

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD ON 1 OCTOBER 2018 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.50 PM**

**Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Guy Grandison (Chairman), Clive Jones, Dianne King, David Sleight, Bill Soane, Andy Croy and Malcolm Richards

**Officers Present**

Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist), Neil Carr (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist) and Shaun Virtue (Local Police Area Commander), Jim Powell (RBFRS Service Group Manager) and Trevor Ferguson (Chief Fire Officer)

**21. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted from Mike Haines and Rachel Burgess.

**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. LOCAL FIRE SERVICE UPDATE**

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 5 to 18, which provided an update on the local fire service.

Trevor Ferguson, Chief Fire Officer, gave a presentation to the Committee outlining various aspects of the fire service including their current workload, budget constraints and the 2019-2025 corporate plan.

Trevor stated that the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) was responsible for a £33.479 million budget. He added that £4.96 million had been saved from the budget between 2010 and 2016. The Capital programme would be funded until 2021.

Trevor stated that much of the budget savings had been achieved through reduction of back office staff and by restructuring parts of the business. Trevor stressed that the frontline service delivery had been preserved and that the service was fully capable of responding to incidents.

Trevor explained that as a result of the Grenfell Fire incident, RBFRS fire safety inspector officers inspected 157 high rise premises and conducted 4700 face to face visits. He added that the service jointly inspected 74 buildings which were identified most at risk, and all Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) high rise buildings were identified.

Trevor explained that three tri-service stations were being developed, with one having already opened in 2017, and a further two being scheduled to open in 2020 and 2021. He added that seven new generation fire appliances had been delivered in 2017 and 2018, with a further 4 to be delivered in 2019 at an approximate cost of £200k each.

Trevor outlined the potential pay pressure placed on the service, as the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) was using a 2% benchmark for yearly pay increases but inflation was sitting closer to 3%. He added that phase 4 of the RBFRS 'life after Grenfell' plans may require additional funding. Trevor stated that, historically, the RBFRS had been a very prudent authority, and as a result sat in the bottom quartile of precept funding when compared to other authorities.

Andy Croy asked whether the majority of staff in the RBFRS had experienced net pay cuts as a result of Central Government austerity measures. Trevor stated that many staff had experienced a real term pay cut over recent years as a result of incremental pay rises being below the market level of inflation.

David Sleight asked for clarification to the definition of a high rise building, and what was the best prevention method for stopping catastrophes such as the Grenfell incident. Trevor stated that the definition of a high rise building was 18m tall. He added that the most efficient method of preventing such incidents were a combination of fire protection staff, building control management and fire safety precautions within the buildings.

Clive Jones asked whether the fire service was consulted adequately regarding new developments. Trevor stated that engagement was crucial in allowing the fire service to address issues as they arose. He added that he could only think of a couple of examples of developments which had ignored guidelines, and that the greater issue was where buildings were being interacted with differently than intended. Guy Grandison followed on by asking how best to contact the planning inspectorate about these issues. Trevor stated that it was a difficult process but interaction and engagement was key.

Clive Jones asked whether there were any issues with recruitment and retention within the RBFRS. Trevor stated that there were no issues with full time firefighters, however the attitude towards life long careers within the service was beginning to show signs of waning. He added that retained firefighters were far more difficult to recruit and retain, as many of the prospective applicants would have little spare time or long commutes in to their main job.

Malcolm Richards asked about the lifespan of specialist firefighting appliances. Trevor confirmed that specialist pumping equipment would last for approximately 10 to 12 years, and that specialist high rise equipment would last for approximately 20 years. He confirmed that these items were purchased out of the Capital budget.

Bill Soane asked for Trevor Ferguson's opinion on sprinklers in schools, businesses and residential properties. Trevor responded to say that he would personally recommend sprinklers to be fitted in all properties as they provide excellent fire prevention benefits. However, Trevor added that the cost associated with sprinkler installation was substantial for the individual or business and that this was the primary reason that many properties did not have sprinklers installed. Trevor reiterated that the service sees sprinkler systems as an excellent investment.

Andy Croy queried the reduction in the number of firefighters in each core unit. Trevor stated that operational management has to consider the risk profile of a specific area and that they believe that a model of 4 firefighters per engine with more units as a backup was the best balance of safety to the firefighters and capability to deal with incidents.

Andy Croy asked as to why the retained support unit had been disbanded. Trevor stated that it was decided that the unit was deemed inefficient, and that full time cover had been spread to a greater area. He added that there was no fix for the retained staffing model, but stated that retained staff provided a greater depth of resilience within the service.

Guy Grandison asked about the percentage of retained units within the RBFRS. In response Jim Powell, RBFRS Service Group Manager, stated that 7 out of 21 (1/3) of the units had retained staff.

Andy Croy asked what reduction in funding the service had seen since 2010. Trevor stated that he did not have those figures to hand but that the information would be given to Democratic Services to feed back to the Committee.

Guy Grandison stated that one of the roles of the Committee was to build and develop relationships with the Borough's services and offer a helping hand where possible. He extended this invitation to the fire service. In response, Trevor Ferguson stated that a motion on sprinklers would be coming to Council soon and encouraged Members to get involved in the discussion. He added that any help that Members could provide in persuading local MP's to lobby for an increase in the service's precept funding would be welcomed, adding that the extra flexibility that this could provide for the service would be very helpful.

**RESOLVED:** That:

1. Trevor Ferguson and Jim Powell be thanked for attending the meeting;
2. figures detailing the Service's funding levels since 2010 be circulated to Committee Members;
3. Members be encouraged to continue to provide support for the RBFRS both locally and to the local MP's;
4. the fire service be invited to present an update to the Committee in 12 months' time.

## **26. LOCAL POLICING UPDATE**

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 19 to 72, which gave an update on the local police service.

Shaun Virtue, Local Police Area Commander (Bracknell and Wokingham), stated that Wokingham was a comparatively safe Borough and that it fared well when compared with similar Boroughs across the UK. He stated that some areas of the country had moved away from local policing and the local knowledge that came with it, but Wokingham still had strong local policing links within its neighbourhoods.

Shaun stated that retained neighbourhood policing enabled the service to maintain community contact, but stated that this division was currently smaller than it had been in previous years. He added that between in the early 2000's, Bracknell had put a lot of investment in to problem solving, and that this ethos was currently trying to be developed within Wokingham.

Shaun raised the issues around crime classification and increasing crime figures. He stated that although figures indicated a rise in all areas of crime within the Borough, much

of this could be due to how crimes are classified as soon as they are reported. For example, if a member of the public called in that they thought they had been burgled, only for the police to find that their possessions were in their home (misplaced), the incident would still be classified as a burglary unless a cumbersome and time consuming administrative process was undertaken. He added that 25% of police workload was crime related, with the other 75% mainly consisting of safeguarding measures and risk mitigation.

Shaun stated that the Wokingham Police Station (that recently closed) cost £100k per year in rent alone, had no public access and was not in a suitable location. He stated that the new facility located within St Crispin's School would provide a good opportunity to interact with young people in the area.

Shaun stated that looked after (and previously looked after) children and individuals with diseases such as Alzheimer's and Dementia prove a big challenge for the police. He added that some global crime issues were beginning to have an effect locally within the Borough. He stated that the force does not have an issue with recruitment, but that there was an ongoing issue with staff retention, with double the number of officers leaving the force than there had been previously.

Bill Soane stated that there had been an emerging pattern of knife crime within the Thames Valley and asked whether bringing back stop and search procedures would assist with this. Shaun was of the opinion that stop and search was a useful tool for the police to have which required firm grounds to do so, and was body-camera filmed. He added that stop and search should be used sensibly, with clear justification.

Clive Jones asked how many police cars would be out on patrol around Wokingham during a typical evening. Shaun stated that it depended on the demand, but a minimum of 6 patrol cars would be deployed. He added that neighbourhood teams and armed response vehicles (ARV's) provided flexibility to the service and enabled a better coverage of the Borough.

Malcolm Richards asked about the workload that road traffic incidents created for the police. Shaun replied stating that approximately 20% of police time was spent responding to and dealing with such incidents. Malcolm asked Shaun's opinion on the effectiveness of Police Community Support Officer's (PCSO's). Shaun was of the opinion that PCSO's were very effective and were as effective as a regular officer in most circumstances. He added that they provided resilience and reliability to the service. Malcolm queried the impact in a reduction of the number of local police stations. Shaun stated that members of the public could contact the police via other avenues, such as via a web chat service. He added that this had freed up the time of some phone operatives, and that a good balance of traditional contact methods and emerging technology needed to be provided.

Andy Croy asked how much extra work had been taken on by the police due to reduction in services previously provided by other public services. Shaun stated that as the service was provided 24/7, they naturally take on workload from other organisations during the unsociable hours. He stated that youth provision and adult social care were two key areas where the police have noticed increased workload.

Guy Grandison asked whether the mind set (with regards to police careers) of officers had changed over time. Shaun stated that many officers did not want to stay in the service for

as long as many had done before them, and that many officers were transferring to forces in the West Country in search of better lifestyle options.

In response to a Member question, Shaun Virtue confirmed that he would supply the Committee with information and figures regarding key worker housing.

In response to a Member question, Shaun Virtue stated that the data showed that the Earley Neighbourhood Action Group had performed well. He added that members of the public should speak to their neighbourhood team if they wanted to enquire about establishing their own group.

Guy Grandison stated that one of the roles of the Committee was to build and develop relationships with the Borough's services and offer a helping hand where possible, he extended this invitation to the police service. Shaun responded by asking the Members to continue to influence the development of the problem solving ethos within Wokingham. He also asked that a Chair be appointed to the Community Safety partnership as a vacancy was currently open.

**RESOLVED** That:

1. Shaun Virtue be thanked for attending the meeting;
2. information and figures regarding key worker housing within the police force be supplied to the Committee;
3. Members continue to support and influence the development of the problem solving ethos within the Wokingham police force;
4. the police service be invited to give an update to the Committee in 12 months' time.

## **27. WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19**

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 73 to 78, which gave details of its proposed work programme for 2018/19. The Chairman asked Members to notify him of potential additional items for inclusion in the work programme.

Members discussed the town centre regeneration item (primarily focussing on the Market Place works) scheduled for the November meeting. They stated that they would like a range of stakeholders to be invited, including disability groups and local businesses. They added that an invitation be extended to the Executive Member for Regeneration, Philip Mirfin, and that a report be presented by Officers working on the town centre regeneration project.

Members discussed the Revenue and Capital monitoring item scheduled for the January Committee. They stated that they would like to review the quarterly revenue and capital monitoring reports at that meeting, with a view to completing a review of the budget setting process during the next municipal year. Democratic Services added that Member training on budget scrutiny could be arranged if Members were inclined.

Members stated that they would like an update on the Community Safety Partnership and an update on WBC's parking strategy policy at the March 2019 Committee meeting.

**RESOLVED** That:

1. Regeneration Officers, Philip Mirfin and a range of stakeholders (including businesses and disability groups) be invited to the November Committee with a focus on the Market Place regeneration project;
2. The January 2019 Committee item on monitoring of the Council's Revenue and Capital expenditure include a review of the quarterly revenue and capital monitoring reports, with a view to completing a review of the budget setting process during the next municipal year;
3. Democratic Services organise training on effective budget scrutiny for the 2019/20 municipal year;
4. An update on the Community Safety Partnership and an update on WBC's parking strategy policy be brought to the March 2019 Committee meeting.