

Minutes of the Meeting of the AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on 2 February 2023

PRESENT -

Councillor Steve Bridger (Chair); Councillor Nigel Collin (Vice-Chair); Councillors Rob Geleit, David Gulland, Phil Neale, David Reeve, Alan Sursham and Chris Webb

In Attendance: Councillor Kate Chinn, Jon Vale (Borough Commander, Surrey Police) (Items 24-27 only)

Absent: Councillor Christine Howells

Officers present: Andrew Bircher (Interim Director of Corporate Services), Brendan Bradley (Head of Finance), Rod Brown (Head of Housing and Community) (Items 24-27 only), Sue Emmons (Chief Accountant), Will Mace (Business Assurance Manager), Jason Ofosu (Principal Solicitor) and Tim Richardson (Democratic Services Manager)

24 QUESTION TIME

The Committee received a verbal question from a member of the public, to which the Chair invited the Principal Solicitor to provide a verbal reply.

In response to the Principal Solicitor's reply, a supplementary verbal question was asked by the member of the public. The Chair replied that a response to the supplementary question would be provided to the member of the public in writing following the meeting.

The member of the public requested to ask a further verbal question. The Principal Solicitor informed the Committee that a second question had already been asked by the member of the public, in the form of the supplementary question. The Principal Solicitor advised the meeting that as a second question had already been asked, the member of the public was not able to ask a further question at the meeting.

25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made in relation to items of business to be discussed at the meeting.

26 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee held on 17 November 2022 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

27 COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

The Committee received a report updating it on the work of the Epsom and Ewell Community Safety Partnership (CSP).

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Meetings of the CSP.** The Committee requested that details of dates and attendance at meetings of the CSP be recorded in future reports to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee. The Head of Housing and Community informed the Committee that this would be provided in future and reported that attendance of statutory partners at recent meetings of the CSP had been fairly consistent.
- b) **Community protection warning notices.** A Member of the Committee asked how many community protection warning notices had been issued, and how they were enforced. The Head of Housing and Community informed the meeting that he would provide the number of notices issued in writing following the meeting, and provided a verbal overview of the process for issuing a Community protection warning notice (CPWN) or a Community Protection Notice (CPN).
- c) **Collaboration between Council and Surrey Police.** Following a question from a Member, the Head of Housing and Community informed the Committee that one of the key purposes of the CSP was to improve collaborative working between all parties of the partnership. With regard to the collaboration between the Council and Surrey Police, the Head of Housing and Community highlighted the recent successful bid to the Police and Crime Commissioner for Safer Streets funding which had led to the replacement of the Town Centre CCTV cameras as well as a number of measures intended to address violence against women and girls, and protecting the night-time economy of the town centre.

In response to a question from a Member of the Committee regarding a reported delay in providing information to the Police by the Council, Inspector Vale informed the meeting that a mistake had been identified in the procedure followed but that this had been corrected. A Member of the Committee asked for clarity as to whether this was a matter which could be called in to the Committee, and was informed that the Chair would look into the matter and inform all Members of the Committee following the meeting.

- d) **JAG and CHaRRM.** Following a question, the Head of Housing and Community informed the Committee that the number of Joint Action Group (JAG) and Community Harm and Risk Reduction Meetings (CHaRRM) held were reported to the CSP and could also be provided to

the Committee in the future. The Head of Housing and Community informed the Committee that it would be difficult to report on the outcome of CHaRRMs, due to sensitive nature of the information considered. The Head of Housing and Community would consider whether information relating to JAG meetings could be disclosed to members of the Committee and provide an update following the meeting.

- e) **RAG Status for Review of town centre crime data.** A Member of the Committee identified that the “Review town centre crime data regularly to identify emerging patterns” objective listed on page 23 of the agenda pack was at red status, and asked how this would be addressed. The Head of Housing and Community informed the Committee that the relevant data was required to be analysed within a six month timeframe. Of the current period, 3 months had passed. The Head of Housing and Community informed the Committee that the data would be reviewed later in the week and that the target would be at green status by April 2023. Inspector Vale informed the Committee that Surrey Police also undertook weekly data analysis and that if this identified any emerging trends, the other relevant partners in the CSP would be informed.

Following a further question from a Member, the Head of Housing and Community informed the Committee that he would contact members of the CSP to ask whether the partnership would be in agreement to updating its report to explain that the target was currently listed as red status, but would be completed within the target 6-month timeframe, and that the review had also been completed in time for the previous 6 month period.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved with 6 votes for, 1 vote against, 1 abstention and the Chair not voting to:

- (1) **Note and comment on the work of the Epsom and Ewell Community Safety Partnership (CSP).**

28 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING - QUARTER 3

The Committee received a report presenting the forecast revenue outturn position for the current financial year 2022/23, as at Quarter 3 (31 December 2022).

The report also provided an update on the external audit of 2021/22's Statement of Accounts.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Staffing levels.** Following a question from a Member, the Head of Finance informed the Committee that the Council budgeted for a full staffing establishment, but included a 2.5% vacancy assumption due to the natural turnover of staff.

- b) **Cemetery income.** A Member asked for further information relating to the £34,000 adverse variance for cemetery income. The Head of Finance informed the Committee there remained a general trend for the population to opt for cremation over burial, and that he would investigate the reduction in income and provide an update following the meeting.
- c) **Charge for External Audit services.** In response to a question from the Vice Chair, the Head of Finance informed the Committee that he would discuss any proposed additional charge for external audit work with the external auditor and consider what representations could be made if the reason for such a fee lies with another party.
- d) **Bank of England Base rate change.** With a view to the increase in Bank of England Interest rate announced earlier in the day, and in response to a question from a Member, the Head of Finance informed the Committee that the change was unlikely to have a material short term impact for the interest rates achievable by the Council.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) **Receive the revenue budget monitoring report, which sets-out a projected favourable budget variance of £304,000 for 2022/23;**
- (2) **Note that a report to Licensing & Planning Policy Committee has been requested to address reduced forecast planning income and identify mitigation options;**
- (3) **Receive the 2021/22 external audit update provided in section 11 of the report;**
- (4) **Note that the outturn position will be reported to Strategy & Resources in July, then to this committee alongside the Statement of Accounts.**

29 CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING - QUARTER 3

The Committee received a report presenting the capital budget monitoring position at Quarter 3 for the current financial year 2022/23.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Replacement lamp columns.** A Member of the Committee asked for further information as to why only 1 of the 6 contractors contacted regarding the works had submitted a tender and it was noted that officers would provide an update following the meeting.
- b) **Plan-E Marketplace.** The Chair asked for an update on outstanding works for the Plan-E marketplace project. The Chief Accountant informed the Committee that there were still outstanding works due to be undertaken by Surrey County Council and confirmed that payment would not be made until the works had been completed.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) receive the capital monitoring position at Quarter 3 (to 31 December 2022), as set out in the report;
- (2) note the progress of capital projects as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

30 PERFORMANCE AND RISK REPORT - FEBRUARY 2023

The Committee received a report providing an overview of the council's performance with respect to its annual plan objectives, key performance indicators and corporate risks.

The following matters were considered:

- a) Update to appendix 1 of report - Property Maintenance completion Q3 data. The Business Assurance Manager informed the Committee that Property Maintenance completion data for was 99.9% for the first two months of quarter 3.
- b) Staff turnover indicator. The Business Assurance Manager informed the Committee that the number of vacancies currently being advertised or progressed for advertisement was 21.
- c) Number of planning applications processed. The Business Assurance Manager informed the Committee that the number of planning applications received in Q2 was 172.
- d) Ombudsman complaints and data protection. Following a question from a Member, the Committee noted that Officers would consider the inclusion of legal risks, data protection breaches and Ombudsman complaints as risks on the Corporate Risk Register.
- e) Staffing levels. Following a question from a Member, the Committee noted that Officers would look into the future provision of information to show the staffing levels across the Council on a monthly basis.
- f) Place Development. The Committee considered that the planning development charts provided on page 11 of the appendix to the report should detail that the existing target had been set at a national level. The Committee also considered that a local, more stretching target should also be set for these indicators.
- g) Performance indicator 24 - Visible Patrols. The Interim Director of Corporate Services informed the Committee that Officers would clarify whether performance indicator 24 ("Visible patrols across the Borough promoting behavioural change to maintain our clean and attractive streets and open spaces") would be retained following Surrey County Council's decision to take back the contract for on street parking enforcement.

- h) Reputational risk. The Committee considered that a general “Reputational Risk” should be included within the corporate risk Register and requested officers to consider its addition.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved with 7 votes for, 1 abstention and the Chair not voting to:

- (1) Note and comment on the performance and risk information located at Appendix 1 to the report.**

31 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2022-2023

The Committee received a report presenting the work programme for 2022-2023.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Ombudsman complaints and data protection breaches.** A Member of the Committee expressed concern that information regarding ombudsman complaints and data protection breaches had not been presented to the Committee. The Interim Director of Corporate Services informed the Committee that a response regarding these matters would be provided to Committee Members following the meeting.
- b) **Equalities impact assessment.** It was noted that the Committee report for this item did not include the equality impact aspect of the report template. Officers would rectify this matter for future reports.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved with 7 votes for, 1 vote against and the Chair not voting to:

- (1) Agree the on-going work programme for 2022-2023 as presented in Section 2 of the report.**

The meeting began at 7.30 pm and ended at 8.52 pm

COUNCILLOR STEVE BRIDGER (CHAIR)