

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held at the **New Council Chamber - Town Hall, Reigate** on **Thursday, 25 January 2024 at 7.30 pm.**

Present: Councillors N. D. Harrison (Chair); J. Baker, M. S. Blacker, J. Booton, G. Buttironi (Vice-Chair), J. Dwight, K. Fairhurst, G. Hinton, S. Khan, S. Parnall, A. Proudfoot, R. Ritter, K. Sachdeva, Z. Cooper (Substitute) and S. A. Kulka (Substitute)

Visiting Members present: J. C. S. Essex, R. Biggs, V. H. Lewanski, C. M. Neame, M. Smith and S. T. Walsh

Visiting Members remotely: Councillors M. Tary and J. P. King



57 Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 December 2023 be approved and signed.

RESOLVED that the exempt minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 December 2023 be approved and signed.

58 Apologies for absence and substitutions

Apologies were received from Councillor Green, Councillor Cooper was substitute.

Apologies were received from Councillor Elbourne, Councillor Kulka was substitute.

59 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

60 Summary of Budget Movements November 2023 to January 2024

In addition to the summary of budget movements November 2023 to January 2024 that had been published in an addendum to the agenda pack, an annex summarising budget movements in table form was tabled at the meeting.

The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the budget for 2024/25 was balanced and provided an explanation of the figures set out in the annex.

In response to a Member question, the Chief Finance Officer confirmed that following the unexpected announcement of additional Government funding on 24 January 2024, it was not yet known how this would impact this Council. It was expected that

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confirmation of any additional funding from the Government would be confirmed in the Final Settlement announcement in early February and that this would be reflected in the recommendations to Council on 20 February 2024.

In response to a Member question, the Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the IT Strategy Reserve had been established in parallel with approval of the IT Strategy in 2022 and was being used to fund one-off costs, such as migration of systems to the Cloud to strengthen business resilience.

With reference to the financial risks identified by the Budget Scrutiny Panel in November 2023, the following clarifications were provided:

- Inflation – CPI inflation forecasts had fallen since the peak of 10%. Inflation pressures remain a risk, but the Chief Finance Officer was content that the budget forecasts are reasonable and realistic with appropriate provision for forecast cost pressures.
- Car parking income – car parking income reduced significantly during the pandemic; however this was no longer considered to be a risk and budgets had been re-baselined to reflect current demand since 2022/23.
- Homelessness demands – this remains a key concern. Government funding continues to be received and is relied upon to manage the costs. It was confirmed that from Quarter 3 2023/24 additional information about homelessness budget risks would be included in the quarterly reporting to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Executive.
- Recyclate income – recyclate income remained volatile and is monitored closely. Government reforms to waste and recycling delivery are expected to bring changes to the Council's waste and recycling services, the costs of which are expected to be partially met by Government. Further updates will be reported to Executive when the details are confirmed.
- Harlequin income – The Head of Service confirmed that costs and income from the 2023 pantomime were currently being collated. The closure of the Harlequin had resulted in loss of income, but also a reduction in running costs. The outcome would be reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Executive.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- i) Considered the updated elements of the Budget 2024/25 and Capital Programme 2024 to 2027.
- ii) There were no recommendations made to the Executive.

61 Leaders Update January 2024

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Biggs, gave an update on the work of the Council. He began by thanking the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Budget Scrutiny Panel for their work throughout the year.

The Leader spoke about the challenges presented by the unexpected closure of the Harlequin theatre. The closure brought a loss of income, but also a saving in costs, and a full report would be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The pantomime had been relocated and all bookings for the forty-three performances had been honoured, helping to raise money for the Lucy Rayner Foundation, the Mayor's

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nominated charity. A pop-up space in the Belfry centre is in use for other shows and events. The Leader thanked the Harlequin team for their hard work.

The Council continues to deliver good services and good work for the borough including:

- Approval for a trial of an electric bin lorry
- Plans to transition waste fleet vehicles to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil fuel
- Renewal of the Public Space Protection Order in Redhill
- A Housing Policy amendment which offers support to those residents interested in downsizing to help make better use of local housing stock
- The influence of The Rise, offering new facilities for residents and attracting new businesses to the area

Other highlights included:

- The Volunteer Awards had taken place in October 2023, recognising volunteers across the borough
- Free football coaching sessions set up for young people in Tadworth, which was showcased at Surrey Downs NHS 'Pulling Together' conference as an example of high quality community engagement
- The Council's work with Mount Green Housing Association on Wheatley Court was shortlisted for the best partnership category in the 2023 Affordable Housing Awards
- The Business Awards took place in November, celebrating the vital role that local businesses of all sizes play in the local community.

Looking ahead, multiple projects are in progress including:

- The Sustainability Team are carrying out a light touch review of the Environmental Sustainability Strategy
- Engagement with residents and other stakeholders is taking place to inform development of the next Corporate Plan to cover 2025-30
- The Reigate and Banstead Sports Awards would be taking place
- Consultation on the A23 Great Street Design Code has concluded and has secured Department of Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities funding of £120k
- Plans are underway for the 50th anniversary of Reigate and Banstead Borough Council to include the appointment of Aldermen, Freeman and additional special awards.

The Leader invited Members to ask questions on his update. In response, the following clarifications were provided:

The Harlequin

Since RAAC had been discovered at the Harlequin and the theatre had been closed, the Council had remained on a waiting list for surveyors to carry out the necessary work to establish the extent of the problem. As the RAAC problem was nationwide, there was high demand for surveyors and no action could be taken to expedite the process. Members would be updated when more information was known. The Managing Director also reported that discussions were ongoing relating to liability for costs resulting from the RAAC issue.

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The Leader confirmed that staff at the Harlequin were being redeployed and that their welfare was a primary concern.

A decision on where the annual pantomime might be held in 2024 would not be made until the report on costs relating to delivery of the pantomime in 2023 had been completed.

Redhill Infrastructure

The Leader confirmed that a strategic view over transport provision in Redhill was important and agreed to arrange a meeting with Redhill councillors and relevant Council officers as well as Surrey County Council members and officers to discuss the matter.

Riverside Garden Park, Horley

In response to a question about possible improvements to Riverside Garden Park in Horley, the Leader agreed to check on the ownership of the park and consider any improvements that might be necessary.

Environmental Sustainability Strategy Review

The Leader confirmed that the light touch review would provide a forum for bringing forward new ideas on environmental sustainability, but changes would be subject to costs and resources.

Gatwick Development Consent Order (DCO)

Following a request from the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Leader would request a written update on the Council's position regarding the Gatwick DCO.

The Chair thanked the Leader for his update.

62 People Portfolio Holders Update

Members received briefings from the People Portfolio Holders overseeing five areas of the Council's work – Housing and Support, Benefits, Intervention, Leisure, and Community Partnerships.

The presentations from each of the Executive Members / Portfolio Holders were published on the Council's website as part of the Committee's agenda pack which can be viewed here:

[Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 25th January, 2024, 7.30 pm | Reigate and Banstead Borough Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

Several advance questions had been submitted regarding the Portfolio Holder Updates. The advance questions and responses can be viewed here:

[Document Advance Questions and Answers OS 25 January 2024 | Reigate and Banstead Borough Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

Councillor Neame, Portfolio holder for Housing and Support, gave an overview of the Council's work in this area.

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Housing Services includes Homelessness, Housing Options, Housing Register including Choice Based Lettings, Refugee and Asylum Seeker accommodation and Housing Delivery.

Councillor Neame reported that homeless applications are increasing, and the number of households in emergency accommodation are increasing; the Housing team are successfully preventing more households becoming homeless.

It is becoming more difficult to secure affordable private rented accommodation for applicants, although the news in the Autumn Statement that the Local Housing Allowance will be increasing in April 2024 will go some way to improve this.

The Home Office procuring hundreds of beds for Asylum Seekers in the borough has and remains a significant challenge for the team – they are effectively a new cohort of homeless applicants.

The Housing team have been able to increase in numbers to help manage the challenges, and this strong and experienced team are committed to enabling good outcomes for vulnerable households.

The Executive has approved over £6million pounds of spend to increase local temporary accommodation which will benefit applicants. The Social Housing Downsizer scheme which went live in November 2023, has already lined up 3 downsizers freeing up 3 family homes to be offered to homeless households.

The Portfolio Holder invited Members to ask questions on the presentation. In response, the following clarifications were provided:

Asylum Seekers

Members asked several questions relating to asylum seekers. It was confirmed that currently a good level of funding was received from Government to house asylum seekers that had received positive immigration decisions that were presenting as homeless when leaving local Home Office hotel accommodation; confirmation of next year's funding had not yet been received and had not been confirmed for the current year until June 2023. The Council was also awaiting confirmation that any unused funding could be rolled over to next year. The contracts for this type of Home Office accommodation were between the hotels and the Home Office, with no direct relationship between hotels and the Council. Once asylum seekers receive a positive immigration decision and change status to refugees, they leave the hotel accommodation and can approach the Council for homeless assistance or secure their own accommodation independently. Some refugees move closer to relatives and friends in other areas, some present to the Council as homeless and others are assisted to find private rented accommodation across the United Kingdom; Government grants are in place to assist this work.

It was confirmed that grants received for transitioning asylum seekers to refugee status covered the costs. It was also confirmed that in order for refugees to qualify for the housing register they must meet the criteria detailed in the Council's Housing Register and Allocations policy that can be found on the RBBC website, these include living in the borough for at least three years continually at the time of application, and nomination or working in the borough continually for at least 12 months at the time of application and nomination. The period of residency would start when the applicant became a Refugee and living in the borough is the "residence of choice", not when the

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Government places them here. The Head of Housing agreed to confirm this after the meeting.

Those on the housing register with refugee status could not be identified separately, as once they receive the “leave to remain” and therefore access to public funds, they have the same rights as any other resident.

Rough sleepers

It was confirmed that Renewed Hope Trust Night Shelter has ten bed spaces. When the forecast temperature falls to 0°C or below, according to the Met weather forecast, for three nights, the severe weather emergency protocol is triggered, and emergency accommodation is offered to all local rough sleepers. It was confirmed that the Council is aware of rough sleepers and works with outreach workers to engage with these residents, although some were reluctant to engage. An annual count of rough sleepers takes place in November on one single night and the count in November 2023 was six.

Homelessness

It was confirmed that the Homelessness Reserve was just under £1million. This reserve would be used if homelessness grants fell short of covering costs.

In Council-owned emergency accommodation staff are in place to help to manage issues and concerns with residents. Every aspect of the life of homeless applicants is reviewed and help is offered, although applicants cannot be forced to accept help.

It was confirmed that the proposed support scheme would provide supported emergency accommodation for single adults with a degree of need, but not high complex needs.

It was confirmed that the £6million investment in temporary and emergency accommodation had been funded by the Council, not Government grants, although Government funding had been used in addition to this investment; once property had been purchased, Homes England funding could be applied for.

Affordable social housing

It was confirmed that the Council was working with Raven Housing Trust on a new build project for affordable housing. In addition, temporary accommodation was being purchased, Council assets were being reviewed to consider their use and the possibility of repurposing, and the downsizers project was underway.

It was confirmed that the limited amount of affordable social housing was a nationwide issue and that initiating new building schemes was challenging.

A visiting member requested information on the amount of the £30million Council aspiration to spend on affordable social housing that had been spent to date. A written answer would be supplied.

Councillor Neame, Portfolio holder for Housing and Support, gave an overview of the Council’s work on Benefits.

Housing Benefit and Local Council Tax Support are statutory services provided by the council. Around 5,000 households are receiving Housing Benefit and a similar number

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receive Local Council Tax Support. The combined expenditure on these schemes is £33million – most of the Housing Benefit costs are reimbursed by the Government.

Discretionary Housing Payments provide extra help to households paying rent, and the funding for this year is £183K, which is provided by the Government.

In the last 12 months the service has dealt with over 3,000 new claims and processed over 40,000 changes in circumstances to all claims.

Many households now claim Universal Credit, but a proportion of households remain under the Housing Benefit scheme – these include pensioner households, supported housing and temporary housing.

Local expenditure has risen in recent years on supported housing, which is where the Council will not always receive 100% of the funding back from central Government, and this is a situation being seen at a national level.

Councillor Neame, Portfolio holder for Housing and Support, gave an overview of the Council's work on Intervention.

Intervention covers three areas, the Family Support Programme, the Money Support Programme, and Refugee Resettlement.

There has been a large increase in referrals for family support, as well as an increase in more complex needs, meaning that more time is spent with each family.

The Money Support team have been working hard to keep the average length of time between 8-10 weeks.

There has been good success with the refugee resettlement programmes, however there can be difficulties in identifying suitable longer term accommodation in the private rented sector.

The Portfolio Holder invited Members to ask questions on the presentation. In response, the following clarifications were provided:

Family Support Programme

It was confirmed that the large increase in referrals was due in part to poor mental health and police referrals for domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour. The Family Support Team consists of 9½ members of staff, although there was currently a 0.5 Whole Time Equivalent vacancy, with each officer dealing with ten cases; there were currently 94 cases. Families waiting to join the support programme were contacted at least every 3 weeks to re-evaluate their case, which allowed for re-prioritisation and signposting to partner organisations.

It was confirmed that several issues had arisen with family sponsorship of refugees; dedicated staff worked with sponsors, sourced alternative sponsors, and assisted refugees in moving to private rented accommodation within and outside the area ensuring that the guests were not disadvantaged.

Councillor Biggs, Leader of the Council, introduced the presentation on the Council's work on Leisure. He explained that the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Leisure and Culture had stepped down from his position and that the responsibilities had been shared between other Executive Members.

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The Leader invited Members to ask questions on the presentation. In response, the following clarifications were provided:

Youth Services

The Leader confirmed that the Council works closely with the YMCA and is relaunching its Get Connected programme to collaborate between partners working to support young people. Work with the YMCA was currently underway to convert a bus into a travelling youth club and the Council supports a wide range of youth services by providing accommodation. School holiday activities were provided, and work was underway to provide a wider range of activities.

Autism-friendly venues

It was confirmed that challenges such as autism and dementia were considered when providing leisure activities, with leisure centres being accessible and welcoming to all needs. A written response would be provided with more detail of the provisions provided.

Star for a Night

It was confirmed that the Star for a Night programme had been affected by the closure of the Harlequin Theatre, however, the Council was currently working on alternative arrangements, which would result in the event being held later than usual in the year.

Arts

It was confirmed that the theatre team were working creatively and quickly to develop an alternative programme of events, while the Harlequin Theatre is closed.

GLL

It was confirmed that the Council was aware of residents' complaints regarding the GLL booking system for classes and would continue to work with GLL to improve this service.

Councillor Biggs, Leader of the Council, introduced the presentation on the Council's work on Community Partnerships.

The Leader invited Members to ask questions on the presentation. In response, the following clarifications were provided:

Banstead food pantry

It was confirmed that the Raven Housing Trust was assisting the Good Company with the startup of the food pantry and that the model was designed to be self-sustainable.

Energy saving devices

A Member asked for examples of the energy saving devices provided to households to combat fuel poverty. It was confirmed that these included LED lightbulbs, draught proofing, electric blankets, radiator foil, tumble dryer balls, water tank lagging, water pipe insulation and air fryers or slow cookers.

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Food clubs

It was confirmed that there were waiting lists for some of the food clubs in the borough. This was due to a problem with the Fareshare food supply, which should improve when a Surrey warehouse was established. In the meantime, other ways of alleviating the problem, such as moving to fortnightly food club attendance, were being considered.

RESOLVED that:

Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the People Portfolio Holders updates.

63 Calendar of Meetings 2024 - 2025

The Committee considered the calendar of meetings 2024/25. The Chair noted that he had requested an extended period of time between the Budget Scrutiny Panel meeting and the subsequent Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, but that this had not been possible.

The Committee made no observations to the Executive.

64 Overview and Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

The Managing Director informed the Committee that a new Police Borough Commander, Jon Vale, was now starting imminently; both he and the interim Borough Commander, Rob Staplehurst, would be attending the Annual Community Partnership Scrutiny meeting on 22 February 2024, as well as officers from the Council.

The Chair informed the Committee that it would be necessary to move the Review of the Recycling Service from the March meeting into the pending section of the forward work programme, to accommodate the timeline for subsequent reporting to Executive.

RESOLVED that Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- i) Approved the change to the Overview and Scrutiny Forward Work Programme.
- ii) Noted the action tracker.

65 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.

66 Any other urgent business

There was no urgent business.

The meeting finished at 10.15 pm