

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 6 MARCH 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.25 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: David Cornish (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Shirley Boyt, Norman Jorgensen, Chris Johnson, Pauline Jorgensen Alistair Neal, and Beth Rowland (Substitute)

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Morag Malvern (WBC RBFRS Representative)

Officers Present

Narinder Brar (Community Safety Manager), Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist) and Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist)

76. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Peter Dennis, Laura Blumenthal and Gregor Murray.

Beth Rowland attended the meeting as a substitute for Peter Dennis.

77. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 January 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

It was confirmed that the matters arising from the meeting held on 23 January 2023 had been circulated via email to the Committee.

78. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

79. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

80. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

81. LOCAL POLICE FORCE PRESENTATION

The Committee considered a presentation from the Local Police Force, set out in agenda pages 13 to 16.

The presentation outlined the priorities for the Local Policing Area, including operations relating to sexual offenses, domestic abuse, knife crime, burglary, and keyless vehicle thefts. A number of partnership working examples were outlined, including a closure order on Ashridge Road, and ongoing facilitation of Wokingham Shop Watch.

The Committee were advised of the initial outcome of the Force Review, which proposed a 5-area command model which would place Wokingham with West Berkshire and Reading. It was unlikely that any changes would happen within Wokingham for at least a year, whilst the changes would feature a push towards neighbourhood policing, which was a crucial part of service delivery. A consultation was due to commence shortly, with a final decision due in July 2023.

Andy Cranidge (Area Commander – Bracknell and Wokingham), and Narinder Brar (Community Safety Manager) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

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

- The Committee expressed a desire to submit a response to the Force Review, and requested that an item return to the Committee in May 2023;
- Were there opportunities for improvement with regards to communication from the police to residents, especially due to a spate of vehicle crimes in the Earley area? Police response – This spate of crimes was being carried out by organised criminals and gangs. Comments regarding communication issues would be taken on board. The best thing that individuals could do to protect themselves from keyless vehicle theft was to purchase and use a faraday box. The Force would make strides to ensure that more people were aware of outcomes to reports of crime;
- It was noted that a more detailed breakdown of crimes carried out within the Borough could be circulated to the Committee;
- It was noted that one crime could be recorded in more than one category;
- Why had car manufacturers not provided solutions to keyless car thefts? Police response – Manufacturers do not want to supply faraday pouches as it gave the impression that the vehicle could be stolen easily. The Force was engaging with local dealerships on this matter;
- Were the figures of domestic abuse victims likely to include individuals who had been abused on multiple occasions? Police and WBC Officer response – This figure included victims who had reported crimes multiple times. On average, a victim would report 35 instances of domestic abuse prior to making a 1st report;
- Was it possible to ‘reboot’ the Shop Watch in Woodley, could schools have a dedicated police liaison officer, and had neighbourhood policing been tried before? Police response – It was important to have good relationships with local schools, and this was being championed in the area. Neighbourhood policing had always operated locally, however recruitment of new officers often involved an element of protected learning which took them away from frontline duties which had to be covered by neighbourhood policing officers. Neighbourhood policing was a priority for the PCC and 80 new officers were being deployed to help drive neighbourhood policing;
- It was noted that a neighbourhood police officer had attended the most recent Woodley Town Centre Management Initiative, and there had been quite a lively discussion regarding antisocial behaviour in the precinct;
- Was there additional funding within the Community Safety partnership for the Shop Watch Woodley scheme? WBC officer response – The Wokingham Town scheme was funded for 2 years, and additional costings would be required to expand this to Woodley. Officers were aware that the Woodley precinct was currently an antisocial behaviour hotspot. A visual and CCTV audit of the precinct had been undertaken, and the CSP was looking to match funding received from the ‘proceeds of crime fund’;

- It was noted that national antisocial behaviour week was scheduled for the week commencing 10 July 2023;
- It was noted that as retailers were now, in general, employing less staff this left the remaining staff more vulnerable to shoplifting with less time to report such instances. Retailers should look to take additional responsibility for staffing and security of their premises;
- It was requested that a spokesperson for the Community Safety Partnership attend a meeting of the Woodley Town Centre Management Initiative, in part to discuss issues relating to antisocial behaviour;
- It was noted that an alert had gone out via 'Thames Valley Alert' regarding how people could take precautions against keyless car thefts;
- It was noted that there was a desire to have a closer working relationship with the Council's antisocial behaviour team. If the police could engage with antisocial behaviour offenders from an early stage, then this could have a positive impact on future knife crime numbers, as perpetrators of knife crime frequently had a history of antisocial behaviours;
- Was it usual for only twenty percent of reported crimes to have any form of action taken? Police response – This figure was around the national average of twenty one percent, however there was a focus to improve on these figures' year-on-year;
- What additional steps could Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) take to assist the police force? Police response – Additional liaison between the police and the WBC antisocial behaviour team would be beneficial, and it was likely that the antisocial behaviour team was not supported by the police as much as it could be. Informal conversations between local Ward Members and neighbourhood police officers were key, and direct contact information could be shared to help facilitate this.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Andy Cranidge and Narinder Brar be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) The Committee formulate a response to the Force Review consultation, with an item scheduled for May 2023 to help facilitate this;
- 3) A spokesperson for the Community Safety Partnership be requested to attend a meeting of the Woodley Town Centre Management Initiative;
- 4) A more detailed breakdown of crimes carried out within the Borough be circulated to the Committee;
- 5) Additional liaison between the police and the WBC antisocial behaviour team be investigated;
- 6) Options be explored to facilitate more informal conversations and relationships between neighbourhood police officers and local Ward Members;

7) An annual update be considered by the Committee in March 2024.

82. LOCAL FIRE SERVICE PRESENTATION

The Committee considered a presentation, set out in agenda pages 17 to 26, which provided an annual update on the work of the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) within the Borough.

The presentation outlined that 1073 safe and well visits had been carried out during the last 12 months, a quality assurance process for protection activities had been implemented, and 1019 incidents in the Borough had been responded to within 10 minutes on 64 percent of occasions. A consultation was underway, CRMP, which set out 6 strategic priorities for the RBFRS. The consultation was scheduled to close at the end of March 2023.

Dave Crease (Group Manager – RBFRS) and Morag Malvern (Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) RBFRS representative) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

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

- Were ‘very high risk’ properties based on the likelihood of a fire or the potential consequences of a fire? RBFRS response – This rating was mainly based on the potential consequences, for example a fire breaking out at a care home or a high-rise residential building;
- Was the RBFRS responsible for responding to any incidents at AWE Burghfield? RBFRS response – AWE Burghfield had a small on-site fire service to respond to minor incidents. The RBFRS worked closely with this team, and were on hand to respond to emergencies;
- It was requested that the link to the RBFRS consultation be emailed to all Members;
- It was noted that any building in excess of five storeys was required to be inspected on a more frequent basis;
- It was noted that should Members or residents have concerns regarding the suitability or conformity of a fire door or alarm system, this should be reported directly to the RBFRS to allow a protection officer to attend and undertake a safety audit;
- How would savings be achieved without compromising vital frontline services? RBFRS response – Many savings were being achieved via cross-border partnership working arrangements, and reductions to back-office staff. The RBFRS were losing some frontline staff to areas such as London who offered higher salaries. Apprenticeships were proving popular and were helping the RBFRS to recruit;
- Would any changes to the Local Policing Areas impact how the RBFRS worked with the police? RBFRS response – There were a variety of communication channels including via the Community Safety Partnership available to facilitate good partnership working.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Dave Crease and Morag Malvern be thanked for attending the meeting;

- 2) The link to the RBFRS consultation be emailed to all Members;
- 3) An annual update be considered by the Committee in March 2024.

83. AGREEMENT OF TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORTS

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 27 to 48 and supplementary agenda pages 3 to 12, which set out the reports of the Preferred Registered Providers (PRP) Task and Finish Group and the Local Cycling, Walking and Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) Task and Finish Group.

PRP Task and Finish Group

Shirley Boyt, PRP Task and Finish Group Chair, stated that there had been a previous focus on delivery of social housing, whilst this report emphasised the need for increased tenant involvement and tenant satisfaction measures. The Group had provided Members with a greater understanding of the processes underpinning social housing delivery and management within the Borough.

It was noted that the report would promote a much-improved approach to tenant involvement.

In response to a query regarding how the PRPs were involved in this process, it was noted that the Chair of the Group had sat on the interviews with prospective PRPs. In addition, tenants of PRPs had been sent surveys which had provided context for the Group.

It was noted that, if agreed at the Executive, the Group's recommendations would be included within the partnership agreement with PRPs, to be signed in April 2023.

In response to a query regarding the powers of the housing Ombudsman, it was noted that the new Government White Paper would provide them with increased powers.

LCWIP Task and Finish Group

Al Neal, LCWIP Task and Finish Group Chair, stated that the Group had met on 2 occasions and had received a considerable amount of detail and data. Due to timescales and the quantity of data provided to the Group, the Group resolved to focus on the draft LCWIP report document. Individual schemes were proposed to be considered by the Active Travel Task and Finish Group prior to public consultation.

It was noted that the Group was pleased to see schemes being re-considered where they had received a considerable amount of criticism.

It was noted that the proposed Active travel Task and Finish Group would assess the LCWIP document on a 6-monthly basis and scrutinise specific schemes prior to consultation. It was recommended that this Group initially consist of the same membership as the LCWIP Task and Finish Group, and subsequent membership was to be agreed annually at the first meeting of the municipal year of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Active Travel Task and Finish Group would likely be required to meet periodically for a number of years, assessing developments to the LCWIP and scrutinising detailed design proposals for specific projects as and when bids were submitted. Whilst the core Group would assess the LCWIP document on a 6-monthly

basis, relevant Ward Members and Town and Parish Council representatives would be included in meetings relating to detailed design of specific schemes prior to public consultation.

It was requested that officers consider whether the Active Travel Task and Finish Group could be renamed to something such as a 'Working Group' or 'Select Committee', as the Group was proposed to exist for a considerable length of time with no set 'finish' date.

RESOLVED That the Committee:

- 1) Thanked Callum Wernham for attending the meeting;
- 2) Considered and agreed the Preferred Registered Providers Task and Finish Group report, set out within the supplementary agenda;
- 3) Considered and agreed the Local Cycling, Walking and Infrastructure Plan Task and Finish Group report, set out as Appendix 2 to the report;
- 4) Confirmed the formation of the Active Travel Task and Finish Group, to assess the LCWIP on a 6-monthly basis and to scrutinise specific schemes prior to consultation;
- 5) Noted that the Active Travel Task and Finish Group would provide periodic updates to the Committee, on the work undertaken since the last update;
- 6) Requested officers to consider whether the Active Travel Task and Finish Group could be renamed, for example to a Working Group.

84. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered their work programme, set out in agenda pages 49 to 52.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Callum Wenham and Neil Carr be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) An item relating to the Force Review consultation be scheduled for May 2023;
- 3) The item regarding earmarked reserves be scheduled for 3 July 2023;
- 4) Officers circulate the briefing update regarding burial capacity within the Borough via email;
- 5) A briefing note be circulated to the Committee, providing additional detail with regards to the Organisational Foundation Programme;
- 6) The Committee discuss specific details of what information they wanted in relation to upcoming items during the work programme item of each meeting;
- 7) It was noted that the Arts and Culture Update could be moved to a later Committee date if the Committee's schedule proved busy;
- 8) An action tracker item be included within each Committee agenda for the 2023/24 municipal year;

- 9) An item be considered in relation to how strategic planning worked with development control. An MS Teams call be considered to assess exactly what information the Committee wished to see.