

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Surrey Heath House, Knoll Road, Camberley, GU15 3HD on 9 November 2022**

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+ Cllr Sashi Mylvaganam (Chairman)  
+ Cllr Valerie White (Vice Chairman)

+ Cllr Graham Alleway	- Cllr Liz Noble
+ Cllr Stuart Black	+ Cllr Darryl Ratiram
- Cllr Vivienne Chapman	+ Cllr Morgan Rise
+ Cllr Paul Deach	+ Cllr Victoria Wheeler
+ Cllr Sharon Galliford	- Cllr Mark Gordon
+ Cllr Edward Hawkins	+ Cllr Graham Tapper
	+ Cllr Helen Whitcroft*

+ Present

- Apologies for absence presented

\* Committee Member in attendance virtually

Substitutes: Cllr Paul Deach for Cllr Mark Gordon  
Cllr Graham Tapper for Cllr Liz Noble

Portfolio Holder in Attendance: Cllr Robin Perry, Portfolio Holder: Finance

Officers Present: Sarah Bainbridge, Organisational Development Manager  
Jo Chauhan, Interim Director Joint Waste Solutions  
Sue McCubbin, Recreation & Leisure Services Manager  
Damian Roberts, Chief Executive  
Nick Steevens, Strategic Director: Environment & Communities  
Bob Watson, Strategic Director: Finance & Customer Services

## **16/PF Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee held on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## **17/PF Half Year Performance Report**

The Committee considered a report summarising the performance of the Council, over the first six months (April to September 2022) of the 2022/23 municipal year against the objectives, priorities and success measures set out in the Council's Annual Plan for 2022/23.

It was reported that 75% of the Plan's agreed objectives and projects were on track to be completed within agreed timeframes and 61% of the agreed performance indicators were meeting their targets.

It was questioned whether, as part of work focusing on the development of School Travel Plans, the Council had any plans to engage with Surrey County Council to facilitate the reduction of car use to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists. It was agreed that a

recent refusal by the County Council's Highway's section to use Community Infrastructure Levy payments to fund one such project would be followed up outside the meeting.

The Committee queried how realistic target HQL11, Aim to build at least 49 homes through a joint venture project with a registered social landlord (RSL) was. It was clarified that the project would involve the Council identifying appropriate land within its ownership that could then be developed by the RSL. Whilst the Council maintained regular dialogue with a variety of RSLs it was recognised that the Council was reliant on the RSLs to progress a new development. A suggestion that as the target was unlikely to be met and should therefore be removed from the Annual Plan was acknowledged however it was considered that keeping the target in the Plan until the end of the year would be more transparent.

The inclusion of projects including Surrey Heartlands as well as Frimley Integrated Care System was received positively. It was clarified that references to 'Frimley Clinical Commissioning Group were a legacy from when the original plan was agreed in March 2022

It was agreed that the possibility of extending the online safeguarding training package to members would be considered as part of work to develop the Member Induction Programme that would be delivered to all members following the elections in May 2023.

With regards to air quality, it was queried whether air monitoring would take place in parts of the Borough that were not yet monitored, it was confirmed that 50 sites across the Borough were already monitored and expanding this programme would have cost implications for the Council. It was noted that new regulations relating to the monitoring of particulate levels were awaited from the Government which could alter the way air quality was monitored.

The Committee's concern over the length of time that it was taking to process Housing Benefits Claims, 25.30 days and 25.80 days in Quarters 1 and 2 respectively compared to a target of 20 days, was acknowledged. The Committee was informed that the majority of the Housing Benefits claims being processed were for Exempt Accommodation claims, i.e. the resident was living in supported or temporary accommodation, which required more detailed assessment than standard claims. In addition, the Revenues and Benefits Team had responsibility for processing a number of new Government Initiatives including Homes for Ukraine grants and the Energy Payment Rebate Scheme, something that had impacted on team capacity.

The Committee noted the report.

## **18/PF Public Litter Bins**

The Committee considered a report summarising the contractual arrangements for waste collection from public litter bins within the Borough, performance against those contracts and the improvements that were being made in relation to the emptying and reporting of issues with litter bins.

The Committee was informed that the Council was responsible for 836 public litter bins within the Borough. Of these 355 (155 dog waste and 200 general waste bins) were located within parks and open spaces where their maintenance and emptying was the responsibility of Glendale, the Council's Grounds Maintenance Contractor. The remaining 481 bins were classified as being street litter bins and responsibility for these fell to Amey, the Council's contracted waste collection service.

Joint Waste Solutions had recently completed an exercise to map all the litter bins in the Borough. Work was underway to locate and map public litter bins within the Borough that were managed by third party organisations for example Accent, the Ministry of Defence and Surrey Wildlife Trust; once complete this information would be combined with Joint Waste Solutions' mapping work and uploaded to the Council's website providing residents with a single point of contact to report any issues.

It was clarified that recent issues with a number of bins in parks and open spaces had occurred because a member of staff had identified that some bins required more frequent emptying than had been scheduled. This knowledge had not been passed on prior to their retirement and the maintenance schedule had reverted to the original scheduled maintenance rounds.

Work was underway to review and replace dog waste specific bins with general waste bins which could also be used for dog waste disposal with bins being clearly labelled as being appropriate for dog waste disposal.

Requests for new bins would be assessed with consideration being given to current bin provision and the amount of waste present in the area concerned. It was confirmed that requests should be sent to the Strategic Director: Environment and Community for consideration in the first instance however there would be cost implications to installing additional bins.

The Committee noted the report.

## **19/PF Revenue Budget Half Yearly Progress Update**

The Committee considered a report providing an update on the Council's Revenue budget at the mid-way point of the 2022/23 financial year.

It was reported that, following the completion of the Star Chamber budget setting process, £647,500 of identified efficiencies, savings and additional income had been applied to the 2022/23 budgets. Notwithstanding this, at the end of the second quarter (July to September 2022) of the 2022/23 financial year there was a projected overall adverse variance of £0.303million in the revenue budget at the end of the financial year. With staff salary increases adding a further £450,000 to the budget variance by the end of the financial year.

A significant proportion of the variance was attributed to a budgeting anomaly within the Community Services budget which had created a double-count for the service level agreement (SLA) income from Surrey County Council and the shared service with Runnymede Borough Council. It was clarified that, as per the SLA, Runnymede had invoiced the Council for services provided however the invoice had been drawn up based on an assumption that the grant due from Surrey County Council for Surrey Heath residents had already been passported to Runnymede when this had not been the case. Work was underway to recoup as much of the money owed as possible.

The £123,000 variance in the drawdown from the pension holding account was attributed to the late receipt of actuarial figures from Surrey County Council which had meant the Council had to use estimated figures when the budgets were originally set and the subsequent need to make an in year adjustment to the budgets.

It was noted that the Council's accountancy function still carried a significant number of vacancies which were being filled by agency staff. Efforts were ongoing to fill roles with permanent staff however accountancy was considered to be particularly mobile profession

with staff being able to work productively from anywhere, consequently finding high quality candidates could be problematic. It was hoped that the recent pay award would encourage more interest in the permanent positions available at the council.

The Committee noted the report.

## **20/PF Capital Budget Half Yearly Progress Update**

The Committee considered a report providing an update on the Council's Capital Budget at the mid-way point of the 2022/23 financial year.

It was reported that at the end of the second quarter (July to September 2022) of the 2022/23 financial year, total spend and commitments on the Capital Budget amounted to £1.383million against a budget of £10.654 million. At their meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2022, the Executive would be asked to agree to the reprofiling of £8.222million of the agreed Capital Budget to later years reducing the in-year capital budget to £2.432million; the majority of this money was intended for use in Investment and Development projects. Arising from the Committee's questions and comments the following points were noted:

- It was clarified that the Heatherside Park play equipment related to Bentley Copse and not the recreation ground.
- It was agreed that updates on the progress of proposed works at 63A High Street Bagshot and the Whitmoor Road Play Area would be circulated.
- It was agreed that the possibility of replacing the trees removed in Wellingtonia Avenue would be explored.
- It was requested that future iterations of the table in the annex include details of the relevant council ward to aid identification..

The Committee noted the report.

## **21/PF Treasury Management Update**

The Committee considered a report summarising the performance of the Council's Treasury Management Services during the first half (April to September 2022) of the 2022/23 financial year.

It was reported that, as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022, the Council held £167million of borrowing of which £51million was held with the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB), £49million with Phoenix and £67million was in the form of short term loans from other local authorities.

It was confirmed that the two loans acquired through Phoenix were 40 year loans and whilst the annuity rate for loans of this type was ordinarily higher than that obtained on loans from the PWLB, at the time the loans were taken out the two rates were comparable. Any decisions to convert short term borrowing to long term loans would be taken on a case by case basis and would be based on financial advice taken at the time that a short term loan was due to mature. Wherever possible the Council looked to pay off short term loans with cash balances when these were available.

The Committee noted the report.

## **22/PF Portfolio Update: Finance and Customer Service**

The Committee considered a report summarising the Council's work over the past twelve months which were encompassed by the Finance and Customer Service Executive Portfolio; a portfolio which covered finance and accountancy, Revenues and Benefits, procurement and the Customer Contact Centre.

It was noted that the Council's Revenues and Benefits Team was the highest performing team in the Country for the percentage of Non Domestic Business Rates collected and in the top thirty highest performing collection authorities for the percentage of Council Tax collected in 2021/22.

Residents' concerns about the length of time that it was taking to assess new properties for Council Tax banding were acknowledged. It was clarified that the Council's Visiting Officer assessed new build properties against IRRV Standards to provide a temporary banding. The information was then passed on to the Valuations Office Agency for evaluation before a permanent banding was provided. It was noted that the Agency was experiencing a back log in its work and consequently it was taking longer to provide bandings than expected. If a resident found that the change from a temporary to a permanent banding was causing financial difficulties then they were encouraged to contact the Council Tax Team in the first instance. Appeals to banding decisions should be taken up with the Valuations Office Agency.

The Committee noted the update.

## **23/PF Public Realm Task and Finish Group Update**

The Committee received a report setting out the findings of a review of the circumstances leading to the increased costs of the public realm improvements in Camberley town centre.

It was agreed that due to the late circulation of the report full consideration of its findings would be deferred to the Committee's next scheduled meeting. It was requested that any comments that the Committee had be forwarded to Councillor Mylvaganam for the Task and Finish Group to consider.

## **24/PF Work Programme**

The Committee considered its proposed work programme for the remainder of the 2022/23 municipal year.

It was agreed that an update from the Climate Change Working Group would be added to the agenda for the Committee's meeting in March 2023.

**RESOLVED** that, subject to the addition above, the proposed work programme be agreed.

## **25/PF Exclusion of Public and Press**

**RESOLVED** that pursuant to Regulation 4 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) Regulations 2012, members of the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of item 12: Call in of Executive Decision – Property Dilapidations which involves the likely disclosure of exempt

information under the following category of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972:

- (3) Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

**26/PF Call In of Executive Decision - Property Dilapidations**

It was agreed that due to the absence of the relevant Executive Portfolio Holder from the meeting this item would be deferred to a later date.

**27/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 25<sup>th</sup> January 2023 at 7pm.

Chairman