

# Report from Surrey Heath Borough Councillors to Windlesham Parish Council

June 2023

Cllr Julie Hoad (Lightwater)

Cllr Shaun Macdonald (Lightwater)

Cllr Kevin Thompson (Lightwater)

Cllr Richard Wilson (Bagshot & N Windlesham)

## **BOROUGH NEWS**

### ***Council Leader***

At the council AGM in May 2023, it was noted that the appointment of new Council leader Cllr David Whitcroft was made on an interim basis, as the full complement of councillors was not in place (due to the delayed Frimley Green ward election). Now that the 3 Frimley Green Cllrs have been elected, and SHBC has a full slate of 35 Councillors, Cllr Whitcroft has stood down as planned and Cllr Shaun Macdonald will take on the leadership role on a permanent basis.

### ***Other Changes to Council***

Cllr Helen Whitcroft has been appointed to the Exec team. There will also be changes to the make-up of several committees (committee make-up must follow proportionality rules, and the proportion of cllrs from each party has changed following the FG election.) Full details will be announced at the 28 June Extraordinary Full Council meeting.

### ***Council Finances***

The first priority of the new administration is to secure the council's finances. Woking Borough Council issued a section 114 notice on 7 June, and can now only provide essential services. Surrey Heath has the same problem but on a smaller scale. Our CFO states that we are not in danger of having to issue a section 114 notice at this time; however the budget is not currently balanced and non-earmarked reserves will run out in 4 years. So whilst Surrey Heath's financial plight is not anywhere near the magnitude of Woking, the council is not currently operating with a balanced budget and reserves are limited. Work will need to be done to both identify cost savings and drive increased income.

### ***New website***

SHBC has launched its new website. This project was initiated by the previous administration, and has been in development for the past year. The new website is easier to use and provides more information for residents.

Transparent accounts will be published on the new website, with a full breakdown of the Council's budgeted expenditure for the year ahead, presented in a clear and easy to understand way, coming soon.

Please let us know if you have suggestions on further improvements that could be made.

### ***Peer Review***

SHBC will be undergoing a Peer Review (review by a team of Councillors from a Council in a different area) over the period 11-13 July. We aim to publish findings once they are available.

## **WARD NEWS – BAGSHOT & N WINDLESHAM**

Cllr Wilson met with the Chief Executive, Damian Roberts, and discussed the botched borough boundaries review of 2016/17. The CEX understands the strength of feeling in Windlesham about the village being split up, and Cllr Wilson made clear to him that the current situation is unacceptable.

Councils do not get to decide their own ward boundaries; that is decided by the Local Government Boundaries Commission for England (LGBCE). Councils can ask for a review after a 5-year freeze period from the previous review. This would have to be approved by the full council, which would be advised by the Governance Working Group. Importantly, this is a working group of the council, not the executive.

The boundary review will only be successful in reuniting Windlesham as a Borough ward if there is broad support among residents; not just in Windlesham, but also in Bagshot and Chobham. The working group would only be likely to recommend the review if there is evidence of such support.

If, as Parish councillors, you would support a borough ward boundary review in our area, please let Cllr Wilson know.

## **WARD NEWS – LIGHTWATER**

### ***Meetings with community groups***

We have held a valuable initial meeting with the Lightwater Care group, and Cllr Hoad attended the Lightwater Society's AGM.

Cllr Macdonald is in contact with the trustees of the Briars Centre to familiarise himself with that organisation.

Several other meetings with community groups are in the pipeline eg Lightwater Library, Scouts group.

### ***Verge Cutting***

Whilst the overall responsibility now lies with Surrey County Council, it is recognised that the quality and scheduling of verge cutting has not met acceptable standards since this service was taken back under County control. A number of meetings have taken place, both within the Councillor group and at Council Officer level, to explore how we can work with Surrey County Council to ensure standards are raised for our residents. We would welcome comment on this issue from County Councillors Rebecca Jennings-Evans and Richard Tear.

### ***Turf Hill carpark – visibility issue***

At the request of a Lightwater resident, Cllr Thompson is in discussion with the Strategic Director for Environment & Community at SHBC to see what can be done to improve visibility for vehicles trying to exit the car park.

### ***Play areas for older children***

We are very aware that this is an important issue for many residents, and we will start looking to see what solutions can be found. Cllr Jennings-Evans has stated that she had been working with SHBC officers, and had set wheels in motion, as part of the previous administration, so we hope to arrange a swift knowledge transfer so we can progress this.