

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 Thursday, 23 January 2020 at 7.30 pm.

Present: Councillors N. D. Harrison (Chair), S. Parnall (Vice-Chair), R. Absalom, M. S. Blacker, G. Buttironi, J. C. S. Essex, R. J. Feeney, J. Hudson, J. P. King, J. E. Philpott, S. Sinden, R. S. Turner and R. Michalowski (Substitute)

Also present: Councillors R. Ashford, M. Brunt, A. Horwood, G. Knight, T. Schofield

25. MINUTES

RESOLVED – the Minutes of the previous meeting on 17 December 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed.

26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Committee Members: Councillor K. Sachdeva and Councillor S. Walsh.

Councillor F. Kelly (substituted by Councillor R. Michalowski).

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

28. ANNUAL COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP SCRUTINY

Members reviewed the work of the East Surrey Community Safety Partnership 2019/20. Cllr R. Ashford, Portfolio Holder for Community Partnerships, gave an overview of the Council's community safety work. The Council's community safety and anti-social behaviour officers work closely in partnership with Surrey Police, Surrey County Council, schools and other council teams such as housing and the Joint Enforcement Team (JET) to support its four community safety priorities. These are: tackling anti-social behaviour, preventing domestic abuse and serious organised crime and undertaking anti-terrorist Prevent duties.

Cllr Ashford introduced Insp Angie Austin, Borough Commander for Reigate and Banstead, who attended the meeting, gave a presentation and answered questions from Members. The Reigate and Banstead Specialist Neighbourhood Team priorities were: protecting vulnerable people, targeting prolific offenders, high harm crimes and crimes which have a serious impact on the community and engaging with hard to reach communities.

Inspector Austin highlighted the key areas of policing activity in the borough over the past twelve months, including cuckooing, tackling county-lines drug dealing, child sexual exploitation and identifying and dealing with prolific offenders for firearms, money laundering, drug manufacture and supply, assaults and knife crime.

Police officers continued to engage with hard to reach communities and worked with community development workers to run sessions for example with elderly groups. They had good contacts with the local mosques and the local Asian Social Group. They wanted to engage more with disability groups and asked Members for their support to work with these groups.

Insp Austin concluded that officers were active in the Borough although they were not always visible to the public due to the high number of 999 calls and work involved with supervising prisoners.

The Head of Community Partnerships set out the Borough's work on community safety which included statutory responsibilities to work with partners, including the police, to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, lead management of domestic homicide reviews and manage public space protection orders. Non-statutory activities included overseeing CCTV and tackling domestic abuse although the latter work will become a statutory duty after new domestic abuse laws come into force. In the last year, the Council had employed a new community safety officer and a part-time anti-social behaviour co-ordinator, both from police backgrounds. This meant that the Council was tackling anti-social behaviour at a faster pace than before.

The Council's Community Safety Officer gave an overview of the Council's work on its community safety priorities which included working closely with partners to deliver more effective joint enforcement activities to respond to and reduce anti-social behaviour. One example of the problem-solving approach to the work was targeting aggressive begging on the streets, often linked to Serious Organised Crime groups. They also worked with individuals who were rough sleepers to help them get the support they need and take them off the streets.

The Community Safety team works closely with East Surrey Domestic Abuse Service (ESDAS) to raise awareness of domestic abuse. This included holding a successful event at the Harlequin theatre in Redhill called 'The Best We Can Be' aimed at young people aged from 16 to 24 and local colleges. The team also oversaw domestic homicide reviews working with the Home Office, with two ongoing and one more potentially starting shortly. The Borough was an active member of the East Surrey Domestic Abuse Working Group with Mole Valley and Tandridge Councils.

The team had held four Serious Organised Crime briefings for officers from housing, family support and licensing as well as Members. Partners have reported increased intelligence from the Reigate and Banstead area as a result. Racist stickers posted in Woodhatch had been removed quickly. A Prevent duty health check had identified some improvements which was now almost completed.

Members thanked Insp Austin for the officers who dealt with the drug problems very quickly in the north of the borough.

Members made the following observations in the discussion that followed:

- **Burglaries in north of the Borough** – Members from wards in the north of the Borough said they had received emails and calls from residents in the High Beeches area who felt they had been targeted by burglars, including car thieves. Insp Austin addressed Members' concerns and gave an update. The figures showed that this time last year there were 12.5 per cent fewer burglaries than the previous year. Burglaries were now 10.5 per cent higher than last year and concentrated in one area. In August, around 65 burglaries were reported in Banstead and Chipstead areas. Insp Austin said they had had some good results from ongoing investigations and officers had carried out effective stop and searches. Several arrests had been made when officers found car boots that contained balaclavas, crowbars and stolen items. This was not enough to press charges, however investigations were continuing using CCTV and mobile phone usage.
A man had been arrested recently on suspicion of stealing a car and inquiries were ongoing. Other crimes had been solved from interviewing offenders who were already in prison. One man who had carried out 47 burglaries had been sentenced and was in prison. She said that this was an issue across the south east with criminals targeting specific areas identifying vulnerable properties with strategic roads nearby, burglars could drop their false number-plates and then drive as quickly as possible out of the area. Some were high value car thefts which showed that this was an organised crime. Officers were carrying out preventative work by knocking on doors of vulnerable properties and offering advice to householders. Targeted roads police and armed response officers were carrying out mobile patrols. Since the end of November, officers on patrol had made 103 stops and 33 stop searches. Criminals did move on if known burglars were being targeted.
- **Officer assaults** – Members asked why police officers in the Borough were assaulted more often than in other local authority areas with a reported 144 assaults. It was identified that this was due to having a custody centre, prison, hospital and mental health premises in the Council's area which were all factors that increased the risk of assaults on officers.
- **Numbers of police officers** – Members asked how many additional officers were deployed in the Borough following the increase in the Surrey Police precept and the national pledge to increase the number of officers on the streets. Insp Austin said that 11 neighbourhood officers were being recruited across Surrey. In the Borough this meant one additional neighbourhood officer, plus a youth intervention officer and an additional neighbourhood support officer. She reported that there had been problems retaining officers as policing was no longer seen as a long-term career.
- **Working with the Crown Prosecution Service to obtain prosecutions** – Members asked how much support the police obtained from the CPS after arrests were made as it seemed that even though criminals were well-known to police it was not easy to obtain prosecutions. It was clarified that support was given but cases needed substantial evidence such as DNA or CCTV evidence for a suspect to be charged. A total of 48 criminals had been recently convicted but not everyone arrested for going equipped to a burglary was convicted of the crime.
- **Communication with communities** – Members asked about communication with the public including minority groups and residents' associations. Insp Austin said that she used the force's Twitter account and

appreciated retweets and 'likes' from councillors on a range of issues. She encouraged them to give out the information to hard to reach groups. A retired volunteer put out weekly information about burglaries and other policing updates.

- **Aggressive begging** – Members asked if the so-called 'Nottingham knockers' (or doorstep sellers) was part of a Serious Organised Crime gang as this was worrying elderly residents who were uncertain whether they should report it. Insp Austin confirmed there was not a link at the moment, but all incidents should be reported if they are suspicious as the information was useful. Doorstep callers should also carry licences from the chief of police. Online crime reporting was also a good method of reporting crime.
- **Alternative giving campaign** – Members asked about this campaign, which was supported by the local charity, Renewed Hope Trust. This helped to educate people in town centres to continue to give money and support homeless people but to do this by giving money to charities such as RHT who are supporting homeless people, rather than giving money to people who are begging. Officers said they could send further information to Members.
- **Parking near schools** – Members asked about dangerous parking near schools. Ultimately parking was not led by police, it was an area of enforcement led by the Council. The Community Safety Officer said that they were working with the JET team and parking enforcement team to educate parents about the risks of dangerous parking. An initiative was also taking place with the fire service who went with the enforcement teams and set off their sirens if they could not get down a road of parked cars. Members were advised to get in contact with the JET team if they had concerns about parking near particular schools.
- **Photography and upskirting offences** – there had been a recent conviction for this offence as well as successful investigations into indecent exposure. This was not a particularly common offence. Most of the sex offending was now sexting and indecent images passed by young people or at the end of a relationship.

Members thanked the Borough Commander and her team for their work and also thanked the Council's community safety team for their work.

RESOLVED – that the annual community safety partnership work 2019/20 be noted.

29. **PORTFOLIO HOLDER BRIEFINGS - PEOPLE PORTFOLIOS**

Members received a briefing from the People Portfolio Holders regarding the People service areas and considered any issues arising from their presentations.

The Director of People Services introduced the item and the three portfolio areas which were: Housing and Benefits, Wellbeing and Intervention and Community Partnerships.

Cllr G. Knight, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Benefits, gave an overview on housing services and revenue, benefits and fraud. Highlights included homelessness prevention (252 positive outcomes where this was prevented – 96 more than last year) and successful use of emergency accommodation in Horley

(which saved around £180k a year on bed and breakfast accommodation). Forty-three affordable and social rented homes have been delivered during the first two quarters of 2019/20. It was examining the affordable housing economic viability qualifications and working with social housing providers to fulfil the criteria which was part of the Housing Delivery Strategy. Projects such as Lee Street, Cromwell Road and Pitwood Park developments were getting underway to deliver more housing.

Universal Credit (UC) was being rolled out gradually in the borough. Raven Housing Trust was performing above the national average to reduce arrears of those receiving UC – an average £589 UC debt compared with £774 national average. It supported Raven's initiative to help people move to the right size homes to free up larger homes for families.

Over 50 per cent of the 19 people in bed and breakfast accommodation in any week were single people with complex needs which was increasing. The four units in Lee Street, Horley would be aimed at accommodating single people and they were looking at best practice projects working with single homeless people. A project in Leatherhead had been visited, called LeatherHead Start.

Members made comments in the discussion that followed which included:

- **Universal credit** – Members asked if people were generally worse off due to the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) and how people were helped to be debt free when there was a five-week delay in payments. It was noted that the Council worked with Raven Housing Trust to help people through the first few weeks such as getting advice from the Money Support Team. It was noted that 700 Raven tenants were claiming UC which was increasing by 12 – 15 households per week. There was no date yet from the Department for Work and Pensions when the full roll out of UC was going to take place.
- **Empty homes** – a number of properties were known to be empty and the Council have tried to engage with some owners to bring them back into use as a private rented accommodation or to find another solution.
- **Cromwell Road and Pitwood Park** – it was confirmed that the forecast completion date of June 2021 was realistic. A budgetary review of the Pitwood Park development had been carried out as the government's scheme on starter homes (on which this project was based) had not materialised and the tenure mix and market had changed as well as Members' appetite for more affordable housing.
- **Housing register** – it was noted that 800 households were on the waiting list and a household could be one person or more. Social housing vacancies were running at 222 to date in this financial year. Members were pleased that the Housing Delivery Strategy aimed to establish a Local Housing Company.
- **Portland Drive, Merstham** – Members asked why 50 homes would be for sale in this development when more affordable homes for rent were needed. It was noted that Merstham had a range of social housing and this allowed a housing mix. There were 80 properties in total so not all were market sale homes. This was to generate cross subsidy to support the building of more affordable homes.
- **Care home developments** – Members asked what impact the increasing number of care home developments in Tattenhams, Nork and Banstead had on the different housing targets and on the local economy. It was noted that

this was considered as part of the planning policy and discussions with developers to make them more aware of their obligations to build affordable housing.

- **Revenue, benefits and fraud** – it was noted that the revenue, benefits and fraud team were very successful in collecting council tax and business rates in the Borough with one of the best collection rates in England and Wales. Identifying cases of false applications for housing services saved the council an estimated £505,800. The team were winners of the Excellence in Counter Fraud Awards 2019. Since 2015, the team had been successful at providing services to other local authorities, housing providers and the private sector. In November, the Council had asked consultants to look into the potential for setting up a Local Authority Trading Company and a report was due to be taken to the Commercial Ventures Executive Sub-Committee in February to consider future growth and the best way of delivering this and ensuring financial sustainability.

Cllr A. Horwood, Portfolio Holder for Wellbeing and Intervention, gave an overview of work in his business area. The intervention work includes the Family Support Programme, the Refugee Resettlement Programme and the Money Support team. The Family Support Programme received 100 referrals in 2019/20 – nearly half the referrals in South East Surrey. Family feedback showed that 79 per cent of families felt their lives have improved as result of the team's work. The Refugee Resettlement Programme was currently supporting 10 households who had been displaced by the war in Syria. Innovative projects included a Conversation Café and Syrian feasts that had been held at the Harlequin. The council had agreed to extend this programme and double the numbers of refugee households in the next five years.

The Money Support Team was one of the newest services aimed at helping with the roll-out of Universal Credit. It helped households with a budget plan, clearing debts, setting up a bank account, digital support and benefit entitlement.

In the Wellbeing business area, the three leisure centres had seen a two per cent increase in visitor numbers to 1,219,649 in 2019 despite a fire in the men's changing room at Donyngs in Redhill which had closed the centre for a short period. The operator, GLL had managed this incident well and made sure the centre then reopened in stages. Leisure activities for residents included the Star for a Night, holiday activities and the Surrey Youth Games.

The Harlequin theatre had a busy year with 46,124 tickets sold for 135 live performances. The refurbished cinema, renamed the Waller Studio, opened in time for October half term and had received favourable feedback. Cllr Horwood thanked officers as well as the Harlequin Board for their work this year and for developing a new vision which will see a refreshed approach in the coming years.

Members discussed the following points:

- **Harlequin theatre** – Members thanked the team for their work on the renovation of the Waller Studio, successful performances and for hosting community events such as the baby café which was important locally. It was confirmed that the visitor numbers to live performances did not include film showings. Members asked for the box office financial takings and officers said they would supply a written response to this question. It was confirmed that the Harlequin theatre was not currently breaking even. It had been a

challenging year, however, venue managers were looking at efficiencies they could make. There was also a rolling financial plan over the next five years so the theatre could rely less on subsidies by 2025. Ultimately though it was seen as a community hub.

- **Harlequin satisfaction survey** – Members noted that a fifth of respondents was going away unhappy as the satisfaction survey rate was 81 per cent. They asked how this data would be monitored in future to improve this rating. It was noted that this was a new collection of data and this focus on customer experience would feed into future management reports, with an action plan. Members asked if customer feedback on the refurbished Waller Studio could be included.
- **Leisure** – It was confirmed that the council worked closely with different voluntary organisations and were always open to speaking to residents who wanted to start up new groups or community associations.
- **Refugee resettlement** – it was noted that this programme to support Syrian refugees would be expanded in future years to support another 10 families. Households also received courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).

Cllr R. Ashford, Portfolio Holder for Community Partnerships, and Justine Chatfield, Head of Community Partnerships, gave an overview of his portfolio. The Voluntary and Community Safety (VCS) Support services underwent a review in 2019 and the recommendations were approved by the Executive in June 2019. Progress had been made, for example, reworking the Council's financial support for the sector, and policies are now in place for free/discounted use of meeting rooms and for 'at cost' printing services. There was also more one-to-one contact with the voluntary sector partners. The team was evaluating the new approach to small grants funding and there would be an opportunity shortly for Members to provide feedback for future rounds.

The Council was working with Skylark charity and Voluntary Action Reigate and Banstead (VARB) to raise resident awareness on volunteering opportunities and increase corporate sector skills-based volunteering including by RBBC employees.

The Council's community development workers support six communities where there are greater needs. Their roles involve listening to local people to understand local issues and build trust. They run very valuable networking fora, each of which has its own action plan. Their roles are highly valued by other Council teams and external partners. As well as supporting individuals, their work can prevent some issues from escalating and save the Council money.

An update on the three Community Centres in Banstead, Woodhatch and Horley was given. These were being brought in-house from 1 April after the provider ended the contract early. The aim was to make the transition for staff and centre members as smooth as possible. A consultation exercise with users and volunteers would be launched once the centres were back in-house. An all-party Member consultative group had been established to inform the work.

Cllr Ashford concluded by thanking the Head of Community Partnerships and her team for their work.

Members asked questions and discussed the following points:

- **Employee volunteering policy** – Members asked for clarity on the number of days of volunteering a year proposed for RBBC employees. It was confirmed that the plan was to introduce the opportunity of two days of volunteering at first as the Council needed to balance showing leadership in this area with its operational staffing needs. It would be reviewed once up and running.
- **Raising public awareness** of volunteering – Members asked about publicising the voluntary groups' work on volunteering. The Council will be working with VARB on this, with a focus on National Volunteer Week at the beginning of June. Some voluntary sector organisations use social media well and may be able to share this expertise with other organisations through peer support. A skilled social media Council staff member is planning some short surgery sessions to provide local voluntary organisations with advice on social media.
- **Community development workers** – Members commented how well the community development work in Preston ward was progressing.
- **Future youth provision**– it was noted that as Surrey County Council planned to move away from providing universal youth work, it had agreed to offer its premises at low or no cost. Cllr N. Harrison thanked the Leader for facilitating work in this area. Ward members who have youth centres in their areas will work with the Portfolio Holder and Executive.

Committee Chair, Cllr N. Harrison thanked the Place Portfolio Holders and officers for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED – that the Committee's observations regarding the People Portfolio Holder briefings and business areas be noted.

30. LEADER'S UPDATE

Members received an update from Cllr M. Brunt, Leader of the Council, who gave an overview of the work of the Council. This included the new Housing Delivery Strategy which was a fresh approach to housing, the 2020-25 Corporate Plan and the ongoing work on the Council's environmental sustainability strategy. The Council was planning to work in partnership with a housing trust to bring forward the development of housing schemes in the Borough with a focus on affordable housing. Cllr Brunt noted that the Budget for 2020/21 and beyond included investment in people and skills so the Council would be fit for purpose to face the challenges coming in the next five years.

Members asked about the proposed budget for developing the environmental sustainability strategy and also proposed investment on working with young people. It was confirmed that £30m was pledged to spend on additional housing over the next three years; £250k was set in the budget to resource proposed climate change initiatives. There was no specific budget for work with young people at this stage – resources would be largely officer time to build good relationships with youth groups and to enable groups to make use of Surrey County Council's buildings that were being made available.

RESOLVED – that the update from the Leader of Council, Cllr M. Brunt be noted.

31. BUDGET 2020/21 AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2020 TO 2025

Members considered the latest Budget proposals for 2020/21 and the Capital Programme 2020 to 2025 which were set out in a report to the Committee. This information was not yet available when the Budget Scrutiny Panel met in November. This gave Members an opportunity to provide any further feedback to the Executive for its meeting on 30 January 2020.

Portfolio Holder for Finance, Cllr T. Schofield, gave an overview of the report. He said that the proposals for Central Budgets were set out in considerable detail and he thanked the Finance team for providing this level of granularity.

The Central Budgets 2020/21 had been reviewed and rationalised and the recommended changes set out in the report. These included resetting the Headroom Contingency budget (set up in 2012 to address any significant unplanned expenses that might arise in-year) to £1m. The review recommended taking out the £0.5m revenue budget for contributions to the Capital Programme. It recommended removing the £100k budget for redundancy costs as there were no significant structural changes planned next year. A budget of £0.730m was included for forecast contractual pay increases. The New Posts Budget was to be replaced with an increase in the New Posts Reserve to accommodate mid-year staffing changes.

The Employer Pension Contributions budget had been updated to reflect the outcome of the 2019 Pension Fund Revaluation. The recommended approach was to maintain the primary employer contribution rate at 15% of salaries and to pay the secondary employer rate as a lump sum of £6.204m upfront rather than three annual instalments. This gave the Council a discount and saved £400k over three years.

The Capital Programme over the next five years was set out in the report. This included more investment in maintenance of Strategic Property and investment in IT services and the Harlequin. The Housing Delivery Strategy budget includes investment of £30m over three years from 2020/21 to 2022/23 funded in part through the allocation of resources equivalent to the value of New Homes Bonus receipts. The Commercial Investment Strategy proposals were to allocate a further £50m for investment in 2020/21 onwards, to enable the Council to start to generate the commercial revenue that would be needed.

Members made the following observations and comments in the debate that followed:

- **Employer Pension Contributions** – it was confirmed that the up-front lump sum payment of three years of contributions would be funded from the earmarked reserve fund set aside for this purpose, plus a contribution from General Fund Reserves at the beginning of 2020/21. It would not be funded from borrowing. The Council would receive c1% interest a year if the funds remained in Reserves. Paying up-front meant there would be the equivalent of a 4% discount, so it was in the interests of the Council to take this option offered by Surrey County Council. It was noted that the success of the largely equity-based pension fund investment depended on how the market performs over the next three years. The Council was making a judgement that the

returns from the pension fund would be higher than keeping the money in Reserves and this was not without risk. It was noted that this facility to pay up-front was offered to all district councils in Surrey and it would depend on the circumstances in each local authority as to whether they took up this offer. Reigate and Banstead Borough Council has strong Reserves so was able to recommend this option.

- **Commercial Investment Strategy** – it was clarified that £50m was recommended for investment over three years.
- **Council tax** – it was noted that the updated Central Budgets would not have an impact on the decision to increase the council tax which is once again recommended to be set at the Government's Referendum limit.

Committee Chair, Cllr N. Harrison, summarised the proposals. The Budget Scrutiny Review Panel report to the Committee in November had set out that the Council was facing an increase in the services revenue budget of £2.1m. It had previously been reported that in future years, the funding gap might grow to as much as £4m as the Council lost central government funding. The contribution from Reserves however is planned at £1.256m as the net reduction in Central budgets had helped mitigate some of these service budget pressures. In particular, the proposed funding of secondary pension contributions by a three-year up-front lump sum payment from reserves takes the cost of annual contributions of almost £2m out of the annual revenue budget.

It noted the proposed funding for capital investments. The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) was forecast as £0.52m and the interest on borrowing £0.92m. This was a conservative estimate and actual costs will depend on the rate of capital spending. Overall, there was a proposed £2.1m of investment and additional spending in service budgets with an overall a £1.256m call from reserves. It was anticipated that the forecast underspend from the current year's budget would in effect fund the majority of the call on Reserves in 2020/21.

The Committee was supportive of this approach and its realistic approach to budget planning.

RESOLVED – that the Budget 2020/21 and Capital Programme 2020 to 2025 be noted, and the observations of the Committee be taken into consideration by the Executive at its meeting on 30 January 2020.

32. CONSTITUTION OF LOCAL PLAN SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL 2019/20

Members received a report on the constitution of the Local Plan Scrutiny Review Panel 2019/20 to consider consultation responses to draft Supplementary Planning Documents.

It was proposed to reconvene this Panel to consider the public consultation responses to the revised Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) on Affordable Housing, Barn and Farm Conversions, Historic Parks and Gardens and Reigate Shopfront SPDs. These are currently out for public consultation until 8 February.

Five nominations were put forward who were: Councillors Allcard, Blacker, Parnall (Conservative Group), Councillor Harp (Residents' Association) and Councillor McKenna (Green Party).

RESOLVED – that the Committee reconvenes the Local Plan Scrutiny Review Panel 2019/20 to consider the consultation responses to draft Supplementary Planning Documents and agrees the membership.

33. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME - JANUARY 2020

Members considered the Future Work Programme for the Committee for 2020 and the Action Tracker from the previous meeting.

Members asked for an update on their request for officers to review the deeds relating to Reigate Baths Trust. It was confirmed that work was underway but as these went back many years it required some time to investigate.

Members asked if written responses to questions asked at meetings which were emailed to Committee Members could be included in the agenda papers and published on the public website (similar to questions answered at Full Council). It was agreed that unless the information was confidential in nature these could be made publicly available.

Members asked if they could have more information following the written answer on trade waste. The question would be clarified after the meeting and an appropriate follow-up response given.

RESOLVED - that the Future Work Programme for 2020 be noted.

34. 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.

35. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

The Meeting closed at 10.20 pm