

MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 2 SEPTEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.19 PM

Committee Members Present

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

Officers Present

Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist), Andy Glencross (Assistant Director – Highways & Transport), Anne Hunter (Lead Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist), Aivaras Jasiunas (Senior Specialist, Asset Management) and Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist)

Executive Members Present

Pauline Jorgensen

20. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Keith Baker.

21. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 22 June 2020, and the Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Committee held on 27 July 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

Note A number of Members commented that several actions that required officer responses from the previous two set of minutes had not been circulated to the Committee. It was confirmed that officers were working on the responses to the actions, and a further reminder email would be sent to the respective officers.

22. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

A declaration of interest was submitted from Guy Grandison for agenda item 26, on the grounds that he was an employee for a company which provided online meeting solutions. Guy added that he did not work within the division which provided these solutions, and would take part in both the discussion and the voting for this item.

23. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

24. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

25. WOKINGHAM HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 19 to 24, which set out the methodology behind how Wokingham's Highway network was maintained.

The report outlined the selection of roads to be included in the annual planned structural maintenance programme was based upon the UK Pavement Management System (UKPMS) which included annual Network Condition Surveys and our own internal design process (including site visits to check the condition survey scores and where required core sampling to establish the scale of intervention to be recommended). The report added that

this approach ensured that the annual structural maintenance programme was based on meeting the highest priority needs on WBC network within the funding available.

The report noted that the maintenance of the Wokingham's Highways network was made up of three main works streams: reactive maintenance (i.e. potholes etc.), winter maintenance (gritting), and planned structural maintenance (resurfacing, surface dressing and micro-asphalt). The UKPMS also prioritised which treatment was most appropriate for each location. Schemes were designed and drawings prepared based upon the network condition surveys, material testing and site walkover. The detailed design would then confirm the extent and scope of all resurfacing work, and would produce an updated estimated cost of each of the schemes. Once works were completed, contractors were tied into a defect period and a joint WBC and Contractor snagging inspection was undertaken to identify any remedial issues.

Pauline Jorgensen (Executive Member for Highways and Transport), Andy Glencross (Assistant Director – Highways and Transport), and Aivaras Jasiunas (Senior Specialist – Highways Asset Management) attended the meeting to answer any Member questions.

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

- What was the size limit for public reported defects? Officer response – The current limit was set at 1m², however a trial was underway to allow reported defects of up to 5m² to be reviewed and repaired.
- Where was surface dressing not recommended for use? Officer response – Surface dressing tended to be used in rural areas, whereas micro-asphalt was used in residential areas.
- Could Town and Parish Council's be formally approached on an annual basis when developing the rolling maintenance plan? Executive Member response – Town and Parish Councils were routinely in touch with Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) regarding the maintenance plan. The Executive Member stated that she would be happy to formally engage with them on an annual basis, in addition to the conversations that already took place.
- Could cycling routes be added as a priority within the rolling maintenance schedule? Officer response – Members were welcome to put a proposal to the Highways department and the Executive Member for consideration.
- When was the machine survey undertaken, and who owed this equipment? Officer response – The timeframe for the surveys to be completed was usually between 1st April and 1st October. The equipment was shared between the Berkshire Local Authorities.
- What were the lengths of time associated with the defect periods for surface maintenance work? Officer response – Surface dressing attracted a two year defect period, whilst micro-asphalt attracted a one year defect period.
- What percentage of the Wokingham Highway network was covered by the annual scan? Officer response – 100% of unclassified roads were covered, in addition to all A, B, and C roads, in addition to the full Wokingham footways network.

- How did micro-asphalt 'settle' once applied to a road? Officer response – Although vehicles may appear to not use the full width of a road, surfaces were embedded within the road consistently by vehicles.
- How long did micro-asphalt last on a residential road? Officer response – The usual expected usage for a micro-asphalt applied surface was between five and eight years. However, this process was only intended to extend the useful life of a surface, rather than making any structural changes.
- How proactive could Highways officers be with regards to surface maintenance? Officer response – Maintenance was carried out using a three year programme, and it was difficult to predict how an asset would behave, especially during the winter months. For the moment, works needed to be carried out on a priority basis. Year two and three of the programme was not publically released as this was subject to change. The Wokingham Highways Investment Strategy provided a long term plan for major projects, whereby major new roads were expected to be useful for between 20 and 30 years.
- Other Local Authorities were using recycled plastics to fill potholes, were WBC planning to adopt this approach? Officer response – There was a lot of innovation within pothole filling, however WBC were not currently using this approach. WBC were using a 'blow in tarmac' approach, which was less damaging to the environment than other methods.
- Could the officer presentation be circulated to all Members of the Council? Officer response – Yes, the presentation would be circulated to all Members.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Pauline Jorgensen, Andy Glencross and Aivaras Jasiunas be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) Highways officers and the Executive Member for Highways and Transport seek to formally engage with Town and Parish Council's when developing the three year programme for surface maintenance;
- 3) The presentation shown on the evening by officers be circulated to all Members of the Council.

26. VIRTUAL MEETING REVIEW

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 25 to 30, which outlined the implementation of virtual Council meetings, and potential next steps moving forwards.

The report stated the initial options considered during the beginning of national lockdown, and the reasons behind why some options were not implemented. A standard Microsoft Teams meeting was chosen, and broadcast using the Open Broadcasting Software (OBS) facility. This allowed the 'flow' of a virtual meeting to be as close to that of a standard physical meeting as possible.

The report also outlined the next steps in Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC's) approach to holding Council meetings, including the possibility of hybridised meetings. Hybrid meetings would provide several logistical and technical challenges, however officer

were working to provide solutions to be able to run these meetings in the future, in a safe and professional manner.

The report stated a selection of achievements associated with the running of virtual meetings, including running the full schedule of meetings for the past few months, and the livestreaming of all public meetings on WBC's YouTube page.

Anne Hunter (Lead Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist) and Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist) attended the meeting to answer any Member queries.

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

- Should hybrid meetings go ahead, Members within the Council Chamber would need to see and hear the same as those within the virtual call. Officer response – This was agreed, and several tests would be carried out internally prior to any public meeting being held. Participants, whether virtual or within the Council building, would see and hear as close to the same content as was possible.
- The running of virtual meetings had meant several other benefits had occurred, including less heating of the Council offices for evening meetings. This in turn met the Council's climate emergency objectives, in addition to allowing participants to join the meeting from wherever was convenient. Hybrid meetings could present additional issues, including the cleansing of the Council chamber after meetings, additional travel to and from the Council offices, and additional heating of the building for evening meetings. Officer comment – Officers had been asked to look into the possibility of running hybrid meetings as there had been an appetite to do so from some Members. Hybrid meetings would not be ran unless they were safe for all attendees. Going forward, the plan was to webcast all meetings whether virtual, hybrid or physical. The positive climate benefits of holding virtual meetings were acknowledged by officers, in addition to the logistical benefits of being able to join a meeting from somewhere convenient.
- How many people could attend a hybrid meeting safely? Officer comment – Subject to ongoing government guidance, twenty people could be accommodated safely within the Council Chamber using a two metre separation distance. For now, only the Council Chamber could be considered for hybrid meetings due to the capacity of the room and the implementation of technology in order to enable hybrid meetings.
- Going forward, were there any plans to offer additional support to Members in terms of participating in virtual or hybridised meetings? Officer response – Any Members wishing to have additional training with Microsoft Teams could approach Democratic Services for a training slot to be arranged. Any Chairman who would be chairing a hybridised meeting would be offered additional training.
- Could the virtual meeting protocol be reinforced for attendees that were not following the procedure? Officer response – Attendees could be reminded of, and referred to, the virtual meeting protocol as agreed by Council.
- Was there the ability to mute participants and turn off participants' video during a meeting? Officer response – Democratic Services officers were able to mute participants that may have forgotten to turn off their microphone. Officers would

message a user who may have forgotten to turn off their video, asking them to do so. A last resort would be the removal of the participant from the call, and this would only occur after several reminders and persistent disruptive behaviour.

- Had an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) been carried out with regards to the holding of virtual meetings? Officer response – An initial EQIA had been carried out, and was appended to the virtual meeting protocol report as agreed by Council. The EQIA identified a ‘no/neutral’ impact in 6 of the 9 protected categories, and a low impact in the remaining 3. Subtitles were available on the YouTube video to give viewers a good representation of the discussions at the meetings.
- Were there any voting modules associated with Microsoft Teams? Officer response – Currently, only the ‘hands up’ feature was integrated within teams to allow for voting.
- The Chairman proposed that a letter be written to the Minister for Local Government, asking that the regulations allowing for specific virtual meetings to take place be made permanent, at the discretion of each Local Authority. It was noted that some meetings may not be appropriate for virtual attendance in perpetuity, and these details could be agreed by each Local Authority at a later date should regulations permit. This proposal was agreed by the Committee. Officers commented that it was hoped that a consultation regarding virtual meeting regulations would be carried out by the Government.
- Regarding meeting broadcasting, how many officers were undertaking this task? Officer response – Originally, one Democratic Services officer undertook the broadcasting of all meetings. After a short time, a further two colleagues situated within the IT department have also been broadcasting Council meetings. The limiting factor was the required upload speed available at the homes of staff members. Many broadband providers were inundated with requests for upgrades and maintenance, making it difficult for staff members to upgrade their connection to the required level. It was hoped that further staff members would have the required upload speed in future.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Anne Hunter and Callum Wernham be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) Members contact Democratic Services with any practical suggestions on how virtual meetings may be improved in the future;
- 3) Members continue to work alongside Democratic Services to enable effective Council meetings to be held;
- 4) A letter be sent to the Minister for Local Government, asking that the regulations allowing for specific virtual meetings to take place be made permanent, at the discretion of each Local Authority. The most suitable route for this communication, be that from the Committee, the Executive, the Council, or from the Chief Executive, would be explored outside of the meeting.

27. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered their upcoming work programme, set out in agenda pages 31 to 36.

Officers commented that due to the number and detail of items coming to the extraordinary meeting on 22nd, it would be useful to place some approximate timings for each item, and to set aside time at the end of the meeting to form the Committee's thoughts on the issues discussed ahead of their contribution into the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee's report on the Council's initial response to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The Committee were advised that the revenue bids for Children's Services and Place & Growth would swap due to the Directorships availability. For clarity, Place & Growth would be coming to the 28 October meeting, and Children's Services would be coming to the 23 November meeting.

It was suggested that work programme item 14, relating to scrutinising the Council's Housing Services to ensure that the needs of local residents and communities are being met, come to an upcoming meeting of the Committee. Officers commented that as Housing had only recently come to the Committee as part of Covid-19 response, it would be appropriate to ask officers for a briefing sheet to be shared with the Committee regarding this issue. If issues arose from the briefing sheet, the item could be put on the forward plan.

It was suggested that work programme item 15, relating to scrutinising the operation and performance of the Council-owned companies and shared service arrangements, come to an upcoming meeting of the Committee. Officers stated that the appropriate Services would be contacted with regards to these issues, and the Committee would be kept updated.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Items scheduled for discussion on 22 September have approximate timings allocated, with time set aside to form the Committee's thoughts on the issues discussed ahead of their contribution into the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee's report on the Council's initial response to the Covid-19 Pandemic;
- 2) The change of dates for receipt of the revenue bids for Place & Growth (28 October) and Children's Services (23 November) be noted;
- 3) Housing officers be asked to provide a briefing sheet with regards to work programme item 14, with a view to have an item placed on the forward plan should issues be identified;
- 4) The appropriate Services be contacted with regards to work programme item 15, and the Committee be kept updated with scheduling of these issues at future meetings.