

MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 22 JUNE 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.25 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Guy Grandison (Chairman), Oliver Whittle (Vice-Chairman), Keith Baker, Shirley Boyt, Paul Fishwick, Graham Howe, Clive Jones and Abdul Loyes

Officers Present

Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist), Nigel Bailey (Interim Assistant Director – Housing & Place Commissioning), Narinder Brar (Community Safety Partnership Manager) and Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist)

5. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

6. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 January 2020, and the Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting held on 16 June 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

Clive Jones queried whether there had been any update to the football foundation grant for Cantley Park. Officers would seek clarification regarding this from the relevant Director.

Clive Jones queried whether there had been a good turnout to the Member survey relating to the initial development of the Borough Design Guide. Nigel Bailey, Interim Assistant Director - Housing & Place Commissioning, confirmed that there had been a low Member response to this initial survey. It was agreed that the survey be re-sent to Members to gather initial opinions.

7. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

8. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

9. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

10. COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

The Committee received and reviewed a report, set out in agenda pages 15-52, which gave an annual update on the work of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP).

Narinder Brar, CSP Manager, noted a number of highlights contained within the agenda report. The CSP had worked throughout the year with its members to manage crime and disorder within the Borough. Partnership working included the police, fire and probation services, whom were working cohesively to review the next steps of the partnership work plan. 2019 had seen a new Chair of the CSP, Superintendent Felicity Parker, begin work alongside a recently appointed and experienced permanent CSP manager.

A variety of recorded crimes had seen decreases including residential burglary and antisocial behaviour, whilst drug possession and vehicle related crime had seen increases

within the Borough. The CSP's 4th domestic homicide review was currently being undertaken. These reviews were an instrument to investigate any serious fatalities within the Borough, and it was hoped that this specific review was to include in the summer of 2020. A successful anti-drug operation, Operation Oedipus, had been undertaken to deploy surveillance teams within the Borough. Various quantities of drugs had been seized within the locality as a direct result of this operation.

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

- Was the 'Kicks' project happening throughout the Borough? Officer response – The 'Kicks' project had been implemented in different locations around the Borough, including within schools on a weekly basis. Sessions were open to all and free of charge whilst being run by qualified coaches. The sessions were designed to offer wider engagement with young people about issues such as drugs, antisocial behaviour and exploitation. Officers would provide Members with details regarding the locations on offer within the Borough for children to participate in sessions;
- How was the 'Kicks' scheme funded, what were the plans for the scheme, and how was success measured? Officer response – The scheme was funded threefold by Tenant Services, the CSP and by the Sports & Leisure team. Funding was secured until 31 March 2021, and currently an online football gaming programme had been set up to comply with government guidelines on social distancing. Success was measured by a variety of KPIs which the 'Kicks' team were required to report back on periodically;
- How had the virtual 'Kicks' programme been received? Officer response – This programme was in its early stages, and safeguarding procedures regarding connecting with children in an online environment had only just been put in place. Officers would report back on the success of this programme;
- What were the underlying reasons for the increase in numbers of domestic abuse reports? Officer response - Domestic abuse could be a hidden crime, and on average a victim would be subject to around 35 offences before seeking support. This increase in reporting was seen as a positive as it was showing that more people had confidence to seek help and trust in the support network that was available. This trend was being seen on a national scale;
- How many children were on the EMRAC radar? Officer response – These figures could be provided to Members outside of the Committee;
- What were the underlying reasons behind the increase in reported drug related offences and vehicle thefts? Officer response – These increases were mainly based on an increased focus on policing activity whereby there had been more of a police emphasis on these areas within the locality. In addition, as Loddon Valley Police Centre was located within the locality, if any offender turned up in possession of drugs it was recorded as a drug offence. Regarding the vehicle thefts, as Wokingham was an affluent Borough with a high level of car ownership, offenders were travelling into the Borough to target specific high performance vehicles;
- As domestic abuse cases could see a rise as children returned back to school, was the CSP ready to work with partners to support victims? Officer response – The CSP

had weekly meetings with Berkshire Women's Aid, Thames Valley Police and two neighbouring Borough Officials. This enabled the CSP to closely monitor the local situation, and there was a stable picture at present. Capacity had been increased across the partnership to enable a swift response to any increases in demand. Information regarding help and support regarding domestic abuse had been placed with food parcels;

- Was the CSP seeking out best practice when working with Berkshire Women's Aid? Officer response – Yes, the CSP worked with partners Thames Valley wide and were in regular contact. The CSP also looked for different approaches on a national level, and were actively looking for innovative ways to improve service provision;
- Would the domestic homicide report be circulated once complete? Officer response – Yes, the CSP has a duty to publish the findings of these reports;
- Was there any provisional date for the 'Only fools carry knives' event? Officer response – Not currently, however once a provisional date had been agreed this would be circulated;
- Would the localities team have a greater presence at neighbourhood action groups in the future? Officer response – Yes, there was a greater focus on neighbourhood working and the localities team would have a better attendance in the future;
- Was there a breakdown of where targeted religious offences had taken place? Officer response – Not currently, Officers would try to provide a more detailed breakdown;
- Was additional police presence in the town centres being considered to combat antisocial behaviour? Officer response – Town centres were hotspots for antisocial behaviour, and there were town centre policing teams who were being as visible as possible. Partnerships with businesses and licensed premises' were important to increase engagement with the community and to educate these businesses on how to report instances of antisocial behaviour;
- How were the CSP working with schools to educate on drug use prevention? Officer response – The CSP could never do enough to raise awareness in this area and this had to be an ongoing focus. There was a safeguarding board that teachers could use to contact for advice, in addition to a multi-agency hub that teachers could use to raise specific concerns. The CSP were engaging with schools via relatable sources such as through social media. Peer on peer sessions were a good way to create discussion around this topic in a relatable way;
- Could the CSP return to the Committee with an update this municipal year, including the progress made on keeping children away from drugs? Officer and Chairman's response – An update would be taken to the committee in approximately 6 months' time.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Narinder Brar be thanked for attending the Committee;
- 2) The Committee be provided with additional details on the location of 'Kicks sessions on offer;

- 3) The Committee be provided with information regarding how many children were currently on the radar of the EMRAC team;
- 4) The Committee be provided with details on how the virtual 'Kicks' sessions had been received;
- 5) The Committee be informed of the provisional date of the 'Only fools carry knives' event;
- 6) The Committee be provided with a more detailed breakdown of specific religious targeted crime, including the areas of the Borough where they had been reported;
- 7) An update, including progress on keeping children away from drugs, return to the Committee in approximately 6 months' time.

11. BURIAL GROUND CAPACITY UPDATE

The Committee received and reviewed a report, set out in agenda pages 53-50, which gave an overview of burial ground provision within the Borough.

Nigel Bailey, Interim Assistant Director - Housing & Place Commissioning, highlighted several areas of the report and associated Annex A. Unfortunately, the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic had made this area even more relevant. There were approximately 1000 cremation plots and 340 full burial plots within the borough currently. The pandemic had seen increases of approximately 35 to 40 additional deaths within the Borough per week, and the service wanted to ensure that there were sufficient plots for those families who requested either a full burial or a cremation plot. Additional Muslim burial plots were due to be provided, in addition to a number of general burial plots.

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

- Was the autumn review proposed to return to the Committee, including an update on the proposed crematorium? Officer response – Yes, an update including any progress relating to the proposed crematorium would be brought back to the Committee for overview;
- How many additional Muslim burial plots were proposed, and where would they be located? Officer response – Between 250 to 300 additional Muslim burial plots were expected to be provided, and Officers were looking at a variety of areas across the Borough in which to house this extra capacity. The plots would be spread across a variety of Borough locations;
- Was there any update on the proposed Borough crematorium? Officer response – Proposals were work in progress at this time, and no decision had been made regarding this provision. Officers were exploring options for a green crematorium, including facilities for woodland burials in addition to a proportion of full burial plots. Neighbouring crematorium facilities were not believed to be at capacity currently, however this would be looked into in more detail as work progressed;
- How many burials were currently taking place within the Borough per week? Officer response – Approximately 2 to 3 burials were taking place within the Borough per week, which was a significant drop to numbers seen pre-pandemic;

- When would the definitive number of burial plots be known? Officer response – 340 plots were expected to be provided, the variation in numbers would come from which plots were available for use all year round and which were only suitable outside of the winter months;
- Had Officers earmarked particular areas for environmentally friendly woodland burials? Officer response – An area adjacent to the proposed crematorium was being explored for woodland burials.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Nigel Bailey be thanked for attending the Committee;
- 2) A further update be taken to the Committee in autumn, including any progress relating to the proposed crematorium and additional burial plot provision.

12. WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21

The Committee received and reviewed a report, set out in agenda pages 59 to 64, which outlined the proposed work programme for the Committee for the 2020/21 municipal year.

The Chairman proposed that an extraordinary meeting be organised for the end of July, in order to begin the Committee's review of the community response to the Covid 19 pandemic.

Members requested that the chairman of the Wokingham BAME forum be invited to the extraordinary July Committee meeting, for an open discussion on the work of the forum and how the Committee and wider Membership of the Council could support and assist this work.

Members noted that the 2021-24 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) would require a variety of additional extraordinary meetings. Officers would look to keep a similar schedule to that undertaken in the 2019/20 municipal year.

Members agreed to form a task and finish group to look at the provision of public and green travel within the Borough.

Members prioritised road repairs specifically out of the highways issues contained within the work programme, to be taken to the September Committee.

Members requested that an initial update be taken to the extraordinary July Committee regarding the Council's community response to the Covid 19 pandemic. This would include topics such as the community hub, staff redeployment programme, business and charity response, and housing services response. A follow up item would then be taken to the September meeting of the Committee.

The Chairman suggested that an additional meeting be scheduled for the end of September, to begin to look at the MTFP 2021-23 and the Council's property investment scheme.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) An extraordinary meeting be scheduled for the end of July, to include an initial update on the community response to the Covid 19 pandemic, and to receive an update from the BAME forum Chairman;
- 2) The Committee set up a task and finish group to look at public and green transport provision within the Borough;
- 3) The September Committee include an item on road repairs within the Borough, and a follow-up item on the Council's community response to the Covid 19 pandemic;
- 4) An extraordinary meeting be scheduled for the end of September in order to begin the Committee's look at the 2021-24 MTFP. An additional item regarding the Council's property investment programme would also be taken to this meeting;
- 5) Additional meetings would be required throughout the 2020/21 municipal year in order to properly scrutinise the 2021-24 MTFP, in line with the additional meetings held for the 2019/20 municipal year.