

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY - RESOURCES - 20 JUNE 2022

(To be read in conjunction with the Agenda for the Meeting)

Present

Cllr Stephen Mulliner (Chairman)	Cllr Peter Martin
Cllr Joan Heagin (Vice Chairman)	Cllr John Neale
Cllr Jerome Davidson	Cllr Peter Nicholson
Cllr David Else	Cllr George Wilson
Cllr Chris Howard	

Also Present

Councillor Peter Clark, Councillor Mark Merryweather and Councillor Richard Seaborne

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTES (Agenda item 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES (Agenda item 3)

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

4 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Agenda item 4)

There were no questions received from members of the public.

5 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (Agenda item 5)

There were no questions received from Members of the Council.

6 COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (Agenda item 6)

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and the Economy Councillor Matt Furniss addressed the Committee in relation to the County Council's CIL bids in Waverley, the comments which had been received on their unsuccessful bids and the action being taken to improve those bids which included meeting with Waverley officers. Lauren Pennington, NHS Frimley CCG addressed the Committee, welcoming any advice on how to improve their CIL bids.

Committee members welcomed their attendance and expressed some concern over the impact on residents of their unsuccessful CIL bids and highlighted the work of Town and Parish Councils in respect of obtaining CIL funding. In response, Councillor Furniss suggested that the application criteria could be reviewed, including implementing a two stage application process involving an initial

expression of interest followed by a detailed application if that expression of interest was accepted. The Chairman advised that the comments would be passed to the Council's CIL Advisory Board for consideration.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Jules Wilmhurst-Smith, Surrey Heartlands CCG addressed the Committee, advising external support had been procured to assist with strategic planning of CIL bids. In response to a question, he advised that the CCG engaged where appropriate with neighbouring CCGs on projects which had cross-border implications.

The Chairman thanked the speakers for the contributions and encouraged them to continue to work with Waverley officers.

7 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT Q4 2021-22 (Agenda item 7)

On behalf of the Committee, that Chairman thanked the Policy and Performance Officer for her support to the Committee and wished her well for her new role in the Council.

The Committee received the report and presentations from the Chief Executive and relevant Heads of Service.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Head of Finance and Property made the following comments:

- There was a typographical error on page 19 of the report, paragraph 3.71. The figure for General Fund overall income and expenditure, including £21m of housing benefits income from Government paid to recipients, should be £56m and not £45m. If the housing benefits inflows and outflows are removed, the figure is reduced to around £35m.
- Additional grant funding in the Environment service had been carried forward to future years for funding of projects.
- The Committee could request an additional column on the General Fund Account Summary Table to show projected outturn.
- A schedule of grant funding dispersed across the year would be circulated to the Committee for its information.

In response to a question from a Committee member, the Head of Policy and Governance advised that the Council was experiencing a national trend with staff turnover and an ageing workforce. There were challenges with recruitment in a buoyant employment market and there were measures in place to address this which were addressed in the Workforce Profile item later in the agenda.

In response to a Member question, the Chief Executive drew the Committee's attention to the commentary and detail throughout the report on any indicators which were RED.

RESOLVED that an additional column to the General Fund Account Summary Table to show projected outturn.

8 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 8)

The Committee noted the work programme.

9 COLLABORATION WITH GUILDFORD (Agenda item 9)

The Committee noted an update from the Chief Executive on the collaboration with Guildford Borough Council. Key milestones had been achieved and the Joint Appointments Committee would be making recommendations to both Councils on the appointments of the joint Director roles. The next stage would be to carry out the consultation on the joint Management Team and an all Member briefing would be taking place shortly.

10 HOUSING ALLOCATIONS TASK & FINISH GROUP (Agenda item 10)

Councillor Wilson, Chairman of the Housing Allocations Task & Finish Group, presented the report which set out the recommendations of the group. He thanked the officers involved in supporting the work of the Group and expressed concern over the housing benefit rates in Farnham, being lower due to its proximity with Aldershot and that he would be writing to the Secretary of State to express his concern.

The Committee welcomed the report and was noted that those on the housing waiting list with housing related debt would need to have a payment plan in place, and be under £500, in order to be considered for housing. The Committee sought clarification whether recommendation 4 related to Waverley related housing debt or also incorporated private sector housing debt. It was proposed that this be clarified, with the final wording of the recommendation to be approved by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

RESOLVED

That the report included as Annexe 1 be agreed and its recommendations be commended to the Executive, subject to clarification that recommendation 4 related to Waverley housing debt:

1. The Council should keep the income threshold at £60,000 per annum and the savings threshold at £30,000. However, this should be reviewed by the Resources Overview and Scrutiny committee or another appropriate O&S committee within 12-18 months.
2. Establish a process to signpost applicants who are unable to join the housing register due to the income or savings threshold to Affordable Home Ownership Schemes notably shared ownership.
3. Maintain the existing position that children will only be accommodated in one home even if a 50/50 residence arrangement exists. An exception will be made if there is a court order in place requiring this or if Surrey County Council Children's Services (or an equivalent organisation elsewhere) provide compelling evidence that a second home is required.
4. Only housing related debts such as rent arrears and deposit scheme debts should be taken into account when considering eligibility for inclusion on the housing register and allocation of housing. Other debts

such as council tax or housing benefit overpayments would be disregarded for this purpose.

5. Given the administrative burden in checking debts and that the average time someone is on the register is 2-3 years, it makes sense that checks at application stage are more light touch given an applicant's debts status can change so much over time.
6. Establish a process by which the Housing Options team signpost applicants unable to join the housing needs register due to debts to local debt advice charities.
7. The Chair of the Housing Allocations Group and the Chair of Resources Overview and Scrutiny to write a joint letter the Secretary of State for Housing, Levelling Up and Communities to reiterate the need for the importance of ensuring the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates properly reflect rents in Farnham.

11 HOUSING DEVELOPMENT UPDATE (Agenda item 11)

The Committee considered the update from the Head of Housing Delivery and Communities.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Seaborne spoke on this item, seeking clarification on the length of the procurement process and proposing that the Executive include the challenges with the procurement in the performance commentary.

The Committee welcomed the update, noting the length of time it took contractors to work on their proposals and the delays caused by material shortages and inflation. The Committee stressed the need for effective communication with both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and residents about delays and the need for continuity in terms of scrutiny.

12 BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION (Agenda item 12)

The Committee noted an update from the Head of Business Transformation. BT1 was largely complete and BT2 was due to commence, in part waiting for the new Joint Management Team to be in place before elements of the programme could be agreed. In response to a question from the Chairman relating to a projected shortfall in savings to be achieved, the Head of Business Transformation advised that further savings were hoped to be achieved and therefore the actual shortfall may not be that significant.

13 HYBRID WORKING (Agenda item 13)

The Committee noted an update from the Head of Business Transformation on the Council's response to the opportunities and challenges presented by hybrid working.

Some Committee Members expressed concern over productivity levels, recruitment and staff wellbeing through working from home. In response, the Chief Executive

advised that employers needed to develop a way of working that responded to people entering the workforce who had an expectation of being able to work flexibly; and he highlighted the challenges with recruitment and attracting talent. The Council was monitoring closely approaches taken by other councils and the need to keep services viable and reduce the impact on climate change by reducing office space.

Given the remarks by the Head of Policy and Governance about the age profile of the Waverley workforce and the need to recruit younger officers, Members underlined the importance of new recruits being able to work with and learn from senior colleagues in person in their first few months of Waverley employment.

In response to Member questions, the Head of Business Transformation advised that technology was in place to ensure staff remained connected and contactable when working from home but that additional training may be required for some staff. The Head of Policy and Governance advised that staff were provided with support if they wished to work from home, including technology and advice on the national scheme and feedback received in the Staff Survey indicated that staff do feel supported. It was noted that there were costs to working from home and costs to travelling into the office and staff were weighing up those costs in light of the cost of living crisis.

The Committee felt that it was too early to determine what shape the hybrid way of working would take and that more caution should be demonstrated in future iterations of the report.

14 WORK FORCE PROFILE (Agenda item 14)

The Committee noted the report which provided an update on the workforce profile for 2021/22.

The Committee expressed some concern over the number of resignations, which was in part due to staff retiring, and asked that information from exit interviews on reasons for resignations be brought back to the Committee. The Committee also expressed concern over the challenges faced by the Council in respect of recruitment and retention; and the gender diversity in some grades.

It was suggested that a fifth aim be added to the recruitment and retention action plan on maintaining performance levels in new ways of working. The Head of Policy and Governance advised that the recruitment and retention action plan was not the most appropriate place for this aim, however stressed that this was a priority for the Council.

RESOLVED that a further report be brought to the next meeting which:

- i) examined data from exit interviews and identified key trends;
- ii) examined the long term impact of career breaks and maternity leave on the gender pay gap; and
- iii) addressed the key issues facing the Council in terms of recruitment and retention.

15 GODALMING REGENERATION PROJECT: UPDATE (TO FOLLOW) (Agenda item 15)

The Committee received a report of the Head of Commercial Services, setting out recommendations to the Executive to seek funding for the next phase in the Godalming Regeneration Project.

The Chairman expressed concern over the financial viability of the project as the Committee had not seen any analysis of either the capital and revenue implications. This created concern about the wisdom of spending £164,000 on Phase 3 work before even the potential viability of the project had been established.

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Commercial and Assets advised that the detail would be available when the Phase 3 work had been carried out. Current assessments were indicative only and the purpose of Phase 3 was to develop capital and revenue models. It was important that the Council retain control by developing the sites itself rather than a private developer.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Hyman spoke on the report and expressed concern that it was proposed to spend money before an assessment of the viability had been carried out and the appropriate assessments should be carried out before being considered by the Executive and Council.

Some Committee Members expressed concern over the proposed development of the Crown Court site and objected to any reduction in parking or loss of public realm space. It was noted that the proposals would provide further detail on the project and there would be an opportunity to comment as part of the consultation process. Given the absence of any financial viability information, the Committee was only narrowly in favour of supporting the recommendation for a supplementary estimate.

RESOLVED that the Committee recommends that the Executive accepts the recommendations in paragraph 2 of the report to:

- i) Agree to change the name of the Bury's Development Project to the Central Godalming Regeneration Project; and
- ii) Recommend to Council to approve a supplementary estimate of £164,000 to progress the project to the Phase 3 stage, including preliminary public engagement, to be funded from the Property Investment reserve.

16 ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT (Agenda item 16)

The Chairman advised that although the Annual Scrutiny Committee was an officer report reflecting on what scrutiny had taken place, he had proposed an amendment to the Chairman's foreword, to express his view that there could have been more of an opportunity for the Committee to be involved before the Guildford Collaboration project commenced.

RESOLVED that the Annual Scrutiny Report attached at Annexe 1 to the Committee report be endorsed.

17 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (Agenda item 17)

RESOLVED

That pursuant to Procedure Rule 20 and in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item on the grounds that it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during the item, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information (as defined by Section 100I of the Act) of the description specified in Paragraph 3 of the revised Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, namely: Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

18 PROPERTY INVESTMENT ADVISORY BOARD ACTIVITY REPORT AND QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE (Agenda item 18)

The Committee noted the report.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and concluded at 9.26 pm

Chairman