

## Minutes of the Meeting of the COMMUNITY AND WELLBEING COMMITTEE held at the Council Chamber, Epsom Town Hall on 22 June 2023

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### PRESENT -

Councillor Clive Woodbridge (Chair); Councillor Bernice Froud (Vice-Chair); Councillors Kate Chinn, Shanice Goldman, Alison Kelly, Rachel King and Lucie McIntyre

Absent: Councillor Darren Talbot

Officers present: Andrew Bircher (Interim Director of Corporate Services), Rod Brown (Head of Housing and Community), Richard Appiah-Ampofo (Senior Accountant) and Dan Clackson (Democratic Services Officer)

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#### 1 QUESTION AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

No questions or statements were received from members of the public.

#### 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Members declared the existence of any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests in respect of any item of business to be considered at the meeting.

#### 3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Committee was asked to confirm as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17 January 2023.

A member highlighted that minute 18c) contained a spelling error – Bourne Hall was incorrectly written as Borne Hall. The Committee confirmed that the minutes were otherwise a true record and authorised the Chair to sign them, following rectification of the spelling error.

#### 4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Committee received a report setting out proposals on how the Council will better engage with residents to receive feedback on services and better understand residents' needs

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) **Online Accessibility:** A Member asked how Officers intended to receive feedback from residents who do not have online access or from those

who face challenges operating touch screens, particularly with respect to online forms and surveys. The Member suggested that Officers could converse with Citizens Advice for information on residents' experiences with the Council's online services. The Head of Housing and Community agreed that the Council's relationship with Citizens Advice, along with its partnerships with other organisations such as the Good Company, were valuable for receiving feedback from residents. He stated that Officers are always committed to learning – he explained how a consultant with loss-of-sight was recently brought in to provide advice on the accessibility of the Council's website.

- b) **Resident Feedback through Councillors:** A Member pointed out that Councillors frequently and regularly receive comments and views from residents through surgeries and door-knocking. The Member suggested that an effective approach of receiving feedback from residents is to approach them rather than asking them to approach the Council. The Interim Director of Corporate Services recognised that Councillors have a unique relationship with their constituents. He stated that there are currently no mechanisms in place to effectively capture the word-of-mouth feedback Councillors receive and suggested that it could be a matter for investigation. He advised that when Councillors receive complaints from their constituents, to pass those comments onto the relevant Heads of Service and other senior Officers where appropriate.
- c) **Engaging with Communities:** A Member enquired as to what was meant by 'hard to reach'. The Head of Housing and Community suggested that the term could be rephrased, considering that the term could be construed as unfairly putting the responsibility of receiving engagement on the communities in question. He explained that the term 'hard to reach' had been used to describe communities that the Council had historically found difficulty in engaging with. He suggested that a change of mindset and an adjustment of technique would be required in order to reach certain communities more effectively – for instance, the approach taken to engaging with the elderly would be different to that taken to engage with the young.
- d) **Moving away from the Citizens Panel model:** Members wished to express their approval of moving away from the Citizens Panel model, agreeing that Citizens Panels are difficult to manage and are not conducive to effectively capturing a diverse range of views and feedback from the community.
- e) **Engaging with Young People in the Borough:** The Chair asked how the Council might better engage with young people. It was noted that attending Schools poses a challenge on account of schools' busy timetables. The Interim Director of Corporate Services suggested that Career Fairs are a great place to reach out to young people. A Member stated that there a large number of youth groups in the Borough, including St. John's Ambulance and Scout groups, and also highlighted the University of the Creative Arts located within Epsom town centre – the

Member considered that approaching these groups could be a good opportunity to engage with young people in the Borough.

- f) **Annual Complaints Report:** Following a question from a Member, the Interim Director of Corporate Services explained that the Comments, Compliments and Complaints received via the website or through the Contact Centre were the primary method of receiving feedback from residents. He stressed the importance of learning from feedback and suggested that a report discussing the year's complaints and highlighting any trends or areas for investigation should be brought to the Strategy and Resources Committee for annual review.
- g) **Safeguarding:** A Member suggested that safeguarding would need to be considered as a matter of high importance with respect to engaging with some of the more vulnerable communities.
- h) **Future Update Report:** The Committee agreed that a report providing an update and reflection on the engagement activities and actions taken in the coming months would be brought to the Committee in early 2024.
- i) **Engagement Possibilities to Investigate:** Referring to paragraph 4.4.1 of the report, the Chair asked the Members of the Committee if there were other activities that could be considered. The Committee considered the possibility of holding outreach sessions in supermarkets, libraries and at markets; establishing Youth Forum/Youth Council events; having a Community Bus; and organising events in schools during Local Democracy Week as in the past. It was agreed these ideas could be investigated by Officers as part of their community engagement work.
- j) **Complaints Feedback to Councillors:** Referring to paragraph 4.4.2 of the report, the Chair asked if the Members of the Committee would welcome complaints feedback relating to services in their areas, to which the Committee unanimously agreed.

Following consideration, The Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) **Agree to support Officers in carrying out the engagement activities set out in the report, incorporating Member feedback.**

*The meeting began at 7.45 pm and ended at 8.26 pm*

COUNCILLOR CLIVE WOODBRIDGE (CHAIR)

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