

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

held on 26  
Present:

Cllr I Johnson (Chairman)  
Cllr K M Davis (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Mrs H J Addison	Cllr R Mohammed
Cllr J E Bond	Cllr M I Raja
Cllr G G Chrystie	Cllr C Rana
Cllr J Kingsbury	

Also Present: Councillors I Eastwood

Absent: Councillor A-M Barker

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A-M Barker.

**2. MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Monday, 26 February 2018 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

**3. URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business to discuss.

**4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor M I Raja declared a non pecuniary interest in items 8 – Countryside Access and 9 – Surrey Heathland Project, arising from his position as a member of the Horsell Common Preservation Society. The interest was such that speaking and voting were permissible.

**5. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING INFORMATION**

The Members of the Committee were invited to raise any matters in respect of the most recent Performance and Financial Monitoring Information (the 'Green Book'). No matters were raised.

## **6. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chairman introduced the report on the Work Programme for the Committee and drew attention to the extract from the Forward Plan of Executive decisions. In considering the report, it was agreed that the consideration of the delivery of affordable housing would be deferred to the meeting in September 2018 to enable Officers time to complete the proposals.

The topic of the Brexit and what role, if any, the Council could play in preparing for any opportunities to arrive from changes in legislation, would be deferred until such time that a clearer picture of the Government's intentions was known. It was added, however, the Council was taking a very positive approach to economic development as part of the programme of investment in the Borough.

RESOLVED

That the Work Programme be noted.

## **7. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The Chairman had prepared the annual report on the activities of the Committee over the past year. The report would be presented to Council at its meeting on 5 April 2018 and the Members of the Committee were advised to identify any changes they would wish to see before the report for Council was published.

Councillor Raja disagreed with the statement within the report that the boiler repair service operated by New Vision Homes has seen improvement, referring the Members to a specific case involving a tenant who had experienced a long period of delay awaiting repairs to their heating system. The Chairman asked Councillor Raja to forward the details to him so that he could investigate the matter, and the Chief Executive reported that the matter had been previously raised with Councillor Raja and was being addressed by Officers. An apology for the delay experienced by the tenant had already been made.

RESOLVED

That the report be submitted to the next meeting of Council, subject to any comments made by Members of the Committee.

## **8. COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS**

The Chairman welcomed Tracey Haskins, Green Infrastructure Manager, Arran Henderson, Green Spaces Development Officer, Marcus Turley, Surrey Heathland Partnership, Paul Rimmer, Horsell Common Preservation Society and Rachel Woodman, Horsell Common Preservation Society.

Tracey and Arran introduced a report and presentation on countryside access, outlining the key strategies and policies of the Council and partner organisations, giving examples of projects undertaken within the Borough to improve or maintain the natural environment for the benefit of residents, workers and visitors to the Borough. It was noted that the Council was responsible for an extensive and expanding range of green infrastructure assets, which were managed both directly and indirectly.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

## **9. SURREY HEATHLAND PROJECT**

Marcus Turley of the Surrey Heathland Project gave a presentation on the work undertaken to recover and maintain the heathlands across the County, including the key sites in the Borough of Sheets Heath, Brookwood Heath, Prey Heath and Smarts Heath. Examples of the work necessary to maintain such sites were given, and Marcus explained the importance of the sites both nationally and internationally. All the species of reptiles found in the UK could be found on the heaths, including the rare Smooth Snake. An amazing range of insects could be found on the sites, with a recent survey of invertebrates having found 373 different species. Similarly, the sites were host to a wide variety of plants, including some very rare examples.

Heathland was becoming increasingly rare, and Marcus reported that up to 85% of heathland had been lost over the past 200 years. The work of the Partnership sought to remove invasive species such as birch and pine and adopted a number of practices and approaches, including ground clearance, felling and grazing, all undertaken to promote the growth of heather.

It was noted that a recent tour of Sheets Heath, arranged for all Councillors, had been very informative and useful, despite poor weather. However, the visit, hosted by Marcus, had been poorly attended and the Chairman proposed that a further visit should be arranged for the summer months to encourage more Councillors to visit the heaths and gain a greater understanding of their importance.

Councillor Davis noted that the Horsell Common Preservation Society had introduced a licensing scheme for professional dog walkers and enquired whether the scheme had proven successful, expressing concern that it could have the effect of displacing the professional dog walkers to other heathland sites. Paul Rimmer explained that the licence scheme was being run as a pilot and that its outcomes could be used to justify introducing similar licensing arrangements at other sites. Paul added that the possibility of using Public Space Protection Orders was being considered as an option in dealing with littering and dog fouling.

The Chief Executive, Ray Morgan, expressed his surprise at the state of the heaths and noted his appreciation of the recent site visit which had highlighted the issues faced by those seeking to maintain the existing heathland areas. There was clearly a need for additional funding if the work was to continue and the Chief Executive suggested that the Committee could request Officers to explore different options with a view to bringing forward a proposal that would see funding allocated to assist in the work being undertaken to protect the heaths in the Borough. If supported, Officers would bring a report forward in the Autumn which would seek to identify funds through the 2019/20 business plan. In drawing up such a report, it was anticipated that Officers would need the support and assistance of many partner organisations.

The Committee welcomed the Chief Executive's proposal, and further agreed that a second visit to one of the Borough's Heaths should be arranged for the summer months, with all Councillors strongly advised to attend.

The Chairman thanked Tracey, Arran, Marcus, Paul and Rachel for attending the meeting and for providing a very informative briefing on the Borough's heathland and its management.

RESOLVED

- (i) Officers be requested to bring forward a proposal to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the Autumn 2018 to establish a formal programme for the maintenance of the Borough's heathlands, with funding to be identified through the annual business plan from 2019/20 onwards; and
- (ii) a further site visit to one of the Borough's Heaths be arranged for the summer months, with all Councillors to be encouraged to attend.

**10. SAFER WOKING PARTNERSHIP - COMMUNITY SAFETY PLAN**

The Chairman welcomed Camilla Edmiston, Community Safety Manager, and Inspector Mark Offord of Surrey Police to the meeting to present the annual report on the Safer Woking Partnership Plan. The three year rolling Plan was brought before the Committee to enable the Members to review the draft proposals before publication in April. In the event the Committee identified any significant issues of concern, the matter would be referred to the Community Safety Task Group for consideration before publication.

The Committee was advised that the plan for 2018-2021 had five key areas, namely Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime, Drugs and Alcohol, Reducing Reoffending, and Preventing Violent Extremism.

The Committee raised a number of points in respect of policing in Woking, and Inspector Offord explained the different approaches adopted for the Borough, and outlined some of the initiatives undertaken in respect of key offences such as domestic abuse, repeat offenders and modern slavery.

The Chairman enquired after the future of Woking Police Station. The Inspector advised that the Police Station site had been identified for disposal, though emphasised that the changes would not affect the Police provision in the Borough. The Police Station was currently used as a satellite office for Officers based out of Mount Browne and the existing front counter remained open. The counter would close once the new counter at the Civic Offices had been completed, and in future the custody centre in Staines would replace the custody facilities at the Woking Station. It was added that the new counter at the Civic Offices would have the same opening hours as the existing counter.

In response to points raised by Councillor Raja, the Committee was advised that there had been an increase in reported crime in general, partly due to improved reporting but also due to increases in specific crimes, notably domestic abuse and hate crime. Domestic burglary had risen, caused in part by a widening of the definition of the term and in part by a spate of incidents in Autumn 2017 which had been subsequently tackled by targeted action. A significant drop in burglaries had since been seen. Overall the number of offences had reduced month on month since July 2017.

The Chairman thanked Camilla and Inspector Offord for attending the meeting and presenting the report.

RESOLVED

That the Safer Woking Partnership Plan 2018-21 be endorsed.

#### **11. GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATION (GDPR)**

Jo McIntosh, Solicitor, and Robert Bishop, Graduate Trainee, presented a detailed report on the General Data Protection Regulation which dealt with the principles on which personal data should be processed, the lawful bases on which organisations could rely on and the rights available to individuals. The report had been considered by the Executive at its meeting on 22 March 2018 and its recommendations – to adopt the new Data Protection Policy and to appoint the Head of Democratic and Legal Services/Monitoring Officer the Authority's Data Protection Officer – would be presented to Council on 5 April 2018.

It was noted that a training programme for Councillors was being developed by the Local Government Association which would be rolled out to the Borough Councillors in due course.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

#### **12. PARLIAMENTARY REVIEW OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FUNCTIONS**

The Members of the Committee were advised that a Parliamentary review of overview and scrutiny functions had been undertaken over the past year. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman had submitted a representation to the review as part of the Select Committee's evidence gathering, a copy of which was attached to the report. The review had concluded at the end of 2017 and the Government had recently published its response to the recommendations.

The report before the Committee proposed that a cross party task group should be established to review the findings of the work and the Government's response, with a view to determining whether any of the recommendations could be adopted for the benefit of Woking. It was anticipated that the Task Group would only need to meet once before reporting back to the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED

- That (i) a cross party task group (the 'Effective Scrutiny Task Group') consisting of five Councillors be established to review the findings of the Communities and Local Government Committee through its review of the effectiveness of the overview and scrutiny functions of local government;
- (ii) the membership of the Task Group to consist of Councillor I Johnson, Councillor K Davis, Councillor J Kingsbury, Councillor M I Raja and Councillor J Bond; and
- (iii) the Task Group to report its findings to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 18 June 2018.

**13. TASK GROUP UPDATES**

The Members of the Committee noted the reports of the Economic Development Task Group, the Finance Task Group and the Housing Task Group, each prepared by the respective Chairmen of the Task Groups.

RESOLVED

That the reports be noted.

**14. VOTE OF THANKS**

The Chairman noted that no further meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be held during the current Municipal Year and expressed his appreciation of the support and assistance of the Members of the Committee, particularly the Vice-Chairman. On behalf of the Committee Members, Councillor Kingsbury thanked both the Chairman and Vice-Chairman for their hard work over the year.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm  
and ended at 9.38 pm

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

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