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Policy and Organisation Board
13 March 2024

A MEETING OF THE POLICY AND ORGANISATION BOARD WAS HELD ON 13 MARCH 2024

Councillors Chegwyn, Hutchison, Hylands, Pepper, Raffaelli, Mrs Cully and Philpott
(Substituting for Burgess)

41. APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE

Apologies for non attendance were received from Councillor Burgess.

42. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Hutchison declared a personal interest in agenda item 11 – Digital Strategy.

43. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD HELD ON 23 JANUARY 2024

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on the 23 January 2024 be signed as a true and correct record.

44. DEPUTATIONS - STANDING ORDER 3.4

There were none.

45. PUBLIC QUESTIONS - STANDING ORDER 3.5

There were none.

46. EY - AUDIT RESULTS REPORT 2021/22 AND AUDITORS ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

Consideration was given to a report of the external auditor setting out the findings to date from the 2021/22 external audit, which is well progressed. It includes the messages arising from our audit of financial statements and the arrangements put in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources.

Kevin Suter was invited to address the Board, he advised that that the report was not timely and that there had been significant issues with a large majority of Local authority audits and this was not the fault of GBC Staff. The support and patience of the Council was acknowledged.

The Board was advise that due to the large number of outstanding sign offs, there was consultation being undertaken to reset the proves to allow for a catch up and to write off the backlog.

The Board was advised that on publication of the report there were some outstanding actions, most of which had been covered and finalised. The one outstanding action was

close to completion, this was waiting for an invoice. Completion of this would allow for the unqualified audit opinion to be issued for 2021/22.

The report highlighted key issues and which had either been actioned or were on their way to being resolved. This included procurement which had a significant amount of work being undertaken.

The Board expressed their disappointment that the report was 18 months late and that the service received was not what had been paid for, and that proposals were being considered to write off 2022/23 to allow audits to get back on track.

Members understood the delays, but recognised that the moving on of 2022/23 made them feel uncomfortable. The Board was advised that an additional report was being presented to the Standards and Audit sub board later in March.

The Board was advised that the consultation was being undertaken by the Department for Levelling Up Communities and Housing in association with the National Audit Office as it was a national issue that would not be resolved if audits were not caught up. Discussions would take place as to how to move this forward and report any outcomes.

Members expressed concern about the current situation but welcomed that there were no significant issues and thanked the auditors and staff for their hard work as the Council moved forward with confidence.

RESOLVED: That the Board review and note the conclusions to date set out in the Audit Results Report and Auditors Annual Report and provides delegated authority for the approval of the audited financial statements for 2021/22 to the Borough Treasurer and Chair of the Policy and Organisation Board.

47. EY - 2022/23 VFM REPORTING

Consideration was given to a report of the external auditor setting out the findings to date from the 2022/23 external audit, specifically, the messages arising from the audit of the arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources.

The Board was advised that the NAO requires a report to be taken on the work undertaken on Value For Money Commentary.

The Board was advised that no other significant risks had been identified and that it was satisfied arrangements were in place.

It was acknowledged that the issues with procurement had been resolved. A Member advised that they had identified a number of issues with the appendix and had addressed these to EY, so would not need to cover them at the Board and felt that a number of these were as a result of Copy and Paste.

In answer to a Members question, the Board was advised that the audit was undertaken on process and procedures and that whilst Members were welcome to engage it was important that the process was a political, and as a result engagement would predominantly be with

officers. The Board was advised that the process was not table top and engagement was undertaken.

It was acknowledged that a Value For Money Assessment would always be subjective and that Members were entitled to raise any concerns they had.

The Board was advised that a report would be taken to Board by 30 September 2024 taking the findings of last year and Members would be able to comment further.

The Board noted the report.

48. BRIEFING ON THE COUNCIL'S BIODIVERSITY DUTY

Consideration was given to a report of the Planning Policy Manager advising Members on how the Biodiversity Duty had been considered by the Council and what actions were proposed.

The Board was advised that a bio diversity report on proposed actions had to be in place by 1st January 2026 and this was a report that was advising of the Council's proposed way forward in meeting this.

Members acknowledged there would need to be partnership working to ensure that all potential opportunities were explored and that partners would need to be engaged to meet targets.

It was envisaged that moving forward the panel would include Members and Officers and suggested that the Community and Environment Board would be a more appropriate owner of the work.

Members were advised that the report had been presented at this stage to ensure transparency in that the work being considered and that this was a starting point.

Other Members also felt that the consideration of any future work should be the responsibility of the Community and Environment Board. It was advised that at this stage it sat more within the policy elements of the Council.

Members acknowledged that the work may need a budget and staffing moving forward.

It was reiterated that there would be a need for partnership working with partners such as the NHS, and other public bodies.

It was acknowledged that other Local Authorities would also be required to meet the duty and that collaborative working with bodies such as the Hampshire Nature Recovery Strategy would be beneficial.

RESOLVED: That this Board:

- Notes the requirements of the Biodiversity Duty

- Approves the first considerations of our Biodiversity Duty, as attached at Appendix 1

Approves the preparation of a Biodiversity Report

49. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME FOR THE EMERGING GOSPORT BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN 2040

Consideration was given to a report of the Manager of Planning Policy seeks approval to publish the latest version of the LDS.

The Board was advised that it was now necessary to update the LDS with a revised timetable to produce the new Gosport Borough Local Plan and extend the end date of the emerging Local Plan from 2038-2040.

A Member advised that they had considered the report previously taken to the Economic Development Board with a similar table of dates and draft plan which noted that Regulation 18 had ended in 2021 and Regulation 19 would commence in 2022. But the commencing of Regulation 19 had not yet happened and was no not due until October 2024. This was over two years later and it was believed put the Council at risk.

The Board was advised that the dates were correct and that the start of Regulation 19 would ring in the changes highlighted. It was advised that neighbouring authorities that had implemented Regulation 19 had struggled in that applications had been made to Brownfield sites that had been subsequently approved by the inspector and this was detrimental.

Members expressed concern that there was already an insufficient supply for the housing demand and that this could further impact on this. A member advised that there had been a proposal for a significant number units removed from the bus station, with the aspiration of making the site green field, from existing brown field. This would impact the availability of brownfield sites further and would put green field sites at risk in future.

Members expressed concern about other sites that could be used if greenfield development became an option on some of the Borough's vulnerable sites, including Stokesmead.

Members expressed ongoing concern that Gosport was not able to meet its Housing delivery targets and that pressure would be placed on other areas of the Borough.

The Board was advised that the figure given was a starting point, and that it could be negotiated up and down depending on availability. Changes still needed to be made to the National Planning Policy Framework which were anticipated in December.

The Board was advised that the suitability of sites would still need to be justified. Members felt that sites such as the gasworks being utilised was beneficial, but were disappointed that the veteran's village in Haslar had not come forward. Concern was also expressed that the Police Station redevelopment would now not be happening.

Members debated whether a tall building was desired for the bus station site and concern was reiterated that there would be a housing shortfall.

The Board was advised that there was a reluctance from constructors to build properties as constructor cost were exceeding returns from them.

It was acknowledged that there was a need for quality housing.

RESOLVED: That the Board approves the Local Development Scheme (March 2024) (as set out in Appendix A).

50. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY & MRP POLICY 2024/25

Consideration was given to a report of the Borough Treasurer outlining the Council's policy for charging unfinanced capital expenditure to revenue (MRP) together with the expected treasury operations for this period.

The Board was advised that the change to assets acquired by leases had zero impact and was a change reflected on the balance sheet.

RESOLVED: That the following be approved.

- Minimum Revenue Provision Policy, as identified in 2.1
- The Treasury Management Strategy, as identified in 2.2

51. DIGITAL STRATEGY - PROJECT DELIVERY PLAN

Consideration was given to a report of the Economic Development and Regeneration Manager detailing the year three proposed project plans for the Digital Strategy.

Members welcomed work with the University of Portsmouth and were advised of the timescale for the projects.

The project had provided tablets without sim cards and it was acknowledged that a greater coverage of wifi was what was desired.

The digital promotion of cultural and historic events was also welcomed.

Members welcomed the promotion of space innovation to young people and the promotion of careers in the industry.

The Board was advised that the hub projects were for an initial period of a year and would be reviewed.

There was a question around the award of a project to Solent Partners, as the LEP was disbanding imminently. The Board was advised that some work would continue, it was agreed that this would be checked and reported back.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Board approves the Year Three project plans set out in Section 2, in accordance with the UKSPF funding criteria.
2. That the Board gives delegated authority to the Economic Development & Regeneration Manager to determine the final detail and deliver the schemes in consultation with the Chief Executive.

52. ANY OTHER ITEMS

It was acknowledged that Cllr Pepper was attending his last meeting before standing down and the Chairman also wished a speedy recovery to Cllr Burgess.

CHAIRMAN

Concluded at 7.30 pm