

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 24 NOVEMBER 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.33 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Guy Grandison (Chairman), Sam Akhtar, Shirley Boyt, Anne Chadwick, Phil Cunnington, Paul Fishwick, Clive Jones and Alison Swaddle (Vice-Chairman)

Executive Members Present

Councillors: Parry Batth, Pauline Jorgensen, John Kaiser, Stuart Munro, Wayne Smith and Bill Soane (Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Communities)

Officers Present

Christine Bennett (Interim Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development), Richard Bisset (Lead Specialist - Place Clienting), Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist), Mark Cupit (Assistant Director, Delivery & Infrastructure), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Resources & Assets)), Andy Glencross (Assistant Director - Highways and Transport), Marcia Head (Service Manager, Place and Growth), Francesca Hobson (Service Manager – Community, Heritage, Green & Blue Infrastructure), Steve Moore (Interim Director - Place & Growth), Emma Pilgrim (Specialist - Place Clienting), Sally Watkins (Assistant Director Digital & Change) and Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist)

48. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

49. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 October 2021, and the Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Committee held on 3 November 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following points of clarification and minor amendments.

6 October 2021

- Had MPs and Government Ministers been contacted regarding a fair funding settlement for Wokingham Borough Council (WBC)? Response – John Redwood, Theresa May and James Sunderland had been contacted, and a letter was being drafted with regards to adult social care funding. The Borough’s MPs had also spoken to Ministers including Michael Gove, and further representations were being made.
- Were the proposed bids not inclusive of any potential costs relating to materials or labour? Response – The proposed bids were a ‘lockdown one’ version, which was consistent with the original summary presented to the Committee in July. Any changes as a result of the Local Government Finance Settlement would be taken back to the Committee at a later date.
- Agenda page 12, bullet point 7 should read “Had meaningful discussions taken place with the police with regards to antisocial behaviour, and the move of this aspect of the service back in-house? Officer response – Discussions ~~had been had with the police since the beginning of this process~~ **with the police were beginning to take place**, and discussions had also taken place with the Community Safety Partnership...”

3 November 2021

- Addition of the following comment into minute item 45 “Members commented that the inclusion of the full report reviewing the BME Forum would have been invaluable to aid the scrutiny of this item.”
- Addition to minute item 46 as follows “The financial consequences if the Government’s Adult Social Care reforms were unknown until the white paper was published early 2022, **however the financial implications on WBC could total £20m.**”
- More detail regarding the impacts on WBC regarding the delay of the special educational needs school in Winnersh would be sought. It was commented that the DfE had been overoptimistic regarding delivery of this project, as now the project would not be delivered until at least Easter 2022. The DfE would assess costs and WBC would submit alternate arrangements and associated costs to the DfE for recompense.
- Addition to the final bullet point of minute item 46 as follows: “The Executive Member, Director, and all staff within the service were thanked for all of their hard work in retaining staff and keeping social workers with the same children. **Special thanks were extended to Carol Cammiss for all of her hard work and effort as the Director of Children’s Services since 2018, and the Committee extended their best wishes to her as she moved on to work at a different Local Authority.**”

50. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

51. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

52. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

53. VEGETATION MAINTENANCE

The Committee considered a presentation, set out in agenda pages 25 to 30, which gave an update on vegetation maintenance in the Borough.

The presentation outlined the different maintenance contracts, primarily the ground maintenance contract with Tovali Group Ltd, the highways reactive maintenance contract with Volker Highways, and the street cleansing contract with Volker Highways which was sub-contracted to Urbaser Ltd. The clienting model was under review, whilst the highways contract had been realigned. The next steps for these contracts included an improved reporting system and integration, map accessibility for residents, and a dedicated officer to be focussed on grounds maintenance and street cleansing.

Richard Bisset (Lead Specialist, Place Clienting), Andy Glencross (Assistant Director – Highways), Steve Moore (Interim Director – Place & Growth), and Emma Pilgrim (Specialist – Place Clienting) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

During the ensuing discussions, Members raised the following points and queries:

- What more could be done to clarify which areas were deliberately designated as wilding areas, and which were in need of maintenance? Officer response – Officers were working with the Trees and Biodiversity Task and Finish Group to develop a clear plan to allow residents to know which areas were designated for wilding, and which were not.
- Could a page be placed on the Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) website or within the Borough News which outlined kerbside maintenance schedules? Officer response – Officers agreed that this was an issue for residents, and the past year had seen difficulties with weed spraying and officers were adjusting the timings for next year to prevent as many issues regarding this.
- Members commented that clearing the growth on the side of carriageways prior to the growing season commencing could help with some of the recurring issues associated with weed growth.
- Was the page on the website detailing when a road had been cleaned automatically updated, rather than manually updated by an officer once it was confirmed that the cleaning had taken place? Executive Member and officer response – Yes, the page updated on the day of the scheduled clean to state that the clean had taken place. Street cleaning was a very important issue, and if soil and debris were not swept up quickly it would lead to germination and the spread of weeds. The contract in place was of high quality, and the team was doing great work to reduce the likelihood of vegetation occurring in the first place. It could be that telling residents about the expected frequency of cleansing particular roads rather than naming specific dates would be more useful for all parties.
- Could vegetation maintenance become more proactive so that some sites would not be required to be repeatedly reported, and instead added to a schedule for maintenance? Officer response – Historically there had been issues with mapping highway hedges, which was now being proactively worked on to programme works over the winter period. Sites which had been reported over the past, including cycle ways, would be maintained over the winter period to reduce issues within the growing season. An aspect of reactive work was still expected in the summer due to the levels of growth experienced, however officers wanted to do as much works as possible during the winter period outside of the bird nesting season to prevent reoccurring issues where possible.
- It was commented that cycleway maintenance should be a priority to ensure that cyclists had enough room to use the routes safely.
- How were highway inspections and the enforcement of private hedges under the Highways Act 1980 processed by the highway inspection team? Officer response – When a report came in and was identified as private vegetation, the contractor would investigate and send a letter out to the resident. Should no improvement be received, this would be passed on to the highways asset team who could enforce if required.
- Did highway inspectors pick up on any issues with WBC vegetation and feed-back for processing? Officer response – If highways inspectors identified vegetation in need of maintenance as being WBC owned, works would be issued to the grounds maintenance contractors to cut back the vegetation.

- What did place clienting mean? Interim Director response – This encompassed contract management, compliance issues, and looked at where the service could be made more efficient and where improvements could be made.
- If a resident raised a request for private vegetation, however the occupier of the property was a tenant and not the owner, how would the request be processed? Officer response – A letter would be sent to the property regardless of whether it was rented accommodation or not, and if the owner did not respond then ultimately WBC would make direct contact with the owner. In a small number of cases once communications had been exhausted, WBC would eventually carry out the works to the private vegetation and then invoice the owner of the property for the works.
- Were there any plans to change the types of herbicide used to be more environmentally friendly and to encourage biodiversity? Interim Director response – This would be a decision for Members, as a number of authorities who had moved away from herbicide use had returned to the use of herbicides due to the numbers of complaints received. This was a budgetary issue as much as an environmental issue, as many alternative methods would incur substantial additional costs.
- What was being done to link up the two separate reporting systems? Officer response – Officers were working with IT to link the two systems, which should be completed by April 2022.
- What was environmental localities? Officer response – This was the enforcement team which dealt with issues such as fly tipping. In order to continue to improve the customer journey, two additional contract monitoring officers were proposed to be employed to increase the proactivity of the service.
- Had contract monitoring officers been employed within the service in the past? Officer response – This aspect had previously been carried out by the environmental localities team, however priorities had shifted during the pandemic.
- What were the typical Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for carrying out maintenance? Officer response – SLAs differed between street cleansing and grounds maintenance, and street maintenance varied between roads dependent on their usage. Grounds maintenance varied dependent on the priority of each area. Officers were committed to get the right services in the right areas.
- If an issue was not reported, how might this be picked up? Director response – There was a proactive schedule in place, which was being enhanced by GIS mapping. Officers did not want to rely only on reports, and more resources and equipment had been given to the contract for next year to try and stay ahead of many issues.
- Could residents be given additional garden waste bags where they went out of their way to trim WBC vegetation? Officer response – Officers supported community minded individuals, however it would be difficult to offer additional bags as it would be hard to ascertain where vegetation waste originated from. Where officers were informed of a community event taking place a collection service could be organised.
- Whose responsibility was it to collect leaf fall in residential gardens from WBC trees? Officer response – It was not the responsibility of a tree owner to clear leaf fall from

neighbouring properties. Residents had the right to cut back trees to their property boundary, bearing in mind any tree preservation orders.

- Did reports from the “Fix my street” app come through to WBC, did residents receive an incident number, and was an in-house app for WBC in the works? Officer response – Reports from “Fix my street” came through to the customer service teams, and then sent to the relevant service area. This process was a bit slower than direct reports to WBC, and the customer was not always re-contacted. Officers would speak with IMT with regards to any plans for an in-house app.
- What did the team need from Members and residents in order to receive more data? Officer response – Officers would encourage any Borough resident to report issues when they were noticed, to build a bigger pool of data.
- Members requested that the service return during the growing season to assess progress made, and to review the streamlining of the reporting system.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Richard Bisset, Andy Glencross, Steve Moore, and Emma Pilgrim be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) Officers explore the possibility of developing a WBC app for reporting vegetation and street cleansing issues;
- 3) The service return to update the Committee in the growing season of 2022 to assess progress made, and to review the streamlining of the reporting system.

54. MTFP 2022-25 - COMMUNITIES, INSIGHT & CHANGE; RESOURCES & ASSETS; AND PLACE & GROWTH PROPOSED CAPITAL AND REVENUE BIDS

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 31 to 168, which set out the revenue and capital bids for the Directorates encompassing Communities, Insight and Change, Place and Growth, and Resources and Assets.

Due to time constraints, the Committee only considered the proposed revenue and capital bids for the Place and Growth Directorate. The proposed bids for the remaining Directorates would be considered at a future meeting of the Committee.

Parry Bath (Executive Member for Environment and Leisure), Pauline Jorgensen (Executive Member for Highways and Transport), John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing), Wayne Smith (Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement), Bill Soane (Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Communities), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Resources and Assets), Steve Moore (Interim Director – Place and Growth), Mark Cupit (Assistant Director, Delivery & Infrastructure), Andy Glencross (Assistant Director – Highways), Richard Bisset (Senior Specialist – Place Clienting), Marcia Head (Service Manager – Place and Growth), and Francesca Hobson (Service Manager – Community, Heritage, Green and Blue Infrastructure) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

It was noted that many of the bids were returning bids from previous years' Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) versions.

During the ensuing discussions, Members raised the following points and queries:

- In relation to PG R1, optimise parking income, a Member expressed disappointment that the proposed increase of parking charges and benchmarking from other Councils were not included within the agenda pack.
- In relation to PG R1, optimise parking income, were there registered risks in case the budgeted income was not achieved? Executive Member and Interim Director response – Parking income was slowly recovering, with footfall back to normal levels within the town centres, however car parking was yet to reach pre-pandemic levels. The Denmark Street car park was now larger, and therefore there was potential for additional income from that car park. It was extremely difficult to forecast parking revenue, and supplementary estimates would be taken back to the Executive if required. The general fund balance included a comprehensive risk analysis, and would be available if necessary to cover any shortfall.
- What was the timeframe for the parking revenue recovery plan, and would there be an opportunity to scrutinise this plan once it was ready? Officer response – This was part of a wider piece of work which was being prepared and was hoped to be completed by the middle of 2022, and there were currently no envisaged issues with the plan being reviewed by the Committee when appropriate.
- In relation to PG R3, additional civil parking enforcement operatives, would the additional resource remain only on-street to tackle road safety issues, and how had the predicted additional income been calculated? Executive Member response – Civil parking enforcement was a cost neutral service of which income was ring-fenced. The additional resource would be used to target problem areas across the Borough. The predicted income was assessed on the current civil parking enforcement officers' work.
- In relation to PG R4, income from park and ride sites, did the predicted income include any predicted income from the Thames Valley Park and Ride? Executive Member response – The Thames Valley Park and Ride was going to be used to supplement the Winnersh Park and Ride during the extension of the Winnersh Park and Ride. Opportunities were being explored in relation to improve the park and ride usage and network via different usage of buses.
- Where would additional civil parking enforcement operatives be deployed? Executive Member and Interim Director response – The additional operatives would be deployed in a variety of problem areas around the Borough including specific schools. Operatives were deployed in areas where the local community had asked for support, and these were mostly areas where there were safety issues.
- In relation to PG R4, what was the predicted income of each park and ride site? Officer response – Robust estimates had been used including an element of expected recovery of the park and ride sites from the pandemic, and the current estimates predicted the park and ride sites to be cost neutral. A more detailed answer would be provided in writing.
- When considering PG R1 and R4 together, car parking income and park and ride income, additional income was expected to be at the level of £1.1m over three years. Was this achievable? Interim Director response – Parking income had near enough recovered to pre-pandemic levels, and the town centre income had recovered very

well. The proposed bids were working on the data available currently. In addition, three new park and ride sites were due to open which would provide part of this additional income.

- Had the previously suggested idea of allowing monthly payment for the garden waste bin been considered, to encourage more residents to recycle? Executive Member and officer response – The demand for garden waste bins had increased across the Borough from residents with a wide variety of different backgrounds. Officers would look at the possibility of a monthly charge option, for example via direct debit.
- In relation to PG R5 and R6, increase in cost of garden waste bins and increased recycling capture rate, had potential delays been factored into the predicted income? Executive Member response – Existing customers would see the increased charges from 1st June 2022, whilst new customers would pay the increased price from April 2022.
- Had a small discount to provision of a second bin for garden waste been considered? Interim Director and officer response – This option could be explored by officers, however the existing charge of £70 included collection and disposal of materials, and was benchmarked across the area.
- Had benchmarking of garden waste collection been benchmarked across the Berkshire Authorities as well as Hart Council? Officer response – Local benchmarking had been carried out with neighbouring authorities. Bracknell and Reading charged slightly less than Wokingham Borough Council (WBC), however they had a smaller number of vehicles going out and less operating costs. The charges for Bracknell and Reading would be sought for Members.
- In relation to PG R6, food waste diversion and increased recycling capture, what were the low performing areas, and was the £350k saving achievable? Interim Director and officer response – Some streets and neighbourhoods were not participating as fully as others, and uptake needed to be as high as possible. Those areas which were not participating as fully were being mapped and given extra support to encourage participation. There were potential savings of £1m per annum via encouraging residents to move food waste from blue bags to food caddies, and therefore the proposed saving of £350k per annum was very realistic.
- Would communications relating to which items should be recycled and how be circulated in a number of different languages to include as many residents as possible? Officer response – This was an equalities and accessibility issue, and this was a key point which would be looked at via some of the funding that had been secured from an outside organisation.
- Could a breakdown be provided for PG R10, meeting operating costs of park and ride sites? Executive Member response – This would be provided as a written answer.
- Members commented that it was very positive to see additional posts being bid for within the traffic management team.
- It was noted that PG R12, permanent staffing for Development Management and Enforcement Team, and PG R27, temporary staffing for Development Management

and Enforcement Team, should be considered together. In future, bids such as this would have a note referencing their accompanying bid.

- In relation to PG R13, re-grading of existing posts within Development Management and Enforcement, how close were WBC graduate salaries compared to competing Local Authorities such as Hillingdon? Officer response – Graduates started on Grade 6, approximately £25,000, and could move up to a maximum salary of £32,910 at the top of Grade 7. Other Local Authorities were being closely monitored, and it may be that next year a bid may be put in to increase the potential career grade to Grade 8, as a lot of time and effort was put in to training up staff and WBC did not want them to walk away once they hit their career grade ceiling.
- In relation to PG R12, permanent staffing for Development Management and Enforcement Team, was demand for pre-planning advice and planning applications expected to continue to rise? Executive Member response – Pre planning, planning, and commercial planning applications had risen unexpectedly last year, and there had been a further upturn this year. The data was not suggesting that this trend would slow down or reverse for the time being.
- In relation to bid PG R19, Community Safety, what was the additional funding going towards? Interim Director response – This would go towards 1.5 full time equivalent staffing to deliver the community safety action plan.
- In relation to PG R20, temporary accommodation, was the £350k sufficient considering the red RAG status? Executive Member response – A commitment had been made to keep homeless off of the Borough's streets. Should the proposed funding not be sufficient, officers could bring supplementary estimates for consideration.
- In relation to PG R21, Local Transport Plan 4 and Delivery Plan, could the plan be adapted in future? Executive Member and Interim Director response – This plan was kept in line with the Local Plan Update, and the best practice was to review both plans every five years.
- It was noted that the both PG R23 and PG R25, enforcement and planning appeals, should be read together.
- It was noted that the supporting evidence for PG R26 should be updated in future as it was currently a hyperlink, and the briefing note would be provided to the Committee.
- In relation to PG R23, development management appeals, what was WBC's position regarding the five year land supply? Executive Member response – WBC was still at 5.23 years of land supply, however reserve sites would have to be considered should this level be reduced further. The consultation for the updated Local Plan had been launched, which would address the issue of land supply within the Borough once a new Local Plan had been agreed.
- To help with comparison in relation to PG R23 and PG R25, appeals and enforcement, how many enforcement notices had been issued this year? Officer response – Nine notices had been served this year, and six more were likely before the end of the financial year. Most cases ended up at an appeal and a public enquiry.

- With regards to the bid for an ecology officer (note: this bid was under the £50k limit for an associated bid sheet), could additional details be given regarding this proposed post? Officer response – This was a special item for an additional officer to support the existing team and to respond to the Environment Bill over the next few years. Grant funding was likely to arrive for this post in future, however this bid would provide the immediate funding required to pay for the proposed post.
- In relation to PG R30, reintegration of the Public Protection Partnership, did this expenditure include any “divorce” settlement? Executive Member response – This bid did not include any such figures, which would hopefully be known in December. Currently, many staff had transferred over to WBC and the process was taking place smoothly. If an update on this figure materialised, this could be updated at the January meeting of the Committee.
- In relation to the managing congestion bid (note: this bid was a carryover from the previously agreed MTFP), had the spending been reduced? Officer response – This was a re-profiling as the initial expected pace of expenditure had changed. The overall spend (£20m) had not changed, however it would now be spread out over a longer period of time.
- In relation to PG C1, structural maintenance, with the expenditure remaining equal each year, would this result in less works being carried out due to rising costs? Executive Member and officer response – The budget for road repairs was split amongst several different areas. Additional funding, including Government funding, had been added to the overall budget, and there was no intention to reduce the overall maintenance budget.
- In relation to the previous bid for the highways infrastructure flood alleviation schemes (note: this was an agreed bid from a previous year), was this in relation to a specific scheme or a number of schemes? Officer response – The main amount of this funding was going towards reducing flooding at the Showcase roundabout, and a scheme was being developed south of the M4 to reduce flood risk on Lower Earley Way and the Showcase roundabout.
- In relation to PG C2, Earley station footbridge replacement, did this include an option for lifts at the footbridge and access to the London bound carriageway? Officer response – Currently the bid did not include a ramp to the London bound carriageway. Lifts had not been costed yet, and when the project reached that stage then this would be looked at.
- In relation to PG C8, A327 cycleway, why was the project requiring an additional £400k funding up to a total project cost of £1m? Officer response – More detail would be provided in writing.
- In relation to PG C6, local cycling and walking infrastructure plans (LCWIP), what would happen once the funding ceased? Executive Member and officer response – The funding from Central Government was uncertain, and this bid covered WBC for two years’ worth of delivery, and additional bids for year three could be expected in the future.
- It was agreed that the list of capital projects that included cycling and walking infrastructure investment would be circulated to the Committee.

- Did WBC make money from electric vehicle charging within the Borough? Executive Member and officer response – A commercial agreement was arranged with operators to achieve a cost neutral service, and possibly to generate income.
- In relation to PG C7, electric vehicle charging points, how many additional charging points would this funding provide? Officer response – This was a very immature market, and a pilot project was underway to provide around 70 charging points for approximately £240k of funding. The market may change in future years which could reduce costs.
- Were there different costs between “slow” and “fast” electric vehicle charging points? Officer response – The power supply used for on-street supplies usually came from lamp posts, and as a result these tended to be slower “trickle” charges. The infrastructure would require an overhaul to facilitate faster on-street charging.
- Had Scottish and Southern Electric been approached to ensure the additional 70 electric vehicle charging points could be facilitated? Officer response – The National Grid had presented to officers a year ago, and they were confident that the network could cope with “trickle” charging, and it was adoption of “fast” charging that could present an issue.
- What was SCAPE? Executive Member and officer response – This was the funding to deliver the major SDL roads.
- In relation to PG C17, greenways, why was the programme changing significantly? Officer response – One of the main routes planned for this project had been required to change due to resident feedback, despite previous consultations not indicating any such issues. The scheme would be delayed until further conversations had taken place with residents and the residents’ association, and amended plans could be taken forward.
- In relation to PG C19, feasibility case for developing new crematorium, what was the status of this? Executive Member response – A number of capital projects may be removed in future iterations of the bid process due to costings. Should this be the case, an explanation would be provided at the time.
- In relation to PG C14, Civica system, could more detail be provided with regards to this? Interim Director response – This was the IT software required for the new WBC enforcement safety colleagues including tablets and remote access software.
- In relation to PG C18, sports provision to serve North and South Wokingham SDLs, had thought been given to the types of facilities to be included? Officer response – Originally an outdoor only facility was considered, however indoor use was now also being considered. Much of the work of the newly recruited master planners would be to assess the requirements of the communities which would be served by these facilities.
- Why was the public rights of way network seeing significant change (note: this was not included within this years’ bid sheets)? Officer response – This was funding for the Loddon long distance path, which would run from Swallowfield up to the north of the Borough parallel to the River Loddon. The issue was that some of the land required

was privately owned, and therefore the permission of the landowners was required. Some serious issues in terms of landowner negotiations had been realised, and officers were working towards solutions and hoped to progress this within the coming year.

At this point in the meeting, a motion was proposed, seconded, and carried to extend the meeting to a maximum finish time of 11pm.

At this point of the meeting, it was agreed to defer the remaining directorates to the meeting of the Committee on 13 December 2021. It was suggested by a Member that points of clarification be sent to officers in advance to alleviate time constraints on the evening.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Parry Batth, Pauline Jorgensen, John Kaiser, Wayne Smith, Bill Soane, Graham Ebers, Steve Moore, Mark Cupit, Andy Glencross , Richard Bisset, Marcia Head, and Francesca Hobson be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) The remaining two directorates capital and revenue bids be considered at the December meeting of the Committee, and Executive Members and officers associated with these directorates be thanked for their patience at this meeting;
- 3) A written answer be provided with regards to the income projected for each park and ride site, and the associated operating costs of each site;
- 4) Officers explore the option of offering green waste bins on a monthly payment model, splitting costs over a calendar year;
- 5) The Committee be provided with the charges for green waste collection services from both Bracknell Forest Council and Reading Borough Council;
- 6) The briefing note relating to PG R26, increase in planning application fee income, be circulated to the Committee;
- 7) Information be sought with regards to the project cost increase for the A327 cycleway;
- 8) The list of capital projects within the proposed capital programme relating to walking and cycling infrastructure be provided to the Committee.

55. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered their work programme, set out in agenda pages 169 to 172.

It was noted that the agenda for the January 2022 Committee meeting may be required to be shortened to allow time to consider any changes to budgetary proposals following the outcome of the Local Government Finance Settlement at the end of 2021.

It was noted that a potential additional meeting in February 2022 may be required to consider upcoming items.

RESOLVED That the work programme be noted.