#### **BOROUGH OF REIGATE AND BANSTEAD**

### **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the New Council Chamber - Town Hall, Reigate on 11 July 2019 at 7.30 pm.

Present: Councillors N. D. Harrison (Chair), R. Absalom, M. S. Blacker, G. Buttironi, J. C. S. Essex, R. J. Feeney, J. Hudson, F. Kelly, J. E. Philpott, R. S. Turner, S. T. Walsh and S. L. Fenton (Substitute).

### 12. MINUTES

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting on 6 June 2019 be approved as a correct record.

## 13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Committee Members: Councillors S. Parnall, J. King, C. Neame.

Councillor S. Sinden (substituted for by Councillor S. Fenton)

#### 14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor J. Essex declared a non-pecuniary interest as a director of Furnistore during discussion of Item 4 – Leader's Update.

### 15. LEADER'S UPDATE

The Committee received an update on the work of the Council and its future plans from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mark Brunt.

The Leader gave an overview on policy development across the Council. Items that were discussed included:

- The Draft Corporate Plan 2020-25 this would go out for consultation shortly to get more ideas and wider input from partners and the public, including areas that could have been missed. It was identified that the scrutiny role was very important. Councillors were asked to engage residents in the new Corporate Plan consultation. Tackling climate change would be included following a recent Local Government Association motion in support of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the role of local government in delivering these.
- Housing Delivery Strategy the Council strategy focused not on planning or how or where houses are built but on homes for people, social rent, homelessness and the growing affordability gap which was pricing people out

of accommodation and the role of local government to support residents. It was not just about managing the housing list and allocating housing but how the Council could take an active role in delivering housing and enabling residents to find homes. There would be more consultation, including input from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The strategy was due to be adopted by the end of the year.

- Climate change policy work was continuing to support the environmental motion on climate change that was made at Full Council at its 7 February 2019 meeting. It was looking at what resources would be needed to understand the Council's environmental impact as an organisation. To make a significant impact it would need to invest in skills to enable it to achieve this.
- Partnership working including work with Surrey County Council was continuing. It was looking at services that were delivered to residents and who would be in the best place to deliver that service. This could be a number of organisations including the third sector. It had just carried out a review of the voluntary, community and faith sectors.
- Corporate Plan performance measures work was ongoing. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were being reviewed to make sure Councillors had the right level of information and data when making decisions. This needed to be local performance measures not just government performance measures. Officers would look to work with the Committee so performance measures and information were more meaningful and timely. It was reported that the Council's recent Internal Audit into its governance arrangements had received a high rating with the internal auditors satisfied with what the Council was doing. This was a credit to the Committee's work, including its work on the Commercial Governance review. Although the feedback was very positive it was important not to be complacent.
- External accounts and audit for 2018/19 these would be reviewed at the Executive meeting on 18 July 2019. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee would consider the report from External Auditors in September. Finances continued to be challenging as there was now no Revenue Support Grant but the Council continued to manage its finances well. It had a future funding gap but its plan would not just be about cutting costs. In some areas, it was felt too many costs had been cut. The Budget Review Group was working with Executive Portfolio Holders as it continued its service and financial planning for next year's budget. The government position on business rates was unclear as yet, so revenue from this area could not be relied upon until confirmed. If it was continued, then this would be a bonus. Group Leaders had discussed the future funding gap and felt it was important for Members collectively to understand this and recognise the urgency of tackling this

funding gap.

Capital Investment strategy – work was continuing on this to look at how it
could address the funding gap and understand what would be needed. It
would continue to understand the realities of the funding gap and put in place
some building blocks to address this.

Committee Members had a number of questions in the discussion that followed.

• The Leader's comments on climate change and adopting the Local Government Association motion were welcomed. It was noted that this item would come back to the Committee at a later meeting. The Corporate Plan would recognise the challenges and set out what the Council plans to do and look its role in setting good practice across the borough. It needed to have a clear picture of what its environmental impact was currently. The Council could not commit to how much resource will be needed yet as this was ongoing work.

The Leader said that rather than the Council putting forward a short-term climate change emergency motion, a better way forward would be to have environmental impact as part of a longer term plan. It should be part of the five year Corporate Plan (with key milestones) rather than adopted as a short term project.

Cllr J. Essex declared a non-pecuniary interest as a director of Furnistore during the discussion of the item on the community and voluntary sector review.

- More information about the community and voluntary sector review and its outcomes were requested. It was identified that the review looked at the work with the community and voluntary sector, how the Council distributed funding and how it could make the most of the voluntary sector. For example, it could commission an organisation such as the Citizens Advice (CAB) to provide specific services over three years which would give both the council and the CAB more certainty. It was clarified that the detail of the review was outlined in the 20 June 2019 Executive report.
- Committee Members were pleased to see that the number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) would be reviewed and rationalised. It was identified that the performance measures would be developed this year and put in place for 2020/21.
- Members asked if it had been possible to obtain new powers for the Joint Enforcement Team (JET). It was identified that it had tried to do this but would now take a different approach and look at what powers it already had

and how it could use them, for example, on anti-social behaviour (ASB) such ASB parking.

 It was noted that on the topic of partnership working, a consultation on libraries was going to Surrey County Council cabinet in mid-July for discussion. There would be a broad consultation in September. Surrey County Council members would be interested in the Borough's approach at that time and ask for views.

The Leader identified that the Community Hub in Merstham was a good example of how the community can become involved with libraries. Visitors from other Boroughs had come to see what it was doing, including a Leaders' meeting to be held in the hub to see how it works.

- In the case of youth work, the Council's responsibility is to the borough but if it was in the best position to influence and enable services then this should happen with support from Surrey and other partners to develop a strategy. It was identified that the Borough was co-designing a potential youth strategy for the borough in conjunction with the County Council and third sector partners e.g. the YMCA. If Surrey does not have the staff to run a service and is not using the buildings in Preston or in Merstham, then it could work with organisations like the YMCA to gain access to those buildings at low or no cost so they could deliver youth services.
- Members asked about how the Council would look at the historic performance of those organisations which received funding and how the Council can challenge those groups to give residents the services they want. It was identified that it was early on in the commissioning process, but the Council would look at its priorities set out in the Corporate Plan and commission the services needed. The new approach to the Community and Voluntary Sector Review puts great emphasis on performance management and measuring success.
- Members noted that, while major towns in the south of the borough and Horley had good transport links, in the north of the borough improved transport links were needed. It was identified that the Council could look particularly at disabled transport across the Borough as well as looking at cycle networks. It could use the Surrey County Council Local Committees to bring up these issues as responsibility was with Surrey County Council Highways. The County Council was planning a consultation on rethinking local transport. It was identified that lack of rural bus services was a real issue although the Council did have some good transportation links by road and rail compared to neighbouring boroughs such as Tandridge.

The Committee Members thanked the Leader for his update and would ask for a progress report when he returned to the Committee to give a further update at the 11 December 2019 Committee meeting.

**RESOLVED** – that the update from the Leader and the comments of the Committee be noted.

#### 16. FIVE YEAR PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT 2018/19

The Committee considered a report on the Council's performance relative to its fiveyear plan in the 2018-19 municipal year which had been discussed at the Executive on 20 June 2019.

Leader, Councillor Mark Brunt, introduced the report. He highlighted some key facts such as the excellent work of the family support programme which had a positive impact on families it worked with and the work on the refugee programme.

There were a number of questions and comments on the report, relating to the following topics:

 Investment in businesses – the report noted that the Harlequin theatre was part of the local business sector that was supported by the Council. Members asked how the Council awarded grants to support the role of the local Council and the public sector and did this include voluntary and community services?

The Leader highlighted the work of Councillor Humphreys and the Head of Economic Prosperity and his team. Recent business awards had showcased thriving local businesses who appreciated the support from the borough including the grants programme. This programme has helped start-up businesses to grow and the £1000 grants have made a big difference to small organisations. If voluntary and faith sectors have innovative business ideas then the Council can look to see if they qualify for grants. It was identified that the Council supported businesses not just with money but with a monthly newsletter, lunch and learn sessions once a month that allowed networking. It was described as "a hidden gem" and it was keen to expand the approach and work with other boroughs across Surrey. A key part is working with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The Leader said that he was due to be appointed to the LEP board in October to represent this borough and the nine boroughs and districts around Gatwick.

It was identified that it was a difficult time for businesses. Canon had announced that due to consolidation of its offices it was sadly closing in Reigate. However, Fidelity conversely was looking to expand. How could the Council support and encourage those larger businesses as well as smaller businesses? Continued engagement with businesses, highlighting what makes the Borough a great place to work was important. The area has a vibrant economy but it is shrinking as businesses are changing. For example, less office space was needed as people worked from home two or three

days a week. The Council needs to adapt to this, look through the changing ways of work and have supportive services and policies in place.

- **Money Support Team** it was identified that the Council had supported families but little was known about the work done by the team and the services offered. Members asked for more information about this service.
- Temporary emergency accommodation it was noted that the provision of council-owned temporary emergency accommodation in Horley had been very successful and had saved the Council money as well as improved support to residents. Could this be expanded to the north of the borough as if people have to move, then employment and schooling places could be lost? Demand would be kept under review and discussions regarding future provision would take this into consideration.
- Introduction of Universal Credit it was identified that this could have an adverse effect on claimants and Members asked how the Council has worked with families to prepare for changes.

The Director of People Services said that the roll out of Universal Credit had only just started. It would be rolled out over the next two and a half years and the Council would not see the full impact until it is finally implemented. At the moment the numbers were quite small – 15 to 20 a month. The Money Support Team was formed from the preparation work that had been carried out to be ready for the introduction of Universal Credit. More information could be provided to Members.

The Borough had lobbied the DWP hard on the question of debt. The Council had limited powers but it could get money to people more quickly in certain circumstances. It has its own schemes for rent deposits and can work with residents to assist them if needed.

The DWP has said that Universal Credit will be rolled out over two years but the council does not have a timetable as yet. Members requested that they be informed when the main rollout starts.

• Fraud and Universal Credit – Members raised this issue which had been reported in the news. They asked what support was given to ensure that vulnerable people were not exploited. Members also asked how the Council helped those less fortunate get back into work. It was identified that the Council worked with the DWP to tackle fraud and carried out financial checks on those people who wanted to join the housing register, or presented as homeless, which had saved the organisation significant amounts of money. Its in-house expertise was used by other authorities. Community

development workers also shared information with other agencies about loan sharks and others preying on vulnerable residents.

One aim of the Family Support Team was to reduce reliance on benefits. However, they were working with families with multiple and complex problems such as mental health and addiction issues. It monitored numbers who got back into work and worked closely with partners to get individuals ready for the world of work.

- Dementia Action Alliance Members asked if this was still running as NHS
  and other funding was drying up. It was confirmed that the Council was still
  taking part in supporting dementia-related activity and organisations directly
  providing support. Its role was to support and encourage their work. It was
  not the Council's area of expertise and it did not deliver direct services but
  supported those organisations.
- Wellbeing prescriptions it was identified that wellbeing prescriptions operating in the south of the Borough had been very successful and has been taken up by GPs. It had looked at providing a similar service in the north of the Borough but the amount of funding on offer was not sufficient to operate
- Children and mental health the Council worked with a number of organisations such as Heads Together to provide mental health support in schools. It was recognised as a growing problem and more funding was needed. In one area there was only nine months of funding as Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) had cut funding. The numbers who needed services was going up and it was identified that this was an issue that should be tackled well before a child is 14 to help improve a young person's way of life.
- Affordable homes it was noted that the Council needed to secure more affordable homes and to take a more active role. Only about five per cent of homes that had been built were affordable. How was performance measured? It was identified that it was frustrating for the Council as developers' lawyers often justified why they could not afford to build affordable homes. The Council was looking to change its approach as discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 6 June 2019. It was delivering 100 affordable homes a year but the Leader said it should be aiming to double that target.

**RESOLVED** – that the Council's performance in 2018/19 relative to its Five Year Plan be noted.

#### 17. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

Members considered the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2018/19 and the accompanying report that were discussed by the Executive at its meeting on 20 June 2019. This was the annual statement on the Council's internal control and governance framework which would be published in the Statement of Accounts 2018/19. The Chair noted that he had asked for the AGS to come to the Committee in July, rather than wait until September as in previous years.

Councillor Tony Schofield, Portfolio Holder for Finance, introduced the item and said the 2019/20 AGS was coming to the Committee earlier so any feedback could be incorporated into the final version before it is signed.

It was noted that the outgoing External Auditors (KPMG) had provided their annual opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's risk management, control and governance processes. They had concluded that the organisation had an adequate and effective framework but further enhancements were identified. Work was continuing to make improvements on these matters.

It was noted that the Committee had also discussed the Internal Auditors' report from outgoing Internal Auditors RSM and its positive result at its meeting on 6 June 2019.

Members discussed the item and raised the following questions:

 Organisational Development strategy – what were the targets and deadlines for this strategy? Members were advised that this work is being led by the head of Organisational Development and HR but will involve all of the management team and Members of the Employment Committee. It includes a variety of components such as how the Council recruits and retains staff, how it manages their performance and development so they are engaged in and delivering the Corporate Plan effectively.

The Council's biggest resource was staffing. It aimed to be an employer of choice but was facing challenges such as retaining key skills. The Organisational Development strategy would be discussed at the Employment Committee's meeting on 29 July 2019.

 One Member asked for more clarification on the statement in the effective financial planning and management section about expenditure and the underspend which was equivalent to 9 per cent of the budget.

**RESOLVED** – the Annual Governance Statement for 2018/19 and the accompanying report was noted.

#### 18. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN UPDATE

Members considered the latest Medium Term Financial Plan update (2020/21 to 2024/25) and Budget forecast for 2020/21.

Councillor Tony Schofield, Portfolio Holder for Finance, introduced this item. He said that local government continues to face a very challenging financial situation. Government funding is set to reduce further so the Council is continually challenged to find new ways to make more efficient use of existing resources while at the same time seeking new sustainable income streams.

The timing for many of the proposed funding changes was unclear – there was speculation that there may be a delay, but the Council needed to plan for implementation next year until formal announcements were made.

Councillor Schofield said that the Committee had been given the opportunity to consider the key budget and financial information earlier in the financial planning cycle that in previous years. The report gave as much information as possible at this early stage in the service and financial planning process to put the financial challenges and plans into context.

Members of the Committee were asked to consider and comment on aspects such as:

- the scale of commercial investment opportunities to be pursued
- the types of investment that the commercial strategy should focus on
- the extent of planned borrowing to purchase income generating assets
- the extent to which investment should be through joint-ventures, and
- -the relative balance between commercial and people/place objectives when considering new investment opportunities.

Members commented on a number of areas of the MTFP update which included:

- New Homes Bonus Reserve this was noted to be quite high with no restrictions on use. It was asked if some of this money be given to provide future affordable housing rather than waiting for the draft housing strategy to be completed. The Portfolio Holder for Finance said that the Council had not previously assumed that the grant would continue therefore it was not being used to support the base budget. And the government had set out its intention to end the New Homes Bonus as part of the Fair Funding Review in 2020. Affordable housing was potentially one area being looked at for use of these funds but there was not a firm plan yet.
- Strategic Property Capital Programme Members asked for more detail
  on the list of properties in the Capital Programme in Appendix 2 of the report.
  It was confirmed that this was mainly expenditure incurred on purchasing
  property.
- Towns and Villages initiatives Members asked what would be included in future budgets to fund Corporate Plan priorities for 2020-25 (p58 of the report) that recognise the need for the Council to support towns and villages in the borough to thrive. This included villages that are in the north of the borough such as Banstead village which provided significant income to the

whole borough. This would be considered as part of the budget setting process along with other priorities.

 Economic growth – Members asked if any allowance had been made for potential impacts on economic growth due to Brexit. It was confirmed that Brexit continued to create uncertainty and that has an impact on the Council's supply chain such as price increases, and that operational delivery of capital schemes had been considered.

The scale of the financial challenge in the next three years, included the change in external funding, with the Council more dependent on Council Tax than before. Income from Retained Business Rates was due to stop and the Revenue Support Grant was now zero. It could lose £2.1m in the Government's Fair Funding Review in 2019/20. It could also be affected by major cuts to services by Surrey County Council.

- The positives were that the Reserves and Balances were healthy. The General Fund Balance acts as a buffer against unpredicted budget pressures. Officers were in the early stages of developing an updated policy for future use and size of Reserves that existed, particularly ones with a small balance remaining. The Business Rates Equalisation Reserve remained as it there was uncertainty on Business Rates funding continuing.
- A timetable was set out which included the Management Awayday that had taken place earlier in the day, and future updates to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It was explained that a **Budget Advisory Working** Group had been set up to support the Portfolio Holder for Finance. It was noted that the membership of this Group consisted of Councillors Feeney, King, Neame, Sachdeva and Paul.

In conclusion, it was a challenging fiscal environment. However, the Council had good reserves but it did not want to draw on these reserves too much as its aim was to be financially sustainable.

The Committee discussed the presentation and made observations in the following areas:

- Brexit Members asked if Brexit could lead to a potential drop in rental
  values commercially and a drop in property values. It was identified that if
  property values dropped it would be reflected in the balance sheet at year
  end. It was not thought that capital values would have an immediate impact
  on rental income. It could also be an opportunity for buying property at a
  lower value and therefore at a lower cost to the Council.
- Purchasing property/other commercial investments Members asked what return the Council was achieving at the moment from its incomegenerating assets. Members noted that if they funded the majority of acquisitions from reserves, this would mean losing investment interest. If the Council cannot use reserves and if it makes substantial investments, then it would have to start borrowing money and it would be paying circa 2.5 per cent interest plus provision for repayment costs.

 Members asked why the Capital Programme in 2018/19 was £25m less in 2019/20. It was identified that £25m has been made available for new investments to support corporate priorities, including commercial investments. The Commercial Ventures Sub-Committee has the authority to approve new spending. Members asked if the Council has the skills and resources to acquire sites.

It was identified that investment included proposals to purchase land for redevelopment that would not generate revenue yet but could take some years for the revenue to come through. Business cases would include an exit strategy for the Council.

• Members asked if the Council could look at joint venture commercial investments with the public sector, for example, with Surrey County Council or with the NHS (eg. to develop the nurses' accommodation at East Surrey Hospital). It was confirmed that it was part of the Commercial Ventures Sub-Committee's role to look at the Council's existing property portfolios and land that it owned. This included looking at its social value as well as commercial value and whether it should develop or dispose of some of it. Some major schemes were well outside the Council's ability to fund and would need support from other partners which included Surrey County Council.

It was noted that Committee Members had been asked to give the Executive feedback on the scale and type of investments as well as assets within or outside the Reigate and Banstead borough.

- Members asked if it could invest in more residential properties to support residents. It did have some **residential affordable housing** schemes such as Lee Street Bungalows and Cromwell Road. These were not as large as other commercial schemes. It was identified that these discussions were part of the draft housing strategy.
- Members discussed the relative importance of commercial and People/Place objectives when considering a new investment opportunity. It was identified that a balance of all three was positive. One Member thought that looking for opportunities outside the borough was very important. It was noted that while investment should be considered outside the borough, the greater the distance when investing in a property, the greater the risks. The right skills and resources would be needed to manage these investments. A Member who had worked on town centre redevelopments said that local authorities could have delays in getting development plans underway if they did not own the land. Investments should be strategic and have clear benefits for the Council. It was identified that the Council could have some restrictions on schemes outside its area of economic influence developers could challenge a decision if it borrowed money to fund an acquisition so it had to be careful where it looked.
- Members said that the Council needs to consider the environmental impact. If climate change was to be part of the Corporate Plan, then this should also be part of its investment strategy, for example, whether it could

invest in solar panels for one of the depot buildings, which would help balance the investment portfolio.

It was observed that the strategy did not discuss the Council's appetite for risk in investment. Should it invest in real estate property or with Brexit on the horizon should there be a balanced portfolio of investments such as in solar panels?

 Members considered if there were investment opportunities that would meet People/Place objectives. Some could involve property purchases that may not be expected to have a revenue stream immediately. One Member said that investments in properties should be made locally within the borough. Local people should benefit from the Council's property investments. It was not just about generating revenue but making sure local people could live in the properties or use them for work or leisure.

Members requested further information on the projects that could require new borrowing for the current approved capital programme, as capital programme costs rise by a large amount between 2020/21 and 2021/22. It was confirmed that work was still ongoing to look at this detail.

- Members asked if other commercial ventures were being considered such as work for other councils in the area of revenue and benefits fraud.
- It was noted that a **review of the reserves** and the reasons why they were held was underway. Members identified that these reserves should be consolidated to be more manageable.
- Fees and charges A review of fees and charges was also noted to be part of this year's service & financial planning plans. Members asked that if the Council puts up fees and charges at a CPI rate, how did this compare to inflation? If it affected residents then it should do an equality impact assessment for residents as some of the charges could be very sensitive. One example was an increase on charges for allotments so Portfolio Holders needed to understand the impact of any decision. Members said that allotments should not be a profit centre. These should be considered as an amenity rather than an opportunity for increasing revenue.

It was identified that the Medium Term Financial Plan update was an initial draft report. It would be reviewed again at the Executive meeting on 18 July 2019 and through the Budget Advisory Working Group. It was quite early to expect considered responses but the O&S Committee Members' views would be considered in an updated report.

Members observed that the updated version of the MTFP should reflect all six of the requirements set out in the **CIPFA Financial Management Code**. This included a Financial Resilience Assessment, a long-term financial strategy and a multi-year MTFP.

In summary, Councillor Schofield said that one of objectives of giving a detailed report was to give Members sufficient reference as to what was being considered in the budget planning process. More details would be given at a later stage.

Members said it was a good starting point and thanked the work of Councillor Schofield and finance officers.

**RESOLVED** – that the Medium Term Financial Plan update and the observations of the Committee, as set out in the Minutes, be noted. The Committee observed that:

- (i) It would consider commercial investment opportunities to be made within the Reigate and Banstead Borough and surrounding areas.
- (ii) It requested a further update on the Medium Term Financial Plan for the Committee so that non-exempt information could be discussed in the public part (Part 1) of the meeting.

### 19. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Future Work Programme for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2019/20 and the Action Tracker from the previous meeting.

The Committee noted that the Local Development Forum Scrutiny Panel would no longer be required following the decision of Full Council on 2 July 2019. The Council is not currently preparing a new plan and so there would be no need for the LDF Scrutiny Panel to convene. The Agenda items on the LDF scrutiny review panel constitution at 12 September 2019 meeting and the LDF scrutiny review panel report at 11 December 2019 meeting would therefore be removed.

Members had one outstanding query on the Action tracker on Capital Programme Outturn 2018/10 – Lee Street Bungalows – and had asked for a further response from the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Benefits.

**RESOLVED** – that subject to the amendments referred to above, the Future Work Programme for 2019/20 be endorsed and the Action Tracker from the previous meeting be noted.

#### 20. EXECUTIVE

It was reported that there were no items arising from the Executive that might be subject to the 'call-in' procedure in accordance with the provisions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules.

#### 21. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

### 22. EXEMPT BUSINESS

**RESOLVED** that members of the Press and public be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of Item 12 of the agenda (Medium Term Financial Plan Update (Exempt)) under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that:

- (i) it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act; and
- (ii) the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

# 23. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN UPDATE (EXEMPT)

Members considered information which had been published via an addendum to the agenda, in relation to the Medium Term Financial Plan Update in the exempt part of the meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the exempt information, published via an addendum to the agenda, in relation to the Medium Term Financial Plan Update (Exempt) be noted.

The meeting closed at 10.05pm.