

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 29 AUGUST 2013 FROM 7:00PM TO 8:20PM**

Present:- Norman Jorgensen (Chairman), Michael Firmager (Vice-Chairman), Parry Bath, Tim Holton, Ken Miall and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey.

Also present:-

*Neil Carr, Head of Neighbourhoods;
Susan Coulter, Senior Democratic Services Officer;
Marianna Pentek, Horticultural & Amenities Officer
Councillor Angus Ross, Executive Member for Environment.*

PART I

8. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19 June 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Committee was advised that with regard to Minute 6, Improving the Customer Experience (Whitehall Business Plan) Update, the Strategic Director of Transformation had prepared an update for Members which was circulated at the meeting. A further update would be presented to the October meeting of the Committee.

Minute 7, Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme, referred to the Minutes of the Planning Policy Steering Group (PPSG) from 27 February 2013. Members had requested that these be circulated to them for information. A copy of these Minutes was circulated at the meeting and it was noted that the meeting of the PPSG was actually held on 21 February 2013.

9. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillors Chris Bowring.

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Kate Haines declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 16 as a potential user of the service.

11. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions

12. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

13. BURIALS REVIEW - UPDATE

The Committee received a report, as set out on Agenda pages 7 to 13, which updated Members on action taken in relation to the recommendations of the Burials Task and Finish Group, submitted to the Executive in 2007 and the subsequent progress reports to the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee discussed the recommendations from the Burials Task and Finish Group and the Executive.

The Head of Neighbourhoods outlined the issues facing the Council and the potential ways forward, which included proposals for increasing capacity at Shinfield Cemetery and St Sebastians Cemetery.

The Committee was advised that discussions had taken place about a new burial site in the Borough and the latest developments were set out in the Part II report elsewhere on the agenda.

With regard to natural burial sites, a private contractor had contacted the Council informally about the potential for developing a green burial site in the Borough. There was some demand for this service in the Borough but any formal proposal would be subject to public scrutiny as part of the planning and licensing process.

Initiatives aimed at saving space and widening choice, such as columbarium walls and gardens of remembrance had been investigated. The Committee was advised that columbarium walls were a space efficient use of cemetery land compared with burials and could provide a cheaper option to a burial plot. Up to two caskets could be placed in each columbarium niche. Each niche is available on a ten year renewable lease, which would generate revenue for the Council.

The Committee was advised that with regard to the current burial space requirements in the core strategy being amended to reflect the proposed space requirements via Managing Development Delivery Development Plan Document (MDD DPD), this had been implemented through the MDD DPD, which was approved by the Executive in 2012. Discussions had also continued with potential providers to explore opportunities for partnership working in order to deliver new capacity, achieve efficiencies and develop best practice. It was noted that the capacity for Muslim burials at Shinfield Cemetery remained adequate.

It was further noted that the four Strategic Development Locations (SDLs) would deliver 11,000 dwellings which equates to 26,400 new residents. Using annual mortality rates it is calculated that the SDL developments would generate demand for an additional 952 burial spaces in the period up to 2026. The implications of this were set out in the Part II report, elsewhere on the Agenda.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) the progress against each of the recommendations from the Burials Task and Finish Group and the Executive, as set out in the report, be noted;
- 2) the options available to the Council, as discussed above, be noted; and
- 3) a further progress report be submitted to the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the 2014/15 municipal year.

14. PLANNING ENFORCEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP – TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee was advised that this item had been referred from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee following a request from Councillor Bob Pitts and Mr Tom Berman, a Wargrave resident, that the functioning of the Planning Enforcement Service be reviewed. At its meeting on 28 May 2013, the Management Committee agreed

that a full review should be carried out and referred it to the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee for action.

At its meeting on 27 February 2013, the Committee considered a report, which provided information about the enforcement service, the key issues and to outline enforcement processes with a view to identifying improvements. The Committee resolved at that time to note the report.

At its meeting on 19 June 2013, the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee discussed the matter further and resolved that:

- a review of the Planning Enforcement Service be undertaken and that all of the Members of the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee be invited to sit on a Task and Finish Group to carry out the work;
- draft terms of reference for the Planning Enforcement Task and Finish Group be brought to the August meeting of the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, if possible, with a view to the review commencing in October; and
- Mr Meadowcroft and Mr Berman be invited to attend meetings of the Planning Enforcement Task and Finish Group as witnesses to provide evidence and information to Members.

At the beginning of July 2013, Members were informed that John Silvester Associates had been commissioned by the Council to undertake a review of the Council's Planning Enforcement Service, which will include a review of existing policies, processes and practices to make recommendations about how these could be amended to improve the service in line with best practice. As part of that review, all Members were invited to attend a workshop with the consultant, John Silvester, on 31 July 2013, where they were given the opportunity to discuss their views of the Enforcement Service.

A similar workshop was held on 22 August 2013 to give Town and Parish Council representatives the opportunity to present their views on the Service. John Silvester will also be talking to members of the public.

The Committee received the draft Terms of Reference for the proposed Planning Enforcement Task and Finish Group, as set out on Agenda pages 14 to 16 and took the above information into account.

Members did not wish to duplicate work and agreed to defer the implementation of the Task and Finish Group until they had had a chance to see Mr Silver's draft report. The Committee therefore requested that Mr Silvester be invited to attend the October meeting of the Committee, together with Councillor John Kaiser, Executive Member for General Planning and Affordable Housing. Members felt that it would be useful to see Mr Silvester's draft report to allow them to have an input into the final report. Should Mr Silvester's report not address any issues of concern raised by Mr Meadowcroft and Mr Berman, then the Task and Finish Group would scrutinise those.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) Mr Silvester be asked to present his *draft* report to the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, prior to it being finalised, to allow Members to comment on the report;

- 2) Councillor John Kaiser, Executive Member for General Planning and Affordable Housing, be invited to attend the 30 October meeting of the Committee; and
- 3) the Terms of Reference for the Planning Enforcement Task and Finish Group be approved, subject to the outcome of Mr Silvester's review.

15. CONTRACT MANAGEMENT OF HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT TAXI ESCORTS

Councillor Kate Haines declared a personal interest in this item, as a potential user of the service and remained in the meeting during the discussion.

The Committee received a report, as set out on Agenda pages 17 to 71, which advised Members that there was concern that some home to school transport escorts were not able to speak English to an appropriate standard. The Committee was advised that at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (OSMC) in May 2013, this item was put forward as a scrutiny suggestion by Councillor Younis.

Members referred to page 19 of the report, in particular the new Code of Practice, which is currently being produced. This will request that it is a genuine occupational requirement for all Drivers and Escorts used on school transport to reach or have a minimum standard of English to enable them to communicate both verbally and in writing. Members did not feel that this was clear enough and felt that this should not be a request. It is either a requirement of the role or not, to be able to reach or have a minimum standard of English.

A Member advised the Committee that in their opinion, some Drivers and Escorts were also over familiar with the children and this needed to be considered as part of the safeguarding measures and requirements around the English Language.

RESOLVED: That the information contained in the briefing report, be noted.

16. CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received its work programme for the remainder of the 2013/14 municipal year.

Members queried the item on the work programme relating to the Update on Planning for the Combined Elections in 2015, which was scheduled for consideration by the Committee in the summer of 2014. Members queried whether this was indeed the European Elections and the Local Elections and in 2015. The Democratic Senior Services Officer advised that it was her understanding that this item related to the Parliamentary and Local Elections in 2015 and not the European and Local Elections in 2014. She undertook to clarify this for Members.

The Committee was advised that in 2011, the Consultation Task and Finish Group had made the following recommendation:

“That the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel consider the implementation of any agreed recommendations after a period of approximately 16 months (June 2013)”.

Members agreed that an item on this matter should be presented to the 30 October 2013 meeting of the Committee.

Further to the update circulated to Members regarding the Improving the Customer Experience (Whitehall Business Plan) Update, Members agreed that a further update be added to the work programme for the 30 October 2013 meeting.

With regard to the item on Roads Maintenance, the Committee queried when this could be considered and suggested that it be presented to the 30 October 2013 meeting. The Senior Democratic Services Officer undertook to find this out and report back to the Committee.

The Committee also discussed the various Task and Finish Groups that were undertaking reviews and asked if any came under the remit of the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee was advised that the only work being undertaken in the Committee's area of work was the Planning Enforcement Task and Finish Group, if and when there was a requirement for it to meet.

Members also requested that a further item be added to the Work Programme on the Planning Enforcement Task and Finish Group and that Mr Silvester, Consultant, and Councillor John Kaiser, Executive Member for General Planning and Affordable Housing, be invited to attend the meeting as a witness to discuss his review.

RESOLVED: That, subject to the above, the Committee's work programme for the remainder of the 2013/14 municipal year be approved.

17. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended) as appropriate.

PART II

18. BURIAL REVIEW UPDATE

The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report providing an update on the Burials scrutiny review.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes that the increase in Borough and local burial capacity is being considered further:

These are the Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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