

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Performance
and Finance Scrutiny Committee held at
Council Chamber, Surrey Heath House,
Knoll Road, Camberley, GU15 3HD on 28
September 2022**

+ Cllr Sashi Mylvaganam (Chairman)

+ Cllr Valerie White (Vice Chairman)

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

+ Present

- Apologies for absence presented

* Committee Member in attendance virtually

Substitutes: Cllr Rodney Bates for Cllr Graham Alleway
Cllr Graham Taper for Cllr Morgan Rise

Portfolio Holders in Attendance: Cllr Shaun Garrett, Portfolio Holder: Economic
Development & Transformation
Cllr Adrian Page, Portfolio Holder: Planning & Control
Cllr Robin Perry, Portfolio Holder: Finance

Officers Present: Gavin Chinniah, Head of Planning
Louise Livingston, Head of HR, Performance & Communications
Damian Roberts, Chief Executive
Lynn Smith, Customer Relations Manager
Nick Steevens, Strategic Director: Environment & Community
Bob Watson, Strategic Director: Finance & Customer Services

10/PF Minutes of Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee held on 13th July 2022 be approved as being a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

11/PF Complaints Monitoring Annual Report

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 2021/22.

It was reported that during the 2021/22 municipal year, 26 formal complaints had been dealt with at either stage 2 or stage 3 of the Corporate Complaints Procedure (compared to 26 in 2020/21). Of these, 23 had been found to be not justified, one had been found to be partly justified and two had been found to be justified. Of the complaints that were considered to be justified or part justified all related to operational matters including insufficient communication with the complainant and the length of time it was taking for the Council to respond to a resident..

Analysis of the complaints that had been found to be unjustified, showed that the majority of them were due to the complainant being unhappy with a Council decision or misunderstanding what the Council was able to do in a particular situation.

It was acknowledged that in view of the number of contacts that the Council dealt with on an annual basis (70,926 telephone calls and 11,943 email, web and face to face interactions recorded in 2021/22) this low number of complaints should be considered to be a positive for the Council.

During 2020/21, the Local Government Ombudsman investigated twelve complaints relating to Surrey Heath Borough Council. Of these none had been upheld, six had been referred back to the Council for local resolution, three were closed after initial enquiries and advice had been given in two cases.

The Committee was informed that whenever possible an effort was made to ensure that there was a full handover when staff left the employment of the Council however this was not always possible and knowledge gaps did occur.

It was agreed that a breakdown of stage one complaints by type would be circulated.

The Committee noted the report.

12/PF Executive Portfolio Update: Economic Development & Transformation

The Committee received a report summarising Council's work over the past twelve months which was encompassed by the Economic Development and Transformation Executive Portfolio; a portfolio which covered asset management, car parking, corporate property, data protection and Freedom of Information, Economic Development, ICT and Digital and service transformation. Key areas of work over the past twelve months had included:

- The retendering of the Asset Management Contract for the Square shopping centre, with an expectation that the successful bidder would be in post by Spring 2023.
- The introduction of cashless payment options at all Council owned car parks
- Providing responses to 616 Freedom of Information requests and 63 Data Protection Individual Rights requests .
- The provision of support to 1,000 businesses through the distribution of the Governments Additional Restrictions Grants.
- Securing £97,000 of funding to enable the Workshop Youth Hub project to be staffed for a further twelve months.
- Relocation of the Workshop Youth Hub project into a larger unit which enabled the project to expand their offer.
- Consolidation of the cloud based ICT services on to the Azure Virtual Desktop system.
- Deployment of 218 laptops to staff, and the associated removal of desktop terminals, enabling greater levels of agile working and the refurbishment of the old desktop computers which were then donated to charity.
- The commencement of work to rebuild the Council's website to enable the Council to replace unsupported and out of date software.
- Completion of the Star Chamber budgeting process resulting in the identification of £660,000 of savings in the 2022/23 financial year.

The proliferation of takeaway delivery drivers parking in the High Street during the evenings was noted and it was questioned whether suggestions made previously about the possibility of providing an official waiting area off the High Street for these vehicles had been

explored. The Committee was assured that the matter was being considered and updates would be provided as the matter progressed.

The impact of increasing charges at all the Council's car parks had been mixed. There had been a significant decline in the use of Yorktown car park something that was attributed to a change in working patterns following the pandemic restrictions with fewer people working in the adjacent BasePoint serviced offices. There was anecdotal evidence to suggest that the introduction of charges in Chobham car park was causing increasing numbers of people to use the recreation ground and Chobham Common and an increase in littering in these areas. It was confirmed that bi-monthly reviews of Chobham car park were taking place and the findings would be shared with members. Reviews of the Burrell Road and Yorktown Road car parks would also take place.

It was clarified that the projected £300,000 cost of replacing the car park control and management system in multi-storey car parks included funding to replace the infrastructure used to support the Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system. A suggestion that differential parking rates be applied to Council owned car parks with drivers parking on the ground floor or close to the elevators and exits being charged more than those who parked further away was noted however it was stressed that adoption of this approach would be dependent on the availability of suitable new technology.

The decision by Surrey County Council to take on responsibility for managing all on-street parking operations across Surrey from 1st April 2023 was noted and it was confirmed that staff would be subject to a TUPE process as part of this transfer. Concerns about the restricted nature of the tender framework that the County Council proposed to use to procure a provider to manage the service going forward was noted and it was agreed that clarity would be sought on how many companies would be eligible to bid under the framework.

It was agreed that concerns about the cleanliness of the Council owned multi-story car parks would be followed up.

It was clarified that whilst the star chamber budget exercise had identified £660,000 of savings in the 2022/23 financial year this was against an original target of £475,000 and the additional savings would be put towards savings required in future years.

The Committee noted the report.

13/PF Executive Portfolio Update: Planning & Control

The Committee received a report summarising Council's work over the past twelve months which was encompassed by the Planning and Control Executive Portfolio; a portfolio which covered Planning Policy and Conservation, Development Management, Drainage, Building Control, Land Charges and Planning Enforcement. Key areas of work over the past twelve months had included:

- Completion of the Draft Local Plan: Preferred Options Regulation 18 consultation
- Ongoing work to identify suitable site for Gypsy and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople as part of the Local Plan development.
- The Development Management Team had defended 36 planning appeals in 2021/22 of which 28 were dismissed and 14 appeals in the first quarter of 2022/23 of which 13 were dismissed.
- The Development Management Service was in the process of implementing the recommendations arising from a review of the service by the Planning Advisory Service including a restructure of the team to enable processes to be streamlined,

build resilience into the section and enable planning officers to spend more time focusing on determining planning applications. Improvements had also been made to the pre-application process and regular training sessions on development management matters for Councillors were now being scheduled.

- The Building Control Service had processed 718 applications, delivered enforcement activity on 55 sites, attended 21 dangerous structures and carried out 5,586 site inspections.

The Committee was informed that if it was not possible to identify sufficient numbers of sites Gypsy and Traveller pitches then there was a significant risk that the Local Plan would be found to be unsound at the Examination stage. Consequently it was incumbent on all Councillors to work with officers to try and identify potential sites across all wards in the Borough.

It was noted that all sites proposed were assessed for their suitability and detailed records setting out why a site was unsuitable were kept. These records would be used at Examination stage to demonstrate that every effort had been made to identify appropriate numbers of pitch sites.

It was clarified that officers did try and ensure that developers provided as much affordable housing as possible however there was no requirement for affordable housing in prior approval and smaller development sites and viability assessments frequently resulted in a reduction in the amount of affordable housing being provided on larger developments.

The Committee was reminded that all planning applications were determined on their individual merits and in line with relevant legislation. Where planning appeals were lost then the learning from these was examined and were relevant applied to future applications.

It was confirmed that whilst the Council had employed an officer to deal solely with ensuring proactive compliance with planning applications due to staff shortages the officer had temporarily been tasked with more general enforcement work. As soon as the Enforcement Team was fully resourced then they would return to the original compliance work.

It was agreed that concerns about Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed would be followed up outside the meeting.

The Committee thanked all the officers involved in the recent Local Plan public consultation work.

The Committee noted the report.

14/PF Work Programme

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

It was noted that the Public Realm Task and Finish Group report would be brought to the Committee's next meeting.

Following concerns about the frequency with which litter and waste bins were being emptied it was agreed that a full update would be brought to the Committee's next meeting.

The Committee noted the work programme.

15/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 9th November 2022 at 7pm.

It was agreed that the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 18th January 2023 would be rescheduled to Wednesday 25th January 2023 to enable it to better fit with the budget setting process.

Chairman