

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Performance
and Finance Scrutiny Committee held at
Council Chamber, Surrey Heath House,
Knoll Road, Camberley, GU15 3HD on
20 March 2019**

+ Cllr Katia Malcaus Cooper (Chairman)
- Cllr Darryl Ratiram (Vice Chairman)

- Cllr David Allen	+ Cllr Robin Perry
+ Cllr Rodney Bates	+ Cllr Chris Pitt
Cllr Bill Chapman	Cllr Joanne Potter
+ Cllr Edward Hawkins	+ Cllr Wynne Price
+ Cllr Paul Ilnicki	+ Cllr Ian Sams
Cllr David Lewis	+ Cllr Victoria Wheeler
+ Cllr Max Nelson	+ Cllr Valerie White

+ Present
- Apologies for absence presented

Substitutes: Cllr Bates for Cllr Allen

Members in Attendance: Cllr Paul Deach
Cllr Josephine Hawkins

Officers Present: Julia Hutley-Savage, Principal Lawyer
Louise Livingston, Executive Head: Transformation
Kelvin Menon, Executive Head: Finance
Richard Payne, Executive Head: Corporate
Jenny Rickard, Executive Head: Regulatory

33/PF Minutes of Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee held on 6th February 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

34/PF Portfolio Holder Update: Customer Experience and Digital Portfolio

Councillor Paul Deach presented an update on the work carried out to date during the 2018/198 municipal year in his capacity as Executive Portfolio Holder for Customer Experience and Digital Services.

The portfolio covered three main areas: digital and ICT, Communications and Marketing and the Contact Centre.

Arising from Members' questions and comments the following points were noted:

- Staff were being transferred to the new telephony system team by team and the interface between the old and the new systems had required a 'work around'. It was expected that once all staff were using the new system these teething problems would be resolved.

- The migration of the Uniform database to a new platform would improve functionality and enable officers to update records when they were not at their desks for example during site visits.
- It was confirmed that the PC upgrade/replacement project would extend to councillors.
- It was agreed that Cyber Security Training would be included in the Members' Induction Programme.
- It was clarified that in the case of planning application representations and election candidates the publication of names and addresses of those submitting representations or supporting the nomination of an election candidate was regulated by law. With regard to Freedom of Information requests the redaction of personal information was dealt with on a case by case basis.
- It was agreed that the possibility of extending the use of cloud based data storage to councillors would be investigated.
- It was thought that the selection of linked pages on the Council's Facebook page was decided by an algorithm and dependent on the websites that a person viewing the page had visited.
- The possibility of live streaming council meetings had been explored however it had been decided that it would not be not cost effective when weighed against the number of people expected to view meetings.
- Meals at Home, Community Alarms and tennis court bookings had all received a greater number of enquiries than usual following publication of articles about the services in Heathscene. Publication of information relating to Calls to Action had also generated interest from residents
- It was agreed that Heathscene's copy deadlines would be circulated to councillors.

The Committee thanked Councillor Deach for his update.

35/PF Portfolio Holder Update: Support and Safeguarding

Councillor Josephine Hawkins presented an update on the work carried out to date during the 2018/129 municipal year in her capacity as Executive Portfolio Holder for Support and Safeguarding.

It was noted that the Support and Safeguarding Portfolio covered a number of areas including community development, the voluntary and community sector, community fund and revenue grants, community safety, safeguarding, equalities and the role of Children's Champion.

Arising from member's questions and comments the following points were noted:

- The Revenue Grant system would be reviewed in the coming year to ensure that the grants remained fit for purpose and that the appropriate organisations were receiving support.
- It was clarified that applications for Community Fund Grants were considered twice a year, organisations had to contribute a proportion of the funding needed for the stated project and money was only paid out after the work had been completed. Full criteria were available on the Council's website.
- All staff had to complete an e-learning safeguarding training course. The requirements for Disclosure Barring Service (DBS) checks on staff was dependent on the role that the staff member held.
- It was agreed that safeguarding training would be incorporated into the Councillor Induction Programme.

- Due diligence was carried out when assessing grant applications. However, organisations were not routinely asked to provide information about their safeguarding policies as part of grant application process and it was agreed that this area would be explored.
- The Safe Drive Stay Alive sessions, which aimed to encourage safe and responsible driving amongst young drivers, were hard hitting and thought provoking for all who attend. Dates of future sessions would be circulated and members were encouraged to attend a session if they had the opportunity.
- It was questioned whether schools were getting sufficient notice of Local Democracy Week events to enable them to build the activities into their timetables. It was agreed that this would be followed up.
- The subjects that most frequently appeared in Freedom of Information requests were building control, business rates and contract information. A database was kept of all Freedom of Information requests and any trends identified were made public.

The Committee thanked Councillor Hawkins for her informative update.

36/PF Surrey Heath Borough Council Annual Plan

The Committee received a report setting out the Council's draft Annual Plan for 2019/20.

The Annual Plan provided an overview of the vision and priorities contained within the Council's Five Year Strategy and set out the outputs and success measures that would be delivered during 2019/20 for each of the Strategy's key priorities. Updates on the quantifiable actions taken to achieve the Annual Plan's targets would be reported in mid-year and end of year performance reports.

The Committee was informed that following feedback from the Executive the Annual Plan would be revised to include the work that was taking place in the urban and rural villages.

It was agreed that the response sent to Councillor Pitt in relation to an enquiry about improving the availability of electric car charging points in the town centre would be followed up.

The Committee noted the report.

37/PF Finance Report Quarter 3

The Committee considered a report providing an overview of the Council's finances at the end of the third quarter (October to December) of the 2018/19 financial year.

It was reported that at the end of the reporting period, £38million had been spent on capital expenditure including the purchase of refuse vehicles, property acquisition and refurbishment of the Square shopping centre and its associated car park. There were sundry debts totalling £3,463,000 and Housing Benefit Debts of £560,000. The council also held £22million in cash investments and £139million of borrowing with the borrowing made up of a selection of long-term loans from the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) totalling £29million and short-term loans from other local authorities.

It was clarified that long term loans from the PWLB were cheaper than loans from other local authorities and the possibility of converting some of the short-term loans into long-term loans was being explored.

The Committee commended officers for their prudent financial planning.

The Committee noted the report.

38/PF Corporate Risk

The Committee considered a report setting out the Council's Corporate Risk Register. The Risk Register summarised the main strategic risks faced by the Council in relation to achieving the objectives and priorities defined in the Council's Corporate Plan and identified mitigating actions that would help control those risks.

It was reported that since the agenda had been published the Risk Register had been updated to include a new risk which focused on the financial pressures faced by Surrey County Council and the potential implications for the Surrey boroughs.

The Committee noted the updated Corporate Risk Register.

39/PF Council Tax Collection and Enforcement

The Committee received a report providing a summary of a pilot programme to explore alternative ways of collecting Council Tax arrears currently being run by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham.

A number of approaches had been made to Hammersmith and Fulham about the success or otherwise of the pilot scheme however to date no substantive response had been received. It was reported that the trial was still ongoing and an update would be given when more information was made available.

It was stressed that it was recognised that Council Tax arrears were often only one of a number of debts that a resident might have and whenever possible officers worked with residents who were struggling to pay. Whilst bailiffs were not regulated they did have to abide by Codes of Conduct; it was requested that any information regarding bailiffs who were collecting Council Tax arrears on behalf of the Council acting inappropriately should be passed to officers so that the matter could be investigated.

The Committee noted the update.

40/PF Work Programme

The Committee received a report setting out a draft work programme for the Committee for the 2019/20 Municipal Year.

The Committee noted the standing agenda items that would be considered at each meeting. It was acknowledged that due to the upcoming Borough Elections it would be inappropriate to encumber the new Committee with too prescriptive a work programme. It was agreed that the new Chairman should meet with officers early in the new Municipal Year to enable a work programme to be drafted.

41/PF Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee would be held on Wednesday 3rd July 2019 at 7pm.

The Chairman thanked the Committee members and officers for the support that they had given to the scrutiny process over the past year.

Chairman

This page is intentionally left blank