

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
ENVIRONMENT AND PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 5 September 2024

Present:

Cllr J Morley (Chair)
Cllr C Martin (Vice-Chair)

Cllr H Akberali Cllr M Kuipers
Cllr P Graves Cllr R Leach

Also Present: Councillors A-M Barker and L Lyons

Absent: Councillors M I Raja

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Raja.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The interests of the Strategic Director – Communities, Louise Strongitharm, the Strategic Director – Corporate Resources, Kevin Foster, and the Head of Transformation, Digital and Customer, Adam Walther, were referred to in the agenda but it should be noted that none were present at the meeting.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the 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 EPSC24-004

The St Johns footbridge item, first suggested at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 January 2024, and subsequently assigned to the Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee, was agreed to be kept on the suggested additions to the work programme, with construction anticipated to begin in December 2024.

Three items were added to the suggested additions; Emergency Planning and Business Continuity, UKSPF Projects Update, Approach to Retender of Waste Contract. These were requested by Officers and provisionally agreed by the Chair. Beverley Kuchar, Interim Strategic Director of Place, confirmed that all were intended to be delivered at the March 2025 meeting.

Committee members raised concern with capacity issues in the sewage network across the Borough and how best consider scrutinise the issue. Officers expressed concern that such scrutiny could prejudice an upcoming planning application. At the suggestion of the Leader, the Committee agreed to ask ThamesWey, the responsible authority for sewerage and sewage collection in the Borough, about plans for increasing capacity. The Committee agreed to the Leader's suggestion with wording to be agreed by the Chair, Vice Chair, and Scrutiny Officer following the meeting. The Chair directed that a placeholder item be added to the Work Programme.

The Committee also discussed scrutiny of issues where Surrey County Council was the responsible authority, specifically highways. The Scrutiny Officer advised that Officers would first contact Surrey County Council to seek its preferred approach; whether to raise the issue through the appropriate Select Committee or for the Borough to conduct its own scrutiny and invite Surrey County Council.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

6. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Interim Director of Place explained that three new performance indicators had been added for planning development to highlight applications decided within statutory guidelines without agreed extensions.

The Committee discussed how appeals overturned by the local Planning Inspectorate, could be reduced. The Interim Director of Place was preparing new quarterly reporting to highlight overturned decisions that.

If more than 10% of appeals were overturned, the local planning authority would be put into special measures and applications would be directly decided by the Planning Inspectorate. In response to a Member query, Officers assured the Committee that applications would continue to be determined within established frameworks irrespective of any risk of breaching the 10% threshold.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulation, Cllr Liam Lyons, noted the costs to the Council when planning applications were overturned on appeal. More training for Planning Committee Councillors had been arranged for the 2024/25 Municipal Year. The Portfolio Holder highlighted that overturned decisions usually followed Officer recommendations with only those ruled differently by the Planning Committee being overturned.

A Committee Member raised concern about council housing stock lacking confirmed electrical certification and smoke detection. Officers undertook to pass the concern on to the Strategic Director of Communities for reply.

The Interim Strategic Director of Place undertook to reply to a Member query on the effectiveness of the mobile CCTV cameras in reducing fly-tipping.

Officers undertook to pass on praise for the marked increase in leisure service users to the Strategic Director of Communities.

The Chair reiterated concerns from the previous Overview and Scrutiny Committee on bin collections and would meet with the Head of Environmental Services.

In response to a query, the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulation confirmed that Environmental Health Services focussed food premises inspections on high-risk establishments. Although there had been a backlog of inspections, these were low-risk premises and posed public health risk. It was requested allergen handling was part of food premises inspections and the Interim Director of Place undertook to provide a response after the meeting.

A Member queried the five complaints about exhumation and public burial.

7. PLANNING OBLIGATIONS REVIEW EPSC24-001

The Interim Strategic of Place explained that Officers were reviewing the governance processes of Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) spending.

For Neighbourhood CIL (NCIL), Council had previously resolved that applications under £10,000 would be determined by the Strategic Director of Place.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulation clarified that the Section 114 Notice did not impact funds gathered under CIL or Section 106 which would only be used for approved CIL applications or Section 106 commitments.

The Interim Strategic Director of Place explained that 25% of CIL money was reserved for nomination by Ward Councillors where a neighbourhood forum existed, as NCIL, otherwise, 15% of CIL money was reserved as NCIL. 40% of CIL money was allocated for Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG). The Council had chosen to fund SANG through CIL, rather than Section 106 agreements, so as to not impact the delivery of affordable housing.

Previously, there was no clear mechanism for spending remaining CIL funds. Officers were reviewing how to request, determine, and measure their effectiveness. In the first instance, a request would be presented to the Corporate Governance board, composed of Corporate Leadership Team members and Commissioners.

Section 106 money could be used by an authority to secure affordable housing obligations but uses were restricted as the Council had adopted a CIL scheme. Frequently, S106 agreements set out a specific project. Otherwise, it could be pooled for contributions towards a larger project. Since the CIL scheme was adopted approximately £12mil had been received with a significant portion used for the Woking Integrated Transport Project.

In response to a query, the Interim Strategic Director of Place confirmed that residents could propose NCIL-funded projects to their Ward Councillors who were required to show public interest in the project.

Officers noted that trees would be considered for eligibility for CIL funding on a case-by-case basis.

The Council had procured software to manage CIL funds, including historical data. It was anticipated that it would help streamline responding to Freedom of Information Requests and allow Officers to ensure all agreed moneys had been paid. Officers had consulted colleagues at other authorities prior to procurement. A corporate Officer working group would oversee government

The paper proposed forming a task and finish group to set the priorities for the new 123 list. Officers would draft terms of reference for presentation at the next meeting.

Resolved That

Members endorsed the planned activities to improve our approach to the management and monitoring of Planning Obligations and CIL.

8. CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY EPSC24-003

The Interim Strategic Director of Place summarised the report as a change to the approach of the Council, reducing the number of commitments and streamlining the priorities.

It was questioned why UK100 had not been referenced in the report and Officers noted that the Council did not have the resources to commit to the responsibilities of its membership. Officers undertook to hold a conversation with UK100 representatives.

A Member asked whether the Council had dropped its previous commitment to reaching net zero across its estate by 2030. Officers confirmed that it was being considered as an aspiration and would be considered as part of the development of the Woking for All strategy.

It was confirmed that the 2050 net zero target was statutory.

Officers confirmed that during considerations with partners regarding procurement of the waste contract, fuel type of the fleet would feature.

Concern was raised at the Council's ability to bid for funding for improving cycle routes across the Borough following the closure of the Green Infrastructure team. The Interim Strategic Director of Place confirmed that if the Council became aware of and was eligible for, a bid would be submitted. Councillors were asked that if they became aware of any funding, that they make the Interim Strategic Director of Place aware.

Officers confirmed that any support for private landlords would be made through partnership with Action Surrey.

As part of the social value aspect of the grounds maintenance tender, Officers confirmed that consideration of working with volunteer groups was included. The Leader confirmed that more information on social value would be available when the tender was presented to the Executive.

The Committee discussed the absence of a review date and agreed to provide a recommendation to the Executive that one be included. The wording to be confirmed following the meeting.

The Committee discussed that the Council's report template include an implication on climate change and agreed to recommend that the Executive consider such. The wording to be confirmed following the meeting.

Recommended to the Executive That

- (i) a review date be added to the Climate Change Strategy, to be set 5 years from the start of the Government intervention at Woking Borough Council; and**
- (ii) Officers be requested to amend the committee report template to include 'environment and climate change' as an implication.**

Resolved that

- (i) the Committee supports the Council's adoption of the strategy;
- (ii) the changes to the WBC Climate Change Strategy and key objectives be noted;
- (iii) the committee supports the final strategy and the Council's continued sustainable practices within the delivery of our statutory services; and
- (iv) the representations to the Climate Change Strategy consultation made between May - June 2023 are noted (Appendix 2a – 2b).

9. FEES AND CHARGES 2024-25 REVIEW FOR CAR PARK TARIFFS

No report was provided by Officers for the item. Following agenda publications, Officers withdrew the item from the upcoming Council meeting. A unified approach to car park tariffs would be discussed with Victoria Square Woking Limited, including Red and Green car park costs.

Any proposals for car park tariffs would be included with the larger Council Fees and Charges report which would include EV charging costs.

The meeting commenced at 7.01 pm
and ended at 9.08 pm.

Chair: _____

Date: _____