

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 21 November 2022

Present:

Cllr A Azad (Chairman)
Cllr J R Sanderson (Vice-Chair)

Cllr K M Davis
Cllr C S Kemp
Cllr J P Morley

Cllr P J T Graves
Cllr A Kirby

Also Present: Councillors A-M Barker, J Brown and R N Leach

Absent: Councillors H Akberali, A Caulfield and M I Raja

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Akberali, Caulfield and Raja.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Monday, 17 October 2022 be approved and signed as a true and correct record subject to the following amendment:

Item 7: Centres for the Community (OSC22-050)

The sixth paragraph, second sentence be amended to read:

“Members asked that the development of a centralised, online booking system for facilities at the Community Centres be considered in addition to the phone booking system.”

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES OSC22-054

The Chairman introduced the report on matters raised at previous meetings of the Committee, drawing the Committee’s attention to actions undertaken subsequently.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

4. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business to discuss.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Declarations of Interest were made.

6. CELEBRATE WOKING 2022/2023 REVIEW AND FORWARD PLAN OSC22-056

Riëtte Thomas, Business Liaison Officer, presented a review of the past year of the Celebrate Woking Programme and a draft of the proposed programme for Celebrate Woking 2023.

The Committee discussed the 2022 Summer in the Square programme and what improvements could be made if repeated in 2023. There had been incidents of anti-social behaviour that had increased costs by £5,000 due to the need for additional security. A Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) had been in force in the Town Centre since February 2022 which granted specific powers for Surrey Police to tackle anti-social behaviour. Whilst Members were mindful of the resource implications for Surrey Police, they were concerned that it had been necessary to employ private security rather than the Police respond to anti-social behaviour issues, especially in the Town Centre where the PSPO was fully operational. Members recognised that Summer in the Square carried a monetary cost to the Council but noted the positive impact it had on the Town Centre and local businesses.

Members wished to know if there were any plans to hold events connected to the Football World Cup. It was not possible to host such an event in Henry Plaza due to fire safety concerns: the glass roof prevented the installation of a sprinkler system and therefore limited what could be held in the space. It was additionally noted by officers that the Police had advised hosting World Cup-related events required a significantly raised police presence. Members commented that maybe the Council should be mindful that the lack of promotion of football events in comparison with, for example, Wimbledon as a part of Summer in the Square may promote a stereotypical image of football fans. Officers noted Members' observations about the promotion of football events and in particular the present World Cup. However, due to the short period of time to organise an event for the World Cup, Officers recommended promoting local hospitality venues, a number of which were already showing the football matches.

Photos that had adorned Market Walk for a number of years had been removed and Officers undertook to establish further details and inform Members if and when they would be reinstalled.

In recognition of the Council's budget constraints, it had been proposed that the events surrounding the Coronation of King Charles III in May 2023 be coordinated with a partner, Nova Cinema, which would reduce the cost to the Council. On days around the Coronation, Community Centres were to host tea parties. The previous Coronation had encouraged communities to produce artworks and photography and it had been proposed that this be emulated for the Coronation of King Charles III. The Group shared concern that the simultaneous running of the May elections and Coronation events could put too much pressure on Council Officers. However, it was anticipated that the partnership with

Nova Cinema may assist to reduce the amount of council resources required for the Coronation.

Officers undertook to consider if there was appetite for a food festival as part of future Celebrate Woking Programmes following a request by Members.

The Committee enquired as to the possibility of buying a screen for Jubilee Square as opposed to continuing to hire. Officers noted that the cost of hire included a support package provided by the contractor and the cost had not increased for several years. It was suggested that a sponsor be sought for the screen.

In previous years local sports clubs had been included in Celebrate Woking, as part of Party in the Park. However, Party in the Park was not scheduled to be held in 2023 and Members requested that alternative opportunities be considered for local clubs.

Members requested Italia Conti, and other local dance schools, be offered opportunity through Celebrate Woking. Officers informed the Committee that Italia Conti had been given rehearsal space at the Rhoda McGaw Theatre for 32 weeks per year and alternative locations for other dance schools was being sought.

[Post-Meeting Note: The information provided by Officers at the meeting contained an error. Italia Conti had a contractual agreement for 9-weeks rehearsal space at the Rhoda McGaw theatre per year, not 32 weeks. Buzz Theatre rehearsal space continued to be available for hire throughout the year for any interested in hiring it.]

The Woking Jazz festival had relocated to Send due to the cost of hiring space in Woking.

The Committee expressed their wish that the Council continued to fund Celebrate Woking for 2023.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

7. TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-YEAR REVIEW OSC22-058

Leigh Clarke, Director of Finance, presented the Treasury Management Mid-Year Review, in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Code of Practice for Treasury Management.

Much of the information contained in the Review continued to be provided in the monthly Performance and Financial Monitoring Information (PFMI or Green Book).

Throughout November, a large maturation of loans, £65mil, was due to occur with a further £30mil due in December. Previously, the Council preferred to take long-term loans but, due to recent economic instability, a series of laddered, short-term loans was taken, following independent professional advice. A number of loans had been taken out for either three, six, or nine months. Interest rates on long-term loans had been deemed excessively high and it was anticipated that these would reduce over time.

The Council continued to review whether to reschedule any debt given the recent increase in interest rates.

The Council secured loans from two sources: the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) and the inter-Local Authority loans market, which was facilitated by brokers. Due to recent volatility in rates, a number of Local Authorities had chosen not to offer loans on the loans market. There was a difference in fees between the PWLB and brokerages which was considered when choosing which source to use for loans.

Subsequent to the recent demotion of the UK's credit rating, to AA-, the Council amended its investment policy to ensure it could continue investment in the UK.

It was noted that the Council's total borrowing was £1.9bil as at 30 September 2022 with an approved limit of £2.3bil. The limit was part of the Investment Programme and allowed for any slippage or speeding-up of Council projects or if the Council's companies required additional financing.

Following a question, officers confirmed that the flexibility provided by not having a minimum threshold for amount of debt as access to long-term loans was beneficial to the Council.

Members enquired whether a review of financial indicators could take place and feed back either to the Finance Task Group or the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee discussed interest rate volatility during the past quarter and Officers confirmed that they had spiked in August and September and were mobile throughout each week. The Green Books for October and November, once published, would reflect that. Officers confirmed that multiple sources from industry professionals were used when assessing the likely values of future rates.

RESOLVED

that the report be received and compliance with the Council's approved strategy be noted.

8. ENERGY EFFICIENCY REPORT OSC22-059

Tracey Haskins, Green Infrastructure Manager, presented an overview of the Energy Efficiency Report that had been requested by Members. Other contributors were available to answer Members queries: Jade Bowes, Daniel Ashe, Adam Browne and Sam Pepper.

The UK Government had announced new policy subsequent to the publication of the report. The Energy Price cap had been extended beyond April 2023 and increased to £3,000. There were a number of means-tested financial aids announced in addition.

As part of the report, Officers contacted private developers, architects and planning agents to seek their input. Members were appreciative that EcoWorld London, the developer of a project on Goldsworth Road, had responded but were disappointed that other developers of sites in the Borough had not. There was concern that no response suggested developers were not prioritising energy efficiency in their builds.

The Committee was interested in using the commitment that the Council had to energy efficient construction as a means of friendly competition with private developers to spur them into making their projects more energy efficient.

Adam Browne, Housing Assets Manager, confirmed that residential rental properties were required to have a minimum Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Rating of E. The priority was to ensure that all Council Stock was at least an EPC Rating of E. The Council had recently employed a new Head of Housing Assets, Craig Humphrey and efforts had begun on developing a strategy to raise properties to EPC rating C, in line with the Government's proposed minimum C rating by 2030. Of the 2% that were below E rating, the majority were due to non-engagement by tenants. A number of strategies had been considered, including formal action against tenants, however that had been considered excessive. The Council had recently had success by educating residents in non-compliant Council Stock properties that improvements would reduce their utility costs and, without the improvements, their properties would be ineligible for future grants, preventing possible future improvements to the properties.

Members were surprised that the Council had not applied for funds from the most recent Decarbonisation Housing Fund. Officers confirmed that the Council lacked the software and resource required to pull together the large amount of data required for the bid. Additionally, the most recent round of funding required Local Authorities to match the amount of funding provided by the Decarbonisation fund and that a minimum of 100 properties were improved. The Council had the means to match the funding for ten properties and there had been a countywide attempt to form a consortium with neighbouring authorities for the remaining 90. However, the total number of properties that could be joined together was insufficient.

The Committee discussed fuel-poverty and enquired how many of the Council's tenants were possibly in fuel-poverty and if this was an appropriate metric of who to target with help. Members also enquired what projections there were that estimated how many would be in fuel poverty in the coming months. Officers undertook to supply the information outside of the meeting.

Sam Pepper, Environmental Programme Manager for ThamesWey Group, confirmed that there had been national funding to provide insulation in homes, but there had not been the same for installation of LED bulbs. ThamesWey had run the Woking Energy Champions Project and through that had financed the replacement of bulbs from a Legacy Fund provided by Action Surrey.

Sam Pepper confirmed that ThamesWey Group had committed to applying ISO 14001 to housing and development from next year onwards. It was already applied to energy assets.

Members enquired what support was provided to park homes in aiding them to access the Energy Support Grant. Previous projects had provided help to park homes, but there were some limitations due to fire safety where homes were in proximity with each other. Additionally, many park homes were on sites with management companies that were not always receptive to working with the Council or ThamesWey. However, ThamesWey was bidding for funding specifically aimed at properties that were off grid for gas, which could benefit some park homes sites. Officers undertook to provide more information outside of the meeting.

The Committee enquired what actions could be used to encourage developers to focus on energy efficiency through national and local planning policy. Officers confirmed that energy efficiency matters were being considered as part of the upcoming update of the Climate Change Strategy Supplementary Planning Document.

Members commented that proposals could be made by Councillors to help residential areas using Community Infrastructure Levy funding.

National Future Homes Standard references the 'fabric first approach', by maximising the performance of the parts and materials that make up the building's fabric itself, before considering the use of mechanical or electrical building services systems. Although spending more on each property would increase efficiency there were diminishing returns that made it not feasible to construct with energy efficiency in mind beyond a certain point.

Officers confirmed that they actively sought external funding for energy efficiency improvements in the Borough but there had been no more found to date.

The Council had recently run a project to identify privately rented properties in the Borough that were below EPC rating E. It had resulted in enforcement action being taken on the owners of several properties. Officers confirmed that identified properties would continue to be followed up.

The Chairman noted the Recommendations which highlighted some of the work that the Council was taking as part of its actions of Climate Change.

RESOLVED

That:

- (i) the outcomes of these enquiries, as set out in the report be noted;
- (ii) the Council prepares for the further planned changes of the National Future Homes Standards, to ensure that new homes and extensions meet the highest possible energy efficiency standards;
- (iii) welcomes the forthcoming revised Climate Change Strategy and Climate Change Supplementary Planning Document in order to secure the latest energy efficiency best practice in development;
- (iv) supports the Council continuing to prepare bids for external funding opportunities that directly relate to energy efficiency improvements; and
- (v) recommends that Planning Development Management develops standard conditions in line with Building Regulations to secure energy efficiency outcomes.

9. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE OSC22-043

Kevin Foster, Strategic Director for Corporate Resources, presented the report on Risk Management that was due to go before the Executive on 19 January 2023.

A review of how the Council handled risk management had elicited several recommendations. One of the recommendations had been to provide Members with training on risk management. This had been provided.

The Council had committed to making its Strategic Risk Register public, which was included at appendix two of the Item.

Members recommended several changes to the Risk Register: the inclusion of how risks change between editions; the removal of acronyms or inclusion of a glossary of terms, for the benefit of residents; implicit in several other risks, energy costs and inflation be more overtly displayed; and risk of not meeting the Council's 2030 Carbon Neutral target. Officers undertook to consider the recommendations.

It was emphasised that the register contained risks to the Council rather than issues experienced by the Council. The Medium Term Financial Strategy had been developed in recognition of the Risk Register.

Each directorate operated its own Risk Register and items were considered for inclusion on the Council's Strategic Risk register if the corresponding Strategic Director considered that the risk required input at a corporate level.

RECOMMENDED TO THE EXECUTIVE

That the Strategic Risk Register reflects the key risks currently facing the Council and that measures to mitigate each risk have been recorded and are being actioned by officers.

10. WORK PROGRAMME OSC22-055

Councillor Azad introduced the report on the updated Work Programme, drawing the Committee's attention to the key changes since the document had last been received.

Subsequent to publication, the agenda for 23 January 2023 had changed. The Committee was to receive a presentation from Affinity Water on their proposed Water Resources Action Plan. The JWS Performance Review item had been broadened to include a Forward Plan and Interim Strategy Presentation. Members requested that JWS and Amey provide an update on the renewal of garden waste disposal as part of the presentation.

The Committee requested that Thames Water be invited to the 23 January meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Officers undertook to extend an invitation.

To accommodate the additional items, it had been proposed that the Noise Complaints Update and Overview and Scrutiny Committee Communications Plan be postponed to March 2023.

Giorgio Framaliccio, Strategic Director of Place, updated the Committee on the Suggested Additions to the Work Programme. It had been recognised that Members wanted the Annual Review of Complaints Report structured in such a way to provide Members with more details about the complaints received by the Council. It was noted that several other reports covering complaints and department-specific caseloads were regularly submitted to Committees and Working Groups of the Council. Officers therefore confirmed that in response to Members' comments, a review of the operational management of complaints, as well as the structure and process of the Complaints reports, was being undertaken and Members would be updated as soon as a unified approach had been formulated.

It was recognised that Surrey County Council's Bus Strategy proposal, as part of the National Bus Back Better Policy, could not be scrutinised at Overview and Scrutiny. This was due to the consultation process ending before the next meeting of the Committee. The Committee agreed that a response would be drafted by Officers and presented to both

the Portfolio Holder and members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee outside of the meeting and submitted to Surrey County Council as part of their consultation.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

11. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING INFORMATION

The Members of the Committee were invited to raise any points in respect of the recently published Performance & Financial Monitoring Information (PFMI).

Following the publication of the August PFMI, the Committee requested that the Exceptions Report be included once again, which was reflected in the September edition.

Following a query, Officers confirmed that the energy cost estimates had recently been reviewed and reflected the fluctuations that had occurred through August and September.

Officers confirmed that the new, quarterly, Working For All Performance Indicators, set to replace the PFMI, were expected to begin operation at the start of the next Municipal Year.

RESOLVED

That the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information (September 2022) be noted.

12. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TASK GROUP UPDATE OSC22-060

The Committee received the update report of the Economic Development Task Group.

RESOLVED

That the Economic Development Task Group Update be noted.

13. HIF TASK GROUP UPDATE OSC22-062

The Committee received the update report of the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) Task Group.

The respective Chairs of the HIF and the dormant HIF Housing Outputs Task Groups agreed to discuss if further meetings of the HIF Housing Outputs Task Group were required subsequent to the meeting.

RESOLVED

That the HIF Task Group Update be noted.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 21 November 2022

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and ended at 9.17 pm.

Chairman: _____

Date: _____