

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 26 November 2018

Present:

Cllr I Johnson (Chairman)
Cllr D E Hughes (Vice-Chair)

Cllr J E Bond	Cllr R Mohammed
Cllr K Howard	Cllr M I Raja
Cllr S Hussain	Cllr C Rana

Also Present: Jaqueline Hutton (Solicitor), Leigh Clarke, Douglas Spinks, Geoff McManus, Andy Calfe, Jason Kinsella, Tracey Haskins, Arran Henderson, Chris Norrington, Rose Blackley, Commander James Tigwell and Dave Axam.

Absent: Councillors Mrs H J Addison and G G Chrystie

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Monday, 17 September 2018 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor H Addison and Councillor G Chrystie.

3. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business to discuss.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

5. WORK PROGRAMME OSC18-004

The Group reviewed the Work Programme, noting the upcoming topics to discuss and the ongoing issues with complaints which would be reviewed at the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 21 January 2019. The theme to the Committee meeting in February would be heavily focused on health and wellbeing, and would involve reports on support services for those discharged from Hospital, the links between health and wellbeing and the objectives of the Council and Borough leisure facilities.

Members were reminded that if there were any items they wanted to bring to the attention of the Committee, there were only two meetings left in the municipal year to do so.

RESOLVED

That the Work Programme be noted.

6. SURREY FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

The Chairman introduced Commander James Tigwell, North West Group Commander for Surrey Fire and Rescue, and noted that the Surrey County Council Consultation was not to be discussed as the focus was on the positive work undertaken by the Surrey Fire and Rescue Services (SFRS).

Commander Tigwell provided a presentation for the Group and informed them of the specialist resources and equipment at the new Woking Fire Station, various hazards and risks, and SFRS prevention events and activities. SFRS prevention activities had been key in reducing fires by 52% over the past ten years, and included events such as Safe Drive Stay Alive, youth engagement schemes and working with Dementia Friendly Surrey and Juniors Citizens.

It was explained that vulnerable people faced increased likelihood of experiencing household fires, and the best way to combat that statistic was to focus on prevention, which was done by fitting smoke detectors and conducting safety and wellness visits to those at risk.

Commander Tigwell informed the Committee that there were currently 26 fire stations in Surrey with up to 28 employees on shift at any given station, anytime. It was noted that Surrey had been the safest County across all fire types for every 10,000 people in 2017/18, and had been named in the top three safest Counties 13 times since 2001.

Councillor Howard thanked Commander Tigwell for his presentation and mentioned he had received a letter from a resident, expressing concerns over a 50% reduction in staffing hours and a reduction in resources in the services. The member of public felt that if there was a major fire emergency then the SFRS would be stretched.

Commander Tigwell was aware of the issues raised, but explained that if a fire station was not equipped with all resources, there would always be assets available nearby that would attend to the emergency. It was added that there had been some budget reductions previously but SFRS were still hitting the response rate target over 90% of the time, and there had never been a closed station.

Councillors praised the response rate and the work of the SFRS, and Councillor Bond was keen to organise a SFRS presentation at a local Floor Forum and the link between SFRS and other Neighbourhood Organisations was discussed. Councillors questioned whether there were any difficulties for the fire service arising from the road works near the new fire station, and it was reported that they had not caused any issues to date.

The Chairman thanked Commander Tigwell and noted the valuable work undertaken by SFRS in protecting the Surrey Heathlands and, more recently, the fire emergency at a business in Goldsworth which had been contained quickly and put out before spreading to other units close by.

7. CELEBRATE WOKING 2018/19 REVIEW AND FORWARD PLAN

Chris Norrington, Business Liaison Manager, and Rose Blackley, Arts and Development Officer, provided a presentation on Celebrate Woking, and reviewed the events figures to date and the events calendar for 2019. The Celebrate Woking website visitor figures had increased steadily over the years, with an average of 14,000 people visiting the site per month. Whilst there was no theme for the events proposed for 2019, there was a strong focus on a variety of cultures, and the team would be grateful for any theme suggestions to be passed on to them. Rose went on to highlight plans and provisional dates for 2019, which included Party in the Park on 6th July.

Celebrate Woking was now a recognised brand that works alongside #WeAreWoking and reaches over 99,000 residents. Recognition was given to Riette Thomas, who was unable to attend the meeting, for her work on the Woking Food Festival that won the award of “2018 Surrey Life Food and Drink Hero” and previously “The Best Local Food Event” for three consecutive years.

The Committee discussed crowd control and capacity which was supervised by security but could sometimes prove difficult as some events were free to attend and in a public place, for example the Food Festival. The Safety Advisory Group considered capacity prior to an event and the procedures that would be put in place if maximum capacity was reached. Councillor Hughes noted the positive work of Celebrate Woking, whose events cater for all generations and bring them together.

Councillor Bond requested that events held in Byfleet, including Parish Day, Midnight Walk and Christmas Lights, should be added to the events calendar for 2019.

Councillor Raja raised a concern about the condition of a headstone in Brookwood Cemetery of a British Soldier that was marked with the Military Cross. Councillor Raja was asked to send the details of the grave to Officers so that the matter could be investigated.

8. ENTERPRISE M3 - ANNUAL REPORT OSC18-008

The Chairman welcomed Dave Axam, Chairman for Enterprise M3, who gave a presentation on the Groups current and previous projects, achievements and challenges. The Group discussed the Woking Town Infrastructure Package, Sustainable Transport and the Strategic Economic Plan. Concern was raised for the impact that Brexit could have on international funding, however there was no update to provide yet. Douglas Spinks, Deputy Chief Executive informed the Group that a bid would be submitted shortly for £95 million for the A320 south of Victoria Arch highway proposals and associated improvements to Victoria Arch itself.

The works in Sheerwater were discussed, noting Enterprise M3's support with the access road to improve accessibility for the development. The Committee had praised the 21 completed projects to date and the achievements of delivering 1,587 jobs, 1,200 new homes with the aspiration of delivering 10,000 new homes, 22,000 new jobs resulting in a total local growth fund of £219.1 million by 2030.

The Committee thanked Mr Axam for his time and the ongoing support from Enterprise M3.

9. GROUNDS MAINTENANCE

Geoff McManus, Assistant Director, gave a presentation on the Council's Grounds Maintenance work alongside Jason Kinsella, Serco Regional Contract Director and Andy Calfe, Neighbourhood Team Leader.

Background information was provided on the contract with Serco, that included 24/7 response, street cleansing, fly tipping, ditch clearance, maintenance of parks and equipment, tree care and estate management. It was noted that the new Sportsbox facilities had been added to the contract. The arrangement had expanded since 2003 and continues to be a flexible partnership.

The plans for expanding the use of the green space at Goldsworth Park to include a cricket pitch were outlined. Potential challenges were detailed in the plans such as fertilisation, irrigation, weed control and weather dependency to allow the marking of the area.

The key maintenance activities were included in the presentation along with details on timings, seasonal renovations and challenges. Some specific challenges of the ponds were noted, and included the water quality and vandalism nearby which regularly became a priority task for the Park Team to repair.

Several management methods of the Serco contract were discussed and included fortnightly meetings and customer satisfaction surveys which were included in the Green Book. The contract was to end in 2023, at which time the contract would be re-tendered.

The Committee was updated on the successful trial of letting some areas grow wild to provide a habitable environment for wildlife and plants. However these areas could easily be disturbed by nearby sports activities and there was more work to be done to ensure the balance between wildlife and the public needs was maintained and the team were open to suggestions.

Councillors raised various questions in regards to qualifications of employees looking after green spaces and general maintenance queries. Specific areas that required further attention were discussed and included Wheatsheaf, Burfield, White Road Lane and Century Yard Sensory Garden. Officers undertook to investigate the sites raised, and Jason added that the skill set of the employees was high. In the event recruitment became more difficult, apprenticeships or bespoke training programmes would be considered.

10. COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT OSC18-005

Tracey Haskins, Green Infrastructure Manager, and Arran Henderson, Senior Green Spaces Development Officer introduced the report. Tracey explained that following on from the presentation from Officers and Marcus Turley earlier in the year and Councillor visits to Brookwood Farm and Sheets Heath, the Committee had requested a programme of maintenance for countryside access and heathlands. The report highlighted themes, challenges, priorities, estimated costs and future maintenance requirements for each category of sites.

The aim of the report at this stage was to secure Councillors' views and thoughts on the proposal and identify priority areas, which would be considered at the next Climate Change Working Group. The report provided the initial stage of creating a sustainable programme.

The Chairman and Councillor Howard thanked Tracey for the report and noted the different levels of resources and the priorities of biodiversity, habitat and peoples' needs. The importance of public awareness was raised, adding that an awareness programme could be beneficial for the public and the future of green spaces.

Councillor Rana drew attention to page 89 of the agenda which showed a budget of £20,000 over a ten year period for lake bank works at Goldsworth Park, which was broken down to £2,000 per year. Due to the size of the lake Councillor Rana enquired whether the estimated budget could be increased. The Chairman added that it would be passed onto and discussed in the Climate Change Working Group.

Following a question from the Chairman, the Committee was updated on the programme of refurbishment and maintenance for play areas, which was not fully complete and would be actioned in 2019. Councillor Hughes added that feedback from residents indicated that there was a desire to have increased access to adult fitness equipment in the Borough. Officers undertook to liaise with the Chairman and to discuss any priorities in the play areas.

Councillors supported the recommendations and welcomed the advice from Officers.

11. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING INFORMATION

The Group received the Green Book, and discussed points raised by Councillor Bond about the number of homelessness and rough sleepers being higher in Woking than in other Boroughs, the comments in the exception report and whether complaints would be detailed in the Green Book.

Leigh Clarke, Finance Director, informed the Committee that a team of Officers collected the information from various sources and identified the data that would be suitable for the Green Book or that was not inline with target. Each section within the Green Book was represented by the Portfolio Holders and was reviewed by the Corporate Management Group, Working Groups and the Executive.

The Chairman added that the number of homelessness and rough sleepers would be discussed at the Housing Task Group on 28 November.

12. TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-YEAR REVIEW 2018/19 OSC18-006

The Committee considered the report on the Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2018/19 and was advised that the content included details of transactions and loans. Similar information could be found in September's issue of the Green Book.

The Chairman raised a question regarding the process for monitoring performance in relation to assets purchased from the revenue created from the Council's invest to save policies. The Committee was assured that investment was always secured within the Borough and with the aspiration of regeneration or other priorities such as, securing employment spaces. An outline of the Strategic Property Investment was set out in the Green Book and had been reviewed by the Finance Task Group.

13. TASK GROUP UPDATES

An update on the work of the Committee's Task Groups would be received at the next Committee on 21 January 2019.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and ended at 9.46 pm

Chairman: _____

Date: _____