

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 13 DECEMBER 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.25 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Guy Grandison (Chairman), Sam Akhtar, Clive Jones and Jackie Rance (Substitute)

Committee Members in Attendance Virtually

Councillors: Shirley Boyt, Anne Chadwick, and Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey (Substitute)

Executive Members Present

Councillors: Parry Bath (Executive Member for Environment and Leisure), John Halsall (Leader of the Council), John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing), Stuart Munro (Executive Member for Business and Economic Development) and Gregor Murray (Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions)

Officers Present

Christine Bennett (Interim Assistant Director HR & OD), Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Resources and Assets)), Nick Spencer (Digital Delivery and PMO Manager), Sally Watkins (Assistant Director Digital & Change), Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist) and Jackie Whitney (Head of Customer Delivery)

56. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Alison Swaddle, Paul Fishwick, and Phil Cunnington.

Jackie Rance attended the meeting as a substitute for Alison Swaddle, and Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey attended the meeting as a substitute for Paul Fishwick.

Shirley Boyt, Anne Chadwick, and Rachelle Shepherd Dubey attended the meeting virtually, and were therefore marked as in attendance, and they were not able to propose, second, or vote on items.

57. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24 November 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the third bullet point on agenda page 6 being amended to state “until at least Easter 2023”.

58. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

59. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

60. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

61. MTFP 2022-25: PROPOSED CAPITAL AND REVENUE BIDS FOR THE COMMUNITIES, INSIGHT AND CHANGE AND RESOURCES AND ASSETS DIRECTORATES

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 17 to 84, which set out the revenue and capital bids for the Directorates encompassing Communities, Insight and Change, and Resources and Assets.

Parry Bath (Executive Member for Environment and Leisure), John Halsall (Leader of the Council), John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing), Stuart Munro (Executive Member for Business and Economic Development), Gregor Murray (Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions), Christine Bennett (Assistant Director for HR and OD), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Resources and Assets)), Nick Spencer (Digital Delivery and PMO Manager), Sally Watkins (Assistant Director Digital & Change), and Jackie Whitney (Head of Customer Delivery) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

It was noted that a large deal of uncertainty remained with regards to a number of the bids, and some of the bids were subject to change in the coming weeks once the Local Government Finance Settlement had been received. Officers commented that they would endeavour to hit the required deadlines for the Committee meeting scheduled on 5th January 2022 if possible, and added that any questions submitted from Members in advance of the meeting would be useful to assist in the provision of more in-depth answers on the evening.

Communities, Insight, and Change

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

- In relation to bid CIC R6, ReCustomer App for Council Tax and selected services, what were the potential benefits of this app? Assistant Director response – The service was keen to understand best practice from a number of other Authorities to see the benefits from a customer perspective. As such, the bid was placed for 2023/24 to allow time for detailed research and benchmarking.
- With regards to the proposed paperless Borough News, had the potential impacts on some residents been taken into account? Assistant Director response – This bid was included within the first version of proposals, but following further consideration this bid would be withdrawn due to certain negative impacts to residents.
- In relation to bid CIC R2, Land Charges shortfall in income, could this bid be explained further? Deputy Chief Executive response – The ongoing expectancy was that there would be a shortfall in land charge fees. As such, a growth bid was being proposed to eliminate the unachievable level of the income stream.
- In relation to bids CIC R3 and R10, implementation of new HR target operating model, what was the growth portion of this bid aiming to achieve? Assistant Director response – The revenue bid was for the increased baseline within the HR budget to deliver services for internal customers, with a strong leadership team enabling an improved delivery of HR functions. The special item was to provide transitional posts to support changes in the interim period, which would tail off in 2023/24. It was noted that the description of the two bids was the same, which would be clarified in future versions.

- In relation to bid CIC R1, additional people resources across Customer Delivery, were the proposed additional 7 staff enough to deal with the increasing call volumes? Executive Member and officer response – The service had seen an approximate 20 percent increase in calls in 2020/21, as the service had always been open to residents. The proposed additional posts was what was believed to be affordable at present, and if a subsequent enhancement was required at a later date then the service could place a supplementary estimate request to the Executive.
- In relation to CIC R6, ReCustomer App for Council Tax and selected services, what did the red RAG status represent? Executive Member response – There was uncertainty as to whether the app would be required as it was limited only to Council Tax, and officers would be researching best practice at a number of other Local Authorities prior to making any final decisions.
- In relation to CIC C1, Microsoft E5, why was this being placed as a capital bid rather than as an ongoing revenue cost? Assistant Director response – Whilst this was not a new bid there was the opportunity to capitalise the license and the service had chosen to do so. This would allow best use to be made of revenue costs in other areas.
- In relation to bid CIC R11, Equalities and Anti-Poverty Communication and Engagement, what would the additional expenditure buy in terms of staff and expertise? Assistant Director response – This expenditure would provide additional resource and support to work with the community and staff around equality and diversity via fixed term contract resource.
- In relation to bids CIC R4 and R10, implementation of new HR target operating model, Members noted that it was good to see additional investment within HR. Should these bids not be successful, would that mean that the negatives outlined within the bid were currently occurring, and would continue to do so? Executive Member and Assistant Chief Executive Response - As a result of the pandemic, HR had seen increased challenge and workload including a number of complex issues. As a result, investment was proposed to meet the challenge that the service was now facing, to meet the needs of internal customers.
- It was commented that bid CIC R5, new content management system, was a very sensible decision.
- In relation to bid CIC R7, revenue support for Capital Bids (telephony, security, fibre, and IDS), it was commented that it was very good to see these systems being upgraded. How old were the current systems? Executive Member response – Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) was always at risk from attacks from a variety of sources, however no major breaches had occurred. This bid was about future-proofing systems as attacks would only get more sophisticated whilst legislation became more complicated.
- In relation to bid CIC R8, budget required to deliver sustainable organisational change, why was the growth bid only proposed from 2024/25? Assistant Chief Executive Response – This was currently being funded via a special item, however a permanent growth bid would better reflect that continuous improvement was now hardwired into the organisation.

- In relation to bid CIC R11, Equalities and Anti-Poverty Communication and Engagement, a Member commented that it was good to see this investment. However, could WBC afford to only have these posts as fixed term contracts? Executive Member response – This bid would set up the process and model, rather than actually carrying out the function, to become a core part of how WBC operated.
- In relation to bid CIC R12, budget required to deliver sustainable organisational change, how would this funding be spent as the proposed spend was quite substantial? Assistant Chief Executive and Assistant Director response – The first two years would attract significant expenditure, whilst the resource would be heavily reduced in 2023/24. The funding would introduce a change gateway, which would promote innovation, savings, partnership working, and digital improvement across the organisation.
- In relation to bid CIC R7, revenue support for Capital Bids (telephony, security, fibre, and IDS), it was commented that it was great to see investment in this area. Were legacy telephone systems proposed to be moved to MS Teams? Assistant Director response – Teams telephony would replace on-premises infrastructure via moving to voice-over-IP (VOIP) to allow MS Teams to be used to make and receive phone calls.
- In relation to bid CIC R11, Equalities and Anti-Poverty Communication and Engagement, this was the second year of the Equality Strategy and as such it was surprising to see another special item rather than a growth bid. In addition, it was commented that it was slightly concerning to see both equalities and anti-poverty placed together, rather than having separate bids and aims. Assistant Director response – The cross-party working group recognised the need to strengthen the equalities program and embed it within the organisation. The funding would sufficiently cover both aspects of the bid, however the feedback regarding placing both aspects together would be taken on-board.
- In relation to bid CIC R12, budget required to deliver sustainable organisational change, what had been learnt from previous change programmes? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – Change was often about making mistakes and improving upon them with innovation and boldness. The key learning point was to ensure that the governance and resource structure was in place to enable learning and delivery to embrace the ongoing approach of continuous improvement within the organisation. Previously, some change had been under-resourced, and it was important to enact change that worked for the organisation rather than making changes which were simply quick and speedy. Change was about investing in the organisation to embed good practice, rather than looking for short-term wins.
- In relation to the proposed smart phone refresh, was this bid to enable staff to take advantage of the new features within the Microsoft E5 licence? Assistant Director response – Capital was always built into hardware purchases as hardware was required to be periodically refreshed to take advantage of new functions and to ensure that the handsets were up to date and running on supported versions for security purposes.
- In relation to bid CIC C2, IMT Infrastructure; Networks & Security, was the proposed spend of £1m sufficient? Assistant Director response – WBC were always investing to ensure that our IT provision was resilient and secure, and the Head of IT at WBC supported the bid.

- In relation to bid CIC C3, IMT devices, how many new devices would the expenditure provide? Assistant Director response – This funding would provide for approximately 200-300 devices to be replaced per annum on a rolling basis, in line with industry best practice.

Resources and Assets

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

- In relation to bid RA R2, income generation in excess of financing costs (commercial properties), how much would be required to be spent to achieve the £700k income, what was the current interest rate for the public works loan board and how did this compare to three years ago? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – The interest rate for the public works loan board long term loans was 2%, which was very comparable when compared to the past few years. The £700k was not necessarily going to be the projected income in the next version of the bids for various reasons, including the market being oversaturated. Should the projected income be lower, then the associated borrowing would also fall. Opportunities, for example with solar panels, would be looked at more closely where there were both significant opportunities to make a return and to enhance WBC's climate emergency agenda.
- In relation to bid RA R3, rationalisation process of corporate accommodation, what were the potential reasons behind the amber RAG status? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – The savings proposed within year one were likely to be more than achievable, however should the pandemic require some of the existing outlier accommodation to be retained then this could impact savings. WBC were currently in the process of undertaking the workplace reimagined project, however this had not been completed yet. As an organisation, there was a desire to move towards a more technologically driven model to enable cost and carbon savings.
- In relation to bid RA R4, contracts and commissioning reviews, which contracts were expected to deliver savings? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – These savings were being delivered across a variety of contracts across WBC. Extra resource was being added to the procurement team to support the contract management process based on CIPFA best practice. There was a fair level of confidence that the savings of £250k could be delivered, however savings for future years could be impacted due to inflation and rising costs for contractors.
- In relation to bid RA R2, income generation in excess of financing costs (commercial properties), it was noted that the proposed savings were subject to change in future versions. In addition, this was the tail end of a programme of savings delivered over previous financial years.
- In relation to bid RA R5, delivery intention of 1000 homes over four years at 5 percent, why was the income projected to remain constant over the three years? Deputy Chief Executive response – A relative degree of caution was being applied to this bid due to the changing landscape of construction and housing delivery, and as such the income target had not been added to, over and above the base amount.
- In relation to bid RA R7, benefit realisation from commercial activities, where was the projected income coming from? Deputy Chief Executive response – This figure used to

be for £300k, and there were now specific targets within the leisure portfolio, for example the new boxing hub and proposed outdoor gym. The remaining £153k was the remaining income which was required to be found across all other possible commercial activities.

- In relation to bid RA R11, development of a sustainable procurement service, was this an expected one off cost? Deputy Chief Executive response – The bid was in place to fund additional resource in year one and to retain the resource on an ongoing basis. The savings provided by the additional resource were expected to cover the costs of the bid.
- In relation to bid RA R10, Internal Audit and Investigation redesign to set up an in-house service with external clients, who were the external clients? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – WBC did work for three other Local Authorities, and the success of this work was a testament to the quality of our Audit team. There was a desire to strengthen and improve our internal Audit team further, to enable even more regular reporting across the organisation and to provide additional resilience.
- In relation to bid RA R5, delivery intention of 1000 homes over four years at 5 percent, was the amber RAG status a result of increasing construction costs? Executive Member response – Yes, however the hope was that the overall delivery of the project would not be put in jeopardy. WBC had the land and the customers, however even affordable homes were out of reach for many. Therefore, the possibility to deliver increased levels of social housing were being explored.
- In relation to bid RA R14, decrease in uptake of schools kitchen contract, could further information be provided? Executive Member response – The uptake had seen a reduction over time, however there were a core of families using the service to get a good hot meal each day, whilst a particular focus was being placed on primary aged children.
- In relation to the bid for Member laptops, was there a need for this? Executive Member response – This bid had been in situ for a number of years and would be progressed, for example, should Members require WBC laptops for security purposes.
- In relation to bid RA R6, early repayment programme, could more detail be provided? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – The programme was doing well, and it was about building strong payment processes across the system whilst being clear about costings. The programme enabled WBC to build a premium supplier list to be paid sooner than their standard terms with a built in saving, and the service was confident that the proposed savings could be achieved. The programme had saved approximately £60k during the last year, and once fully implemented was expected to deliver between £200k and £250k per year.
- In relation to bid RA R8, boxing hub, were the projected income figures of £330k per annum achievable? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – The hub was still in the mobilisation stage, for example offering free classes, and the figures were subject to change in the next version of the bids.
- In relation to bid RA R10, Internal Audit and Investigation redesign to set up an in-house service with external clients, was there anything within the contract to allow cost

recovery from RBWM? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – This was doubtful as RBWM were acting within the bounds of the contract, and this bid was proposed to fill the gap whilst the in-house service was finalised.

- In relation to bid RA C1, community investment, how was the proposed £66m in funding proposed to be split? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – The money available was part of the key corporate objective agreed by the Executive and Full Council. Some of the funding was made up from housing investment and commuted sums built up over previous years.
- In relation to bid RA C2, work place reimagined, was selling off the rectory space for residential accommodation feasible? Deputy Chief Executive response – The outcome of the workplace reimagined programme was required to gauge the views of staff, however there was an expectancy that WBC would have office space in excess of our needs. There was therefore potential to rent out some of the space commercially, or turn it into another form of use which was beneficial for WBC. The Committee were advised that they may find it useful to treat this bid as a yellow or red RAG status. A Member commented that if feasible, this seemed like a reasonable proposal.
- In relation to bid RA C3, Carnival Pool redevelopment, what might happen with the proceeds should the site of the old library be sold? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – There were no plans regarding the current library site, and any future use of the site would be used to reduce the debt of the Town Centre.
- In relation to bid RA C3, Carnival Pool redevelopment, was the project on target? Executive Member response – The pool was on target, whilst the centre was believed to be on target also.
- In relation to bid RA C4, new pool at Arborfield, how was the use of the facility by the public and the local school going to be split? Executive Member response – The facility would be predominantly for public use, with certain times blocked out for use by the school. The school was a forward thinking trust, and WBC needed to be robust when dealing with them to ensure that residents got fair use of the facility. The facility had been funded by S106 contributions, with some small costs paid for by WBC to ensure that the facility met the needs of our leisure objectives.
- In relation to bid RA C5, renewable energy infrastructure projects, were details available regarding where the £8m worth of solar panels might be placed? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – These bid lines were confusing as they took into account several projects, and as such the bids would be made clearer going forwards. The business case was strong for these projects as it would pay for the projects and make a return on the investments. Additional details relating to exactly where the assets would be placed would be finalised in future.
- In relation to bid RA C6, energy reduction projects, could any additional detail be given on the types of projects being considered? Executive Member response – This was part of a rolling project to invest in energy reduction schemes, for example lighting and insulation improvements.
- The Executive Member thanked the Committee for challenging and enlightening questions and comments, and added that he hoped that version two of the proposed bids would provide further clarity for the Committee.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Parry Batth, John Halsall, John Kaiser, Stuart Munro, Gregor Murray, Christine Bennett, Graham Ebers, Nick Spencer, Sally Watkins, and Jackie Whitney be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) Version two of the proposed bids be presented to the Committee in January 2022 after receipt of the Local Government Finance Settlement;
- 3) Members of the Committee provide any initial questions relating to version two of the bids in advance of the meeting to allow for more in-depth answers on the evening.

62. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered their work programme, set out in agenda pages 85 to 86.

The Committee were advised that the items related to the Borough Wide Parking Management Strategy and the Customer Journey item had been delayed to the next municipal year, as the projects required additional time prior to presentation. In addition, the Arts and Culture Strategy update had been postponed as many of the projects had been delayed due to the pandemic. Once additional projects and activities had been carried out, an update would be taken to the Committee.

It was requested that officers ascertain how much ongoing funding was available to enact the Arts and Culture Strategy.

The Committee requested a further update regarding bringing the public protection partnership back in house at their March 2022 Committee meeting.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Callum Wernham be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) Items relating to the Borough Wide Parking Management Strategy, the Customer Journey, and the Arts and Culture Strategy update be considered during the next municipal year;
- 3) Officers ascertain how much ongoing funding was available to enact the Arts and Culture Strategy;
- 4) A further update regarding bringing the public protection partnership back in house be considered at the March 2022 Committee meeting.