

**Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
17 March 2015**

Present:

P.A. Broom (Chairman)
Councillor A.E. Friday (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

D. Gohil

I.T.E. Harvey

D. Saliagopoulos

Apologies: Councillors F. Ayers, M.W. Bushnell, R.D. Dunn, D.L. Grant, M.W. Rough.

In attendance: Councillors V.J. Leighton, J.M. Pinkerton OBE, R.W. Sider BEM and R.L. Watts.

Voluntary Organisations

Representatives attended from Voluntary Action in Spelthorne (VAIS), Runnymede and Spelthorne Citizens' Advice Bureau, Shopmobility, Rentstart, Home-Start, Riverside Arts Centre, Spelthorne Museum and AgeUK.

57/15 Disclosures of Interest

Councillor Saliagopoulos declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to item 6 on the agenda which related to the Voluntary Sector and the Council. She explained that she was a member of Surrey County Council and was the elected governor of Ashford and St. Peter's Trust which appears in the Voluntary Action in Spelthorne's (VAIS) Newsletter.

58/15 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2015 were approved as a correct record.

59/15 Matters arising from the minutes

No matters were raised.

60/15 Call in of Cabinet Decisions

No decisions had been called in.

61/15 The Voluntary Sector and the Council

Representatives from the eight largest voluntary organisations in Spelthorne, including Voluntary Action in Spelthorne (VAIS), Runnymede and Spelthorne Citizens' Advice Bureau, Shopmobility, Rentstart, Home-Start, Riverside Arts Centre, Spelthorne Museum and AgeUK, gave presentations to the Committee on the services they provide for the benefit of the Borough's residents and a summary of their annual reports and their financial statements 2013-2014 were attached to the agenda.

The Committee asked questions relating to how the Council could improve its assistance to the voluntary organisations, the importance of a reserve policy

to justify the level of financial reserves each voluntary organisation retains and the usefulness of service level agreements with the Council and how those agreements could be improved to work better for the residents of the borough.

The Committee noted the financial constraints experienced by the voluntary sector in recent years owing to the impact of austerity cuts and the decreasing capacity of Local Authorities and other organisations to provide the level of financial assistance that they had in previous years. The Committee noted the positive comments made by the voluntary organisations when asked about their working relationship with Spelthorne Borough Council.

The Committee asked further questions relating to how the voluntary organisations would achieve their shortfalls in the forthcoming municipal year and the likelihood of the organisations present charging local authorities for their services.

The Chairman thanked the representatives of the voluntary organisations in attendance for the important work they achieve and for the positive multiplying effect they have on the lives of people in the borough. She also joined the Committee in praising the work of the Grants Panel, in particular Councillors I.T.E. Harvey and J.M. Pinkerton OBE.

Resolved to note the review of the voluntary sector and the Council.

62/15 Better Neighbourhood Grants

The Committee received a presentation from the Community Development Officer on the Better Neighbourhood Grants Scheme. She explained that the scheme was designed to provide assistance to residents who required the most support in the borough and in turn the scheme encouraged councillors to engage with residents and better understand the needs of their local community.

The Committee emphasised the importance of the grants and that every councillor should make use of them as they are appreciated by residents. The Committee expressed satisfaction with the scheme.

Resolved:

- (1)** to note the Better Neighbourhood Grants report.
- (2)** that use of the scheme was considered to be an integral part of a councillor's role;
- (3)** to recommend that the basic minimum donation amount be £100 rather than the £250 suggested in the report.
- (4)** to recommend that a re-launch of the scheme be undertaken in June after the induction programme for new councillors.

63/15 Legal and Committee Services

The Committee received a report from the Head of Corporate Governance in relation to Corporate Governance services and how they are proposed to develop in relation to the Towards a Sustainable Future programme.

The Head of Corporate Governance gave an overview of the progress of both teams (Legal and Committee Services). These included:

- Implementation of a quality management system within Committee Services to ensure that all processes within the team are documented, reviewed and followed. He explained to the Committee that the system was completely auditable, with all processes monitored through a Red Amber Green (RAG) review chart and issues log. The intention and advantage of this structured way of working was to maintain quality and resilience within the team when there is a reduction in staff resources.
- The Head of Corporate Governance also highlighted the advantages of electronic working with the installation of modern.gov, a back office software programme which would greatly reduce the manual processes relating to Committee management. Furthermore he explained that greater savings from the same system could be experienced if there were councillor interest to work in an electronic way.
- The shared services arrangement with Reigate and Banstead Borough Council and the prospect of combining legal resources with other Surrey districts in the future. He explained that the intention was to gradually deliver £90k in savings per annum and in the long term there would be improved cost effectiveness as other local authorities entered the shared services arrangement and the service continued to grow.
- The strategy for Legal Services which was focused on pooling together resources and as a result acquiring stronger teams. He explained that there would be resources in each area and scope for specialised lawyers within the team. Furthermore junior level staff would be trained in a variety of areas allowing them to gain experience and increase resilience within the shared service.

The Committee asked questions relating to developing income streams within legal services and increasing Surrey County Council's use of local authority teams. In addition the Committee drew attention to printing costs and the advantages for councillors of moving over to electronic agendas and minutes. The Committee agreed that this topic could be explored further at a future Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Head of Corporate Governance reiterated that the prospect of electronic agendas and minutes for Councillors would be explored again at a later date after the 2015 election.

Resolved to:

- (1) note the report on current issues in relation to Corporate Governance services and how they are proposed to develop in relation to the Towards a Sustainable Future programme and
- (2) to include an item on the future work programme of the Committee in relation to electronic documents.

64/15 Capital Monitoring

The Committee received the Capital Monitoring report covering the period April to January 2015.

The Committee noted that for the period ending January 2015, capital expenditure including commitments was £498k (58%) of the original budget and (45%) of the revised budget.

Resolved to note the current spend position.

65/15 Revenue Monitoring

The Committee received the Revenue Monitoring Report providing the net revenue spend figures to the end of January 2015.

The Committee noted the forecast outturn at net expenditure level was £13.894m against the revised budget of £13.621m; which was a projected adverse variance of £273k. The Committee noted that after taking into account the use of carry forwards, the net position is approximately £17k adverse variance.

Resolved to note the current net revenue spend and forecast position.

66/15 Towards a Sustainable Future – update

The Committee received a written update on the Toward a Sustainable Future Programme (TaSF). The Committee noted that a dashboard had been created to monitor the three key work streams under the TaSF programme, including the use of assets programme, the Knowle Green programme and the Structural Review (including service redesign and alternative delivery models).

Resolved that the Committee notes:

- (1) the new TaSF Project map and dashboard
- (2) the three key work streams under the programme
- (3) the progress being made on the Knowle Green Programme
- (4) the progress being made on resource issues
- (5) the progress being made on structural reviews

67/15 Leader's Task Groups – update

The Committee received a report from the Lead Councillor of the Economic Development Leader's Task Group and the Portfolio Holder for Asset Management, Councillor Nick Gething on the work of the Economic Development Task Group.

Resolved that the Committee note the work of the Economic Development Task Group.

68/15 Review of the Work Programme 2014-2015

The Committee noted the review of the Work Programme over the course of the year.

The Committee recommended a number of areas for the forthcoming Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review in future meetings, including:

- a discussion on the use of IT equipment for councillors in relation to electronic working
- the development of expertise within Legal Services through training
- the sharing of services across local authorities
- the way the Legal department is moving towards merit and ability with employment rather than internal promotion

The Chairman thanked all officers and councillors for their support over the course of the year, in particular Gillian Hobbs, the Committee Manager and Terry Collier, the Assistant Chief Executive.

69/15 Cabinet Forward Plan

The Committee received the Cabinet Forward Plan.

Resolved to note the Forward Plan.

70/15 Any Other Business

The Vice-Chairman, Councillor A.E. Friday, thanked the Chairman, Councillor P.A. Broom, for her services to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee over the last 4 years, in particular her chairmanship of the public flooding meeting in 2014.