

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
HELD ON 20 SEPTEMBER 2017 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.50 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Keith Baker (Chairman), Laura Blumenthal (Vice-Chairman), Parry Batth, Pauline Helliar-Symons, Ken Miall, Bill Soane, Chris Smith, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Chris Bowring, Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Pauline Jorgensen and Richard Dolinski

Officers Present

Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Paul Ohsan Ellis, Strategy and Commissioning Support Manager

25. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted by Lindsay Ferris, Kate Haines, Ian Pittock, Malcolm Richards and Shahid Younis.

Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey and Imogen Shepherd-Dubey attended the meeting as substitutes for Lindsay Ferris and Ian Pittock respectively.

26. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11 July 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

28. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

29. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

30. LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATES

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 15 to 20, which continued the process of holding discussions with Executive Members. The aim of the discussions was to increase awareness of key policy and service issues over the year ahead and to identify areas where Overview and Scrutiny could provide effective challenge and support. Members had agreed the principle that Overview and Scrutiny would add more value if it was a proactive process rather than a reactive process.

Charlotte Haitham Taylor (Leader of the Council) and Chris Bowring (Executive Member for Highways and Transport) were in attendance to give an outline of key challenges and opportunities and to answer Member questions developed around key lines of enquiry. Pauline Jorgensen (Deputy Executive Member for Communications) was also in attendance to answer Member questions on communication issues.

Councillor Haitham Taylor addressed the Committee and provided answers relating to the relevant key lines of enquiry set out in the report. She began by welcoming the role of Overview and Scrutiny in holding the Executive to account and supported its bipartisan approach.

Key Line of Enquiry 1 – Remit

Councillor Haitham Taylor described her leadership style as consensual, seeking to support and empower the Executive and Deputy Executive Members. Members had been appointed to those roles based on their ability to deliver and to adapt to the changing local government environment. Her aim was to work with colleagues to enable the Council to deliver sustainable services for the benefit of the Borough's residents.

Key Line of Enquiry 2 – Priorities

Councillor Haitham Taylor set out a list of priorities for the Council, viz:

- Local Plan Update
- Improving communications
- Engagement with the Government
- Engagement with the business community
- Supporting the more deprived parts of the Borough
- Building capacity in the Council-owned companies
- Making the Council more self-sufficient
- Highways investment to tackle congestion
- Working with partners, including Towns/Parishes and the voluntary sector
- Managing demand and risk relating to adult and children's services.

Councillor Haitham Taylor felt that two of the most pressing issues were the Council's plans to meet housing needs and the achievement of financial stability. Areas for new housing were being identified through the Local Plan Update with 263 potential sites identified. It was important to work closely with Members and community stakeholders to ensure that new housing was developed in sustainable locations.

In relation to finance, the Council was approaching a "cliff edge" as a result of reductions in Government grant and the proposed move to a negative grant position. It was important to develop a more commercial approach which delivered new sources of income and maximised the potential of the Council's assets.

Councillor Haitham Taylor referred to the 21st Century Council programme which would support the priorities by making the Council more efficient and more effective at delivering the key services which residents needed.

Key Line of Enquiry 3 – Communication with Councillors

Councillor Jorgensen outlined her role in improving communication with Members and residents and gave examples of more effective use of social media.

Councillor Haitham Taylor recognised the important role of Members in keeping residents informed but did not necessarily agree that they were "by passed". There were examples of good communication and poor communication. The aim was to learn from the examples where communication was effective. She suggested that the Committee may wish to

review the sections of the Council's Constitution relating to Member communications and make appropriate recommendations to the Constitution Review Working Group

Councillors Haitham Taylor and Jorgensen were happy to receive Member feedback on areas of poor communication. Councillor Baker gave an example relating to the recent changes to Member communication on the approved plans list.

Key Line of Enquiry 4 – Town Centre Regeneration

Councillor Haitham Taylor confirmed that it was still the Council's aim to regenerate the other towns in the Borough once the Wokingham project was completed. It was accepted that costs relating to the Wokingham town centre regeneration had increased but there had also been an increase in the scope of the project. It was not accepted that the increase in costs had taken place without scrutiny. There was a Member group in place to oversee the project and to scrutinise the financial implications.

Key Line of Enquiry 5 – Budgeted Savings

Councillor Haitham Taylor confirmed that the Council was on track to achieve its savings target for 2017/18. In relation to 2018/19, a budget shortfall of £6m was being addressed and, to date, £5.8m savings had been identified. The 21st Century Council programme was on track to achieve its savings targets and, as mentioned earlier, it was anticipated that a more commercial approach would identify new revenue streams. The Council was also focussing hard on measures to manage demand relating to adult and children's social care. Finally, the Council would continue to lobby the Government about the injustice of a move to negative grant funding.

Key Line of Enquiry 6 – Independent Remuneration Panel and the Executive

Councillor Haitham Taylor confirmed that the number of Executive Members had increased from eight to nine. However, the total of Executive and Deputy Executive Members remained at 15. The new Executive reflected a greater emphasis on strategic highways and planning, business links, commercialisation and communications. The benefits of stronger communications had been identified by the recent LGA Peer Review team.

Councillor Haitham Taylor noted that the Independent Remuneration Panel report would be considered by the Council in November. She felt that Non-Executive Director payments should be treated separately to Special Responsibility Allowances and had made representations to the Panel on that basis. She also noted that payments for Members on the Fire Authority were a matter for the Fire and Rescue Service.

Councillor Haitham Taylor agreed to provide the Committee with details on recent changes to Non-Executive Director payments for Members on Council-owned companies.

In the ensuing discussion Members of the Committee raised the following points and questions:

What ideas were being considered as part of the move to greater commercialisation? It was confirmed that a number of areas were being explored with staff such as greater income generation from the Council's property portfolio.

Was uncertainty over the 21st Century Council programme resulting in the loss of key staff? It was confirmed that the 21st Century Council team were working closely with staff and the trade union to ensure that there was good communication and clarity about the change process.

In relation to the list of key priorities, how would success be measured? It was confirmed that a range of success measures would be used, including:

- Local Plan Update – ensuring that local communities are engaged in the process and effective lobbying of Government about housing numbers;
- Communications – residents having a greater understanding of Council services and how the Council makes a difference in local communities;
- 21st Century Council – delivering a more efficient organisation which is more business-like, self-sufficient and customer focused. Developing the 21st Century Councillor role with training on new IT systems, etc.;
- Working with partners – developing shared opportunities and managing shared risks across the Borough with the police, health services, Towns and Parishes and the voluntary sector.

Chris Bowring (Executive Member for Highways and Transport) addressed the Committee and provided answers relating to the relevant key lines of enquiry set out in the report. Pauline Jorgensen provided information and answered questions on communication issues.

Key Line of Enquiry 1 – Communications

Chris Bowring noted that effective communication was an important issue for Members and gave details of measures in hand to improve the flow of information. This included the development of a flow chart which set out a pro forma sequence of events and ensured that the right people were informed at the right time. In addition the Major Works programme was published each year and the Roadworks.org website provided up to date information on current and planned schemes.

Pauline Jorgensen gave details of ongoing work to improve the flow of information to Members, especially on ward issues. Members felt that the receipt of information in advance of residents was important for them to “manage” the message. Feedback was welcomed on the type of information which Members found useful, especially in relation to ward matters.

Members raised issues around roadworks which overran and sites where little work appeared to be happening. Chris Bowring confirmed that work was ongoing to make roadwork signs more informative and helpful to the public.

Members asked about the operation of the Highways for Members inbox. It was confirmed that the target for responses was five working days. However, Officers tried to provide a quicker response if possible. Councillor Jorgensen confirmed that the 21st Century Council programme would include a replacement for the Highways for Members inbox.

Members suggested that a cross-party group of Members be brought together to discuss ideas for improved communication and highlight the types of information which would be useful.

Key Line of Enquiry 2 – Policies

Chris Bowring confirmed that ongoing priorities related to road safety, tackling traffic congestion and developing partnerships with Town and Parish Councils. Ongoing policy work included:

- Review of subsidised transport across the Borough;
- Safe routes to Primary Schools, including consultation;
- Devolution to Towns and Parishes – e.g. Civil Parking Enforcement and separate car park charges e.g. Woodley;
- Parking Policy – report of the Member Working Party to be considered by Executive in April 2018;

In the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points and questions:

In relation to the ongoing regeneration works, what was the impact on car park income? It was confirmed that the performance for August 2017 was an improvement on August 2016.

What measures could be introduced to improve transport and parking for people with disabilities e.g. working with adult and children's services to develop new policies?

Were proposals under consideration to reinstate school crossing patrol officers? It was confirmed that safety audits were being carried out at seven sites. Local Members were involved in the discussions and there would be consultation with local residents.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Councillors Haitham Taylor, Bowring and Jorgensen be thanked for attending the meeting and answering Member questions;
- 2) Progress on key issues and priorities identified during the discussions be reported to a future meeting of the Committee;
- 3) Councillors Bowring and Jorgensen consider the Member suggestions on improving Member communications and report back on any initiatives which are introduced.

31. COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE MONITORING Q1 2017-18

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 21 to 66) which provided Council Plan performance data for the first quarter of 2017/18 (April to June). The report gave details of performance against 48 performance indicators and 19 key projects.

The report stated that the overall direction of travel was positive with 20 indicators showing improved performance and nine indicators showing a worsening performance. The indicators with a Red rating were:

- % of children in care at the end of the period who were in a placement more than 20 miles from their home (excluding unaccompanied asylum seeking children, children placed with parents and children in receipt of short breaks support);
- % of children leaving care who achieved permanence (adopted, returned home or subject to a special guardianship order);
- % of child protection visits due in the period which were on time (within 10 days of the previous visit);
- Shinfield Eastern Relief Road.

In the ensuing discussion the following points were made:

Re the Red indicator on % of children in a placement more than 20 miles from their home – Pauline Helliard-Symons reported that the current position was that the Council did not have sufficient capacity (recruiting more foster carers was a priority) and placements were not made in order to meet the target, the placements had to be right for the child and the families.

Re the Red indicator on child protection visits which were on time – Pauline Helliard-Symons reported performance was affected by several factors such as parents not being at home when arranged visits took place.

Re the Amber indicator on the number of initial carers' assessments completed – Pauline Helliard-Symons requested that this indicator be included in the performance management report to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Keith Baker requested that future reports should include details of action plans to bring Red/Amber indicators back on track.

Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey requested that indicators relating to % of schools should also include data on the actual number of schools involved.

Keith Baker requested that Annex B to the report (Changes in Corporate Indicators) should include the reasons why indicators were removed or introduced, including their relevance to the Council Plan.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) progress on key performance indicators and major projects be noted;
- 2) Member comments on presentation and content be incorporated in future versions of the report.

32. CONSIDERATION OF THE CURRENT EXECUTIVE FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a copy of the Executive Forward Programme as set out on Agenda pages 67 to 70.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Executive Forward Programme be noted;
- 2) Members notify Democratic Services of any issues they wish to include in the Committee's future work programme.

33. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its forward work programme and that of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees as set out on Agenda pages 67 to 82.

Following the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, on 12 September 2017, Pauline Helliar-Symons gave details of amendments to the Committee's future work programme.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the forward Work Programmes be noted;
- 2) the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be amended to reflect the update provided at the meeting.

34. UPDATE REPORTS FROM CHAIRMEN OR NOMINATED MEMBER OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

The Committee considered updates from the Chairmen of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees as follows:

- Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 4 September 2017;
- Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 12 September 2017.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the updates be noted;
- 2) future update reports be made on an exception basis.

35. MEETING DATES 2017/18

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 85 to 86, which gave details of proposed dates for three extra meetings during 2017/18. The proposed dates were 16 October 2017, 21 February 2018 and 16 April 2018.

RESOLVED: That the proposed additional meeting dates for 2017/18, as set out in the report, be approved.