

## MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 26 JANUARY 2015 FROM 7.30 PM TO 9.50 PM

*Present:- Councillors Tim Holton (Chairman), Michael Firmager (Vice Chairman), Parry Batth, Prue Bray, Mike Gore, Pauline Helliar-Symons, Nicky Jerrome, Norman Jorgensen, Ken Miall, Malcolm Richards and David Sleight*

*Also present:-*

*Andy Fry, Chief Fire Officer, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service  
Kevin Jacob, Principal Democratic Service Officer  
Mike Ibbitson, Head of Customer Services and IMT  
David Phillips, Area Manager, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service  
Councillor Angus Ross, Executive Member for Environment  
Josie Wragg, Head of Community Services*

### PART I

#### 45. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24 November 2014 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the correction of the last sentence of Minute 39, (Agenda page 5) to read "The Committee was informed that *it* was believed the drop in performance had related to delays caused by staff turnover, but that more information could be provided".

The Chairman commented that there were a number points arising from the minutes which he would be pursuing later in the meeting as part of the Open Green Spaces Update item, Chairman's Report Item or separate actions points recorded in the minutes he wished to receive an update on as follows:

- Minute 37: If there was a date when an Executive decision would be taken in respect of the review of Open Spaces?
- Minute 37: What progress had been made in the development of a policy covering the liability and insurance implications of residents grass cutting Council owned Open Green Space themselves?
- Minute 37: Responsibility for grass cutting of Open Green Space adjoining social housing properties owned by Reading Borough Council, but within the Wokingham Borough Council boundary?
- Minute 38: In respect of the action being taken to reduce the number of inaccurately claimed Council Tax Single Person Discounts, had the public been made aware yet of the positive outcomes arising from the Council's actions in this area as suggested at the previous meeting? Kevin Jacob commented he would follow this up;
- Minute 39: Various queries relating to Balanced Scorecard Indicators, 25 Housing Need, 42 Housing Rents Collection and Indicator 44 Percentage of Calls Answered. Kevin Jacob updated the Committee that the response to the Indicator 25 query would be included in the covering report to the March Committee and that the other progress on the other queries would be followed up;
- Minute 44: Whether the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee had yet considered options in the delivery of non-emergency care.

#### 46. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

#### **47. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Pauline Helliar–Symons declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in Item: 54.00 Briefing from Andy Fry, Chief Fire Officer, Royal Berkshire Fire Authority on the grounds that she was a member of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority and took part in the Committee's consideration of the issue.

#### **48. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions

#### **49. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions

#### **50. BRIEFING FROM ANDY FRY, CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE**

The Committee received a briefing from Andy Fry, Chief Fire Officer of the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, (RBFPS) on the new policy direction that the service was taking. As written background to the presentation, a copy of '*Our Commitments to the people of Royal Berkshire*' published by the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority had been included within the Agenda as set out on Agenda pages 10 to 15.

The Committee was reminded that at its meeting in October 2014 it had considered how the Council might become more efficient and that as part of this, consideration had been given to the potential opportunities of working more closely with other public sector organisations such as the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service. The Committee had learnt of the work undertaken by the service in light of the challenges it faced and had decided that it would be useful for Councillors to receive a presentation and briefing from Andy Fry.

Copies of the slides used are attached to these minutes.

A summary of the Committee's discussions with Andy Fry following the presentation is set out below:

- It was confirmed to the Committee that the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service did currently have adequate numbers of fire fighters and resources. However, the service was at a tipping point for the future and as a consequence the Service was looking at a range of saving options e.g. reducing the number of appliances from 2 to 1 or in building new fire stations looking to co-locate with other public sector organisations. With regard to retained fire fighters consideration was being given to the possibility of them also acting as first responders to medical emergencies;
- Members of the Committee asked how the Fire Service worked with insurers to encourage fire suppressions systems such as fire walls and sprinklers to be designed into new buildings. Andy Fry responded that in his opinion, the debate around the provision of fire suppression systems, particularly sprinklers was not as informed as it could be. Most insurance was centred on the risks associated with theft not fire. There was also what was felt to be a perverse incentive against the provision of sprinklers because if included, the rateable value of a property was increased;
- Members questioned whether the Fire Service had the capacity to respond to simultaneous multiple incidents. The Committee received assurance that it did have such capacity as had been the case during the flooding incidents in February 2014, but that the service did have capacity to call on assistance from other areas. An issue

for the future would be that as resources became more scarce nationally it would be more difficult for individual fire services to share resources;

- It was queried whether consideration had been given to the reorganisation of the Fire Authority itself to reduce running costs, e.g. a reduction in the number of councillors that represented each of the Berkshire Unitary Councils. The Committee was informed that any such structure reorganisation would be a political decision, but there had been some suggestions that nationally the role of Police and Crime Commissioners might conceivably be broadened to include fire and rescue. However, no formal proposal had been brought forward and it was felt more likely that some of the smaller fire authorities might combine as they became financially unsustainable;
- Reference was made to the innovative practice of the Dorset Fire and Rescue Service in devising a set out of common questions that were used by a range of public sector services, such as local authorities, the police, ambulance service etc whenever a representative of that service came into contact with a vulnerable person and the efforts made to improve the sharing and coordination of the information between services. Councillors were informed that improvements to the sharing of information between services was a key issue and some work was already taking place through the West Berkshire Safeguarding Board to seek to address this and to devise common questions/criteria. This would require the approval of each authority;
- It was confirmed that the current national policy position of the Fire Brigades Union, (FBU) was that it opposed the use of fire fighters as emergency first responders in light of a specific local dispute. However, it was felt that regionally there was sign of some flexibility by the FBU and consideration was being given to the use of non-FBU members to pilot the idea;
- Councillors were interested to know what specific steps Andy Fry felt the Council should take. In response he and David Phillips commented that they felt the Council should:
  - Encourage the early consideration of the incorporation of fire suppression systems in buildings at the design stage of development through the Pre-Planning Application advice system and to educate Officers and Councillors about fire suppression systems. Planning Committee Councillors and Planning Officers could play a part to facilitate this and therefore needed to understand more about such systems;
  - Give consideration to the contribution that the Fire Service could make as part of the health and wellbeing agenda and improvements to public health. For instance the home fire safety visits undertaken by the Fire Service to vulnerable people provided an opportunity to contribute to adult social care. The Fire Service was represented on the Community Safety Partnership, but not the Health and Wellbeing Board. There were opportunities for the Fire Service to work more closely with Adult Social Care;
  - In a number of areas the Fire Service already worked closely with young people as part of its preventative agenda and initiatives such as its 'Fire Break' course. It had developed a positive image amongst young people. Fire Fighters acted as constructive role models. There were opportunities to expand this relationship by working with young people to raise their aspirations, attainment and employability;
- Members of the Committee acknowledged that it was preferable and more cost effective to incorporate fire suppression systems early in the design stage, but commented that in considering planning applications, Council Officers and the Planning Committee could only consider the information submitted within the application on its merits and apply the relevant policies. It was suggested that a way to increase awareness of the fire suppression systems might be for a

representative of the Fire Service to discuss the issue and any associated training needs for members of the Planning Committee with Clare Lawrence, Head of Development Management and Regulatory Services.

Based on the representations made to them and their questioning of the Chief Fire Officer, Members of the Committee commented that they felt it was clear that the Royal Berkshire and Rescue Service was a key leader within the Wokingham Borough and that the work it undertook in support of vulnerable people was fully in keeping with the core role of Health and Wellbeing Boards to improve the health and wellbeing of the local community and to reduce health inequalities.

It was noted that the Service was represented on the Community Safety Partnership which reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board. However, the Committee felt that the current and potential contribution the Service could make towards the Health and Wellbeing agenda was significant enough to justify representation on the Board itself and that the Board should be asked to consider this as part of the peer review processes it was shortly to undertake.

Pauline Helliard-Symons suggested that in order to take forward the potential opportunities of increased collaborative working between the Fire Service, Children's Services and schools, it would be helpful for a representative of the Fire Service to discuss their ideas in more detail with Judith Ramsden, Director Children's Service.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the Wokingham Health and Wellbeing Board consider the addition of a representative of the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service to its membership;
- 2) That the Head of Development Management and Regulatory Management be requested to discuss with a representative of the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service how the incorporation of fire suppression systems could be encouraged at the pre-application advice stage of development proposal and how any associated training needs for members of the Planning Committee could be met;
- 3) That the Director of Children's Services be requested to discuss with a representative of the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service how the possible opportunities of increased collaborative working between the Fire Service and Children's Services and schools might be taken forward.

#### **51. UPDATE ON COMPLETION OF BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANS**

The Committee considered a table as set on Agenda pages 16 to 18 which gave details of the status of Business Continuity Plans for Council service areas regarded as high risk.

Mike Ibbitson, Head of Customers Services and IMT attended the meeting and presented the paper to the Committee. It was highlighted that it was recommended to each service area that they reviewed their plans on at least a biannual basis. In summary:

- 33 key areas had been identified;
- All 33 areas had Business Continuity Plans;
- 22 of the 33 plans were fully up to date and had been reviewed
- 11 plans had overdue review dates, (but these were unlikely to be amended and were mostly overdue by a few months).

The Chairman commented that the table represented a much improved picture from the previous report circulated to the Committee and that it appeared that a lot of work had been undertaken. Notwithstanding this, he noted that the Electoral Services Business Continuity Plan had a review date of November 2014 and given the multiple elections that were due to take place in May 2015, he sought reassurance that the Electoral Services Business Continuity Plan was up to date. Mike Ibbitson agreed to raise this with Andrew Moulton, Head of Governance and Improvement Services.

Members of the Committee, whilst welcoming the assurance that plans were in place for the majority of services commented that plans also had to be tested given that some of the services were critical to the functions of the Council. The Committee was informed that services were strongly encouraged to test their plans and that this was part of the discussions that he and his team had with individual services.

Members referred to the recent arson attack on the offices of South Oxfordshire District Council, (SODC) and whether there were any lessons for the Council's own business continuity arrangements. The Committee was informed that it was planned to review the Corporate Recovery Plan in light of any lessons from the SODC incident.

With regards to Information Technology, the Committee noted that that the ICT Operations plan would be reviewed as part of the process for looking at the future procurement of ICT for the Council that was due to take place during 2015. In terms of the business continuity risk to ICT provision, relatively little infrastructure was hosted in house and appropriate back up service provision available in alternative locations.

Norman Jorgensen referred to the establishment of volunteer resident networks that might assist residents in the event of an incident or event with the guidance of Council Officers. An example of this was the 4x4 car network which had played a very helpful role in recent flood events. It was suggested that this kind of resident self-help network should be encouraged and the Committee was informed that this was an area that could be looked at.

The Committee considered whether any additional follow up action was required. It was felt that the robustness of the Council's business continuity arrangements was an issue that required monitoring and it was agreed that a further update report should be presented to the Committee in 12 months.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the report be noted;
- 2) That a further report be presented to the Committee in January 2016.

**52. OPEN GREEN SPACES - UPDATE**

The Committee considered a report set out on Agenda pages 19 to 25 which gave details of a public consultation exercise on open green spaces that had been undertaken between the 17 October 2014 and 12 December 2014. Consideration of the report followed on from the July 2014 meeting of the Committee where Councillors had looked at some of the challenges and problems that the open green spaces service had experienced that summer in light of the unusual weather and high levels of vegetation growth. In November 2014 the Committee had received an update on the provisional results of the public consultation.

Josie Wragg, Head of Communities and Councillor Angus Ross, Executive Member for Environment attended the meeting, presented the report and address the Committee's questions.

The Committee's attention was drawn to the summary of response to the public consultation as set out within the report on Agenda page 20 and to a number of potential next steps as set out on Agenda page 21.

Angus Ross highlighted the piece of work that was taking place as part of the Council's Customer Service programme to improve the information about open green spaces including grass cutting. This would include improvements to the mapping systems used which increase the accuracy of the location of the areas of open green space. This would for example make it easier to determine responsibility for particular areas of green open space.

Discussions were also taking place to seek to establish some flexibility within the existing grass cutting contract and the responses collected from the public consultation process would inform that process and also help inform the design and specification of future service provision.

It was clarified to the Committee that it was not expected that an Executive decision would be required in respect of the review of the service. Effort was being put into managing requirements and it was not possible to define at this stage what requirements there might be, but all options were being kept under review.

Councillors' attention was also drawn to the results of Question 7 within the public consultation which asked respondents to indicate if they had ever cut/mowed an area of public open space in their area. 32% of respondents had indicated that that they had, but 68% had not. Angus Ross suggested that residents voluntarily undertaking such activity needed to be expanded upon and encouraged. The legal position on this was being checked with the aim of providing reassurance to residents.

With regards to properties owned by Reading Borough Council but located within the Wokingham Borough Council boundary it was clarified that Wokingham Borough Council would have responsibility for any associated open spaces.

In discussion, members of the Committee referred to the comments made at previous meetings where they had expressed support for any encouragement of residents to play a part in looking after their own local green open spaces, although it was again stressed that it was important that a policy on the issue be drafted. Councillors renewed their support for a move to a more outcomes focussed contract rather than one which relied on a fixed specification. It was noted that the current contract was due to expire in April 2016.

Prue Bray referred to Question 8 of the public consultation and commented that 19 residents had answered with 'any other suggestions' to this question when asked what would encourage residents or groups to help maintain open green spaces. She asked whether a list of the alternative suggestions could be circulated to the Committee. Josie Wragg agreed to do this.

The Committee then discussed whether to take any further action. It was felt that a further update to the March 2015 meeting of the Committee would be helpful.

**RESOLVED:** That a further update be provided to the March meeting.

### **53. BROADMOOR ESCAPE ALERT SIRENS UPDATE**

The Committee considered a short report as set out on Agenda page 27 written by Councillor Michael Firmager following the visit he had undertaken along with Councillors Bray, Sleight, Miall and Richards on 25 November 2014.

In presenting the report, he thanked the other Councillors who had visited the hospital with him and also thanked the hospital and John Hourihan, Director of Security for extending the invitation and making them so welcome. He commented that he had found the visit very useful indeed and highlighted a number of areas within his report. His impression of the hospital following the visit was that it was very secure and had complex and thorough security measures. He had met a number of the patients and pointed out to the Committee that not all of the patients at the hospital had been admitted via the criminal justice system. Patients had an average stay at the hospital of seven years.

Councillor Prue Bray commented that during the visit they had seen the different type of facilities provided to the different patients depending on the level of security required and Councillor Ken Miall stated that following the visit he thought it be very unlikely that an escape would occur from the hospital.

Kevin Jacob referred the Committee to the discussion that had taken place at its November 2014 meeting around the efficiency of operation of the school telephone cascade system that would be put into operation in the unlikely event of an escape from Broadmoor Hospital. The Committee had originally requested that the effectiveness of the cascade system be looked at by the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, but for practical reasons the results of the enquiry were being brought back to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.

Kevin Jacob circulated a supplementary report to the Committee which was marked as to follow on the Agenda, which set out the results of a straw poll sent to the 26 schools within the Wokingham Borough that were part of the cascade system and the summarised responses of individual schools. The survey had asked the following three questions:

- When was the last time that your school received a test alert through the cascade system?
- How well do you think the escape alert system is operating?
- Do you have any other comments?

The Committee was informed that:

- At the time of the meeting responses had been received from 12 schools; (46%);
- 10/12 schools reported receiving a test alert in the last 12 months;
- 2/12 schools reported that they had not received a test alert;
- 8/12 school responses indicated support for the retention of audible escape sirens.

In discussing the school responses, various Members of the Committee felt that it was important to follow up on the schools who had indicated that they had not received a test alert, especially given that one of them was a secondary school. It was also felt that those schools had not yet responded should be encouraged to do so.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Prue Bray updated the Committee on discussions that had taken place on the sirens issue at an informal meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board in November 2014 and the Community Safety Partnership in December 2014.

At the informal meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board, some concerns had been expressed that the alert sirens could be said to represent a historical anachronism given that no other mental hospital or even high security prison had such siren provision and that the presence of the sirens might unintentionally contribute to or perpetuate, stigma towards people with mental health issues. It was felt that the perceived fear with regard to a possible escape from Broadmoor was far greater than the reality. She commented that she understood and respected that point of view, but that Councillors as representatives and leaders of their local communities also had to have cognisance of the genuinely felt concerns of local residents and the sense of reassurance they gained from the existence of the sirens. She accepted that they also had a role in informing the public and that there an opportunity for Councillors to act as intermediaries between professional opinion and the wider community. The discussion at the Community Safety Partnership had included the discussion of wider business resilience and emergency planning issues associated with sirens in general across the West of Berkshire.

It was suggested that a possible way forward was for the West London Mental Health Trust to consider retaining the existing sirens for as long as they remained operable as an interim measure whilst other more modern alert systems were developed and the public had opportunity to get used to them. In this case, the replacement of some of the sirens with modern equivalents as originally proposed by the Trust and the costs involved might not be necessary.

The Committee then debated whether to take any further action. It was felt that it was important to follow up where schools had indicated in the straw poll that they had not received a test alert and the comments made by one school that on occasion they had experienced delays in getting through to Forest Care. Kevin Jacob agreed to progress this with the appropriate Officers.

David Sleight commented that on the basis of what he had learned including the visit to the hospital he did not think that the sirens were still necessary.

Councillors also felt that the West London Mental Health Trust should be contacted to seek an update on the offer the Trust had previously made at the Bracknell Forest Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny Commission meeting to reconsider their original proposals.

It was acknowledged that there remained a need for cooperation and the sharing of information with the Bracknell Forest Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the report be noted;
- 2) That the schools part of the schools cascade system be prompted to respond to the schools cascade straw poll if they had not already done so;

- 3) That where schools had indicated that they had not received a test alert within the last twelve months this be followed up with the appropriate Officers;
- 4) That the West London Mental Health Trust be contacted to seek an update on the status of their proposals for the escape alert sirens.

#### **54. CONSIDERATION OF THE CURRENT EXECUTIVE FORWARD PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered the published version of the Executive Forward Programme which set out decisions expected to be taken by the Executive in the period January 2015 to April 2015.

With regards to the programme for January 2015 and item WBC748 Fee for Correction of Commons Register, Commons Act 2006, members of the Committee requested that they receive information on the number of errors made by the former Berkshire County Council in incorrectly registering land on the Register of Town and Village Greens. Kevin Jacob agreed to investigate this.

**RESOLVED:** That the Executive Forward Programme be noted.

#### **55. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES 2014/2015**

The Committee considered the anticipated Work Programme of the Committee and that of the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees as set out on Agenda pages 41 to 64.

It was noted that a further update on Open Green Spaces would be added to the programme for the Committee meeting on 24 March 2014.

Kevin Jacob reminded the Committee that the Annual Reports of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees were due to be considered at the Council meeting in March 2015. He commented that given the timings of the Committee meetings it would be impossible for the Committees to consider their annual reports before they had to be submitted to Council and suggested that they be agreed outside of the meetings in consultation with the Committee Chairman. This was supported.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the a further update report on Open Green Spaces be added to the Work Programme for 24 March 2015;
- 2) That the Annual Reports of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and other Overview and Scrutiny Committees be agreed in consultation with the Committee Chairman.

#### **56. UPDATE REPORTS FROM CHAIRMAN OR NOMINATED MEMBERS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES**

The Committee considered update reports from the Chairman of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Community Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee which had been circulated to the Committee prior or at the meeting.

Councillor David Sleight, Chairman of the Community Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee in presenting his report highlighted the work undertaken by the Committee in looking at the various outside organisations the Council had appointed representatives known as 'Outside Bodies' and 'Other Bodies'.

Councillor Ken Miall, Chairman of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee in presenting his report highlighted the consideration by the Committee of a report on the effects of air pollution on public health and how this was measured. A number of interesting points for further enquiry had been raised which would be pursued at a future meeting. The Committee was also informed that he and the Vice-Chairman of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be attending an overview and scrutiny meeting at West Berkshire Council which would be looking into maternity services at the Royal Berkshire Hospital following a number of incidences when the Maternity Unit had had to temporarily close.

Councillor Norman Jorgensen commented that the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee was due to meet on Tuesday 27 January 2015. It was due to consider the draft Local Enforcement Plan prior to its consideration by the Executive on 29 January 2015. The Agenda also included a proposal for a scrutiny review into commuter parking.

**RESOLVED:** That the reports of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairman be noted.

*These are the Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee*

*If you need help in understanding this document or if you would like a copy of it in large print please contact one of our Team Support Officers.*