

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 November 2018

* Councillor Caroline Reeves (Chairman)

* Councillor James Walsh (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Richard Billington	* Councillor Susan Parker
* Councillor Adrian Chandler	* Councillor Dennis Paul
* Councillor David Goodwin	* Councillor Mike Piper
* Councillor Nigel Kearse	* Councillor David Quelch
* Councillor Sheila Kirkland	* Councillor Jenny Wicks

*Present

Councillors David Bilbé, Lead Councillor for Enterprise and Economic Development, Matt Sarti, Tony Rooth, and David Wright, Deputy Lead Councillor were also in attendance.

OS29 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

An apology was submitted on behalf of Councillor Billington.

OS30 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT AND DECLARATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

OS31 MINUTES

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 16 October were approved.

OS32 LEAD COUNCILLOR QUESTION SESSION

The Chairman welcomed the Lead Councillor for Enterprise and Economic Development and the Local Economy Manager to the meeting.

Question areas were provided to the Lead Councillor for Enterprise and Economic Development in advance of the meeting. In responding to these issues and other questions put at the meeting, a number of clarifications and responses were offered:

- The Lead Councillor for Enterprise and Economic Development indicated that the likely impact of Brexit was largely unknown, although local businesses who employed a high proportion of EU nationals were concerned at the possibility of future skills shortages. He advised the Committee that a skills survey was being undertaken to better understand where the sensitive areas in the local economy were. The Lead Councillor for Enterprise and Economic Development indicated that a Surrey Chamber of Commerce briefing checklist for Brexit could be circulated to interested members. In addition, he referred to the work of the Council's officer-led Brexit group. He advised that the Council had no specific risk assessments for Brexit. Committee members suggested the need to provide information and support to EU nationals living in the UK.
- The Lead Councillor for Enterprise and Economic Development advised that affordable housing, reducing congestion, and air quality were some of the factors important to Guildford's economic development and prosperity.

- In response to questions, the Lead Councillor for Enterprise and Economic Development suggested that the hardships and decline of the retail sector in Guildford, particularly small independent retailers, had been overstated. He indicated that the current retail vacancy rate in Guildford was lower than the South East average.
- The meeting discussed the possible hazard that might be caused by A boards and other signs on pavements. Councillors suggested that the Council had been more active in enforcing restrictions on such signage in the past.
- In response to a question about future use of the former Village site, the Lead Councillor for Enterprise and Economic Development indicated that the site was not Council land [the lease held by the Council came to an end in September 2018].
- In reply to a question, the Deputy Lead Councillor advised that the Council was a strong supporter of Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and provided the meeting with examples. In addition, the Committee was advised of an upcoming symposium at the University of Surrey to discuss the future of Surrey Hills AONB. In response to a question, the Committee was advised that there was no difference in protection between an AONB and a National Park and that significant additional costs and resources were required to manage landscapes with a National Park designation. The Committee was advised of the government's review of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- In reply to a question suggesting the number of stalls on North Street Market was declining, the Lead Councillor for Enterprise and Economic Development indicated that he would look into the matter and provide a written response to the Committee members. The Lead Member for Enterprise and Economic Development indicated that the North Street Market was the responsibility of the Parking Team. In addition, the Chairman indicated that the number of stalls on North Street Market was often lower in the winter months due to the weather and stallholders' holidays.

The Chairman thanked the Lead Councillor for Enterprise and Economic Development and the Local Economy Manager for attending and answering questions.

OS33 OPERATION OF THE LEISURE MANAGEMENT CONTRACT, 2017-18

The Chair outlined the background to the Committee's consideration of the review of the annual report and monitoring arrangements for the operation of the Leisure Partnership Agreement for 2017-18, including the role of a working group to progress the task.

The Leisure Services Manager introduced a report detailing the performance of the contractor operating Guildford Spectrum, Guildford Lido, and Ash Manor Sports Centre and the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny working group. The Committee was advised that performance had been affected by closures for essential maintenance. The Leisure Services Manager indicated that a detailed ten-year maintenance plan had been produced and agreed by GLL (Greenwich Leisure Limited), FL (Freedom Leisure), and officers.

With reference to the report submitted to the Committee, the meeting was advised that although FL made a deficit against its bid target, the contract still contributed positively financially to FL due to the central support services cost allocated. The Leisure Services Manager informed the Committee that this central support services cost was equivalent to 5 percent of the income of the contract.

Speaking as a member of the Overview and Scrutiny working group, Councillor Sarti advised the Committee of concerns including decreases in membership and the asset management plan. The Committee was informed that the working group judged the contractor to be operating adequately in a difficult market, and providing a wide range of sports and facilities. The Chairman thanked the working group for its work.

In reply to questions about maintenance of the Lido and the contribution of the Friends of Guildford Lido volunteers, the Leisure Services Manager indicated that the Lido should be very grateful for the contribution of the Friends to the operation. In addition, the Leisure Services Manager advised the Committee that maintenance issues were a regular concern for his team.

The Committee was advised that the Leisure Partnership Agreement expired in November 2021, and was extendable for up to two 2-year periods. The Leisure Services Manager indicated that the possibility of Spectrum 2.0 was a factor in the evaluation of options for post-November 2021. In reply to questions, the Committee members were informed that the decision about contract renewal should be addressed a minimum of two years before the end of the contract.

The Committee was informed that there was no contractual requirement for the contractor to pay the Living Wage, although FL had reduced the number of zero hours contracts.

With reference to the costs of a possible Spectrum 2.0, the meeting was advised that to service an £80m debt was estimated to cost £3.5m annually. The Committee was advised that the most feasible location for Spectrum 2.0 was at the same site as the current Spectrum, but not on the same footprint. The Leisure Services Manager confirmed that any proposals for a Spectrum 2.0 would go to an Executive Advisory Board and be subject to a large-scale public consultation.

The Director of Environment indicated that the initial feasibility study for future options in relation to the Spectrum would be complete by the first quarter of 2019.

In response to a question about the Ash Manor Sports Centre, the Committee was informed that water ingress in the main hall was an issue for the school.

The Committee indicated its support for the report submitted and the Chairman thanked officers and Councillor Sarti for attending the meeting.

OS34 WATERCOURSE AND GRILL CLEARANCE

The Committee received a report outlining the cost and service implications of the Council undertaking the clearance of watercourses and grilles, including those not on Council-owned land. The report described the rights and responsibilities of riparian owners and updated the Committee on events since the matter had been considered in March 2018 [minute OS47, 6 March 2018 refers].

The Engineering Manager advised that Surrey County Council had written to riparian owners in Ash and Ash Vale to remind them of their legal responsibilities. The Committee was informed that grilles had been categorised according to flood risk but watercourses had not.

The Engineering Manager indicated that recouping Council money spent on watercourse and grille maintenance would be difficult in some areas. He invited the Committee to comment on the watercourse and grille clearance work undertaken by the Council.

Members of the Committee stated that the maintenance work should continue alongside efforts to recover maintenance costs from the riparian owners. Members suggested that riparian owners should be advised of their legal responsibilities but ultimately the work should continue. Members suggested parish councils that were riparian owners should be approached over the issue.

In reply to a question, the Engineering Manager stated that to introduce and administer a scheme of recharging would be expensive and unlikely to recover costs.

The Director of Environment indicated action that would be taken within the allocated budget: watercourses prioritised according to flood risk, all riparian owners contacted and provided with information about their legal responsibilities, and efforts made to recover maintenance from partners such as SCC and parish councils.

OS35 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a report setting out the Overview and Scrutiny work programme for the period 2018-19.

The Committee was advised that all Councillors had been invited to a Special Meeting of the Committee to consider the Future Guildford proposals and options on 6 February 2019. In addition, the officer-lead Brexit task group [minute OS28, 16 October 2018 refers] would be reporting to the Committee in January 2019.

The meeting finished at 9.01 pm

Signed

Date

Chairman