

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 7 JULY 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.00 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Jim Frewin (Chairman), Andrew Mickleburgh (Vice-Chairman), Andy Croy, Peter Dennis, Graham Howe, Adrian Mather, Stuart Munro, Gregor Murray and Alison Swaddle

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Michael Firmager, Alistair Neal, Clive Jones and Sarah Kerr

Officers Present

Ian Bellinger, Service Manager for Growth and Delivery
Richard Bisset, Lead Specialist, Place Clienting
Laura Buck, Green Infrastructure Special Project Manager
Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Andrew Collins, Specialist Climate Emergency Officer
Robert Curtis, Transport Planning Team Manager
Ian Gough, Energy Manager
Rhian Hayes, Assistant Director, Economic Development and Growth
Tabitha Shell, Climate Emergency Project Officer
Susan Parsonage, Chief Executive

14. STATEMENT BY THE CHAIR

Jim Frewin (Chair) made the following opening statement.

Before we start the main business, I would like to thank those Members and officers who took up the opportunity to input ideas on what you want from Scrutiny, and your top three priorities for 2022/23. That opportunity remains open should anyone further wish to provide input.

The top points on what you want from Scrutiny were:

- Scrutiny to add value for our residents;
- Work towards a culture of greater openness, transparency and honesty;
- Be more forward looking and ambitious through early engagement;
- Review delivery - if something has not been achieved then understand why, dig down to root causes and then help identify lessons learned;
- Direction-check strategy, influence strategy but don't try to set strategy - that is the Executive/CLT role;
- Influence measures and reporting that enable better understanding of how residents experience our services which can, in turn, be used for better Scrutiny which can lead to service improvements;
- More concise and meaningful questioning, be prepared;
- Engage as a team with CLT, the Executive and officers to add value;
- Try to be non-political, stop political point scoring, be a true critical friend.

15. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted by David Cornish and Norman Jorgensen.

Michael Firmager and Alistair Neal attended the meeting as substitutes.

16. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13 June 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

A declaration of interest was submitted from Gregor Murray in relation to item 20 – Climate Emergency Action Plan Annual Progress report 2022. Councillor Murray left the meeting during consideration of this item.

18. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Chair invited members of the public to submit questions.

Tony Johnson asked the Chair the following question:

Question

In the O&S Work Programme, Appendix A illustrates some two dozen topics, where item 4 is “Scrutinising the underpinning priorities and KPIs for the Corporate Delivery Plan 2020/24 and the Quarterly Performance Management Reports”

How should the KPI’s and performance management reports be improved so that they are better understood and more meaningful to members of the public?

Answer

Over the last year the reports have evolved considerably giving Council Members and members of the public improved understanding into the performance of the Council. The officers responsible for this report take a continuous improvement approach, acting on feedback to improve the report iteratively. These improvements cover both the presentation and style of the report and the way that progress updates are written.

In addition to this, Wokingham Borough Council recently underwent an independent Scrutiny Improvement Review, undertaken by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. The quarterly performance report and how it is used has formed part of this review. The feedback from the review is expected at the end of July and will be used to ensure that the performance report continues to evolve in a meaningful way in the future.

The specific KPIs and the associated targets are decided by the Executive Members responsible for each portfolio in consultation with the relevant Director. Following the recent election result and the change in Executive, the KPIs are being reviewed to ensure they are relevant, aligned with political priorities and reflect the things that matter to our residents.

Supplementary Question

Thank you for providing such a good and comprehensive answer. From roughly four years’ experience of reporting KPIs to a business, I was aware that communicating them often involved re-explaining to those receiving them – what the KPIs were about, how they were calculated and where the data came from. Therefore, I am asking: How does the Task and Finish Group or this Committee propose to consider introducing measures so that the public can easily understand the opportunities as well as the challenges the Council faces.

Supplementary Answer

Thank you for that supplementary question. I think that this is something we will have to provide a written answer to. I will also take these points into consideration when we look at the Terms of Reference for the proposed Task and Finish Group.

19. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Chair invited Members to submit questions.

Gary Cowan asked the Chairman the following question:

Question

The Agenda makes reference to and I quote "Some Members also highlighted the Local Plan Update and Five Year Land Supply. It should be noted that, at the previous meeting, it was confirmed that the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny would scrutinise the Local Plan Update (with associated issues) at the meeting on 13-6-22 but due to its importance perhaps the OSMC may wish to take these items back if Members agree.

I notice that the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a work programme which includes an EXTRAORDINARY meeting on the 19 September 2022 headed Local Plan Update to receive a progress report on the Local Plan Update from Ian Bellinger. I now see that the meeting is on the website. Liaison with the Planners will identify the best time for O&SMC to get involved in the LPU which perhaps needs to be sooner rather than later.

I also notice that, in March 2023, a Flood Risk Update is scheduled which is an annual report nine months away which is rather long time with Climate Emergency a key concern. I understand that it takes place in March to allow inclusion of any flooding issues over the winter period but with Climate Emergency might it be worth a mid-year review as flooding has occurred in both summer and winter?

In agreeing the work programme for the year and as it's a new administration should the O&S Management Committee now review all the previously considered programmes such as the prioritising of the key business of which the Local Plan Update and the 5 year Housing Land Supply which must be the most important issue to all our residents.

My question is, therefore, should this be for the O&S Management Committee, as a matter of some urgency, to decide to deal with this immediately itself and not leave it to the Corporate O&S? I understand the O&S Management Committee could decide this course of action if that was considered appropriate.

Answer

In Councillor Cowan's absence, the following written answer was provided:

The Committee reviews its work programme at each meeting. At the meeting on 13 June 2022, Members agreed that the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee would scrutinise the Local Plan Update. That Committee has already set up an extraordinary meeting in September for this purpose. I am happy with this position. Peter Dennis, as Chair of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be able to keep this Committee up to date on progress.

20. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Clive Jones (Leader of the Council) and Susan Parsonage (Chief Executive) attended the meeting to give a presentation to the Committee on the challenges facing the Council over the coming year.

The presentation covered the following points:

Challenges Facing the Council:

- Budget pressures (e.g. from Health and Adult Social Care reforms).
- Recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Inflation and the cost of living crisis.
- Increasing demand, complexity and costs (housing, poverty, special educational needs and disability (SEND) and Adult Social Care (ASC)).

Service Priorities:

- Chief Executive's Office – customer excellence; tackling poverty and the equalities framework; community engagement; organisational development.
- Resources and Assets – financial sustainability; income generation and commercialisation; high standards of governance and financial management; supporting businesses; health and wellbeing.
- Place and Growth – Local Plan Update; new Anti-Social Behaviour service; climate change; housing demand and needs; sustainable transport options; supporting refugees coming into the Borough.
- Adult Social Care – keeping people safe; involving residents and delaying the need for formal care and support; commissioning services that deliver quality and value for money; integrating health and social care changes; Public Health priorities for the Borough.
- Children's Services – protecting and safeguarding children, young and vulnerable people; championing outstanding education; enabling children and young people to achieve their full potential regardless of their background.

Crosscutting Priorities:

- Customer excellence – embed a customer excellence culture and simplify customer journeys.
- Business intelligence – use data to develop insights which support demand management and decision making.
- Contracts and procurement – drive commercial efficiencies and service quality through contract management and longer term planning.
- Asset opportunities – review the Council's property portfolio and align assets to future business needs.
- Workforce – enhanced organisational design and improved retention through a focus on talent management.
- Community and partnerships – develop relationships which support a cohesive approach to meeting community needs and increase social value.
- Financial sustainability – underpins each of the cross-cutting priorities.

Administration Priorities:

- Recover and prosper – supporting local businesses; homes for local people; arts, culture and libraries.
- Cleaner and greener – preserve green spaces; tackle climate change; highways and transport.

- Caring for everybody – Adult Social Care (funding and partnerships); Children’s Services (school places, SEND and CAMHs); Covid-19 recovery plan; White Ribbon accreditation.
- Being responsible and responsive – equality, inclusivity and diversity; support for residents on low incomes; finance (prudential controls, review of Capital programme, reduce debt and borrowing, review contracts).
- Improve our responsiveness to residents – improving access to the Council and responsiveness of services.

Next Steps:

- Further action on the Budget and Capital re-profiling.
- Continuing the delivery of priority projects.
- Further review of the administration’s aspirations.
- Increase and deepen the quality of partnership working within and outside the Council; improve cross-party working.

In the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points:

The presentation highlighted key priorities which had been identified and addressed by the previous administration. What was different about the priorities identified in the presentation and what new challenges were emerging? Clive Jones stated that the new administration was already making progress on key issues, such as the discussion with Michael Gove about housing numbers in the Borough (to be followed up with the new Secretary of State, Greg Clark). The new administration was looking at the challenges to be tackled in the Local Plan Update and assessing the Council’s financial situation. Susan Parsonage commented that a number of the priorities and challenges were cross-cutting and the new administration was not aiming to change everything. For example, customer excellence was a priority for the previous administration and continued to be a priority for the new administration.

Did the new administration have a target in mind for the reduction of the annual new housing numbers target? Clive Jones stated that work was ongoing to understand the Council’s financial position and the impact on the organisation and key services. In relation to housing numbers, the Liberal Democrat Group had stated in the past that moving below 600 new homes per year was a reasonable target for discussion with the Government.

Did the new administration aim to bring greater transparency to financial decisions such as the sale of assets? Clive Jones stated that the process of taking the draft Budget through the Overview and Scrutiny process would continue. The new administration saw value in the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Bringing items to the Committees earlier in the decision making process would add value and enable Overview and Scrutiny Members to influence policy development more effectively.

Potential changes to the delivery of Adult Social Care could have serious impacts on the Council’s financial stability. Susan Parsonage stated that work was ongoing to map out various scenarios with possible risks and mitigation measures. In the meantime the Council would continue to lobby the Government to ensure that its views were heard. The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be updated on any new developments relating to changes to Adult Social Care.

Recent publication of Census data had shown that the Borough’s population had increased by 15% over the past 10 years. This was unsustainable. What was the Council

doing to challenge the Government's methodology for future housing numbers? Clive Jones stated that contact had been made with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on the issue of Councils which had over-delivered on new homes and should, therefore, have lower targets moving forwards. This should be reflected in the Local Plan Update.

Now that the regeneration of Wokingham town centre was reaching a conclusion, what plans were there for regeneration of the other towns in the Borough? Clive Jones stated that officers had commenced working on options for further regeneration projects, commencing with Woodley.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Clive Jones and Susan Parsonage be thanked for attending the meeting to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing the Borough;
- 2) Clive and Susan be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to discuss progress and the identification of emerging challenges and opportunities.

21. CLIMATE EMERGENCY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 173 to 178, which gave details of a Member request to establish an additional Overview and Scrutiny Committee to focus on the Council's response to the Climate Emergency via scrutiny of the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

The report stated that the Council had declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 with the aim to playing as full a role as possible in reducing the Borough's carbon footprint to achieve Net Zero by 2030. Scrutiny of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan, to date, had taken place through the establishment of an Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group which produced reports in 2020 and 2021.

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee's terms of reference enabled it to propose amendments to Council in relation to the Overview and Scrutiny function, including the establishment of a new Committee. Any new Committee would be established on the basis of political proportionality.

Appended to the report were draft terms of reference for the proposed Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The potential role of the new Committee was summarised as scrutinising, reviewing and assisting with policy development relating to:

- a) the Council's commitment to play as full a role as possible to reduce the Borough's carbon footprint to be Net Zero by 2030;
- b) implementation of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan, including the annual progress report to Council;
- c) progress against recommendations, agreed by the Executive, from the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group and the proposed Overview and Scrutiny itself;
- d) examples of Climate Emergency "best practice" from other local authorities and public/private sector organisations.

In the ensuing discussion, Members made the following points:

If a new Committee was established, what would be the impact on Democratic Services in terms of supporting the Committee? It was confirmed that Democratic Services had successfully supported the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group in 2020 and 2021. Also, the recent external review of the Council's Scrutiny function would make recommendations about structure and resourcing.

The report suggested that the new Committee be made up of nine Members (five Wokingham Borough Partnership and four Conservative). Could the Committee have a smaller number of Members? It was confirmed that the Committee membership could be 5:4 or 4:3. This would be clarified in relation to the political balance issue.

Rather than setting up a new Committee, could climate emergency be a standing item on each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees? This could reduce the workload for officers currently supporting the Council's work programme. It was confirmed that this was possible, but this approach would also generate additional work for Democratic Services and the officers working on delivery of the Climate Emergency Action Plan, for example in relation to the number of meetings requiring attendance.

Were the proposed Terms of Reference too narrow? It was confirmed that the Committee could expand/refine the draft Terms of Reference before submitting the report to Council.

Following the discussion, the Chair suggested that consideration of the report be deferred to the next meeting in order to provide further clarity on the issues raised by Members – officer workload, political balance, Terms of Reference and how the proposed Committee would fit into the existing Overview and Scrutiny framework.

RESOLVED: That consideration of the request to establish a Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee be deferred to the next meeting, to enable further clarity to be provided on the issues raised by Members.

22. CLIMATE EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT 2022

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 13 to 172, which provided the annual progress report on the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan.

The report stated that the Climate Emergency Action Plan had been approved in 2019. The Action Plan was submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee for comment each year, prior to submission to Council.

Rhian Hayes (Assistant Director, Economic Development and Growth) attended the meeting to present the report, supported by colleagues involved in the delivery of the Action Plan. Sarah Kerr (Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services) attended the meeting to discuss the report and answer Member questions. Sarah confirmed that the annual progress report would be submitted to Council in September 2022. This would enable the comments from Scrutiny Members to be incorporated into the report.

The Climate Emergency Action Plan identified key priority areas for CO2 emission reductions including transport, homes, businesses and waste. It also included SMART carbon targets and projections for the period up to 2030. The Action Plan highlighted the

size of the challenge facing the Council and recognised that, at this point, the proposed actions were not sufficient to deliver the carbon reductions necessary to meet the Borough's 2030 target. However, as a living document, new ideas would be developed over the next period which would support progress towards the target.

The report referred to the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group which had produced reports in 2020 and 2021. The most recent report had included 25 recommendations to the Executive. The majority of the recommendations had been accepted and incorporated into the Action Plan.

The report highlighted a number of areas where significant progress had been made, including:

- The Borough's recycling rate had increased from 50% to 54%.
- Council buildings had been built/retrofitted to Net Zero standards – Dinton Activity Centre, Woodley Library, Carnival Hub, etc.
- Carbon sequestration projects had begun – over 15,000 trees planted.
- Renewable energy installations were progressing – significant progress on the Barkham solar farm project.
- Over 1,500 households receiving assistance from Help to Heat, the Council's locally set ECOFlex scheme.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

What were the implications of the Environment Act 2021 on the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan? It was confirmed that the Environment Act had a number of impacts including Biodiversity Net Gain, building standards, the development of an infrastructure strategy and recycling targets.

Was there an overall road map for the Climate Emergency Action Plan? It was confirmed that a road map with key milestones was being developed.

Was the Climate Emergency Action Plan influencing the Local Plan Update, for example in the requirement for new homes to achieve carbon neutrality? It was confirmed that new environmental standards had to be included in the new Local Plan. The zero carbon homes target, for example, could not be included in a supplementary planning document. The new administration was working with officers to progress the Local Plan Update. Work was also ongoing on the updated Local Transport Plan – LTP4.

The Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group, in its two reports, had challenged some of the numbers in the Action Plan. It appeared that there were still inconsistencies and sections where the numbers did not add up. It was suggested that Andy Croy and Sarah Kerr meet with the officers to discuss these issues before the Action Plan was submitted to Council in September 2022.

It was noted that, in the Action Plan column headed "Timescale/Total Cost, there were still a number of sections with "TBC" (To Be Confirmed) in the box. Could there be further commentary in the Action Plan on these sections, to provide greater understanding and a timescale for the TBCs to be resolved? It was confirmed that this suggestion would be given further consideration.

In relation to the projected growth in the number of electric vehicles (EV) in the Borough, had officers done any work on the cost/benefit of recycling EV batteries? It was confirmed that this issue had not been explored to date. Officers would give further consideration to this idea and report back to Members in due course.

The report referred to the use of ecargo bikes which could provide last-mile delivery services. It was suggested that officers contact West Berkshire Council which had received grant funding for its scheme.

Did the Council run a Bike to Work scheme? It was confirmed that WBC did run a scheme in order to encourage more bike usage amongst staff.

It was essential that the Action Plan was able to demonstrate value for money, i.e. a specific project may look attractive but the key issue was the carbon saving achieved against the cost.

In addition to the proposed solar farm at Barkham, were other initiatives being considered such as ground-source heat pumps and district heat networks? It was confirmed that officers were looking at battery storage options at the solar farm site and were also exploring other initiatives, including the ideas raised by Members.

What progress was there in relation to the work on deliberative processes? It was confirmed that the project was coming to the end of the first stage with nine stakeholder groups having met to consider key climate emergency issues and potential solutions.

Sarah Kerr suggested that the business case for the Barkham solar farm be considered by the Committee at its September meeting. This would allow Scrutiny feedback to be considered before the contract was awarded.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Sarah Kerr, Rhian Hayes and supporting officers be thanked for attending the meeting to answer Member questions on the Climate Emergency Action Plan;
- 2) Member comments and suggestions on the Action Plan be fed into the annual update report to be considered by Council in September 2022;
- 3) Andy Croy and Sarah Kerr meet with officers to consider the methodologies used to inform the Action Plan and the resulting accuracy and consistency of calculations;
- 4) a report on the business case for the Barkham solar farm be submitted to the meeting of the Committee on 8 September 2022.

23. WORK PROGRAMME 2022-23

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 179 to 183, which provided an update on the development of the Committee's work programme for 2022/23.

The report reminded Members that, at its meeting on 13 June 2022, the Committee had agreed the list of items to be included in its work programme for 2022/23. From the list of items, Members were requested to highlight their "top 3" priorities for consideration at the July meeting. The priority items highlighted by Members, to date, were:

- The emerging Waste Strategy – 2 votes.
- Discussions with the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive – 2 votes.
- Impact of increasing levels of homelessness across the Borough, the cost of living crisis and the Anti-Poverty Strategy.
- The Council’s Continuous Improvement Programme.
- Progress against Motions agreed by Council.
- Emissions and Air Quality.
- Adoption of estate infrastructure following new housing development – including litter clearance.

In addition to the list of items for inclusion in the work programme, the Chair suggested that a Task and Finish Group be established to review the way in which key performance indicators (KPIs) supported the delivery of continuous improvement and customer excellence across the organisation.

Following the earlier discussion on the Climate Emergency Action Plan, it was agreed that an item on the business plan for the Barkham solar farm be submitted to the September meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the key priorities for inclusion in the work programme, identified by Committee members, be noted;
- 2) the Chair and Vice-Chair agree a draft 2022/23 work programme for consideration and agreement at the next meeting in September 2022;
- 3) an item on the Barkham solar farm be submitted to the September meeting of the Committee;
- 4) the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to review the development and effectiveness of key performance indicators be agreed;
- 5) draft terms of reference for the proposed Task and Finish Group be submitted to the next meeting.

24. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES

The Committee considered its work programme for upcoming meetings and the work programmes of the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees, as set out on Agenda pages 185 to 194.

RESOLVED: That the work programmes be noted.

25. EXECUTIVE FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Executive Forward Programme, as set out on Agenda Pages 195 to 200.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Executive Forward Programme be noted;
- 2) the Committee consider an item on the proposed Public Spaces Protection Order, due to be considered by the Executive in September 2022.

26. ACTION TRACKER REPORT

The Committee considered the Action Tracker report following the meeting on 13 June 2022.

RESOLVED: That the Action Tracker report be noted.

This page is intentionally left blank