

# Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held at the **New Council Chamber - Town Hall, Reigate** on **Thursday, 13 October 2022 at 7.30 pm.**

**Present:** Councillors N. D. Harrison (Chair); H. Avery, M. S. Blacker, G. Buttironi, M. Elbourne, J. C. S. Essex, N. C. Moses, S. Parnall, A. Proudfoot, M. Tary, R. S. Turner, S. T. Walsh (Vice-Chair), R. Absalom (Substitute), P. Harp (Substitute) and S. Sinden (Substitute)

**Visiting Members present:** Councillors T. Archer, R. Biggs, M. A. Brunt, V. H. Lewanski and T. Schofield



## **21 Apologies for absence and substitutions**

Apologies for absence had been received for Councillor Ritter who was substituted by Councillor Sinden; Councillor Hinton who was substituted by Councillor Harp and Councillor A King who was substituted by Councillor Absalom. Councillor Walsh would be slightly late.

## **22 Minutes**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 July 2022 were approved.

## **23 Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **24 Quarter 1 2022/23 Performance Report**

The Committee received reports on the Council's performance for the first quarter of 2022/23 including Key Performance Indicator (KPI) reporting, as well as revenue and budget monitoring. The reports were due to go to the Executive on 20 October 2022.

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Policy and Resources, Councillor Lewanski, introduced the KPI report by noting that the report outlined the performance of the Council from April to June 2022. Nine out of the ten KPIs were on target or within the agreed tolerance, the remaining red-rated KPI being recycling, which is reported one quarter in arrears. 52.4% had been achieved against a target of 60%, which had been set by the Joint Waste Management Strategy as a stretch target. However, the cumulative 21/22 performance of 55.6% was the highest recorded.

Members discussed and asked questions on the following areas:

**Recycling** – it was noted that the report stated that a reduction in residual waste per household continues to decrease to pre-pandemic levels, which may indicate that life is returning to normal. It was felt that this was an assumption, and the decrease could be attributed to residents' increased awareness of recycling. It was confirmed that the report says, "may indicate" and so could possibly be due to an increased awareness of recycling and levels would be monitored and reported on in future quarters.

**Street Cleaning** – Members noted that the levels for street cleaning and detritus were lower than other categories of local environment quality surveys. It was confirmed that all categories were on target at Grade B, but that graffiti, fly-posting and fly-tipping were exceeding the targets and were at Grade A.

**Affordable Housing** – Members requested a distinction between social rent and affordable rent. It was reported that there was no reliable information on a quarterly basis splitting social rent and affordable rent, as this was reconciled at the end of the year.

**Homelessness** – Members asked for a KPI for the cost of living. It was confirmed that this committee has the ability to review and recommend additional KPIs to the Executive annually and that data on this issue is currently monitored. The Executive Member for Corporate Policy and Resources and Managing Director would consider reporting on the cost of living issues following the meeting.

Members asked what steps are taken to support those who do not meet the support threshold for homelessness. It was confirmed that there were categories for prioritising need for homelessness support and those that did not meet the support threshold were supported in other ways including signposting, housing plan, help into private rented accommodation and other information and assistance.

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance, Councillor Schofield, outlined the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme performance for Q1 2022/23. The projected full year outturn for the Revenue Budget was £19.558m against a management budget of £20.062m resulting in an underspend for the year of £504k (2.5%). Details of the more significant budget variances were set out as usual in the report.

The full year Capital Programme forecast at the end of Q1 of £37.42m was (45%) below the approved Programme for the year. The variance is as a result of £30.18m slippage and a £0.05m net underspend.

The reasons for the significant forecast slippage at this stage is purely because, while substantial budgets have previously been allocated for investment in Housing developments, the related business cases have not yet been developed. These will follow in due course as strategies are implemented in these areas. Details of other scheme variances were set out in the report. Councillor Schofield drew the Committee's attention to a typographical error on page 16 item 18 where "overspend" should read "underspend" regarding treasury investments.

An advance question had been received. The question and response can be viewed here:

[Document Advance Questions OS 13 October 2022 | Reigate and Banstead Borough Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.moderngov.co.uk/Document-Advance-Questions-OS-13-October-2022-Reigate-and-Banstead-Borough-Council)

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Members discussed and asked questions on the following areas:

**Investment income** – Members noted that forecast investment income had decreased to £3.9 million compared to £4.3 million in the previous year due to expired leases and asked whether the forecast would increase in the next quarter due to renewed leases. It was confirmed that the decrease had been due to voids many of which had now been filled.

**Service budgets** – Page 16 mentions lower staff costs for car parking and an underspend due to vacancies in the Planning Policy and Development team, Members asked what the impact on the budget will be when these vacancies are filled. It was reported that vacancies are not automatically filled and that there is a thorough vacancy approval process in place. In addition, Surrey County Council would be taking over responsibility for car parking on the highway in April 2023 and any staff in post at the transfer date would be TUPEd to Surrey County Council. The Council is therefore keeping some roles vacant or covering them on a temporary basis to ensure that these transfers are kept to a minimum.

It was also reported the bulk of the underspend for car parking was due to an increase in car parking revenue. Members noted that the budget for car parking income had been set on a precautionary basis, reflecting the uncertainty of recovery from COVID.

Members commented on the forecast shortfall of approximately £0.620 million in rental income and asked for a breakdown of the properties this relates to. It was reiterated that the data in the report was based on the situation at the end of June 2022; since then the situation had improved and currently there was only one significant vacant asset. It was confirmed that a breakdown would be provided to Members following the meeting.

**Government funding distribution** – Members asked whether the £415k grants balance would need to be repaid to the Government. It was confirmed that these funding streams, such as COVID-related funding and Ukrainian refugee funding, had been forward funded based on Government estimates and the unspent sums would need to be repaid to Government, following reconciliation. There would be some treasury income benefits from interest on holding this funding balance, however administering the funding was demanding on staff resource.

Members asked for an update on the approximate £1million energy rebates still to be paid to residents at the end of the quarter. It was confirmed that 95% of rebates had been paid to date and that the remaining outstanding payments were due in part to non-response from a small number of residents that were proving difficult to contact. A written update would be provided to Members following the meeting. Members further asked whether this performance included the discretionary payments. It was confirmed that this information would also be provided to Members following the meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee:

1. Noted Key Performance Indicator (KPI) performance for Q1 2022/23 as detailed in the report and at Annex 1 and made observations to the Executive.
2. Noted the Budget Monitoring forecasts for Q1 2022/23 as detailed in the report and at Annexes 2 and 3 and made observations to the Executive.
3. Noted the update on the Financial Sustainability Programme (FSP) at Annex 4.

## 25 Annual Environmental Sustainability Strategy Progress Report

The Committee received an annual update on the work towards the objectives set out in the Council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy, adopted in July 2020.

Councillor Lewanski, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Policy and Resources, outlined the work that had taken place over the past year, challenges and next steps. In addition, the agenda pack included Annex 1 which set out the progress on Environmental Sustainability Strategy (ES Strategy) Actions and Indicators for 2021/22.

As well as carbon emission data, the priority topics were:

- The Council's own assets and buildings
- The Council's vehicle fleet
- Rolling out electric vehicle charging infrastructure; and
- Domestic retrofit

Several advance questions had been received. The questions and responses can be viewed here:

[Document Advance Questions OS 13 October 2022 | Reigate and Banstead Borough Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

In addition, Members asked the following questions:

**Natural Environment: Ecological Enhancement** – Members commented that the planting of new trees was commendable but that some of these trees were dying due to lack of maintenance and watering and felt that a resource was necessary to care for the new trees. It was confirmed that residents were requested to water new trees and that the Council relied on residents' goodwill. Members observed that this was not feasible if the trees were well away from housing, such as in parks and open spaces. It was suggested by Members that new trees planted in these areas could be smaller trees which required less watering.

The Environmental Sustainability Strategy has an action encouraging trees removed due to new developments be relocated elsewhere in the borough; Members asked whether this practice was in actively place. It was confirmed that although this had occurred on a few limited occasions it was not regularly used and that this was an aspirational target.

**Energy and Carbon: Renewable Energy** – Members asked how retrofitting of homes was facilitated in older homes with solid wall construction. It was confirmed that retrofitting presented challenges and could not be made mandatory by the Council. However, there were several options available to residents including government grants such as the Sustainable Warmth Grant and officers asked Members to make their constituents aware of these grants. Options were not limited to cavity wall insulation, other options for solid wall construction homes were available such as external wall insulation, internal wall insulation, loft insulation and window and door insulation.

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Although noting that the number of upgraded properties was low compared to the total number of homes in the borough, Members commended officers for their work on raising awareness of and facilitating retrofitting and commented that there had been some significant successes.

Members enquired whether the Home Upgrade Grant would be applied for. It was confirmed that this grant was included in the Sustainable Warmth package.

**Effective Implementation: Communications** – Members asked how the Council communicates with residents regarding energy saving tips and similar information. It was reported that information is available on the Council website and through the Borough News publication regarding issues such as the Sustainable Warmth Grant and sign posting to other sources of information. The Council provides a wealth of communication pertaining to general ways of saving and works with the Surrey County Council Campaign, the voluntary sector, parish councils and food banks.

**Electrical Vehicle Charging** – Members noted that of 29 charging points in the Borough, only 7 are owned by the Council and were concerned that this number should be increased. It was confirmed that the Council is working on an agreement with Surrey County Council to provide further electric vehicle charging points.

Members asked for the full fleet review and the consultant survey of buildings to be shared. It was confirmed that the fleet review report would be shared following the meeting but that the survey of assets had not yet been completed – the key outcomes from this work would be shared when it had been finalised.

Members asked that future information more clearly shows progress against targets with an analysis of targets met, factors resulting in reductions and next steps to address challenges. It was reported that the Environmental Sustainability Strategy had been written pre-COVID and was due to be reviewed next year, and a carbon trajectory is in the process of being produced; officers would be happy to work with Members to adapt future reporting to be more specific during the upcoming review.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee:

1. Noted the Environmental Sustainability Strategy Annual Progress Report at Annex 1 and made observations to the Executive.

## **26 Local Plan - Local Development Scheme**

The Committee received a report on the Local Plan – Local Development Scheme. Councillor Biggs, Portfolio holder for Planning Policy and Place Delivery, explained that the Local Plan Core Strategy was adopted in 2014 and, together with the 2019 Development Management Plan, is scheduled to run until July 2027, subject to a review in 2024. Beyond July 2027 it will become an out-of-date plan and therefore it is important work is started on a new Local Plan that will set out the vision and policies for development beyond 2027. It is a statutory requirement for Local Planning authorities to have an up-to-date Local Plan and will ensure that the Council remains a plan-led authority.

The first step in starting a new Local Plan is to agree a Local Development Scheme or LDS, which is the formal timetable setting out the key work programmes from evidence-gathering through to consultation, examination and then adoption.

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Executive and Full Council will be asked to authorise this in the next couple of weeks, together with the anticipated budget costs over the period. A new plan takes time to prepare. Much of this time will be used to prepare the evidence, engage with stakeholders, local communities, and Members, and prepare the policies. The Local Development Scheme in Appendix 1 of the report outlines how this will be achieved, by who and when. The LDS considers the risks associated with the programme and the types of mitigation measures to minimise these. Throughout the process, all Members will be provided a variety of opportunities to engage in the process, working with officers through the different issues, consider different options and agree the draft policies. This is just the start of the process.

Members asked the following questions:

Members asked what the advantages to a one-step plan are as opposed to a two-step plan, with particular reference to the Five-Year Land Supply. It was confirmed that the Council could choose either a one-step plan or a two-step plan. The detailed planning policies contained in the part two plan or Development Management Plan, such as the environmental policies, sustainability policies and biodiversity policies are those which set out how development should be carried out and would all be reviewed to consider up to date national policy, guidance, and legislation. This part of the two-step plan would take a similar amount of time to develop as a single plan and earlier implementation of such policies was an advantage of a single plan. The single stage plan would be less expensive than a two-step plan. With respect to the number of houses to be built, the Council could retain a number that it was comfortable with; the current number of 460 houses would remain until 2027.

Members felt that the contingency amount should only be used if absolutely necessary.

The Chair pointed out that other Surrey councils have taken a far longer time to develop their plans and would urge the Executive to ensure that the Council's plan was completed within the five-year period. He would also ask the Executive to consider if a two-step plan would present less risk in ensuring that the Council had an agreed housing target in place by the end of the current plan period in 2027.

Members noted that the housing land monitor for April 2022 was 8.72 years and that it was projected to be 5.40 in April 2023; if this trajectory continued, the available land would be used before 2027 and there was concern for the future of green belt land. It was confirmed that the housing monitor is a forecast prediction for the following year only and that large scale permissions could change the housing supply position. When published, the housing monitor anticipated the housing number for 2023 onwards based on 640 homes rather than the 460 stated in the Local Plan but has since been reverted to the 460 figure until 2027, following Council advice. It was also clarified that sustainable urban extensions are not green belt.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee:

1. Noted the Local Plan – Local Development Scheme as detailed in the Report and made observations to the Executive.

## **27 Partner and Shareholder Actions EXEMPT**

The Committee received a report on Partner and Shareholder Actions. This report was due to go to the Executive on 20 October 2022.

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This report was exempt and was excluded from the webcast. This item was scrutinised more fully under part 2 due to the confidential nature of the discussion held.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee:

Considered the Partnership and Shareholder Actions report and made its observations to the Executive.

### **28 Constitution of the Budget Scrutiny Panel**

Members noted the timetable and scope of the Budget Scrutiny Panel due to take place on 29 November 2022 to consider and respond to the draft Budget proposals for 2023/24 due to come to Executive on 15 November 2022.

The Committee agreed membership of the Budget Scrutiny Panel as Councillors Avery, Blacker, Elbourne, Essex, Harrison, A. King and Parnall.

All Members were welcome to attend the meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee:

1. Agreed the membership of the Budget Scrutiny Review Panel and the timetable for scrutiny of the Budget for 2023/24 as set out in the report.
2. Agreed the scope of the Budget Scrutiny Panel's work.

### **29 Overview & Scrutiny Work Programme Schedule 2022/23**

Members considered the Forward Work Programme 2022/23 for the Committee.

An additional meeting had been added for 9 November to accommodate items which had been scheduled for 13 October but had to be postponed due to carrying forward the business from the cancelled meeting on 8 September. These items were the presentation on the Work of the Banstead Common Conservators and the presentation from the Organisation Portfolio Holders.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee:

Noted its proposed Forward Work Programme 2022/23 and the action tracker.

### **30 Leader's Update**

Members received an update from the Leader, Councillor Brunt about the ongoing activities and key work ahead for the Council.

Points to note included:

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- The Financial Sustainability Plan would reduce expenditure by approximately £2 million, ensuring that the Council makes best use of its assets and maximises income both inside and outside the Borough.
- Marketfield Way in Redhill continues to develop, with tenants beginning to move in from November. Most units had rental agreements in place.
- Cromwell Road housing development of 32 new homes would help to reduce the housing waiting list.
- A £4 million investment would be coming to the next Executive meeting to develop emergency and short-term accommodation locally, saving on costs for accommodating residents in temporary accommodation outside the Borough.
- CIL strategic funding applications had been submitted from organisations across the Borough, such as the YMCA, charities and East Surrey Hospital which would diversify the infrastructure delivered by CIL.
- Green spaces – work was underway for winter maintenance and Green Flag status had been retained by Memorial Park and Priory Park.
- A Leisure and Culture Strategy is being developed.
- The Refugee Support Team has been working to support Ukrainian refugees and continues to support Syrian refugees.
- Cost of living support is in place for residents through food clubs, food banks, the Community Development Group and partnership work with East Surrey Place.
- Work continues on environmental sustainability and work will be taking place with local businesses to assist them to improve their environmental sustainability.

Members noted that strategic CIL is generated successfully from development due to the Local Plan and commended the Council on its good relationships with local charities and other local organisations.

Members asked whether there would be an investment zone in RBBC. It was confirmed that the Council had been approached regarding this issue but that it was not in a position to bid currently. However, the Council would continue to attract funding for projects which would benefit residents.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee noted the Leader's update.

### **31 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 Procedure Rules.

### **32 Any other urgent business**

There was no urgent business.

The meeting finished at 9.53 pm