

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 20 February 2023

Present:

Cllr A Azad (Chairman)
Cllr J R Sanderson (Vice-Chair)

Cllr K M Davis
Cllr A Kirby

Cllr R N Leach
Cllr M I Raja

Also Present: Councillors A-M Barker and P J T Graves

Absent: Councillors H Akberali, A Caulfield, C S Kemp and J P Morley

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Akberali, Caulfield, Kemp and Morley.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Monday, 23 January 2022 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES OSC23-012

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

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

4. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business to discuss.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

6. AFFINITY WATER - WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PLAN

Affinity Water did not attend the meeting. The Committee expressed their disappointment and agreed to provide Affinity Water with a further opportunity to attend a future meeting.

7. WEACT

Representatives of WEAct, Rupert Devereux, Jamie Gordon and Ellen Pirie, were welcomed to the meeting. The WEAct representatives stated their hope that the Council considered WEAct as a critical friend and emphasised their appreciation for the long history of Climate Change related activities by the Council.

The presentation encouraged the Council to utilise its dual role as influencer and enforcer in the Community to greater effect. The Council was also challenged to further reinforce its climate action and knowledge throughout the organisation.

The recently published Anthesis report, that measured the carbon footprint of the Council, was praised by both the WEAct representatives and Councillors. The report set out three ambitions to reduce the amount of carbon produced; business as usual, low ambition, and high ambition. WEAct registered their strong preference for the Council to pursue the high ambition, which would reduce the Council's carbon footprint by the greatest amount.

The Committee Members and WEAct representatives discussed the potential economic benefits of adopting robust climate change objectives that could create jobs. A focus on renewable energy generation would also mitigate against the current inflated utility costs.

WEAct encouraged the Council to join the UK100, a collection of local authorities that were working together to reach net zero in their areas by 2045, ahead of the national ambition of 2050. Members of UK100 were sharing resources and knowledge to be more effective.

The presentation provided information on Zero, a climate charity in Guildford, which was leading the Leaky Homes campaign and WEAct supported.

Following questions from Members on how to accurately measure carbon production for the Borough, the WEAct representatives pointed to the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE). The CSE had produced a tool that provided details of the total carbon production, both direct and indirect, in local communities and authorities based on extensive calculations.

The WEAct representatives recommended, when asked by Members, that Councillors could make an impact by helping those in the private rented sector to make improvements and reduce climate impact. To make more general change, the most effective approach was to show residents that they were contributing to a larger effort and making similar changes to others.

WEAct was due to open a repair café and asked if the Council would provide support for the Café. Councillors were asked to speak to their local community to find those with experience in repairing any and all items to volunteer their time and expertise.

Members expressed an interest in celebrating the activities of the Borough's youth. The creation of a young climate activist award and running an inter-schools competition were both mooted.

The Committee thanked Rupert Devereux, Jamie Gordon and Ellen Pirie for their presentation and agreed to consider areas that could be scrutinised by the Committee.

The Committee agreed to provide recommendations to the Executive.

8. ANNUAL UPDATE ON CLIMATE CHANGE OSC23-008

Lara Beattie, Senior Policy Officer, accompanied by Tracey Haskins, Green Infrastructure Team Lead, was welcomed to the Committee and provided a presentation on the activities of the Council in respect of Climate Change activities over the past year and plans for the forthcoming year.

The Climate Change Strategy, Woking 2050, which was adopted in 2015, was being updated. More commitments had been given by both the Council and nationally since the adoption, the strategy was being updated to reflect these. A draft of the report had been provided to the Greener Woking Working Group and would be submitted for Officer consultation. A public consultation was planned for the Summer.

A Climate Change Supplementary Planning Document was being produced and consultation on that would run in parallel with the Climate Change Strategy public consultation.

On 25 July 2019 Woking Borough Council declared a climate emergency and as part of this a Climate Emergency Action Plan has been produced. The Plan was submitted to the Greener Woking Working Group quarterly for review as well as published to the Council website.

Over the past year, the Council and its subsidiaries had applied for a number of different grants covering a range of infrastructure improvements in the Borough. This had included a £3 million grant from the Government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund to improve the Energy Centre operated by ThamesWey at Poole road. The Energy Centre improvements resulted in energy efficiency improvements for two of the Council's office spaces; Midas House and Export House.

The Council had continued working with many partners throughout the year.

In response to the cost of living crisis and inflated utility costs, the Council had opened Warm Hubs throughout the Borough to help those in need.

A proposal was due to be submitted to the Executive, asking to pledge to 'Take the Jump', referring to a campaign for all members of society to make everyday changes.

Building Services was compiling a comprehensive database of utilities used across the Council. Building Services was set to commence a trial of energy monitoring software. The Committee noted Member suggestion to consider as a potential item for scrutiny, results of the trial and if it would be feasible or practicable to employ in Council housing stock.

The Green Infrastructure team was working on a Green Garden guide for residents.

Following questions from Members, Lara Beattie considered that the greatest challenge for the Council to reach net zero by 2030, aside from financial issues, was Officer resource.

To achieve net zero successful bids for external funding would be required which took significant time, and therefore, Officer resource.

The Chair noted the conclusions of the report and recognised the need for accelerated action on the part of the Council.

RESOLVED

That the activities undertaken to date and those planned in furtherance of the Council's climate and ecological emergency declaration, be noted.

9. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUESTS ANNUAL REPORT OSC23-009

The Chairman summarised the annual Freedom of Information Requests report, noting that 739 requests had been received over 2022, a significant increase on the number received in 2021 (632).

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

10. REVIEW OF THE AMENDED CONSTITUTION OSC23-011

The Committee welcomed Joanne McIntosh, Director of Legal and Democratic Services, to the meeting.

At its meeting on 11 July 2022, the Committee had agreed to recommend that the Constitution should be reviewed, following a Scrutiny Topic Review Selection Form submitted by Councillor Caulfield. Joanne McIntosh had undertaken to redraft the Constitution and had subsequently provided an update to the Committee at its meeting held on 26 September 2022.

The Committee thanked Joanne McIntosh for the amended Constitution and commended the hard work from all contributors in producing the new draft document. Members expressed satisfaction with the modernised format and user-friendly language which would increase its usability, noting that the new draft benefitted from several new sections.

As part of the changes to the Constitution, it had been proposed that a Corporate Governance Group should be set up. The Group's mandate would be to keep the Constitution under review and report on any recommended updates at regular intervals.

Members provided several recommendations. It was requested that the explanations for Councillor term length, Points of Order and Personal Explanations be clarified and Joanne McIntosh confirmed that these would be addressed. Some Members reaffirmed their view that etiquette at Committee be enforced asked that guidance be reiterated to all Members before the next Council meeting.

Members stressed expectation that the creation of Deputy Portfolio Holders would not equate to an increase in allowance for those Members. Joanne McIntosh confirmed that this was not the intention but was for Councillors to gain experience and share responsibility. Joanne McIntosh advised Members that there was to be a separate review of Councillor allowances at a future date.

The Committee briefly discussed the recently resolved Motion to Council regarding verbatim questions and responses and whether it should be incorporated into the Constitution. Joanne McIntosh advised that the Constitution could not include such level of detail.

The Committee noted that the amended Constitution would in due course be presented to the Standards and Audit Committee, the Executive and finally Council.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

11. WORK PROGRAMME OSC23-013

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

The invitation of Thames Water, as a Matter Arising from the previous Minutes, had been added as a suggested addition to the Work Programme.

RESOLVED

That the Work Programme be noted.

12. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING INFORMATION

The Members of the Committee reviewed the most recently published Performance & Financial Monitoring Information.

RESOLVED

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

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and ended at 8.50 pm.

Chairman: _____

Date: _____