queried if the increase in usage would prevent the Centres' use as vaccination centres. The Centres had been considered for the Covid vaccination programme; however, they had been deemed too small. The Centres were used for flu vaccination programmes.

The Communities Team expected to focus on further increasing the different services available at all Community Centres and in particular making the services more diverse. Members discussed cloud kitchens and it was confirmed that Foodwise, an organisation operating in the Borough, was considering how best to utilise the kitchen spaces at Community Centres.

The Committee requested that more information be provided on how the Centres were monitored.

The Committee thanked Adam for the presentation.

RESOLVED

That the changes and transformation of the Centres for the Community to reflect the Council's strategic priorities be noted.

8. WORK PROGRAMME OSC22-049

The Chairman introduced the report on the updated Work Programme, drawing the Committee's attention to the key changes since the document had last been received.

The Committee reaffirmed its desire to see the Suggested Items be included in the Work Programme: the Complaints Report and Pre-Decision Scrutiny – Risk Management Update.

The Complaints Report was presented to the Committee annually. The report was being reviewed to ensure that Members received the most useful report but did not duplicate reports submitted to other Committees.

It was requested by Members that Thames Water be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee. It was additionally requested that senior representatives of the Council's wholly owned companies be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee.

Changes to the Company Governance Structure had started; elected Members had been removed from company Boards. It was anticipated that the Committee would receive a report on the progress made to Company Governance Structure.

The Committee asked to review the proposed events for the Celebrate Woking calendar in light of the Council's financial constraints ahead of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting to be held on 21 November 2022.

RESOLVED

That the Work Programme be noted.

9. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING INFORMATION

The Members of the Committee were invited to raise any points in respect of the recently published Performance & Financial Monitoring Information.

The Committee noted that the August Performance and Financial Monitoring Information did not contain the Exception Report and requested that it be included for the next edition.

Members noted that the list of Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) Loans indicated that none had been taken out since March 2022 and sought assurances that the list was complete. Officers agreed to confirm the PWLB list was complete at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee due to be held on 21 November 2022. Officers additionally confirmed that any refinancing of short-term loans were only being considered on a short-term basis due to the current uncertainties in the market and that the Committee would be updated on their status at future date.

RESOLVED

That the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information (August 2022) be noted.

10. PARTNERSHIP LANDSCAPE OSC22-052 (VERBAL UPDATE)

Giorgio Framalico, Strategic Director of Place, presented to the Committee the most recent developments to Woking Borough Council's Strategic Partnerships.

Surrey County Council (SCC) was due to submit a Level 2 County Deal proposal to the Government, which was expected to change the relationship between Woking Borough Council and SCC.

The Woking Joint Committee was set to end and two Boards had been proposed to replace it; the Strategic Partnership Board would oversee infrastructure, climate change, health outcomes and safety; the Place Board would consider businesses and stakeholders, while ensuring that decisions considered the Master Plan and Corporate Strategy. Neither Board would have decision-making powers. Each would meet several times a year and report to the Executive.

The Committee discussed the need for the Boards to balance engagement with residents, to replace the direct engagement of the Woking Joint Committee, but also allow the Council and Partners to discuss items not ready for public consumption.

Members discussed the possibility of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could be used as a forum for the public to directly engage with the Council once the Woking Joint Committee ended. It was recognised that to be effective relevant parties would need to attend the meetings to be able to respond to questions.

Several Delivery Groups were also proposed that focussed on specific sectors: Woking Wellbeing Group, Safer Woking Partnership, Joint Infrastructure, Green Woking, CIL, and Place Brand. Each Group would meet several times a year with CIL potentially meeting monthly. The Groups would report to the two new Boards as well as the NWS Alliance Board. Several of the Groups would replace those that already existed under the Woking Joint Committee.

Kevin Foster, Strategic Director of Corporate Resources, presented an update to the County Deal and Woking Borough Council's plans to work with SCC. The Deal would see a number of powers devolved to SCC and the need to work constructively going forward was emphasised.

A Level 2 County Deal would encompass Local Enterprise Partnerships and an aspect of the Place Board would be to attract SCC to invest in the Borough.

Members noted the need to balance a focus on the Town Centre, where there was a concentration of businesses and connections to attract investment, while ensuring the wider Borough was still considered. It was emphasised that attracting investment by promoting culture was relevant across the Borough and not limited to the Town Centre.

The Committee noted the need to understand how the County Deal would affect infrastructure and planning in the Borough and that it would be of keen interest to residents.

11. FINANCE TASK GROUP UPDATE OSC22-053

The Committee received the update report of the Finance Task Group.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and ended at 8.43 pm.

Chairman: _____

Date: _____