

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 9 JANUARY 2017 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.50 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Philip Mirfin (Chairman), Michael Firmager (Vice-Chairman), Chris Bowring, Ken Miall, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Bill Soane and Shahid Younis

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Malcolm Richards

Officers Present

Andy Couldrick (Chief Executive Officer), Heather Thwaites (Programme Director, C21 Council), David Wilby (Policy and Strategy Manager) and Arabella Yandle (Democratic Services)

27. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from David Sleight.

28. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21 November 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

29. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

30. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

31. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

32. POLICING ARRANGEMENTS

Superintendent Rob France, Bracknell and Wokingham LPA Commander, delivered a verbal report on the merging of the Bracknell and Wokingham forces, covering the following points:

- Streamlined administrative processes had resulted in officers being freed up to focus on their key roles.
- Re-organisation of teams had allowed the creation of a force of 8 officers plus a sergeant focussing on high risk areas and working with vulnerable drug users.
- Amalgamation of investigative teams had allowed more effective deployment and higher resistance. Whilst there had been some teething problems initially as the new system bedded in, reaction times had now been seen to rise.
- Good practice had been shared between the two parts of the new force. For example, the work on reducing domestic abuse repeats that had been carried out in Wokingham had been shared with the Bracknell force.
- Better resilience to budgetary constraints. For example, the increase in armed response officers had impacted on frontline policing but the merged force was better able to deal with these pressures.

- Changes to funding meant that the force needed to focus on things that made a difference. Staffing numbers might be lower in these areas but they were better protected.

In response to a Member's question regarding Beat Officers, Superintendent France stated that evidence showed that the presence of police on the beat did not catch criminals or prevent crime unless they were stationed in places where crime happened. For example, Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) had been circulated widely on the Norrey's Estate and this had led to a reduction in crime due to their accessibility and visibility. As PCSOs were attached to an area, engagement and reassurance was greater. He clarified the fact that police from the Bracknell and Wokingham Force were not, in general, called to London to assist in large operations but were more likely to be called to assist with public order in the Thames Valley Police area. He agreed that officers needed to be better at talking to people and listed a number of methods that had been used, such as local meetings and surgeries.

In response to Member's questions about the impact of the closure of the Public Counter at Wokingham Police station and the general trends in crime in the last 12 months, Superintendent France explained that the use of the Public Counter did not justify the expense of staffing it. Reports at the Counter averaged 15 per week, of which all but 3 or 4 were lost property related. He stated that there had been a rise in overall crime over the 2015-16 year of approximately 5% and then went on to provide a breakdown of this figure. He explained that some crimes had fallen in occurrence whilst others had increased. For example, occurrences of violence with injury were down and burglaries were up, although the clear up rate for this crime in Bracknell and Wokingham was the highest in the Thames Valley area. He stated that figures on low level acquisitive crime were up but that there were currently no identifiable patterns, but sexual assaults, robberies and theft from vehicles had dropped.

In response to a Member's question about the impact of the European Referendum on hate crime, Superintendent France reported that, whilst not directly attributable to the European Referendum and possibly due to a range of circumstances, there had been a significant rise in reported incidents, that of 200%. He clarified that all reports that fell into one of the five categories of hate crime cited by the Home Office had to be recorded but that only a small percentage then went on to be recorded as crime as this required a duty of proof.

In relation to a question regarding a possible move of the Wokingham Police Station to the fire station, Superintendent France indicated that this was one possible option and that the matter was open to discussion. He went on to state that Members were welcome to join the police on a 'ride-along' or 'walk-along', to gain a better idea of the work being done. Councillor Mirfin stated that he had taken up the opportunity on more than one occasion and that it had been a very valuable experience.

Resolved: That

- 1) Superintendent Rob France be thanked for attending the meeting and providing a detailed update on the merging of the Bracknell and Wokingham Forces; and
- 2) a report be presented to the Committee each January to update Members on crime statistics and the impact of changes in policing/emergency services.

33. 21ST CENTURY COUNCIL

Andy Couldrick, Chief Executive of Wokingham Borough Council, presented an update to the Committee on the 21st Century Council. He shared the Programme Objectives and summarised the rationale behind the changes, outlining the benefits to the Council of the re-structuring both in terms of financial savings and the improved customer experience. He stated that Phase 1, which dealt with the senior levels, Support Services, IT and Strategy and commissioning, was well underway, and that Phase 2 was due to commence in May 2017.

The Chief Executive explained that the new arrangements would give greater autonomy to managers to control their own budgets and react more quickly to needs and change.

In response to Member concerns around risk, the Chief Executive stated that all risk registers were in place and had been reported to the Audit Committee, but that there were some risks that were more difficult to manage, such as the degree of cultural change and the need for change to be effected at all levels including Members and their interaction with officers. He also indicated that the Programme Board was aware that timetable resulted in some clashes between change and function, such as the changes to the sections dealing with finance coming at the tail end of the financial year.

In response to Member concerns about the loss of Change Agents and the degree of change being embarked on, the Chief Executive explained that the partnership company, Ignite, had been involved in a number of successful restructurings of district councils. He indicated that this was the first project where unitary functions had been involved and that the Council would be able to act as a model for other councils wanting to go through the same process.

In response to Members' questions around staffing, the Chief Executive stated that, whilst there would be a loss of staff, the Council had tried to limit this by filling vacant posts with interim staff. He stated that the bulk of the post reductions would be within the lower tiers of the support staff as their roles were more generic. Positions in specialist roles would be more attractive to future employees as there would be less administration. He also made it clear that the process of examining the organisation to find cost savings would be an ongoing process.

In response to a Member's question regarding union involvement, The Chief Executive outlined the processes that had been followed to gauge staff feedback about the Programme. He was aware that resistance would be more visible as the impact on individual staff members became more apparent. He explained that the Council was not highly unionised and that, although the unions were fully involved, the Council had had to devise its own consultative methods.

Resolved: That

- 1) Andy Couldrick be thanked for the update report on the 21st Century Council; and
- 2) a further update report be submitted to the Committee, following the commencement of Phase 2, at the November Committee Meeting.

34. CYCLE LANES

David Wilby, Policy and Strategy Manager, delivered a report on cycle lanes in the Borough, outlining, amongst other points, the funding obtained and partnerships that had

been established, the development of the My Journey brand, the work that had been completed and the safety training that had been delivered. He indicated that Phase 4 of the Project was about to commence.

In response to Members' questions about safety, the Policy and Strategy Manager stated that evidence showed separate pedestrian and cycle lanes did not always work as users tended to ignore the markings and this could lead to conflict. Superintendent Rob France clarified that whilst bikes had to be sold with bells, there was no requirement for bikes to carry bells. The Policy and Strategy Manager outlined the steps that were being taken to address issues around safety, such as handing out free lights, but indicated that more promotional activity would be taking place around training, safety, use of the lanes and the My Journey brand.

In response to a Member's question regarding use of the lanes, the Policy and Strategy Manager explained that monitoring was expensive, at £6000 per week. He stated that monitoring was carried out on a yearly basis and had shown that that use had increased.

In response to Members' questions about statutory cycle lanes, the Policy and Strategy Manager stated that some stretches of the cycle lanes would be made advisory, with dashed lines. This was to help address issues where motorists had been penalised for crossing solid white lines in situations where it was difficult to avoid.

Resolved: That

- 1) David Wilby be thanked for the update report on cycle lanes; and
- 2) a further update on use and safety following the completion of Phase 4 be presented to the Committee at the September Committee Meeting.

35. WORK PROGRAMME

The Work Programme for 2016-17 was noted.