

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, 17 March 2022 at 7.30 pm.

Present: Councillors M. S. Blacker, G. Buttironi, Z. Cooper, M. Elbourne, J. C. S. Essex, P. Harp, N. D. Harrison (Chair), A. King, N. C. Moses, S. Sinden, M. Tary, R. S. Turner, C. T. H. Whinney, R. Biggs, M. A. Brunt, E. Humphreys and T. Schofield

Also present: Councillors Biggs, Brunt, Humphreys, Schofield, Lewanski and Michalowski.

74. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Parnall and Walsh. There were no substitutes.

75. MINUTES

The Minutes of the previous meeting on 24 February 2022 were approved.

76. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interests.

77. EXEMPT - IT STRATEGY 202/3 TO 2026/7

The Executive Member for Corporate Policy and Resources presented to Members the IT Strategy 2022/23 to 2026/27.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

Noted the proposals set out in the IT Strategy 2022/23 to 2026/27 discussed in Minute 82 Exempt business and made observations for consideration by the Executive.

78. PLACE PORTFOLIO HOLDERS UPDATE

The Committee received presentations and briefings from the three Portfolio Holders responsible for the following areas of the Council's services: Economic Prosperity, Planning Policy and Place Delivery, and Neighbourhood Services.

Portfolio Holder for Economic Prosperity, Councillor Humphreys, gave the first presentation and overview of work over the past year.

Highlights included:

- £800k in Business Growth Grants had been allocated in 2021/22.
- The Job Hub, funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, had been extended for a further year.
- Awards would take place the following week (w/c 28/03/2022) to celebrate business and would be financed by sponsors.
- The High Street for Heroes Award had been sponsored by the Council and had received 1,300 votes.

Committee Members asked questions in the following areas:

Retail Spaces in Merstham and Hooley – Members asked what actions were being taken to entice businesses to the retail spaces in Merstham and Hooley. It was noted that high streets were struggling, but that the Council would endeavour to match businesses seeking retail premises with current spaces. The Director of Place would take up this matter outside the meeting.

Portfolio Holder for Planning Policy and Place Delivery, Councillor Biggs gave his presentation.

Highlights for Planning included:

- Implementation of a local cycling and walking plan.
- Stage 1 of the infrastructure plan is complete; applications for grants and funding could now be made to improve residents' health and wellbeing.
- New Supplementary Planning Documents had been implemented to define character areas of the borough and how to implement sustainability policies.
- Southern Building Control Partnership was now delivering a positive financial return.

Challenges to come included:

- Developing the new Local Plan.
- Gatwick Development Consent Order submission and examination of its Northern Runway Project.
- Bio diversity in response to the Environment Act.
- The Strategic Infrastructure Programme review to be completed to establish the need for CIL funding over the next 5 years.

Highlights for Place Delivery included:

- Marketfield Way, now known as The Rise, would include a cinema complex with bowling, as well as a branch of Tesco. All except one unit had offers on them. Building would be completed by summer 2022 with fitting out of the cinema completed by Easter 2023. Councillors were invited to visit the site.
- Pitwood Park and Cromwell Road development projects had been completed; a third development project at Lee Street was near completion.

Challenges to come included:

- The increasing cost of building.

- Planning permission for Merstham recreation ground.

Committee Members asked questions in the following areas:

Sustainable Construction – Members asked whether the guidance which is enforceable in Redhill and Horley could be enforced in other areas. It was explained that the Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) were guidance, however design codes could be decided through SPDs or through examination and in this case it would become part of the plan and would therefore become enforceable.

Members stated that a press release had specified that the guidance must be adhered to and asked how this could be imposed. Officers explained that the design code could be taken forward and that the Council worked with developers in order to ensure that design codes were adhered to.

Affordable Housing – Members asked if the affordable housing provided rented accommodation at a lower cost. It was confirmed that the affordable housing was available at 80% of market value and was available in a variety of options - for sale, rent, or shared ownership.

Members asked whether the managing agents for The Rise would be internal or external. Officers confirmed that an external agent would be employed to manage The Rise.

Members enquired if parking spaces were being removed from town centres and were informed that Horley car park site project had been put on hold currently but that it was an allocated site in the development plan.

Energy Efficiency – With the rising cost of energy, it was asked whether the Council would review lighting and the use of LED lights in newly constructed houses and extensions. It was confirmed that most homes already had LED lighting and that LED lighting was used as standard on new buildings. Building Control would need to be consulted regarding the use of LED lighting in extensions.

Members also asked about the installation of Electric Vehicle chargers in extensions; this question would also be answered after the meeting.

Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – Members asked if residents' views in relation to the current review by Natural England were being considered. The importance of residents replying to consultations was stressed as a reply.

Building Control and the Local Plan – Members commented that Building Control should monitor building sites more closely during construction as two recent large developments had not been constructed in accordance with the plans. It was explained that building control was not now the sole responsibility of the Council; outside companies could be employed to provide building control services. It was likely that the projects in question had not used the Council's Building control service.

Members asked if a new Local Plan would be put in place before the current Local Plan expired. It was confirmed that plans were underway and that the intention was to remain a plan-led authority.

Members would like to see the underlying financial outturn on the completion of projects. It was confirmed that this information would be made available.

Community Infrastructure Levy – Members felt that the new five-year Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) review should have input from Councillors and asked for seminars to be offered. It was confirmed that this option would be explored.

The Rise – Members were informed that the Council had received offers on all but one of the units on The Rise and asked whether all the units would open simultaneously. Officers explained that the units would open at differing times according to the leases. Practical completion was expected in summer 2022, when shop fitting could begin; shop fitting for Tesco was expected to be completed within five weeks.

The Leader gave the presentation on behalf of the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services, with an overview of work over the past year.

Highlights included:

- Trade waste creates an income for the borough.
- Roll out scheme for flats continues.
- One bring site had been closed this year.
- Recycling income was above the forecast.
- Q2 saw the highest rate for doorstep recycling at 58%.
- A trial of a fully electric dustcart had taken place.
- The use of new Big Belly bins.
- Working with the Joint Enforcement Team.
- Providing apprenticeships.
- Merstham Rec regeneration would be awarded a PIPA Gold standard for the play area for being fully inclusive.

Committee Members asked questions in the following areas:

Environmental Health – Members noted that Environmental Health inspects around 300 premises per year and asked how often the premises are inspected and how many are closed. Premises inspections were carried out annually. Unfortunately, the Environmental Health team have seen a drop in standards of the food business in the borough. This was mostly due to a shortage of available staff in the food industry.

Parking – Members reported that two car park ticket machines were out of order in Gloucester Road Car Park. The Leader replied that this issue would be investigated.

Members reported that there was some confusion over the change in times for parking enforcement. It was explained that the changes had been put in place in February 2022 and the shifts now cover 7.00am to 5.00pm for five weeks and 10.00am to 8.00pm for three weeks, which provided greater coverage around schools in the mornings and around the evening parking, and also twice per month on a Sunday.

Greenspaces – Members stated that Jubilee Woodlands had been adapted to accommodate children with brain injuries but that there were no playgrounds in

the area that were suitable for these children. It was reported that the Pippa Standard recognised playgrounds which are accessible for children of all abilities.

Members asked why the broken benches and bins in the greenspace in Nork Ward had not been repaired. It was reported that CIL funding was a good and quick way to have benches and bins replaced.

Members felt that following recent flooding in several wards, planning and engineering should be considered, and the County Flooding Team should be consulted. It was confirmed that the Council was currently working with the Flooding Team on a project and that this partnership was growing.

Refuse, Recycling and Cleansing – Members had noticed that a large number of dog poo bags had been deposited outside a local school, close to Banstead Common and were keen for this problem to be addressed. Members were told that an active campaign was in use including graphics and social media.

Members asked how the electric bin lifters on refuse vehicles are charged. It was reported that the bin lifters were charged by the refuse vehicle.

Members referenced the recycling data stating that 58% had been reached for doorstep recycling and asked if the data could be broken down e.g. what is the recycling rate for household rubbish excluding garden waste. The Leader confirmed that the service was looking to provide a wider recycling service for flats and the Head of Neighbourhood Services could provide a more detailed written answer after the meeting.

Members also asked if the additional 300 flats expected to join the service in 2022 were newly built or existing flats. It was confirmed that these were existing flats. The Chair added that it would be helpful for ward Members to be informed which flats were included in the programme and which flats remained to be addressed. Members also felt that recycling information would be of interest to the public and that this information should be shared in addition to the KPIs.

Greenspaces and Engineers – Members asked whether the growing of wildflowers on verges of highways was something that might be further adopted. Members were informed that this contract was with Surrey County Council and was not the responsibility of this Council.

Members remarked that the verge cutting contracts would end in September and noticed that Surrey were not cutting verges in public areas and asked whether this Council could follow this example. It was confirmed that an agreement was in place with Surrey regarding the number of grass cuts and that schedules were under review.

Joint Enforcement Team – Members reported an empty building near Banstead station with fly tipping in the footpath alongside the building. The empty building would need to be investigated by Planning Enforcement.

RESOLVED – that the Committee:

Noted the Place Portfolio Holder Updates and made observations for consideration set out in the Minutes by Executive Members.

79. QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT 2021/22

The Executive Member for Corporate Policy and Resources presented the Quarter 3 Performance Report 2021/22 which related to the period October to December 2021. Of the ten Key Performance Indicators, seven were on target and three were outside their tolerance. Those outside their tolerance were:

- Council Tax collection – there had been a delay in Council Tax recovery due to the impact of Covid-19 and the closure of courts. Measures were in place to improve collection performance.
- Business Rates Collection – Business rates relief and the economic situation due to Covid-19 had led to rent recalculations. However normal collection rates were expected by the end of Quarter 4.
- Affordable Housing Completions – completions were off target, but units were often completed in batches; a significant number of housing projects were expected to be completed later in the year which would bring numbers in line with the target.

Two new Key Performance Indicators were proposed for 2022/23:

- Handling of Complaints – The Council was upgrading its complaints handling system and expected to be able to report on key metrics associated with complaints.
- Sustainability – reduction in the Council's carbon footprint compared to 2019/20 baseline.

Committee Members asked questions in the following areas:

Affordable Housing Completion – the target for affordable housing had not been met; Members asked how the completion of the RNIB housing project would assist with this when there was no affordable housing included in this project. It was reported that housing projects were in line to deliver roughly within target; 1,600 dwellings were under construction, 208 of these being affordable housing. The Project and Performance Team Leader would check the percentage of affordable housing on the RNIB site.

Members also questioned whether the affordable housing in progress would reach the target of 22%. It was reported that the Local Plan set a target for the entire period of the Local Plan. It was pointed out that affordable housing and non-affordable housing was delivered (and completions reported) differently by industry to the Council, which provides some challenges when tracking trends.

KPI 4 Staff Sickness – Reigate has the second highest rate of Covid-19 in Surrey; Members asked whether staff had been working from home whilst having Covid-19. Members were informed that during the pandemic, short term sickness absence had decreased, however, staff were encouraged not to come into work if they were sick and should not be working at all if they were unwell. The full effect of Covid-19 had not been felt with regards to mental health, but a wealth of support was in place if needed. The reception area would reopen the following week (w/c 21/03/2022)

and offices would reopen over the coming weeks, however, hybrid working was working well and had benefits.

KPI benchmarking – Members enquired whether KPIs could be benchmarked against neighbouring boroughs. It was agreed that this should be possible, and the Projects and Performance Team would work with the Portfolio Holder to explore this.

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance and Governance provided some Expenditure and Funding headlines:

- Council tax was at 97.88% collection and at the end of the year would be 1% below normal figures.
- There was a £17.133 million forecast outturn, with a potential underspend of almost £700,000.
- Parking income showed a shortfall of just over £1 million but was slowly recovering.
- £354,000 Government funding had been received for Covid-19 losses. Further Covid-19 related grants for businesses were still being paid.

Members asked questions in the following areas:

Covid-19 related expenditure – Members asked if the £2 million earmarked for Covid-related expenditure and income losses was funded from Government grants. This was confirmed. Members were informed that a maximum of 70% of Covid income losses had been funded by the Government in 2020/21 and the first quarter of 2021/22, the remainder was being funded from these reserves.

Service Budgets – Members asked whether there was a revenue opportunity for Revenues, Benefits and Fraud to generate more income. It was confirmed that was a possible business opportunity providing services to other neighbouring councils but there are limits on the amount of income that could be generated in this way.

Members asked what was planned for the funds allocated for commercial investment. It was reported that just over £60million remains the total allocated for commercial investments, but this would no longer be reported in the capital programme until individual business cases had been approved.

Members asked whether the budget savings made in Electoral Services could be continued in further years. It was reported that services were under constant review. Tablets and voter ID checks were implemented; at this stage it was not known whether the savings would continue.

Members asked whether the reductions in DWP subsidy in Revenues, Benefits and Fraud could be controlled. The subsidy is received to repay the cost of benefits paid out. The budget for 2022/23 had been adjusted to reflect the lower amounts claimed and therefore reimbursed.

Members asked for an explanation of the decrease of £312,000 in investment income. It was explained that the income forecast for this year had been compared to the actual income for the previous year, as previously requested by Members. Members asked about the delay in capital spending on Beech House due to vacancies in the building, and its impact on the revenue budget. The Interim Head

of Finance undertook to provide a more detailed follow-up written answer after the meeting.

Savings on CCTV Budget – As there had been an underspend on the CCTV budget, Members asked if an ANPR camera could be installed in Redhill. It was explained that following a review and decision by the Executive last year, CCTV coverage had been revised and this had resulted in the underspend. ANPR cameras were installed and controlled by the Police. The Head of People would pass on the request to the Neighbourhoods Team for consideration.

RESOLVED – that the Committee

- I. Noted the Key Performance Indicator performance for Q3 2021/22 as detailed in the report and Annex 1 and made observations to the Executive;
- II. Noted the Key Performance Indicators to be reported on in 2022/23 as detailed in Annex 1.1 and made observations to the Executive;
- III. Noted the Budget Monitoring forecasts for Q3 2021/22 as detailed in the report and at Annexes 2 and 3 and made observations to the Executive.

80. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

Members received and approved the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2021/22 to be recommended to Council.

RESOLVED – that the Committee

- I. Noted the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for this year and recommended it to the Council.
- II. Make any additional observations to the Council on 7 April 2022.

81. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23

Members considered the suggested additional scrutiny topics for 2022/23 and suggested that the planning of greenspaces be added to the review of how greenspaces are managed across the borough. The Chair suggested that the detailed terms of reference be developed by the Chair and Vice Chair.

A second suggestion was that in addition to examining the work of Raven Housing Trust, who worked well with the borough, the work of other housing trusts with smaller numbers of properties in the borough be examined, as these trusts proved more problematic. The Director of People would contact the housing trusts in an attempt to engage them. It was also suggested that Members might assist the Housing Team in dealing with housing associations in their own wards.

RESOLVED – that the Committee

Approved the proposed Work Plan for 2022/23 as set out in Annex 1 and detailed in the report.

82. EXEMPT BUSINESS

RESOLVED - that the Committee considered the information in the exempt report.

83. 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.

84. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

The Meeting closed at 10.07 pm