

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 18 OCTOBER 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.00 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Pauline Helliard-Symons (Chairman), Alison Swaddle (Vice-Chairman), Rachel Burgess, Paul Fishwick, Jim Frewin, Norman Jorgensen, Sarah Kerr, Rebecca Margetts, Jackie Rance and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Chris Bowring, Michael Firmager, Parry Bath, John Halsall, Clive Jones, Gregor Murray and Bill Soane

Officers Present

Dave Allen, Communications, Engagement and Marketing Manager
Rebecca Bird, Senior Specialist, Communications, Engagement and Marketing
Richard Bisset, Lead Specialist Place Clienting
Narinder Brar, Community Safety Partnership Manager
Stephen Brown, Interim Assistant Director, Place Services
Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Karen Evans, Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator
Andy Glencross, Assistant Director - Highways and Transport
Rhian Hayes, Interim Assistant Director - Housing and Place
Nick Spencer, PMO and Digital Lead Specialist
Diana Tovar, Climate Emergency Manager
Jackie Whitney, Head of Customer Delivery

11. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Sam Akhtar and Guy Grandison.

Chris Bowring and Michael Firmager attended the meeting as substitutes.

12. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 20 September 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Note: Alison Swaddle referred to a request from Clive Jones about the format and style of Overview and Scrutiny Minutes. Councillor Jones had requested that the Minutes should name any Member who raised an issue or asked a question. The Committee considered the pros and cons of Councillor Jones's request.

It was proposed by Alison Swaddle and seconded by Jackie Rance that the current format, i.e. not naming individual Members be continued.

Upon being put to the vote, the proposal was approved.

13. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Michael Firmager declared a personal interest in item 38 – Waste Strategy - on the grounds that he was the Deputy Executive Member for Environment and Communities.

Note: Sarah Kerr referred to the decision made by the Committee at its meeting, on 19 June 2019, relating to membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The

Committee had resolved that in light of the Government's Statutory Guidance on the Overview and Scrutiny function, Deputy Executive Members should not sit on the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or any other Overview and Scrutiny Committee which related to their portfolio. In light of that decision Councillor Kerr asked for clarification on Councillor Firmager's attendance at the meeting as a substitute. It was confirmed that the matter would be investigated before the next meeting of the Committee in November 2021.

14. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

15. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

16. DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021-24

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 9 to 68, which gave details of the proposed Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-24.

The report stated that the Domestic Abuse Act came into effect in April 2021, placing a new duty on Tier 1 Authorities to provide a rounded offer of support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation. The proposed Domestic Abuse Strategy covered the new statutory duties introduced under the Act as well as its wider response to domestic abuse.

Feedback and comments from the Committee would be fed into the final draft of the Strategy to be considered by the Executive in November 2021. Once approved, the Strategy would be published on the Council's website.

Bill Soane, Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Communities, attended the meeting to answer Member questions along with Narinder Brar (Community Safety Partnership Manager) and Karen Evans (Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator).

The report stated that the Council's duties under the 2021 Act included the appointment of a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board which must be consulted as it performed specific functions such as:

- assessing the need for domestic abuse support in the Borough for all victims and their children;
- preparing and publishing a strategy for the provision of such support having regard to the needs assessment;
- monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the strategy and reporting back to the Government each year.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

Overall, Members felt that the Strategy document was comprehensive and well structured.

In relation to terminology, the Strategy referred to "victims and children". It was felt that children who witnessed domestic abuse were also victims. Could the terminology be amended to say "victims which include children"? It was confirmed that the wording in the Strategy reflected the wording in statutory documents. However, this point would be considered further.

The action plan underpinning the Strategy should have an emphasis on awareness raising and prevention as many victims did not recognise that they were being abused until they received professional help. It was confirmed that awareness raising was a key part of the Strategy. Officers were happy to share the action plan with the Committee.

It was important that staff in Children's Services received training on issues such as post separation abuse and coercive control. It was confirmed that the training plan for Children's Services included a comprehensive list of key topics such as the ones mentioned.

The Council had awarded its five year domestic abuse support contract to Cranstoun. How would Cranstoun meet the needs of different types of victim e.g. male and female? It was confirmed that Cranstoun was working to get a new refuge up and running. Accommodation for women and men was never mixed. It was accepted that there currently gaps in provision, e.g. for men and victims with complex needs.

The tables on page 43 of the Agenda highlighted the current gaps in service provision. What was being done to address those gaps? It was confirmed that there was good data on the key issues and that the relevant table set out initial recommendations for action. However, it was recognised that there were significant issues to address.

The report referred to the Domestic Abuse Strategy for 2017-20. How successful was that strategy in tackling domestic abuse in the Borough? It was recognised that there had been significant changes since 2017. The Council's approach would continue to develop as the new strategy was implemented. The Council had received significant additional Government funding in order to meet the new duties in the 2021 Act.

What were then implications of the Domestic Abuse Strategy for children under 16? It was confirmed that the Government definition of domestic abuse related to children over 16 years of age. The under 16s would primarily be dealt with through the child protection services. The Council worked with local schools to ensure that guidance and support were available as necessary.

One of the key challenges was effective communications, especially in relation to hard to reach groups. How would this be achieved? It was confirmed that communication was a big challenge. This would be achieved through effective signposting and a co-ordinated response across the Borough. The aim would be to use a wide range of media sources and to "piggyback" on to other communication tools.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the proposed Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021/24 be noted and ratified, taking on board the points raised by the Committee;
- 2) the annual refresh of the Domestic Abuse Strategy and the full review, due in 2024, be reported to the Committee to enable it to measure success against the key priorities.

17. WASTE STRATEGY

The Committee considered a presentation on the objectives and proposed process for developing the Council's new Waste Strategy.

The presentation was delivered by Richard Bisset (Lead Specialist, Place Clienting) and Rebecca Bird (Senior Specialist, Communications, Engagement and Marketing). Parry Bath (Executive Member for Environment and Leisure) attended the meeting to answer Member questions.

The presentation highlighted the current issues facing the service:

- increasing costs - £10.7m waste disposal cost each year;
- high waste volumes – over 70,000 tonnes of waste produced each year;
- weekly collection of rubbish and recycling – limited to 80 bags per property;
- Climate Emergency – commitment to achieve 70% recycling rate by 2030.

The aim was to approve a new waste collection service by 2023 with the following aims:

- reduced cost – the current trajectory was not sustainable in the long term;
- reduced waste – will result in lower costs and support Climate Emergency targets;
- increased recycling – help to achieve climate targets.

The presentation set out the proposed process and timeline for developing the new Waste Strategy by 2023, including:

- an early resident engagement survey;
- establishment of a cross-party Member working group;
- data gathering and analysis;
- Climate Emergency community deliberative process;
- update on emerging options to Overview and Scrutiny;
- public engagement on emerging options;
- draft Waste Strategy to Member working group and Overview and Scrutiny;
- public consultation on draft Waste Strategy;
- approval of waste Strategy by the Executive.

In the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points:

As part of the public consultation on the Strategy, could residents identify new options such as the introduction of wheelie bins? Was the re3 partnership outside the scope of the new Strategy? It was confirmed that all aspects of the collection and disposal process were included in the development of the new Strategy.

At present, the Household Waste and Recycling Centres were situated in Bracknell and Reading. Was there potential for a site to be developed within the Borough? It was confirmed that the potential for a site in the Borough would be explored. Survey data indicated that Wokingham residents were regular users of the waste and recycling centres.

The development of the new Strategy was likely to take around 14 months. Would the Council be seeking to adopt innovative solutions in the meantime? It was confirmed that the service was constantly looking at examples of best practice and new ideas. The service received independent advice on best practice so would be keen to adopt innovative practices where possible. Regular discussions already took place with Veolia on the subject of continuous improvement.

How would the proposed focus groups be constituted and what expert advice would they receive to enable them to understand the key issues? It was confirmed that the Council would ensure that the deliberative processes would seek to engage with a representational cross section of residents and would be supported by expert advice.

A key part of the new Strategy would be communication and engagement with all sections of the community, including those residents who were not currently aware of the benefits of recycling and waste minimisation. It was confirmed that a wide variety of communication tools would be used to ensure that key messages were understood by all residents and community groups. This would include working with Town and Parish Councils, the voluntary sector and local schools.

The new Strategy should include a review of roads which could not accommodate a full size refuse vehicle. Smaller, more flexible vehicles would help to meet the needs of residents who struggled with the current service arrangements. It was confirmed that this point would be taken forward as part of the ongoing discussions on the new Strategy.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Parry Batth, Richard Bisset and Rebecca Bird be thanked for attending the meeting to answer Member questions;
- 2) the presentation on development of the new Waste Strategy be noted;
- 3) the Committee receive a further update on the development of the new Waste Strategy at its meeting in January 2022.

18. WBC WEBSITE IMPROVEMENT

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 69 to 78, which gave details of proposals to improve the Council's website, in line with customer feedback.

Gregor Murray, Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions, attended the meeting to answer Member questions along with Nick Spencer (PMO and Digital Lead Specialist) and Jackie Whitney (Head of Customer Delivery).

The report stated that the Council website provided 24/7 online access to residents, allowing them to interact with the Council at times convenient for them. The website was currently ranked 5/40 for local authorities using the Gov. Metrics customer feedback service. However, the website system which provided the Council website was approaching the end of its life and needed to be replaced in order to meet the needs of residents more effectively. Customer feedback also indicated areas for improvement in the design and structure of the website.

The report stated that improving the website was part of the ongoing programme aimed at strengthening the voice of the customer. This programme aligned with the Council's Customer Experience Strategy. Usage and analytics data highlighting customer transactions was also used to identify areas of opportunity for digital development.

The report confirmed that a Capital bid had been submitted to fund a project to replace the website system. If the funding was approved the project would commence in 2022. The proposed outcomes would be a modernised look and feel focussing on mobile use, simple

navigation, consistent signposting, less reliance on PDFs and easy to use and intuitive transactional forms.

It was estimated that the redesign and rebuilding of the website would take 18-24 months. The project was part of the Modernise agenda which would have a significant impact on all services delivered by the Council, both internal and external.

In the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points:

In developing the new website, what measures of success would be included? Would Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) be reported to the Committee? Specific points included:

- the mobile app was not really an app and was prone to failure;
- the reporting tool used two systems and needed better co-ordination;
- a lot of content was too technical and should be made more user friendly, including the use of plain English;
- signing up for library events was not easy.

It was confirmed that consistency was key in developing the website. It was essential to understand the customer journey and to engage with users, making sure that the website was as easy to use as possible for all residents.

It would be sensible to look at the most used webpages as the first step in the iterative programme of website development. It was also important that different systems were able to talk to each other. The importance of the customer journey was emphasised along with a consistent voice to residents. The Council's Communications team had an important part to play in this process.

It was felt that viewing website content on a mobile phone was often difficult. Could content be reshaped to include a brief synopsis which would assist residents? It was acknowledged that the website was not designed to accommodate residents using mobile phones. The pandemic had seen a major shift in the way residents interacted with the Council – now 50% of website interactions were via mobile phones. This issue would be considered as part of the improvement plans.

How could we ensure that all Members had the opportunity to provide feedback on the website and put forward ideas for improvement? It was confirmed that all Members would be given the opportunity to comment and make suggestions relating to the improvement journey.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Gregor Murray, Nick Spencer and Jackie Whitney be thanked for attending the meeting to answer Member questions;
- 2) the proposed plans to improve the Council's website be noted and supported;
- 3) the comments and suggestions from the Committee be incorporated into the plans to improve the website.

19. CLIMATE EMERGENCY - EXECUTIVE RESPONSE TO THE TASK & FINISH GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 79 to 100, which set out the officer responses to the 2021 recommendations from the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group.

The report stated that the Task and Finish Group's recommendations had been submitted to the Executive in September 2021. The report to the Executive included officer comments on each of the recommendations, the majority of which were accepted. The officer comments were reported back to the Committee for information and comment. The report also included an update on progress against the Task and Finish Group's 2020 recommendations.

Gregor Murray, Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions, attended the meeting to answer Member questions along with Rhian Hayes (Interim Assistant Director Housing and Place) and Diana Tovar (Climate Emergency Manager).

The report stated that the Task and Finish Group's 2021 report had focussed on four key elements of the Action Plan: transport, homes, renewable energy and behaviour change.

The report stated that the next update report on the Climate Emergency Action Plan would be submitted to the Committee in January 2022.

In the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points:

In relation to the recommendations on transport, were there plans to carry out a Borough-wide Journey Needs Assessment, including consultation with key stakeholders? It was confirmed that an assessment would be carried out as part of the work on the new Local Transport Plan (LTP4). This would include a focus on sustainable transport journeys.

Clarification was sought on the Action Plan target of achieving 50% registered Electric Vehicles in the Borough by 2030 in light of the Government announcement that the sale of new petrol/diesel cars and vans would end in 2030. It was confirmed that, although the sale of new petrol/diesel vehicles would end by 2030, many petrol/diesel vehicles would continue in use well into the 2030s.

In relation to the recommendation on the introduction of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) linked to the current Local Plan, it was noted that an SPD could not be attached to the existing Local Plan. Instead, an interim measure could be the publication of a policy statement to encourage carbon improvements. Was this work being progressed? It was confirmed that the proposed policy statement would be delivered.

In relation to the proposed Low Carbon Transport Strategy, it was confirmed that the strategy should consider all transport emissions, not just carbon. This had been emphasised in a Motion approved by Council in 2019.

As 60% of journeys were less than 5km there was an opportunity to develop safe alternatives to the private car. The Council is in the process of developing the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). LCWIP proposals were currently out to consultation. Were the delivery costs of the LCWIP being considered? It was confirmed that work was ongoing to calculate the delivery costs for the LCWIP. Officers were currently evaluating the key cycling and walking routes across the Borough.

In relation to the Task and Finish Group's recommendation on clean air zones for Twyford and Wokingham town centre, the officer response referred only to Twyford. Were there plans to consider a clean air zone for Wokingham? It was confirmed that the officers would give further consideration to this issue and report back to the Committee. It was also confirmed that Reading University was leading a project aimed at reducing emissions and improving air quality through a mix of energy management and traffic management initiatives. An update on the project would be submitted to the Committee.

In relation to the £17m project aimed at tackling traffic congestion across the Borough, did the project include carbon saving targets which could be shared with the Committee? It was confirmed that carbon saving targets would be attached to the project, but that the targets had not yet been agreed.

In relation to the 2020 recommendations of the Task and Finish Group, it was felt that a number had been accepted but not progressed, including:

- Development of a Vision for a Net Zero Borough – utilising the Climate Emergency Cross Party Working Group. The working group had not met since January 2021. It was confirmed that the development of the Vision would take place through the proposed local deliberative processes. One of these processes would be a cross party group of Members.
- Independent carbon audit of the Climate Emergency Action Plan and the supporting methodology. It was confirmed that this item had been included in the Council's Internal Audit programme for 2021/22.
- Inclusion of an assessment methodology which measures the likelihood (as a %) of success or failure of each item in the Action Plan. It was confirmed that all the items in the Action Plan were assumed to be deliverable. The RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rating had been introduced to show progress against each target. Progress would be further updated in January 2022.
- Updates to the Action Plan address the gaps and errors in the original version. It was felt that some of the gaps and errors had not yet been addressed. It was confirmed that a further update be scrutinised as part of the next update in January 2022.

What progress was being made on the recommendations relating to behaviour change? It was confirmed that behaviour change was one of the most important issues in the Action Plan. A range of discussions were ongoing and progress would be reported in the January update.

What was the Council doing to encourage residents to replace gas boilers with heat pumps and/or solar panels? It was confirmed that the Green Bank concept was still being discussed as a way to deliver funding for residents to make changes to their home heating arrangements. The Local Plan Update process would also deliver stretching targets relating to new homes in the Borough.

In relation to future update reports on the Action Plan – could the reports separate out progress relating to the Borough-wide targets and progress relating to the Council's own carbon footprint? This issue had been raised through a public question at full Council. It was confirmed that this matter was under consideration and Members would be updated as part of the next update report.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Gregor Murray, Rhian Hayes and Diana Tovar be thanked for attending the meeting to answer Member questions;
- 2) officers be asked to take account of the Committee's comments on the response to the Task and Finish Group's 2021 recommendations;
- 3) progress against the Task and Finish Group's 2020 recommendations be noted;
- 4) the next update report on the Climate Emergency Action Plan be submitted to the Committee's meeting in January 2022;
- 5) issues raised by the Committee (set out above) be addressed in the next update report.

20. CONSIDERATION OF THE CURRENT EXECUTIVE FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a copy of the Executive Forward Programme as set out on Agenda pages 101 to 104.

A query was raised about the Bus Service Improvement Plan which had not been considered by the Committee before submission to the Executive. It was confirmed that completion of the Plan within a tight deadline meant that it could not be reported to the Committee in draft form. However, the next stage in the process was the development of the Enhanced Partnership document by the end of March 2022. It would be possible to bring this element of the process to the Committee for discussion.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Forward Programme be noted.

21. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES

The Committee considered its forward work programme and that of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees as set out on Agenda pages 105 to 120.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programmes be noted;
- 2) clarification be sought on the timetabling for the report on the Council's emerging Tree Strategy.

22. ACTION TRACKER REPORT

The Committee considered the latest Action Tracker report, set out at Agenda pages 121-122.

RESOLVED: That the Action Tracker report be noted.

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