

**Minutes of a Meeting of the
Performance and Finance Scrutiny
Committee held at Council Chamber,
Surrey Heath House, Knoll Road,
Camberley, GU15 3HD on 24 January
2024**

+ Cllr Shaun Garrett (Chair)
+ Cllr Liz Noble (Vice-Chair)

+ Cllr Nirmal Kang	+ Cllr Bob Raikes
+ Cllr Sarbie Kang	+ Cllr Victoria Wheeler
+ Cllr Lewis Mears	+ Cllr David Whitcroft
+ Cllr David O'Mahoney	+ Cllr Richard Wilson
+ Cllr Jonathan Quin	

+ Present

- Apologies for absence presented

Members in Attendance: Cllr Mark Gordon, Cllr Rob Lee, Cllr Sashi Mylvaganam, Cllr Murray Rowlands, Cllr Pat Tedder, Cllr Kevin Thompson, Cllr Valerie White,

Officers in Attendance: Sarah Bainbridge, Alan Burns, Julia Greenfield, James Hall, Sally Kipping, Sue McCubbin, Damian Roberts, Eddie Scott, Nick Steevens and Bob Watson

24/PF Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2023 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

25/PF Public Question Time

There were no questions by Members of the Public in line with Part 4, Section E of the Constitution.

26/PF Declarations of Interest

It was noted for the record that Councillor Liz Noble declared on behalf of the Committee, that all its members were users of the Council's car parks.

27/PF Council Strategy

The Scrutiny Committee considered the new draft Council Strategy for 2024-2028 before it was considered by the Executive at its February Meeting.

The Strategy sought to ensure that the Council has a clear direction for the future and was delivering the priorities of the new Council. It aims to improve accountability and transparency and meeting the wider aspirations and priorities of

local residents and stakeholders. The draft Strategy draws on feedback received in previous consultations.

Five priorities were identified in the new draft strategy and would be delivered each year through a set of actions and targets agreed in the Annual Plan. The five priorities were as follows:

- Protect our Environment
- Promote Healthier and More Inclusive Communities
- Support a Strong Economy and Create More Homes
- Campaign for Residents
- Deliver Effective Services with Sustainable Finances.

The Committee praised the overall readability and accessibility of the new Strategy and the fact it concisely and clearly detailed the overall objectives of the Council. Moreover, it was felt that the strategy successfully captured the priorities of the Council following the 2023 elections and would be published on the website once agreed.

In relation to the objective to Support a Strong Economy and Create More Homes, Members asked whether reference could be made to social and council housing. Members also drew attention to the statistic that there was a life expectancy gap of 11 years for women between two areas of Camberley. Members queried whether 'Drive to Net Zero' should be reworded to 'Drive Towards Net Zero' to reflect the practical difficulties of achieving the target in full within the timeframe of the Strategy.

28/PF Draft Annual Plan 24/25

The Committee considered a report setting out the Council's draft Annual Plan for 2024/25. The draft Annual Plan set out the key goals, projects and performance targets for the Council during the 2024/25 financial year to deliver the goals and ambitions set out in the draft Council Strategy. A final draft would be presented to the Executive for approval in February 2024. Arising from the Committee's questions and comments the following points were noted:

- Concern was raised at how many of the proposed targets were March 2025, it was agreed that the delivery dates would be reviewed to stagger them where possible.

- A question was raised regarding costs and what measures were in place for addressing chewing gum removal, litter, fly tipping and anti-social behaviour. In relation to the Town Centre deep clean, Officers explained that it had improved, but still impacted on the look and feel of the area, so it was felt a deep clean was needed. Funding needed to be sourced for this, which was why the target had been extended to March 2025. In respect of litter, fly tipping and Anti-Social Behaviour, a number of different techniques were used to combat this including deployable CCTV and partnership working events with Police, Housing Associations and other partners. It was recognised that addressing these issues promptly prevented them from occurring in the future.
- A question was asked about raising awareness on social media of recycling centres within the borough now accepting DIY waste free of charge. It was agreed that awareness could be encouraged online.
- Praise was given to Officers addressing air quality in the borough, and a question was asked if an air quality target could be set. It was confirmed that standards are set by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) meaning the setting of a target by the Borough would not have a legislative basis. However, Air Quality in the borough was good, and an item was on the Committee's work programme for March for more in-depth discussion.
- A question was raised about Council Tax collected target of 98.5%. It was explained that this was a prudent assessment of the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on residents' ability to pay.
- It was confirmed that the target to 'Promote Sustainable Travel Options' included the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP) Project and any other options if funding sources could be identified.
- It was queried whether bus shelters could be added to the action relating to lobbying for improved transport.
- It was recognised no target was set for Housing Advice - Homelessness Prevented. It was clarified that this measure was a monitoring indicator only, as it did not seem appropriate to set a target and it was dependent on the economic conditions.
- It was requested that more detail be provided in the milestones for the first action relating to the decarbonising of council buildings.
- It was requested that reference be made to the monitoring of contract performance measures and service level agreements, regarding bins being emptied across the borough to a satisfactory standard.
- Praise was given to the Community Networking Event pilot, and it was noted that going forward any events would be ward specific in their delivery.
- A question was asked about the target of 98% of Food Premises Inspections completed within 30 days. It was confirmed that all food inspections took place, and the target allowed for flexibility due to any

resourcing issues, the fact some premises operated infrequently and premises with frequent management changeovers were tricky to arrange inspections with.

- It was noted that no Attendance by Performance target had been set for Camberley Theatre in 2023/24 and it was clarified that this was because the target was not included in the previous Annual Plan.

A discussion was had surrounding the Meals at Home service provided by the Council audit was queried whether the target could be more ambitious. It was clarified that that the target for the number of meals provided reflected a limited market and also potentially the impact of the current cost of living crisis. It was stated that if an individual stopped using the service, a health check would be conducted to establish why and that they had an alternative means of receiving food in place. This led to another question about the arrangement with Frimley Health to automatically provide this service to hospital outpatients, and it was asked if this service was still being provided, if it was free to customers and if it was being advertised. It was confirmed that the service was ongoing and widely promoted through Home Safe Plus. The service was not provided free of charge but the council was looking to work with health partners to subsidise the cost to maintain affordability.

The Committee was reminded that the performance of the Council against 2023/24 targets would not be confirmed until after the financial year had concluded and that reporting would be undertaken throughout the following year through Performance Monitoring Reports sent to the Committee.

29/PF Proposed Parking Strategy

The Committee considered the Council's draft Parking Strategy, prior to its pending consideration by the Executive.

The draft Parking Strategy had been developed following the September 2023 Executive consideration of proposed parking tariffs and its decision that a strategy document should be developed, which would set out the Council's aspirations for its car parks and determine where improvements could be made to enhance customer experience. It was underlined in the covering report that the development of the Parking Strategy intended to push a more strategic and rounded review of the Council's Car parks, with inclusion of an in-depth look about income, tariff structures, levels of usage, future technology, maintenance and required levels of future investment.

This strategy set out plans for Surrey Heath to have

- Safer car parks which were kept in better condition with the essential structural and safety improvements undertaken;
- Easier contactless payments;
- Cleaner and thereby less smelly environments;
- Security - the need of improved or where needed, replaced CCTV;
- Better signage and markings.

It was detailed that little proactive, long-term maintenance undertaken in council car parks since 2014/15 and page 25 of the Parking Strategy detailed that one of the car parks needs significant works. A new Preventative Planned Maintenance programme was proposed and would include each of the car parks, so that works could be done in a proactive rather than a reactive manner.

A noteworthy feature of the Strategy was the adoption of more innovative payment solutions including a move towards contactless and app-based payments, which was driven by the fact that the Council paid in excess of £35,000 per annum for money handling from ticketing machines and that contactless payment allowed for quicker and more-convenient payment for the end user.

Moreover, the Strategy featured a proposed reduction in the free period of Pay on Foot Car Parks located outside the town centre from 1 hour to 30 minutes, with the exception of Chobham High Street Car Park where the location of the Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace would preclude such a limited free period.

It was detailed that public consultation on the strategy was undertaken in December 2023 in connection with the proposals within the covering report. Although the preliminary findings were initially released as part of this report, the final more detailed analysis would be included in the future Executive report.

There was broad discussion and debate amongst the Committee as to the proposed reduction in the free period of Pay on Foot Car Parks located outside of Camberley Town Centre. Members felt that the change could lead to an increase of anti-social and illegal on-street parking, which would require the Council to lobby and push for Surrey County Council to penalise on-street illegal parking. It was suggested that there could be some significant pinch points in high street locations where residents were used to 'popping in', to shops and services for about an hour, and could be put off from accessing such services or encouraged to park in side-streets. However, an opposing view was suggested which opined that the proposed car parking tariffs of £1 for a hour at Pay on Foot locations were not high enough as to lead to a significant drop in numbers of people accessing high street locations, when taking into account the cost of the proposed tariffs in comparison to indicative items a car-user may purchase during a visit.

Contrasting views were also indicated in relation to any long-term potential investment into Prior Road. Whilst it was noted by some members that any potential future investment into the Car Park would mostly benefit Prior Heath Infant School visitors. Thereby it was felt that Surrey County Council should be asked to contribute to the cost of the investments. However, due to very limited capacity of the car park some members did not see the value of any potential investment into the car park.

The Scrutiny Committee questioned the rationale for some of the tariff increases, in relation to the deferment of the decision to increase car parking tariffs by 5% in September, despite the current proposal of tariff increases which amounted to 17% on average. Moreover, it was also asserted that whilst the Strategy provided free car parking for locations outside Camberley Town Centre on Sundays in order 'to entice customers to village centres, boosting the local economy', it was noted that many shops and services did not open on a Sunday or benefitted from their own private car parks. In addition, in the interest of the strategy acting as a guidance document for the Council's longer-term vision in relation to car parking provision, it was felt that reference should be made to the forthcoming St Catherine's Road Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG) Car Park.

During the debate, it was firmly asserted and agreed that the proposed Strategy (page 26) needs to be amended to reflect that up to 1 hour of free parking will continue to be provided at Chobham High Street Car Park, as intended and detailed in the Covering Report. It was affirmed that as the Car Park acted as the Car Park for Chobham Water Meadows Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and thereby should have a sufficient free-parking provision to encourage use of the SANG rather than sites on the Special Protection Area for recreation and dog walking, which was backed up with informal guidance.

The Chair, thanked the Committee for its comments and it was stated that the Executive would take into account its views during its forthcoming consideration of the strategy.

30/PF Executive Portfolio Update: Leisure and Culture

The Committee received a report which outlined the current performance and the key projects which had been undertaken over the last 12 months within the Leisure and Culture Portfolio.

The success of the Places Leisure Centre was highlighted with the Camberley branch having been recognised as the highest performing branch amongst 80 others across the country. Camberley Theatre reported another popular Pantomime season.

The popularity of the museum had increased by 23% on the third quarter of 2022/23, which was attributed mainly to the free French Forces Outreach engagement project with local schools and the community. The museum witnessed an increase of circa 10,000 web page hits and an increase of engagement on Facebook from 21,894 to 31,612 in 2023/24.

The stated focus for the coming year included:

- The completion of playground replacements including the Burrell Road, Mytchett Recreation Ground and the Briars Centre;
- Environmental protection work following the Esso pipeline completion and utilising a receipt of £80,000 for habitat generation, biodiversity enhancement and flood mitigation;

- The planting of 5,000 trees during the 2024 year; and
- The replacement of open top dog bins with standard sized covered bins.

Several questions were raised regarding Camberley Theatre. It was clarified that during an election any costs incurred for hiring a venue for the count would be covered by the relevant body. Camberley Theatre is the venue of choice for counting the votes in a General Election and it was confirmed that the scheduled performances would likely be disrupted in the event of a snap election that could not be properly planned for. Concerns were raised that individual artistic groups don't utilise the theatre spaces and that the borough was the only Surrey borough and district which did not benefit from a film society. It was noted that Camberley Theatre had seen an increase in the variety of shows and local arts in their programme, and that Officers were looking to analyse current use of all spaces at Camberley Theatre when open at a point in time to improve the output of the Theatre.

The Committee was informed that a new Arts and Culture Strategy was being developed to enable the arts, culture and heritage to benefit from other funding opportunities and to continue their success. Members interested in developing this strategy were encouraged to speak with the Portfolio Holder.

Thanks was given to Officers for their professional approach to the presence of Reinforced Aerated Autoclaved Concrete and for preventing any detrimental impact on performances over the winter period. Praise was given to Camberley Theatre for the British Sign Language (BSL) performances provided in the year.

The Green Spaces team were recognised for delivering an excellent service. It was noted that issues had arisen with the contractor for managing waste bins but a notable improvement in performance over the last few months was recognised. The Committee was encouraged to hear that 1,000 trees had been planted and members were encouraged to direct residents to tree planting schemes via the Woodland Trust and to work with Tree Wardens in the Council.

A question was raised regarding the cost of fishing permits with it being noted that a marginal increase will be seen in the coming year, with no dramatic increases brought in after lockdown to encourage outdoor activity.

The Committee discussed the annual Halloween fair at the Council-owned Heatherside Recreation Ground, noting that the rides at the event were expensive and the event attracted incidents of anti-social behaviour. It was noted that giving the police as much advance warning as possible would ensure an adequate presence at the fair. The Council had no control over the costs charged to attendees of the fair, and that the hire costs of the Recreation Ground were benchmarked to maintain a presence within the market to provide such events to the public.

Thanks were given by the Committee to the Open Spaces team for their hard work and timely response during Storms Isha and Jocelyn. The Committee was provided with an update that the Whitmoor Road Play Area had been included on

Surrey County Council's paper to their Property Board and the paper had been well received ahead of the board meeting.

Several concerns were raised regarding the environmental impact of the Esso Pipeline in the borough. Officers noted that £80,000 of funding had been secured for various projects in areas affected by the pipeline, but the tree planting in these spaces was the responsibility of Esso who would also contribute financially to replant any trees that died in affected areas over the next 5 years. Concerns had been raised about invasive plant species emerging in areas where spaces had been left to regenerate naturally. Officers confirmed that consultation from Natural England encouraged the natural regenerative approach and that that funding had been received to combat invasive species emerging.

The Committee thanked the Portfolio Holder for his attendance and comprehensive report.

31/PF Work Programme

The Committee considered the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

Resolved that the Work Programme as included in the agenda pack be agreed.

Chair