

## MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 1 JUNE 2015 FROM 7.30 PM TO 9.45 PM

### Committee Members Present

Councillors: Tim Holton (Chairman), Michael Firmager (Vice-Chairman), Prue Bray, Norman Jorgensen, Ken Miall, Malcolm Richards, Shahid Younis, Kate Haines, UllaKarin Clark and Dianne King

### Other Councillors Present

Councillor: Pauline Jorgensen

### Officers Present

Kevin Jacob, Principal Democratic Services Officer  
Stuart Rowbotham, Director of Health and Wellbeing  
Alan Stubbersfield, Head of Learning and Achievement  
Rob Stubbs, Head of Finance

### 1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24 March 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman commented that there were a number of points arising from the minutes that he wished to follow up as follows:

- Minute 62: Had the resolved action under 2) been actioned? Kevin Jacob confirmed that the clerk to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Chairman had been informed of the Committee's request that it seek assurance of the level of performance of Indicator 5 Safeguarding;
- Minute 63: Had the resolved actions under 2) and 3) been actioned? Kevin Jacob commented that the ways to minimise delays in the performance management reporting schedule would be in considered in setting future Committee dates and that ways to circulate performance management information as soon as possible after Executive Briefings had considered;
- Minute 64: Had the resolved action 2) been actioned? Kevin Jacob confirmed that the Committee's request that it be consulted on the draft grass cutting contract specification had been passed onto the Executive Member for Environment and Head of Community Services;
- Minute 65: Had the resolved action under 2) been actioned? Kevin Jacob commented that Officers had been informed of the Committee's request that they provide a further update to the Committee following further stakeholder engagement;
- Minute 66: Had the resolved actions under 4) and 5) been actioned. Kevin Jacob responded that an item on emergency alert mechanisms had been scheduled for the Committee meeting in November 2015, but that he had not yet been actioned 5);
- Minute 68: The Chairman commented that he had written to the Leader of the Council to express the Committee's concerns regarding the cancellation of reports to the Executive concerning the business of Council owned companies and therefore he had been pleased to note that the May Executive Agenda had included a Council companies report.

The Chairman also commented that he had asked Officers in future to produce a list of the actions arising from each meeting.

## **2. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted from Pauline Helliard-Symons and John Jarvis.

## **3. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

A declaration of interest was submitted from Norman Jorgensen on the grounds that his wife Pauline Jorgensen had submitted a scrutiny review suggestion concerning potholes and road maintenance.

## **4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

## **5. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions.

## **6. CHANGES TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

The Committee considered a report setting out proposed changes to the Overview and Scrutiny committee structure by the disbanding of the Community Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the transfer of its functions to the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Chairman had agreed that the item be considered as an urgent item and copies of the report circulated to the Committee with a Supplementary Agenda.

The Chairman presented the report and commented that he recognised that the timing of the report had not been ideal in that the annual Council meeting had recently taken place. However, the consideration of the work programme of the Council's overview and scrutiny committees for 2015/2016 had provided an appropriate opportunity to consider whether the committee structure should be amended.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillors Younis and Jorgensen gave their views as the Chairman of the Community Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Younis commented that he recognised that the whilst the two Committees had been established in 2013 with different Terms of Reference, the work load of the Community Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee had decreased over time and taking account of the expected workload for 2015/2016 it was not the best use of resources to maintain the Committee. Councillor Jorgensen commented that he felt the additional workload could potentially be accommodated by the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, but this would need to be carefully monitored. He asked Members to take into consideration that Members of the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny would be involved in a review of Commuter Parking.

In discussing the proposal, the following points were made:

- The focus of Community Partnerships had been external partnerships. This was still an important area of work for the Council moving forward and would need to be retained within overview and scrutiny;
- Could the Committee be put into a dormant state? Yes, this could happen, but in those circumstances the Members would remain appointed and the Chairman would continue to be entitled to receive a Special Responsibility Allowance;

- Consideration would need to be given to renaming the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to reflect its expanded role. Members were encouraged to submit ideas for a new name to Kevin Jacob
- The outstanding work of the Community Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee in looking at Outside Bodies should be completed and the its scheduled meeting of 15 June 2015 go ahead.
- Would the number of Members on the Committee be sufficient? It was felt that eight Committee Members would be sufficient.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee recommends to Council that the Community Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee be disbanded as of 24 July 2015 and its functions and responsibilities be transferred to the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## **7. CONSIDERATION OF REQUESTS FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEWS 2015/2016 AND COMMITTEES WORK PROGRAMME 2015/2016**

The Committee considered a report on Agenda pages 17 to 67 which set out details of the ongoing work programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Committees together with a list of new scrutiny suggestions received for the 2015/2016 municipal year. The Committee was reminded that the purpose of the item was to decide whether a suggestion should be progressed to a review or not.

Prior to the discussion of the items, the Chairman outlined the arrangements that would be followed for individuals to introduce their suggestions.

Kevin Jacob advised the Committee in considering the suggestions to take account of the review selection criteria set out on Agenda page 18 which were:

- Whether the issue is of local, and preferably current, concern;
- Whether the undertaking of the review can be linked to the Council's Vision, priorities and underpinning principles or would help achieve these;
- Whether the topic is already being reviewed elsewhere within the Council ;
- Is the topic one that is capable of being influenced by the Committee;
- Is the topic of manageable scope – not too wide-ranging and yet of sufficient size to warrant a scrutiny review;
- Whether sufficient resources are available to support the scrutiny review;  
If a review is warranted, should it have a high, medium or low priority?
- Whether the review should be undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee itself, delegated to an Overview and Scrutiny Committee or a Task and Finish Group created to undertake the review?

He also asked the Committee to bear in mind the limited resources available within the Democratic Services Team to support any new review and also drew its attention to the scrutiny reviews that were currently in progress.

Consideration of the individual scrutiny reviews is set out below:

### **The Potential Impact and Consequences of the New Government's Right to Buy Scheme – Councillor Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey**

Members were referred to the detail of the suggestion form as set out on Agenda pages 51 to 51 which asked for a review to be undertaken into the potential impact of the new

Government's Right to Buy Scheme on the Council's housing stock, the Borough's Housing Needs Register, residents in need of housing and overall available housing.

Councillor Prue Bray presented the suggestion on behalf of Councillor Shepherd-DuBey's and commented that whilst the detail of the proposals was not yet known, there was the potential for the proposed changes to have a significant impact on the Council, both in financial terms and for people on the housing waiting list. It was important to plan for the impacts and where possible mitigate against the potential negative impacts of the scheme.

In discussing the suggestion, Members felt that it raised important issues that needed to be explored. It was felt that the changes could potential affect the council's approach to the provision of social housing, including upon the Council's own housing company. However, it was also noted that until more detail was available on the Government's proposals it would be premature to start a review.

It was agreed that the review should be referred to the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee for a review to commence in late 2015.

### **Road Repairs – Councillor Pauline Jorgensen**

Members were referred to the detail of the suggestion form as set out on Agenda pages 55 to 57 which asked for a review of road repairs, specifically, quality control, contract management, planning and prioritisation, scheduling, repair life and management of utilities work.

Councillor Pauline Jorgensen attended the Committee and presented the suggestion. She commented that she was concerned that it was difficult for residents and local Members to know when road repairs were to be completed and serious concerns existed regarding the quality of the repairs being made. The Committee was informed by Councillor Jorgensen that it was her understanding from conversations she had had with John Kaiser, the Executive Member for Planning and Highways that new initiatives were around planned around the arrangements for notification of residents and local Members were planned to be introduced shortly. In light of this she suggested the initiatives should be given time to bed in and the issues looked at in the autumn of 2015, with a potentially fuller review around May 2016.

In discussing the suggestion, Member made the following points:

- It was felt by all Members that arrangements for notification of local Members of road repairs to be undertaken was not as effective as it had once been;
- Quality of repairs and their longevity was a concern;
- That development often had a negative effect on the state of local roads in the vicinity of new developments. It was unclear how this was mitigated;
- It was felt to be difficult to access information on planned repairs;
- Was it correct that the Council did not plan to adopt roads within Strategic Development locations;
- Was the council planning for the upkeep of new roads built as part of the Strategic Development Process

It was agreed that the suggestion should be delegated to the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee for an initial report to its November 2015 meeting to include impact of expected initiatives around customer service and public and ward Member road repair notifications.

## **The process around setting of school budgets and the funding allocation to schools – Robb Stubbs Head of Finance**

Members were referred to the detail of the suggestion form as set out on Agenda pages 59 to 60 which asked for a review of the process around the setting of school budgets and the funding allocation to schools. Rob Stubbs, Head of Finance and Alan Stubbersfield, Head of Learning and Achievement attended the meeting and presented the suggestion.

Roy Stubbs explained that the level of funding available to schools from the Government through schools grants was increasingly under pressure. There had been an increase in the number of schools requesting licensed deficits. The role of the Schools Forum in considering how funding was allocated to schools was increasingly under scrutiny and some tensions had emerged in the relationships between schools, the Schools Forum and the Council. In addition it was expected that as part of the Ofsted inspection process an assessment would be made of schools' financial management which was felt would further increase the profile of their financial position.

There was also a need for a discussion around to what degree the financial challenges faced by schools were as a result of Government decisions or which were decisions within the Council's control.

In discussing the suggestion, the following points were made:

- The number of schools expressing concern regarding their financial circumstances was increasing and Members were aware that more schools were asking for licensed deficit permission. They also felt that some schools had concerns over the transparency of decisions and that some felt 'done to' rather than involved in the process;
- The Committee was informed that the Department for Education had not yet finally confirmed funding figures for the 2015/2016 financial year;
- The Director Children's Services and the Director Finance and Resources had delegated authority to approve school licensed deficits;
- There was a range of schools with licensed deficits to schools with significant reserves;
- It was felt that part of the reasons for schools anxiety around funding stemmed from comparisons with the funding of schools within Reading Borough which received higher levels of funding through the national funding formula because of factors such as deprivation, level of educational need and rates of English as an additional language. Members commented that it was worth considering how the Government might be influenced with regards to the national funding formula;
- Members were informed that the authority distributed funds to all schools including academies, but that the funding for academies came from the Education Funding Agency;
- The Council had some flexibility in setting its local funding formula, but had to adhere to strictly set national guidelines.

It was agreed to refer the issue to Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee for a review and that as a part of any review should include looking at the national funding formula and opportunities to influence Government.

## **The Better Care Fund – Stuart Rowbotham, Director of Health and Wellbeing.**

Members were referred to the detail of the suggestion form as set out Agenda pages 61 to 64 which asked for a review to be undertaken into the major changes the Better Care Fund

would bring to health and social care services in Wokingham. Stuart Rowbotham, Director of Health and Wellbeing attended the meeting and presented the review suggestion to the Committee.

The Committee was informed that as Members were no doubt aware, the outlook for health and social care services was extremely challenging. Part of the solution to this was the development of integrated social and care services and the purpose of the Better Care Fund was to enable health and social care crossover. The size of the Better Care Fund was originally £3.8bn, which had been subsequently increased to £5.3 by top slicing.

The Wokingham Health and Wellbeing Board had already undertaken a lot of work under this agenda and Members were referred to none schemes within the Better Care Fund umbrella as set out on Agenda page 62. Stuart Rowbotham commented that his was aware that the scale of the suggested review was a challenge and suggested that if a review was undertaken Members might wish to focus on the following aspects which in his view would have a significant impact on the Council:

- Health and Social Care Hub
- Integrated Short Term Health and Social Teams
- Connected Care
- Neighbourhood clusters, Primary prevention and Self-Care

He commented that a scrutiny review would add value by seeking assurance that the governance of these projects was working effectively and that the benefits of reorganisation and integration were clear and proven.

In discussing the suggestion, the following points were raised:

- Whilst the potential significance of the changes was apparent, the subject was very large and complex area and it was difficult to establish where to start;
- Members of the Committee commented that it was difficult to see how a review could add value;
- It was accepted that the Council had to take action to respond to the impact of health and social care integration;
- The target date of review should be April 2016;
- That if a review was undertaken it should be further targeted. A number of Members referred to difficulties that their constituents had faced in accessing General Practice services and it was felt that this and implication of the development of Neighbourhood clusters, Primary prevention and Self-Care.

It was agreed to refer the issue to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee for a review to focus on the implications of Neighbourhood clusters, Primary Prevention, Self-Care and Access to General Practice.

### **The Process around the Allocation of School Places in Maiden Erlegh - Councillor David Chopping**

Members were referred to the detail of the suggestion form as set out on Agenda pages 53 to 54 which asked for a review to be undertaken into the allocation of primary school places in Maiden Erlegh and the perceived renting of properties to acquire a place, without taking up real and full-time occupation. The Committee also consider a note to the Committee from Councillor Chopping which gave additional information to support his request.

Prior to the general discussion on the suggestion, the Chairman invited Councillor Younis to make his observations as Vice-Chairman of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He commented that he had spoken with the appropriate Officers concerning the issues raised in Councillor Chopping's suggestion. It was recognised that there had been an issue for a number of parents within the Earley area this year in obtaining places at their preferred primary school, but across the Borough there was a sufficient number of primary places and the forecasting of the number of places required was considered to be correct. The pressure for places within Early had been increased by the popularity of Earley schools amongst residents of Reading Borough who were entitled to apply for places. It was anticipated that there would continue to be pressure on places with no big demographic changes in 2016/2017 before a reduction in demand was expected in 2018/2019.

In discussing the suggestion, the majority of Members felt that the issues around the forecasting of the demand for primary school places as well the process around the allocation of primary places were of current and local concern to parents across Earley, but particularly within the Maiden Erlegh ward. It was felt that the issues should be explored further and potentially a scrutiny review undertaken although the point was also made that the situation in Wokingham where there was a sufficient number of places in total was fundamentally different from areas where local authorities had not been able to provide sufficient places within their areas. A summary of the issues raised by Members included:

- What could be considered to be a reasonable distance and the difference between radial and walking routes distances;
- It was recognised that the forecasting of places was a very difficult process and subject to a lot of variances. How was forecasting of school places undertaken? Could the Council improve upon the sources of data available to it as part of the forecasting process by more developing innovative ways of gathering data, for example working with estate agents, doctors surgeries etc. to provide people moving into the area with a form that new residents could voluntarily return with information on the number of pre-school children in their household or using the opportunity of people registering to vote to ask them to voluntarily supply this information;
- The impact of the greater turnover of houses in the Earley area and the decrease in the turnover of the pupils;
- The operation of school designated areas, oversubscription criteria and the statutory stipulations on how these could be drafted;
- The operation and impact on the admissions process of the expression of preferences by parents in applying for primary school places and the information available to parents on expressing preferences;
- The measures put place to validate addresses as part of the admissions process.

Kevin Jacob commented that school admissions was a difficult area for overview and scrutiny in that the Council's ability to set its own policy was heavily proscribed by statute, particularly by the School's Admission Code. He suggested that if Members were minded to look into the issue, they consider suggesting to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee that it receive an initial background report on admissions policy and primary place forecasting.

It was agreed to refer the suggestion to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee for an initial report and potential review on pupil place planning and processes

for the allocation of places across the Borough particularly Earley to include information for parents on choosing preferences.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the current Work Programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Committees as set out in Appendix A be noted;
- 2) That a Work Programme for the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committees be developed on the basis of the Committee's discussion.

**8. CONSIDERATION OF THE CURRENT EXECUTIVE FORWARD PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered an updated version of the Executive Forward Programme which had been circulated to Members separately.

**RESOLVED:** That the Executive Forward Programme as circulated at the meeting be noted.