

**MINUTES OF AN EXTRARODINARY MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 26 OCTOBER 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.26 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Peter Dennis (Chair), David Cornish (Vice-Chair), Laura Blumenthal, Shirley Boyt, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Alistair Neal, Adrian Mather (Substitute) and Michael Firmager (Substitute)

Executive Member Present

Councillors: Clive Jones (Leader of the Council), Imogen Shepherd-DuBey (Executive Member for Finance), Stephen Conway (Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Housing), Lindsay Ferris (Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan), Paul Fishwick (Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways), Sarah Kerr (Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services), and Ian Shenton (Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure)

Officers Present

Richard Bisset (Lead Specialist - Place Clienting), Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Resources and Assets)), Andy Glencross (Service Manager - Green and Blue Infrastructure), Rhian Hayes (Assistant Director Economic Development and Growth), Francesca Hobson (Assistant Director – Environment & Safety), Zulfiqar Mulak (Interim Assistant Director Neighbourhoods and Communities), Trevor Saunders (Interim Assistant Director - Planning) and Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist)

45. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Chris Johnson and Gregor Murray.

Councillors Adrian Mather and Michael Firmager attended the meeting as substitutes.

46. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

47. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

48. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

**49. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2023-26 - PLACE AND GROWTH
DIRECTORATE**

The Committee considered the proposed revenue and capital bids for the Place and Growth Directorate, set out in agenda pages 5 to 74.

Clive Jones (Leader of the Council), Imogen Shepherd-DuBey (Executive Member for Finance), Stephen Conway (Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Housing), Lindsay Ferris (Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan), Paul Fishwick (Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways), Sarah Kerr (Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services), Ian Shenton (Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure), Richard Bisset (Lead Specialist – Place Clienting), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Resources and Assets), Andy Glencross (Service

Manager – Green and Blue Infrastructure) Rhian Hayes (Assistant Director Economic Development and Growth), Francesca Hobson (Assistant Director – Environment and Safety), Zulfiqar Mulak (Interim Assistant Director Neighbourhood and Communities), and Trevor Saunders (Interim Assistant Director – Planning) attended the meeting to answer member queries.

The Executive Member for Finance stated that there was currently a £4m revenue shortfall for the 2023/24 financial year, inclusive of potential savings already identified, whilst there was a £14m gap in the capital programme. Whilst high priority capital spends would stay in the budget, the Committee were being asked what other revenue or capital schemes might be prioritised whilst inviting members to put forward any savings suggestions. The revenue reserves had been used during the last financial year, whilst inflation was running very high and Council Tax would only be permitted to be increased by 1.99%.

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

- When would the Committee receive a breakdown of the cost of agency workers, contractors, interims and fixed term contracts (that translates into people, outside of IR35)? Officer response – A similar request had also been made by the Personnel Board, and to avoid duplication of work these figures would be provided to both sets of members as soon as possible;
- Was the additional adult social care council tax precept included in assumptions? Officer response – An increase of 1% (in addition to the 1.99% base council tax increase) had been assumed as officers were not certain what would be permitted at this stage;
- Was there an assumption that the £14m gap in the capital programme would be bridged? Officer response – This was the working assumption through a variety of channels including leveraging additional income and reprofiling schemes. There was no assumption that Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) would be borrowing to fund the capital programme;
- It was noted that there was a level of uncertainty around the level of new homes bonus that WBC would receive, and as such a reduction of this income had been factored in over a period of time to try and reduce WBC's dependency on this;
- In relation to bid PG R29, additional consultancy budget for the Local Plan, it was noted that this was a drawdown pot to assist in future years;
- In relation to bid PG R30, development management staffing costs, it was noted that this bid covered retention of existing staff to carry out business as usual planning enforcement work. It was hoped that expenditure could be reduced if statutory planning fees were increased;
- In relation to bid PG R27, domestic abuse – commissioned services, how many staff would this deliver and would it bring caseloads down to the recommended level of 30 per member of staff? Executive Member and officer response – This would enable the service to have 2 additional members of staff and would go some way towards bringing cases down to 30 per member of staff, though it was accepted that this level would not be achieved immediately. It was noted that grant funding was being sought wherever possible, whilst this bid was being considered to be moved from a growth bid to a

special item. The £75k figure was given by the provider as the cost needed to bring in these staff;

- In relation to bid PG R34, deliberative process for climate emergency, it was noted that the total budget for the activity should read approximately £270k, and officers would consider why the figure was stated as £180k in the paperwork;
- In relation to bid PG R1, proposal to move to alternate weekly or three weekly waste collections, it was noted that the £700k figure was a high-level assumption, as work had been undertaken with an external consultant to look at other Local Authorities who had undergone similar changes. Introduction of wheelie bins would also see cost reductions, and the £700k figure was largely as a result of containerisation. The wheelie bins would be purchased with capital on an invest to save programme, with payback expected within 5 years. It was requested that this issue be considered alongside the waste strategy at the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee;
- In relation to bid PG R2, increase garden waste service annual fees by £10, had there been any reduction in service use since the £5 increase introduced last year? Officer response – The numbers of people utilising this service had remained steady. It was noted that the proposed introductory charge of £40 had been removed. Officers were working with IT to identify if the service could be paid for in instalments via direct debit;
- In relation to bid PG R2, increase garden waste service annual fees by £10, was this a cost recovery only scheme? Officer response – Officers would ascertain whether this was the case, however it was not believed to be just a cost recovery service. Income generated through this service would be used to fund other aspects of the waste service;
- In relation to bid PG R4, reduce grass cutting by increasing conservation areas, was there a role for community groups to adopt and maintain areas, and what were external consultants being used for? Executive Member and officer response – There was definitely a role for people to nominate conservation areas, whilst consultants were looking into the contract to see if any savings could be realised;
- In relation to bid PG R5, event income from open spaces, was this comparative to private charges? Officer response – This was modelled off of experiences at Dinton Pastures and California Country Park. Officers would consider liaison with Wokingham Town Council who already had experience of a commercial based model;
- In relation to bid PG R6, smart drainage sensors Borough wide rollout, it was commented that this was a very good idea and it would be good to see it expanded;
- In relation to bid PG R8, reduction in drainage maintenance to every other year, was the saving of £25k greater than the potential risk of additional flooding? Executive Member response - £4m in savings needed to be identified, and officers had been asked to put forward options. Proposals such as this would be considered further before implementation;
- In relation to bid PG R9, school keep clear markings – roll out of parking enforcement scheme, was there a contradiction between wanting to change behaviours and receiving a consistent level of income? Executive Member and officer response – Once behaviours had changed at particular schools, the service would move to

different schools. The likelihood was that people would realise the service had moved on and may offend again, and when the service returned it would catch repeat offenders. The whole purpose of this item was to improve road safety outside schools;

- In relation to bid PG R10, additional charges for residents second parking permits, what was the current charge? Executive Member response – The current charge was £35, and the proposed figure of £900 was not fixed at this stage;
- It was noted that bids PG R11 linked to PG R25 and PG R31;
- In relation to bid PG R12, stretch target for off street proposed increase in charges, would this include parking meters? Executive Member response – This was part of a wider look at all off street car parking. It was noted that point four of PG R12 should be covered in PG R13;
- In relation to bid PG R13, introduction of on street parking controls, it was suggested that officers speak with Reading Borough Council who implemented a similar scheme and have not seen expected cost recovery;
- In relation to bid PG R15, reduce reliance on consultants for transport planning expertise, was the £61k for a full-time grade 10 member of staff the full cost of employment? Executive Member response – Yes, this was the total cost of employment;
- In relation to bid PG R16, highways operational savings, were £400k savings in 2023/24 realistic and what was the £210k of expenditure to be used for? Executive Member response – This was at an early stage and the £400k figure was a best estimate. A response would be provided with regards to the expenditure figure;
- In relation to bid PG R17, charging leisure users at Carnival car park, could this be looked at other leisure centres including Loddon Valley and Bulmershe? Executive Member and officer response – Whilst this was a possibility, the difference was that Carnival Hub was part of the town centre and its associated car parks. This needed to be done carefully as WBC received a substantial management fee from Places Leisure, and whilst savings could be made from reducing car parking subsidy WBC could then receive a smaller management fee if business dropped as a result;
- In relation to bid PG R18, introduction of moving traffic offence enforcement, was this allowed as the service was a cost recovery model, how did the capital costs stack up, and what were the expected timescales? Executive Member and officer response – Additional income would be used to deliver other transport services, whilst there was a possibility that the service could be delivered by a contractor which would mean no capital costs for WBC. This was very much at a ‘work in progress’ stage, with officers assessing options and timescales;
- In relation to bid PG R19, night-time dimming for street lights, was there scope to turn traffic lights off in certain areas at certain times of the night, and was it possible to decrease the on-time of street lights which were already partially dimmed to get savings sooner? Executive Member response – In terms of traffic lights, road safety was a priority and any such work would require detailed liaison with the police. There was potential to bring some smaller savings forward, however this process was overall at an early stage;

- In relation to bid PG R20, efficiencies from merging the highways services, was this about merging teams with other Local Authorities or within our own service? Executive Member response – This bid was about looking at efficiency savings within our own highways service;
- In relation to bid PG R21, reduce the community engagement team by 2 posts, what would WBC lose from these 2 posts? Executive Member response – A small amount of general community engagement would be lost, however one of these posts was currently vacant and the other had a fixed-term contract ending in December 2022;
- A number of income generations suggestions were put forwards, including increased advertising in the Borough News, advertising within Council Tax receipts, increased advertising on billboards, extension of waste collection to commercial companies, having a business mindset about income generation, and considering ‘no win no fee’ opportunities where if money or income was recovered WBC would be entitled to a percentage, however WBC would not be liable to any charge if the venture failed;
- In relation to bid PG R23, sustainment of 7-day week antisocial behaviour service at 2022/23 levels, was it necessary to staff 7 days per week as some morning hours on weekdays could be ‘quiet’ for the service, and was it possible to clawback and money from the police? Executive Member and officer response – This growth bid was related to a special item from last year to retain the same staffing levels. The service had been really successful so far with a 7-day per week operation. It was very unlikely that the police would be willing to pay any money to WBC for running this service, however officers could explore any opportunities;
- In was noted that bid PG R24 was no longer required;
- In relation to bid PG R26, local bus service inflation, was there any option to use S106 money or ask Town and Parish Councils for contributions, and what would happen if passenger numbers increased later on? Executive Member response – S106 was limited, and this needed to be put in the budget as there was not sufficient monies related to S106 as these were tied to other projects. Officers could go away and explore in Town and Parish Councils could contribute towards this, whilst WBC’s financial support for these services would decrease if passenger numbers increased;
- In relation to bid PG R32, replacement of routewise system, could the cost of this be incorporated into the cost of school transport charges? Executive Member response – This suggestion could be taken away and explored;
- In relation to bid PG C2, Toutley highways depot modernisation, it was commented that this figure was also challenged for the last 2 years as a high spend and may warrant further consideration this year;
- In relation to bid PG C3, California Crossroads, how much flexibility was there as to other projects that this S106 money could be spent on. Executive Member response – The project firstly needed to be built out, and any savings go back into the overall Arborfield SDL ‘pot’;
- In relation to bid PG C4, Bulldog Garage – Temporary Accommodation, had other vacant sites been considered, what were the timescales for the project? Executive

Member response – Sites were being sought and appraised at all times, whilst the land was owned by WBC and modular units could be constructed quite quickly. It was noted that the money to build out the scheme would come from developer contributions and the Homes England grant, whilst the savings would be made on the emergency accommodation budget contained within the HRA which was ringfenced;

- In relation to bid PG C8, active travel and bus priority, was the grant time limited? Executive Member response – If it was Active Travel England's funding they would give a time limit for the money to be spent;
- In relation to bid PG C9, Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP), was this partly a levelling up bid, had the European Cycling Federation Grant been considered, and was secure town centre parking included in this bid. Executive Member response – A levelling up bid had been placed for a route from Charvil to Twyford Station, which was hoped to be successful. Any additional grant funding opportunities would be explored, whilst secure cycle storage was a part of the LCWIP;
- In relation to bid PG C10, Greenways, could any cost savings be realised via linking the cycleways and greenways teams? Executive Member and officer response – Both teams work closely together, however the key was ensuring that the routes chosen for both projects fitted together and did not duplicate.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Clive Jones, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Stephen Conway, Lindsay Ferris, Paul Fishwick, Sarah Kerr, Ian Shenton, Richard Bisset, Graham Ebers, Andy Glencross, Rhian Hayes, Francesca Hobson, Zulfiqar Mulak, and Trevor Saunders be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) Income generation and savings suggestions be passed on to the Finance team for consideration;
- 3) A breakdown of the cost of agency workers, contractors, interims and fixed term contracts (that translates into people, outside of IR35) be provided to the Committee;
- 4) Officers consider why the figure was stated as £180k in the paperwork for PG R34 rather than £270k;
- 5) Further consideration be given to the proposal to move to two or three weekly waste collections and the use of wheelie bins, including cost-benefit analysis, at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee when the Waste Strategy/Waste Strategy consultation was to be considered;
- 6) Officers continue to work with IT to identify if the green waste collection service could be paid for in instalments via direct debit;
- 7) Officers would ascertain whether green/garden waste collection could only be a cost recovery service;
- 8) Officers provide detail as to the detail behind the expenditure requirement for PG R16;

- 9) Officers explore whether Town and Parish Councils could contribute towards inflationary pressures on local bus services;
- 10) Officers explore whether the replacement of the routewise system could be incorporated into home to school transport costs and charged accordingly;
- 11) The Executive Member and officers consider if the total spend for the Toutley depot modernisation was necessary and required;
- 12) Additional grant funding for highways schemes be explored by officers.