

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 17 NOVEMBER 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.45 PM

Committee Members Present

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

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Guy Grandison and Pauline Jorgensen

Officers Present

Rebecca Brooks, Senior Transport Planner
Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Graham Ebers, Deputy Chief Executive
Andy Glencross, Assistant Director, Highways and Transport
Deana Humphries, Community Engagement Lead - Place and Growth

13. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

Guy Grandison attended the meeting on Microsoft Teams.

14. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 18 October 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendments:

Minute 18 – WBC Website Improvement

Add the following paragraph: “The website was one of the Council’s resident contact channels. Officers were requested to submit a further report explaining how the various contact channels fitted and worked together”.

Minute 19 – Climate Emergency – Executive Response to the Task and Finish Group Recommendations

The paragraph relating to the £17m traffic congestion project (Page 12) be amended to read: “In relation to the £17m project aimed at tackling traffic congestion across the Borough, there was currently no commitment to attach carbon savings”.

Minute 22 – Action Tracker Report

Add the following sentence: “Members queried progress relating to the regular meetings with the Executive and CLT as per the Executive-Scrutiny Protocol”.

Note: Sarah Kerr referred to Minute 12 (Minutes of Previous Meeting) and queried the vote on the format of Overview and Scrutiny Minutes on the basis that a Deputy Executive Member had attended as a substitute and voted.

It was proposed by Alison Swaddle that the earlier decision to maintain the current format of the Minutes, i.e. not naming individual Members, be confirmed.

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

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

For information, Rachel Burgess and Alison Swaddle confirmed that they had been appointed to the cross-party Member working group which was overseeing the development of the Anti-Poverty Strategy.

16. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

17. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

18. RECOVERY STRATEGY UPDATE

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 15 to 28, which gave details of progress against delivery of the Council's Recovery Strategy 2021-26 up to September 2021.

Graham Ebers, Deputy Chief Executive, attended the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions.

The report stated that the Council had developed a Recovery Strategy to focus on recovery from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Strategy had set out nine key areas of focus, viz:

- 1 Climate Change
- 2 Physical and Emotional Health and Wellbeing
- 3 Education and Development for Children and Young People
- 4 Creating resilient Communities and Sustainable Services
- 5 Investing in a Sustainable Future, Regeneration and Arts and Culture
- 6 Supporting and Strengthening Businesses and the Local Economy
- 7 Stimulate Job Creation and Skills
- 8 Developing our People and New Ways of Working
- 9 Contain Outbreak Management Framework (COMF)

The report set out progress against each of the priority areas, drawing out achievements and any aspects that had changed up to the end of September 2021.

Due to the wide range of issues covered, the report was set at a high level, but did enable Members to highlight specific issues for more detailed scrutiny over the next year. These items would be included in the work programmes for 2021/22 and 2022/23.

The report highlighted one aspect of the Recovery Strategy where the approach had been changed. This was in the Stimulate Job Creation and Skills priority where there had been a change in focus from a hub model to an outreach approach.

At this point, the Recovery Strategy was in the early stages of delivery. Actions were planned to continue over the next four years, supported by the existing Equality Plan and

the Anti-Poverty Strategy which was in joint development with the Council's voluntary sector partners.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

It was noted that the ground-breaking Dinton Activity Centre had been chosen by the LGA as an innovative climate activity and was being promoted through their digital exhibition at COP26.

Ten schools had received carbon saving retrofitting works – were photovoltaic solar panels being fitted at the schools and were similar panels being installed at the Shute End offices? It was confirmed that a programme of works was being developed for Council buildings. This included an assessment of the roofing infrastructure for the Shute End offices. The issue of solar panels at car parks was also under consideration. The Council's website also contained advice for residents on the planning issues relating to the installation of solar panels on domestic properties.

It was subsequently confirmed that expenditure on solar PV at Shute End could not be justified due to the very complicated roof structure which would not permit areas for the solar PV to be installed. In short, the Council would not achieve 'payback' on the investment on a sizeable system at Shute End.

As the Council had a detailed Climate Emergency Action Plan, why was Climate Change included in the Recovery Strategy? It was confirmed that the Executive had decided on the nine pillars in the Strategy and had decided to include Climate Change.

The Council's initial response to the pandemic had been impressive but the report lacked detail on progress relating to the key priorities. It was confirmed that the report provided an overview of progress. Members would then be able to identify specific issues requiring further detailed scrutiny at future meetings.

The report referred to the installation of 54 new electric vehicle charging points. Could further details be provided on the location and funding sources for these charging points together with the contract arrangements? It was subsequently confirmed that there were a total of 68 charge point units in the Borough, which equated to 137 connectors (some charge point units had multiple connectors). Of these 137 charge point connections 54 were installed by WBC and 83 were installed privately. Locations for all charge point units could be found on the Zap-Map App:

[Map of charging points for electric car drivers in UK: Zap-Map](#)

In relation to Education and Development for Children and Young People, it was confirmed that the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be scrutinising the impact of the pandemic. Early Years services would be considered at the meeting in January 2022. It was suggested that the Committee consider the effectiveness of the virtual school and future capacity to support children and young people remotely. It was confirmed that the Children's Services Task Force was maintaining a strong focus on support for local schools.

In relation to Creating Resilient Communities, did the reference to delivery of enhanced community facilities in Twyford relate to the proposed new library facility? It was confirmed that the Twyford Library project had been paused to consider issues around affordability. It was likely that progress would be reported early in 2022.

In relation to supporting and strengthening businesses, what progress had there been? It was confirmed that the Council's support had gone well beyond the distribution of financial support. Officers had also focussed on engagement and dialogue with the business community and had sought to bring new investment into the Borough.

In relation to the stimulation of job creation and skills, the report did not address the impact of the ending of the £20 uplift in October 2021. It was confirmed that the Council continued to work with partners in the community and voluntary sector to ensure that information and support was available to those in need.

In relation to Developing Our People and New Ways of Working, it was important to understand the impact of the pandemic on mental health and to provide support for Council staff. It was confirmed that a range of initiatives had been introduced to promote the wellbeing of staff such as mental health first aiders and Wellbeing Wednesday. The workplace reimaged project was maintaining a strong focus on wellbeing and mental health issues. Members were keen to be involved in the discussions about new ways of working.

In relation to staff returning to WBC offices a flexible approach was being pursued with the aim of balancing work priorities with the individual circumstances of staff. The Council had introduced flexible working arrangements before the pandemic which made it easier to adapt to the new working environment.

In relation to communications and engagement, it was felt that residents appreciated the greater transparency and collaboration brought about by the pandemic, for example in relation to the issues around care homes. It would be important to maintain the benefits of this approach.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Graham Ebers be thanked for attending the meeting to present the report answer Member questions;
- 2) progress in delivery of the Recovery Strategy and the key achievements to date be noted;
- 3) Member comments and suggestions, set out above, be used to inform the ongoing delivery of the Recovery Strategy.

19. ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

The Committee considered a report, set out in the Supplementary Agenda, which gave details of the Council's approach in developing the Anti-Poverty Strategy with partners in the voluntary and community sector and a suggested role for Overview and Scrutiny.

Graham Ebers, Deputy Chief Executive, presented the report and answered Member questions.

The report stated that the aim of the Anti-Poverty Strategy was to work with partners to mitigate the hardships faced by residents in the Borough on the back of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Strategy built upon learning from research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and would focus on:

- Challenging the stigma attached to poverty;
- Improving the customer engagement experience;
- Creating meaningful outcomes from cross-party and partner initiatives to deliver change;
- Being a catalyst for change in the Borough, connecting Council strategies and plans to impact the lives of the community.

In delivering the Strategy, the Council and its partners would work with three target resident groups:

- Persistent hardship – residents on low incomes claiming Universal Credit or other benefits as well as Housing Benefit and Council Tax relief.
- Just about managing – people who, before the pandemic, were just getting by on their own means without qualifying for support.
- Asset rich, cash poor – people who would traditionally be viewed as comfortably off whose situation changed during the pandemic (redundancy, furlough, business failure, etc.) and now found themselves slipping into debt.

The report stated that a cross-party working group had been formed to develop the Strategy in conjunction with VCS partners. It was proposed that the Strategy would be submitted to the Executive for approval in March 2022. In the meantime, the Council and its partners had been delivering short-term measures to support those in hardship and would continue to do so ahead of the formal adoption of the Strategy.

The report suggested that Overview and Scrutiny be engaged six months into the delivery of the Strategy, providing an opportunity to scrutinise early implementation measures and the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on poverty within the Borough.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

There were some recent examples of WBC communications where more effective language could have been used. It was agreed that accurate messaging and appropriate language were key in the development and implementation of the Anti-Poverty Strategy.

In relation to the proposed involvement of Overview and Scrutiny in the development and monitoring of the Anti-Poverty Strategy, it was felt that the Committee should be able to scrutinise the draft Strategy before it was submitted to the Executive for approval in March 2022. This would enable the Committee to understand the involvement and engagement of partners in the co-production process.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Graham Ebers be thanked for presenting the report and answering Member questions;
- 2) the proposed timeline for developing the co-produced Anti-Poverty Strategy be noted;
- 3) a report on the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy be submitted to the Committee for consideration and comment prior to its submission to the Executive in March 2022;

- 4) further Scrutiny of the Anti-Poverty Strategy take place six months into its delivery, to learn from progress to date and support the development of the Year 2 action plan.

20. UNLAWFUL ENCAMPMENTS

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 29 to 40, which provided an update on progress relating to the actions the Council was taking to manage unauthorised encampments and future pitch provision within the Borough.

Deana Humphries, Community Engagement Lead – Place and Growth, attended the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions.

The report stated that the total number of encampments in 2021, to date, was 14. This compared to 17 in 2018, 41 in 2019 and 34 in 2020. The 14 unauthorised encampments in 2021 were shared equally between WBC and private sites. The areas affected most were Earley, Winnersh, Wokingham and Woodley. There was also activity in Wokingham Without and the Mere oak Park and Ride site. For the first year on record, there had not been any unauthorised encampments in the school summer holidays, the most recent encampment taking place in early July 2021.

The report reminded Members that management of the service had moved to the Localities team in April 2020. This had resulted in additional capacity which meant that the Council was able to respond more effectively. The Council had also adopted the use of bailiffs rather than the County Court process in 2019. The use of bailiffs resulted in a quicker process which appeared to have acted as a deterrent as evidenced by the reducing number of encampments across the Borough.

In relation to meeting the future needs of the Gypsy, Romany and Traveller community, the report referred to the needs assessment published in September 2017. It also gave details of the additional pitches that had been approved and delivered since then and the sites with planning permission as at March 2021. Further consideration of site allocations would be included in the Local Plan Update which was expected to progress to the pre-submission version in the summer of 2022.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

Officers were thanked for the improved information on the Council website and the additional support provided to private landowners. It was noted that activity in Shinfield had reduced as the sites formerly in use had now seen housing development. It would be helpful to see details of the sites authorised for use in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. There had been one tolerated site in 2020 (Mere oak) and none in 2021. It was confirmed that the details of the tolerated sites in 2020 would be circulated to the Committee.

The report provided an update on the viability of implementing a Borough-wide injunction against specific named individuals who repeatedly set up unauthorised encampments. In May 2021 a legal ruling marked the end of injunctions against “persons unknown”. It was confirmed that the Council’s use of bailiffs had delivered an alternative solution which had speeded up the process and acted as a deterrent against unlawful encampments in the Borough.

In addition to the use of bailiffs, were there other factors influencing the reduced number of unlawful encampments? It was confirmed that Reading Borough Council had indicated that activity had not reduced during 2020/21. Reading BC had continued to use the County

Court legal process which took significantly longer than the WBC approach. WBC had also developed a database of potential private sites. This data also supported a speedier response to unlawful encampments.

In previous years Earley had experienced problems with a small number of traveller groups. Were those groups still circulating in neighbouring areas? It was confirmed that these groups had not been seen locally for some time (end of 2020).

In relation to the Mere oak Park and Ride site, this site was owned by WBC but managed by Reading BC. Which authority took the lead when unlawful encampments occurred? It was confirmed that WBC officers had taken the lead in relation to the Mere oak site.

Earlier discussions had highlighted the requirement for a transit site in the Borough. What was the latest position in relation to this requirement? It was confirmed that the Mere oak site had acted as a “tolerated site” during the pandemic. However, it was not intended as a long-term solution. At present, no decision had been made on the potential location for a long-term transit site in the Borough.

Did the reduced number of unlawful encampments indicate better protection for vulnerable sites? It was confirmed that additional protection measures had been implemented successfully. The report also indicated a reduced number of repeat encampments across the Borough.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Deana Humphries be thanked for attending the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions;
- 2) the actions taken to prevent unauthorised encampments on local authority and private land within the Borough be noted;
- 3) the actions taken to increase permitted Gypsy, Roma and Traveller site provision in the Borough be noted;
- 4) that the officers be thanked for their efforts and the progress made in reducing the number of unauthorised encampments in 2021.

21. ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP FOR LOCAL BUS SERVICES

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 41 to 46, which gave details of the requirement for Local Transport Authorities to publish a Bus Service Improvement Plan by October 2021 and an Enhanced Partnership by 1 April 2022. The aim of these two documents was to raise the standard of local bus services and ensure that these services met local needs.

Pauline Jorgensen (Executive Member for Highways and Transport), Andy Glencross (Assistant Director for Highways and Transport) and Rebecca Brooks (Community Transport Manager) attended the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions.

The report stated that the Council had published a Bus Service Improvement Plan on 28 October 2021. The Plan set out the Council’s high-level vision and ambition for the development of local bus services across the Borough. It also included targets for

improving bus journey times, local bus service reliability, passenger numbers and passenger satisfaction.

The Enhanced Partnership was the next stage in the process. It would form the legally binding agreement between the Council and local bus operators for the delivery of improved local bus services in the Borough. The Enhanced Partnership agreement was the delivery mechanism for achieving the outcomes set out in the Bus Service Improvement Plan.

The timeline for developing the Enhanced Partnership was:

- November/December 2021 – agreeing, drafting and legal approval of the Enhanced Partnership;
- January 2022 – statutory objection period;
- February 2022 – consultation on the Enhanced Partnership;
- March 2022 – approval of the Enhanced Partnership by the Executive.

The Committee was asked to comment and make suggestions which could inform the development of the Enhanced Partnership. This could include issues such as bus stops, bus lanes, marketing schemes, fare reductions, new routes, vehicles and ticketing arrangements. However, any proposals should be costed to demonstrate that sufficient funding was available to enable effective implementation.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

What engagement had taken place with the local bus companies in developing the Bus Service Improvement Plan and the Enhanced Partnership? It was confirmed that discussions had taken place with local providers who were keen to work in partnership with the Council.

There was concern at the extremely short timeframe for developing the Bus Service Improvement Plan and the Enhanced Partnership. Officers were commended for their efforts in producing the relevant documents to a high standard within the limited time available.

It was felt that the Committee would be unable to make detailed suggestions for inclusion in the Enhanced Partnership without officer support and detailed financial information.

In relation to the targets set out in the Bus Service Improvement Plan, what did the proposed 8% reduction across key corridors refer to? It was confirmed that the target was an 8% reduction in average journey times throughout the day for all corridors listed in the Plan. It was suggested that the Plan be amended to clarify this point.

What baseline data was used to establish the targets in the Bus Service Improvement Plan? It was confirmed that the baseline data related to 2018/19.

In relation to the proposed limit on the number of roadworks on a specific corridor within a given period, how would this work in practice? It was confirmed that this initiative would not be applied to emergency works. The Council was working to designate more “traffic sensitive” routes which enabled more sensitive timing of roadworks.

Following the consultation process on the Enhanced Partnership (February 2022) could a further report be submitted to the Committee to enable scrutiny before consideration by the Executive in March 2022. It was confirmed that a further report would be submitted if the relevant timescales/deadlines allowed it.

The Bus Service Improvement Plan indicated a lack of North-South bus routes. Where they did operate, they finished around 6pm which was too early for many workers and commuters (e.g. from Twyford to Wokingham). Evening services needed to be strengthened especially down the key corridors. It was agreed that the current timings were not sufficient. The Council could seek to negotiate enhanced services with the bus companies. However, the extent of commercial services was down to the providers. WBC could only fund subsidised services within the limited funding available.

Examples were provided of services which did not use integrated ticketing, e.g. Reading Buses and Thames Valley Buses. It was confirmed that improvements in integrated ticketing was a priority in the Bus Service Improvement Plan.

What was the process for ensuring adequate bus services for the new housing development areas, such as Hatchwood Mill? It was confirmed that the Hatchwood Mill development did not include S106 to support bus services. More recent developments did include substantial S106 to fund the development of new services. It was important not to introduce new services until sufficient residents had moved in to ensure adequate demand.

Did the plans ensure that the travel corridors were able to interconnect, thereby ensuring greater travel flexibility for residents? It was confirmed that the principle of interconnectivity was adopted along with flexible ticketing arrangements. Consideration was also being given to interconnectivity with train services in the Borough.

How would the new plans benefit residents in the south of the Borough and residents moving into new developments such as Gorse Ride? It was confirmed that community engagement was a key part of the process. Feedback on community need would be fed into the development of new bus services. It was essential to establish services which were sustainable.

Were car park charges being reviewed in order to ensure that bus travel was competitive? It was confirmed that the relative costs of car parking were under constant review. The Council had to balance a number of considerations in order to ensure that town centres remained attractive. The issue of group travel ticketing was also under discussion with the bus companies.

The PLUSBUS service (discounted bus ticket linked to a rail journey) was currently available to and from Wokingham station. The service didn't cover Winnersh and Winnersh Triangle stations. Could consideration be given to extending the service to additional stations, e.g. Twyford, Winnersh and Winnersh Triangle?

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Pauline Jorgensen, Andy Glencross and Rebecca Brooks be thanked for attending the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions;
- 2) the Council's local Bus Service Improvement Plan be noted;

- 3) the process and timeline for developing the Enhanced Partnership Agreement between the Council and local bus operators be noted;
- 4) the comments and suggestions made by Members be used to inform the development of the Enhanced Partnership Agreement;
- 5) a further report on the development of the Enhanced Partnership Agreement be submitted to the Committee prior to its approval by the Executive, if timescales permit.

22. CONSIDERATION OF THE CURRENT EXECUTIVE FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a copy of the Executive Forward Programme as set out on Agenda pages 47 to 50.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Forward Programme be noted.

23. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES

The Committee considered its forward work programme and that of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees as set out on Agenda pages 51 to 64.

Members made the following points relating to the Management Committee's work programme:

- Add scrutiny of the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy – February/March 2022;
- Add the date for the Q3 Performance Management report;
- Add scrutiny of the draft Enhanced Partnership Agreement for local bus services – subject to meeting the deadlines for developing the agreement.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee work programme, as amended, be noted;
- 2) the remaining Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programmes be noted.

24. ACTION TRACKER

The Committee considered the latest Action Tracker report, set out at Agenda pages 65 to 68.

Members highlighted the following points:

- Work programme items – Green Recovery and New Ways of Working;
- Regular meetings with Executive and CLT as part of the Executive-Scrutiny Protocol.

RESOLVED: That the Action Tracker report be noted.