

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
HELD ON 19 SEPTEMBER 2018 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.40 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Clive Jones and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

Officers Present

Peter Baveystock, Service Manager, Cleaner, Greener and Reactive Highway Services
Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist

36. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted by Lindsay Ferris, Kate Haines, Mike Haines, Philip Houldsworth and Ian Pittock.

Clive Jones and Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey attended the meeting as substitutes.

37. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the extraordinary meetings of the Committee held on 1 August and 3 September 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

38. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

39. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

40. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

41. GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT REVIEW

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 27 to 80, which provided further evidence relating to the Scrutiny review of the Council's Grounds Maintenance contract.

The report reminded Members that the review had commenced at the extraordinary meeting of the Committee on 1 August 2018. At that meeting the Committee had agreed the publication of a "Call for Evidence" in the following terms:

"The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee is undertaking a review of the Council's grass cutting service. The new service commenced in April 2016 and aimed to provide a more flexible service which responded to local needs and priorities. However, there have been a number of complaints about the quality and effectiveness of the service which has led to the review.

The Committee would like to hear the views of residents, Town and Parish Councils and Community Groups about the frequency and quality of grass cutting across the Borough. This could include the timeliness and frequency of cuts, the quality of the work, disposal of

grass cuttings, impact of wildflower areas, information on the Council's website, complaints handling or any other issues".

The Call for Evidence had generated a number of responses from residents, community groups and Town and Parish Councils. The detailed submissions were set out in an Annex to the report.

The Committee also received a further report setting out Officer responses to the Key Lines of Enquiry agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 1 August 2018. The Officer feedback included an extract from the current Grounds Maintenance Contract Specification and details of the consultation exercise conducted in 2014.

In addition to the written evidence included in the Agenda, the Committee received submissions from the following witnesses:

- Councillor Jane Hartley – Charvil Parish Council;
- Peter Baveystock – WBC Service Manager, Cleaner and Greener Services;
- Emma Pilgrim – WBC Performance Officer, Cleaner and Greener Services.

Finally, several Members provided feedback to the Committee following a site visit to the following locations on 18 September 2018:

- Southlake, Woodley;
- Cantley Park, Wokingham;
- Winnersh Meadows, Winnersh.

Peter Baveystock provided some background to the operation of the Grounds Maintenance contract since its go-live in 2016. There were a number of problems in 2016 which related to the start-up process for the new contractor. He stated that the situation was much improved in 2017 with appropriate grass cutting frequencies being achieved and there was a low level of complaints. However, as Members were aware, there had been a number of issues in 2018 which related, in part, to the adverse weather conditions at the start of the grass cutting season and operational issues for the contractor.

Members were also reminded that there had been a change of contractor in 2018 following the buy out of ISS Facility Services Landscaping by Tivoli Group Ltd. Tivoli took over the running of the contract in June 2018. Peter assured Members that lessons had been learnt from the 2018 experience and that discussions were ongoing with Tivoli to ensure that appropriate resources were available in 2019. This included discussions about the inclusion of extra flexibility such as the potential use of grass cutting machinery from Dinton Pastures Country Park.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

There was a lot of public interest and concern about this service and two themes were apparent, the need to encourage biodiversity at the same time as delivering an effective, responsive grass cutting service. It was important to achieve a balance between the two.

It was very important that grass was cut on a regular basis. If the grass was allowed to grow too long there were a number of issues arising when it was finally cut, such as litter collecting within the grass, blocked drains and a generally "scruffy" appearance to the local area.

Was it possible, under the contract, to collect grass cuttings in order to improve the appearance of green spaces? It was confirmed that grass cuttings had never been collected as part of this contract or previous contracts as this would involve a significant extra cost to the Council.

How were complaints handled under the contract? It was confirmed that complaints were forwarded straight to the contractor for resolution. WBC staff were involved if the complaints were not resolved to residents' satisfaction. The CRM Dynamics system was being rolled out and helped to update residents on progress relating to complaints. It was important for residents to use the online complaints system as this generated an audit trail which could be used to monitor the contractor's performance.

In relation to Winnersh Meadows, the area was cut previously but now the weeds were very high which was not helpful to birds or pollinators. Lack of maintenance had also resulted in more ticks and fleas. It was confirmed that discussions would take place with the contractor and the Council's Biodiversity team about the future maintenance of the area.

There was a lot of public concern about grass being allowed to grow long in informal green spaces used for children's play, e.g. kickabouts. It was confirmed that work was ongoing to clarify the areas where grass was allowed to grow longer with the aim of delivering short grass for informal play areas. It would be possible to consider cutting the grass shorter in additional areas but this would need to be considered within current financial constraints of the contract.

As the Grounds Maintenance contract had been procured jointly with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM), was the service delivered in the same manner? It was confirmed that WBC had implemented an output-based contract whereas the RBWM contract was more traditional and prescriptive with closer contract management by RBWM staff. It was noted that RBWM, along with many other Councils, had also suffered problems with the grass cutting service earlier in 2018.

Was it possible to receive more effective weather forecasts which would facilitate more effective service planning and communication with local communities? It was confirmed that the potential for accessing longer term weather forecasts would be investigated.

The Grounds Maintenance contract was worth £800k per annum and did not include financial penalties. It did include a performance bonus which was reduced dependent on actual performance. It was confirmed that details of the financial management of the contract, including the level of bonus payments, would be circulated to Members.

Councillor Jane Hartley (Charvil Parish Council) addressed the Committee and gave details of the issues raised by residents in Charvil. These included requests for greater transparency about grass cutting frequencies, support for the enhancement of biodiversity, concern about the state of the green corridors adjacent to the A4 and specific issues relating to overhanging/encroaching vegetation and branches on pathways near schools.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Jane Hartley, Peter Baveystock and Emma Pilgrim be thanked for attending the meeting and answering Member questions;

- 2) Peter Fry (Tivoli Area Manager) be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee on 17 October 2018;
- 3) Information on the financial management of the Grounds Maintenance contract, including bonus payments, be circulated to Members;
- 4) Discussions at the next meeting focus on the issues and recommendations to be included in the Committee's report to the Council's Executive.

42. Q1 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 81 to 128, which gave details of the 2018/19 Council Plan Performance Monitoring for the first quarter of 2018/19 (April to June).

Louise Griffin, Performance and Programme Management Specialist, attended the meeting to provide additional information and answer Member questions on the report.

The report stated that the performance measures, set out in the annex to the report, were designed to indicate progress in delivering the objectives in the Council Plan. For Quarter 1, 2018/19, the majority of measures were achieving the assigned target. The following performance measures were reported as being "Red" as the quarterly target had not been achieved:

- EA1i – percentage of Wokingham Borough Local Authority maintained primary schools with a current Ofsted rating of Good or better;
- EA2 – percentage of children who attend a Wokingham Borough school (primary, secondary or special) which is rated Good or better;
- EA7 – percentage of infants who received a 6-8 week review by the time they were eight weeks old;
- EA21 (Annual Measure) – Achievement gap between pupils eligible for Free School Meals and all other pupils achieving a strong pass in English and Maths at GCSE;
- VP8 – percentage of child protection visits due in the period which were completed on time (within 10 days of the previous visit).

The report provided contextual information for each of the Red indicators and a summary of the work being undertaken to bring each indicator back on track.

The report also gave details of an indicator which was performing well and the actions undertaken to generate the improved performance. The indicator reported in the first Quarter was EA9 – percentage of children who received a 2/2.5 year review as part of the Healthy Child Programme. The 2/2.5 year review aimed to optimise child development and emotional wellbeing and reduce inequalities. Responsibility for these reviews had transferred from NHS England to local authorities in 2015. Public Health England had reported a 12% improvement in the proportion of 2/2.5 year reviews completed in the Borough post-transfer compared to pre-transfer.

The report gave details of proposed measures aimed at making the performance management information available to Members earlier in the reporting process. This would be achieved by publishing the detailed performance data on the Member Intranet pages. This would allow Members to consider specific indicators well in advance of the quarterly discussions at the Committee.

Finally, the report reminded Members about the ongoing work and public engagement to develop a new five year Borough Plan. In order to support the new Plan, commencing in April 2019, a detailed review and consultation process would be conducted in order to establish robust performance measures which would underpin the Plan. Progress on the new Borough Plan would be reported to the Committee at its November meeting.

In the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points:

- EA1i - Percentage of Wokingham Borough Local Authority maintained primary schools with a current Ofsted rating of "Good" or better.
- EA2 – Percentage of children who attend a Wokingham Borough school (primary, secondary or special) which is "Good" or better.

What were the reasons behind the "Red" indicators? What was the impact of the more challenging Ofsted inspection regime?

- R1/R2/R3 – Update on Regeneration Projects: Peach Place, Elms Field and Carnival Pool Phase 2.

Why was the Wokingham town centre Market Place regeneration not included in the list of key regeneration projects?

- R8 – Number of businesses engaged with on an individual basis.

What type of businesses were engaged with and what did "engagement" entail? Was the Council engaging with business in other towns/cities in order to encourage investment into the Borough?

- House building rates.

Members would like to see data on house building rates against target across the Borough, including affordable housing, over the past five years.

- VP8 – Percentage of child protection visits due in the period which were completed on time (within 10 days of the previous visit).

This indicator was reported as "Red" on a regular basis. The national target was 42 days and WBC achieved 85% of visits within 15 days. Was 10 days an achievable (SMART) target or would the indicator continue to be reported as "Red"?

- In addition to publishing the data on the Members' Intranet, could the information be published on the Council website to enable greater public scrutiny?
- Earlier publication of the performance data would enable Members to formulate questions in advance of the Scrutiny Committee meetings and identify specific Officers who could then be invited to attend to provide additional information.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Louise Griffin be thanked for attending the meeting to answer Member questions;
- 2) Members receive further information on the specific issues and indicators highlighted at the meeting;
- 3) the proposal to publish the performance management data on the Member Intranet pages be supported;
- 4) Officers give further consideration to publishing the detailed performance management reports on the Council's website.

43. CONSIDERATION OF THE CURRENT 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 129 to 140.

RESOLVED: That the Executive and Individual Executive Member Decision Forward Programmes be noted.

44. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES

The Committee considered its forward work programme and that of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees as set out on Agenda pages 141 to 154.

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and other Committee Work Programmes be noted.

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

The Chairmen, or nominated Members from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees provided feedback on recent discussions and presentations received by each Committee.

RESOLVED: That the reports be noted.