

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
HELD ON 24 NOVEMBER 2014 FROM 7.30PM TO 9.25PM**

Present:- Councillors Tim Holton (Chairman), Michael Firmager (Vice Chairman), Parry Batth, Prue Bray, Norman Jorgensen, Malcolm Richards, David Sleight and Shahid Younis

Also present:-

Luciane Bowker, Team Support Officer, Democratic Services

Julie Holland, Service Manager, Business Improvement

Councillor Philip Houdsworth, Deputy Executive Member for Environment

Kevin Jacob, Principal Democratic Services Officer

Councillor Angus Ross, Executive Member for Environment

Rob Stubbs, Head of Finance

Josie Wragg, Head of Community Services

PART I

32. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13 October 2014 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman referred to the request made at the October meeting for further information on the status of Business Continuity Plans that were required for each of the Council's service areas. Councillors were reminded that an update on the status of the plans had been emailed to the Committee and Councillors invited to make comments or raise further question. None had been received to date, but he had concerns that a number of the service areas showed as not having plans and a number referred to plans dating from July 2013. He commented that he would be proposing that a full report be brought back to the next meeting as part of the work programme item.

33. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Mike Gore, Pauline Helliard-Symons and Nicky Jerrome.

34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

35. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

36. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

37. OPEN GREEN SPACES – UPDATE

The Committee considered a report on Agenda pages 14 to 20 which gave an update on the progress of the consultation on the maintenance of open green spaces across the Borough. Councillor Angus Ross, Executive Member for Environment, Councillor Philip Houdsworth, Deputy Executive Member for Environment and Josie Wragg, Head of Community Services attended the meeting for this item.

The Committee was reminded that in July 2014 it had considered an item on the Council's grass cutting service following concerns expressed by residents and local Councillors. Councillors had asked for a further update on grass cutting and the review of open spaces in the autumn.

Councillor Ross and Josie Wragg explained that the consultation which began on 17 October 2014 would continue until 12 December. So far 164 responses had been received and this was considered an acceptable number. Further reminders to encourage people to take part in the consultation would be carried out before the end of the consultation period. The Council was seeking residents' views on how best to maintain parks and open spaces. The outcome of the responses received so far was listed in the report on page 15 of the Agenda.

It was identified that the priority for grass cutting was as follows: firstly children's play areas, secondly sports pitches and thirdly parks.

Josie Wragg highlighted three main areas of further improvement in the service:

- Customer Services – how the Council to make sure the work is integrated.
- Information Technology Systems – at the moment emails are used for customers to report issues. This is not the most efficient or modern way and it could be updated and there was ongoing work with IT to improve the systems.
- Contracts – the service was looking at different possibilities. At the moment the contract is based on a fixed number of cuts per year, it may be more effective to have the flexibility to change to cuts on demand.

The following points were raised in the Committee's discussion:

- It was noted that negotiations around contracts and options for the future of the maintenance of open spaces were ongoing and the necessity or timing of any formal decisions by the Executive had not yet been fully established;
- Members of the Committee stressed that they felt that it was important that the Committee had opportunity for a formal input into the outcome of the open spaces review process, prior to consideration by the Executive and asked that Kevin Jacob liaise with the Executive Member, Deputy Executive Member and Officers regarding the timing of this. It was felt that there if necessary an extraordinary meeting of the Committee could be called;
- The possible legal implications for the Council of the fact that some residents had been helping to maintain certain areas by cutting the grass themselves were raised. Josie Wragg explained that there were liability and insurance issues involved and the service was going to explore this option and have a formal policy position on this;
- It was felt that the volunteer option should be explored and that if people were given permission, training, equipment and ways to dispose of green waste perhaps more people would be willing to help as had been successfully trialled with the 'Adopt a Street' scheme which had been it was felt successfully used to encourage residents to volunteer to collect litter in their neighbourhoods;
- It was suggested that it might be possible to draft a contract which was based on outcomes and not outputs, (e.g. the number of cuts) as was the case now and that the contract might be split into separate geographical areas. Angus Ross explained that it was difficult to predict the demand for cuttings and due to the size of the current contract already being quite small in overall contract terms there was not much ability to be flexible in terms of splitting the contract into smaller areas;

- Research undertaken into examples of innovative outcomes based contract terms indicated a wide range of possible terms. For example one local authority had drafted a contract including a performance indicator based on the number of resident complaints about that contract. There was a place for flexibility in how contract specification might be approached in the future and a range of options would be considered;
- It was felt that in areas of the Borough that bordered Reading Borough Council it could be unclear which Council had responsibility for areas of grass and open space. An example of this was social housing owned by Reading Borough Council located within the Wokingham boundary. In this situation residents paid rent to Reading Borough Council and Council Tax to Wokingham Borough Council. Josie Wragg agreed to investigate and report back to the Committee.

The Chairman felt it was important that the general public should be informed that the Committee had considered this report and that it would be looking again at the issue in the future.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the update report be noted;
- 2) That a report containing the outcome of the consultation and result of the review process be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee;
- 3) That Angus Ross, Josie Wragg and Kevin Jacob liaise regarding the date of the Committee's consideration ahead of any potential decision by the Executive.

38. COUNCIL TAX SINGLE PERSON DISCOUNT REVIEWS

The committee considered a report on Agenda pages 21 to 23 updating on the review of the Single Person Council Tax discount. Rob Stubbs, Head of Finance attended the meeting and introduced the item.

Rob Stubbs explained that regular reviews have generated significant amounts of tax income for the Council as set out on page 21. Going forward the Council intended to put in place an annual data matching exercise carried out under a contract with a suitable provider and it was expected that this exercise would generate an increase in Council Tax income of at least £100k per annum.

He mentioned that contacting people directly and asking them to confirm that they were still eligible for the single tax discount had proved to be the most effective way to ensure that only valid claims would continue. The Council also had used credit reference agencies to undertake a data matching exercise which had resulted in additional tax income.

The Committee asked how much it cost to use these agencies. Rob Stubbs indicated that he could supply this information outside the meeting, but that he was certain that the gain in Council Tax income exceeded the expense.

Members of the Committee referred to the comparative figures on page 22 and commented that they were somewhat surprised that Reading and Slough Borough Councils had not supplied any data to date. Rob Stubbs explained when the figures were made available they would be included in any future report.

The Committee enquired how many fraudulent claims and prosecutions had occurred as a result of the review. Julie Holland, Service Manager Business Improvement informed the Committee that the Legal and Investigations Team would normally look at any potentially fraudulent claims and there were three possible outcomes depending on the case: caution, penalty or prosecution. When it came to a prosecution, the outcome would usually be made public.

The Committee congratulated Rob Stubbs on the good service being provided and the Chairman asked that the public be made aware of the positive outcomes arising from the Council's actions in being vigilant in this area.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted;
- 2) That a report be brought back in 12 months containing updated comparison figures with neighbouring authorities.

39. BALANCED SCORECARD – 2014/2015 QUARTER 2 REPORT

The Committee considered a report on Agenda pages 24 to 32 which set out details of the Council's performance as measured by a series of performance indicators.

Julie Holland presented the report and explained that the service was currently looking at ways to improve the presentation of the information by more closely linking the Council's priorities as set out in the Council Plan with performance and progress towards the achievement of the priorities. Following internal discussions, it was planned that a draft of the replacement balanced scorecard would be presented at the January meeting in order for the Committee to become familiar with the look and feel of the new document and make comments.

The main report set out on page 24 of the Agenda onwards highlighted the indicators that presented changes. It was noted that 69% of the indicators were 'green'.

Councillor Michael Firmager questioned whether the redesigned Balance Scorecard Report would include a matrix of performance management information regarding the performance of the Council's wholly owned Local Authority Trading Companies such as Optalis and Wokingham Housing Limited. The Committee was informed that this would depend on how the Council decided to demonstrate the particular link and contribution between the activities of the particular company and the priorities set out in the Council plan. It was stressed that in order to be strategic and keep to the idea of presenting a 'dashboard' of information there would be different levels of detail depending on the target audience, e.g. managers at the front line would need and receive much more detailed information than at Corporate Leadership Team or Councillor level.

Prue Bray expressed concern regarding the performance of Indicator 25 under Housing Needs which measured the number of households prevented from becoming homeless as a proportion of those becoming inevitably homeless. There had been recent cases of homelessness that were reported in the local press and it was suggested that this was indicator the Committee needed to continue to monitor.

With regard to Indicator 42 Housing Rents Collection, Prue Bray commented that this indicator was shown as having a green status having been reported to be at Amber in the previous report. Whilst this apparent improvement in performance was to be welcomed

she commented that there were some concerns regarding the level of assurance from the data given that she was aware of technical difficulties in reconciling data following the handover from one software application to another. This issue had recently been discussed by the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel. Julie Holland agreed to feedback the Committee's concern to Tenant Services so that the data could be checked.

Norman Jorgensen and various members of the Committee commented that they felt that it was import to receive information that was as up to date as possible, information that was four months old would no longer be meaningful.

Councillor Younis queried why there had been deterioration in the performance of Indicator 44 which measured the percentage of telephone calls answered and asked what the basis for the assessment was. The Committee was informed that this was believed the drop in performance had related to delays caused by staff turnover, but that more information could be provided.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Further clarification on the homeless, rent collection and external customer satisfaction indicators be brought back to the Committee.
- 2) The report be noted.

40. INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2012/2013 SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS – MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATES

The Committee received a report on Agenda pages 33 to 41 which set out the progress in implementing the recommendations arising from the Internal Audit review of scrutiny arrangements in 2012/2013. Kevin Jacob, Principal Democratic Services Officer presented the report to the Committee as Statutory Scrutiny Officer.

Since implementing the action plan the following observations were made:

- 2.1. It was noted that it was not necessary for both Kevin Jacob and the Chairman to attend Corporate Leadership Team meetings, although separate meetings could and had taken place between the Chairman and Chief Executive. Kevin Jacob commented that he was due to attend a meeting of the Corporate Leadership Team, (CLT) on 2 December as part of the quarterly reporting process and that on 16 December he would be attending a meeting of the Extended Corporate Leadership Team. He would report back on the key aspects of the discussion to the Committee following each attendance at CLT;
- The public profile of Scrutiny was being increased by the use of social media such as Tweeting. Kevin Jacob explained that the use of social media was not yet common practice in the administration of scrutiny although this was already being used by Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- The work was ongoing to make sure that deadlines for submission of papers were adhered to. It was expected that Modern.Gov would ease the process although it would still relay on officers and partners to comply with the work flow;
- There was ongoing work to ensure that major projects were available for Scrutiny to review, going forward this would be monitored through the Balanced Scorecard if they were linked to the Council priorities.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted

- 2) That following the quarterly liaison meetings with the Corporate Leadership Team Kevin Jacob update the Committee on the key points arising from the discussion.

41. UPDATE ON BRACKNELL FOREST OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION MEETING ON 22 OCTOBER 2014 – BROADMOOR HOSPITAL ALERT SIRENS

The Committee received a report on Agenda pages 42 to 45 containing the minutes of the Bracknell Overview and Scrutiny Commission meeting of on 22 October 2014. The Chairman invited Councillor David Sleight who attended the meeting to provide feedback.

Councillor Sleight highlighted that at the meeting representatives from the West London Mental Health Trust had explained the rationale for their proposals to not replace all of the current escape alert sirens and had been robustly challenged on this by the members of the Bracknell Forest Overview and Scrutiny Commission and the Wokingham Borough councillors present. He referred to the agreement of the Trust to relook at their proposals, particularly the location of any replacement sirens as set out on Agenda page 45.

Councillor Prue Bray commented that she had raised the issue of the possible decommissioning of the sirens to members of the Wokingham Health and Wellbeing Board. The issues around mental health and Broadmoor's role as a secure hospital were sensitive ones and Councillors had an important role to play in being community leaders and helping to reduce some of the stigma and misconceptions about the hospital's patients, but as local representatives Councillors had an obligation to reflect and communicate some of the concerns expressed by residents back to the professionals and act a bridge between the two groups. A key factor was that the presence of the sirens as audible warning of potential escape made residents feel more comfortable and safe in the event of an escape even though it was recognised that chances of an escape happening were extremely low.

As a result of the discussion by Health and Wellbeing Board members, the Wokingham Community Safety Partnership was to look at the issue and report back.

Members referred to the schools' cascade system which was intended to come into operation in the event of an escape. It was noted that at the Bracknell meeting, the West London Mental Health Trust had agreed to look at ways of improving the schools' cascade system in general and Members queried how the schools' cascade system would work for schools within Wokingham Borough and whether it regularly tested. It was suggested that as this was a schools issue, the Chairman of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be asked to look into the issue.

It was noted that the West London Mental Health Trust had invited Councillors from Bracknell and Wokingham to visit Broadmoor Hospital and that the following day five members of the Committee be undertaking a visit. The Chairman asked that Councillor Michael Firmager be the lead Member on the visit.

The Committee felt that if another joint meeting between the Council's overview and scrutiny committee was required, Wokingham should offer to host the meeting.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee be asked to look at the effectiveness of the school's cascade system and present its proposals to the committee;
- 2) The Members visiting Broadmoor report back at the next meeting.

42. 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 period of November 2014 to February 2015 on pages 46 to 53.

It was noted that the Car Parking Charges item had been removed from the Executive Forward Programme for November.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

43. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2014/2015

The Committee considered the anticipated Work Programme of the Committee and that of the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees as set out on Agenda pages 54 to 75.

The committee asked that duplication of work should be avoided where possible.

RESOLVED That the Forward Programme be noted subject to:

- 1) The addition of an item on the status of Business Continuity Plans at the Council the 26 January 2015 meeting;
- 2) The addition of an item on the Open Space Review, the date of which to be confirmed and if necessary an Extra-ordinary meeting called.

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

The Committee considered update reports from Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Community Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out on Agenda pages 76 to 80, reports from Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee were tabled and also considered.

Councillor David Sleight commented on the consideration by the Community Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meetings held on 27 October and 11 November of issues around the future of amenity vehicle provision and reported that after the meeting on 27 October, it had resolved that the Executive be advised that the amenity vehicle service was still required, but various aspects of the service were unsustainable and required further investigation. On the 11 November it had resolved that an update report on the item be presented in six months.

Concern was expressed by a number of Councillors that the Executive was due to consider a report at its 27 November meeting which recommended that the amenity vehicle service be ceased from 1 February 2014. The Chairman offered to speak to the Leader of the Council about the principle of Overview and Scrutiny involvement prior to Executive decisions.

Norman Jorgensen reported on the work by the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee highlighting the plans for the general election in 2015. The count will follow the close of polls with the result declared as soon as possible thereafter, likely to be 5am. Because the timing of the end of the count is not known and to give counters adequate rest it is planned to hold the count for the local elections on the Saturday.

Councillor Ken Miall, Chairman of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee presented the report of that committee and praised the work of the Clinical Commissioning Group. Regarding the non-emergency visits to Accident and Emergency departments, a number of Members of the Committee suggested that some treatments could be performed at certain GP surgeries depending on the severity of the case which would relieve pressure on A & E. The Committee would like to ask HOSC to explore this option.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) That the reports of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees be noted.
- 2) That the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee be asked to consider options in the delivery of non-emergency care

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

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