

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
HELD ON 16 JANUARY 2019 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.25 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Philip Houldsworth (Vice-Chairman), Andy Croy, Lindsay Ferris, Mike Haines, Ken Miall, Ian Pittock, Malcolm Richards, Bill Soane and Shahid Younis

Officers Present

Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Graham Ebers, Director of Corporate Services and Deputy Chief Executive
Rhian Hayes, Acting Category Manager, Economic Prosperity and Place

65. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Following Parry Batth's appointment to a role on the Executive, the Committee elected a Chairman for the remainder of the 2018/19 Municipal Year.

RESOLVED: That Philip Houldsworth be elected as Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the 2018/19 Municipal Year.

66. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Guy Grandison and Kate Haines.

67. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21 November 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

68. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

69. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

70. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

71. PREPARING FOR BREXIT

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 13 to 17, which gave details of initial assessments of the impact of Brexit on residents, the Council and its services.

Graham Ebers (Director of Corporate Services and Deputy Chief Executive) and Rhian Hayes (Acting Category Manager, Economic Prosperity and Place) attended the meeting to present the report and answer any Member questions.

The report stated that, although final decisions on Brexit were yet to be taken, all local authorities and other public bodies were preparing for potential impacts and identifying mitigation plans where necessary and appropriate.

Initial assessments indicated that the Borough did not face any locally significant risks from Brexit (e.g. risks faced by major ports) and that any impacts would be generic to those experienced across the UK.

Potential issues facing the Council were:

- Possible reduction of EU nationals in the workforce, for example in the health, care, hospitality, construction and retail sectors.
- No further access to EU funding streams – the Council had received £147k in EU funding over the past three years relating to the Elevate Skills and Employment Service. This project was due to come to an end in June 2019 and the existing funding was not considered to be at risk.
- Impact of a potential economic downturn – a number of studies had predicted that there may be an economic downturn triggered by Brexit especially following a “no deal” Brexit. The likelihood of a no deal outcome had increased following the defeat of the Government’s proposed deal in the House of Commons. The Borough had a high percentage of EU and other foreign-owned companies which may make the local economy more vulnerable to reduced business investment due to uncertainty and more challenging trading arrangements.

In order to strengthen the Council’s preparations for Brexit a number of measures were being implemented, viz:

- Establishment of a corporate Brexit Officer working group to monitor the Brexit process, Government advice and any local impacts;
- Working in partnership with Local Resilience Fora to report progress back to the Government;
- Working in partnership with the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to develop mitigation actions;
- Engagement with local businesses and suppliers to understand the challenges they face from Brexit – especially foreign owned businesses and businesses involved in the import/export of goods and services.

The Officer working group would continue to monitor events up to Brexit day on 29 March 2019 and the transition period to December 2020 depending on the final decisions relating to Brexit and the UK’s future relationship with the EU.

In the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points:

In relation to the impact on the workforce, was there any data on the number of EU nationals who had already left the Borough?

It was confirmed that, nationally, the number of EU citizens coming to the UK to work fell from 82,000 in 2016 to 37,000 in 2018. The most recent Census data indicated that there were 4,350 EU nationals living in the Borough. Evidence from the Council’s suppliers indicated that there had been a reduction in EU nationals in the workforce, but that the reduction was manageable. Members noted that the reduction in numbers entering the UK could also be influenced by other factors such as the weakness of the £.

What was the likely impact of Brexit on the current procurement regime?

It was confirmed that, at present, there was no clarity on this issue. The current arrangements (OJEU) were considered by some to be bureaucratic and time-consuming,

so there may be an opportunity for the Government to introduce a more streamlined process post Brexit.

How much additional money was being spent on the Council's Brexit preparations?

It was confirmed that the work carried out to date was being met from existing resources. The Council was taking a prudent approach and seeking to link in to existing networks where possible.

What other resources and data sources were being accessed in order to analyse the wider impact of Brexit?

It was confirmed that the impact of Brexit was discussed at the regular scheduled meetings of the Berkshire Unitary Chief Executives. The Council also produced a 6-monthly analysis of economic facts and figures which was published on the Council's website. In addition, Officers were regularly in touch with local businesses in order to understand their views on Brexit. These discussions indicated a range of responses to Brexit. Some companies were making detailed contingency plans while others were waiting to see the final outcome of the process.

What advice and support was the Council offering to the 4,000+ EU nationals living in the Borough?

It was confirmed that the Council's suppliers had indicated that they were assisting employees with advice and support relating to the process for remaining in the UK. The issue of advice and support to Council employees and the wider group of EU nationals in the Borough would be considered by the Council's Officer working group.

Were there any Brexit implications for the Council's overseas financial investments?

It was confirmed that the Council's strategy was to make "Triple A" rated investments and to ensure that those investments were secure. Any potential risks arising from Brexit would be closely monitored by the Council and its expert advisers.

Was there any data on the number of companies in the Borough engaged in haulage or the movement of goods outside the UK? What additional risks were these companies facing?

It was confirmed that there was no specific data on this local business sector at the moment, but the matter would be considered by the relevant Officers.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Graham Ebers and Rhian Hayes be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) the update on preparing for Brexit be noted;
- 3) the additional measures put in place by the Council to monitor and plan for potential outcomes, including the Brexit Officer group, be supported;
- 4) the issues raised by the Committee be referred to the Brexit Officer working group for consideration;
- 5) the Committee receive a further update on Brexit at a future meeting when there was more clarity on the final outcome.

72. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMMES 2019/20

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 19 to 28, which outlined the process for agreeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programmes for 2019/20.

The report stated that effective work programming was a Member-led process aimed at prioritising issues of community concern and issues which would benefit from Scrutiny input such as major policy and service changes. The aim of work programming was to:

- reflect local needs and concerns;
- prioritise Scrutiny issues which have the most impact or benefit;
- involve evidence from local residents and stakeholders;
- be flexible enough to respond to new or urgent issues.

In order to generate ideas for the 2019/20 work programmes it was proposed to canvas views from a range of stakeholders including Members, Officers, residents, Town and Parish Councils, partner organisations, community groups and MPs. Views would be sought using local print/social media and the Council's website.

The report suggested that the initial consultation with stakeholders take place in January/February 2019 with a report back to the Committee's March 2019 meeting. Implementation of the work programmes would then take place in the new Municipal Year.

The report set out the range of issues covered by the Management Committee in 2018/19 and referred to the successful review of the Council's Grounds Maintenance contract. The review had concluded with a report to the Executive setting out 12 recommendations to improve the service. It was felt that the Grounds Maintenance review was an example of effective Scrutiny which should be used as a template for future reviews.

The report also provided an update on the anticipated Government statutory guidance on Overview and Scrutiny following the Select Committee report in 2017. It was likely that the guidance would confirm the Government's view that detailed Scrutiny arrangements were a matter for local discretion. However, the Government had indicated a specific interest in three issues:

- Scrutiny of "external bodies" (this might be bodies operating under contract, commissioned partners, alternative delivery vehicles, more traditional partners and so on);
- Access to information (access to, and use of, information effectively by Scrutiny having been a challenge for many practitioners);
- Scrutiny of financial resilience and sustainability of Councils (recognising the recent, and continuing, pressures on the sector and scrutiny's role in helping to understand them).

In the ensuing discussion Members highlighted the following issues for consideration as part of the 2019/20 work programmes:

- Street Cleansing – current performance and preparations for letting the new contract;
- Implications for the Council of the 2018 IPCC report on climate change;
- Waste and Recycling - update on progress towards achieving the 2020 recycling targets;
- WBC systems for collection, management and dissemination of information;

- Implementation and impact of the 2018 GDPR regulations;
- Scrutiny of WBC shared service arrangements;
- Scrutiny of WBC's budget and budget setting process;
- Local Plan Update;
- Discussions on WBC priorities with the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council;
- Streamlining of the Council's decision making process.

It was confirmed that the issues raised by Members would be included in the long list of work programme items for consideration and prioritisation at the meeting of the Committee in March 2019.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the process for establishing Overview and Scrutiny work programmes for 2019/20, as set out in the report, be approved;
- 2) the suggested process for public consultation on the work programmes be approved;
- 3) the 2019/20 Overview and Scrutiny work programmes be finalised at the Committee's meeting on 20 March 2019;
- 4) each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees carry out one or more detailed reviews during 2019/20;
- 5) the update on the Government's proposed statutory guidance on Overview and Scrutiny be noted.

73. CONSIDERATION OF THE CURRENT EXECUTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION FORWARD PROGRAMMES

The committee considered a copy of the Executive and Individual Executive Member Decision (IEMD) Forward Programmes as set out on Agenda pages 29 to 42.

Members considered the Forward Programmes and discussed items which may be suitable for inclusion in the Overview and Scrutiny work programmes.

RESOLVED: That the Executive and IEMD Forward Programmes be noted.

74. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES

The Committee considered its forward work programme and that of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees as set out on Agenda pages 43 to 52.

It was confirmed that the 20 February 2019 Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee meeting would consider items on 21st Century Council, the Grounds Maintenance service and the Q3 Performance Monitoring report.

RESOLVED That Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programmes, as amended, be noted.

75. UPDATE REPORTS FROM CHAIRMEN OR NOMINATED MEMBER OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

The Chairman invited members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to provide an update on the issues considered by the Committees at recent meetings.

Members of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee gave feedback on the meeting held on 14 January 2019. The meeting had considered the regeneration of Wokingham Town Centre with specific focus on the Market Place Highways Improvement scheme. Members and Officers in attendance felt that the meeting had provided a good example of effective Scrutiny with robust and challenging questions to the Executive Member and the Officers involved in the town centre projects.

RESOLVED: That the updates from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees be noted.