

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
HELD ON MONDAY 28 JULY 2014 FROM 7.30 PM TO 9.45 PM**

Present:- Tim Holton (Chairman), Michael Firmager (Vice Chairman), Parry Batth, Prue Bray, Mike Haines, Nicky Jerrome, Norman Jorgensen and Malcolm Richards.

*Also present:-
Kevin Jacob, Principal Democratic Services Officer*

*Witness Invitees:
Brian Clark
Councillor Angus Ross, Executive Member for Environment
Heather Thwaites, Director Environment
Philip Truppin, Clerk of Earley Town Council and member of the Wokingham Clerk's Forum
Julia Woodbridge, Horticulture and Amenity Coordinator*

PART I

9. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 June 2014 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

In relation to Minute 8, it was noted that in response to a question on the Balanced Scorecard Report from Norman Jorgensen in respect of Indicators 19 and 20, further information was to be provided to the Committee by Andrew Moulton, Head of Governance and Improvement Services. Kevin Jacob commented that this had been received and circulated to members of the Committee, but it was agreed it should be attached to the the minutes of the June meeting.

10. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted by Mike Gore, Kate Haines, (substituted by Mike Haines), Pauline Helliard-Symons and David Sleight.

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

12. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions

13. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions

14. GRASS CUTTING

In accordance with the Committee's Rules of Procedure and the Council's Constitution, Councillor Norman Jorgensen had submitted a request that an item on grass cutting be placed on the Committee's Agenda which had been agreed by the Chairman. In his request, Councillor Jorgensen had expressed concern that grass in areas controlled by Wokingham Borough Council was being allowed to become too long and that residents needed to understand the reasons for this and what could be done to improve the situation.

Officers had been asked to prepare a report on the subject taking into account the areas of concern and questions expressed by Councillor Jorgensen. In addition a number of witnesses including relevant Officers and the Executive Member for Environment had been invited to attend the meeting.

Councillor Norman Jorgensen – Member requesting that an item on grass cutting be placed on the Committee’s Agenda.

The Chairman asked Councillor Jorgensen to summarise why he had decided to raise the issue. Councillor Jorgensen commented that:

- There was a problem with grass cutting which had first come to light from Ward Member surgeries that he had held in Earley, initially with regard to complaints made by residents with regard to Chilcombe Way in Earley where residents felt the grass had not been cut enough. Once he raised the issue with Officers it was then cut;
- Due to the wet and warm weather conditions, the growing season had been particularly virulent which he accepted had made keeping the grass at a reasonable level particularly challenging;
- He referred to the questions he had asked in making his request and noted that responses to these had been set out within the Officer report on pages 12 to 13 of the Agenda;
- In bringing the item, it was hoped that once there had been an opportunity to talk to witnesses suggestions could be made on what the Council could do differently, bearing in mind the cost of doing so.

The Chairman commented that whilst the initial complaints had related to the Earley area, concerns had also been made about grass cutting across the Borough and therefore he had considered it cross ward issue where there was an opportunity for the Committee to make a difference.

Brian Clark, Local Resident and Lead Petitioner

The Chairman invited Brian Clark, a local resident to address the Committee. Mr Clark had been invited to attend the meeting as he had raised concerns regarding grass cutting in the local media and had organised a public petition on the issue. (A copy of the slides used by Mr Clark are attached to these minutes).

- Mr Clark had been a resident of Wokingham for seven years and had two children. As a family he regularly used the Barkham Recreation Ground and had become concerned over the frequency and manner of grass cutting undertaken by the Borough Council to extent that he did not think it was fit for purpose;
- He was concerned that the existing Council ‘medium’ frequency cutting regime of eight cuts per season was not enough as there was a period of five to six weeks between each cut. 50% of low frequency grass cutting was cut once a year and cutting frequency could extend to over six weeks if weather conditions were poor;
- During the peak growing season litter including drinks cans and dog mess were often hidden in the long grass. When the grass was cut the litter was shredded and created further risk of laceration and to health;
- The Council’s contractor did not collect grass cuttings and because of the length of the grass this creates an eyesore;
- Long grass restricts the activity and mobility of residents;
- Mr Clark proposed that:
 - A ‘High Frequency’ cutting regime be introduced between the months of May and August which would include all playing fields and some of the larger public spaces. Grass would be cut on a fortnightly basis equating to nine cuts;

- The 'Medium Frequency' cutting regime should be amended to extend the period of cutting from five weeks to six weeks and run alongside the 'High Frequency' regime. Medium Frequency areas would extend to the outer edges and less used areas of all playing fields and public spaces, reducing the need to cut the entire area on a fortnightly basis;
- All 'High Frequency' grass cuttings should be removed as this would reduce the risk of lacerations from shredded litter and exposure to dog mess.
- The number of cuts under the existing regime was 8 cuts which should be increased to 14 under the proposals.
- Mr Clark had received the support of many residents in his campaign including through social media and he also had the support of *The Wokingham Times*. At the time of the meeting some 600 people had signed the petition.

The following points were raised during the discussion between Mr Clark and the Committee:

- Mr Clark's concerns and complaints about grass cutting had originally related to the Barkham area, but as his campaign had become more widely known and the E-Petition became established concerns had been expressed from residents across the Borough;
- His main concern had initially been parks and open spaces and this remained his main priority, but concerns regarding verge grass cutting and hedge rows had also been raised;
- His experience was only of parks and public open space not owned by the Borough Council, he was not aware of issues at parks and open space owned by the Borough Council;
- Members asked whether Mr Clark felt that the issue of long grass was ongoing. He commented that it was at its longest in May and June, but still remained an issue. It was about making sure that the parks and public open spaces were open to all;
- Long grass had also been a problem in previous years and he had contacted the Council two years ago. It was becoming an annual issue.

Phillip Truppin, Clerk to Earley Town Council and Member of the Wokingham Clerk's Forum

- Mr Truppin stated that he was speaking as the Clerk to Earley Town Council and although he was the Chairman of the Clerk's Forum covering Town and Parish Councils within the Wokingham Borough it was important to stress that he could not speak for those Councils;
- He was aware of the concerns expressed by some Town and Parish Councils regarding the grass cutting of areas managed by the Borough Council, mainly relating to the cutting of highway verges. However, this was by no means a unanimous concern amongst Town and Parishes and there was a potential difference in the views of rural vs urban councils;
- He had not been lobbied about grass cutting before this year. Possibly the issue had occurred because of the particular weather conditions in 2014 or it could potentially be related to due diligence;
- Earley Town Council had introduced some alternatives to traditional forms of verge management by the introduction of the sowing of wild flower seeds such as Poppy along a number of roads including Rushey Way and Paddick Drive. The comments on this by local residents had mainly been complimentary and the planting was colourful and self-seeding for future years;
- Within Earley there were a number of parks and open spaces managed by the Borough Council and a number operated by Earley Town Council. It was his view that

the facilities owned by Earley Town Council were better managed because those facilities were closer to those managing them whereas those managing the Borough facilities were not so local that they could make assessments easily. However, it was stressed to the Committee that other Towns and Parishes might have a different view;

- He felt it was the preference of sporting organisations in Earley to use Sol Joel Park which was operated by Earley Town Council rather than parks such as Laurel Park and Chalfont Park which were operated by the Borough Council;
- Earley Town Council had made significant capital investment in grass cutting equipment in recent years. In principle, it might be able to work in partnership to extend the areas it cut into other parks and open spaces. However, grass cutting of verges was a different proposition although there were perhaps opportunities for a co-operative solution;
- The Borough Council had a couple of years ago extended an offer for Towns and Parishes to take on grass cutting. However, at that time the estimated costs to Earley Town Council of taking on such responsibility were more than the funding being offered by the Borough Council.

The following points were raised during the discussion between Mr Truppin and the Committee:

- Earley Town Council directly employed its grass cutting team with the exception of the arrangements for its cemetery, but a number of other Parish Councils including Winnersh Parish Council used contractors;
- When necessary, sports pitches were cut by Earley Town Council employees in addition to parks at a cutting frequency of once per week. Rather than contractual arrangements for the frequency of cuts, parks staff were on site and could monitor the condition of the park or open space and cut it more if necessary;
- Clippings from grass cut by Earley Town Council were collected and composted;
- Members of the Committee questioned whether there might be potential for Towns and Parishes to assist in grass cutting. Mr Truppin responded that each Council would have their own view on this and that ultimately, the Members of those Councils would need to come to a view whether they could afford to take on more grass cutting responsibility and it also needed to be taken into consideration that Towns and Parishes varied significantly in terms of their staff establishments;
- The need to maintain appropriate site lines had been taken into consideration by Earley Town Council in the planting of wild flowers along verges;
- Members queried what Mr Truppin felt were the advantages to Earley Town Council of better maintained parks and open spaces. He felt that better maintained parks were more attractive to visitors and so attracted greater footfall;
- It was not possible at the meeting to be exact in terms of the additional time and cost to Earley Town Council of collecting grass trimmings, but parks staff were occupied all of the time and also undertook litter picking. Park staff also undertook grass cutting work for other organisations which generated income for the Town Council;
- It did not cost a significant amount of money to plant and seed verges and the planting in Earley had been undertaken well within budget. The borders had lasted well and it was hoped they would regrow next year.

Heather Thwaites, Director Environment, Angus Ross Executive Member for Environment and Julia Woodbridge, Horticulture and Amenity Coordinator

- The opportunity to discuss the subject of grass cutting and to be able to give the whole picture was very much welcomed;
- Wokingham Borough Council was responsible for the grass cutting some 3.5 million sqm of grass;

- The concerns of residents regarding the length of grass were fully understood, especially in the current year which had seen unprecedented rates of growth;
- The Council's grass cutting contractors were getting on top of the problem, but consideration was being given to maximise opportunities for flexibility within the existing contract around issues such as frequency of cuts, timing and priorities. A consultation was also being undertaken;
- It was important to understand the overall context affecting the Borough Council when considering grass cutting. The Council had to make significant savings of £6-7 million and it was extremely unlikely that any change in the grass cutting regime that increased costs would be supported in light of the statutory services that the Council had to provide and fund. Therefore it was a question of how best the Borough Council could provide the service within the money available;
- The idea of wild flower meadows was one of the good ideas that had been put forward and it was felt that there were some quick wins available that could improve the service and boost ecology;
- The performance of the contract was monitored by Officers, but the area to manage was large and to some degree Officers relied on members of the public and Town/Parish Council's reporting matters of concern to them. It was hoped that this would continue as any concerns expressed were treated seriously;
- The agreed contract schedule had not changed since 2009 and very few Councils had cutting schedules that could be considered to be high frequency;
- The collection of grass trimmings had never been part of the contract.

The following points were raised during the discussion between Angus Ross, Heather Thwaites and Julia Woodbridge and the Committee:

- Members asked what had been done to monitor compliance with the contract given that grass had grown rather long and that this had pushed the boundary of what was acceptable. Angus Ross and Heather Thwaites responded that the contractor had fallen behind because of the effect of the weather conditions at the time and various problems but had then caught up;
- Members asked whether the contractors employed staff full time all year and whether they employed additional staff to cope with the busy growing period. Officers confirmed that less staff were employed in the winter time;
- Members expressed concern that grass trimmings left from cutting were unsightly, but also created problems as a result of being blown by the wind such as blocking drains and gutters as well as making paths more difficult to use. Angus Ross responded that it was recognised that this issue had manifested itself more this year. Grass trimmings were not collected and the cost of collecting them would be high and require additional equipment;
- It was confirmed to Members of the Committee that the current contract had commenced in 2009 and expired in 2016. Part of the work currently being undertaken was related to whether there was an opportunity to move forward with revisions to the contract and potential contract extension if there could be mutual benefit to all parties;
- Members asked for information on some of the specifications that the contractors had to comply with. The Committee was informed that hedges were contracted to be cut once a year and that it was specified that grass would be cut to 25mm. In addition, litter picks were to be undertaken prior to grass cutting, but this was more difficult to do during the peak growing season due to the length of the grass;
- Prue Bray asked about the input the Highways and Tenant Services Departments had into grass cutting and what influence could be brought to bear on them. She commented that tenants as part of their rent paid towards the grass cutting of communal open space. Angus Ross responded that Tenant Services had separate

contractual arrangements. Cutting of verges was undertaken as part of the Parks and Open Spaces grass cutting contract on behalf of Highways;

- A number of members commented that they felt that the actual number of cuts undertaken by the Council's contractor was more than eight times because the length of the grass could mean that more than one cut was required;
- Concern was expressed that in some cases, the length of grass and overgrowth around road signs was such that the signs were obscured. The Committee was informed that this was being looked at, but resource was a factor;
- Reference was made to the amount of information available to residents on grass cutting on the Council's website and whether it showed the last time grass had been cut in a particular location. Angus Ross responded that the website was a potential solution in terms of making more information available to residents;
- It was felt that there had been problems in 2013, but that the contractor had at that time taken on additional staff;
- In addition to grass, it was also felt that low hanging brambles had been a particular ongoing problem along pavements and paths and that this had effected some high profile locations including the approaches to Dinton Pastures, thereby discouraging the public from using the facility. It was suggested that the management of brambles and other like vegetation along path and pavements might be an issue that could be looked at as part of the contract review;
- It was confirmed to the Committee that it was recognised that there were examples of best practice in other areas and the Council would be happy to learn from other authorities;
- In response to points made about the potential advantages of outcomes based contracts, (where for example, the maximum length of grass permitted might be stipulated but not the number of cuts to maintain that length), Heather Thwaites commented that such contracts did have some strengths. A significant disadvantage was that Council's did lose some control as such an arrangement meant placing more on trust. Some discussions had been undertaken, but she had not yet been convinced of the benefits. Angus Ross commented that when Council's moved to such arrangements it was still necessary for there to be a strong in-house client. It was important to minimise duplications of management without losing control over the contract;
- Norman Jorgensen referred to the idea of trying to engage with local communities to encourage them to play a part in looking after their own areas and highlighted community initiatives such as community litter picking 'Adopt a Street';
- Members asked if there was a clause in the Council's contract with the contractor that they were required to pick and clear up afterwards. It was confirmed to the Committee that the contractors were required to blow grass trimmings away from paths and pavements, but they could of course and did blow back;
- In response to a question, Angus Ross responded that it was expected that the review being undertaken would be completed by October and that he was happy to keep the Committee informed of its outcomes.

Following the evidence gathering session, witnesses were given the opportunity to make final points or clarifications.

Members of the Committee then discussed what action the Committee should take in response to the information presented. The following points arose:

- That there was a clear level of interest in the review of the grass cutting services that was shortly to be undertaken. It was felt by Members that the Committee should

examine the review later in the year and in enough time to be able to influence any decision by the Executive;

- That there was opportunity for looking at the combination of contracts between the Borough and Town/Parish Councils;
- That the existing contract should be monitored in the most cost effective way possible;
- It was felt that in the short term information on the monitoring of the existing contract including information on past grass cutting dates be investigated;
- That the idea of using different cutting frequencies for different categories of grass cutting, i.e. sport pitches, play areas, park land and verges;
- That it was important that existing discussions around joint working on grass cutting between the Borough and Town/Parish Council continue and that the Committee be updated on the outcome of those discussions. It was noted that this was an issue which had also been highlighted to and discussed by the Borough Parish Working Group.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Executive Member for Environment ensure that the contract is monitored in the most cost effective way possible;
- 2) That the Executive Member for Environment ensure that as much information as possible on past grass cutting dates throughout the year is available on the Council's website;
- 3) That the Executive Member for Environment be requested to continue discussions with Town and Parish councils regarding the possibility of partnership arrangements with Wokingham Borough Council for grass cutting;
- 4) That the Executive Member for Environment and Officers be requested to present a report setting out the results of the review of how grass cutting is managed to a meeting of the Committee in autumn 2014, prior to consideration by the Executive.
The report to incorporate:
 - a) A response to recommendations 1-3 including any information on implementation of the recommendations;
 - b) Consideration of the comments and suggestions made by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.

15. CONSIDERATION OF ADDITIONAL REQUEST FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEWS AND COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2014/2015

The Committee considered three additional scrutiny review suggestions as set out on Agenda pages 17 to 22. Kevin Jacob asked the Committee to be mindful of its existing agreed scrutiny review work programme and priorities in considering the suggestions and also the level of resources available to support any reviews.

Kazek Lokuciewski – Composition of Overview and Scrutiny Committees

The Committee noted that the request asked for a scrutiny review of the process by which appointments were made to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the basis that the existing process was not independent and that the Committee places should be offered to members of the public on a random basis. The Committee would continue to be chaired by an elected Member.

At the request of the Chairman, Kevin Jacob advised the Committee that it was a requirement of the Local Government Act 1989 that where there were political groups of

elected Members on an authority, that seats on Council and Committees be allocated to those groups on the basis of political proportionality, including on the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. It was therefore a requirement of national legislation and not something that the Council could introduce locally.

The Committee was also informed that under the Localism Act 2011 there was a requirement for Overview and Scrutiny Committees looking at education to include provision for co-opted parent governors and diocesan representatives who had voting rights. It was also noted that there was provision within legislation and the Council's Constitution for members of the public to be co-opted to Committees on a voting or non-voting basis, but that this was not a process of random selection as advocated within the scrutiny suggestion.

In discussing the suggestion, Members commented that they did not think that the review should be undertaken as the composition of the Committees was not a matter within the Committee's or Council's control. It was agreed that Mr Lokuciewski should be informed of this.

Councillor Michael Firmager

Michael Firmager indicated that he would not take part in the discussion or decision on this suggestion on the basis of his membership of the Committee.

The Chairman invited Michael Firmager to introduce the suggestion. He commented that he had submitted the suggestion was that he felt that a number of Borough's sports pitches had been unplayable during the summer and members of the public had complained about this to him. Because of the conditions of the pitches individuals and groups were choosing to use other facilities which also resulted in a loss of fee revenue for the Council.

In discussing the suggestion, Members of the Committee commented that they recognised that it was an important issue of concern to a number of residents and that potentially better value could be realised from the sports pitches than was currently the case.

Norman Jorgensen as Chairman of the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee suggested that potentially a short report could be brought to that Committee at a later date.

It was also suggested by Mike Haines that if the matter was taken forward, the Wokingham Borough Sports Council could be approached to see if that organisation had a view on the condition of pitches. Prue Bray commented that she understood that a survey of sports pitches had been undertaken as part of the Open Space and Sports Assessment Volume and that this assessment might be a source of information.

It was agreed that the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be asked to look in more detail at the issue.

Andy Couldrick, Chief Executive Wokingham Borough Council

Kevin Jacob introduced the scrutiny review suggestion to the Committee. He commented that the Council was facing continuous downward pressure on the amount of funding available to it whilst at the same time having to meet increasing demand for services to residents. The scrutiny suggestion had been made by the Chief Executive in order to

highlight the progress made to date in making efficiencies and to use the resources of overview and scrutiny as a mechanism for identifying opportunities for further savings.

Norman Jorgensen commented that the suggestion was a good one and needed appropriate consideration, but that it might not be possible to undertake a full scrutiny review. He suggested that a way to progress the subject would be to hold an informal style discussion or 'brainstorming' session on possible future efficiencies ideas at the next Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee meeting. Although this would not be a full review, it would identify potential pieces of scrutiny work.

Prue Bray commented that she supported the suggestion as it would in her view be a form of budget scrutiny, if not the full budget scrutiny that she strongly felt that should be undertaken by Overview and Scrutiny within the Council.

It was felt that the discussion and brainstorming session should be held in public at the October meeting.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the scrutiny review suggestions be progressed as set out above;
- 2) That the work programmes of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and Committees be approved.

16. BROADMOOR HOSPITAL ALERT SIRENS

The Committee considered a background document on Agenda pages 50 to 65 which set out:

- A copy of a presentation given by John Hourihan, Director of Security at Broadmoor Hospital to the Bracknell Forest Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny Commission, 10 July 2014;
- An extract from the minutes of the meeting of the Bracknell Forest Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny Commission, 10 July 2014;
- An extract from the minutes of the meeting of Finchampstead Parish Council, 14 March 2014.

Kevin Jacob commented that the issue of the potential decommissioning of a number of the Broadmoor alert sirens including some inside the Wokingham Borough had been brought to his attention by colleagues at Bracknell Forest and in consultation with the Chairman, it had been decided to place the item on the Agenda. In light of the time available to the publication of the Agenda and to avoid the duplicating the work of Bracknell Forest, it had been decided to include the information as considered by them.

Members were referred to the concerns expressed by a number of Bracknell Forest Members as recorded in the minutes of the 10 July 2014 and that it was understood that following that meeting a letter had been sent by the Chairman of the Bracknell Forest Overview and Scrutiny Commission, Councillor Ian Leake to Steve Shrubbs, Chief Executive of the West London Mental Health Trust expressing those serious concerns and asking the trust to reconsider the proposals.

In discussing the item Members expressed a number of concerns:

- That notwithstanding the accepted improvements in site security that had been made at Broadmoor Hospital and the redevelopment of the site, it was impossible for the

Trust to guarantee that an escape could not occur and that therefore the reassurance value of the sirens as audible warning could not be underestimated.

- That the school cascade system could not be effective in the event of schools being closed, (for instance through industrial action) as the cascade system could not be as instantaneous as the audible signals;
- Members were disappointed that although there was evidence to suggest that Parish Councils in the areas effected had been consulted, it did not appear that some of the principal local authorities effected by the proposals such as Bracknell Forest Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council had been formally consulted;
- Members commented that they were mindful of the Trust's obligation to spend public money wisely in considering whether to upgrade the sirens. However, Members commented that they strongly felt that the £201,000 difference in cost between the replacement of all 13 sirens or £183,000 replacement of the 6 sirens closest to the hospital was a relatively small amount of money when balanced against the real need to maintain public confidence and risk of tragedy, (however small that risk might be). It was also felt that the cost needed to be put in the wider context of the £252 million pound redevelopment of the hospital site;
- Members commented that their recollection of the most recent escapes of patients from Broadmoor was the patients had absconded whilst on visits outside of the hospital site and therefore outside of the reach of any improved security at the site.
- Concern was expressed that the West London Mental Health Trust was asserting that the majority of the public was in support of the proposals when in their opinion the wider public remained unaware of the proposals.

Members commented that they fully agreed with the concerns expressed by Bracknell Forest Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny Commission and wished to support them in their request that West London Mental Health Trust reconsider the proposals. It was agreed to write to the Trust in support of the Bracknell's position and it was also suggested that a press release should be issued.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Chairman write to Steve Shrubbs, Chief Executive of the West London Mental Health Trust to express the Committee's concerns regarding the proposals and in support of the request made by the Bracknell Forest Overview and Scrutiny Commission that the proposals to decommission a number of Broadmoor Hospital Alert Siren be reconsidered;
- 2) That a press release be issued on the subject.

17. CONSIDERATION OF THE CURRENT EXECUTIVE FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the published version of the Executive Forward Programme which set out decisions expected to be taken by the Executive in the months July 2014 to October 2014 as set out on Agenda pages 67 to 77.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Forward be noted.

18. UPDATE REPORTS FROM CHAIRMAN OR NOMINATED MEMBERS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

The Committee considered update reports from the Chairman of the Community Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In presenting her report as Chairman of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Kate Haines referred Members to the discussion at the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the use of Member substitutes at Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the proposal that substitutes should be requested to attend all meetings of the Committee they had been appointed to rather than to cover the absence of a particular member of the Committee they sat on.

In discussion, Members of the Committee acknowledged that this would allow for a greater degree of awareness of a Committee's work and continuity, but concern was expressed that the reason for the appointment of substitutes was the need to cover specific absences and Members had agreed to be appointed on that basis, not an ongoing commitment. It was felt overall that no change should be made at this stage.

RESOLVED: That the update reports from the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

These are the Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

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Improving Wokingham's Green Spaces

Presentation to WBC Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee - 28 July 2014

Brian Clark



E-petition – The Issue

- Current grass cutting policy is not fit for purpose.
- Medium frequency - majority of parks and open spaces grass - 8 cuts per season which is roughly 5 weeks between cuts in the growing season
- Low frequency - areas of grass are left – 50% of low frequency grass is cut once per year Cutting frequency can often extend beyond 6 weeks due to poor weather conditions.
- During peak growing season, litter and dog mess can often be hidden in this long grass, causing potential health risks.
- When the grass is eventually cut, the contractor appointed to maintain Wokingham's green spaces leave all the cuttings behind.
- Long grass restricts activity and mobility for children and the elderly
- Metal drinks cans, dog waste etc. Can be hidden in the long grass are shredded by the mowers and hidden under the blanket of grass causing a real laceration and health



E-petition – The Proposal

Introduce a “High Frequency”. This would include all playing fields and some of the larger open public spaces. The “High Frequency” period would start on the 1 May and end on the 31 August. This is roughly an 18 week period and would require grass to be cut on a fortnightly basis (9 cuts).

Amend the “Medium Frequency” regime by extending the frequency of cutting to 6 weeks (from 5). This would run alongside the “High Frequency” regime where all grass was cut (3 cuts during the “High Frequency” period & 5 outside). “Medium Frequency” areas would also be extended to the outer edges and less used areas (as agreed) of all playing fields and public spaces, reducing the need to cut the entire area on a fortnightly basis.

Remove all “High Frequency” grass cuttings. This will reduce the risk of lacerations from shredded litter and exposure to dog mess.

Existing Regime - 8 Cuts / Yr

New Regime - 14 Cuts / Yr

E-petition Support - Press

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THE WOKINGHAM TIMES

UNRIVALLED COVERAGE OF THE BOROUGH, INCORPORATING CROWTHORNE, WOODLEY AND TWYFORD NEWS

Est 1993 No 2,800 www.getwokingham.co.uk EDF Energy London and the South of England Media Awards 2011 Thursday, June 5, 2014 80p where sold

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THE WOKINGHAM TIMES

UNRIVALLED COVERAGE OF THE BOROUGH, INCORPORATING CROWTHORNE, WOODLEY AND TWYFORD NEWS

Est 1993 No 2,806 www.getwokingham.co.uk EDF Energy London and the South of England Media Awards 2011 Thursday, July 17, 2014 80p where sold

INSIDE

Park damaged

VANDALS have trashed new plants and fencing at a revamped town centre park forcing police to step up patrols.

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Taking the lead

COMMUNICATING what the council is doing will be "vital" according to the borough's prospective new leader.

NEWS → PAGE 3

CO campaign

THE family of a newborn who died from carbon monoxide poisoning is pushing for compulsory CO monitors.

NEWS → PAGE 11



All fresco dining in the town centre before the free concert. BK2/91410990. Picture by Steve Smyth.

Street concert is cultural finale

CULTURE in Wokingham was celebrated with a free street concert in the town centre.

Performers including Anty McClain and The Trailer Park Troubadours, Louis Armstrong tribute Troy Anderson and The Australian Troubadours, Anthony Snape and Paddy Zarb entertained crowds on Saturday night.

The event rounded off a Wokingham Cultural Month.

Please turn to pages 8 & 9 for more.

Pupils are 'overcome' by fumes

FOUR pupils were taken to hospital on Tuesday after being overcome by chlorine fumes at their school.

The children were taken by ambulance to Royal Berkshire Hospital as a precautionary measure after inhaling chlorine at All Saints Primary School, in Norreys Avenue.

Acting headteacher Jacqui Keeney said on Tuesday: "This morning was the first time we have used the pool this summer, and unfortunately four children reacted to chemicals in the water."

We acted promptly to ensure their safety and wellbeing. Four children were taken to hospital as a precautionary measure and three of them have since been discharged. All other children appear to be unaffected.

The swimming pool is now closed and it will be inspected tomorrow to establish what caused today's issue. We are writing to parents today to inform them and remind them, as always, the safety and wellbeing of all the children at our school is our highest priority."

South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) sent a rapid response vehicle, ambulance crew and emergency care practitioner to the school shortly after 10am.

A SCAS spokeswoman confirmed ambulance staff assessed and treated a number of others at the scene.

Police and crews from Bracknell and Wokingham Road fire stations were also called to the scene, but were not required.

INSIDE

Duke in Woodley

THE Duke of York paid tribute to fallen troops and the people who had remembered them as he unveiled a new war memorial.

NEWS → PAGE 5

Project offered

A KIND-HEARTED builder is putting a £3,000 project up for grabs to give something back to the community.

NEWS → PAGE 3

Mysterious girls

RELATIVES of a soldier who may have lived in Wokingham in the early 1900s are calling for help to shed light on a mystery.

NEWS → PAGE 7



The festival vibe was the real thing when music fans took over Elms Field for Wokingham's Under The Sky Concerts.

Festival creates some vibrations

THE festival vibe was the real thing when music fans took over Elms Field for Wokingham's Under The Sky Concerts.

Headlining on Friday night was 70s soul act The Legendary Real Thing, who got the crowd in a mood for a party. And the atmosphere was ramped up for Saturday evening when members of The Rolla's Stoned strutted their stuff.

Organiser Stan Hetherington said: "I usually hate the word vibe but that's what we had - a really good vibe."

"It was really wonderful and I am sure we will be back next year."

For more pictures turn to pages 8 & 9.

Work hub for young at library

WORK has started to revamp part of Wokingham Library to create a work zone for young people looking for work and apprenticeship opportunities.

Part of the ground floor of the library in Denmark Street will become Elevate Wokingham thanks to £500,000 government funding.

The money has been awarded to Wokingham Borough Council over three years as part of a wider Berkshire City Deal Elevate programme to boost the local economy.

Work started on Tuesday and the hub will be open in time for A-level results on Thursday, August 14.

Councillor Keith Baker, council leader, said: "Our young people are our most important asset and we want to give every one of them the opportunity to fulfil their potential - and Elevate Wokingham is a key to that because it will help them make the right choices for their training, education and careers."

"This centre will give young people the chance to get information, advice and practical help in a single location in the borough for the first time. There will also be online support and other centres at locations around the borough."

"This is a thriving borough where business is booming and we believe everybody should have the chance to share in that success and Elevate Wokingham will, in particular, help those who may have been disadvantaged in one way or another to benefit from the many opportunities here."

The project team visited The Progress School in Wargrave and Abingdon School in Wexley to get ideas on what young people would like to see in the centre.

The hub will include an IT area, office areas, seating and intercom room.

Experts from Adviza, formerly Connections, and Wokingham Job Support Centre, Optalis, National Careers Service and Job Centre Plus will be on hand along with a dedicated centre manager.

The hub will also have a focus on construction. Hundreds of homes are planned to be built across the borough by 2020.

NEWS about town

CULTURE MONTH CAUSING CONCERN

ONE MAN WENT TUNED

SCOUTS CELEBRATE 50TH BIRTHDAY

DERBY DAY

THE family of a newborn who died from carbon monoxide poisoning is pushing for compulsory CO monitors.

"You'll have to try and live in a HORRIFIC month August!"

TWT15ST 000614 800

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Parks mowing is a victim of cuts

Grass due to budget squeeze says council

By JILL STEVENS

KNEE-high grass is turning parks and play areas into no-go areas for children and the elderly, a dad has warned.

Brian Clark yesterday launched an online petition to force Wokingham Borough Council to cut the grass on its playing fields more often.

His campaign has struck a chord with others using social media to criticise the borough, claiming recreation areas look like mini-jungles.

Mr Clark says the overgrown Latimer Road playing field is not a safe place for his sons to play.

Please turn to page 2 column 3



Lucas Clark, 4 and Theo Clark, 15 months, in the long grass at Latimer Road playing field.

Taking the lead on third bridge

WOKINGHAM Borough Council is to lead an exercise to find out the likely effect on traffic of a third Thames bridge would create.

The decision follows the second Third Thames Bridge Summit meeting at Westminster on Tuesday co-chaired by MPs Rob Wilson and John Howell.

Council officers in Wokingham will lead an initial scoping exercise into the projected traffic effects and report to the next summit in mid-July.

Please turn to page 5 column 1

NEWS about town

WBC OVERVIEW & SCRIPNY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

"I ensure you we've not kicking the problem into the long grass!"

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'More mowing' campaign grows

Dad to demand answers from committee

By JILL STEVENS

A DAD leading a campaign for more mowing in Wokingham will put his case to a committee after his vice-chairman admitted "something had gone badly wrong" with grass cutting.

Brian Clark will be at the council's overview and scrutiny management committee meeting on Monday, July 28, at the request of councillors.

The invitation comes after his vice-chairman admitted "something had gone badly wrong" with grass cutting.

He said: "Several residents had contacted me and I have eyes myself and some of the grass does appear to be long. Other colleagues have said in their areas there seems to be an issue."

"Scrutiny is there to have a look, we cannot prejudice but we can make recommendations to the executive."

Mr Clark, of Ormeau Road, Wokingham, said: "I was told that one of the members of the committee has asked for grass cutting to be placed on the agenda for discussion, so I have been asked to give a five-minute statement on the petition."

Councillor Tim Bolton, committee chairman, said he was concerned about the length of grass before he was aware of Mr Clark's petition.

He said: "Several residents had contacted me and I have eyes myself and some of the grass does appear to be long. Other colleagues have said in their areas there seems to be an issue."

"Scrutiny is there to have a look, we cannot prejudice but we can make recommendations to the executive."

Cllr Angus Ross, Wokingham Borough Council's executive member for the environment, will answer questions about the moving contract at the meeting.

Cllr Michael Firagoor, committee vice-chairman, added: "I personally have had lots of emails about this and I think it is right that scrutiny will look at it."

"It does seem to be scheduling of works is something to look at and why it has failed."

"Something has gone badly wrong, but we don't know what it is yet."

"As it has been widespread across the borough I should think every councillor has had some feedback and it is right to look at it."

Please turn to page 2 column 1

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E-Petition Support - Signatures

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- [Current e-petitions](#)**
- [How to start an e-petition](#)
- [Rejected e-petitions](#)

Current e-petitions

Add your signature to a petition collecting signatures by selecting the title. If you sign a petition your name will be displayed on our website against that petition.

Petitions

Petition	Signatories	Status	Author	Closing Date
SAVE WOKINGHAM'S BADGERS FROM CULLING	19 Signatures	Collecting Signatures	Alexandra Pawley-Kean	16/08/2014
Improving Wokingham's Green Spaces	596 Signatures	Collecting Signatures	Brian Clark	31/07/2014
Add Glass into weekly recycling collections	416 Signatures	Collecting Signatures	Matthew George	31/08/2014
Rubbish Collections Plastic Bags	63 Signatures	Collecting Signatures	Julie Wyatt	31/08/2014
Skatepark care/ refurbish	1 Signatures	Collecting Signatures	James Saunders	31/08/2014

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E-Petition Support – Social Media



Brian Clark ▸ **Wokingham Guys And Girls.**

June 5 · Staines · 🇬🇧

Read the article about my campaign here!

<http://www.getreading.co.uk/news/dads-warning-long-grass-turns-7219102>



Dad's warning long grass at turns Wokingham parks into 'no-go areas'

Brian Clark has launched an online petition to force Wokingham Borough Council...

WWW.GETREADING.CO.UK | BY JULIE SPENCER

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Retweeted by Brian Clark



Lucy Thorne @getlucy · Jun 5

Today's Wokingham Times front page. Featuring @WokyGreenSpaces @Wokingham_TC @HelenAndDouglas @katiehainesMT #wokyo

CO campaign
THE family of a cyclist who died from carbon monoxide poisoning is pushing for compulsory CO monitors.
NEWS PAGE 11

CULTURE in Wokingham was celebrated with a free street concert in the town centre. Performers including Amy Clark and The Toffee Park Band, Lorie, Anarcho, Troy Anderson and The Australian Troubadours. Anthony Sarge and Paddy Zehn entertained crowds on Saturday night. The event rounded off a Wokingham Cultural Month. Please turn to pages 8 & 9 for more.

Parks mowing is a victim of cuts
Grass due to budget squeeze says council
By Jane Spencer

EMERGENCY high grass is turning parks and play areas into no-go areas for children and the elderly, a dad has warned.
Brian Clark yesterday launched an online petition to force Wokingham Borough Council to cut the grass on its playing fields more often.
His campaign has struck a chord with others using social media to criticise the borough, claiming recreation areas look like nurseries.
Mr Clark says the overgrown Letmore Road playing field is not a safe place for his son to play.
Please turn to page 8 column 1

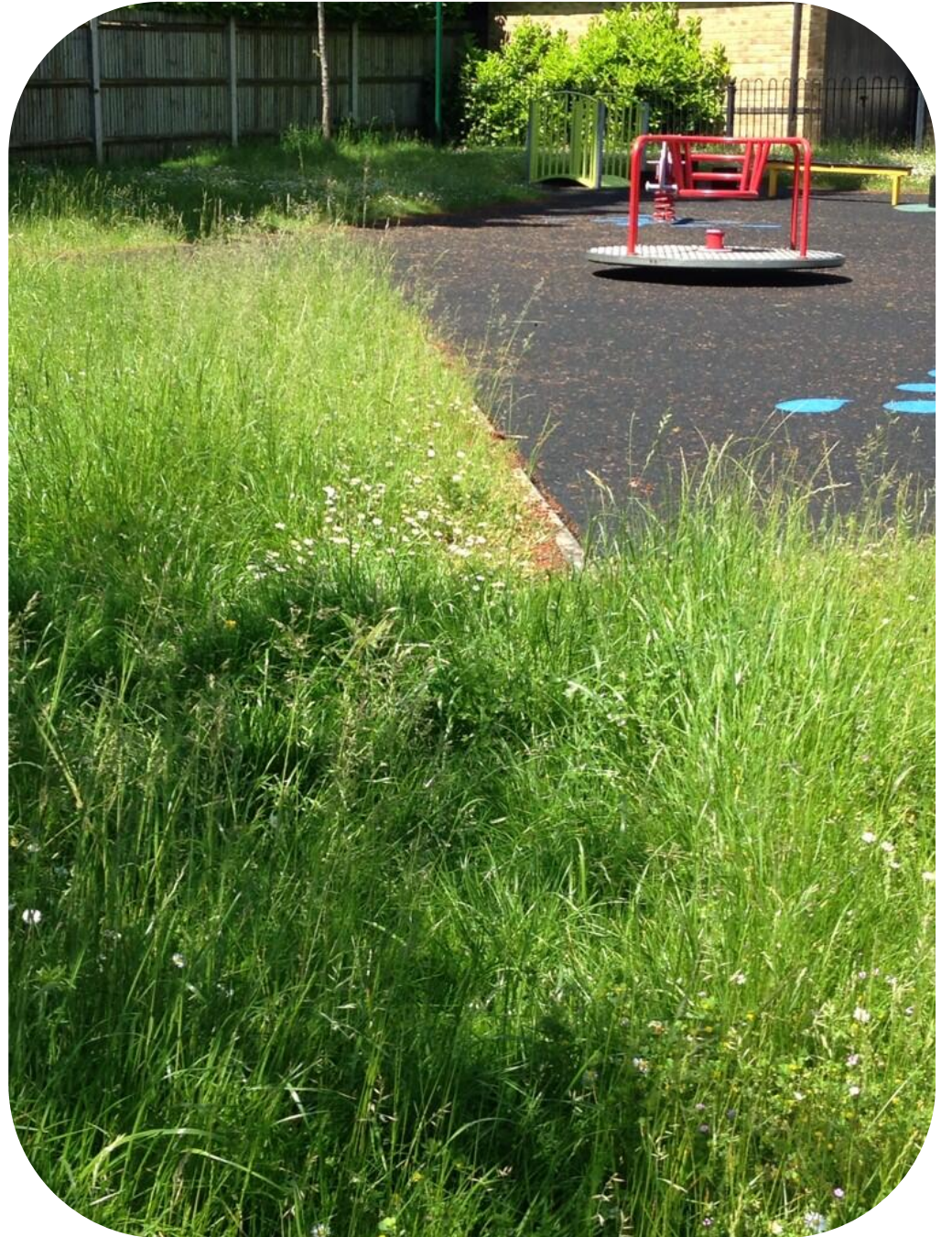
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👁️ 6 ⭐ 3 ⋮

[View more photos and videos](#)









Thank you



Wokingham Town Council's Langborough Recreation Ground