

COUNCIL MEETING

25 October 2023

ADDENDUM TO THE COUNCIL MINUTE BOOK

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| 9. | Audit and Standards Committee - 3 October 2023 | (Pages 9 - 12) |
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**Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive
held on 17 October 2023**

+ Cllr Shaun Macdonald (Chair)

- | | |
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| + Cllr Alan Ashbery | + Cllr Morgan Rise |
| + Cllr Kel Finan-Cooke | + Cllr John Skipper |
| + Cllr Lisa Finan-Cooke | + Cllr Helen Whitcroft |
| + Cllr Leanne MacIntyre | |

+ Present

In Attendance: Cllr Louise Ashbery, Cllr Jonny Cope, Cllr Shaun Garrett, Cllr Julie Hoad, Cllr Sarbie Kang, Cllr Emma-Jane McGrath, Cllr Lewis Mears, Cllr Sashi Mylvaganam, Cllr Liz Noble, Cllr Jonathan Quin, Cllr Murray Rowlands, Cllr Pat Tedder, Cllr Kevin Thompson, Cllr Josh Thorne, Cllr Victoria Wheeler, Cllr David Whitcroft, Cllr Valerie White and Cllr Richard Wilson

34/E Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2023 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

35/E Questions by Members

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Shaun Macdonald responded to a question from Councillor Richard Wilson by expanding on the Council's position on the recent conflict in Israel and reiterating its ongoing support for Jewish and Palestinian residents within the borough.

The Leader responded to a number of questions from Councillors Shaun Garrett, Lewis Mears, Jonathan Quin, Josh Thorne and Victoria Wheeler following his recent statement on the Council's financial position.

Councillor Alan Ashbery, the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Transport & Planning, responded to a question from Councillor Richard Wilson by updating Members on the actions taken in response to concerns about Surrey County Council shutting a footbridge over the M3.

36/E Local Community Project Fund Bids

In October 2020, the Executive had set up the Local Community Improvement Fund for bids to use local CIL funds for the non-parished wards. The Fund pooled the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy contributions to allow wards that did not deliver new development, but did experience its impact, to have access to CIL funding. It also allowed the community to bid for funding for small scale local capital projects.

The Executive considered five applications that had been received during the round of bids open between 3 July and 31 July 2023. These applications related to:

- a. the installation of a Bike Repair Point at High Cross Church in Town ward;
- b. the restoration of Frimley Village Hall in Frimley Green ward;
- c. the refurbishment of the Well Community Centre in Watchetts ward;
- d. the installation of an outdoor gym and 2 picnic tables at Frimley Green Recreation Ground in Frimley Green ward; and
- e. the installation of signage and planters in Deepcut within the Mytchett & Deepcut ward.

It was noted that, as the applicant for the installation of the Bike Repair Point at High Cross Church had been submitted by the Chair of Surrey Heath Liberal Democrats, members of the Executive did not intend to vote on the application and referred it to the Full Council for consideration.

RESOLVED that, in line with the CIL bids detailed in Annex 1 of the agenda report,

- (i) £3,744 be awarded to Frimley Village Hall for the restoration of the Village Hall floor (Bid 2);**
- (ii) £10,462 be awarded to The Well Community Centre for the refurbishment of the Community Centre (Bid 3);**
- (iii) £20,800 (net) be awarded to Frimley Green Recreation Ground for the installation of an outdoor gym and 2 picnic tables (Bid 4); and**
- (iv) £12,400 be awarded to Deepcut Neighbourhood Forum for the installation of signage and planters (Bid 5).**

RECOMMENDED to Full Council that

- (i) a decision be made in respect of awarding £1,500 to High Cross Church for the installation of a Bike Repair Point (Bid 1); and**
- (ii) £20,800 be added to the Council's Capital Programme for the installation of an outdoor gym and 2 picnic tables at Frimley Green Recreation Ground.**

Note 1: In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct Councillor Kel Finan-Cook and Councillor Lisa Finan-Cooke declared non-pecuniary interests as they ran a Warm Hub at the Well Community Centre, the subject of Bid 3. They left the Council Chamber during the consideration of the item.

Note 2: It was noted for the record that

- (i) Councillor Morgan Rise and Councillor Helen Whitcroft declared that they had sent letters of support for the applications in their respective ward; and
- (ii) On behalf of all members of the Executive Councillor Shaun Macdonald declared that they knew the applicant for Bid 1, the installation of a Bike Repair Point at High Cross Church, as he was the Chair of Surrey Heath Liberal Democrats. He informed the meeting that the application would be referred to Full Council for decision.

37/E Residents Panels

The Executive considered a report detailing proposals for introducing Residents Panels. The Panels were intended to bring residents and partner agencies together to examine the big issues facing local residents, improve engagement between the Council, residents and communities, as well as empowering residents and partner agencies to have their voices heard when resolving major issues that impact across the borough. It was intended to link Residents Panels to the Council's established petitions process.

Members noted the eligibility criteria for Residents Panels and were advised that, as the Panels would have to be managed within existing resources, it was proposed to allow a maximum of three Panels within a 12 month period.

RESOLVED that the procedure for residents to apply for and attend a Residents Panel through the petitions process, as set out at the Annex to the agenda report, be adopted by the Council and communicated on the website.

38/E Youth Council Options

The Executive considered a report setting out progress on exploring the options for continuation of the Youth Council and the establishment of a Young Mayor, as requested by the Council at its meeting on 26 July 2023 (minute 24/C refers).

It was reported that there had been limited success to date in securing a new provider for managing the Youth Council, although a meeting would be taking place the following week with a potential provider. Members were advised that, although securing an external provider to run the Youth Council remained the preferred approach, the option to directly employ a youth worker to run the service had not been ruled out.

In relation to the establishment of a Young Mayor, it was suggested that this should be explored separately by the Governance Working Group once the status of the Youth Council had been established at the December Executive meeting as the establishment of the Youth Council and the Young Mayor role overlapped.

RESOLVED that

- (i) officers continue to explore options to identify a potential external supplier to support the Youth Council together with funding**

options and report further progress back to the December Executive Meeting; and

- (ii) the establishment of the Young Mayor be referred to the Governance Working Group for further consideration after the December Executive Meeting, once the outcome to (i) is known.**

39/E Finance Service Stabilisation Review

The Executive considered a report setting out changes proposed to the finance service which were intended to strengthen the Council's financial processes and address the resourcing issues within the Finance Accountancy and Transactions team. The report detailed a revised staffing structure and proposed changes to the Council's financial processes.

Members were informed that the revised structure proposed would see a base budget cost increase of at least £250k, which would be identified as a growth bid as part of the budget setting process in February 2024. It was noted that the proposals were intended to remove reliance on agency staff.

RESOLVED that

- (i) the actions proposed by the Council's Strategic Director Finance and Customer Services (the Chief Finance Officer appointed under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972), set out in the main text of the agenda report and summarised at Annex A to the agenda report be supported;**
- (ii) a budget growth bid on the current establishment of a minimum of £250k be considered as part of the budget process reported to full Council in February 2024; and**
- (iii) the cost of supporting the Council's stabilisation of its finance functions in the current year be noted.**

40/E Property Update

The Executive discussed a report setting out the current and projected income and costs associated with the Council's Property Portfolio including some of its major retail acquisitions.

RESOLVED to note

- (i) the findings of the agenda report;**
- (ii) the cost of debt financing and repayment funded by the income generated by the Council's property portfolio and any surplus/deficits therein; and**

(iii) that this type of analysis and reporting will be adopted in future annual performance reports on property related activities to the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee.

41/E Exclusion of Press and Public

In accordance with Regulation 4 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012, the press and public were excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the ground that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as set out below:

Minute	Paragraph(s)
42/E	3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

42/E Contract Update

The Executive received an update on a contractual matter.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

Chair

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Minutes of a Meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held at Council Chamber, Surrey Heath House, Knoll Road, Camberley, GU15 3HD on 3 October 2023

- + Cllr Cliff Betton (Chair)
- Bob Raikes (Vice Chair)

- Cllr Jonny Cope
- + Cllr Rob Lee

- + Cllr Leanne MacIntyre
- Josh Thorne
- + Cllr Pat Tedder

- + Present
- Apologies for absence presented

Substitutes: Cllr Shaun Garrett (In place of Cllr Josh Thorne), Cllr David Whitcroft (In place of Cllr Bob Raikes) and Cllr Valerie White (In place of Cllr Jonny Cope)

Members in Attendance: Alex Middleton, Gavin Ramtohal, Bob Watson, Cllr Julie Hoad, Cllr Nirmal Kang, Cllr Sarbie Kang, Cllr Shaun Macdonald, Cllr Emma-Jane McGrath, Cllr Lewis Mears, Cllr Morgan Rise, Cllr Kevin Thompson, Cllr Victoria Wheeler and Cllr Richard Wilson

7/AS Minutes

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2023.

It was agreed to amend the minutes of the meeting to reflect that the Committee asked for cyber-audits, instead of them being discussed.

The minutes were subsequently agreed.

8/AS Annual Governance Statement

The Committee considered a report setting out the draft Annual Corporate Governance Statement for the 2022/23 financial year.

There was a statutory requirement for the Council to produce an Annual Corporate Governance statement that reviewed the effectiveness of the Council's control systems and provided high level assurance on governance matters and issues within the Council. The Statement formed part of the final accounts for each financial year and set out the governance arrangements in place at the Council, highlighted any key issues identified during the year and summarised progress made towards addressing any previously identified issues; senior officers had also been asked to provide management assurance statements where key issues had been identified.

It was reported that for the first time the statement included headings on Project Management, Risk Management and Carbon Net Zero, which reflected greater focus in these areas.

Whilst it was acknowledged that the Corporate Risk Register was considered by the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis, it was suggested that there was an opportunity for Member-review of the register on a more regular basis. Furthermore, it was requested that the most up to date copy of the register was circulated to Members following the meeting.

Following Members' questions, it was acknowledged that statistics on received Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) requests were regularly reported. However, as it stood there was not a uniform process for the publication of answers following successful FOI requests. Whilst there was a desire from some Members in respect of the maintenance of a register which would publically document all successful FOI requests and their answers, such a facility would require significantly more Officer resource.

Moreover, it was picked up that the 2021-22 Annual Governance Statement documented that Officers met every 6 months in order to review which exempt documents were now appropriate to release in to the public domain. However, following discussion it was recognised that the policy was very resource intensive and as a result was no longer pursued. However, moving forward it was suggested that there was an opportunity to consider the creation of an index of exempt documents.

Following Councillors' questions it was also advised that there were continued areas for improvement, which were also mentioned in the 2021-22 statement including the need for further resource and better utilisation of bundle documents.

RESOLVED that the signing of the Annual Governance Statement by the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive be recommended.

9/AS Verbal Update on Accounts

The Committee received a verbal update from the Strategic Director, Finance and Customer Services as to the status of the external audit of the 2019-20 accounts.

As it stood there was still not a set of accounts to present to the Committee and to be subsequently signed. The Council had been advised during discussions with BDO, that in order to complete the audit, despite having already been furnished with the excel format of the Primary Statements and the necessary working papers, the auditors needed the final word version of the accounts before they undertook the audit fieldwork. This was despite the fact it was the professional opinion of experienced Council accountants and former auditors that such documents were not required to progress the audit. It was anticipated that the word version of the Statement of Accounts, including assumptions on the audit adjustments would be send to BDO, CC'ing in the Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee and the Performance and Finance Portfolio Holder. This would also be published on the Council website.

In addition, new government proposals stated that all outstanding accounts for up to 19-20 must be completed and audited by the end of the calendar year.

It was noted that the current financial year's accounts would be audited by Grant Thornton.

Following discussion from the Committee it was advised that BDO had advised that they would be in Surrey Heath House in early September to conduct fieldwork and that they had set aside 8 weeks of auditor time in order to complete the audit of the accounts, meetings had been cancelled by BDO, and constructive dialogue had been denied or refused. Furthermore, Members showed their disappointment that the accounts for the 20-21, and 21-22 accounts were likely to be disclaimed.

Furthermore, following discussion, Committee Members were reassured that Officers were confident as to the start balances for the financial years subsequent to 19-20.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

Chair

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**Minutes of a Meeting of the
Employment Committee held at
Council Chamber, Surrey Heath
House, Knoll Road, Camberley, GU15
3HD on 12 October 2023**

+ Cllr David Whitcroft (Chairman)
+ Cllr Shaun Macdonald (Vice Chairman)

- Cllr Shaun Macdonald	+ Cllr Leanne MacIntyre
+ Cllr Alan Ashbery	- Cllr Sashi Mylvaganam
+ Cllr Lisa Finan-Cooke	+ Cllr Josh Thorne
Cllr Mark Gordon	+ Cllr Victoria Wheeler

+ Present
- Apologies for absence presented

Substitutes: Cllr Mary Glauert (In place of Cllr Shaun Macdonald) and Cllr Richard Wilson (In place of Cllr Alan Ashbery)

Members in Attendance: Sally Kipping, Eddie Scott, Julie Simmonds, Cllr Sarbie Kang, Cllr Morgan Rise, Cllr Helen Whitcroft and Cllr Valerie White

Officers Present: Sally Kipping, Julie Simmonds and Eddie Scott

7/EC Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 7 October 2023 were confirmed by the Committee.

8/EC People Strategy

The Committee considered a proposed new People Strategy which outlined how the Council would be made an attractive proposition in the employment market, encourage empowerment and positive performance management and how workforce resilience would be built.

It was noted that the proposed policy had been considered by the Joint Staff Consultative Group at its meeting on 14 September 2023. However, the Consultative Group had not proposed any changes to the policy.

Following Members' questions and comments it was clarified that during the development of the policy, whilst the staff focus groups were relatively small they were diverse and representative of the Council's employees in relation to ages and pay grades. Moreover, it was noted from the survey, which aimed to ask which benefits were most valued by staff, that there was significant value placed towards leave over Christmas and little importance placed on the Cycle to Work scheme. Following Members' questions, it was clarified that the value placed on Christmas leave was more reflective of workloads and not in respect of the diversity of the Council, which largely reflected the population it served. It was acknowledged that

there was room to improve take-up of the cycle to work scheme including options such as e-bike take up.

Members were advised that there was ongoing exploratory work being undertaken in respect of the Council's future use of artificial intelligence which would inform the Council's forthcoming Digital Strategy.

Further Committee Members' questions resulted in it being emphasised that the Council did not mandate working from home and employees were allowed to work anywhere in the Council areas of Surrey Heath House. In addition, it was noted, following questions that mentoring opportunities across councils already existed. However, it was felt by Members' that there was room to explore a greater amount of shared roles with neighbouring Councils in order to increase the scope of roles and thereby retention.

There was discussion on the impact of the recent publicity on the Council's financial position. It was advised that there were no plans to undertake another all-staff survey, as the results and comments of the last survey had not yet been fully actioned.

Furthermore, the Chair of the Committee informed Members that he had informally spoken to staff and Human Resources to identify the effect of recent statements. It was noted that suggestions had been made that this affected staff morale and retention. However, the Chair emphasised that the administration was confident that a revised financial plan would be produced which would stabilise the Council's financial position and commented that since his election in May 2023 he was impressed with the ongoing professionalism, quality and high level of service which Officers provided. He expressed his thanks and hoped that staff and administration would continue in partnership long into the future.

There were also a number of typographical changes which the Committee agreed should be amended.

RESOLVED that the People Strategy, as appended at Annex A to the agenda report, as amended be approved.

9/EC Capability Policy and Procedure

The Committee considered a proposed revised Capability Policy and Procedure.

The policy had been reviewed, as part of the regular review of the Council's HR related policies and not as a result of legislative changes. The significant proposed change was to allow the opportunity for employees to be brought into the capability process at a higher stage, where the employees' actions were dangerous or had caused reputational damage to the Council.

Following Members' questions it was affirmed that where an employee felt that they were not being fairly treated throughout the process, the employee had an opportunity to engage with Staff Representatives or raise a formal grievance through the grievance process.

However, resulting from the Committee's discussions it was agreed to the change paragraph 9.1.3 to 'discuss', the possible reasons instead of 'explain' and to change 'why', to 'where', in paragraph 10.1.5.

There were also a number of typographical changes which the Committee agreed to be amended.

RESOLVED that the revised Capability Policy and Procedure, as per Annex A to the agenda report, as amended, be adopted.

10/EC Organisational Change Policy and Procedure

The Committee considered a proposed revised Organisational Change Policy and Procedure which gave guidance to staff when their service or team was undergoing a restructure. The proposed changes aimed to make the rights of employees clearer in the process.

At its meeting on 14 September 2023 the Joint Staff Consultative Group recommended that the use of the word 'complete', in relation to ring-fenced interviews should be replaced with 'have the opportunity to be considered for the role or roles'.

Following the Committee's discussion, it was acknowledged that there was a potential opportunity to explore the use of seconding staff to partnering councils, in order to avoid their redundancy.

RESOLVED that the revised Organisational Change Policy and Procedure, as at Annex A to the agenda report, be adopted.

11/EC Mental Health Policy

The Committee considered the proposed new Mental Health Policy which gave guidance to staff on support available, guidance and where to go for advice in respect of their mental health.

The proposed policy had been considered by the Joint Staff Consultative Group at its meeting on 14 September 2023. However, the Consultative Group had not proposed any changes to the policy.

It was felt by Members that there was room to acknowledge some of the existing good practice and policies which contributed to the positive mental health of employees. Furthermore, it was suggested following discussions that there was room to also highlight and signpost local services of mental health support in addition to the more general means of support already signposted on the Council's Intranet.

It was agreed to amend a number of typographical and formatting changes.

RESOLVED that the Mental Health Policy, as per Annex A of the Agenda Report, as amended, be adopted.

12/EC Flexible Working Policy and Procedure

The Committee considered the proposed revised Flexible Working Policy and Procedure, following a review as a result of legislative changes.

The policy was a key part of the Council's attraction and retention policy and following legislative changes, allowed 2 flexible working requests per employee per year and put a time limit of 2 years for applications to be processed. In addition, it was proposed that employees would be able to submit a flexible working request from their first day of employment.

The revised Policy had been considered by the Joint Staff Consultative Group on 14 September 2023, with no changes recommended.

Following Members' comments and feedback it was acknowledged that the Council's flexible working practices could be given a higher profile on its job adverts. Furthermore, it was agreed to amend paragraph 2 of the policy to add '(please note this may not be available for all roles)', to the first bullet point for the purposes of clarity.

RESOLVED that the revised Flexible Working Policy and Procedure, as per Annex A of the agenda report, as amended, be adopted.

13/EC Work Programme

The Committee noted its Work Programme as published in the Supplements Report Pack.

The Chair also asked Members where possible to submit questions and comments to Officers in advance of future meetings to aid the meeting process.

Chair