

## Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held at the **Executive Meeting Room - Town Hall** on **Thursday, 12 October 2023** at **7.30 pm**.

**Present:** Councillors N. D. Harrison (Chair); J. Baker, M. S. Blacker, J. Dwight, K. Fairhurst, B. Green, G. Hinton, S. Khan, S. Parnall, A. Proudfoot, R. Ritter, J. C. S. Essex (Substitute) and S. A. Kulka (Substitute)

**Attended remotely:** Cllr K. Sachdeva

**Visiting Members present remotely:** Councillors R. Biggs, A. King, J. P. King, V. H. Lewanski, R. Michalowski, C. M. Neame and S. T. Walsh



### **34 Minutes**

A Committee Member requested that the following addition be made to the public minutes of the previous meeting:

Item 5 Environmental Sustainability Strategy: Annual Report

*Members requested consistency in the separate recycling bins provided in open spaces for different streams of recycling and consistency in the signage provided, across the borough, in order to avoid recycling contamination. It was confirmed that the Waste and Recycling team have secured CIL funding to introduce solar compacting bins in public locations and that consideration would be given to signage on how best to direct residents on which bin to use for different streams of waste, to reduce contamination of recycling bins.*

The original minutes have been amended.

**RESOLVED** that with this amendment, the minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 September 2023 be approved and signed.

### **35 Apologies for absence and substitutions**

Apologies were received from Councillor Booton; Councillor Essex was substitute. Apologies were received from Councillor Elbourne; Councillor Kulka was substitute. Apologies were received from Councillor Buttironi, there was no substitute.

### **36 Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### 37 Organisation Portfolio Holders Update

Members received briefings from the Organisation Portfolio Holders overseeing four areas of the Council's work – Communication & Customer Contact; Finance, Governance & Organisation; Commercial & Community Assets; Corporate Policy & Resources.

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, 12th October, 2023, 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 12 October 2023 | Reigate and Banstead Borough Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Biggs, gave an overview of the Council's work in Communications & Customer Contact and the Corporate Plan Review.

#### Communications & Customer contact

The way in which residents want to contact the Council is changing; work is underway to ensure needs are met, balancing the use of technology while maintaining telephone options and options for more vulnerable residents.

Regular effective communication with residents is continuing.

A communications toolkit providing a library of resources for use by services, is being produced.

#### Corporate Plan Review

A new Corporate Plan needs to be in place for 2025/26. Engagement with Members is underway and will continue.

Councillor Lewanski, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and Organisation, gave an overview of the Council's work in this area.

#### Organisational Development & Human Resources

The focus of work has particularly been around a revised service operating model, which has now been agreed and adopted and is delivering an ongoing saving. Permanent recruitment to fill the team vacancies is now underway. Establishment management processes have been improved, which has included further scrutiny of vacancies throughout the Council. Roll out of real time people data to Senior Management Team and Heads of Service will follow next. The Employment Committee will be asked to endorse the revised OD & HR Strategy through to 2026/27 and an all staff survey will go live before the end of the calendar year, with analysis and action planning to follow in early 2024.

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### Legal & Governance

Great progress has been made in ensuring sound governance and transparency. Once again, the May elections went very smoothly despite the challenges of introducing Voter ID. Looking ahead, future plans include reviews of the Constitution and Code of Corporate Governance to ensure they remain relevant and fit for purpose. Replacement of the Council Chamber webcasting equipment is progressing to plan.

### Mayoral & Civic Events

It has been another busy year, with one regret that the recent Volunteer Awards event at the Harlequin had to be cancelled while the building is closed.

### Revenues & Fraud

Performance for council tax and business rates collection rates remains strong; the Council's counter-fraud team's achievements have been recognised in a national excellence award, while the external customer base continues to grow.

### Finance

As summarised in the slides and in the many finance updates to O&S throughout the year – the Council remains in a position of relative strength but acknowledges that the challenge of budget setting does not get any easier.

Members made observations and asked questions on the following areas:

### OD & HR

It was confirmed that the ongoing budget saving of £100k per annum was sustainable. The saving had been achieved by deleting funded posts, decreasing Full Time Equivalent numbers from 13 to 11. It was confirmed that the new staff structure was appropriate for the service going forward. Any proposal for future growth in the service would have to be submitted through the service & financial planning budget growth proposal process with a supporting business case.

### Mayoral & Civic Events

It was confirmed that the Volunteer Awards would not be held at an alternative venue and that awards had been sent and some award winners had received personal visits.

### Revenues & Fraud

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and Organisation, confirmed that proposed Cabinet Office savings were expected from the NFI Data Matching Review highlighting fraudulent activity.

### Finance

It was confirmed that Central Reserves were at a "healthy" level of £38million.

Councillor Andrew King, Portfolio holder for Commercial and Community Assets, gave an overview of the Council's work.

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### Property Assets

The Council has continued to ensure that void space is reduced as much as possible and that asset running costs are being controlled, including entering into new energy contracts. Asset acquisitions have focused on sites of strategic importance, such as Reading Arch Road. The Light has opened.

### Companies

The Council has continued to progress its strategy of exiting arrangements in a controlled way with regular updates to the Partnership, Shareholder, and Trustee Executive Sub Committee (PSTESC) and Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

### Charities

PSTESC has taken on formal responsibility for overseeing charities and ensuring compliance with annual trustee reporting requirements. The next report is scheduled for December 2023.

Members made observations and asked questions on the following areas:

### Property Assets

It was confirmed that options for the future use of Beech House were being considered. A report would be presented to the PSTESC when they are ready for consideration.

It was confirmed that the three properties in Reading Arch Road had all been commercially let. An officer working group had been set up to consider future options for these properties and would report to Members in the future. The Local Plan allocation sees the site allocated for mixed-use redevelopment.

It was confirmed that quarterly reports are now submitted to PSTESC providing in depth detail on the Council's assets and are available to view on the Council's website. Vacant properties reported in 2021/22 were now all let. Recent voids had been caused by tenants losing funding and businesses downscaling their office space. The three park cafes were temporarily closed for refurbishment and lease terms had been agreed with the new tenants.

Councillor James King, Portfolio Holder for Policy and Resources, gave an overview of the Council's work.

### Corporate Policy

An approach to the development of Council strategies has been agreed. Work on the Corporate Assurance Framework is underway.

### IT

The IT strategy is being progressed, with three main strands – disaster recovery, telephony and communications system, and cyber defence, due to be finalised by the end of December 2023. Following completion of the IT strategy, the level of IT resource will be reviewed to help with IT project delivery.

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### Data and Insight

The Data and Insight team have made valuable contributions to areas of Council priority such as the Financial Sustainability Programme, strategy development and rolling out Power BI across services.

Members made observations and asked questions on the following areas:

### IT

It was confirmed that the IT Strategy had a clear line on IT support for Members but that this could be looked at again following the review of IT resourcing. The Chair suggested that a questionnaire could be sent to Members to canvas the level of need for IT support.

### Data and Insight

It was confirmed that the approximate annual cost of the Data and Insight team was £160,000. The possibility of commissioning this service from an outside provider was being considered, but this would incur a charge for discovery work for each project, adding an additional cost pressure which would not be present if using the internal service. The possibility of marketing the Council's Data and Insight team's services externally was also being considered.

The use of Power BI, a data visualisation tool (allowing users to interrogate complex data easily), is being rolled out and can be a valuable tool in the reporting of KPI Performance Indicators. A data community is in existence to assist services to use data more effectively. Having evidence-based strategies was important and an in-house Data and Insight team provides a resource for services to engage with at the early stages to best inform strategy development. Power BI has the potential to be a valuable tool in the reporting of Key Performance Indicators – this is currently being explored. There are approximately 500 internal data sets at the disposal of the Council, largely used by individual services for their needs, as well as access to a wide range of external data and insight; the Data and Insight team have the ability to overlay many complex data sets, to draw out insights from these and use to inform more relevant strategy development and targeting of resources.

It was confirmed that Power BI was included in the existing Microsoft 365 licences held across the Council, so incurred no additional cost.

The Chair recommended that Members view the monthly project dashboards. The Clerk would circulate a link.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee:

Noted the Portfolio Holder Updates on activities undertaken within the Organisation Portfolio service and policy areas.

## **38 Lessons Learnt: Pitwood Park, Cromwell Road & Lee Street**

Members received a report on the Council's key reflections and learnings from three recent housing delivery projects at Pitwood Park, Cromwell Road and Lee Street undertaken between October 2020 and August 2022.

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Several advance questions had been submitted regarding Lessons Learnt: Pitwood Park, Cromwell Road & Lee Street. The advance questions and responses can be viewed here:

[Document Advance Questions and Answers OS 12 October 2023 | Reigate and Banstead Borough Council \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)

Councillor Neame, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Support gave an overview of the work undertaken.

The Council undertook the construction and delivery of three new-build housing led schemes between October 2020 and August 2022. This report presents the key reflections and learnings from those housing development projects.

Pitwood Park was delivered in August 2021 and is a good example of a mixed tenure development with some homes being sold on the open market, and others being sold onto a Housing Association for re-sale as shared ownership properties.

Whilst the expenditure was higher than anticipated at the time of Executive approval, but within the budget allocation, the Council was able to generate a greater capital receipt than was originally anticipated due to higher sales prices at point of sale.

There were challenges on this site due to the type of contract used as well as due to site conditions. Officers have addressed the key lessons learnt from these in the report and learnings will be applied for future developments.

Cromwell Road was delivered in February 2022, and the 32 flats have been retained by the Council for social housing.

The Council were delighted to have been successful in securing Homes England grant funding for these schemes which provided cross-subsidy of £1.36m. The development was recognised as the region's Best Large Social Housing Development in the LABC Building Excellence Awards 2022 which was testimony to the excellent quality of build.

Lee Street was delivered in August 2022, and now provides 4 much needed 1-bedroom temporary accommodation homes for those in real housing need. The development had an extensive history and at times the delivery of the project seemed unreachable. However, with subsidy from Homes England a successful project has been delivered.

In addition, the Senior Development Manager shared a PowerPoint presentation showing the completed housing projects.

Members made observations and asked questions on the following areas:

### Pitwood Park

It was confirmed that although the exact price obtained by Raven Housing Trust on the sale of these homes was not known, they were sold by Raven Housing Trust on a part buy/part rent basis and the Council had received fair value for the units sold.

Members requested details of the onsite contamination. A written response would be provided following the meeting.

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It was confirmed that a JCT Design & Build contract was typical for housing association and local government use, as it passes more risk to the contractor, rather than the local authority, and is more widely used at the current time.

### Cromwell Road

Members commented on the length of time taken to remediate outstanding defects and asked whether lessons had been learnt with regards to: a) tenants being contracted to make themselves available for repairs to be carried out and b) higher retention figures on contracts. It was confirmed that the 1.5% retention was standard, but it was recognised that nine months was a long period of time to remedy defects. It was confirmed that it had been a small number of properties delaying the works and that all defects had now been made good.

It was confirmed that there had been interest in the commercial units at Cromwell Road and that negotiations with potential clients were underway.

It was confirmed that there was an intention to move away from gas utilities and it was noted that Lee Street is 100% electric.

### Homes England Funding

It was confirmed that Cromwell Road had qualified for Homes England funding, due to it being 100% social housing; Lee Street had qualified for Rough Sleeper Funding. Pitwood Park had not met the criteria for Homes England funding due to the tenures on the site.

### Budget and Budget Changes

It was confirmed that the budget history of the developments was available in the reports to Executive, links to which had been included in this report. The original budgets had been approved in 2018. When the current team took over the project in 2020, budgets had been re-examined and both the design and budget for Lee Street had to be adjusted due to necessary changes. Budgets for Cromwell Road and Lee Street had not been changed.

### Cost per M<sup>2</sup>

It was confirmed that the final bill cost per M<sup>2</sup> was the cost for work, not the project cost. This cost did not include any funding received.

### Involvement of Members

It was confirmed that although Members would be consulted and given the opportunity to provide feedback on any future projects, there was a clear delineation of roles and Members would not be consulted in a professional capacity.

### Potential Joint Working on Future Projects

It was confirmed that Council representatives meet with Raven Housing Trust monthly and that a close relationship exists. Opportunities to work with Raven would be considered, but this would depend on the project. It might be advantageous for the Council to work alone on projects utilising Council-owned land. The Council would need to be flexible and explore the possibility of different partnerships for different opportunities.

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It was explained that compiling lessons learnt information from the earliest stages of the projects was challenging as the officers involved were no longer employed by the Council. Members commended the work of the Senior Development Manager since taking over these projects.

A visiting member had a number of questions to ask on this report. The visiting member was requested to submit the questions in writing for a written response following the meeting.

**RESOLVED** that Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

Noted the report on Lessons Learnt: Pitwood Park, Cromwell Road, and Lee Street.

### **39 New Local Plan Update**

Members received an update on the New Local Plan from the Portfolio Holder for Place, Planning and Regulatory Services, Councillor Michalowski.

Several advance questions had been submitted regarding the New Local Plan Update. The advance questions and responses can be viewed here:

[Document Advance Questions and Answers OS 12 October 2023 | Reigate and Banstead Borough Council \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)

The report sets out the current position and the proposed way forward, following the new style of local plan creation. Some risks have been identified and the update provides a reasonable and pragmatic approach.

Members made observations and asked questions on the following areas:

#### Habitats Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal Commissions

It was confirmed that the Government would be introducing Environmental Outcomes reports, which would be a significant shift from current requirements. Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRAs) and Sustainability Assessments would not form part of the new local plan; therefore it would pose a risk to undertake this work at the current time. Members were invited to contact officers directly for further discussion.

#### Local Plan development timeframe

It was confirmed that the current style of local plan could not be submitted after summer 2025; the Council would not have the new Local Plan finalised in time to meet this deadline, therefore it would need to work towards the new style of local plan. The Government framework would need to be adhered to, meaning that the plan could not be delivered any earlier than its newly proposed target date. The Chair noted that it was a year since work on the Local Plan had started, and disappointingly, although for understandable reasons, the target date had slipped by nine months to a year.

#### Resident Engagement

It was confirmed that a campaign to involve residents in the new Local Plan would be run in the Borough News in November 2023. Following this, workshops and presentations would be planned, formal consultation would take place, and the Local Plan Advisory Group (LPAG) would commence its work early in 2024. The timetable



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included in the report was indicative and would include time for analysis of resident engagement.

Members were concerned that the first formal consultation for the new Local Plan would be in the summer holiday period and that this would affect resident engagement. It was explained that the consultation would be for an 8-week period, which exceeded the normal consultation period of 6 weeks, and had been planned to align with the committee cycle and Member engagement.

### Risks of interim period between Local Plans

It was confirmed that the current Local Plan would end in 2027, when it would then become out of date with the National Planning Policy Framework. However, it would still carry weight with regards to decision-making. A balance would need to be struck between the existing Local Plan, national policies, and the emerging Local Plan, by the decision-maker.

### Differences between the old-style and new-style Local Plans

It was confirmed that the new-style local plans, although similar to the old-style local plans, would focus on unique visions for the authority's own locality.

The Council's response to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, which has been submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) would be shared with Committee Members following the meeting.

### The borough's 5 year housing supply

It was confirmed that the Council's intention was to retain the 460 per year figure, identified in the current Local Plan, in its housing monitor.

Committee Members noted that the new Local Plan required political leadership to keep it to schedule.

**RESOLVED** that Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- i) Noted the progress of the Council's new Local Plan.

## **40 Constitution of Budget Scrutiny Panel**

The Committee received the report on the constitution of the Budget Scrutiny Panel, scheduled to take place on Wednesday 29 November 2023.

The Committee agreed membership of the Budget Scrutiny Panel as follows:

Councillors Blacker, Buttironi, Chandler, Dwight, Essex, Green and Harrison.

The Chair stated that all Members were welcome to attend the Panel meeting and asked that it be included in the Members bulletin.

**RESOLVED** that Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- i) Agreed the membership of the Budget Scrutiny Panel.
- ii) Agreed the scope of the Budget Scrutiny Panel's work during 2023/24.

**41 Constitution of Environmental Sustainability Strategy Review Panel**

The Committee received the report on the constitution of an Environmental Sustainability Strategy Review Panel.

The Committee agreed membership of the Environmental Sustainability Strategy Review Scrutiny Panel as follows:

Councillors Booton, Chester, and Harp; the four nominations for membership of the panel from the Conservative party had not yet been received and the Committee agreed that the Chair would approve the nominations by email following the meeting.

*Clerk's note: Following the meeting, Conservative nominations for the panel were Councillors Baker, Blacker, Cooper and Fairhurst.*

**RESOLVED** that Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- i) Considered and agreed to the option to convene a scrutiny panel to review the proposed updates to the Environmental Sustainability Strategy.
- ii) Agreed the membership of the proposed Environmental Sustainability Strategy Review Panel (Conservative party nominations to be agreed with the Chair by email following the meeting) and the timetable for scrutiny of the Environmental Sustainability Strategy as set out in the report.
- iii) Agreed the scope of the proposed Environmental Sustainability Strategy Review Panel's work during 2023/24.

**42 Overview and Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme**

The Committee received the Overview & Scrutiny Forward Work Programme.

The Chair noted that in future the mid-year Treasury Management Reports would be included in the Quarterly Performance Reports.

It was agreed that the Update on Marketfield Way Report would be added to the Forward Work Programme for December 2023. This report should include costings or reasonable estimates for completion, which would possibly be exempt information.

It was agreed that the Environmental Sustainability Strategy Review Panel Report would be added as a pending item.

It was agreed that the Leisure & Culture Strategy would be added as a pending item.

It was confirmed that the work of the Greenspaces Team was reviewed at a high level through annual Portfolio Holder presentations and that a consultant was being appointed to work on the Greenspaces Strategy.

It was agreed that the Review of the Greenspaces Team would take place after the Review of the Greenspaces Strategy.

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It was agreed that the advance questions and responses for the Budget Scrutiny Panel would be shared with all Overview & Scrutiny Committee Members as soon as they were available.

It was noted that the review of the recycling service was on hold pending government guidance on their preference for a uniform collection regime across the country. Officers explained the Council was also reviewing the approach to expanding the recycling service to further properties in the borough.

It was noted that there was a need for an additional Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting in February or March 2024 to address the pending items on the Forward Work Programme.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee agreed the amendments to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme for 2023/24 and noted the updated action tracker.

### **43 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.

### **44 Any other urgent business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting finished at 10.07 pm