

Minutes of a Meeting of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Surrey Heath House, Knoll Road, Camberley, GU15 3HD on 8 September 2021

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

+ Cllr Graham Alleway	+ Cllr Edward Hawkins
+ Cllr Cliff Betton	+ Cllr Darryl Ratiram
+ Cllr Vivienne Chapman	+ Cllr Morgan Rise
+ Cllr Sarah Jane Croke	+ Cllr Graham Tapper
+ Cllr Paul Deach	+ Cllr Victoria Wheeler
+ Cllr Sharon Galliford	

+ Present

- Apologies for absence presented

Members in Attendance: Cllr Rodney Bates, Cllr David Mansfield, Cllr Alan McClafferty, Cllr Adrian Page and Cllr Robin Perry

Officers Present: Sarah Bainbridge, Senior Organisational Development Advisor
Gavin Chinniah, Head of Planning
Adrian Flynn, Chief Accountant
Louise Livingston, Executive Head: Transformation
Kate Noviss, Marketing & Communications Manager
Richard Payne, Executive Head: Corporate
Gavin Ramtohal, Head of Legal
Damian Roberts, Chief Executive

10/PF Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee held on 7th July 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

11/PF Five year Strategy Update

The Committee received a report providing an update on the work to develop a new Five Year Strategy for Surrey Heath Borough Council.

The Committee was informed that the Strategy's development had been guided by a cross party task and finish group which had, to date, met five times and agreed that the strategy would be focused around the following four overarching priorities:

- Environment
- Health and Quality of Life
- Economy
- Effective and Responsive Council

Following early engagement with key partners, an extensive public consultation programme had been launched in July to gather the views and opinions of residents, visitors businesses and partner groups and organisations on the aspects of the Borough that they loved and valued, what they thought needed to be improved and the issues that they considered to be important factors for the future of the Borough.

The consultation had taken place across a number of different channels including general and targeted promotion on a range of social media platforms, articles in Heathscene, promotion of the survey through the Surrey Heath Youth Council, Meals at Home, residents' associations and neighbourhood watch schemes and the Borough Boards. Officers had also attended public events across the Borough. By the end of the consultation period, on 27th August 2021, a total of 703 full surveys had been completed and a significant amount of feedback had been received via social media and more detailed conversations at focus groups and feedback from local groups.

It was noted that work to analyse all the feedback received was still underway, and emerging headlines had been included in the report. It was reported that the aspects of Surrey Heath that respondents valued had included its green and open spaces and the rural feel of the borough, transport links, local facilities and amenities and the local community. Respondents also felt that Surrey Heath was a safe area. Areas which were considered to need improving had included: roads and traffic levels, public transport, facilities and services, levels of development, town and village centres and shopping facilities.

The draft strategy had been written to reflect not only feedback from members, partners and the public but also those priorities previously agreed by the Council including alleviating poverty and climate change. Efforts had also been made to link targets in the draft Strategy with existing policies and work with key partners and delineate between those aspirations which the Council could facilitate or deliver and those aspirations where the Council could act as a community leader seeking change through lobbying on behalf of residents.

Arising from the subsequent discussion of the draft Strategy the following points were noted for each of the agreed priorities:

Priority: Environment

- Consideration needed to be given to tackling air inequality and pollution across the Borough and not simply focusing on air quality.
- A balance needed to be struck between preserving the green nature of the Borough and ensuring that people's quality of life was not unduly impacted by policies restricting the removal of trees.

Priority: Health and Quality of Life

- Reference needed to be included to both the Clinical Commissioning Groups which covered Surrey Heath.
- Support for older and vulnerable residents needed to be incorporated into the Strategy.
- Housing must be fit for habitation and partners should be held to account where problems arose.
- Affordable housing encompassed more than Registered Social Landlords and reference should be made to the actions that the Council would take to work with developers to deliver affordable housing through the Local Plan and planning process.
- Consideration should be given to the possibility of the Council developing its own affordable housing stock.
- Specifics over the types of affordable housing needed to be given.
- The action "Improve transport accessibility for villages" needed to be clarified.

Priority: Economy

- Our communities were more diverse than just 'towns and villages' and plans to invest in town and village communities should reflect this.
- The section needed to be expanded to take into account both the green economy and how the local economy worked for residents.
- Consideration should be given to how the Council might utilise the green economy in a post pandemic world.
- Reference needed to be made to the number of people who travelled into and out of the Borough each day for work and the impacts that these movements had on all aspects of life including the economy, health and the environment.

The Committee expressed disappointment that the substantive comments provided by many residents in response to the consultation appeared not to have been taken into account in the Strategy's development. It was stressed that the substantive comments were still being analysed and categorised and would be shared with the Task and Finish Group once this work was completed. Details of the substantive responses would also be included in the report that would be taken to the Executive in October.

It was considered that a number of the proposed targets needed to be reworded to ensure that they were specific and achievable and it was suggested that the Task and Finish Group review these. Target implementation years for the priorities would be included in the final strategy.

The Committee was informed that the feedback provided would be combined with any feedback received from the Surrey Heath Partnership at their meeting on the 22nd September 2021 and taken to the Task and Finish Group for discussion on the 29th September 2021. The final draft would be presented to the Executive in October before it was taken to Full Council for adoption.

The Committee commended the officers involved in developing and delivering the comprehensive consultation.

12/PF Complaints Monitoring Report 2020/21

The Committee received a report summarising the outcome of complaints received by the Council at either Stage 2 or Stage 3 of the Council's Corporate Complaints Policy.

During the 2020/21 municipal year, 28 formal complaints had been dealt with at either stage 2 or stage 3 of the Corporate Complaints Procedure (compared to 17 in 2019/20). Of these, 21 had been found to be not justified, four were found to be partly justified and three had been found to be justified. From the seven complaints that were considered to be justified or partly justified five related to operational matters and a failure to respond to the resident concerned in a timely manner.

During 2020/21 the Local Government Ombudsman investigated seven complaints relating to Surrey Heath Borough Council of these one was not upheld, three were referred back to the Council for local resolution and three were closed after initial enquiries. The Local Government Ombudsman made no recommendations to the Council in relation to any of the complaints it had investigated.

It was recognised that whilst Covid-19 had impacted on the Council's resources, it was accepted that this should not be a reason for delivering a poor customer experience to residents. The Council's Management Team had committed to a fundamental review and

refocus of customer service including the implementation of revised service standards as well as staff training and development.

In recognition of the fact that planning matters constituted a significant proportion of the complaints received, the Planning Advisory Service had been engaged to holistically review the Council's planning processes with a focus on improving the service that people received. The review would start at the end of October. It was agreed that the Committee would receive an update on the findings of the review.

The Committee noted the report.

13/PF Executive Portfolio Update: Planning and People

The Committee received a report summarising the Council's work during the first six months of the 2021/22 municipal year which were encompassed within the Planning and People Executive Portfolio; a portfolio which covered a number of areas including planning policy and conservation, planning enforcement, development management, building control, drainage and land charges.

It was reported that at the current time, work to develop a new Local Plan was focused on identifying sufficient suitable land to meet both the Government's identified housing need and the five year land supply targets for the Borough and the requirement for additional Gypsy and Traveller sites; the constrained nature of the Borough's landscape with its proximity to amongst other things Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Green Belt and areas of flooding and the lack of Suitable Alternative Green Spaces (SANGs) to mitigate homes developed in the west of the Borough made this particularly challenging.

The Committee was informed that the latest Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (2020) showed a significant need for Gypsy and Traveller pitches in the Borough and it was stressed that without a viable Gypsy and Traveller Policy the Local Plan would be found to be unsound at the examination stage. This would in turn leave the Borough vulnerable to unsuitable and unsustainable developments.

The Council's target of 35% of new housing provided in developments of more than 10 units to be affordable had been missed for a number of years. A fact that was attributed to a combination of developers stating that the provision of a high volume of affordable housing made developments unviable and negotiating a reduction in the number of affordable units to be provided and many developments being completed through the Prior Approvals process which did not place a requirement on developers to deliver a proportion of affordable homes.

Developers seeking to reduce the levels of affordable housing in a development were required to provide a viability assessment which was independently checked before any agreements were reached. However the Council was bound by the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework when assessing requests for a reduction. It was noted that the situation with regard to affordable housing was expected to be exacerbated by the introduction of the Government's First Homes Scheme which would require the first 25% of any new development to be classified as a First Home and offered for sale at a reduced rate.

There had been a significant increase in the numbers of planning applications from homeowners seeking to build extensions submitted for consideration. Consequently, it had proved a challenge for officers to always determine applications within the statutory timescales of with 64% of minor development applications being determined within the 8 week statutory timeframe and 67% of major development applications being determined

with in the 13 week timeframe during the first quarter of 2020/21. It was noted that the threshold for Government intervention in respect of determining planning applications was 50%. To alleviate pressure on the Development Management Team and speed up the determination of planning applications two additional planning officers, who would focus primarily on reducing the backlog of applications and lead on the delivery of major cases, had been appointed on a temporary basis until March 2022.

The Committee noted that over the winter of 2020/21, the flood defences and attention measures put in place by the Council had performed as intended and consequently no reports of flooding had been received that could be attributed to fall within the Council's responsibility. It was clarified that work on Frimley Fuel Allotments had not been completed because, at the current time, it was not considered to be a problem area and consequently resources had been diverted to other areas of the Borough where need was greater.

The Committee commended the achievements of the Council Drainage Section which had very limited resources and questioned the resilience of the service in view of the fact the drainage service was delivered by a single officer.

The Committee noted the update.

14/PF Review of Public Realm Works

The Group received a report setting out the proposed remit of the Task and Finish Group that had been convened to examine the over spend on public realm works in Camberley town centre.

The Group was informed that the Monitoring Officer would be conducting a review of of the circumstances leading to the increased costs of the Public Realm project and this would form part of the Task and Finish Group's final report.

It was requested that any comments on the Task and Finish Group's remit be forwarded to Councillor Mylvaganam in the first instance.

15/PF Work Programme

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

It was agreed that the following item would be added to the work programme:

- Review of Planning Processes

The Committee noted the report.

Chairman