

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Performance  
and Finance Scrutiny Committee held  
virtually on 17 March 2021**

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+ Cllr Sashi Mylvaganam (Chairman)  
+ Cllr Shaun Garrett (Vice Chairman)

+ Cllr Dan Adams	+ Cllr Sharon Galliford
+ Cllr Graham Alleway	+ Cllr Edward Hawkins
+ Cllr Cliff Betton	- Cllr Darryl Ratiram
+ Cllr Vivienne Chapman	+ Cllr Graham Tapper
+ Cllr Sarah Jane Croke	+ Cllr Victoria Wheeler
+ Cllr Paul Deach	+ Cllr Kristian Wrenn

+ Present

- Apologies for absence presented

Substitutes: Cllr Paul Deach for Cllr Darryl Ratiram

**Members in Attendance:**

Councillors Peter Barnett, Rodney Bates, Emma-Jane McGrath, Robin Perry, Pat Tedder and Valerie White

**Executive Portfolio Holders in Attendance:**

Cllr Josephine Hawkins, Support and Safeguarding  
Cllr Rebecca Jennings-Evans, Places and Strategy  
Cllr David Lewis, Finance  
Cllr David Mansfield, Environment and Health  
Cllr Alan McClafferty, Leader

**Officers Present:**

Sarah Bainbridge, Senior Organisational Development Advisor  
Daniel Harrison, Executive Head: Business  
Martin Hone, Executive Head: Finance  
Louise Livingston, Executive Head: Transformation  
Sue McCubbin, Recreation and Business Services Manager  
Richard Payne, Executive Head: Corporate  
Jenny Rickard, Executive Head: Regulatory  
Ben Sword, Commercial and Community Development Manager

**37/PF Minutes of Previous Meetings**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2021 and 27<sup>th</sup> January 2021 were, subject to an amendment to include Councillor Mansfield's attendance at the meeting of the 27<sup>th</sup> January, agreed as being a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**38/PF Executive Portfolio Update: Places and Strategy**

The Committee received a report summarising the Council's work during the past twelve months which were encompassed within the Places and Strategy Executive Portfolio; a portfolio which covered a number of areas including recreation and business, greenspaces, commercial and community development, physical activity, health and wellbeing and events.

The Covid-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions had had a significant impact on the functions within the portfolio; a number of planned events had either been cancelled or postponed and the Recreation and Business Team, in their entirety, had been seconded to deliver support to residents through the Council's welfare cell. There had been a significant increase in the number of visitors to the Borough's green spaces and this had impacted negatively on road surfaces in the surrounding areas as car parks reached capacity. There had also been a surge in vandalism and antisocial behaviour in the Borough's parks and green spaces during the restrictions.

Over the year, improvements had been made to a number of playgrounds and green spaces in the Borough including the playgrounds at Loman Road, Old Dean Recreation Ground and Watchetts Recreation Grounds. Further improvement works were underway in Chobham Road in Frimley, Heatherside Recreation Ground, Frimley Lodge Park and London Road Recreation Ground.

The Borough's Greenspaces contract with Surrey County Council included a duty to treat known areas of Japanese Knotweed and over the past year approximately 6 days had been taken up with this work. It was stressed that the Council was currently only responsible for treating those areas named in the original contract with the County Council and treatment of any new areas would either be the responsibility of the County Council or would require additional funding to be made available from the County to the Borough. It was agreed that the matter would be raised with the Executive. It was requested that Members forward any information about Japanese Knotweed on public land to the Executive Head of Business in the first instance.

It was clarified that the Active Lives Survey was a nationwide survey administered by Sport England. The Survey was sent to 2000 households selected at random by postcode in each local authority area with the only criteria for respondents was that they were at least 18 years old. In the October 2020 survey, which covered the period May 2019 - May 2020, a total of 561 responses had been received from Surrey Heath residents. Whilst the 2020 survey showed a continued reduction in levels of inactivity it was thought that these results did not fully reflect the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and it was expected that the next survey which would cover the period November 2019 to November 2020 would show a sharp increase in inactivity levels.

The construction of the new Leisure Centre was on target and on budget, prices for memberships and activities are currently being finalised and it was expected that the facility would open in July.

A new Physical Activity Strategy, which would set out how the Council planned to help reduce inactivity in the Borough and support people to return to physical activity was under development. Included in the planned work to encourage improved levels of physical activity was the introduction of Sweatcoin, an app which enabled residents to convert the number of steps they walked into points which could be exchanged for rewards. The national scheme, which would be tailored to Surrey Heath residents, was backed by Sport England and would be free to use with costs covered by advertising.

Concerns about the standards of public cricket pitches were noted. Renovation works were ongoing however the majority of pitches were located on multi-use sites and consequently maintaining their standard was more difficult to control.

The Committee noted the update and the positive work which was taking place.

### **39/PF Executive Portfolio Update: Support and Safeguarding**

The Committee received a report summarising the Council's work during the past twelve months in the functions which were encompassed within the Support and Safeguarding Executive Portfolio. The portfolio covered a number of areas including voluntary sector and community partnerships, grant schemes, community safety, safeguarding, equalities, housing solutions and family support.

During the course of the year, a number of additional grants schemes had been made available including the Covid-19 scheme, which made grants of up to £25,000 available to local voluntary and community groups, and the Ward Councillor Grants, which provide ward councillors with £1,000 which could be used to provide grants of up to £500 to community initiatives within their wards. The Council had received £40,922 from DEFRA to help alleviate local hardship which had subsequently been used to support the work of local foodbanks.

A Poverty Working Group had been established with representation from a wide range of organisations including Councillors, the Clinical Commissioning Group and the voluntary and community sector. Initial work had focused on working with partners to provide assistance to local residents including a computers for schools scheme and a hardship fund which was administered by Citizens Advice Surrey Heath. A Poverty Summit had been scheduled for Monday 29<sup>th</sup> March and an invitation had been sent to all councillors. It was agreed that a recording would be made available for those who were unable to attend.

In 2020, 119 Disabled Facilities Grants had been made to local residents who needed adaptations to be made to their homes to meet their changing needs. The maximum grant available was £30,000 and independent occupational health advisors helped to assess bids and work with applicants to ensure that improvement schemes met their needs. The grants were used to pay for a range of improvements including the installation of stair lifts, adaptations to bathrooms and addressing access issues.

Between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020, the Housing Solutions Team had received 487 approaches from households who were either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Of these 214 were either already homeless or were at risk of being homeless within 56 days of their approach to the Council, compared to 315 in the same period the previous year, a reduction attributed to the eviction ban put in place by the Government as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The removal of the eviction ban in May was expected to increase levels of homelessness however it was not possible at this stage to gauge the full impacts.

At the start of the pandemic, 31 individuals were identified as sleeping rough in the Borough and were accommodated. At the end of the first lockdown restrictions, 18 had moved into settled accommodation, 2 had refused offers of alternative accommodation and 11 placements had ended due to abandonment, non-engagement, non-payment of rent or anti-social behaviour.

The Council had bought Connaught Court, a 10 bed unit, to provide accommodation for up to two years for single homeless people for up to two years and a 5/6 bed property had been bought to provide Night Stop accommodation via the Hope Hub. The Council worked closely with the Hope Hub and other specialist charities to support those residents who were sleeping rough, particularly those with more complex needs. It was requested that officers be made aware of any people who were sleeping rough so that support could be provided.

Difficulties in identifying suitable accommodation had slowed the Council's commitment to rehoming 10 refugee families through the UK Resettlement Scheme. To date, five families had been rehomed and all were reported to have settled well into their new communities. The suspension of services during the pandemic had impacted on the families particularly with the suspension of English language classes and the move to home schooling. It was agreed that a briefing on the programme would be provided to members.

The Committee was informed that the roll out of community noticeboards was taking place on a phased basis and an update would be provided outside the meeting.

The Committee noted the report.

#### **40/PF Quarter 3 (September to December 2020 ) Finance Update**

The Committee received a report summarising the Council's financial position at the end of the third quarter (October to December 2020) of the 2020/21 financial year.

It was reported that projections showed a year end overspend of £1,100,000 in the revenue budget and £16.9million of the Capital Programme's total budget of £34.2million had been spent.

In February 2021, the Council had moved £25million of short term loans into 40 year fixed term loans. The change was expected to cost the council an extra £500,000 over the course of the loan however it was considered good practice that the financing of long term projects which were expected to run for 20 years or more, for example the building and running of a leisure centre, should be financed by long term borrowing and this transfer of short term loans into long term borrowing reflected this.

The Covid-19 pandemic had had a significant impact on the Council's income in a number of areas including car parking and a loss of rental income from retailers and businesses in the Council's commercial property. The Council was taking advantage of Government Grant schemes that had been put in place to support local authorities wherever possible.

The Committee noted the update.

#### **41/PF Draft Five Year Strategy**

The Committee received a report providing an update on the development of a new five year strategy for the Council.

The five year strategy set out the Council's overarching priorities for the Borough and would be used to shape the Council's annual projects and targets. The strategy would be informed by a number of existing policy areas, data sources and emerging legislation. The report identified key areas for inclusion in the emerging strategy and the Committee was invited to comment.

To ensure that the Council had the resources to deliver the ambitions in the strategy, the review of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy would be aligned with the five year strategy's development.

It was noted the terms of office for the current cohort of councillors would expire in 2023 and it was suggested that a five year strategy could potentially commit the incoming administration to a course of action that did not necessarily align with their manifesto. It

was suggested that a three year strategy followed by a four year strategy would better align with these terms of office.

Officers confirmed that the Five Year Strategy would include the Council's commitment to addressing climate change.

The Group noted the report.

#### **42/PF ISO9001**

The Committee considered a report which provided an overview of the ISO9001 standard and how it applied to local government.

It was noted that ISO9001 was an international standard used by organisations to demonstrate their ability to consistently provide products and services that met customer and regulatory requirements and demonstrated continuous improvement.

Surrey Heath's Building Control function was currently working towards ISO9001 accreditation. The process of obtaining ISO9001 accreditation is an intensive one and Surrey Heath Borough Council's Building Control Team has been supported through this process by Local Authority Building Control (LABC) via advice, support and templates. Officers undertook to report back to Committee members on the expected timeframes for the outcome of the accreditation process.

Whilst there were no plans to pursue ISO9001 accreditation for other Council functions, there were a number of projects and targets outlined in the draft Annual Plan for 2021/22 which focused on improvement and aligned with the Standard's quality management principles. With this in mind it was proposed that a self-assessment of the Council's performance against the Local Government Assessment Tool for Integral Quality Management which was contained in the ISO18091 Standard. The outcomes of this work would then be used to inform the review of performance management in 2021/22.

The Committee noted the update.

#### **43/PF Property Investment Task and Finish Group**

The Committee received an update on the work of the Property Investment Task and Finish Group which the Committee had established to review the decision making processes which had led to the Council's purchase of the Mall Shopping Centre in 2016. The outcomes of the review would then be fed into the Council's developing Property Investment Strategy

The Committee was informed that delays in appointing an independent reviewer and accessing information had meant that the Group's work had taken longer than initially anticipated. The Task and Finish Group had taken evidence from a number of organisations who had provided the Council with advice in the run up to the purchase and reviewed the decision reports, urgent actions and legal advice that had been provided. A projected budget of £110,000 had been agreed for all stages of the work with £40,000 being allocated to an external review of valuations and £20,000 being set aside for any additional external advice required.

The Committee was informed that the Task and Finish Group had taken evidence from Arlingclose, in their capacity as the Council's Treasury Advisors, Montagu Evans, Addleshaw Goddard and KPMG. A review of the papers used to inform the Council

decisions in 2016 had been carried out and Avison Young had been instructed to carry out a 'desktop' review of the 2016 acquisition of the Mall Shopping centre and ancillary properties.

Interim findings had concluded that whilst the Council had purchased the Shopping Centre at the top end of the expected price range it had not over paid. In addition, the Council had been the only prospective purchaser and this had removed any element of competitive market tension at the time of purchase. Notwithstanding the subsequent collapse of the retail sector and the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on any income the shopping centre might have generated, the Council's primary driver for buying the property had been to secure the future regeneration of Camberley town centre.

The final report would be brought to the Committee's next meeting for consideration. It was agreed that a full breakdown of the cost of the investigation would be included in the report.

The Committee noted the update.

#### **44/PF Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee Work Programme**

The Committee received and noted a report setting out the draft work programme for the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee for the 2021/22 municipal year.

It was agreed that an item looking at the Council's use of bailiffs to recover non-commercial debts would be added to the work programme before December 2021 so that the outcomes could be fed into the budget setting process for 2022/23.

It was requested that a review of the Council's Climate Change Policies be included in the work programme.

The Committee noted the significant gap between the dates of meetings between March and July and requested that this be reviewed when the timetable was next set.

**RESOLVED** that subject to the amendments detailed above the Committee's work programme for the 2021/22 municipal year be endorsed.

#### **45/PF Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee would take place on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2021 at 7pm.

**CHAIRMAN**