

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting held on Thursday, 20th October, 2022 at the Council Offices, Farnborough at 7.00 pm.

Voting Members

Cllr M.D. Smith (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs. D.B. Bedford (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr K. Dibble (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr A. Adeola
Cllr Gaynor Austin
Cllr L. Jeffers
Cllr Mara Makunura
Cllr Marina Munro
Cllr Sophie Porter
Cllr S. Trussler

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Cllr Prabesh KC.

15. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 15th September, 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

16. PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS

The Committee welcomed James Duggin, Head of Operational Services, who was in attendance to give a presentation on the Borough's parks and play grounds.

Mr Duggin provided an overview of the current Strategy, which had been approved by the Cabinet in December, 2019, following a series of meetings with the Policy and Project Advisory Board. The Committee were apprised of the locations of the 40 Council owned sites across the Borough, which varied in quality, standard and usage. It was noted that a key strategic principle within the Strategy had been to ensure that for every resident in the Borough should have either; an equipped playground within a five-minute walk (0.4 km) or; a neighbourhood playground within a fifteen-minute walk (1.2 km); with either complimented by a destination facility at one of the key parks within the area. It was advised that the principles also stated, that:

- Sites should be of a high quality with diverse play facilities
- Sites should be maintained to ensure a safe and high-quality experience
- Continued assessment should be carried out on population demographics to ensure appropriate provision
- Consideration of levels of deprivation be taken into account when considering playground provision

Mr Duggin advised that recent census data had shown a population increase within the Borough. However, the data showed a decrease in 0-4 year olds and an increase in 5-9 year olds, with the figures for 10-14 year olds remaining static. These statistics could result in a reduction in demand for smaller sites aimed at the youngest age group.

The Committee were advised on some recent work to sites including, Moor Road Recreation Ground, Blunden Park and King George V Playing Fields. The new site at the Southwood Country Park was also noted. Other minor refurbishment works were highlighted, these included a minor refurbishment and repaint at Carlton Gardens, new fencing at Aspen Grove and surface replacement, repaint and equipment service at Howard Cole Way.

Looking forward, Mr Duggin advised on further minor refurbishments and the Committee noted that old equipment had been built to last, allowing the Council to repaint and service much of it, however, health and safety remained a high priority on all sites. It was also noted that sites not on the Council's land, such as Curly Bridge Close, Fleming Close, Highclere Road, Derwent Close and Dart Road, considered to be at the end of life, would be recommended to close.

The Committee were apprised of the financial arrangements. It was noted that the current maintenance budget had been around £65,000 and to fully implement the Action Plan within the Strategy would cost in the region of £3million. Section 106 (S106) contributions were noted and it was advised that currently, contributions in Aldershot were in the region of £280,000 and in Farnborough £684,000. The Committee were advised that S106 funding had very specific guidelines and currently a number of sites were under development or awaiting contributions at Southwood Country Park, Cove Green Recreation Ground, Redan Hill Gardens, Farnborough Civic Quarter and Elles Road.

In conclusion, it was noted that the Strategy had been developed to ensure ongoing appropriate play provision across the Borough with investment targeted in the right place. Some funding had been available for ongoing maintenance but it had been insufficient to fund the whole strategy, therefore S106 contributions were sought wherever possible. Moving forward funding would be considered alongside other Council priorities in the budget setting process.

The Committee discussed the presentation and raised the following queries:

- Accessible play equipment - it was advised that all sites were designed to be accessible but not to have disabled appropriate equipment
- Provision of S106 in areas not likely to receive a contribution for development – it was advised that the Council would apply as much flexibility as possible when applying for S106 contributions
- Provision for 12-16 year olds – It was noted that this age group fell outside the scope for play provision within the Council's strategy which only accounted for young people up to the age of 14
- Safety check process – it was noted that all sites were inspected either daily or weekly, depending on use. On a monthly basis a qualified inspector would

carry out checks and full condition surveys would be undertaken annually. If a piece of equipment was deemed unsafe it would be taken out of commission

- End of life play areas – when a play area reached end of life the Council would look to provide an area that was safe and appropriate for the area, however there were cost implications
- Funding – the Committee noted that an imaginative approach had been taken towards funding play areas, primarily through the use of S106, however, when all else failed, a bid could be made for funding from the capital budget

The Chairman thanked Mr Duggin for his presentation.

17. **PROPERTY SERVICES**

The Committee welcomed Mr Tim Mills, Head of Economy, Planning and Strategic Housing who was in attendance to provide an overview of the Council's Property Service.

Members were apprised of objectives, governance and reporting for the service. It was noted that, in 2019, the initial strategy had been to increase the portfolio size to £178 million, using Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) funding, through well let assets, with strong secure income and minimal risk. However in 2020/21 PWLB changed their rules preventing borrowing to purchase for income yield. It was noted that following this change, the Council had focussed on acquiring permitted regeneration assets in the Borough, targeting value added opportunities and maximising income from existing assets. The current value of the portfolio was £128.2 million.

It was noted that governance was in place to ensure that the portfolio was well managed and the performance of the portfolio was monitored by the Property Investment Advisory Group (PIAG). It was advised that PIAG met quarterly (or as required) to consider performance reports consisting of data on acquisitions/sales, asset management initiatives and financial considerations. In addition, monthly meetings took place, to review progress, between the Council's property team and Lambert Smith Hampton Investment Management (LSHIM), the Council's investment and asset advisors. All data was then fed into the Council's budget and performance monitoring processes.

The Committee noted a number of key points regarding the portfolio, these included:

- £7,646,384 – contracted rent p.a.
- 81 tenants – excluding short term licenses
- 6.13% of vacant space
- Rent collection performance
- Debt performance

Mr Mills reported on the asset management planning for the planned period of 2022-2030. The 7-8 year planning process, had been set to tie in with potential energy efficiency requirements and the Council Plan. It was noted that Concerto, the asset management system being utilised, mapped all potential events and assumptions for all assets, identified stock condition investment requirements, identified energy

efficiency investment requirements, outlined a proposed approach to rent and rebate for community buildings and minimum license costs and identified specific plans for key assets such as the Princes Hall and the Alpine Snowsports centre.

The Committee discussed Mr Mills' report and recognised that the new management system, Concerto, allowed quick access to all information relating to each property making for a more efficient and effective service. In response to a query regarding debt management, it was noted that Concerto enabled effective invoicing which had had a positive effect on outstanding debt since its implementation. In response to a query regarding energy efficiency, it was noted that the rating of each property within the portfolio were now known. The next step would be to survey each property to establish costs to achieve the required "B" energy efficiency rating as set by the Government.

The Committee requested a session on the portfolio at which an overview of each property was given, this would be discussed further at the next Progress Group.

The Chairman thanked Mr Mills for his presentation.

18. **WORK PLAN**

The current Work Plan was noted.

It was advised that an update would be provided on the Supporting Communities Strategy and Action Plan at the December, 2022 meeting.

It was also noted that an economic assessment of the airport was underway and it was expected that the report, when complete, would help facilitate an item on the Farnborough Airport at a future meeting of the Committee.

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm.

CLLR M.D. SMITH (CHAIRMAN)
