

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
HELD ON 18 JULY 2018 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.15 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Parry Batth (Chairman), Andy Croy, Lindsay Ferris, Guy Grandison, Kate Haines, Mike Haines, Ken Miall, Malcolm Richards, Bill Soane and Shahid Younis

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Charlotte Haitham Taylor

Officers Present

Manjeet Gill, Interim Chief Executive
Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist

14. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted by Philip Houldsworth and Ian Pittock.

15. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Committee considered the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2018.

Andy Croy referred to comments he made at the meeting relating to the need for greater focus and urgency on scrutiny of the Wokingham Town Centre Market Place refurbishment.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the inclusion of reference to Councillor Croy's comments on the Market Place refurbishment.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

17. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

18. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

19. LEADER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE UPDATES

Charlotte Haitham Taylor (Leader of the Council) and Manjeet Gill (Interim Chief Executive) attended the meeting to discuss the key issues facing the Council over the next year and the potential for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to add value by providing challenge and support.

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 11 to 17, which contained a set of key lines of enquiry. The key lines of enquiry provided a framework for the discussion and an indication of the areas of interest which the Committee wished to pursue.

Councillor Haitham Taylor and Mrs Gill gave an initial address to the Committee on progress made over the past year and priorities for 2018/19.

Mrs Gill referred to the headlines emerging from the recent Local Government Association (LGA) conference relating to the need for financial resilience. Members were aware of the additional funding provided for the NHS. This was welcomed. However, the provision of extra funding for social care was still not being addressed. All Councils, including WBC, were facing major challenges relating to their financial resilience and their capacity to deliver and/or commission key public services.

Councillor Haitham Taylor referred to the significant growth in demand for social care services – relating to both children and adults. She felt that innovation in local government was reducing somewhat as Councils were forced to focus more and more on the dealing with the challenges in social care.

One of the key messages from the LGA conference was the potential benefits of learning from best practice in other parts of the country. WBC was developing best practice itself through, for example, the development of its own companies such as Optalis and Wokingham Housing Ltd.

Councillor Haitham Taylor gave examples of other success stories over the past year, including:

- The development of 140 affordable homes, the opening of Fosters and 55 Reading Road;
- Progressing the leisure strategy to bring forward new facilities at the Carnival Pool and Bulmershe leisure centre;
- Progress on a Business Rates pilot scheme with the other Berkshire Unitaries;
- Support to the Letwin review into the gap between the number of planning permissions for new homes granted against the number of homes actually built in areas of high demand;
- The development of the £100m investment portfolio aimed at generating new income streams for the Council;

Following the opening statements, Members asked questions using the framework provided by the Key Lines of Enquiry set out in the report.

Key Line of Enquiry 1 – Priorities

Lyndsay Ferris asked about proposals being developed to manage the growing pressures on social care budgets and the potential threat of negative Rate Support Grant (RSG).

Mrs Gill outlined some of the challenges around managing the increase in demand for statutory services for both children and adults. She commented that reviews undertaken as part of the 21st Century change programme had highlighted the fact that all available efficiency savings had already been taken. This meant that the search for more efficiencies ran the risk of making services unsafe. However, a number of actions were under way, including:

- Developing solid foundations by focussing on more effective integration with partners;

- Continuing to lobby local MPs;
- Exploring the potential for more shared services, building on the success of Optalis;
- Increased monitoring of day to day spending to identify emerging pressures.

In relation to the threat of negative RSG, Councillor Haitham Taylor commented that a lobbying session with the Government had taken place earlier that day.

Parry Batth asked about the progress made over the past year in supporting the more deprived areas of the Borough.

Mrs Gill commented on the work of the Health and Wellbeing Board which was the key strategic body working to reduce health inequalities and improve the health and wellbeing of residents across the Borough. She referred to specific projects such as the regeneration of the Gorse Ride housing estate and the development of the new Council Plan which included a focus on tackling inequalities and supporting the more deprived neighbourhoods. It was important to be able to drill down into the available data to understand the key local issues and then be able to target specific initiatives.

Mrs Gill agreed to provide more information to the Committee on the process for developing a better understanding of local issues and the targeted initiatives being undertaken in the Borough's most deprived wards.

Councillor Haitham Taylor commented on the large amount of work going on in schools, with families through the Family First programme, through campaigns such as smoking cessation and through the work of the Health and Wellbeing Board which had a key priority relating to enabling and empowering resilient communities.

Bill Soane asked about the ongoing work with small businesses and shops in towns across the Borough.

Charlotte Haitham Taylor referred to the successful World Café business engagement event and wide range of engagement activities relating to the Wokingham Town Centre regeneration. There was also a focus on engaging with smaller businesses across the Borough. The next business engagement event would seek to engage with smaller businesses and would be exploring ways in which WBC could support the local economy.

Kate Haines asked about the Council's engagement with the business community on initiatives they could undertake to help children leaving care settings, for example through providing apprenticeships.

Councillor Haitham Taylor confirmed that this issue was raised with the business community as part of the ongoing engagement and discussions. Relevant staff would also be involved in future engagement events with businesses across the Borough.

KLOE 2 – 21st Century Council

Councillor Haitham Taylor and Mrs Gill updated the Committee on the Council's 21st Century Council change programme.

Mrs Gill stated that the first two years of the 21st Century Council programme had been about investing in new IT infrastructure and reorganising the Council to reflect the agreed operating model. The next stage would involve embedding the new arrangements and developing the organisational culture to reflect new ways of working and the emerging new Vision and Council Plan.

Lyndsay Ferris asked if, in addition to social care, there were any service areas of the Council which were causing concern.

Mrs Gill stated that the emerging Council Plan would allow Members, in conjunction with partners, to identify and focus on key areas where the increasingly scarce resources should be targeted. In order to succeed the Council would have to become more commercially minded, more outward looking and more able to empower residents to help themselves. The 21st Century Council localities model would help to promote this new approach.

Guy Grandison asked about the ways in which the 21st Century Council programme was developing staff who were able to support residents via a more personalised approach.

Mrs Gill emphasised the quality and commitment of staff working for WBC. She also emphasised the importance of a more consistent approach to customer service and the need to be realistic about what the Council could achieve. It would take time for the organisational culture to change to reflect the 21st Century model.

Parry Batth asked about the concerns relating to the large number of interim managers/ consultants employed by the Council over the past two years.

Mrs Gill referred to progress made in filling key posts such as the shared Director of Adult Social Services with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and the filling of WBC Assistant Director posts on a permanent basis. In some areas it was difficult to fill posts due to the state of the job market. Consequently, the Council was looking at possible solutions with partners and neighbouring authorities. There would also be areas, such as narrowing the gap in educational attainment, where a consultant would be able to provide the step change in progress that was required.

Councillor Haitham Taylor commented on the additional pressures on staff arising out of a major reorganisation such as the 21st Century Council programme. She stated that the Council was committed to holding honest conversations with staff about their roles and with residents about expectations. A key part of the new arrangements was signposting residents to the correct service provider at the earliest opportunity.

Key Line of Enquiry 3 – Council Plan

Councillor Haitham Taylor and Mrs Gill updated the Committee on progress relating to the development of the new Council Plan.

Shahid Younis asked about the ongoing debate on the new Council Plan and the process of engagement with residents about the move to a more enabling role for WBC.

Mrs Gill outlined the way in which the 21st Century Council model had been developed to date and stated that the engagement process for the new Council Plan would be the vehicle used to seek the views of local residents, community groups, the voluntary sector and Town and Parish Councils. It was important that elected Members played a central role in these conversations.

Councillor Haitham Taylor commented that the emerging Council Plan was key to developing a new relationship between the Council and other local stakeholders. It was important that all voices were heard and that the Council Plan was built on clear evidence. The new Council Plan would be submitted to Council for approval early in 2019.

KLOE 4 – Town Centre Regeneration

Councillor Haitham Taylor and Mrs Gill provided an update on the Wokingham Town Centre regeneration programme. The Market Place project was due to be completed in August 2018 with Peach Place on schedule for the end of 2018 and Elms Field scheduled for completion in 2020.

Parry Batth asked about the key risks relating to the Wokingham Town Centre regeneration and how these risks were being managed.

Mrs Gill referred to the Council's Vision for Wokingham including the cultural quarter and the project management arrangements in place to ensure that the various strands of the programme were delivered effectively and key risks were mitigated. Councillor Haitham Taylor commented on the circumstances which had led to the delays in the Market Place project. She also highlighted the strong interest from potential tenants in Peach Place.

Kate Haines referred to the imminent closure of part of the Shute End car park and asked if the alternative entrances to the building had suitable access ramps for wheelchair users.

Mrs Gill undertook to investigate the situation and provide feedback from the Equality Impact Assessment for the project.

Andy Croy referred to access arrangements around the Market Place works and work on the new road linking Wellington Road to Shute End which did not provide suitable access ramps. He asked about arrangements to monitor the town centre works to ensure that accessibility was considered.

Councillor Haitham Taylor stated that Councillor Mirfin would be holding a site visit with Councillor Burgess on 19 July to look at access arrangements in the town centre. Any issues arising would be discussed with the contractors.

Guy Grandison commented that the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be scrutinising the town centre regeneration programme and, as part of the process, would be reviewing the disability access arrangements for the Market Place project.

Lyndsay Ferris asked about the delays in the Market Place works and whether this had resulted in an overspend on the project.

Charlotte Haitham Taylor stated that the project was not yet finished and involved a number of bodies. Consequently the financial outcomes were not yet confirmed.

Mike Haines asked what initiatives the Council was pursuing to attract residents from further afield into Wokingham town centre.

Mrs Gill referred to the emerging Council Plan and the intention to engage with residents from across the Borough. Promoting the improvements in Wokingham town centre would be part of this process. Councillor Haitham Taylor stated that a marketing campaign would be developed for Peach Place in the run up to Xmas 2018.

Andy Croy asked about the potential for including social enterprises within the new town centre facilities in order to help the Borough's more disadvantaged residents.

Councillor Haitham Taylor stated that there would be a mixture of rates for the new units. However, this issue would need to be considered as part of the Council's overall offer to the voluntary sector.

Lyndsay Ferris referred to feedback from businesses in the town centre and the national picture of High Street chains closing or consolidating.

Councillor Haitham Taylor stated that the Council was aware of the national picture. However, there was evidence of strong demand for the units at Peach Place and this included interest from new innovative businesses. The Council's strategy was to develop a different offer to neighbours such as Bracknell and Reading.

KLOE 5 – Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment

Councillor Haitham Taylor and Mrs Gill provided an update on progress made on narrowing the gap in educational attainment between disadvantaged young people and their peers from more affluent backgrounds.

Mrs Gill stated that there had been some progress in narrowing the gap but more needed to be done. In order to drive further progress an expert consultant had been retained to advise the Council.

Shahid Younis asked about the impact on narrowing the gap of more schools becoming academies.

Councillor Haitham Taylor stated that the Council was still responsible for the performance of all the Borough's schools. In relation to academies the Council's role became more about influencing and seeking to promote best practice. Academies were also accountable to Ofsted for their performance.

KLOE 6 – Community Safety and Fear of Crime

Councillor Haitham Taylor and Mrs Gill provided an update on measures taken by the Council and its partners to tackle local pockets of anti-social behaviour across the Borough.

Mrs Gill referred to the refreshed Community Safety Partnership targets which would provide a greater focus on local "hot spots". She commented that Community Safety had

not been one of the key priorities within the previous Council Plan. The new Council Plan would promote prevention and focus on helping residents to help themselves.

Councillor Haitham Taylor referred to the priorities set out by the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner. She felt that the Overview and Scrutiny Committees may wish to look at these priorities and consider whether they matched the priorities of our local communities. In this way Overview and Scrutiny would be able to influence the development of the Community Safety agenda.

Guy Grandison referred to the impact of cybercrime which impacted on a large number of residents and should be included within the Council's prevention agenda.

KLOE 7 – Overview and Scrutiny Work Programmes

Councillor Haitham Taylor and Mrs Gill made suggestions for the future development of Overview and Scrutiny at the Council. These included:

- Developing the Overview and Scrutiny structure to “shadow” the work of Executive Members;
- Undertaking “deep dives” into specific service areas;
- Providing ideas for inclusion in the new Council Plan;
- Scrutinising financial pressures and the delivery of value for money;
- Reviewing best practice in other parts of the country, for example in relation to managing demand for statutory social care services;
- Greater engagement with residents, community groups and the voluntary sector;
- Regular engagement with the Council's Executive to promote greater understanding and cooperation;
- Focussing on the equalities agenda and the Council's commitments under the Equality Act 2010.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Charlotte Haitham Taylor and Manjeet Gill be thanked for attending the meeting to brief the Committee and answer Member questions;
- 2) the Overview and Scrutiny work programmes for 2018/19 be reviewed and amended in light of the challenges and priorities highlighted at the meeting;
- 3) the specific issues relating to the Wokingham Town Centre regeneration programme be considered by the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- 4) Manjeet Gill provide more information to the Committee on targeted work in the Borough's more deprived wards and the Equality Impact Assessment relating to access to the Shute End offices;

- 5) the issues relating to narrowing the gap in educational attainment be considered by the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- 6) the issues relating to the Police and Crime Commissioner's priorities be considered by the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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

The relevant Chairmen provided updates on recent issues considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and future Agenda items.

RESOLVED: That the update reports be noted.

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Chairman
1 August 2018