

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 23 MARCH 2022 FROM 7.04 PM TO 10.48 PM

Committee Members Present

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

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Angus Ross (RBFRS Representative), Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey (RBFRS Representative) and Bill Soane (Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Communities)

Officers Present

Boniface Ngu Azeh (Principal Flood Risk & Drainage Engineer), Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist), Francesca Hobson (Service Manager – Green & Blue Infrastructure), Ed Shaylor (Head of Enforcement and Safety) and Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist)

Others Present

Andrew Cranidge (LPA Commander Bracknell and Wokingham) and David Crease (Central Hub Manager – RBFRS)

71. APOLOGIES

In the absence of the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman, Shirley Boyt proposed that Clive Jones be elected Chairman of the meeting until the Chairman arrived. This was seconded by Phil Cunnington and carried.

An apology for absence was submitted from Alison Swaddle.

72. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 5 January 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

73. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

74. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

75. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

76. LOCAL POLICE SERVICE UPDATE

At 7.08pm, Guy Grandison joined the meeting and resumed the Chair.

The Committee considered a presentation, set out in supplementary agenda pages 3 to 8, which gave an update on local policing within the Borough.

The presentation noted four key areas of focus for the local police service – serious violence duty, domestic abuse, neighbourhood policing and anti-social behaviour, and violence against women and girls. Performance statistics indicated that the force was

doing particularly well in tackling knife crime and undertaking formal action, whilst performance issues relating to rape and sexual offences were being looked at as a priority whilst noting that these performance issues were affecting the whole nation. Partnership working had been undertaken with the Community Safety Partnership to address issues including car cruises, school interventions in relation to knife crime, and persistent callers. Future activity would focus on a number of areas including the new safety and enforcement service (ASB) and neighbourhood policing, addressing hate crime, addressing knife crime and exploitation, and tackling cybercrime and fraud.

Andrew Cranidge, Local Policing Area (LPA) Commander for Bracknell and Wokingham, and Narinder Brar (Community Safety Manager) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

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

- Was there a plan to increase performance in relation to tackling rape cases and associated prosecution? LPA Commander response – Unfortunately data could not currently be split between Bracknell and Wokingham, and this would be sought to be addressed in future. Notwithstanding the data issues, the situation was neither good locally or nationally, and there was a concerted focus to tackle violence against women and girls. The force was looking to address the lack of confidence from victims in getting the police to tackle their case and seek convictions. It was noted that it was currently taking over 700 days to get a case to court, which was contributing to victims losing confidence in the process. The strategy for tackling violence against women and girls would be published shortly, and included actions in relation to identifying potential offenders before a crime was committed.
- What period of time were figures on crimes compared over, as the pandemic could have influenced the data? LPA Commander response – The burglary figures were a five-year comparison, whilst the pandemic was factored into the data to compare to a more normal year. There was a desire to improve the data in future to be able to break it down further.
- How should residents report drug related issues? LPA Commander response – Residents should ring 999 if a crime was in progress, and 101 if it was a report of a previous crime. Officers had to balance the threat and harm posed by reports.
- It was noted that a range of issues raised at the recent meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee relating to local policing would be responded to via a written answer.
- A number of Members and residents had used the 101 service and had experienced considerable delays in excess of 40 minutes. What was being done to address these delays? LPA Commander response – There had been an acute issue with the 101 service a number of summers ago, however the average response time was currently around four minutes, which rose during the summer months when there tended to be additional reporting. A 40-minute wait time was clearly not acceptable, whilst the online reporting service was undergoing improvements to make it more intuitive.
- Were Town and Parish Councils involved within the partnership working agenda? LPA Commander response – This could come forward as part of the work on neighbourhood action groups, which were being looked at. A good example of

community working, including involvement of Town and Parish Councils, were local speed watch initiatives.

- A Member had reported instances of cars fully blocking footways where there were no double yellow lines which had forced residents to use a busy 'B' class road to get around the obstruction including some with pushchairs. No response had yet been received which gave the impression that no action was being taken. Did the Police take these reports seriously and what action would they normally take? LPA Commander response – These reports should be fed back to the person who raised them regardless of the action taken. Footways should not be blocked whether double yellow lines were present or not, and representations could be made to the Highways Authority where residents felt double yellow lines would be useful.
- A resident had provided camera footage of at least five near misses by motorised vehicles whilst he was riding his bicycle over the past 12 months. This footage was passed to Thames Valley Police (TVP), but they have not responded on what action they have taken, if any. What is the procedure that TVP follow, and should he have received an update? LPA Commander response – This would go to the road policing department to assess and to communicate with the person who sent in the footage. If this was not working then this needed to be looked at, and direct details could be passed to the LPA Commander for escalation.
- Were there plans to embed the long-term strategy to deliver improvement in relation to rape cases? LPA Commander response – Yes, there was a long-term strategy to embed this both locally and nationally. Across the country there had been a slow increase in the amount of charges, and a range of long term measures would be put in place. The courts also needed to be able to hear more cases earlier, whilst a whole system review was currently underway. One of the key long-term approaches would be to change the attitudes of young adults.
- Had much success been realised in educating teenagers that they did not need to carry knives? LPA Commander response – There was a lot of work going on with schools, including within the violence reduction unit to help identify those children at risk of carrying knives or at risk of being subject to knife crime, and to educate on why it was not a good idea to carry a knife. There was a serious violence partnership meeting that covered the serious violence duty within the Wokingham Borough.
- How often did TVP visit teenagers in schools? LPA Commander response – Each year group was systematically visited at least once per year to provide them with information. Pupils tended to be able to relate more to previous offenders than a police officer, and such talks were often organised at schools. TVP worked alongside parents and community groups to provide support and information, whilst a knife crime survey had recently gone out to all residents. There was strong partnership working between TVP, the youth offending team and the early years team. Whilst there were not a huge number of incidents within the Borough it was very important to continue the committed focus on early intervention and prevention to maintain a safe environment.
- Was neighbourhood policing moving away from areas such as Earley, Shinfield, and Arborfield? LPA Commander response – No, the college of policing guidelines on neighbourhood policing were being implemented across the Borough. A review had been undertaken and neighbourhood officers were now deployed based on geographic location and based on a problem solving basis, which allowed for more

difficult issues to be addressed more efficiently. Residents will be able to contact their neighbourhood team via details provided on the internet. The LPA Commander added that the implementation of the guidelines needed time to embed.

- Had there been any reduction in the number of frontline police officers? LPA Commander response – No, there were 13 neighbourhood officers across the Wokingham area, in addition to a number of dedicated PCSOs across the different localities. A national programme had delivered 183 response policing officers to Thames Valley in year one, 21 detectives in year two, and 60 officers were expected in the coming year. Response police officers freed up other resources within the service, making it overall more efficient and effective. There were going to be some pressures on the service next year as graduate officers had protected learning time which would take them away from front line and office-based duties.
- Was there any opportunity to re-open the Wokingham police station? LPA Commander response – The LPA Commander was not involved in the estate strategy and therefore did not know with certainty, however the likelihood of a re-opening in the near future was low as this station was closed as part of a wider savings package for the overall service. If the budgetary position changed then this could be revisited, and stations were currently located in Loddon valley and Bracknell.
- Had the previous focus involving identifying children at risk of county lines been overtaken by the focus on knife crime? LPA Commander response – Knife crime was part of the modus operandi used by many gangs and county lines operations, and there was a lot of work underway to get people with previous experiences to talk to children. There were a number of dedicated school officers which provided a specific resource for schools.
- How would TVP work alongside the Council to implement the recently agreed public space protection order? LPA Commander response – This was a real opportunity to implement joint patrolling and problem solving between public protection staff and police officers, which would enable sharing of techniques and information. In relation to car meets, there were less reports within the Wokingham Borough and more reports in neighbouring Boroughs which evidenced that effective action was being taken here. There needed to be a continued focus on working with landlords to identify typical meetup spots and reducing crime wherever possible.
- How was cybercrime and fraud being dealt with on a local level? LPA Commander response – Reports went to Action Fraud for assessment, and if prosecution was a possibility then these reports were sent to local police. There was a skills gap within the service in relation to how fraud was investigated, and new dedicated officers were being deployed to recognise the changing nature of criminality online.
- In the absence of time, it was noted that written responses would be provided to a number of questions provided to the LPA Commander prior to the meeting.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Andy Cranidge and Narinder Brar be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) Written responses be provided to any outstanding questions;

3) A further update on local policing be considered during the next municipal year.

77. LOCAL FIRE SERVICE UPDATE

The Committee considered a presentation, set out in agenda pages 13 to 26, which gave an update on the work of the local fire service.

The presentation outlined a number of demands on the service including their financial position and target savings update, the built environment programme, and their prevention and response service. A range of savings had been delivered including the introduction of the new remotely managed station model and the closure of a number of smaller stations. Three new tri-service stations had been opened since 2017, whilst 19 new generation Volvo fire appliances had also been delivered. Work was continuing to address any concerns relating to buildings at risk of fire due to cladding. A number of response and protection proposals were also presented, including introducing 18 new apprentices to the service and developing a risk based inspection programme methodology to look at both risks to property and risk of compliance.

Dave Crease (Group Manager), Angus Ross (Wokingham Borough Council RBFRS Representative), and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey (Wokingham Borough Council RBFRS Representative), attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

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

- With regards to interim measures for high-rise buildings, what would happen if landlords did not meet the prescribed deadlines? Group Manager response – The emphasis was to work with the building owners via a measured approach focussing on both safety and enforcement. Powers were available if necessary, however additional staff would likely be required to increase standards. There were a number of buildings within the Borough with enforcement action against them.
- Were electric and low emission vehicles planned to replace the fleet? Group Manager response – There were no hybrid or electric vehicles within the front-line fleet at present, however the engines used were as efficient as possible. The current dilemma was to assess how front-line vehicles could achieve their functionality whilst running in a hybrid or electric model, for example running pumps for extended periods of time.
- Were there any examples of where callouts were being reduced relating to previous prevention measures? Group Manager response – A significant reduction had not been realised yet, however this was a difficult area to measure. Prevention measures were important to educate the public and to protect vulnerable groups and to prevent incidents from occurring where possible.
- Had there been any increase in suspicious fires in relation to property insurance fraud? Group Manager response – This was not something that had seen an increase, and any such cases would be jointly worked on with Thames Valley Police.
- What were the advantages of recruiting staff via apprenticeships, and how were these staff recruited before? Group Manager response – Previously, recruitment campaigns were run with new recruits then integrated by each service. There was a degree of funding associated with apprenticeships which reduced funding pressures on the services, and the candidates were of the same or better quality than previously recruited.

- Had sprinkler systems been installed in schools as per motions passed by full Council? Group Manager and Wokingham Borough Council RBFRS representative response – Retrofitting was not cost effective or efficient, however all new schools within the Borough had sprinklers successfully installed. The key message for schools was not necessarily the risk to life, but the impact on the education of the pupils via having the school burnt down in the absence of sprinklers.
- How many safe and well visits had been carried out in Wokingham, and how did this compare with other areas in Berkshire? Group Manager response – 9,500 visits were planned across Berkshire, with around 1,000 planned for Wokingham Borough. Visits were carried out on a referral basis, and Wokingham Borough was getting slightly less referrals than neighbouring Boroughs.
- How many motorcyclists had been contacted as part of the road safety programme, and how did the service determine individuals as at risk? Group Manager response – Motorcyclists were a more at-risk group of road users, and individuals were reached out via local groups and clubs. Courses and sessions would be run to meet the demand.
- Was analysis carried out in relation to accident data for those motorcyclists that attended road safety sessions? Group Manager response – This was not currently carried out; however, this was a good area of focus and work could be carried out via the tri-service arrangement.
- As the only Berkshire authority with no cadets, how would this be changed? Group Manager response – This was a current plan to instigate such a service, and it was not believed to be majorly challenging to implement. The Community Safety Partnership was keen to support this ambition, and this would represent the expansion of an existing project.
- Were front line staff trained as first responders? Group Manager – This was not the case within the Wokingham area, however all frontline staff had been upskilled. Such a project had been trialled elsewhere, which had presented both positives and issues.
- It was noted by the Wokingham Borough Council RBFRS representatives that the RBFRS was in the top quartile for service provision whilst being in the bottom quartile for precept charges. It was added that it would be useful to circulate the Committee presentation to all Members to provide information on the support offered and work carried out by the RBFRS.
- It was noted that the causation of road traffic incidents needed to be investigated.
- What were the call out rates for fires compared to other incidents? Group Manager response – False alarm callouts were the most regular callout, followed by supporting other services, and then responding to fires. It was noted that it would be useful for Members to see the full data breakdown.
- Had there been an increase in deliberate open space fires? Group Manager response – There had been a spike during the lockdown over the summer months, and this would be a case of evaluating any increases going forwards.

- It was noted that the local safety plan for Wokingham Borough would be going live soon.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) David Crease, Angus Ross, and Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) The Committee presentation be circulated to all Members to provide information on the support offered and work carried out by the RBFRS;
- 3) The full breakdown of data relating to the number of callouts and the reason for them be circulated to the Committee;
- 4) A further update on the local fire service be considered during the next municipal year.

78. FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 27 to 32, which gave an update on flood risk management within the Borough.

The report outlined a number of areas of focus, including CCTV drainage surveys and repair works, delivery of capital drainage schemes, ongoing drainage revenue works, commenting on planning applications in relation to flooding and drainage works, smart drainage trials, and Thames Water partnership work to reduce surface water flood risk.

Boniface Ngu (Principal Flood Risk & Drainage Engineer) and Francesca Hobson (Service Manager – Green & Blue Infrastructure) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

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

- Was there any more that could be done to require residents to retain at least a small portion of green space in their front gardens, rather than paving over the whole area? Officer response – All planning applications were considered, not just major applications. Officers pushed for permeable surfaces to be installed which acted in a similar manner to grass. Officers required drawings to be presented, and if permeable surfaces were not indicated then a recommendation would be made to install permeable surfaces as opposed to concrete. Installation of non-permeable surfaces created a cumulative issue, and a number of social media pieces and newsletters had gone out and were being worked on to inform residents. Officers were working alongside the National Flood Forum to install rain gardens and water butts, whilst there were possibilities to review the SuDs strategy.
- Officers were thanked for the improving situation with relation to flooding in Norreys.
- Were officers confident that developers of large sites were implementing optimal drainage solutions? Officer response – Officers encouraged above ground attenuation features such as SuDs basins, attenuation basins, ponds and swales whereby issues could easily be noticed via public notification and inspection by officers. Officers looked at the increase to the one in one-hundred-year flood event in addition to a forty-percent climate change allowance for any large-scale development. There was a riparian responsibility for landowners to maintain ditches next to a development where there was water discharge. There were plenty of cases where riparian owners were

not carrying out the required maintenance, and officers were writing to those landowners to remind them of their responsibilities. Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) had powers under the land drainage act to carry out land drainage enforcement where landowners had been notified but had so far failed to take action. In addition, there were additional powers under the recently adopted Wokingham specific land drainage bylaws.

- Were there any updates in relation to the proposed flood alleviation scheme on the river Loddon? Officer response – Officers were quite surprised that funding had not been received through the DEFRA innovation flood resilience fund given the level of feasibility work which had been carried out. The Environment Agency had now opened up a scheme over the wider Thames catchment area to look to catch and store water, including the river Loddon. Investigative works were now underway for this scheme including partnership working with a wide range of stakeholders. With a scheme of this size, implementation could take several years as reservoirs might have to be created whilst looking at ecological improvements and the potential for hydroelectric power generation. The first round of the consultation had been completed and was currently being reviewed, which would feed into the second stage of the scheme and the emerging business case. The section of land proposed was on the western side of the river, and was currently allocated under the master planning proposals as an eco-valley.
- Were there any solutions in the works to alleviate flooding at the Waitrose car park in Woodley? Officer response – The car park should have a drainage gully which may be blocked, and could require a jet to clear any blockage.
- It was noted that Thames Water were responsible for a significant drainage system and they often had capacity issues. Thames Water were working with WBC to seek potential areas such as on roundabouts to hold back water during times of high demand on the drainage network.
- At this stage of the meeting, Guy Grandison proposed to extend the end time of the meeting by 30 minutes to a maximum finishing time of 11pm. This was seconded by Clive Jones, and upon being put to the vote the motion was carried.
- What funding was in place to deliver the 10-year programme of large-scale pipe replacement? Officer response – Officers were looking at over 300km of pipes across the Borough, some of which were over 100 years old and were in need of replacement. A business case would be required to deliver this project, and there were opportunities for grant funding. The £200k per annum figure listed within the MTFP was used to deliver capital drainage schemes.
- If trials were successful in relation to gully sensors, what was the approximate cost of delivery and what return on investment might be realised? Officer response – Sensors costed around £450 per sensor, and each sensor could be redeployed to different locations and streets to locate exactly where each blockage was. These sensors would form part of an invest to save business case.
- It was noted that smart drainage solutions were very much welcomed within the Borough, and the Committee hoped that this could be rolled out across the Borough.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Boniface Ngu and Francesca Hobson be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) A further update on flood risk management be considered during the next municipal year.

79. ENFORCEMENT AND SAFETY SERVICE UPDATE

The Committee considered a presentation, set out in agenda pages 33 to 44, which gave an update on the new enforcement and safety service.

The presentation gave an update on recruitment to the new service, noting that 30.6 full-time-equivalent (FTE) roles had been filled, with 3 FTE roles outstanding. The presentation noted that services to be provided by the new service included environmental health, pollution control, and antisocial behaviour, whilst services such as trading standards and farm animal welfare would be purchased from West Berkshire Council. The project had a go-live date of 1 April 2022, and phase 2 of the project was planned which included a new problem-solving approach to antisocial behaviour and procurement of a modern computer system to drive automation and service improvement.

Bill Soane (Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Communities) and Ed Shaylor (Head of Enforcement and Safety) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

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

- It was noted that enforcement officers would work in 8-hour shift patterns.
- Would enforcement officers be on duty past 2am in areas where bars and pubs had licences to stay open until 3am? Officer response - Officers had the ability to check the licencing conditions of establishments across the Borough, however they were civilians and did not have the arrest powers of police officers. Evidence could be gathered such as where broken glass was originating from and then a case could be built via the licensing route.
- Would there be any final payment due to the Public Protection Partnership? Officer response – All details would be provided in the Executive papers which were due to be considered on Thursday 31st March 2022.
- It was noted that issues relating to commercial processes, construction sites and water supplies were covered by environmental purposes for some commercial processes.
- Which staff would handle private housing, the rented sector, and caravan and home parks? Officer response – There was a residential and environmental team who would inspect private rented properties and houses of multiple occupation in addition to mobile home and caravan parks.
- If a resident needed to report a foul-smelling bonfire, would they be able to call the enforcement team or email them? Officer response – Residents could email the team directly which would be sent through to officer's smart phones to be dealt with in the field. There was an out of hours service whereby a resident could ring, and the operator would note the details and write an email to the enforcement officers. Officers would be dealing with issues in the field and would therefore not be able to take calls whilst dealing with an ongoing issue.

- How many officers would be in the field at any one time? Officer response – There were 10 officers altogether, with two being in the field during weekends and evenings. Most weekdays, possibly excluding Mondays, there might be between 4 to 6 officers in the field, whilst all officers might be working some days where training was required.
- Who should be contacted in the event of groups playing loud music from their cars late at night whilst generally acting in an antisocial manner? Officer response – If crimes were being committed it would be more appropriate to ring the police, however if there was no specific crimes but drugs or alcohol were involved then officers may be hesitant as they would have to risk assess if it was safe to approach. Where it was safe to approach, officers would engage in consultation with individuals.
- It was noted that this process had been a large piece of work completed over a 12-month period, which had been undertaken to provide a better service for residents. Officers should be commended for their commitment to delivery of this service over a short period of time.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Bill Soane and Ed Shaylor be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) The new enforcement and safety service be reviewed during the next municipal year to assess the initial successes and challenges that had been realised.

80. WORK PROGRAMME - 2022/23

The Committee considered the proposed work programme for the next municipal year, set out in supplementary agenda pages 3 to 8.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Callum Wernham be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) The draft work programme be noted;
- 3) An update on the Arts and Culture strategy be provisionally scheduled for the 25 May 2022 meeting of the Committee;
- 4) Updates relating to the community safety partnership, the bus strategy, and civil parking enforcement be provisionally scheduled for the 4 July 2022 meeting of the Committee;
- 5) An update in relation to Council owned companies be provisionally scheduled for the 5 September 2022 meeting of the Committee.

The Committee thanked Councillor Guy Grandison for his exemplary chairing of the Committee over the past 4 years, and wished him well for his future once he retired from the Council this coming May.