

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD ON 30 OCTOBER 2013 FROM 7:00PM TO 9:10PM**

*Present: Norman Jorgensen (Chairman), David Sleight, Andrew Bradley Chris Bowring, Tim Holton and Ken Miall.*

*Also present:*

*Councillor Keith Baker, Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Highways;  
Sarah Barrow, Head of Customer Services and Administration;  
Susan Coulter, Senior Democratic Services Officer;  
Matt Davey, Head of Highways and Transport;  
Steve Potts, Highway Network Manager; and  
Mark Redfearn, Policy Manager – Community Safety.*

## **PART I**

### **19. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29 August 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **20. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Parry Bath (substituted by Andrew Bradley) and Michael Firmager (substituted by David Sleight).

### **21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **22. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

### **23. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions.

### **24. IMPROVING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE (WHITEHALL BUSINESS PLAN) UPDATE**

The Committee received a presentation from Sarah Barrow, Head of Customer Services and Administration and the following issues were discussed:

#### **The aims of the programme:**

- To save money and serve residents and Councillors better by increasing online customer self-service and joining up customer management across the council.
- “One and done” customer pathways.
- Systems that talk to each other so that we have a ‘golden record’ for the resident.
- Enabling improved councillor engagement through better cascading of management information.

#### **Customer service is everyone’s business:**

- “Improving the customer experience when accessing services” – one of the council’s top priorities.
- Part of every officer’s performance management dashboard.
- Programme of work has begun which includes:

- People – customer, stakeholders and staff
- Property – where services delivered & staff located
- IT – the technology tools to enable channel shift & efficiency
- Process – re-designed services (inc LEAN & people strategy tools as well as others)
- Need for ‘one team’ approach & clear strategy!

#### **Defining the “Hallmarks”:**

- ECLT (1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> tier officers) had considered the Hallmarks of good customer service. They identified the following:
  - Right staff behaviours
  - Knowledgeable staff and resolution at first point of contact
  - Accountability for the enquiry
  - Choice in contact channels
  - Making the council easy to do business with.
  - Focus groups with residents would be held to ensure the hallmarks were aligned with their expectations.

#### **Proposed outcomes of the programme:**

- £200k savings in 15/16.
- Enable customers to engage with us better via self service 24/7.
- Common customer management technology across the organisation.
- Reduce complaints and learn from the ones we do receive.
- Better use of customer data to inform service delivery, planning and strategy.

#### **Next steps:**

- Define the vision and strategy.
  - Benchmarking of current position (data collection and analysis).
  - Undertake focus groups with residents, councillors and staff.
  - Identify the ‘future state’.
  - Procure technology.
  - Phased implementation to September 2015.
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- The Head of Customer Services and Administration stated that she would be happy to keep the Committee up to date with the progress of the project. She advised that a capital bid for 13/14 of £250,000 for the technology had been approved and would be carried forward to 14/15;
  - All calls to the Council via Wokingham Direct were recorded. Customer Service Advisors graded themselves against quality criteria to see if they had behaved in the correct manner during the call. This method could be widened out to other teams to ensure consistency of quality across services ;
  - E-learning was also available and managers worked with their teams to upskill staff;
  - Cross skilling staff (such as Administration staff to handle customer enquiries) would be important to be able to build resilience within the authority if more services became automated and there was (for example) an IT outage.
  - A WBC project manager was running the project and there would be regular highlight reports outlining its success factors. A report would be brought back to the Committee in February 2014. Residents’ views would be sought over the next few months and the vision and strategy will be presented to the Executive in January 2014.

#### **RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) the above information be noted; and

2) an update report be presented to the Committee on 25 February 2014.

## **25. ROADS MAINTENANCE**

The Committee received an update from the Head of Highways and Transport, the Highway Network Manager and the Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Highways as follows:

- The Council works with WSP and Balfour Beatty to deliver the service;
- Balfour Beatty and officers out on Monday to clear the fallen trees following the storm on Sunday evening;
- Reactive work was usually commissioned by Council officers, with WSP staff carrying out construction work and offering professional advice and Balfour Beatty staff implementing the work;
- Approximately £2 million per year is spent on reactive work and £2.5 million per year is spent on planned maintenance;
- Benchmarking was difficult as different people split their budgets in different ways;
- Different areas had differing amounts of roads; i.e. West Berkshire has more roads than Wokingham and Slough has less;
- Wokingham Borough Council issues approximately 7,000 instructions per year to Balfour Beatty. The majority of these are routine highway works arising from inspections. The frequency of inspections depending on the category of the road (town centres have weekly inspections and rural areas have inspections once a year);
- There is a significant difference in the cost of reconstructing roads (including resurfacing) and surface dressing;
- In the last 3 years, an average of 23km of roads per year had been maintained;
- The increase in oil prices means that the materials used in road repair and maintenance are more expensive and increases in cost have to be absorbed in the budget;
- New technologies have been investigated with regard to repairs, most of which had been disappointing in terms of improvements;
- Levels of customer satisfaction had been improved. Residents had been consulted and the feedback had been positive;
- A good measure of how the Council was doing was the number of insurance claims received and how they were dealt with. In the last 3 years, 200 claims had been received from accidents that had happened on the highways. 142 cases were now closed. As a result, payments of £7,000 had been made in total. The repudiation rate was more than 90% as the Council had a successful level of defence;
- Members expressed concerns about potholes in the Borough and the quality of the work undertaken to repair them. Members were concerned that repairs were undertaken even when it was raining. This often resulted in a poor repair that had to be revisited. The Head of Highways and Transport advised that the Council had an obligation to keep the highways safe, so if potholes were identified, repairs would be undertaken in the rain if necessary;
- The Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Highways explained that 7,000 instructions per year were given for repairs which meant that there would always be some level of imperfection. Officers worked with Balfour Beatty, whose work was inspected for quality and their performance was measured. This information could be shared with the Committee but nothing in the performance indicators for the last year had given officers any cause for concern;
- A lot of work was being carried out on the road network and there was heavy traffic usage. On the whole, the quality of the work undertaken was very good. On occasion, when it was poor, it was usually because the contractor had employed sub-

contractors. Officers were unable to supervise every job but sub-contractors were dismissed if their work was poor;

- Members advised that they had been disappointed when they saw that this agenda item was to be a verbal update. They would have preferred to see a written account of potholes, where they were and when they were scheduled for repair. They requested that an annual report be prepared for the Committee. The Head of Highways and Transport undertook to provide this information;
- Councillor Ken Miall expressed concern about the recent problems on the A329M. He asked how the maintenance work was scheduled and how did officers gauge the impact that the work would have on traffic in the area. The Highway Network Manager advised that rigorous checks were made on work on the highways by the Street Works Team. He had to apply for permission to carry out work on the highways via the Street Works Team. Monthly discussions were held with the statutory authorities, including the Fire Authority, Bus companies and Parish Councillors;
- Diversion routes are discussed and officers design traffic management schemes based on their knowledge and expertise;
- Officers did not think that the work undertaken on the A329M would have a significant impact on traffic but unfortunately it was compounded by the fact that there had been a massive breakdown in communication;
- A press release will be issued soon on the matter;
- Wokingham's road network is extremely congested, especially at peak times. The Council needs to give the public as much notice as possible when work is carried out;
- There needs to be a balance when work is carried out, such as whether it is done during the day/night and consideration needs to be given to the noise factor. The work is essential and will provide a long term gain for relatively short term disruption;
- Members suggested that an annual report be added to the Committee's work programme giving information on traffic congestion, road maintenance and repairs and Street Work.

**RESOLVED:** That an annual report be added to the Committee's work programme giving information on traffic congestion, road maintenance and repairs and Street Work.

## **26. CONSULTATION TASK AND FINISH GROUP – UPDATE**

The Committee received a verbal update on the implementation of the Task and Finish Group's recommendations as follows:

- There was a difference in the quality of the consultations being undertaken throughout the Borough;
- There was no corporate policy or protocol across the Council as to how consultations were undertaken;
- Councillor Baker proposed a concept which tried to classify how the public are consulted:
  - Low – involves the public, such as planning applications, public responses are considered but no response required;
  - High – Respondees receive a reply to their comments; and
  - Medium – a mixture of the above.
- The idea is being presented to CLT, having already been considered by the services areas;
- A report will be presented to the Committee in 18 months' time to consider how the protocol is working and to consider case studies based on consultations that have been carried out between now and then.

**RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) the above information be noted; and
- 2) an update report item be added to the Committee's work programme to be presented to the Committee in 18 months' time.

**27. CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

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

**RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme be noted; and
- 2) an update report on Improving the Customer Experience be added to the work programme for the meeting on 25 February 2014;
- 3) an annual report on Roads Maintenance be added to the Committee's work programme giving information on traffic congestion, road maintenance and repairs and Street Work; and
- 4) a report updating the Committee on burials provision in the Borough be added to the Committee's work programme.

**28. ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT**

While there were no matters raised under this item, the Chairman felt it important to discuss the following issues:

- Members expressed their concern at receiving verbal reports at this meeting and requested that in future, written reports be included in the agenda, however brief they may be;
- The Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen had, earlier in the evening, discussed how scrutiny's activities mapped onto the Council's priorities;
- The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee was not included in the Council's priorities; and
- The Council had 5 priorities but traffic congestion and regeneration of towns and villages had not been scrutinised, although both topics were within this Committee's remit.

**RESOLVED:** That Members consider issues that the Committee should be scrutinising and refer topics to the Senior Democratic Services Officer for inclusion in the Committee's future work programme.

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

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