ELMBRIDGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

REPORT of a meeting held on 27 September 2012

Members of Committee:

* A.J. Hopkins (Chairman)
* B.J.F. Cheyne (Vice-Chairman)

* M. Axton
* I.T. Donaldson
* B. Fairbank
* R.J. Gray
* Mrs. T. Izard
* Rachael I. Lake
* Mrs. R. Mitchell
* C.R. Sadler
* Mrs. E.E. Saunders

* F. Dabell
* C.J. Elmer
* B.W. Fairclough
* G. Herbert
* A.C. Kelly
* Mrs. R.J.M. Lyon
* Mrs. M. Odone
* Mrs. L.M. Samuels

* Denotes attendance

(J. Browne, Ms. B.A. Cowin, G.P. Dearlove, Mrs. S.J. Dennis, , Mrs. C.J. Elmer, Mrs. J. Fuller, Mrs. D.M. Mitchell, J. O’Reilly and Mrs. K. Randolph were also present.)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 23 March, 16 May and 14 June 2012 were agreed as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET ON 17 OCTOBER 2012

3. CALL IN OF THE CABINET’S DECISION IN RESPECT OF THE THAMES DITTON MULTI USE COURT

The Overview and Scrutiny reviewed a decision taken by the Cabinet, following receipt of a Call In signed by 5 Members of the Committee.

This Call In was in respect of the Cabinet resolution on 4 July 2012 that the Dual Use Agreement between Elmbridge Borough Council and Surrey Council for the multi use court at Thames Ditton Junior School be terminated from the end of the current agreement.
The Thames Ditton Ward Councillors addressed the Committee with regard to the Thames Ditton Multi Use Court and explained there were a number of factors that they considered had not been present in the report.

The Ward Councillor’s advised that the Thames Ditton Multi Use Court was established following the redevelopment of the Milk Marketing Board site for Housing in 1997. A Section 106 Agreement was entered into for the replacement of recreation facilities for the community over 4 acres of the site. This was to include a multi use court to be used for 5-aside football, short tennis, netball and other sports and to include a Pavilion. The agreement was for Elmbridge Borough Council to make available a multi use court and Pavilion on Surrey County Council land. It was suggested that the multi use court and pavilion be moved to the Weston Green Junior School so that the school children could use the facility Monday to Friday and the community could use it in the evening, at weekends and during school holiday periods.

Furthermore, the Ward Councillor’s stressed that the Multi Use Courts had been utilised predominantly by the school and a local Tennis Academy. In their opinion they considered that the Council had not advertised the Multi Use Courts and accordingly the local community had been unaware that the courts were available for use. It was confirmed that there had been recent interest from other groups in the community to utilise the courts e.g Thames Ditton Cricket Club. The school had highlighted that the courts were accessible only through the school playground and that the school caretaker would need to be available for each booking to open and close the courts. The Ward Councillors advised that this was not the case as access could be obtained via the pavilion gate entrance. The Ward Councillor’s proposed that further discussions be held between Surrey County Councillors and Officers & Elmbridge Borough Councillors and Officers regarding the continuation of the multi use sports facilities for the community.

The Committee noted the comments from the Ward Councillor’s and one member enquired whether the Courts could accommodate both Cricket and Tennis nets within the site. It was confirmed that the Courts were quite big and could accommodate a number of different sports including 5-aside Football, Netball, Short Tennis and Cricket together with the different netting and equipment required.

One Member of the Committee advised that they had used the Multi Use Court and felt that it was a wonderful facility and could attain tremendous use.

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture addressed the Committee and explained that contact had already been made with Surrey County Council and this matter would be taken forward. A meeting would be arranged for further discussion and Surrey County Council Officers and relevant County Councillors would be invited to attend.

It was agreed that Councillor Mrs. Lyon would represent the Committee at Cabinet.
In light of the discussion, the Committee,

RECOMMENDED THAT: THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ASK CABINET TO RECONSIDER THE MATTER AFTER DISCUSSIONS WITH SURREY COUNTY COUNCILLORS AND OFFICERS AND ELMBRIDGE BOROUGH COUNCIL COUNCILLORS AND OFFICERS TO ENSURE THE CONTINUATION OF THESE MULTI USE COURT FACILITIES FOR THE COMMUNITY.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE CONSULTATIVE GROUP MEETING HELD ON 27 JUNE 2012

(Link to Council Priorities: A5, A6, P4, P5)

The Committee considered a report with regard to the recommendations of the Countryside Consultative Group in respect of the hydrogeological and restoration proposals for Milbourne Pond as commissioned by the Weston Green Residents Association.

One Member of the Committee confirmed that a tremendous amount of work had been undertaken regarding the restoration of the pond, which included a solution for restoring the water supply on a long term basis. The Thames Ditton and Weston Green Residents Association had been fundraising for this project and this would not be sourced from Elmbridge Borough Councils budget.

The Chairman advised that he had raised a couple of questions with the Countryside Officer who had confirmed that funding would be made by the Thames Ditton and Weston Green Residents Association residents association although the insurance for public safety would be unchanged and would continue to be covered by the Council’s public liability insurance.

In this regard the Committee endorsed the recommendations from the Countryside Consultative Group

RECOMMENDED: THAT
(A) THE WESTON GREEN RESIDENTS’ ASSOCIATION BE ALLOWED TO PROCEED WITH OPTION 2 FOR THE RESTORATION OF MILBOURNE POND, SUBJECT TO THE SATISFACTORY COMPLETION OF THE FOLLOWING CHECKLIST OF OPERATIONS:

CHECKLIST:
1. ESTABLISH DEPTH OF PERCH WATER TABLE.
2. EVALUATE WATER QUALITY.
   (1 + 2 TO BE DONE AT SAME TIME THEY REQUIRE A BOREHOLE BEING DUG FUNDED BY WGRA).
3. WGRA TO HAVE FUNDING IN PLACE FOR LANDSCAPING AND LINER.
4. **WGRA TO HAVE FUNDING IN PLACE FOR BOREHOLE CONSTRUCTION INCLUDING ABSTRACTION PUMP AND ELECTRICITY SUPPLY.**

5. **TENDERING PROCESS UNDERTAKEN TO EBC REQUIREMENTS TO EMPLOY CONTRACTORS.**

(B) **IN ACCORDANCE WITH (A) ABOVE, THE SATISFACTORY COMPLETION OF THE CHECKLIST OF OPERATIONS BE APPROVED BY OFFICERS TO ENSURE THAT ALL REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED IN OPTION 2 HAD BEEN UNDERTAKEN.**

**MATTERS OF REPORT**

5. **CARBON FOOTPRINT REDUCTION GROUP UPDATE**

(Link to Council Priorities: P5, 7)

The Committee received an update of the progress achieved by the Carbon Footprint Reduction Group since September 2011. Since this date the group had been working on implementation of Elmbridge’s Climate Change Action Plan and significant progress had been made to date in all areas.

The Head of Asset Management and Property Services and the Head of Housing Services gave a joint presentation to the Committee outlining the work that had been undertaken to reduce the carbon footprint for residents and the Council. This included four main areas relating to domestic energy efficiency and fuel poverty, planning services, own estate and community leadership. A number of current new initiatives had been identified, that included the promotion of domestic carbon reduction using Elmbridge Case Studies, to undertake sustainable energy work within Elmbridge schools, drive energy efficiency action amongst small businesses and organisations and the implementation of settlement investment and development plans and a development management document.

In addition to this a number of new potential areas of work and projects had been identified that were to be included within the new plan.

The Committee thanked both the Head of Asset Management and Property Services and the Head of Housing Services for their informative presentation and took the opportunity to ask questions.

The Chairman enquired whether it would be possible for the Committee to be provided with a breakdown on how much the Carbon Footprint Reduction initiatives had cost the Council. The Corporate Group Accountant addressed the Committee and explained that this information could be obtained and could be circulated by e-mail to the Members after the meeting.
A member enquired whether there was any indication of what the energy rating of the Walton Community Hub may be. The Portfolio Holder for Environment advised that as it was an old historic building, it was difficult to ascertain what the energy rating would be at this time however would try to make the building as energy efficient as possible.

AGREED that the report and presentation be noted.

6. SCRUTINY OF CABINET MEMBERS

(Link to Council Priorities: All)

The Portfolio Holder for Housing was invited to attend the meeting to provide an update on the work currently being undertaken as part of his Portfolio, highlighting any issues or challenges and providing Members of the Committee with an opportunity to ask relevant questions.

The Committee welcomed Councillor J. Browne, Portfolio Holder for Housing to the meeting.

The Portfolio Holder explained that there were two key issues that were being faced by the Housing Services Team. These were the Government led welfare reforms and the increased number of people requiring assistance in relation to homelessness.

With regard to the Government led welfare reforms, there had been increased Officer time being utilised to deal with the considerable impact that would be faced by local residents. This included the reductions in Housing Benefit levels, changes to Council Tax Benefit, the transfer of Housing Benefit into Universal Credit and the transfer of Crisis loans and Community Care Grants to upper tier Councils. In addition to this there would be a knock on effect for the Council and employees from the changes to Benefit Fraud Investigation whereby the transfer of these functions would move from the Local Authority to the Department for Work and Pensions. However as Council Tax Benefit was being localised it was important to recognise that any investigation of any fraud within these schemes would remain with Local Authorities.

With regard to Homelessness, the Housing Options Team had noticed an increased number of people that had approached the Council for assistance with homelessness. This was due to the current financial climate and the change in Housing Benefit levels. In addition the Housing Register currently had the highest number of applicants awaiting to be rehoused seen in recent years. The housing team were looking at a number of initiatives to try and prevent homelessness and to increase the number of properties becoming available. One initiative highlighted was the recently introduced Perfect Fit Scheme whereby a financial incentive was offered to current Elmbridge Housing Trust tenants that were underoccupying their properties to downsize to a smaller property. This scheme had been immensely popular and it was thought that the initial funding would be fully utilised for the first tranche of applicants.
The Portfolio Holder was pleased to advise that having achieved great success last year, there was further scope for the Council to achieve further financial gain under the New Homes Bonus Scheme in 2012/13. An Empty Homes Co-ordinator had recently been recruited and the Committee noted that this role would identify empty properties that had been vacant within the Borough for a substantial period of time and to provide financial support through the offer of grants and loans for these homes to be brought back in to use.

The Committee thanked both the Portfolio Holder and the Head of Housing for the in depth report that had been provided and took the opportunity to ask questions.

A Member noted that the Perfect Fit Scheme had been very well received and enquired whether the Scheme would be continued after the initial funding had been exhausted.

The Portfolio Holder advised that it was hoped that the scheme could be continued but this was dependent on whether there was further funding available. A report would need to be discussed by the Affordable Housing Member Panel for this to be taken forward.

One Member also enquired why a number of families that had approached the Council as homeless had been placed in temporary accommodation that was located outside of the Borough that had led to problems for these families to get their children to school.

The Head of Housing advised that as at the end of March 2012 there were 23 households that were housed in temporary accommodation that had since risen to 33. Some families had been placed in Bed and Breakfast, self-contained units (provided by Elmbridge Housing Trust) and also the Y.M.C.A in Surbiton. Unfortunately the Housing Options Team were required to provide temporary accommodation placements at very short notice and this did include placements in Bed and Breakfasts outside of the Borough. The Council used to have access to hostels that were located within the Borough but these had since been replaced by better self-contained units provided by Elmbridge Housing Trust. The Council could ask for up to 27 Units under the stock transfer agreement with Elmbridge Housing Trust however it had taken time for the full 27 units to be provided. When families were placed in Bed and Breakfast the Housing Options Team aimed to locate alternative temporary accommodation within the Borough as soon as possible.

One Member asked whether it was known when the total number of 27 self-contained units would be available for the Council to use and whether the council had managed to keep placements of families in Bed & Breakfast accommodation placements for no more than 6 weeks.

The Head of Housing explained that they were trying their best to obtain alternative accommodation for households placed in Bed & Breakfast and unfortunately there had been families that had been placed for more than 6
weeks. One factor that had not helped was that Elmbridge Housing Trust, who owns the majority of social housing within the Borough, had faced a very difficult issue with their main repairs contractors that led to a termination of their contract. This had had a significant effect in void properties being repaired and made ready for reletting not only on providing the temporary accommodation units but also for families that had been allocated permanent social housing properties. Some households who had been waiting to move in to permanent accommodation had faced homelessness whilst waiting.

7. CABINET DECISION MAKING

(Link to Council Priorities: All)

The Committee considered the Cabinet’s Forward Plan, which covered the period 1 September to 31 December 2012 and contained matters which the Leader of the Council had reason to believe would be the subject of consideration by Cabinet or by way of the Individual Cabinet Member Decision Making mechanism during this period. The Committee was also asked to identify any relevant matters for inclusion within the Work Programme in 2012-13.

The Chairman noted that following the Cabinet meeting held on 19 September 2012 a Member Working Group, reporting to the Cabinet, to assist with the future of the Waterside Drive Sports Hub Project was agreed following the Overview & Scrutiny Committees discussion the previous meeting. The Group would be established once the project had progressed to a more advanced stage.

One Member asked whether a specific timescale had been agreed for when the Member Working Group would be established.

The Chairman invited the Leader of the Council to address the Committee regarding this issue and the Leader explained that as discussed at Cabinet, he could not be more specific when the Group would be established due to a number of ongoing issues. However this would be kept under review and when an appropriate time had been established, there would be consultation with the Chairman of the Committee.

AGREED that

(a) the Cabinet’s Forward Plan be noted; and

(b) the decisions taken by Cabinet, at its meeting on 19 September 2012, be noted.

8. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13

(Link to Council Priorities: All)
The Committee was invited to review progress against its work programme, identify any additional items for consideration at a future programme and add, amend or delete items from the work programme as appropriate.

AGREED that the progress of the Committee’s work programme for 2012-13 be noted.

9. PAINSHILL PARK UPDATE [PART II REPORT – EXEMPT UNDER PARAGRAPH 3 OF PART 1 OF SCHEDULE 12A TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 (AS AMENDED)]

The Committee received a written report from Mr. Michael Gove, Chief Executive of Painshill Park, regarding Painshill Park activities since March 2012. The Committee expressed their congratulations to Painshill Park on its ongoing success.

AGREED that the report be noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.45 p.m. and concluded at 9.10 p.m.

A.J. HOPKINS
Chairman

Committee and Member Services Officer

M. Clarke

Other Officers in attendance

I. Burrows - Head of Leisure & Cultural Services
Mrs. A. Williams - Head of Asset Management and Property Services
Mrs. J. Cook - Head of Housing Services
Miss. K. Mills - Policy Manager
Mrs. A. Gale - Corporate Group Accountant
Ms. A. McHugh - Solicitor