

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 2 JULY 2014 FROM 7:00PM TO 8:00PM**

Present:- Norman Jorgensen (Chairman), Michael Firmager (Vice-Chairman), Prue Bray Parry Batth and Bill Soane.

Also present:-

Councillor Angus Ross, Executive Member for Environment;
Susan Coulter, Senior Democratic Services Officer;
Matt Davey, Head of Highways and Transport.

PART I

1 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3 April 2014 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Kate Haines, Ken Miall (substituted by Bill Soane), and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey (substituted by Prue Bray).

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Parry Batth declared a personal interest in Item 7, Work Programme, as he was a Trustee for the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

5. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

6. ADVANCED SIGNING DURING ROAD FLOODING

The Committee received a report, as set out on Agenda pages 13 and 14, which was raised by the Committee during a review of issues for it to consider. It had been suggested that an item be added to the agenda relating to the recent flooding in the Borough. Members asked why advance warning signs were not displayed around the Borough during the recent bad weather to forewarn residents of the flooded areas. Some roads were closed due to flooding and residents had not been made adequately aware.

The Committee was advised that the winter of 2013/14 had been exceptionally wet and there were a number of flooding incidents across the Borough. As well as property flooding, several roads were affected and a number of roads were closed to protect road users. The Highway Authority had the power to erect barriers under Section 287 of the Highways Act 1980 "for the purpose of securing public order or public safety", with the intention of prohibiting traffic. No notice was necessary in this instance, nor notification of road users, other than the signs associated with the barriers. Similarly the police had powers granted under Section 67 of the Road Traffic Act 1984 to place signs on the highway prohibiting traffic.

The Committee was further advised that signs were erected as close to the hazard as possible. This minimised the length of road affected. However signing also had to try to

offer road users the chance to turn safely or use an alternative route. Flooded roads tended to be dynamic hazards and as such could be difficult to sign, particularly when conditions changed rapidly. Clearly, if “road closed signs” were erected too far from a hazard then they would be widely ignored and would be seen to be ineffective in dissuading road users from trying to use a section of road deemed dangerous.

The gang employed to carry out this work (generally out of normal working hours) was called upon to carry out numerous activities, including responding to emergency call out for flooding, road traffic accidents, dangerous structures and roads, fallen trees and other hazards on the highway.

The Council had invested in variable mobile message signs. The contractor was happy to advise people of the hazards, but this would be at a cost to the Council. There had been no complaints received regarding inadequate warning of flooding. Text messages and the internet had been used to inform people about which roads had been closed and the Council had been in regular contact with the local radio stations to keep people up to date with what was happening.

The Committee was advised that there had been a big problem at the Showcase Roundabout. The first time it had flooded, the signs were not in the correct place. Lorries had continued to use the road which was closed. The diversion for Sonning Bridge was very long so that required more thought if it should flood again.

The Committee was advised that it was difficult to give clear directions about diversions as officers had to predict where people were going to go. Discussions would be undertaken with Oxfordshire County council to see if a system could be devised to make it easier for people to follow.

The Head of Highways and Transport advised that he had a good relationship with the Environment Agency as he met with the Regional Manager regularly and he knew what was happening at a strategic level.

The Executive Member for Environment advised that a good flood partnership group had been set up, initially by residents, but the Environment Agency was now starting to look more at catchments rather than boroughs. The Council was currently working with the Environment Agency on an active piece of work and it was hoped that this would be brought forward soon.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received a report, as set out on Agenda pages 15 to 18, which set out the Committee’s work programme for 2014/15.

It was agreed that the item on the work programme relating to amenity vehicle provision should be an item for consideration by the Community Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman requested that the update on burials provision include actions from last year and how they were being progressed.

Members requested that the update on planning for the combined elections in 2015 include an explanation about individual electoral registration, how it works and what impact, if any this will have on the combined elections in 2015.

The Chairman advised that a number of items had been referred from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, which needed careful consideration by the Committee, as follows:

- Review of Town Centre Regeneration Scheme;
- Review of the Wokingham Town Car Parks Strategy and Council Car Parks Strategy;
- Commuter Parking;
- How the Council Learns as an Organisation;
- Decent Homes Standard.

The above items had been suggested by Officers and Members as suggested items for scrutiny reviews.

The Committee agreed that the business case for the regeneration of the town centre should be review when it was available. Members agreed to write to the relevant Executive Member and Officers and request this information.

The Chairman advised that the review of the Wokingham town car parks Strategy and the Council car parks strategy was being considered by the Civil Parking Enforcement Group and suggested that officers provide a report on activity and achievements. The Committee was advised that last December or January the strategy went out to consultation but there had been no feedback provided. The Committee felt that it would be useful to have the feedback on the consultation as well as the strategy itself.

With regard to commuter parking, the Chairman suggested that terms of reference should be drafted and a meeting should be arranged between Councillor Lindsey Ferris and himself to draft these, prior to the September meeting of the Committee.

The Committee was advised that a suggestion for report/briefing to the Committee on the embedding of a learning organisation culture within the Council had been submitted. It was suggested that the Director of Finance and Resources be invited to attend the September meeting of the Committee to explain what was meant by "learning organisation culture" and to discuss what the terms of reference could be for a potential review and how a review could add value to the process.

With regard to the Decent Homes Standard, the Committee was advised that had been suggested that a report on progress towards meeting the standards and targets should be considered by the Committee. The Committee was advised that the Government had a programme to bring houses up to a decent standard but that the Council had not met the deadline. The project was monitored by the Homes and Communities Agency but there had been a problem in that the contractor had been dismissed due to none performance and it had taken some time to employ a new contractor. This had now happened and the new contractor would be starting work this month. The Committee was advised that if the Council did not get back on track with this project then it could lose its funding. The Chairman suggested that a report on progress be presented to the September meeting of the Committee.

The Committee was advised that an update on the Planning Enforcement Service Action Plan was to be considered at the September meeting. However, Members were keen to know timescales for the Local Plan and when this was expected to be consulted on. The Chairman requested that an update report be presented to the September meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the following items be added to the work programme for 8 September 2014 meeting:

- 1) update on burials provision (including actions from last year and how they were being progressed;
- 2) update on planning for the combined elections in 2015 (including an explanation about individual electoral registration, how it works and what impact, if any, this will have on the combined elections in 2015);
- 3) Review of Town Centre Regeneration Scheme;
- 4) Review of the Wokingham Town Car Parks Strategy and Council Car Parks Strategy – Report on Activity and Achievements and Feedback on the Consultation;
- 5) Review of Commuter Parking;
- 6) Review of How the Council Learns as an Organisation;
- 7) Decent Homes Standard – Progress Report; and
- 8) Update on Planning Enforcement Service Action Plan and Consultation on the Local Plan.

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

If you need help in understanding this document or if you would like a copy of it in large print please contact one of our Administrators.