

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 6 NOVEMBER 2017 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.00 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Shahid Younis (Chairman), Bill Soane (Vice-Chairman), Pauline Jorgensen, Abdul Loyes, Ken Miall, Clive Jones and Dianne King

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Andy Croy and Malcolm Richards

Officers Present

Arabella Yandle (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist) and Simon Price (Category Manager, Housing Operations)

Others Present

Shaun Virtue (Local Policing Area Commander)

20. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillor David Sleight (Councillor Diane King attended as substitute), Councillor Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey (Councillor Clive Jones attended as substitute) and Councillor Philip Mirfin.

21. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 4 September 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

22. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

23. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

24. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

25. REPORT BY THE CATEGORY MANAGER, HOUSING OPERATIONS ON UNAUTHORISED ENCAMPMENTS

Simon Price, Category Manager Housing Operations, delivered an update on Unauthorised Encampments, outlining reductions in the number of encampments and the cost of clearing up during the preceding year. He explained the process that was followed to deal with a camp and highlighted some of the issues that accompany the process, such as welfare issues and time taken for paperwork to be completed by the courts. He went on to describe the close working relationship that the team had with the police and the pressure on the service due to the need to double team when visiting sites.

In answer to Member questions, Simon stated that, whilst not sufficient to address public perceptions of travellers completely, having clear and transparent policies and procedures on the Council website would help allay fears to a certain extent. The process of moving a camp on could be expedited if a Section 61 order was imposed or if the site was in a vulnerable area such as a school playing field, but that the normal time period was approximately 2 weeks. As part of the changes to processes coming from 21st Century

and as part of a Berkshire-wide protocol, it was hoped that officers would be empowered to assess sites and choose the most efficient and appropriate way of dealing with them. A paper was being prepared that would cover all these issues and was due to be presented to the Executive in February 2018.

Shaun Virtue, Local Area Police Commander, outlined the types of issue that would lead to the exercising of a Section 61 order. He stated that the force had a wide pool of police officers that could be summoned when needed, as had happened when a camp of 30 caravans landed in Bulmershe in July 2016. He explained that data was used to identify hotspots of crime and anti-social behaviour and that this would identify any links between camps and incidences.

In response to Member questions regarding prevention, Simon stated that after each encampment incident there was a wash-up session during which suggestions were welcomed of how to improve the process. Sites were assessed and methods of preventing access were used where appropriate. He would speak to the Council's Property Team about identifying sites and risk and pro-active measures that could be taken to avoid access.

In response to a specific question regarding clearing up on private land, Simon stated that the onus was on the landlord and that he would communicate with the Waste and Recycling Team regarding enforcement. An invitation was extended to the Committee for Members to visit a site with an officer to see the assessment process in action.

RESOLVED That

- 1) Simon Price be thanked for his report;
- 2) Officers approach Property Services regarding pro-active preventative measures that could be taken;
- 3) Officers approach Waste and Recycling to ascertain the process needed for enforcement of clearance on private land, and
- 4) The information on the Council website regarding the procedure taken to deal with unauthorised encampments be reviewed and improved in terms of clarity and ease of access.

26. UPDATE FROM LOCAL AREA POLICE COMMANDER

Superintendent Shaun Virtue, Local Area Police Commander, delivered an update on local area policing and the joint Bracknell and Wokingham Police Area. The presentation highlighted the issues that were facing the force in terms of new and emerging crimes and the areas where there had been success, such as the work targeting drug dealing in Norreys Estate. Overall, Wokingham was one of the safest boroughs in England and Wales.

In response to a Member question regarding drug use in schools, Superintendent Virtue stated that that it was an ongoing concern, especially amongst Looked After Children who were often more vulnerable. Schools usually called the police in when incidents occurred. There were a range of options available for addressing this including education. He went on to state that he would feed concerns about drug selling in Maiden Place into the team.

In relation to Anti-Social Behaviour, he indicated that information supplied could be subjective but, when unpicked, informed priorities.

In response to questions regarding cyclists using lights, Superintendent Virtue indicated that there was a joint responsibility regarding bikes and education was part of this. Enforcement was not an answer. Cycle deaths were increasing. Various methods could be used, such as employers enforcing the use of lights as part of bike schemes. Regarding thefts of Asian gold, the figures were fairly low as the change in rules around accountability for cash generating companies had impacted it positively. Regarding Domestic Violence, the figures showed an overall reduction but that the percentage of repeat offenders was still high. The force worked closely with a number of outside agencies, such as Berkshire Womens Aid, to improve the situation. Overall, one of the key drivers of crime was drugs. There was a need for increased community intelligence and this would be aided if the police were more effective in feeding back the results of intelligence to the public.

In response to Member questions regarding staffing, recruitment and retention, Superintendent Virtue stated that the force had 250 police and PCSOs. The increase in firearms teams meant that a team could attend an incident in less than 9 minutes. Across Thames Valley as a whole, there had been a cut of 400 posts since 2010. The backroom functions had been pared back and the service was stretched. The increase in local population would lead to higher demand. Thames Valley was one of the least well-funded in the country. Approximately 70% of funding came from the Government so the increase in local population would only have a slight impact on the precept that provided the remainder. Recruitment was a particular problem currently. The nature of policing as a career appeared to have changed with people seeing it as a short-term career. Although loss of experienced staff to the Metropolitan Police had reduced, many forces were recruiting actively and some, such as Surrey, offered better packages. The cost of accommodation locally was significant, with some police officers having to take second jobs or claim benefits. A lot of legwork was actually carried out by volunteers.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Superintendent Shaun Virtue be thanked for his update;
- 2) a further report be presented to the Committee in 2018 to update Members on crime statistics and the impact of changes in policing/emergency services, and
- 3) Members be asked to submit questions to Democratic Services to be sent to Superintendent Virtue prior to this.

27. POSSIBLE AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MEETINGS - COMMUNITY SAFETY AND HOUSING

As part of improving Overview and Scrutiny within the Borough, the Committee considered a report on possible agenda items for inclusion in the work programme in future. They were asked to suggest items of concern to receive reports on; suggest stakeholders to invite to future Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Meetings, and comment on the proposals in this paper as a method of determining future work programmes.

It was felt that Overview and Scrutiny would be more effective if carried out at the formative stage of policy or awarding of contracts rather than afterwards merely as an

update. Committee meetings would be more effective if targeted on one or two issues at a time and looking at them in more depth with a combination of submissions from officers and stakeholders. A report would be allocated a set period and followed up by witness testimony and then questions from Members.

The work programme for January included an item on the Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration and Members suggested that interested groups be invited to act as witnesses.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report on Community Safety Partnership and policing be postponed until March 2018;
- 2) Stakeholders such as the Business Chamber of Commerce and the Federation for Small Businesses be invited to the Committee meeting in January 2018 to provide witness on the Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration Item;
- 3) A report on the proposed annual work programme be invited from Highways and Transport;
- 4) A representative of Highways be invited to present a report on parking standards, parking and Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and parking and railway stations;
- 5) Stakeholders such as Bill Luck been invited to the Committee meeting in January 2018 to provide witness on the item to be delivered by Highways on parking standards ;
- 6) A range of other reports be invited for March 2018 including the impact of CPE;
- 7) Stakeholders such as Sam Milligan of JAC (Just Around the Corner) and Action Groups be invited to the Committee meeting in March 2018 to provide witness on the item on Community Safety and Policing, and
- 8) The Committee to consider items relating to the environment for consideration in June 2018.

28. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

There were no items subject to exclusion.