

TASK GROUP UPDATE

Executive Summary

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee receives regular updates on the work of the Task Groups that fall within its remit, namely the Economic Development Task Group, the Finance Task Group and the Housing Task Group. Attached are the reports prepared by each of the Chairmen on the current work of the Task Groups.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

RESOLVE That the report be noted.

The Committee has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

Background Papers: None.

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1.0 The Economic Development Task Group – Councillor I Johnson

- 1.1 The Task Group meets twice a year to review the progress of the Economic Strategy. The Chairman also attends ad hoc events to support the Council's public relations effort. The primary focus of the mid-year meeting was the conclusion of the previous Economic Development Strategy 2012 - 2017 and the transition to the new version for the period 2017 - 2022. Simon Matthews, who had helped with the formulation of both of our strategies, assisted us with a transition paper which highlighted how the priorities dove-tailed and how the new strategic priorities could be readily monitored.
- 1.2 Additionally, the Task Group discussed member concerns about the impact on local firms of development in West Byfleet. Officers confirmed they would be happy to assist wherever possible and monitor any proposals.
- 1.3 Towards the end of March, the Task Group would be reviewing the performance of the strategy in its first full year

2.0 The Housing Task Group – Councillor I Johnson

- 2.1 The Task Group had a presentation on the work being undertaken to implement the Homelessness Reduction Act. New online systems would be needed and officers had visited other authorities, which had acted as trailblazers, to check working practices. Various housing policies were impacted by the new strategy, one of which, the allocations policy, was discussed in depth and supported by the Task Group.
- 2.2 Housing performance data showed there had been a large increase in the number of registrations for housing as a result of the proactive work in Sheerwater. They had been logged in Band B which was the second highest priority and it was noted that some of the need would be met from new properties in the regeneration area. There was an average wait of 3.3 years for two-bed properties and 3.2 years for a three-bed.
- 2.3 Affordable housing numbers had increased due to reconfiguration of properties to use space in the existing housing stock not used to their full potential and included adaptations for families with multiple means.
- 2.4 The new Selective Licensing Policy was to come into effect on 1 April and until 31 March landlords could apply for a licence for no fee. There had been extensive publicity and opportunities for landlords to engage with the process and anyone not having a licence would be committing an offence from 1 April.
- 2.5 The Task Group had updates on the Lets Rent scheme which encourages landlords in the private sector to address the Borough's Housing need and the transformation agenda which involves joint working with third parties to achieve efficiencies in supporting residents.

3.0 The Finance Task Group – Councillor G G Chrystie

- 3.1 The Task Group met on 25 January 2018
- 3.2 The Group reviewed the General Fund budget for 2018-19 which would be considered by the Executive at its meeting on 1 February. The proposed 3% increase in Council tax was noted, as was the success of the Surrey Business Rates pilot which is expected to generate additional income for the Council in 2018-19. Government funding forecasts, including New Homes Bonus, were reviewed and the impact on the Medium Term Financial Strategy was discussed. It was noted that there was pressure within the staffing budgets in 2018-19 and that a greater proportion of overheads had been allocated to the General Fund this year. The Group discussed the risks identified and considered that retail income in particular should be closely monitored due to the difficult national position for retailers.

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- 3.3 The draft Investment Programme, which had also been considered at previous meetings, was reviewed. Officers highlighted the most significant changes since the earlier drafts.
- 3.4 The Treasury Management Strategy was considered including the impact of rising interest rates, in particular on the Victoria Square project.
- 3.5 Given the size of the budget papers it was felt that a summary which explained the key points and relationship between the numbers in the various reports would be useful.
- 3.6 The Group noted bad debt write-offs between September and December 2017, and the latest position on Wolsey Place. The December Green Book was discussed in detail. Members of the Group raised a number of questions on the performance and financial information presented including requesting further information on the Opportunity Purchases reported.
- 3.7 The Group also considered the Earn Your Deposit scheme and were supportive of the proposals.

REPORT ENDS