

Minor amendments were made to these minutes at the meeting of the Committee held on 1st September 2021

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 21 JULY 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.24 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Committee Member in Attendance

Councillors: Shirley Boyt

Executive Members Present

Councillors: Wayne Smith (Executive Member for Planning & Enforcement) and Bill Soane (Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Communities)

Officers Present

Stephen Brown (Interim Assistant Director - Place), Neil Carr (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist), Steve Moore (Interim Director - Place & Growth), David Thrale (Interim Public Protection Consultant) and Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist)

17. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

Shirley Boyt attended the meeting virtually, and was therefore marked as in attendance, and was not able to propose, second, or vote on items.

18. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

19. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

20. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

21. BRINGING THE PUBLIC PROTECTION SERVICE BACK IN-HOUSE

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 5 to 10, which set out the areas for a verbal update regarding bringing the public protection service back in-house.

Bill Soane (Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Communities), Wayne Smith (Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement), Steve Moore (Interim Director – Place and Growth), David Thrale (Interim Public Protection Consultant), and Stephen Brown (Interim Assistant Director – Place) attended the meeting to verbally update the Committee and to answer Member questions.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Communities stated that Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) would leave the public protection partnership (PPP) on 31 March 2022. WBC had appreciated the partnership working over the years, however it was felt that the residents of Wokingham would be better served by an in-house service. Low level antisocial behaviour was one area where residents could be better served by a service

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with more in-depth local knowledge. Progress was going well in terms of staffing and negotiation, and the aim was to minimise costs for all three local authorities. A modern new IT system would be procured once the service had transitioned in-house. Regarding Building Control Solutions, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) had left the service, whilst West Berkshire were deciding on their future. The move away from the PPP to an in-house service was being done to provide a better service for the Borough's residents.

The Interim Director (Place & Growth) stated that there was universal thanks to the staff and the PPP as a whole for the work that they had done. The transition was a work in progress, and the goal of creating a localised service which worked better for the Borough's residents was a top priority. Areas including the staff transition plan and the customer process design were a work in progress, whilst other areas such as budgeting and the exit plan were to be progressed with the next steps of the transition. Ongoing staff dialogue would be carried out throughout the process, and keeping staff up to date and informed was key to a successful transition.

During the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points and queries:

- What was the progress of the transition, and what were the challenges faced so far? Director response – A range of issues were being worked on including HR and IT, and transitions out of a partnership always presented challenges. WBC was working closely with Bracknell and RBWM to ensure a smooth transition.
- Had any risks regarding pensions been considered? Interim Director response – Indicative cost modelling had been carried out, and this was an item included within the risk register. A fit for purpose HR function was critical to the transition process, and conversations were currently taking place regarding this issue.
- Was there anything to suggest that WBC would have been better off to wait prior to deciding that they wished to leave the PPP? Executive Member and Interim Director response – This decision was made prior to the Interim Director appointment, and part of this appointment was to oversee a successful transition process. The transition to an in-house service would allow for a more localised offer for the Borough's residents, whilst providing a quicker response time.
- When would full costings and the exit plan be available? Executive Member and Interim Director response – A number of options were being considered, but it was premature to say what the operating model would be and what it would cost. The Executive Member added that he would be happy to inform Council once he had been fully briefed.
- How much of the allocated £500k budget, to ensure the smooth transfer of services back in house, had been spent to date and how much more would be spent? Interim Director response – The provision of £250k for 2021/22 and the provision of £250k for 2022/23 was on target to be adequate, and there was no reason to suggest that any additional funding for the transition would be needed from a program or project perspective.
- Wokingham Borough was a relatively small unitary authority, where working together with other similar sized authorities could bring benefits in terms of knowledge and

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collaboration. What was the difference in the position between now and 2010 when the PPP was created? Interim Director response – The interim Director was not at WBC in 2010. The focus was now to implement this decision for the benefit of the Borough's residents, and to ensure no service reduction and to offer service improvements.

- It was noted that specialist staff would be crucial in providing an excellent service for the Borough's residents.
- The interim Director noted that staff were at the heart of the transition process, and they were being kept informed to ensure they understood what was happening, and to ensure that all information was aligned correctly from both a Wokingham and West Berkshire perspective.
- What level of confidence was there that a fully functioning in-house service would be operational on 1 April 2022? Interim Director response – The new service would not be any lesser than the service on offer now, whilst being a functioning in-house service. A wide variety of stakeholders would be listened to after the initial transition, including residents, Town and Parish Councils, and the wider community. This feedback would then be implemented within a second phase from around April 2022 to refine the service on offer to ensure that the needs of residents were being met.
- Would the processes within the new service be compatible with the current processes within the PPP? Interim Director response – Yes, there was also a separate work stream focussing on the technical offering to ensure that compatibility was maintained, and features were improved moving forwards.
- The Executive Member commented that the service would not have a hard switch between 31 March 2022 and 1 April 2022, as various aspects would gradually move back in house prior to these dates to ensure a smooth transition.
- Was any reduction in service expected during the transition phase, and who would pick up the responsibility should any slippage in service delivery occur? Interim Director response – It was not envisaged that there would be any slippage from an operational perspective, and there was confidence that the transition would complete by 31 March 2022.
- What other aspects of the PPP function, outside of antisocial behaviour, would see improvements from being brought back in-house? Interim Director response – There had been a heavy focus on a more localised approach, which would utilise local knowledge. This in turn would increase the responsiveness of the service offered. There was a real opportunity to strengthen partnership working such as with the police to target local issues, to target activities and resolve issues rather than reflect them. The move in-house would allow for more local community feedback to deal with a plethora of issues including antisocial behaviour, events, or food premises in a responsive manner.
- The Executive Member commented that local knowledge was an absolute must for a number of functions including licensing and food premises inspections, which would benefit from a localised service.

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- The PPP website was excellent, and it could be a backwards step if these functions were taken directly into the WBC website. If these features could be maintained when moving in-house, that would be a continued benefit to the Borough's residents. The Executive Member commented that there was an appetite to have a "one-stop-shop" site for residents, which would be easy and intuitive to use.
- Was there an option to revoke the termination notice? Executive Member response – There was no reason to consider this necessary.
- Was there any possibility of compensation being due to the other local authorities within the PPP as a result of WBC pulling out of the partnership? Interim Director response – There was a willingness from all sides to keep any liability costs down for all parties.
- Were all partners working collectively on an exit plan? Interim Director response – There was collective working to reach an agreement, and regular meetings were taking place between the three authorities. Each authority had a vested interest to make the transition as smooth as possible. It was important not to forget the staff that were involved, who needed confidence that this process was being carried out correctly.
- Were the needs of staff being met? Interim Director response – Absolutely. Staff were at the heart of this process and the future of the service, and there was an aligned approach to ensure their wellbeing in addition to regular communications. The aim was to meet with staff and to mitigate their concerns wherever possible.
- A number of points from the constitution were raised by Members, including 6.1.3, 6.3.24, 6.3.25, and 6.3.2.1. These points outlined various aspects regarding the remit of the Committee, including that the wider issue of the PPP was likely included within the Committee's remit as was questioning of Executive Members and senior officers regarding their work. Officers commented that 6.3.25A stated that Overview and Scrutiny Committees were not entitled to any document currently in draft form. As such, whilst the wider issue of the PPP and the process of bringing its services back in-house came under the Committee's remit, the fact that the exit plan was in draft form superseded this. Officers noted that items such as the Medium Term Financial Plan were reviewed in draft form by the Committee as the Executive had agreed that this could occur over and above the requirements of the constitution.
- The Chairman asked that a further verbal update return to the Committee on 6 October 2021, to update on progress made. The Interim Director stated that he would be happy to update the Committee periodically.
- Were there assurances services would not be compromised should staff have to move roles to help with the transition? Interim Director response – There was assurance that staff would not let anything be compromised. In addition, there was a consultant in place to liaise regarding frontline service delivery.
- Was there an opportunity to share the exit plan prior to implementation? Executive Member response – Once the information was available and had been agreed between Members of the Executive it would be shared with Members.

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RESOLVED That:

- 1) Bill Soane , Wayne Smith, Steve Moore, David Thrale, and Stephen Brown be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) Points raised by the Committee be noted;
- 3) An additional verbal update return to the Committee for the meeting scheduled on 6 October 2021.

22. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 11 to 12, which outlined the work programme of the Committee for the municipal year.

A number of requests and suggestions were made by Members, summarised below:

- An update on the building control standalone service be scheduled for the November meeting of the Committee;
- An update on the strategy and process for dealing with overgrown pavements be scheduled for the November meeting of the Committee;
- Officers investigate an appropriate time to consider an update regarding burial plot provision, the potential new in-Borough crematorium, and the implementation of the Arts and Culture Strategy.
- An update regarding the Council's in-house services and public facing services be provisionally scheduled for the January Committee;
- An update on the Council's Bus Strategy, linking the with "Bus Back Better" national strategy, be scheduled for the December meeting of the Committee. In addition, officers organise a briefing note for Committee Members on the process of implementing double yellow lines on a section of road.

Members were informed of a budget scrutiny training session, open to all Overview and Scrutiny Members, being held virtually on 27 September.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Callum Wernham be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) An update on the building control standalone service be scheduled for the November meeting of the Committee;
- 3) An update on the strategy and process for dealing with overgrown pavements be scheduled for the November meeting of the Committee;
- 4) Officers investigate an appropriate time to consider an update regarding burial plot provision, the potential new in-Borough crematorium, and the implementation of the Arts and Culture Strategy.

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- 5) An update regarding the Council's in-house services and public facing services be provisionally scheduled for the January Committee;
- 6) An update on the Council's Bus Strategy, linking the with "Bus Back Better" national strategy, be scheduled for the December meeting of the Committee. In addition, officers organise a briefing note for Committee Members on the process of implementing double yellow lines on a section of road;
- 7) The budget scrutiny training session scheduled for 27 September be noted.