

## PETITION – SHEERWATER HEALTH CENTRE

**Meeting:** Council

**Date Of Meeting:** 12 December 2024

**Report Author(s):** Frank Jeffrey, Head of Democratic Services | frank.jeffrey@woking.gov.uk

**Lead Officer:** Louise Strongitharm, Strategic Director, Communities  
louisestrongitharm@woking.gov.uk

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Ian Johnson | cllrian.johnson@woking.gov.uk

**Date Published:** 5 December 2024

Will the decision be open for call in (i.e. is it a key decision)?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

### 1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 Woking Borough Council has received a petition which asks the Council to establish a fit-for-purpose building and financial compensation, to achieve an improved health centre in Sheerwater.
- 1.2 In accordance with Woking Borough Council's arrangements for petitions, the matter has been referred for consideration by the Council. The Council is invited to consider the implications of the request together with the Officer advice before deciding on any course of action.

### 2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Council is requested to consider the petition and determine accordingly.

### 3.0 Proposal and Outcome

- 3.1 It is recommended that:

The Council continues to work with the GP's practice and NHS partners to support the provision of health services in Sheerwater. However, for the reasons set out in this report, the Council is unable to provide a new health centre building or provide financial compensation to the GP's practice.

### 4.0 The Petition

- 4.1 A petition has been received from Dr M Mohamed of the Sheerwater Health Centre which exceeds the minimum number of signatures required for a petition to be presented to Council. The petition contains the details of 672 individuals wishing to express their support for the Health Centre's request; a further 45 individuals have marked the petition but have not provided a signature and/or a complete address.

Wording of the Petition

4.2 Each page of the petition has the following wording:

*Sheerwater Health Centre*

*Your help needed to secure improved health centre*

*Woking Borough Council have let you down – no new health centre*

*\*\*\*\*\*Campaign to improve existing building\*\*\*\*\**

*I support the campaign for an improved health centre, and that Woking Borough Council should support this in providing a fit-for-purpose building and financial compensation.*

4.3 Some of the pages of the petition have the additional five points:

- *Woking Borough Council promised a new and bigger Health Centre – ABANDONED*
- *The Health Centre has become run down and not fit-for-purpose*
- *More space is urgently needed to provide care for the local population*
- *Staff recruitment and retention is adversely affected by the current facilities*
- *Regeneration scheme has caused significant loss of Health Centre income – compensation and ongoing support needed from Woking Borough Council*

4.4 The petition was received by the Chief Executive at the end of October 2024, together with a covering letter from Dr Mohamed. The text of the letter is set out in Appendix 1 to this report.

## **5.0 Petitions Scheme**

5.1 The Council's arrangements for a petition are set out in detail in the Authority's constitution (Section 7 of Part 4 – [Council Procedure Rules](#)) and explained on the Council's [website](#).

5.2 As the number of signatories exceeds 400, the petition falls to be debated at full Council. In accordance with the Council's scheme for dealing with petitions, the petitioner has been invited to attend the meeting and present the petition. The ward Councillors for the area covered by the petition have been notified of its receipt and a copy of the petition has been added to the Council's website.

5.3 The presentation of a petition is limited to not more than three minutes, and should be confined to reading out, or summarising, the purpose of the petition, indicating the number and description of signatories, and making supporting remarks relevant to the petition.

5.4 Following the presentation, Members will have the opportunity to ask questions of the petitioner. Thereafter, the Council will discuss the petition and determine what action, if any, is to be taken.

- 5.5 The Council shall consider all the specific actions it can potentially take on the issues highlighted in a petition and the Councillors will decide how to respond to the petition at this meeting.
- 5.6 A motion suggesting a formal response to the petition shall be proposed and seconded at the meeting and dealt with under the normal rules of debate, provided that any such motion must respond explicitly to the request in the petition i.e. that part of the petition which asks the Council to take some form of action.
- 5.7 The Council may decide to support the action the petition requests, or not, or refer the matter to another meeting, such as the Executive or a Scrutiny Committee, for further consideration. The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of this decision.

### **Officer Comments**

- 5.8 On 6 April 2017, the Council formally appointed ThamesWey Developments Limited (TDL) to deliver the Sheerwater regeneration scheme. The £492m scheme aimed to deliver 1,142 new residential units, along with the associated community infrastructure, over a phased programme lasting circa 9 years. This was due to include a new replacement health facility as part of Yellow phase.
- 5.9 Following the issue of the S114 notice on 7 June 2023, it became clear that the Council could not afford, and ThamesWey could not rely on, the future borrowing required to complete the regeneration. Subsequently, in July 2023, the Council agreed that the existing Development Agreement between the Council and ThamesWey for the delivery of the Sheerwater regeneration project be brought to an end and no new phases would commence following those currently under construction.
- 5.10 Following the decision that ThamesWey would not proceed with any new phases of the regeneration project, a consultation was undertaken with residents and stakeholders in the Sheerwater area to understand their views on the future of the regeneration area. 53.5% of respondents stated that the Health Centre was 'good' or 'reasonable' as opposed to 25.2% who stated that the Health Centre was 'poor'. In response to the consultation feedback, and independent advice on how best to find a financially sustainable delivery option for the Sheerwater regeneration project, a decision was taken to retain the existing community facilities, which were generally considered to be in a good or reasonable condition.
- 5.11 Despite the majority of those surveyed saying the health centre was satisfactory, the Council accepts its responsibility as a landlord to maintain the building to a suitable standard. To that end, officers from the Council's Property team have been working with the GP's practice to address building concerns. A productive meeting was recently held with all stakeholders and clear path forward agreed.
- 5.12 The Council also recognises that the Sheerwater regeneration project has impacted upon patient numbers and has supported the GP practice with rent subsidy as a result. However, ThamesWey are about to complete a new phase of regeneration which should help increase patient numbers, and the remaining areas will be developed in due course by a private developer.

5.13 In summary, the Council regrets the disruption that the changes to the planned Sheerwater regeneration scheme has caused for residents. Whilst the current health centre is viewed as being as fit-for-purpose, the Council is working in its capacity as landlord to address any building concerns. The Council will also raise the concerns of Sheerwater residents regarding local health services with the NHS through the North-West Surrey Alliance, a partnership organisation of health, local government, and voluntary organisations which works together on health and wellbeing issues.

## **6.0 Implications**

### Legal

- 6.1 Under the terms of the Council's constitution, a petition with the number of comments received will need to be considered by Full Council.
- 6.2 The proposal for the provision of a new health centre is not one which is a decision of the Full Council. This would be a decision of the NHS. The request for compensation which forms part of the request for the new building on the basis of the information provided as part of the petition does not fall within the remit of the Council.

### Resources (including finance)

- 6.3 The Council is over £2 billion in debt due its historic investment strategy. The Council has neither the resources, nor the funding, to complete the Sheerwater Regeneration Scheme as originally envisioned. GP facilities fall outside the statutory responsibilities of a Borough Council.

### Risks and Mitigation

- 6.4 Decisions around the future of the Sheerwater regeneration project have been taken to reduce the financial risks to the Council.

### Consultation, Equality Impact Assessments

- 6.5 An extensive consultation took place Summer 2023, to enable residents and local stakeholders to have their say on the future of the Sheerwater regeneration project. The Council also commissioned a consultant to update the Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) to continually assess the potential impacts of the scheme on groups with protected characteristics.

### Environment and Climate Change

- 6.6 There are no environmental or climate change implications from this response.

## **7.0 Supporting Documents**

### Appendices

- 7.1 Appendix 1 – Text of the Covering Letter received by the Chief Executive

### Background Documents

- 7.2 Executive Report - 'Sheerwater Regeneration', 13 July 2023

7.3 Executive Report - 'Sheerwater Regeneration' - 5 October 2023

7.4 Executive Report - Companies Governance Framework and Business Cases for Victoria Square Woking Ltd and ThamesWey Developments Ltd (Sheerwater) Supported Borrowing – 16 November 2023

**Report Ends**

### Text of the Covering Letter accompanying the Petition

Petition from the Patients of Sheerwater Health Centre

Sheerwater Regeneration programme has had a major impact on patients registered with the Practice. This has had a several pronged impact on the Practice:

- Loss of patients due to patient relocations (to facilitate the regeneration)
- Loss of Practice income as a result of loss of registered patients
- Existing building no longer fit for purpose
- Lack of space required to meet the needs of the local population
- Staff recruitment and retention issues – adverse effected of current facilities

Movement of patients away from the area has resulted in a significant reduction in the practice population leading to a loss of income, making it difficult to support patient services to standards dictated by Surrey Heartlands ICB (and the Care Quality Commission). Following discussions with Woking Borough Council the Practice, with the help of the ICB, presented a business case to support the Practice financially for loss of income during the period of regeneration. The report used NHS published information to determine transparently the loss incurred by the Practice.

The Council has previously accepted the business case:

*“The Council has previously acknowledged that there has been a gradual decline in patient numbers registered at the Practice, albeit with a time lag, as residents move to homes outside of the development area. This reduction in turn results in a loss to the Practice of the revenue from the NHS, whose payments are (in the main) calculated on a ‘per registered patient’ basis.”*

However, the slow growth in patient registrations due to delays in various building projects has meant that the Practice will have suffered a loss of income of around £50,000 by the end of this year (2024).

All GP practices have agreed with the health authority to define boundaries within which patients can be registered for health services. Throughout all the years, the practice has never prevented new patients from registering – an uphill task if some of patients have been forced out of area during regeneration programme.

Despite providing outstanding patient care, potential new patients also find it unattractive to visit practice premises surrounded by constant building construction/demolition work on virtually all sides of the surgery building. This has also had an adverse effect on staff recruitment and since the beginning of this year we have been unable to recruit another doctor.

In addition to this, the location of the Health Centre now being isolated at the end of a cul-de-sac is attracting undesirable antisocial behaviours with vandalism and probable drug dealing in the car park. The staff arrive in the mornings to litter and detritus that they should not be expected to deal with. The impression this gives is of a yet more downtrodden area. The Police have advised that this is a matter for the Landlords (Woking Borough Council) to provide measures to improve security.

## **Petition – Sheerwater Health Centre**

It has been disappointing that the practice will not be moving to a new building and the practice is desperate for space, which fortunately is now available with the departure of the adjacent dental practice. However, the Practice is unable to take advantage of this until the premises have been upgraded to CQC standards and can only then benefit from NHS investment in additional staff to provide patient services.

As a Practice, and with support from the ICB, there have been multiple attempts to engage with Woking Borough Council to discuss the requirements that need to be addressed by the landlord (WBC), which have made no progress.

Our patients are naturally very disappointed, as are we, that due to lack of space we are unable to expand our services to meet their needs, particularly in bring care closer to home. The existing building is no longer fit for purpose.

The petition for better health centre facilities and financial support has demonstrated overwhelming response from the patients of Sheerwater Health Centre with over 700 signatures. We urge the Council to give priority to working with us in upgrading the Health Centre facilities to enable patients to benefit from NHS investment in providing patient services.

Your sincerely,

Dr Munira Mohamed