

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 20 MARCH 2019 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.50 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Philip Houldsworth (Chairman), Malcolm Richards (Vice-Chairman), Andy Croy, Lindsay Ferris, Guy Grandison, Kate Haines, Mike Haines, Ken Miall and Bill Soane

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Gary Cowan, Charles Margetts and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

Officers Present

Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Graham Ebers, Deputy Chief Executive
Sally Watkins, Assistant Director, Digital and Design
Jude Whyte, Assistant Director, Customer and Localities

87. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Ian Pittock and Shahid Younis.

Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey attended the meeting as a substitute.

88. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 20 February 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

89. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

90. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

91. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Chairman invited Members to submit questions.

Gary Cowan asked the Chairman of the Committee the following question:

On more than one occasion I brought to the attention of the Executive my concerns about the evolution of Century 21 in that technology seems to play a big role yet very little attention seems to be paid to methods that encouraged the Public/Members/Officers personal communication when, in fact, it is a very simple process. Is this driven by the desire to be secretive and keep the public/Members at a distance or are there other reasons why the Executive seem to want to steer away from a closer more personal relationship with our residents and Members, particularly backbenchers and Opposition Members?

Answer

The 21C programme has adopted a "Digital by Choice" approach to services, and this has ensured our customers continue to have the ability to choose how they interact with the Council.

The programme has been able to improve responses to customers at first point of contact by the introduction of the Customer Delivery Service. Customer Delivery has centralised a number of teams across the Council, ensuring the customer is able to contact the right person, at the right time to receive the right information, irrespective of the channel they choose to use.

The introduction of the Localities offer has grown our customer service offering by further developing our offer within Libraries and creating Community Hubs, as well as launching a Locality Engagement Team that is focussed on community engagement.

In addition, in order to improve communication to all residents, the 21C Programme highlighted the need to build a stronger, more resilient Communication and Engagement Team. This team is being set up, with a number of smaller teams being centralised across the Council and increased resource that will ultimately create a better level of engagement both internally and externally.

New technology that has been introduced will help both the public, and Members to carry out their duties more effectively, for example, the new HIMS system (Highways Information Management System) for logging potholes and the introduction of a new Members Intranet.

Supplementary Question

I have no problem with the 21CC programme. However, every one of us has the experience of when the phone rings and the caller is not identified. You speak to a person and you have no idea who they are, so you are on guard. The way 21CC works is missing out the development of those personal relationships between the Council and members of the public. I know that this cannot be 100%, but in communications the intention should always be to include the name of the relevant individual rather than just the name of the department. For example, responses from Highways are badged as a response from the Highways Department with “we will respond within five days”. If you are dealing with a person you should tell that person who you are.

Should we not be looking at the personal relationship between the Officers, the Members and the residents to make our interactions as personal as is humanly possible and not too technical?

Answer

I have some sympathy with your views, but I will take it away and provide a written answer.

92. 21ST CENTURY COUNCIL

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 13 to 62, which provided an update on the 21st Century Council (21 CC) change programme.

Charles Margetts (Deputy Executive Member for Finance, HR and Corporate Resources), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive) Sally Watkins (Assistant Director, Digital and Design) and Jude Whyte (Assistant Director, Customer and Localities) attended the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions.

The report reminded Members of the projected benefits of the 21CC model, viz:

- Improved availability of, and access to, Council services through digital channels;

- Swifter resolution of issues and queries;
- Ability for residents to track the progress of their issue as it is resolved by the Council;
- Greater focus on problem-solving and customer responsiveness
- A leaner, more efficient Council costing significantly less to run.

Appended to the report were three key documents:

- 21CC Update Report to the Executive on 21 February;
- WBC/Ignite 21CC: Future Operating Model Blueprint – August 2016;
- Overview and Scrutiny - Key Lines of Enquiry agreed by the Chairman.

The February 2019 Executive Update Report stated that Phase 1 of the programme (Support Services) was completed in the Spring of 2017 whilst Phase 2 (Environment, Housing, Income and Assessments and Customer Services) was now in the final stages of implementation. The Update Report gave details of the key customer benefits being delivered as part of Phase 2.

The report also stated that the 21CC methodology would then be applied to Adult and Children's Services as part of a wider Continuous Improvement Programme over the next three years.

In the ensuing discussions Member raised the following points and questions:

Members noted that some of the supporting documents included jargon which would not help residents to understand the 21CC organisational model.

It was confirmed that future reports would be checked to ensure the use of plain English and avoid byzantine phraseology wherever possible.

Members asked for clarification on the 21CC financial impact table, set out on Agenda page 22.

Graham Ebers explained that the table should have made it clearer that there had been an underachievement of savings totalling £1m linked to Adult/Children's Services. These service areas would be assessed as part of a Council-wide Continuous Improvement Programme. This would involve the application of 21CC principles to those service areas. Graham agreed that Adult and Children's services were different to other services, for example in relation to the complexity and sensitivity of case work and the interface with key partners. The delay in addressing Adult and Children's Services also reflected the earlier instability in those service areas and the short term priority to tackle increasing levels of demand and financial pressures.

Sally Watkins outlined the process for applying 21CC principles to service areas. This involved the development of a baseline through analysis of current service delivery followed by detailed analysis of systems, processes and best practice elsewhere in the country. Frontline staff would then be involved in workshops aimed at identifying potential new/streamlined ways of working. The aim was to redesign processes to make them more efficient and effective.

Members referred to the Member Working Group established to provide oversight to the 21CC programme. The working group had not met since the summer of 2018 and there was concern that Members had lost touch with the programme.

Graham Ebers reported that key personnel changes in the 21CC team had resulted in a gap in meetings of the working group. The programme was also transitioning into the Council-wide Continuous Improvement Programme. Charles Margetts agreed that Member oversight was important and should be refreshed as part of the new programme.

As a result of the 21CC programme, how would residents experience improved customer service?

Sally Watkins referred to the move from traditional transactional services based on paper forms to the improved online offering which allowed residents to carry out transactions 24/7 and made the Council more efficient. Examples included Council Tax online, planning comments on line and improved reporting of issues such as fly tipping, potholes and damaged trees. The outcome from the new arrangements included greater convenience for residents and more streamlined systems for WBC which enabled significant savings to be delivered.

Jude Whyte outlined the synergies delivered in the new Localities service by bringing teams together, developing community hubs within libraries and providing more efficient and effective call handling.

How was the 21CC programme helping Members to carry out their roles more effectively?

Sally Watkins referred to the development of the Members' Intranet which aimed to provide access to key information in one location. The strengthened Communication and Engagement team would manage the Member Intranet site which would be rolled out in May/June 2019. Sally agreed to review the provision of training and support for Members in relation to key 21CC initiatives such as the new Highways systems.

The original 21CC Business Case (September 2016) referred to the reduction of between 120 and 150 full time equivalent posts in order to deliver the savings targets in the programme. How many posts had been deleted so far and what were the implications of further post reductions in Adult and Children's Services?

It was confirmed that the first two phases of 21CC had resulted in a reduction of 57 fte posts. In relation to the challenges facing Adult and Children's Services it was unlikely that the Continuous Improvement Programme would identify significant fte reductions in these service areas. However, it was felt that the application of the 21CC methodology to the services would generate savings through more streamlined systems and processes.

The use of improved IT systems should generate improved performance data which could be used by managers and Members to identify issues and support continuous improvement. How was the 21CC programme supporting improved performance management? How did the Council measure customer satisfaction?

It was confirmed that work was ongoing to establish updated key performance indicators (linked to the new Council Plan). As the new/improved IT systems were capable of generating a significant amount of data, it was important to have a clear focus on the key areas to be monitored and reported.

In relation to customer satisfaction, Jude Whyte explained that the Council currently collected a lot of quantitative data. The aim was to start collecting more qualitative data which would give a better view of resident satisfaction with Council services and customer interactions.

In relation to software functionality, Mike Haines gave an example relating to problems experienced by residents seeking to renew their Brown Bin collection. How did the Council test/vet the online systems to prevent problems for residents?

Sally Watkins explained the process for identifying user journeys and identifying how the systems would deal with “worst case” scenarios. Sally agreed to look at the specific issues relating to the Brown Bin service.

In relation to the Equality Act 2010, how had the Council complied with its statutory duties?

Jude Whyte explained how residents could continue to interact with the Council in a variety of ways, including telephone and personal visits. The Council had also worked with specific groups to ensure that the 21CC programme reflected the needs of all the Borough’s residents.

In relation to the Key Lines of Enquiry set out in the Agenda, could Officers provide written answers to each of the questions included?

Graham Ebers confirmed that written answers had been drafted for each of the Key Lines of Enquiry and this information could be circulated to the Committee.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Charles Margetts, Graham Ebers, Sally Watkins and Jude Whyte be thanked for attending the meeting to answer Member questions on the 21CC and Continuous Improvement Programmes;
- 2) Officers provide written responses to the Key Lines of Enquiry, set out at Annex C to the report, for circulation to the Committee;
- 3) Officers/Members responsible for the Council’s 21CC and Continuous Improvement Programme be requested to reconvene the Member oversight working group;
- 4) the Committee receive a further update on the 21CC and Continuous Improvement Programmes in 2019/20.

93. UPDATE REPORTS FROM CHAIRMEN OR NOMINATED MEMBER OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

The Chairman stated that this item had been moved up the Agenda in order to facilitate a discussion about events following the news that one of the Council’s contractors, Dawnus Construction, had gone into administration. Dawnus Construction was responsible for delivering the Peach Place regeneration project and the planned primary schools/community facilities at Arborfield Green and Matthewsgreen.

As the Town Centre Regeneration Programme had been scrutinised by the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Guy Grandison provided an update to the Committee as follows.

Dawnus had been appointed to deliver the Peach Place Regeneration scheme in 2016 after a rigorous tendering and due diligence process. In January 2019 the Council became aware that Dawnus was in financial difficulties. Consequently, the Council developed contingency plans to ensure that, in the worst case scenario, works could carry on to complete the Peach Place project. This meant that, on 14 March 2019, the Council was able to act swiftly by securing the site and instructing another contractor (CTS) to continue the construction work in the short term.

In the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points:

What were the governance arrangements for overseeing the Town Centre Regeneration works?

Graham Ebers confirmed that Member oversight of the Regeneration programme was delivered through the Town Centre Management Board made up of Members and Officers from the Borough and Town Councils.

What were the next steps to ensure completion of the Peach Place project?

Graham Ebers confirmed that discussions were ongoing re the requirement for retendering and completing the works. It was inevitable that there would be negative impacts relating to cost and completion dates. However, it was anticipated that the project would be completed within the agreed budget.

Were there any warning signs about Dawnus, for example following the collapse of Carillion in 2018?

Graham Ebers stated that the collapse of Carillion had raised a number of issues. However, there had been ongoing dialogue between WBC and Dawnus. The Council developed a contingency plan as soon as information about the Dawnus financial situation was received.

Were there any financial implications for the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)?

Graham Ebers stated that the recent events did not have a direct impact on the MTFP. Funding of the Regeneration project was structured so that income received was initially to be used for debt repayment. This meant that there may be a delay in the debt payback period but there were no immediate additional financial risks.

Could the financial risks have been reduced through additional insurance?

Graham Ebers stated that credit checks indicated that Dawnus was a sound company. It was not possible to de-risk every business decision. It would have been possible to pay higher insurance premiums but the Council's arrangements in this case were felt to have been sound and prudent.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the update on the collapse of Dawnus Construction be noted;
- 2) Members receive further updates on the implementation of the contingency plan aimed at completing the Peach Place project.

94. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMMES 2019-20

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 63 to 72, which gave details of proposed Overview and Scrutiny work programmes for 2019/20.

The report stated that effective work programming was a Member-led process aimed at shortlisting and prioritising issues of community concern together with issues arising out of the Council/Borough Plan and major policy or service changes. Effective work programming aimed to:

- Reflect local needs and concerns;
- Prioritise topics for Scrutiny which had the most impact or benefit;
- Involved local residents and stakeholders;
- Be flexible enough to respond to new or urgent issues.

The report reminded Members of the importance of carrying out in-depth reviews of policies or services and considering evidence from service users and community groups. It referred to the Scrutiny review of the Council's Grounds Maintenance service in 2018 as an example of good practice and suggested that each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees carry out a detailed Scrutiny review in 2019/20.

Appended to the report were draft work programmes for each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees along with a list of suggested Scrutiny items submitted by residents.

In the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points:

- Scrutiny would be more effective if the Committees gave more detailed consideration to a smaller number of items;
- the capacity of the Scrutiny Committees would be increased by setting up Task and Finish Groups to look at specific issues;
- as the Community and Corporate Scrutiny Committee was reviewing the Budget setting process in 2019/20, it was necessary to consider the Committee's workload;

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programmes for 2019/20, as amended, be approved;
- 2) the Management Committee scrutinise the overall Town Centre Regeneration programme;
- 3) the Community and Corporate Scrutiny Committee complete the review of the Market Place Highways Improvement project;

- 4) the additional Scrutiny requests submitted by residents be approved for inclusion in the work programme of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- 5) each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees carry out a detailed Scrutiny review during 2019/20;
- 6) the Management Committee consider a progress report on the implementation of the work programmes at its meeting in November 2019.

95. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORTS

The Committee considered the Annual Reports of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees for 2018/19, set out on Agenda pages 73 to 93.

The reports provided a summary of the issues considered by each of the Committees during 2018/19 and highlighted the evolving approach to Overview and Scrutiny at the Council.

The reports also noted that the Government was due to publish updated Statutory Guidance on the operation of Scrutiny in local government. Publication of the guidance would provide an opportunity for Members to review the operation of Overview and Scrutiny at the Council and to learn from best practice across the country. The annual Overview and Scrutiny Member Training event would also cover the key learning points arising from the new guidance.

The Chairman confirmed that the Annual Reports would be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 21 March 2019.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Reports for 2018/19 be noted;
- 2) the Annual Reports be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 21 March 2019.

96. CONSIDERATION OF THE CURRENT EXECUTIVE AND IEMD FORWARD PROGRAMME

The committee considered a copy of the Executive Forward Programme and the Individual Executive Member Decision Forward Programme, as set out on Agenda pages 95 to 104.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Executive and Individual Executive Member Decision Forward Programmes be noted;
- 2) the Adult Social Care High Level Business Case be added to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work programme.

97. KATE AND MIKE HAINES

The Chairman stated that this would be the final Overview and Scrutiny meeting for Kate and Mike Haines as they were not standing for re-election in May 2019.

On behalf of the Committee the Chairman thanked Kate and Mike for their commitment and input into the work of Overview and Scrutiny over a number of years and wished them well for the future.

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