

## MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 24 MAY 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.10 PM

### **Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Guy Grandison (Chairman), Alison Swaddle (Vice-Chairman), Sam Akhtar, Shirley Boyt, Anne Chadwick, Phil Cunnington, Paul Fishwick and Clive Jones

### **Executive Members in Attendance**

Councillors: Parry Batth, Pauline Jorgensen and John Kaiser

### **Officers Present**

Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist) and Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist)

### **1. APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies for absence.

### **2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29 March 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **3. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

### **5. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions.

### **6. WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22**

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 11 to 28, which set out the provisional Committee work programme for the year ahead and service priority lists from the Resources & Assets and Place & Growth Directorates.

John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing), Parry Batth (Executive Member for Environment and Leisure) and Pauline Jorgensen (Executive Member for Highways and Transport) attended the meeting to provide service overviews and to answer Member questions.

John Kaiser stated that the Local Plan Update was ongoing, with a consultation due to go live in July or August of this year and the plan to be finalised by Christmas of 2021. There was an original commitment to deliver 1000 homes over 4 years via Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) owned housing companies. This strategy was now more ambitious, and included offering affordable rents rates of between 40 and 50 percent market rate, which was well below the normal rate of 80 percent of market rates offered across the country. In addition, 40 percent of all homes delivered in the Borough would be affordable, and WBC was exploring options to purchase S106 homes to enable them to be offered as affordable rent or shared ownership.

Parry Bath stated that the emerging revised Leisure Strategy was entering a consultation period, which would allow residents to have a say on what leisure offerings they wanted to see in the Borough going forwards. The Carnival Hub redevelopment was also underway, which would host both a brand new leisure centre and a library facility. Parry added that the Cantley park renovation was well underway, with a number of 3G pitches and cricket pitches ready to come online shortly, amongst a number of major improvements across the site. Consultations were underway with a developer in Arborfield to discuss whether the facilities in Arborfield Green could be turned into cricket pitches which would be approved by the English Cricket Board. 3G pitches were under construction at a number of sites across the Borough, including in Arborfield.

Pauline Jorgensen stated that the Highways programme would see a three-pronged approach in the coming year. Firstly, there would be major road programmes and road improvement programmes taking place across the Wokingham Borough. The second priority was related to drainage, including provision of additional SUDs across the Borough and a flood mitigation scheme on a section of the River Loddon. The third approach would be in relation to sustainable travel improvements, which would include improvements to cycling and walking infrastructure, a bus service improvement strategy and a low carbon travel strategy. Other priorities within the Service included improvements to parking services, which would include a parking strategy pilot in Twyford and the development of a Borough wide parking management plan.

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

- What were the approximate housing stock numbers owned by WBC? Executive Member response – There were approximately 2700 properties owned by WBC, however there were not many larger 4-bedroom property social homes.
- Where did upgrading WBC housing stock to achieve carbon neutrality sit within the Council's housing strategy plan? Executive Member response – Newly built homes would conform to standards, and WBC would work with residents wherever possible to facilitate these upgrades to existing homes. The most important priority was to ensure that homeless people were housed in good quality accommodation.
- What was the status of the self-building initiative? Executive Member response – This initiative had not been a great success to date, and the issue had been in finding a good partner to run the scheme with. The initiative was progressing, however not at any great rate.
- If the Local Plan Update dropped back by a month or two, would WBC still maintain a 5 year land supply? Executive Member response – WBC had an excellent track record of defending planning appeals, and hired the best barrister possible to facilitate this. WBC still had a Local Plan, and although older it still stood the Borough in good stead and it would be difficult for an Inspector to argue otherwise considering the national picture.
- Did WBC have a plan for where the 1000 Council developed homes would be placed within the Borough? Executive Member response – There was a list of 1352 homes within the programme, which would be used to progress the plan moving forwards.

- Were there any plans to develop a pool at the Ryeish Green Sports Hub? Executive Member response – If the community wanted a pool and there was sufficient demand for such a facility then this could be considered.
- How well advertised was the revised Leisure Strategy and associated consultation? Executive Member response – It had been well advertised on the WBC website, social media channels and in local newspapers. On suggestion from the Committee, the Executive Member agreed to push for the revised strategy and consultation to feature in the next edition of the Borough News.
- How was WBC's leisure provider, Places for People, coping in relation to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic? Executive Member response – WBC were supporting Places for People via provision of loss of income. Since reopening, our leisure facilities had coped well and were continuing to offer a great range of services for residents.
- When was it anticipated that the planning application would come forward for the proposed in-Borough crematorium? Executive Member response – This was still in the discussion and planning stage, however a planning application was anticipated for later in the year.
- What measures might be included within the Bus Service Improvement Plan? Executive Member response – There was a new Government announcement regarding bus partnerships, which would allow Local Authorities to partner with bus providers to improve local services. This was in very early stages, and more details would follow in time.
- Were there any updates relating to the flood alleviation scheme on the River Loddon? Executive Member response – Works relating to culverts had been completed, and flood monitoring of flow through those culverts and others would be put in place, which would allow action to be taken if needed. Officers could provide more detail regarding the flood alleviation scheme if required.
- Were the park and rides due to open in the order of Thames Valley Park, Winnersh Triangle and then Coppid Beech? Executive Member response – The Thames Valley park and ride had been affected by Covid-19 as all of the offices had been essentially closed. Works were beginning at both the Winnersh Triangle and Coppid Beech sites.
- Was there any strategy to get more residents to use train services? Executive Member response – The development of the Winnersh Triangle park and ride would promote increased train usage. Other opportunities needed to be explored, in addition to the creation of better pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure to and from railway stations.
- Why had the Low Emissions Transport Strategy been renamed to the Low Carbon Transport Strategy? Executive Member response – This was most likely an error, and would be changed back to its original name.
- Was there the potential for a partnership between WBC, Reading Borough Council and Bracknell Council in relation to Reading Buses? Executive Member response – A partnership had previously been suggested, and WBC would keep pushing to have a more active role and therefore have more influence over Reading Buses in order to protect residents of the Borough. Conversations had taken place with the new Managing Director about a closer working relationship.

- When would the active travel funding bid be finalised and chosen? Executive Member response – This was imminent, a consultation and evaluation of the three options had been carried out and a decision would be made very soon. All three options would go forward at some point in the future.
- Was there anything in the works for safer walking routes to and from school, to encourage sustainable travel for school children? Executive Member response – Safe crossing points were installed as part of new development costs. The LCWIP would be used to fill in the missing links to ensure safe walking routes for children to and from school.
- Were there any plans for additional motorcycle parking at Earley station? Executive Member response – This was a very small site, and suggestions from local Members and residents were welcome as to how this might be accommodated.
- What were the plans to provide a greater electric vehicle charging network? Executive Member response – In London, power from street lights was used to facilitate electric vehicle charging. LED lights had been moved to the interior of pavements for safety reasons which inhibited this strategy. There was an options consultation which was due to go live in October to gather opinions for the best way forward.
- Were there any plans to create more parking permit schemes for residential areas? Executive Member response – In general, residents were keen to have parking permit schemes until they were required to pay for them. The Service was happy to consult on specific roads, however these schemes sometimes moved the problem to other areas.
- Would the Borough Wide Parking Management plan come to Overview and Scrutiny prior to going out for consultation? Executive Member response – The Service would be happy to accommodate this. It was important to note that this could not really progress until the Borough was in a more normal state post pandemic. An update in December 2021 or January 2022 would be reasonable.
- Had there been any changes to the business and economic recovery plan? Executive Member response – A more detailed update would be provided to the June Committee meeting.
- Were there plans to regenerate the other Town centres? Executive Member response – Interest rates remained low and WBC were looking to invest where possible. Progress would be much further ahead if it had not been for the pandemic. It was hoped that the money generated from the Wokingham Town Centre regeneration could be used to invest in the other town centres within the Borough.
- Had options such as ping-pong parlours been considered for vacant shops in Wokingham, which would make use of empty space and develop interest in the sport? Executive Member response – This was a good idea, however Wokingham Town Centre was not in a position to offer this as there were no shops which were at risk of being empty for a long period of time.
- What was the Borough's position in terms of vacant office buildings? Executive Member response – There had been a lot of conversion to residential space in central

Wokingham, which had been good in some cases and bad in others. As a Council, WBC was fortunate to be in the retail sector and not so much in the office space sector. The Arborfield garrison had seen large amounts of business rates replaced by Council Tax over its redevelopment.

- Was there an update regarding the homeless accommodation strategy? Executive Member response – This would be more challenging going forwards, however the Housing Revenue Account could be used to assist. This was a complex area, and WBC was very hopeful not to lose any ground in this cause.

The Committee went on to discuss their work programme for their upcoming meetings.

It was agreed that the June Committee would consider the Community Safety Partnership, and update regarding business and economic recovery in the Borough as a result of the pandemic, an update regarding how WBC advertises planning applications, and a list of Service priorities from the Communities, Insight and Change Directorate.

It was agreed that an extraordinary meeting be arranged for the end of July, to consider the exit plan for the Public Protection Partnership and Building Control Solutions.

It was agreed that the September meeting receive an update on library provision and best practice, and a potential update on the implementation of the Arts and Culture strategy.

It was agreed that an update regarding the Borough Wide Parking Management Plan be considered by the Committee in January 2021.

It was agreed that an update regarding Flood Risk Management and an update from the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service be considered in March 2021.

A number of other issues were discussed by the Committee, including the Sports and Leisure Strategy, the Bus Improvement Strategy, Broadband provision, the creation of a task and finish group regarding overgrown pavements, and Burial Ground Provision. It was agreed that these items and others discussed on the night be scheduled directly with the Directorates input to an appropriate meeting of the Committee.

The Committee, including the Chairman of Health Overview & Scrutiny, agreed to send work programme item 13 (public toilet provision) to the Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) John Kaiser, Parry Bath, and Pauline Jorgensen be thanked for attending the Committee;
- 2) The Low Carbon Transport Strategy revert to be named the Low Emissions Transport Strategy;
- 3) The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure look to advertise the revised Leisure Strategy and associated consultation in the Borough News;
- 4) The format of inviting Executive Members to the first meetings of the municipal year be continued in future;

- 5) The June Committee would consider the Community Safety Partnership, and update regarding business and economic recovery in the Borough as a result of the pandemic, an update regarding how WBC advertises planning applications, and a list of Service priorities from the Communities, Insight and Change Directorate;
- 6) An extraordinary meeting be arranged for the end of July, to consider the exit plan for the Public Protection Partnership and Building Control Solutions;
- 7) The September meeting receive an update on library provision and best practice, and a potential update on the implementation of the Arts and Culture strategy;
- 8) An update regarding the Borough Wide Parking Management Plan be considered by the Committee in January 2021;
- 9) An update regarding Flood Risk Management and an update from the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service be considered in March 2021;
- 10) Other items of business discussed on the night be scheduled for an appropriate meeting following direct discussions between officers, the Directorates and the Chairman.