

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD ON 30 OCTOBER 2019 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.00 PM**

**Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Guy Grandison (Chairman), Shirley Boyt, Paul Fishwick, Graham Howe, Clive Jones, Abdul Loyes and Barrie Patman

**Executive Members Present**

Councillors: Parry Bath (Executive Member for Environment and Leisure), UllaKarin Clark (Executive Member for Children's Services), John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing) and Charles Margetts (Executive Member for Adult Social Care)

**Other Councillors Present**

Councillors: Pauline Helliard-Symons, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Chris Bowring and Malcolm Richards

**Officers Present**

Carol Cammiss (Director of Children's Services), Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive - Director of Corporate Services), Francesca Hobson (Flood Risk Manager), Jim Leivers (Children's Services Consultant), Matt Pope (Director of Adult Services) and Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist)

**Others Present**

Phiala Mehring (Vice Chair of the National Flood Forum)

**24. APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Ken Miall.

**25. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

A declaration of interest was submitted from Councillor Graham Howe on the grounds that he was the Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services. Graham stated that he would not participate in any discussions or voting related to the Children's Services bids.

**26. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

**27. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions.

**28. FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE**

The Committee received and reviewed a report, set out in agenda pages 5 to 8, which gave an update on the progress made with the Lead Local Flood Authority's (LLFA) duties under the Flood and Water Management Act (FWMA) 2010 during 2018/19.

Parry Bath (Executive Member for Environment and Leisure) and Francesca Hobson (Flood Risk Manager) attended the meeting to answer Member queries and present the report.

The report focussed on 8 key areas of work for the LLFA, these being:

1. Completion of a surface water management plan for Shinfield;
2. Maintenance of the Section 21 asset register;
3. Delivery of capital drainage schemes;
4. Drainage revenue works;
5. Commenting on planning applications in relation to flooding and drainage;
6. Development of a natural flood risk management scheme for the Lower Loddon;
7. Collaboration with the University of Reading;
8. Designation of additional flood defence structures.

The report outlined that the primary responsibility of the LLFA was to manage the coordination of surface water and groundwater flood risk in order to protect residents from flooding. A successful grant funding application to DEFRA enabled the LLFA to complete a flood risk management scheme to the south of Church Lane in Shinfield. This work was being carried out on third party land and involved the creation of a 250m ditch and a 190m bund to protect properties on Church Lane from surface water flooding. In future, Officers would be carrying out surface water management plans for all Towns and Parishes at risk of surface water flooding within the Borough.

The Section 21 asset register had been updated during 2018/19, which provided a database of features or structures within the Borough that, in the opinion of the Authority, could affect flood risk. Officers across the Council had access to the register via a mapping system, and part of the information had been made publically available to allow residents to report faults with individual assets across the Borough.

Officers had delivered a number of capital drainage schemes in 2018/19, including at Wilderness Road, Kentons Lane and Gypsy Lane. During 2018/19, Officers were expecting to deliver capital drainage schemes for Pound Lane, Pepper Lane, Jouldings Lane and Barkham Ride.

Over 40,000 gullies had been emptied by Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC's) contractor in 2018/19 as part of the annual gully cleansing programme. Silt levels had been recorded within the gullies to allow officers to develop a risk based approach to gully cleansing going forwards. In addition, 1,215 drainage problems had been responded to on the highways network after being reported by residents.

During 2018/19, the Flooding and Drainage Team had provided consultation responses to 460 planning applications, which had helped to ensure that the most appropriate drainage strategies were being implemented by developers. This had, in turn, contributed to a reduction of surface water flood risk across the Borough.

A preliminary design was being developed by officers to investigate the feasibility of delivering a natural flood risk management scheme to the south of the M4, to contribute to a reduced risk of flooding to the highways network and properties along the Lower River Loddon.

Officers had been working and collaborating with a number of students at the University of Reading on water related studies. This had provided WBC with more accurate and detailed information regarding flood risk and water quality across the Borough. This collaboration was expected to continue and develop further going forwards.

Officers had formally designated a number of additional features and structures within the Borough during 2018/19 which could have an impact of flood risk should significant changes be made to them. The benefit of designating these structures for the LLFA was that the owner would be unable to change the feature/structure without previous consent. Any successive owners would also be made aware that the feature/structure was significant in terms of flood risk.

In the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points and queries:

- How were new build houses and developments managed in terms of assessing potential flood risk? Officer response – Any structure that could pose a significant flood risk could be designated under the flood and water management act, which gave the LLFA emergency powers and meant the owner could not change the structure without the consent of the local authority. The Flooding and Drainage Team routinely responded to major planning applications and worked with developers to minimise their impact of flood risk within the Borough.
- How was WBC's strategy towards gulley cleansing being altered? Officer response – Contractors were now measuring the percentage of silt build-up when a gulley was being routinely cleansed. This would provide data to allow contractors to target gullies which had a higher level of silt build-up more regularly, which would reduce issues where a 'problem' gulley could become blocked.
- What measures were being put in place to relieve root infiltration issues? Officer response – The Wokingham Borough had 100's of kilometres of pipes within its network, which made it incredibly difficult to have a cleansing programme for the pipe network. Officers were looking at capital funding bids for schemes to maintain and clean the pipe network in future. There was potential to put measures in place to protect existing pipes, however, it was usually more effective and efficient to replace an existing pipe with more substantial infrastructure.
- Did WBC charge residents for sandbags when they were required? Officer response – WBC never charged residents for sandbags and currently had a good stock of sandbags for emergency situations. It was, however, the residents' responsibility to dispose of the sandbags when no longer required. Officers worked with residents in flood prone areas to identify measures they could take to protect their property from potential flooding.
- Had the amount of planning application consultation responses sent by the Flooding and Drainage Team increased in recent years? Officer response - The number of planning application consultation responses sent by the Flooding and Drainage Team had significantly increased when compared to previous years. In 2016, new obligations were put in place for the team to respond to surface water flood risk for planning applications. The Flooding and Drainage Team had increased from one to five officers in recent years, which had enabled consultation responses to be sent for both major applications and a number of householder applications.
- How did WBC work with the Environment Agency (EA) on a collaborative basis? Officer response – As the LLFA, WBC met with the EA on a monthly basis to look at issues within the Borough. WBC also worked closely with the EA when responding to planning application consultations.

- Did the Flooding and Drainage Team have any influence in planning policy, for example when a resident paved over their front garden to provide additional parking? Officer response – An Executive sub-strategy was agreed in 2017 which provided a set of conditions regarding planning policy within the Borough relating to flood risk management. There was a lot of weight behind this sub-strategy and the team worked with householder applicants to ensure that the conditions were followed.
- What was being done to address flooding in Lower Earley? Officer response – A flood risk management plan was being developed, which would cover all of Lower Earley Way. This scheme was similar to the scheme delivered in Shinfield. This was taking some time as a bid had been placed to secure capital drainage funding, and this process was inherently lengthy.

Phiala Mehring, Vice Chair of the national Flood Forum, was invited by the Chairman to offer comment on the issues raised during the meeting. Phiala praised the work of Francesca Hobson and the whole of the Flooding and Drainage Team at WBC, citing their in depth knowledge and compassion for the communities they served. Phiala stated that in the shadow of climate change, more funding was required to address and rectify flooding issues and risks. Phiala added that more lateral thinking was required to address flood risk, and cited examples of London Boroughs which had conducted green space audits to identify areas where sites, such as schools and playgrounds, could be ‘greened-up’ or where rain gardens could be installed to capture rain water. Phiala stated that Local Authorities needed to strive to engage with communities and seek out an appetite to improve their environment.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) Parry Batth, Francesca Hobson and Phiala Mehring be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) The Committee continue to work with the Flooding and Drainage Team to achieve effective flood risk management within the Borough;
- 3) An update on flood risk management progress during 2019/20 be scheduled to the Committee in 12 months’ time.

**29. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2020-23: REVENUE BUDGET**

***Graham Howe declared an interest in this item, specifically the Children’s Services bids, by virtue of the fact that he was the Deputy Executive Member for Children’s Services. Graham stated that he would not take part in any discussions or voting related to the Children’s Services bids.***

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 9 to 46, which detailed all revenue growth and savings bids over £50k for Children’s Services, Adult Social Care, Corporate Services and Customer and Localities Services. The Committee were advised to focus on the bids for Children’s Services and Adult Social Care, with a view to analyse the bids for other service areas at the Committee meeting scheduled for 25 November 2019.

UllaKarin Clark (Executive Member for Children’s Services), Carol Cammiss (Director of Children’s Services), Jim Leivers (Children’s Services Consultant), Charles Margetts (Executive Member for Adult Social Care), Matt Pope (Director of Adult Services), John

Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing) and Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive – Director of Corporate Services) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

Graham Ebers stated that around 80% of the revenue budget went towards care services, with around 10% – 12% of the budget going towards waste services. This left a small amount of the budget to provide discretionary services which were much valued within the community, for example park and countryside services. Graham added that the format for this year's budget scrutiny would provide a new level of transparency around the budget and the budget setting process, with all growth and savings bids over £50k being publically provided.

During the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points and queries:

- What impact would the delay of national budget have on Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC's) budget? Officer response – This would create a certain level of uncertainty within WBC's budget, however there was always fluidity within any budget setting process in order to deal with emerging pressures. It was not yet clear what this would mean for the Local Authority settlement, and WBC would continue to make representations to Central Government for a fair settlement.
- When would equality impact assessments (EQIAs) be carried out for specific proposals? Officer response – All EQIAs would be carried out at the appropriate time in the process, before implementation and after major considerations had been made. There was little point in carrying out the EQIAs at this stage in the process as proposals were subject to constant change and awaiting consultation responses. Where required, all EQIAs would be completed prior to the Budget Council in February 2020.
- Relating to agenda page 16, what would the £245k growth bid be used for in relation to increased capacity to deliver Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services? Officer response – This growth would enable an increase in staffing, including 2 educational psychologists and 3 case managers. This struck a sensible balance between service need and budgetary pressure.
- Relating to agenda page 19, how would the savings of £330k be realised within Children's Services system capitalisation? Officer response – A lot of work was being conducted to capitalise existing software licences to convert them to a revenue saving. This process would ensure that the licences that were currently being used were being properly utilised.
- What was the target case load for a Children's Services case worker? Officer response – An average case load of 15 cases was being targeted, and it was important that staff had a manageable case load going forward. The current caseload for each staff member was between 18 and 23 cases, and this number was already significantly smaller than it had been in recent years.
- Relating to agenda page 18, when would the additional places at Addington School go towards reducing WBC's Home to School Transport (HTST) budget? Officer response – It was hoped that savings within the HTST budget would be realised by April 2021 as a result of the additional places at Addington.

- Relating to agenda page 14, what was being done to address the significant number of locum staff within Children's Services? Officer response – Due to the nature of the social worker market nationally, there was not a great appetite amongst locum workers to become permanent members of staff. WBC regularly had conversations with a number of locum staff whom we would like to become permanent, explaining the benefits of joining WBC. A recruitment specialist had recently been employed to begin to promote and market Wokingham in order to attract more permanent social workers to WBC.
- Relating to agenda page 18, what specific issues were there related to the 'mid-phase challenge'? Officer response – This was related to the efficiency strategy that was being developed, which was currently mid-way through. For example, HTST was hugely reliant on school spaces at local schools, with the plan being to open 3 more primary schools within the Borough in the future which would reduce the pressures on transporting primary aged children. This would not, however, reduce the pressures on Special Educational Needs related travel.
- Relating to agenda page 16, how long had WBC not been compliant with our statutory SEND responsibilities? Officer response – There had not been enough in-Borough SEN school places to meet the needs of SEND pupils within the Borough, the number of which had significantly increased in the past 3 to 4 years. There were currently ongoing discussions with the Department for Education about opening a 3<sup>rd</sup> in-Borough SEN school to provide up to 75 SEN spaces. This was in addition to the 7 resource bases attached to mainstream schools within the Borough. WBC were expecting to be fully compliant with our statutory obligations within 7 to 8 weeks, in no small part due to the extra 4 staff that were currently processing Education, Health and Care Plans in a timely manner.
- Relating to agenda page 17, how did WBC end up with the lack of funding within the current Safeguarding and Quality Assurance arm of the Directorate? Officer response – When Children's Services split from People Service's a portion of this funding was lost. This growth bid was required to make sure that this area was not funded by special items going forward.
- What was being done to reduce the budgetary pressures within HTST? Officer response – This was an area of significant budgetary pressure, with 30 – 35 additional HTST places being offered this school year. Savings could, in future, come from looking at how some students with an Education, Health and Care Plan were transported, as not all of these pupils required a taxi for transportation for example.
- Relating to agenda page 21, how many children would be affected by the savings within the review of therapy services? Officer response – No service reduction would take place, and no less therapy would be offered to children as a result of these savings. The proposed savings were about reducing the costs of commissioning and not a reduction of service. Both the Director and Executive Member were clear that they would not sign off to a reduction in therapy delivery to children.
- Relating to agenda pages 21 and 22, how confident were officers of the combined proposed savings of £500k over 2 years within Children's Services? Officer response – This figure was believed to be achievable, given the caveats of having an increasing number of children in care within the Borough.

- Had the Executive Member for Children’s Services been briefed on all of the proposed growth and savings bids? Executive Member and Officer response – There was a close working relationship between the Director and the Executive Member for Children’s Services, and all proposals had been agreed, and signed off, in collaboration between the Executive Member and the Director of Children’s Services. The final sign off had occurred following the publication of this agenda.
- Relating to agenda page 29, how would technology enabled care provide savings within Adult Social Care? Officer response – An example of a saving in this area was the use of epilepsy bracelets, which would alert staff when a service user was having a seizure. This would lead to less stress on staff having to constantly monitor service users and allow a better overall outcome for both staff and service users. It would also require less overall staff to monitor service users, leading to a saving. Savings in this area would come from using simple and effective technological tools to make both staff and service users overall experience better.
- Relating to agenda page 26, had these figures taken into account the full pressures of a changing demographic? Officer response – Yes, these figures included all current and predicted demographic changes, which would lead to an increase in demand from the service, hence the need for a growth bid to continue to provide these services.
- Relating to agenda page 27, how long had WBC not been meeting the needs required under the Care Act? Officer response – Issues in this area had been occurring for approximately 12 months. It was predicted that WBC would be meeting its duties under the Care Act by March 2020.
- Relating to agenda page 29, had similar savings within the Adult Social Care Pathway Redesign already been achieved this year? Officer response – Yes, approximately a £300k saving had been realised this year, and the figures presented within the bid were what was expected to be delivered in the coming years.
- Relating to agenda page 30, were the proposed savings within the Optalis review achievable? Executive Member and Officer response – Yes, this was a relatively large contract totalling approximately £8.2m, and Officers were confident of making a 12% saving over the life of this contract. There would be no reduction in frontline staff numbers as a result of these savings, and savings would be realised from streamlined governance and marketing.
- How were savings monitored in year? Officer response – Revenue monitoring was carried out throughout the financial year which tracked all revenue spending and savings. Revenue monitoring reports were presented to the Executive quarterly.
- Relating to agenda page 32, how would savings be realised by properly utilising funding streams? Officer response – WBC needed to make sure that its partners, such as the NHS, were meeting their legal obligations, and that WBC were not funding services in areas where its partners had authority.
- Relating to agenda page 34, was this level of grant funding realistic in its continuation? Officer response – This was a prudent valuation of the level of grant funding in this area, and enabled the service to plan for the long term.

- Had the Executive Member for Adult Social Care been briefed on, and subsequently signed off, all submitted bids? Executive Member response – Yes, discussions had been ongoing between Officers and the Executive Member for several weeks, with a final sign off having occurred since the publication of the agenda.
- What was being done to help address the transition for service users between Children’s Services and Adult Social Care? Officer response – There was a high level improvement plan in this area which was already funded, and was overseen by the Director of Children’s Services and the Director of Adult Services. The transition team would be moving back to Adult Social Care in the immediate future. There was always a problem in this area due to the gap in eligibility when transitioning between the two services.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) UllaKarin Clark, Carol Cammiss, Jim Leivers, Charles Margetts, Matt Pope, John Kaiser and Graham Ebers be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) The Committee be kept updated should any of the published bids within Children’s Services or Adult Social Care change significantly;
- 3) Bids related to Corporate Services and Customer and Locality Services be considered at the meeting of the Committee on 25 November 2019;
- 4) Directors and Executive Members related Corporate Services and Customer and Locality Services be invited to the November Committee meeting.

**30. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered a report about its work programme, set out in agenda pages 47 to 54, which outlined the proposed forward programme for the Committee for the remainder of the 2019/20 municipal year.

The Committee were advised that the property investment group item, originally scheduled for the 25 November meeting, would be better placed on the agenda for 6 January. The final months of the calendar year were a busy time in the investment cycle and a delay of just over a month would allow for a more complete report to be submitted. In addition, adding this item to the January agenda would tie in well with the scheduled capital and special items figures to be provided as part of the Committee’s budget scrutiny work at the January meeting.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) The proposed forward plan for the remainder of the 2019/20 municipal year be agreed;
- 2) The item related to the property investment group be moved to the meeting on 6 January 2020.