

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
RESOURCE AND FINANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 9 July 2024

Present:

Cllr A Boote (Chair, present items 7 and 8)
Cllr L Rice (Vice-Chair in the Chair for items 1-6)

Cllr S Greentree Cllr P Pandher
Cllr S Oades Cllr J Pearce

Also Present: Councillor D Roberts

Absent: Councillors G Cosnahan and A Javaid

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Cosnahan. Councillor Boote apologised for being unable to attend the start of the meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received from Members.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Strategic Director – Corporate Resources, Kevin Foster, declared a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning the companies of which he was a Council-appointed director. The interests were such that Mr Foster could advise the Committee on those items.

The interests of Strategic Director – Communities, Louise Strongitharm, and the Head of Transformation, Digital, and Customer, Adam Walther, were referred to in the agenda but it should be noted that neither were present at the meeting.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee held on 20 May 2024 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

4. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of Urgent Business under Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

5. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee had met informally with Officers to discuss topics for inclusion on the Work Programme for the year. The Chair, Vice-Chair, Strategic Director of Corporate Resources, and Scrutiny Officer would meet to agree the topics for presentation to the Committee at its next meeting.

Included in the Work Programme were several suggested additions inherited from the preceding Overview and Scrutiny Committee, since made defunct. The Committee agreed to retain:

- Biannual Review of Complaints;
- Definition of Statutory and Non-Statutory Services; and
- Review of Member Development.

It was agreed that the Plan for Member and Officer Finance Training be removed; the Member training to be covered in the Review of Member Development item, and an action for the Strategic Director of Finance be raised for Officer training.

6. PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Kevin Foster introduced the item, highlighting that the project management process had undergone a review over the previous two years.

The Council did not employ dedicated project managers. Instead, Officer from the relevant department was appointed to oversee each project.

The Corporate Leadership Team met quarterly as a programme board to review the status of each project. In the interim between meetings, if a project was perceived to be falling behind schedule or facing other risks, it was incumbent on the responsible manager to immediately submit an exception report to the Corporate Leadership Team. Pino Mastromarco, Corporate Strategy Manager, clarified that the Project Management Office collaborated daily with assigned project managers to help monitor projects.

Concern was shared within the Committee that formal reporting on a quarterly basis was too infrequent.

It was confirmed that change control was embedded in the reporting process and changes to the project were represented against those agreed in the project mandate.

A specific question was raised regarding the amber RAG status of the Sheerwater Regeneration budget. In response, Pino Mastromarco explained that the project was being redefined, which included a reassessment of the budget.

In response to a query on project managers employed by the Council's subsidiary companies, Kevin Foster confirmed that ThamesWey had project management capability but not in the form of dedicated project managers. Victoria Square employed project managers throughout its existence.

The Corporate Strategy Manager noted that the Council did distinguish between projects and programmes but that were very few of the latter. The Improvement and Recovery Programme was cited as an example. The Strategic Director of Place added that any

initiative, regardless of its size, was subject to the same project management process if it did not have a pre-allocated budget.

It was suggested that the template project mandate should be revised to include sections on the potential impact of delaying or not undertaking the project. It was further proposed that a review be undertaken of what is considered to be a project and a separate review on the project monitoring methodology.

The Committee discussed how cost overruns were approved. All cost overruns would be presented to the programme board and then submitted to the Executive for approval prior to any expenditure. It was confirmed that while this process was in place, it could not be guaranteed that all projects had historically followed the same process.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

7. PRINCIPLES OF RISK MANAGEMENT

It was noted that the Strategic Risk Register and Risk Management Policy were not readily available on the website. It was suggested that they be made easily accessible.

The Committee discussed the Council's approach to risk appetite. It was highlighted that the current approach to appetite had been established two years ago and Officers agreed that the approach could be revisited given the Council's current circumstances. Pino Mastromarco confirmed that rather than a separate risk appetite outturn report, appetite was assigned to each risk on the Strategic Risk Register.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

8. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT

In response to a query on the lack of detailed information in the Corporate Key Performance Indicators pie chart, Officers confirmed that narrative for each indicator was contained further into the report. Officers suggested that a narrative could be added to the pie chart for clarity.

A view was raised that some indicators would be more informative if absolute values were included in addition to relative values.

The corporate complaints indicator was identified as an area of improvement. Rather than report the timeliness of responses, an indicator that captured the substance of a complaint would be more beneficial and help the Council to identify service improvements.

Pino Mastromarco confirmed that discussions were underway with Local Partnerships on conducting ongoing benchmarking between Local Authorities. While some benchmarking between Surrey authorities already took place, it was not reflected in the Performance Management Report.

A view was expressed that more information on staff turnover and vacancies would be beneficial.

The Vice-Chair requested an age analysis of the past dues for Council Tax and Rateable Value (Business Rates) in addition to information on write-offs.

The Committee discussed the negative balance of Byfleet and West Byfleet Ward Community Infrastructure Levy funding. The Chair explained that human error had attributed some funds from West Byfleet Neighbourhood Area, these had been spent and once the error had been corrected, had left Byfleet and West Byfleet fund with a negative balance.

The Chair suggested some level of scrutiny of the collection of Community Infrastructure Levy funds be undertaken.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and ended at 8.04 pm.

Chair: _____

Date: _____