

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 22 NOVEMBER 2017 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.10 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Keith Baker (Chairman), Laura Blumenthal (Vice-Chairman), Parry Batth, Pauline Helliar-Symons, Ken Miall, Ian Pittock, Malcolm Richards, Chris Smith and Shahid Younis

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Simon Weeks and Norman Jorgensen

Officers Present

Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist

44. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted by Lindsay Ferris and Bill Soane.

Imogen Shepherd-Dubey attended the meeting as a substitute for Lindsay Ferris. Philip Houldsworth attended the meeting as a substitute for Bill Soane.

45. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 20 September and 16 October 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

46. DECLARATIONS 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. DISCUSSION WITH EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 21 to 26, which continued the process of holding discussions with Executive Members. The aim of the discussions was to increase awareness of key policy and service issues over the year ahead and to identify areas where Overview and Scrutiny could provide effective challenge and support. Members had agreed the principle that Overview and Scrutiny would add more value if it was proactive rather than a reactive process.

Simon Weeks (Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement) and Norman Jorgensen (Executive Member for Environment, Sports, Environmental Health, Leisure and Libraries) attended the meeting to give an outline of key challenges and to answer Member questions developed around a set of key lines of enquiry.

Simon Weeks addressed the meeting and explained his role on the Executive. Councillor Weeks dealt with day to day planning issues while David Lee (Executive Member for Strategic Highways and Planning) focussed on strategic planning matters.

In relation to new policies, Councillor Weeks outlined work to produce an updated policy on Traveller incursions. It was hoped that the new policy would be ready by February 2018. Officers were working closely with the police on this issue and it was noted that the new police protocol had been effective in dealing with a recent Traveller incursion at Coppid Beech. It was confirmed that all Members would be notified once the new policy was completed, early in 2018.

In relation to the current challenges facing the Planning service, Councillor Weeks highlighted the following:

- 21st Century Council – the Planning service would be addressed in Phase 2 of the programme. At present 30% of Planning staff were on temporary contracts pending the new service structures. 21st Century Council would also bring in new ways of working which included more self-service for residents and Members.
- 5 Year Land Supply – the Council was facing significant pressures from opportunist developers who sought to exploit the current loophole whereby the Council was judged on the number of houses built rather than the number of planning permissions granted.
- Planning Appeals – there were currently 12 appeals in the pipeline which would have significant financial implications for the Council.
- Planning Enforcement – the Council was taking a more robust approach to enforcement with more prosecutions and more use of the Proceeds of Crime legislation.
- Performance Management – day to day performance was good against the 8/13 week targets for the handling of planning applications. A longer timeframe was negotiated for major planning applications.
- Communications – the key issue was to ensure that stakeholders had realistic expectations about the service. The Council had to be seen to be even-handed in dealing with applications and enforcement issues.

In the ensuing discussion Members of the Committee raised the following points and questions:

- How were residents informed about service standards and inappropriate behaviours? It was confirmed that the vast majority of residents obeyed the Planning rules. The Council used leaflets and other publicity tools to make sure that residents were aware of the required standards and behaviours.
- Why were developers with planning permissions not building the houses required to meet local needs? It was confirmed that some developers restricted the level of building in order to keep prices high and increase profitability. The Council had met with a range of Government Ministers and the Prime Minister to lobby for a change in the Government's approach to this issue.
- Were there any measures that the Council could consider local in order to bring house prices down? It was confirmed that all opportunities, such as the use of modular construction techniques, were under active consideration.

- Does the Council have the right number of skilled, experienced staff in order to address the many pressures on the Planning service? It was confirmed that, following the 21st Century Council changes, the service would be able to reduce the number of temporary staff. This would improve the quality of permanent staff and save money currently paid for agency staff. The availability of experienced senior staff was a key issue in taking the service forwards.
- In relation to the developers who obtain planning permission but do not build, can the Council use compulsory purchase powers to expedite matters? It was confirmed that the Council can enter into S106 agreements with developers which specify the rate at which houses should be built.

Norman Jorgensen addressed the Committee and highlighted a number of key issues relating to his portfolio, as follows:

- Collection of food waste – the Executive had agreed to this in principle. A further report would be considered by the Executive in January 2018. It was likely to be the subject of a Member working group, commencing in March 2018.
- Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) – under the framework of the Flood Water Management Act the Council needed to develop its own policy on SUDS which would be used in relation to development applications. This could be considered by a Member working group or by one of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, with a start date in early 2018.
- Licensing of events – the implications for the licensing of major events such as the Henley Regatta. Councillor Jorgensen would be discussing this issue with the Licensing Committee. It could be the subject for a Member working group.
- Building Control/Public Protection fees and charges – there had been some negative public feedback about the level of fees and charges for certain services. This could be a matter for review by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Country Parks and Sports and Leisure projects – these would be considered by Member working groups. The relevant Terms of Reference could be submitted to Overview and Scrutiny for agreement. Members noted that Member groups had been set up for these services but had not met during 2017.
- Norman Jorgensen confirmed that any Member working groups would be cross-party. The Chairman commented that evening meetings would be necessary in order for Members with day jobs to play an effective part in the process.

In the ensuing discussion Members of the Committee raised the following points and questions:

- In relation to the Carnival Pool Redevelopment, what was the status of the 53 flats to be built as part of the scheme? It was confirmed that this matter should be referred to the Town Centre Regeneration team.
- In relation to the collection of food waste, what could the Council do to encourage residents to buy less and to recycle more? It was confirmed that re3 had an ongoing programme which was reviewed by the Board on a regular basis. In relation to the

collection of glass it was felt that the existing bring banks were successful. Furthermore, it would cost the Council around £600k to collect glass at the kerbside.

- At present the Borough did not have a cycling forum which would enable cyclists to provide feedback to the Council and would provide a specific group for consultation on new policies and projects. It was confirmed that Councillor Jorgensen would consider the potential for a cycling forum.
- In relation to major new leisure developments such as the Carnival Pool, how did the Council consult with groups representing people with disabilities? Was the Council carrying out its duties under the Equality Act 2010? The specific example of parking for disabled people at the Carnival Pool was discussed. It was confirmed that Councillor Jorgensen would review these issues.
- What was the Council doing to tackle climate change and improve energy conservation? It was confirmed that the Council did have an energy saving policy. Councillor Jorgensen confirmed that he would be meeting with Officers shortly to discuss the potential for further energy saving measures.
- In relation to the grass cutting contract, was there confidence that performance in 2018 would be an improvement on 2017? It was confirmed that performance in 2017 was an improvement on the previous year. Councillor Jorgensen confirmed that discussions had taken place with the contractor and that improvements would be made in 2018, for example a greater focus on informal grassed areas.
- Which parts of the overall portfolio were delegated to the Deputy Executive Member? It was confirmed that the Deputy Executive Member had specific responsibilities relating to waste collection, parks and open spaces, arts and leisure and partnership working.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Councillors Jorgensen and Weeks be thanked for attending the meeting and answering Member questions;
- 2) Progress on key issues and priorities identified during the discussions be reported to a future meeting of the Committee;
- 3) The process for setting fees and charges relating to the Public Protection Service be considered by the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

50. COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE MONITORING QUARTER 2 2017-18

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 27 to 36, which provided Council Plan performance data for the second quarter of 2017/18 (July to September). The report gave details of progress against 48 performance indicators and 19 key projects.

The report stated that the majority of indicators/projects (70%) were achieving the assigned targets for the year to date and were classified as "Green". Another 15 indicators/projects (25%) were slightly off target and were reported as "Amber". The

remaining three indicators/projects (5%) were outside the Amber threshold and were reported as “Red”.

The indicators/projects with a Red rating were:

- Percentage of child protection visits due in the period which were completed within 10 days of the previous visit.
- Number of new businesses engaged with.
- Shinfield Eastern Relief Road.

The report also highlighted a service area demonstrating improved performance with an explanation of the steps taken to achieve better outcomes. The service area highlighted was Homelessness with the indicator – Formal Homelessness decisions made within 45 working days. Performance against this indicator had improved from 78% in 2015/16 to 95% in the second quarter of 2017/18.

In the ensuing discussion the following points were made:

- In relation to the indicator on child protection visits completed within 10 days of the previous visit, it was confirmed that the statutory minimum requirement for visits was 42 days. The local target of 10 days was very challenging. In fact visits completed within 15 days remained high (94.4%).
- In relation to school attainment, the Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee now looked at all schools causing concern, with local Members invited to attend the relevant meetings.
- In relation to the indicators on school performance it was suggested that in addition to the percentage of schools rated “good or better” the report should include the actual number of schools involved.
- Members noted the good news that the Shinfield Eastern Relief Road had finally opened. However, there was disappointment that the road would be closing again for further drainage works.
- In relation to the indicator on staff turnover, it was suggested that the commentary include an explanation on the rationale for and benefits of a “healthy” turnover rate.
- It was suggested that all indicators showing a deteriorating position should include explanatory comments in the commentary box.
- Members felt that the layout of the report was improving, but there was still some concern about the time delay from the end of each quarter to the report’s submission to Overview and Scrutiny. It was confirmed that the report was submitted to the Corporate Leadership Team and the Member Executive Briefing meeting prior to its consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. The Chairman undertook to discuss this process with the Leader of the Council.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) progress on key performance indicators and major projects be noted;
- 2) Member comments on content and presentation be incorporated into future versions of the report;
- 3) Officers in the Homelessness team be congratulated on their success in improving performance relating to homelessness decisions;
- 4) the Chairman discuss the potential for speeding up the delivery of the report, to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, with the Leader of the Council.

51. SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 37 to 39, which provided an update on the Inquiry into Overview and Scrutiny being carried out by the House of Commons Select Committee for Communities and Local Government.

The report stated that, as part of the Select Committee's deliberations, Councillors Ferris and Richards had attended a session at the House of Commons on 30 October 2017. This included an informal discussion with MPs and attendance at a formal meeting of the Select Committee.

The report stated that amongst the key questions being considered by the Select Committee and put to witnesses were the following:

- Do local authority scrutiny committees operate with political independence and in a non-partisan way?
- Do officers and Members working on Scrutiny have sufficient resources, expertise and knowledge to deliver effective scrutiny?
- If you could make a single change, what would you change about the way scrutiny operates in your authority?

The report confirmed that the Select Committee had finished its evidence taking sessions and was now meeting to consider its final report which it aimed to finalise by mid-December 2017.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the update report on the Select Committee Inquiry into Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government be noted;
- 2) a further report be submitted following the publication of the Select Committee's final report;
- 3) feedback on the Select Committee hearings, from Councillors Ferris and Richards, be circulated to Overview and Scrutiny Members.

52. CONSIDERATION OF THE CURRENT EXECUTIVE FORWARD PROGRAMME

The committee considered a copy of the Executive Forward Programme as set out on Agenda pages 41 to 45.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Executive Forward Programme be noted;
- 2) Members notify Democratic Services of any issues they wish to include in the Committee's future work programme.

53. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES

The Committee considered its forward work programme and that of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees as set out on Agenda pages 47 to 57.

Pauline Helliard-Symons gave details of additional items for consideration at the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, viz:

- Action Plan following the Joint Targeted Area Inspection (January 2018);
- Schools Performance – 2017 Exam Results for secondary Schools (January 2018);
- Children in Care Questionnaire (March 2018).

RESOLVED: That the forward Work Programmes be noted.

54. UPDATE REPORTS FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

The Committee considered updates from the Chairmen of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Pauline Helliard-Symons reported that the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee Agenda now included an item on "Executive Member Future Policy Issues". This was seen as a positive development in highlighting future issues which may benefit from the Committee's input.

Shahid Younis reported on the new approach, being undertaken by the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with more detailed analysis of issues such as housing and greater involvement from residents, community and user groups.

Ken Miall reported on issues to be considered at the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee including feedback on the operation of the GP Alliance and the Health and Wellbeing Board.

RESOLVED: That the updates be noted.

This page is intentionally left blank