

**MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 28 OCTOBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.03 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Guy Grandison (Chairman), Emma Hobbs (Vice-Chairman), Shirley Boyt, Paul Fishwick, Graham Howe, Clive Jones, Abdul Loyes and Alison Swaddle

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Caroline Smith

Officers Present

Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Resources and Assets)), Matt Pope (Director of Adult Social Care and Health), Chris Traill (Director of Place and Growth) and Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist)

Executive Members Present

John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing), Parry Batth (Executive Member for Environment and Leisure), Pauline Jorgensen (Executive Member for Highways and Transport), and Charles Margetts (Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services)

44. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

45. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

A declaration of interest was submitted from Emma Hobbs regarding agenda item number 48, on the grounds that she was a Trustee for the Wokingham Advice Bureau. Emma stated that she would continue to take part in the discussion and questioning for this item.

46. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

47. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

48. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2021-24: REVENUE BUDGET

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 5 to 102, which outlined the proposed revenue bids for Adult's Services and Place & Growth.

John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing), Parry Batth (Executive Member for Environment and Leisure), Pauline Jorgensen (Executive Member for Highways and Transport), Charles Margetts (Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Resources and Assets), Matt Pope (Director of Adult Services), and Chris Traill (Director of Place & Growth) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

John Kaiser stated that the Council was in the middle of its pandemic response, and any proposals were subject to change as a result of the pandemic response. John added that the papers also included special items, which had not been agreed and were subject to review.

Graham Ebers stated that the papers presented showed all of the proposed savings and growth bids of £50k or over for Adult Services and Place & Growth. Graham added that special items and capital bids for these directorates would be presented at a future meeting.

Matt Pope stated that the Adult's Services budget was approximately £62m, with a net income of approximately £52m. Matt added that in general, when people were approaching the service for help they tended to be in greater need and from an aging demographic. Part of the Adult's Services transformation plan had included a review into the Optalis contract price, resulting in an overall reduction in costs. In addition, demand management had become a large part of the service, whereby staff worked closely together and with management to deliver a good service whilst looking after staff. Charles Margetts added that the service was experiencing uncertain times as a result of the Covid-19 (C-19) pandemic, and as such all bids were subject to change.

During the ensuing discussions relating to Adult's Services, Members raised the following points and queries:

- Relating to bid 6, better use of accommodation relating to learning disability review, could this be clarified? Officer response – Residential services for people with a learning disability tended to be quite expensive. In addition, this was quite an old mode of service delivery specifically for people with a learning disability. Most people with a learning disability need, requiring support, now accessed supported living where Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) paid for the care and support, but the individual got access to housing via streams such as housing benefits. Therefore, this was about moving away from the old style towards the newer supported living style, slightly reducing the overall costs and giving people a more independent life.
- Could clarification be given regarding the £62m gross expenses and the £52m net income? Officer response – Some of the income was made up of grants, however most of this was made up of charges for adult social care. Officers looked at the average costs, and then made a projection for the likely costs for the next year whilst taking into account the numbers of people moving in and out of the Borough and the needs of our residents. This calculation was placed into a spreadsheet formula to produce a projection.
- Had C-19 and the effect on the voluntary sector been factored in to the bid proposals? Officer response – Yes, WBC had a close and positive working relationship with the voluntary sector, in addition to a new voluntary sector strategy. There was a good deal of infrastructure around the voluntary sector, and there had been additional funding placed to pay for staff to write bids. More money would be placed into the voluntary sector year on year, to invest in this area to allow people to be more independent for a longer time, therefore reducing overall demand on the service.
- How would the £1m one-off investment into demand management help to produce a year on year saving? Officer response – The one-off payment in each of the years would pay for additional staffing and resourcing to get the service through that change, with a payback time of approximately two years. In the long term, a saving of £1m per year would be realised against demand.
- Were the savings proposals relating to Optalis realised from the 2020-23 MTFP proposals? Officer response – Yes, the savings had been realised, and the forecasted

savings within the draft 2021-24 MTFP were projected to be realised. Part of the saving came from winning the argument regarding the splitting of central management costs with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

- What were the new ways of working related to demand management? Officer response – This was multifaceted, and included strength based working such as investing in arming staff with the appropriate skillsets to enable earlier and better conversations with service users in order to save WBC money in the long term. Pilots in this area were being formed to gear up for the year ahead.
- What lessons had been learnt from the response to date to the C-19 pandemic? Officer response – Transformations within the service had already been made within the service as a result of the C-19 response. In addition, WBC had formed stronger relationships with the voluntary sector, to enable people to get help from the voluntary sector prior to waiting for a crisis to occur which would require formal adult social care intervention.
- Had the saving of £250k relating to the review of the application of continued health care been realised from the 2020-23 MTFP proposals? Officer response – Yes the savings had been realised, and the savings proposals for this year were a continuation of this. The savings last year were the easier savings to make, hence the lower projected savings level for the next financial year.
- Had the saving of £100k relating to commissioning savings been realised from the 2020-23 MTFP proposals? Officer response – Yes this had been realised, however C-19 had caused some differences, though overall the savings had been delivered.
- How much had been spent on Adult Social Care in 2019/20? Officer response – These figures would be provided at a later date, as various departments had moved slightly and been renamed in the interim.
- The Committee were very pleased with the negotiations regarding contract management of Optalis, and gave praise to all those involved.
- Had the saving of £250k relating to existing care packages been realised from the 2020-23 MTFP proposals? Officer response – Yes these savings had been realised via efficiency of delivery of existing care provision.
- There had been an expected saving of £400k related to social care grants, had this been realised? Officer response – Yes these savings had been realised and would be a recurring saving year on year.
- Had the saving of £300k relating to the adult social care pathway redesign been realised from the 2020-23 MTFP proposals? Officer response – Yes these savings had been made via efficiency savings, including through the voluntary sector and the “one front door” approach.

The Committee moved on to their overview of the savings and growth proposals for the Place & Growth directorate.

Pauline Jorgensen stated that there had been increases in the Volker Highways contract, which had resulted in increased quality of service delivery. The current incumbents of the contract were not willing to bid on the lower end.

Parry Bath stated that income had been received from the previous contractor of the Toutley depot, as they had paid WBC for use of the facilities. Parry added that the other growth bid under his area of responsibility was the procurement of the waterproof recycling bags. On savings, Parry stated that there was a proposed £5 increase to the charge for brown garden waste recycling bins. In addition, a saving would be realised from additional recycling as a result of the introduction of the waterproof recycling bags. Parry stated that a saving would be made as a result of increased uptake of garden waste bins. Finally, a 10% increase to parking fees and fishing permits at country parks was proposed.

During the ensuing discussions relating to Place and Growth, Members raised the following points and queries:

- How long had the brown garden waste bins been priced at £60? Executive Member response – The brown garden waste recycling bins had been priced at £60 for approximately 8 years, and the proposal was for the price to increase to a £65 per year charge. This increase had been benchmarked against a number of other Local Authorities.
- How confident were officers that the suggested increase in recycling levels would materialise? Officer response – Part of WBC's ongoing strategy was to increase the overall capacity for recycling within the Borough, in line with the overall waste management strategy. The increases, as projected, were in line with this strategy.
- Would the Wokingham Business Association Retailers be included within the review of parking charges? Executive Member response – Any increases would be consulted on widely, balancing the income need for the Council against making sure that damage was not done to businesses. These proposals would affect all towns within the Borough, and it was therefore important to be fair and equitable across the Borough when consulting.
- Some other Local Authorities offered a discount on garden waste bins for those eligible for the Council Tax reduction scheme, were WBC looking into this as a possibility? Executive Member and officer response – It was really important to get residents into the habit of recycling. A possible option would be to allow residents to pay for their garden waste bin in monthly instalments, rather than a one off fee, in order to make the payment more manageable. In addition, neighbours were welcome to share a bin and split the payment between themselves.
- Why was there not a projection for cost increases from the garden waste contractor over the three year period, given the projection of increased garden waste recycling? Officer response – There had been a lot of good will from the contractor, who believed they were able to absorb some of those costs. It was important to bear in mind that this was subject to change, as the state of the industry was ever changing. The £5 increase could always be reviewed should economic circumstances change.
- The revenue drainage budget for 19/20 was covered by underspends from other parts of the directorate's budget. How was the 20/21 revenue drainage budget coping with no increase within this financial year? Executive Member response – Going forward,

efficiency savings within the service would be explored. For the current financial year, these costs had been manageable within the existing directorate's budget.

- With new road networks on the horizon, how would the related budgets cope with the total Borough road network? Executive Member response – These increases would be covered via efficiency savings within the directorate. New roads generally had little associated maintenance costs, as the infrastructure was new and built to a high standard. In addition, new roads were under warranty for a period of time. It was not expected for the costs to increase significantly for some time.
- There was a proposed £210k growth bid relating to the contractor costs for highways cleansing and maintenance, was this a sufficient amount when compared to neighbouring Local Authorities? Executive Member response – A balance needed to be struck between delivering a quality service for residents, whilst keeping costs as low as possible. There was a tendency to spend all available budget regardless of the size of the budget, and therefore this growth amount would be monitored over time to assess whether any additional funding was required.
- Was the £600k proposed growth bid related to highways reactive maintenance sufficient? Executive Member and officer response – Yes, this amount was projected to enable the service to deliver the reactive highways maintenance programme across the Borough, taking into account increases in demand.
- There was a lost income of £320k related to the Toutley depot due to a change in contractors. Why was this not taken into account when letting the contract, thereby showing up in the three year MTFP? Executive Member and officer response – Historically, the previous contractors paid WBC £320k per annum for use of the facilities. Should this charge have been levied against the new contractors, they would have increased the overall contract cost. This would have been negotiated previously, and absorbed into last year's budgeting. The figures presented showed the bottom line figures. The previous incumbent of the contract did not bid on the new contract, and they were no longer affordable.
- How long were the new Toutley road contracts in place for? Executive Member and officer response – There was a cluster of partners working out of the Toutley depot, with an approximate contract length of seven years.
- When would additional waterproof recycling be required for purchase? Officer response – The longevity of the bags had been factored into the costing, and there was a sufficient amount for the roll-out for this year and the beginning of next year. With the increased, income, this service should be managed within the existing budget portfolio. The bags were predicted to last for five years, with contingency planning built into the business case.
- How many brown garden waste recycling bins were in operation across the Borough? Executive Member response – This figure would be provided at a later date.
- Was there an existing price increase to the country park car parking charges? Executive Member and officer response – The se of Dinton had been very popular, and there was a large appeal to a ready market. The income figure would be kept under review, and it was built into the existing business plan for Dinton Pastures. The

charges were designed to be cost neutral, and any additional monies would be invested back into the country parks.

- How was car parking charges in non-country park areas of the Borough being assessed? Executive Member and officer response – The charges were being reassessed to check that they were in line with similar areas, whilst ensuring that they were available for use by residents. Regarding the risks related to C-19 and town centre usage, this was being balanced against a one-off special item, with more confidence for the following year.
- Did Thames Water charge WBC for damage to their network from tree roots? Executive Member response – No, this was absorbed by Thames Water as a part of their maintenance programme.
- Had the brown garden waste recycling bags been assessed for an increase? Executive Member response – These were used by some residents who required infrequent usage, and were charged at £1. The cost had not been increased as it was deemed as not worthwhile.
- Regarding the Government's White Paper on planning reform, was there potential for less planning applications due to permitted development rights, and therefore the additional income from pre-application's may not be realised? Executive Member response – The proposals were based on the current system and the rules and regulations that are being worked within currently. Contingency plans were in place should things change, however the current savings lines related to this were a reasonable estimate.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) John Kaiser, Parry Batth, Pauline Jorgensen, Charles Margetts, Graham Ebers, Matt Pope, and Chris Traill be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) The total spend within Adult's Services for 2019/20 be provided to the Committee;
- 3) The total amount of brown garden waste recycling bins in use across the Borough be provided to the Committee;
- 4) Special items, updated revenue bids, and capital bids for Adult's Services and Place & Growth be considered by the Committee at a later date.