

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE  
HELD ON 30 MAY 2017 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.10 PM**

**Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Keith Baker (Chairman), Laura Blumenthal (Vice-Chairman), Lindsay Ferris, Kate Haines, Pauline Helliar-Symons, Ken Miall, Malcolm Richards, Chris Smith, Bill Soane and Shahid Younis

**Other Councillors Present**

Councillors: Beth Rowland and Gary Cowan

**Officers Present**

Neil Carr, Principal Democratic Services Officer

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillors Parry Bath and Ian Pittock.

Councillor Beth Rowland attended as a substitute for Councillor Pittock.

**2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 28 March and 3 May 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

**5. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions.

**6. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered a report, set out on Agenda pages 23 to 29, which provided an update on the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2017/18. The report stated that the work programme, which was appended to the report, had been approved by the Committee at its meeting on 28 March 2017.

The Committee discussed the current operation of Overview and Scrutiny and ways in which the process could be improved. The Chairman confirmed the view that Overview and Scrutiny should focus more on pre-decision scrutiny and policy development. The aim was to work with the Executive to ensure that decisions were more robust as a result of detailed examination and challenge in the period before final decisions were taken. Members supported this aim and felt that Overview and Scrutiny should be seen to be more independent and should be more vigorous in holding the Executive to account.

In order to develop this new way of working Members agreed that Executive Members should be invited to attend the Committee to set out their policy programme over the year ahead and agree a list of issues to be considered by Overview and Scrutiny. The Executive Member for Adults/Health and Wellbeing and the Executive Member for

Children's Services would be invited to attend the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In relation to the specific Committee work programmes Councillor Pauline Helliard-Symons reported that a number of additional items had been agreed for inclusion in the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme, viz:

- Progress on the Ofsted action plan
- Review of the May 2017 Ofsted inspection findings and action plan;
- Secondary School place planning;
- Early Years Strategy;
- Sufficiency Strategy for children in care and care leavers;
- Refresh of the Children and Young People's Plan;
- Special Needs and Disability Strategy;
- Safeguarding Children Board annual report;
- School improvement – narrowing the gap in attainment.

The Chairman confirmed that the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme was not set in stone and would be amended, as necessary, during the year. He also confirmed that Members were able to request items for inclusion in the work programme at any time.

At the March 2017 meeting the Committee had considered a number of Scrutiny requests from Members and residents, including a request from Councillor Gary Cowan about improving the existing protocols for communication between Members, Officers and residents. The Committee agreed to defer the request and to invite Councillor Cowan to attend tonight's meeting in order to develop a greater understanding of the issues involved. Councillor Cowan addressed the meeting and gave examples of poor communication which impacted on residents' lives, caused additional work for Members and damaged the Council's reputation.

Members supported the principles underpinning the scrutiny request and felt that it should be linked to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Council change programme. The outcome should be greater clarity on the roles of Members and Officers and the way they interact with residents. Existing protocols should be refreshed to reflect the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Council programme to ensure that residents knew what to expect when they contacted the Council and to improve the flow of communication with Ward Members.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2017/18, as amended, be noted;
- 2) Councillor Gary Cowan's scrutiny request on improving communications between Members, Officers and residents be included in the Overview and Scrutiny work programme;
- 3) Heather Thwaites (21<sup>st</sup> Century Council Programme Director) and Councillor Pauline Jorgensen (Deputy Executive Member for Communications) be invited to attend the July meeting of the Committee to discuss how the programme will deliver improved communications between Members, Officers and residents;
- 4) Councillor Cowan also be invited to attend the July meeting to discuss the scrutiny request;

- 5) the issue of improving Member/Officer/resident communications also be referred to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Council Member/Officer steering group;
- 6) Andy Couldrick (Chief Executive) be invited to the July meeting (or to a special meeting) to give an overview on progress relating to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Council change programme;
- 7) each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees consider the impact of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Council programme on their remit;
- 8) the Management Committee's work programme include an overview of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Council change programme;
- 9) Executive Members be invited to attend the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss priorities for the year ahead and agree a timeline for issues to be scrutinised by the Committees.

## **7. QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT**

The Committee considered the Quarter 4 Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report 2016/17, set out at Agenda pages 31 to 94.

The report indicated that the breakdown of performance indicators in Quarter 4 was 43 Green, 6 Amber and 3 Red. The indicators of greatest concern (Red) related to:

- % of children who became subject of a Child Protection Plan (CPP) who are subject to a CPP for a second or subsequent time within 24 Months;
- % of Looked After Children living within 20 miles of "West Berkshire";
- Number of cycle trips on the A329 corridor (LSTF project investment area).

Appendix B to the report gave a description of each of the performance indicators, contextual information and an explanation of the determination of Red, Amber and Green thresholds.

The report also stated that, as part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Council programme, a set of revised, streamlined performance indicators was being developed for use in 2017/18.

Members considered the performance set out in the report and the proposal for a new performance management regime and made the following points:

- The Management Committee should be briefed on the development of the new Performance Management regime before it is implemented;
- The new performance management reports should be more timely and be able to measure the impact and benefits accruing from specific programmes and projects;
- Future performance management reports should refer relevant indicators to the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairmen should refer indicators to the Management Committee by exception.

## **RESOLVED** That:

- 1) the Quarter 4 Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report be noted;
- 2) the Committee scrutinise the proposed new performance management regime prior to its approval and implementation;
- 3) future performance reports refer specific indicators to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- 4) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairmen report specific indicators to the Management Committee by exception.

## **8. HOUSE OF COMMONS SELECT COMMITTEE UPDATE**

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 95 to 112, which gave an update on the review of Overview and Scrutiny launched by the House of Commons Select Committee for Communities and Local Government.

The report stated that the work of the Select Committee had been halted due to the calling of the General Election. However, a number of pieces of written evidence had already been submitted by Councils, Scrutiny bodies, political groups and individuals.

Two pieces of evidence were appended to the report in order to facilitate Member discussions on the strengths and weaknesses of the current Overview and Scrutiny function at the Council. The submissions were submitted by the Unitary Councils' Overview and Scrutiny Officer Network and the Council's Lib Dem Group.

The Unitary Council Network identified a number of factors which contributed to successful and less successful Overview and Scrutiny outcomes, viz:

Where Overview and Scrutiny works well:

- Availability of timely, quality information;
- Political support and buy in from senior Officers;
- Interest and curiosity from elected Members;
- Less formal approaches such as private sessions;
- Effective Task and Finish Groups;

Where Overview and Scrutiny works less well:

- Lack of access to information or late information;
- Wavering commitment from Executive Members and senior Officers;
- Insufficient Member skill or experience;
- Formal, public sessions where Member and Officer candour becomes an issue.

Members considered the evidence in the context of the operation of Overview and Scrutiny at the Council. During the discussion the following points were made.

- Members endorsed the comments in the Unitary Councils' Officer Network paper: "Scrutiny provides the potential to achieve great things. It continues to have the power to hold to account and review policy detail which in turn leads to the avoidance of bad

or unintended consequences that can only come to light through a process of detailed examination”.

- Members discussed the current lack of Church and parent governor representatives on the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. It was felt that a further attempt should be made to attract outside representatives utilising local newspapers and social media.
- It was noted that the issues raised in the report supported the earlier discussion about ways to make Overview and Scrutiny more robust and challenging.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) the suspension of the House of Commons Select Committee review of Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government be noted;
- 2) the evidence in the submissions to the Select Committee be fed into the ongoing discussions about ways to improve Overview and Scrutiny;
- 3) Officers investigate the potential for joining the Unitary Councils’ Overview and Scrutiny Officer Network;
- 4) a further attempt be made to recruit Church and parent governor representatives to sit on the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

## **9. COUNCIL MOTION ON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 113 to 118, which gave details of a Motion debated by the Council at its meeting on 23 March 2017. The Motion, submitted by Councillor Ian Pittock, related to the appointment of Overview and Scrutiny Members, Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen.

The Motion sought to improve the public perception of Overview and Scrutiny by enabling non-Executive Members to control the procedure for the allocation of places on the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Council supported the principles underpinning the Motion and resolved that it be referred to the Constitution Review Working Group for a more detailed review of the proposal and a recommended way forwards. The proposer and seconder of the Motion (Councillors Pittock and Ferris) were also invited to attend the Working Group to provide more detail on their view of the practical implementation of the proposed changes.

Appended to the report was an example, submitted by Councillor Pittock, of how the proposed arrangements could work in practice.

Members discussed the proposals set out in the report and considered the process for consideration by the Constitution Review Working Group.

Members felt that the Motion should be considered first by the Constitution Review Working Group and that the Working Group’s recommendations should then be considered by the Management Committee.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) the Motion on Overview and Scrutiny Committee membership be considered first by the Constitution Review Working Group at its meeting on 21 June 2017;
- 2) the recommendations from the Working Group be considered at the next meeting of the Management Committee on 11 July 2017.

## **10. MEMBER TRAINING SESSION**

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 119 to 123, which gave details of the annual Overview and Scrutiny Member training event, to be held on 19 July 2017.

The report stated that the aim of the event was to provide an introduction to Overview and Scrutiny for new Members and to provide a refresher for more experienced Members. The range of issues to be covered included the role of Overview and Scrutiny in holding the Executive to account, the importance of pre-decision scrutiny and support for policy development. The event would also focus on specific skills such as effective chairing and questioning techniques.

Members considered the draft programme for the training session and made the following points:

- It was felt that the training event should focus on the suggestions for improving Overview and Scrutiny already discussed at the meeting;
- the training session should focus on more advanced issues such as preparing for meetings and questioning techniques and should use evidence from “best practice” authorities.
- in order to generate new ideas Members and Officers from other Councils should be invited to take part in the training session.

### **RESOLVED** That:

- 1) the Member training session be confirmed for the evening of 19 July 2017;
- 2) the training focus on the higher levels skills and techniques which underpin effective Overview and Scrutiny;
- 3) the training utilise role play and “best practice” examples from other Councils;
- 4) Members and Officers from other Councils be invited to attend the training event.

## **11. PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS**

The Committee considered a report, set out on Agenda pages 125 to 130, which gave details of public and Member questions submitted to recent meetings of the Executive and full Council.

Members considered the questions and discussed the value added by this report. Members felt that the reports over the past year had not generated new ideas for inclusion in the Overview and Scrutiny work programme. Consequently it was felt that report should be discontinued.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted, with no further reports on Public and Member Questions to be submitted to the Committee.

## **12. EXECUTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION FORWARD PROGRAMMES**

The Committee considered a copy of the Executive Forward Programme and the Individual Executive Member Decision Forward Programme, as set out on Agenda pages 131 to 140.

An updated version of the Executive Forward Programme (published on 30 May 2017) was circulated to Members.

Members discussed the Forward Programmes and considered any issues suitable for inclusion in the Overview and Scrutiny work programme.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) the Forward Programmes be noted;
- 2) the Local Plan Update (Preferred Options Consultation) item be scrutinised at the July 2017 meeting.

## **13. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING PROGRAMMES 2017/18**

The Committee considered the meeting programmes for scheduled meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, set out on Agenda pages 141 to 156. Amendments to the programmes, as discussed earlier in the meeting, were confirmed.

**RESOLVED:** That the Overview and Scrutiny meeting programmes, as amended, be noted.