

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

7 July 2020

- * Councillor Paul Spooner (Chairman)
- * Councillor James Walsh (Vice-Chairman)

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| Councillor Dennis Booth | * Councillor Ramsey Nagaty |
| * Councillor Colin Cross | * Councillor George Potter |
| * Councillor Graham Eyre | * Councillor Tony Rooth |
| * Councillor Angela Goodwin | * Councillor Deborah Seabrook |
| * Councillor Tom Hunt | * Councillor Fiona White |

*Present

Councillors Angela Gunning, Julia McShane (Lead Councillor for Community), Maddy Redpath, Caroline Reeves (Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing and Development Control), and James Steel (Lead Councillor for Environment) were also in attendance.

OS6 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Committee was advised of an apology from Councillor Dennis Booth.

OS7 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT AND DECLARATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

In relation to item 5, North Downs Housing Limited, four Councillors disclosed a non-pecuniary interest and indicated it would not affect their objectivity in relation to the matter: the Chairman, Councillor Paul Spooner, as Leader of the Council when North Downs Housing Limited was set up; Councillor Tony Rooth as Lead Councillor for Housing and Social Welfare when North Downs Housing Limited was set up; Councillor Angela Goodwin as a recently appointed director of North Downs Housing Limited; and Councillor Tom Hunt as a director of Guildford Borough Council Holdings Limited.

OS8 MINUTES

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 2 June 2020 were agreed.

OS9 COVID-19 RESPONSE - UPDATE

The Chairman indicated that the Committee had looked at the Council's response to COVID-19 in June and requested an update for its July meeting.

The Leader of the Council introduced the item. With reference to the easing of the lockdown since the Committee's June meeting, the Leader of the Council noted the successful reopening of businesses in Guildford town centre. She identified the need to ensure vulnerable residents continued to receive help at a time when support for large numbers of people was being withdrawn, in addition to being prepared for a surge or second wave in COVID-19. The Leader of the Council advised the Committee of the desire to maintain the community spirit within the Borough as the impacts of COVID-19 changed.

The Managing Director gave a presentation recapping the initial response to COVID-19 and identifying current issues. In a summary of the response, the Managing Director provided details of the food parcels and prescriptions delivered, the operation of a vulnerable persons helpline, welfare checks for shielded and vulnerable residents, and the extension of the meals on wheels service. The Committee was advised that grants, advice, and support had been provided to local businesses. The Committee was reminded that the Council's response included the introduction of virtual meetings and the redeployment of staff alongside the maintenance of essential services.

With reference to current COVID-19 issues, the Managing Director advised the meeting of the development of the Surrey Local Outbreak Control Plan and the establishment of the Surrey Local Outbreak Engagement Board. The Committee was advised that the Council's activities were risk assessed to ensure safety for staff, visitors, and residents.

With reference to a query raised at the previous meeting of the Committee about the number of local businesses struggling and the forecast extent of redundancies, the Managing Director indicated that he was unaware of major job losses locally although there had been an impact in the retail sector. The Committee was informed that an impact was to be expected once the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme reduced or ended. The Managing Director stated that approximately twenty percent [15,400] of the working age population in Guildford were on the furlough scheme and approximately 4,800 people in the Borough had claimed grants through the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme.

In concluding his presentation, the Managing Director noted the litter anti-social behaviour campaign launched recently in the Borough, the continuation of support and services for the most vulnerable, the review and recovery of Council services, and new ways of working.

The Chairman thanked the Managing Director for his presentation and invited questions from the Committee members.

In reply to a question about a date for the full re-opening of the Council offices to the public, the Managing Director referred to government guidance and confirmed the situation was being monitored.

In response to a question, the Managing Director undertook to arrange for details of the current homelessness situation in the Borough to be provided to Committee members.

A member of the Committee asked about the known impact of the COVID-19 emergency on voluntary and faith organisations in the Borough. The Community Wellbeing Manager updated the Committee on the situation and indicated that it was not clear where funding for the recovery of the voluntary and charity sector would come from. She advised the Committee that a more accurate assessment of the impact on the sector would be possible in 3-6 months.

RESOLVED: That regular updates on the response to COVID-19 continue to be provided to Committee meetings.

OS10 NORTH DOWNS HOUSING LIMITED

The Chairman thanked two directors of North Downs Housing Limited (NDH) for attending the meeting: Sarah Creedy, the Chair of directors, and Mike Parsons. The meeting was reminded that a member of the Committee, Councillor Angela Goodwin, had declared a non-pecuniary interest as a newly appointed director of NDH. In addition, the Chairman

welcomed the Council's Director of Operational Services and the Council's Landlord Services Manager.

The Landlord Services Manager gave a presentation outlining the purpose of NDH, its relationship with the Council, the objectives of NDH and progress to date, and its plans for 2020/21.

The Chair of directors at NDH indicated that the organisation's business plan published in 2016 had been updated in the report submitted to the Committee. She advised the Committee that NDH had not grown as fast as planned. The meeting was informed that NDH was seeking to meet the housing needs of residents in the third income quartile – people thought to be unable to access market housing in the Borough and unlikely to qualify for social housing.

The Leader of the Council, Lead Councillor for Housing and Development Control, indicated that NDH was a valuable tool to help address a particular demand for housing in the Borough.

The Chairman invited questions from the Committee members and during the ensuing discussion a number of points were made and clarifications offered:

- The Council's Landlord Services Manager indicated that until March 2020 NDH tenancies had been over ninety percent stable; since COVID-19, turnover of tenancies had increased.
- The Chair of directors of NDH indicated that the company was funded entirely by the Council through Guildford Borough Council Holdings Ltd. She advised that the income generated from NDH properties had to cover the running costs of the company and that a gross initial yield of 4.5 percent was sought on each property. She confirmed that the net yield figure for each property was established by calculating the expenditure required to enable it to be let.
- The Chair of directors of NDH indicated that the company was not subject to the Right to Buy scheme and that the properties acquired by NDH stayed within its ownership for the benefit of its tenants.
- The Council's Landlord Services Manager indicated that NDH properties were advertised on Rightmove and the company did not keep a waiting list for its properties. In addition, the Committee was advised that the Council's social housing waiting list was used to identify potential tenants for NDH properties.
- The Committee was informed that the Council's funding for NDH was currently unaffected by COVID-19 and that NDH provided a favourable financial return to the Council on its investment, that is to say, a borrowing rate of Bank of England base rate plus 5 percent.
- The Council's Landlord Services Manager advised the Committee that help and support had been offered to those people unable to pay rent due to COVID-19.
- The Council's Landlord Services Manager stated that current NDH tenants took little management and only one tenant had been evicted (and that this had been due to behaviour issues).

- The Committee was advised that NDH had been set up to deliver 4 objectives and that these could be summarised as meeting identified housing need, generating returns for the Council, accelerating development in the Borough, and to do such other things that helped deliver the first three objectives.
- The Committee was informed that a small number of NDH properties were outside the Borough boundary and these had been let to people that worked in the Borough.
- The Committee was advised that NDH currently had 50 properties while its original business plan aimed for 125 properties by 2020 and 200 properties by 2021. The availability of suitable property, the need to let at genuinely affordable rents, and the lack of personnel at NDH were put forward as the main factors limiting the growth of the portfolio.
- In response to a question, the meeting was advised of the need for the Council to adhere to state aid rules. The meeting discussed the benefit and possibility of NDH accessing funds at a lower borrowing rate than currently agreed with the Council.
- The Committee was updated on progress with the plans to recruit a member of staff to grow the NDH portfolio.
- The meeting was informed that the effects of COVID-19 on the housing market and the consequent availability of properties to NDH was not clear, although there did not seem to be a reduction in the number of people wanting properties in the Borough. The Council's Landlord Services Manager informed the Committee that more properties were now becoming available in the Borough. A member of the Committee indicated the value in monitoring the situation to ensure opportunities to increase NDH's portfolio were developed.
- In reply to a question about brownfield development in the Borough, the Committee was informed that the scarcity of land was the main factor limiting NDH building its own properties.
- The possible involvement of NDH in providing properties for the most vulnerable in society was discussed.
- The Chair of directors of NDH offered to provide future updates on the company to the Committee.

The Chairman thanked Sarah Creedy and Mike Parsons from NDH, the Council's Director of Operational Services, and the Council's Landlord Services Manager for attending.

RESOLVED: (I) That the four objectives of North Downs Housing Limited, as set out in its 2016 - 2046 Business Plan, be supported.

(II) That the Executive be requested to explore the provision of increased resources, particularly personnel, to enable NDH to deliver its ambitions more quickly.

(In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 19(e), Councillor Angela Goodwin requested that her decision to take no part in the vote due to her position as a director of NDH be recorded in the minutes.)

OS11 LEAD COUNCILLOR QUESTION SESSION

The Chairman welcomed Councillor James Steel, the Lead Councillor for Environment.

A number of question areas were provided to the Lead Councillor for Environment in advance of the meeting: the increase in fly tipping, rubbish, and litter across the Borough; park and ride services; the parking review; procurement of the new waste fleet; service reassessments and reconfigurations; and recycling. In addressing these issues and other questions, the following information and responses were provided by the Lead Councillor for Environment:

- The Lead Councillor informed the Committee that the apparent incidence of fly-tipping in the Borough during lockdown had decreased compared with the same three-month period (April – June) in the previous year.
- The meeting was advised of the Council's seasonal litter-picking and public waste bins arrangements, including the redeployment of some staff during COVID-19. The Committee was informed that staff had been subjected to some verbal abuse or disregarded when engaging the public over the issue of littering. The Lead Councillor for Environment indicated that communication campaigns had been put in place as part of the Council's response to the increase in littering. He confirmed that the Council was not facilitating or encouraging community litter picks during the current COVID-19 situation.
- The Lead Councillor for Environment stated that littering in a public place carried a maximum fine of £2,500 and that the Council had powers to issue a Fixed Penalty Notice of £150.
- The Lead Councillor for Environment indicated that questions about the expansion of park and ride should be directed to the Lead Councillor for Regeneration. He informed the meeting that the park and ride at Onslow was likely to continue to be used as a COVID-19 test centre until October and then revert to a park and ride by Christmas. He indicated that the Merrow and Artington park and ride sites were open and that the Spectrum park and ride site would open in agreement with Surrey County Council and Stagecoach.
- The Lead Councillor for Environment stated that efforts to progress making the barriers at Onslow park and ride operational would recommence once the site was returned to the control of the Council after its use as a COVID-19 test centre.
- In response to a question, the Lead Councillor for Environment indicated that the £3 million procurement of the new waste fleet was 11 percent under budget and the vehicles were due to arrive in late autumn.
- The Lead Councillor for Environment was asked if, in addition to measures envisaged as part of Future Guildford, any service reconfigurations or reassessments of the services within his portfolio were planned. In reply, the Lead Councillor for Environment indicated that the delivery of all services was under review as part of Future Guildford. In addition, he stated that decisions about the delivery and development of services would be taken in an open and transparent manner.
- The Committee was advised that the implementation of the 2019 on-street parking review was ongoing. The Lead Councillor for Environment advised that due to COVID-19 the controlled parking zones elements would not be completed until the spring/summer of 2021.

- With reference to off-street parking, the Committee was informed that actions within the existing parking business plan were being implemented and progressed. The Lead Councillor for Environment advised the meeting a major car parking study was completed this year.
- In reply to questioning, the Lead Councillor for Environment stated that there had been a growth in all waste streams (recycling, food, garden, and refuse) during the COVID-19 crisis. The Committee was advised that the cost of reprocessing waste materials was significantly less than disposal costs.
- With reference to the correct processing of waste and recycling from the Borough, the Committee was informed that Surrey County Council was the Waste Disposal Authority and that the Environment Agency was responsible for both checking the quality of reprocessed recyclables and that recycled materials reached declared destinations.
- The Waste, Parking and Fleet Services Manager indicated that he could provide details in response to a query about increasing the provision of cycle-parking in Guildford town centre.
- The Parks and Landscape Manager indicated that information would be provided by the Countryside Manager to answer questions from a Committee member about the drainage system and a walkway renewal at Riverside Nature Reserve.

The Chairman thanked the Lead Councillor for Environment for attending and answering questions.

OS12 MATTERS OUTSTANDING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Committee was advised of six matters outstanding from previous meetings: information relating to Future Guildford; the traveller strategy and policy; the overall decision-making on the Walnut Bridge project; businesses struggling and the forecast extent of redundancies from COVID-19; data on complaints and expressions of dissatisfaction to the Council during COVID-19; and the cancellation of the Major Projects Portfolio Board meetings.

With reference to the further information on Future Guildford, the meeting was advised that the next update to the Committee would be in January 2021.

In relation to the traveller strategy and policy, the Committee was advised that the transit site work was being progressed at Surrey Leaders and that the Council's Managing Director would provide a further update as this developed.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that information on the local businesses struggling and redundancies had been provided earlier in the meeting and data on complaints to the Council during the COVID-19 crisis had been circulated to members.

The meeting's attention was drawn to the update within the report submitted to the Committee advising of the cancellation of the Major Projects Portfolio Board and a review of Major Projects requested by the Lead Councillor for Regeneration.

RESOLVED: That the updates on matters outstanding from previous meetings be noted and taken forward.

OS13 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20

The Chairman introduced the item and advised the meeting that Full Council would consider the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2019-20 at its meeting on 28 July 2020. He advised that the Committee was requested to consider the work of overview and scrutiny during 2019-20 and the Committee’s future work programme, and review the operation of provisions relating to call-in and urgency.

With reference to the number of items scheduled for its September 2020 meeting, the Chairman confirmed that an additional Committee meeting had been scheduled for 20 October 2020.

With reference to the discussion at the Committee’s pre-meet the previous day, the Chairman suggested retaining five items for the Committee’s September meeting: the COVID-19 response update; the Lead Councillor question session; the Safer Guildford Partnership Annual Report 2020; the Air Quality Strategy; and the Council’s Property Investment Strategy. For the Committee’s October 2020 meeting, the Chairman proposed scheduling four items: the Woodbridge Road Sportsground Pavilion Refurbishment – post project review; the Crematorium – post project review; the Council’s use of consultants; and the update on the Council’s ICT Refresh Project. He indicated that the Evaluation of project Aspire could move to the Committee’s November 2020 meeting.

With reference to the Committee’s currently unscheduled items, the Chairman proposed considering the Submission of a Garden Village Bid for Wisley Airfield and the Use of the New Homes Bonus at the Committee’s November 2020 meeting. In addition, he suggested that three items be added to the agenda for the Committee’s January 2021 meeting: Traveller encampments/traveller strategy and policy; an update on Houses in Multiple Occupation; and Future Guildford.

The Committee agreed to amend its future work programme in accordance with the proposals put forward by the Chairman.

RESOLVED: (I) That subject to the amendments to the Overview and Scrutiny work programme agreed and detailed above, the report submitted to the Committee be commended to Full Council as the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report, 2019-20.

(II) That the current rules relating to call in or urgency provisions remain unchanged.

The meeting finished at 9.13 pm

Signed

Date

Chairman