

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD ON 3 NOVEMBER 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.32 PM**

**Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Peter Dennis (Chair), David Cornish (Vice-Chair), Shirley Boyt, Norman Jorgensen, Laura Blumenthal, Chris Johnson, Pauline Jorgensen and Alistair Neal, and Chris Bowring (Substitute)

**Executive Members Present**

Councillors: Clive Jones (Leader of the Council), Imogen Shepherd-DuBey (Executive Member for Finance), Rachel Bishop-Firth (Executive Member for Equalities, Inclusion and Fighting Poverty), Sarah Kerr (Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services), Ian Shenton (Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure)

**Officers Present**

Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist), Narinder Brar (Community Safety Manager), Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist), Glynn Davies (Head of IT), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Resources and Assets)), Karen Evans (Domestic Abuse Coordinator) and Francesca Hobson (Assistant Director – Environment & Safety)

**Others Present**

Katie Lloyd (Service Manager at Cranstoun), Andrea West (Chief Executive of Berkshire Women's Aid, and Vickie Robertson (Founder of Kaleidoscopic UK)

**50. APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Gregor Murray.

Councillor Chris Bowring attended the meeting as a substitute.

**51. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3 October 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the following minor amendments:

Agenda Page 7 – Did the ~~hostel~~ **hotel** for asylum seekers in Earley...

Agenda Page 10 – It was noted that WBC spent a considerable amount of money on external consultants, some of which carried out very specialist work. ~~It was noted that it would be useful to see how much money each department was spending on external consultants.~~ **It was requested that the Committee receive a breakdown of the cost of agency workers, contractors, interims and fixed term contracts (that translates into people, outside of IR35).**

**52. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**53. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

**54. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions.

## **55. WOKINGHAM DOMESTIC ABUSE UPDATE**

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 13 to 42, which gave an update on the support offered to victims of domestic abuse in addition to measures in place to tackle instances of domestic abuse.

The report outlined that the Wokingham Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-24 was underpinned by two action plans, one delivered via the domestic abuse partnership focussed on delivering Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC's) duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and the other which covered wider domestic abuse support which was delivered by the Domestic Abuse Networking group. A number of key achievements had been realised, including appointment of a domestic abuse housing specialist and establishment of a Thames Valley wide group to explore options linked to safe accommodation. A referral programme was in place for the men and masculinities programme, with 7 male referrals to the programme to date.

The Committee welcomed Katie Lloyd (Service Manager at Cranstoun), Andrea West (Chief Executive of Berkshire Women's Aid, and Vickie Robertson (Founder of Kaleidoscopic UK) to provide additional context and to answer member queries.

Sarah Kerr (Executive Member for Resident Services and Climate Emergency), Narinder Brar (Community Safety Manager), Francesca Hobson (Assistant Director Environment and Safety), and Karen Evans (Domestic Abuse Coordinator) attended the meeting to answer member queries.

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

- There was a proposal to provide an additional £75k of funding to allow additional staff to deal with case work. Whilst this would bring case work per member of staff to approximately 35, this was still above the safe and recommended level of 30 cases per member of staff. Was additional funding being investigated to address this concern? Officer response – The safe lives best practice level stood at 30 cases per member of staff, and a growth bid was in place to get numbers in the Borough down. Other resources were being put in place to help relieve pressure, and should levels increase even with the additional funding then a further growth bid could be explored. It should be noted that the 30 cases per member of staff figure included a 20% margin either way (27 – 33 cases). Grant funding could also be explored where available, whilst it should be noted that the national economic picture meant that all growth bids at WBC needed to be very carefully considered;
- In relation to the anti-abuse charter, what progress had been made to embed this across WBC? Officer response – This hung on the premise of a reduction of violence across the Borough. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) would be included as part of the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWAG) plan;
- Members congratulated Kaleidoscopic UK for highlighting and delivering upon the impacts of domestic abuse on children;
- A recent television programme had highlighted exempt accommodation, whereby gangs would provide a 'refuge' for nefarious reasons. Officers had given assurances that there were no such properties in the Borough, however, what was being done to ensure that Borough residents being placed elsewhere were being placed in suitable

accommodation? Officer and service representative response – There was a collective responsibility to ensure that service users were placed in safe accommodation. WBC ensured that our own local provision was suitable and safe, whilst officers worked with Local Authorities and various organisations across the Thames Valley. Whilst this did not guarantee that every individual was placed in suitable accommodation, officers always worked to the best of their ability to provide suitable accommodation. There was a national refuge database which was overseen by Women's Aid, whilst key worker would be assigned to individuals with complex issues including drug use and mental health;

- Thames Valley received between 4000-5000 calls about Domestic Abuse each year. What number of these calls were being referred to the police? Officer response – Monthly and quarterly figures were provided to the police, whilst a breakdown of referral sources was provided by Cranstoun. High risk cases, via MARAC, were referred to the police as were some medium risk cases. Overall, referrals were up approximately 7% from last year;
- There was a positive move to encourage people to come forward and report domestic abuse. Were there resources available to cope with any potential steep increase in demand? Executive Member and officer response – Many people did not realise that they were in a domestic abuse situation, as that situation was normal for them. There was a lot of work around education as to what was acceptable and what was not. A growth bid was in place based on the pressures currently faced by the service which was right and proper. If demand increased, additional grants could be explored, and an additional business case could be presented to the Executive asking for additional funding. It was key that perpetrator referrals increased to challenge and change behaviours;
- How was any increase in reporting (due to increased confidence and messaging) being separated from an actual increase in service demand? Executive Member and service representative response – This was a particularly difficult area to separate data. On average, it took a victim of domestic abuse 7 attempts to leave an abusive relationship before they were able to leave for good. Information relating to repeat referrals was collected and monitored, whilst it should be noted that victims were at their highest risk when leaving an abusive relationship as that was when the perpetrator was losing their power;
- What resourcing was in place to provide safe accommodation? Officer and service representative response – Whilst work with survivors was at an individual level, when a survivor was leaving an abusive relationship this was not dealt with in isolation. A holistic network of was in place to ensure joined-up support for survivors in these situations. There was not a domestic abuse housing specialist in place which added an additional level of security and specialism for survivors. For example, this could enable more survivors to stay at their own home if it was safe and so long as the perpetrator was not living at the address. There was a community based support network in place to help keep victims safe;
- What was being done in schools to educate on acceptable behaviour from an early age? Executive Member, officer and service representative response – VAWAG would form part of the prevention plan to tackle deep rooted misogyny. The Educate to Eradicate Programme was in place, however the issue was getting schools to actively engage as domestic abuse was still seen as a 'taboo' topic. Regular meetings were in

place with the Executive Member for Children's Services, whilst schools had a statutory responsibility to promote healthy relationships. The police were informing any domestic abuse incidents involving children to schools to make them aware. Statistics of prevention programmes in schools could be provided to the Committee via Kaleidoscopic;

- If another Local Authority required addition resourcing from Cranstoun, would this effect the resourcing available to Wokingham? Service representative response – The contract with Cranstoun specified that staff were in place specifically to deal with cases in the Wokingham Borough;
- What alerts were in place if staffing became under pressure? Officer response – A service manager was in place to manage the operation service requirements at Cranstoun, whilst officers had a very good relationship with Cranstoun and if there were concerns a frank conversation would be anticipated;
- A number of questions were put to officers in advance of the meeting. Responses to these questions can be found below.
- How long does a case typically take to? Officer response - This is very difficult to answer as each individual client will require different levels of support and for varying time periods. For some, this could just be one phone call or chat with an outreach worker whereby the client gathers the information they need and then may not need any additional support for some time, with others needing weeks or months or years of support, especially if there are ongoing court cases. The commissioned service primarily focused on cases where the abuse was current, developing safety plans, putting in place the emotional and practical support they need, so (although this would need to be double-checked) probably around 3 or 4 months, but the emotional impact on a victim-survivor and child is likely to last for many years and so some will need ongoing emotional support – at which point, they are likely to be referred to Kaleidoscopic whose support offer is open ended;
- What were the success criteria for the service? Officer response – Ultimately, that the person is not murdered or seriously harmed. Within this, for each client, success will mean different things – feeling more confident; being able to secure occupancy of their home; feeling more in control of their finances; having an injunction in place; being supported to report the abuse to the police etc;
- What happens if only the statutory requirements are delivered, and what staffing is required for that? Officer response - The statutory duty only covers a couple of percent of those who need to access support in Wokingham so only delivering on the statutory requirements would mean that the vast majority of those affected by domestic abuse in Wokingham would not receive any specialist support or be safeguarded. This then has an impact on wider services – increase A&E / GP attendances; anti-social behaviour; criminal damage; serious crime etc;
- Ideally, what would be the required level of staffing, and what is the delta between that and what was in place now? Officer response – This answer would be provided at a later date;
- With regards to home modifications for safe houses - how much did that cost? Officer response - These depend on the property but probably average around £50 - £200 per

property. In a lot of cases, it will be lower value items needed, e.g. door chain, lock change, fireproof letter box. Others will need a video doorbell and for some more extensive measures (e.g. changes to internal doors, fencing etc) which could cost a few hundred pound. Instillation of measures is part of a wider Adult Services contract. The scheme is managed by the Community Engagement Team and support for the victim-survivors and their children in these properties is via the central Government new duty's money;

- With regards to the perpetrator service, do you get referrals from enforcement agencies as you mentioned victims are passed on? Officer response - The majority of referrals are from Children's Services or self-referrals although we are working with the police to try and increase the referrals for those who are on the police radar but the case isn't progressing to court. The probation service had their own perpetrator programme which the courts mandate people to attend;
- With regards to response times to issues, what was the service level agreement and how often is it missed or reached? Officer response – A fuller response would be provided, but it was understood that Cranstoun were meeting it's KPI to respond to referrals within one working day;
- What danger was there to the Council for a failure case? Officer response - All domestic murders and DA linked suicides require a full multi agency review which are published and would lead to poor headlines, loss of confidence in our response, cost of undertaking the review as well as the tragic loss of life itself and the impact on the family and wider community. The Home Office estimates the cost to the criminal justice system, health service, social care and housing to be just over £1M for each domestic abuse murder- this doesn't include the wider costs such as loss of income, impact on family, etc. In addition to Domestic Homicide Reviews, the council also has Serious Case Reviews, where near misses and failures are highlighted. Poor headlines are a major issue due to the impact this has on future victim-survivors confidence in help seeking.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) Katie Lloyd, Andrea West, Vickie Robertson, Sarah Kerr, Narinder Brar, Francesca Hobson and Karen Evans be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) Officers continue to carefully monitor the need for any additional growth bid to manage staff case load;
- 3) Statistics of prevention programmes in schools be provided to the Committee via Kaleidoscopic;
- 4) Information regarding ideal staffing levels and KPIs and response times be circulated to the Committee.

**56. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS AND WHITE RIBBON ACCREDITATION**

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 43 to 54, which provided an update on progress made in achieving White Ribbon Accreditation and actions taken to stop Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWAG).

The report provided an overview of the local VAWAG strategy 2023-26, including the timeline for development, implementation and consultation plan.

The Committee welcomed Katie Lloyd (Service Manager at Cranstoun), Andrea West (Chief Executive of Berkshire Women's Aid, and Vickie Robertson (Founder of Kaleidoscopic UK) to provide additional context and to answer member queries.

Sarah Kerr (Executive Member for Resident Services and Climate Emergency), Narinder Brar (Community Safety Manager), Francesca Hobson (Assistant Director Environment and Safety), and Karen Evans (Domestic Abuse Coordinator) attended the meeting to answer member queries.

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

- It was noted that this topic was of national and local importance, and focussed on prevention and social and cultural changes;
- What measures of success had other Local Authorities used with White Ribbon Accreditation? Executive Member response – Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) would be assessing what other Local Authorities were doing as part of the development of our VAWAG plan, to understand what success looked like and how it would be measured. A set of KPIs would be developed, whilst Surrey County Council had gone through the accreditation process and their successes could be shared with the Committee;
- Were WBC's proposals ambitious enough – what percentage reduction of reports were we expecting? Executive Member response – Smart measurements would be put in place, however at this early-stage specifics could not be given;
- Strategic themes were being shared with the community safety partnership in a few weeks time, what were these themes? Officer response – Themes around prevention education and awareness, safe spaces and places were in development alongside other strategic priorities including the justice system to enable better outcomes for victims;
- It was noted that White Ribbon was an element of the VAWAG plan, which would look at issues on a much wider scale;
- It was noted that 25 November was White Ribbon day, and lots of activities were planned to help show how important an issue this was;
- It was noted that there would be vigils for the victims that did not survive, and communications would be sent out when details were more finalised;
- It was noted that the Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services would work with the communications team to get information about these events to schools;
- It was agreed that an update on the plan would be taken to the March 2023 meeting of the Committee.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) Katie Lloyd, Andrea West, Vickie Robertson, Sarah Kerr, Narinder Brar, Francesca Hobson and Karen Evans be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) The Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services would work with the communications team to get information about White Ribbon events to schools;
- 3) Successes and learning points from Surrey County Council, who had gone through the White Ribbon Accreditation process, be circulated to the Committee;
- 4) A further update be considered by the Committee in March 2023.

#### **57. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2023-26 - CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE AND RESOURCES AND ASSETS**

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 55 to 136, which set out the proposed revenue and capital bids for the Chief Executive's Office and the Resources and Assets Directorate.

Clive Jones (Leader of the Council), Imogen Shepherd-DuBey (Executive Member for Finance), Rachel Bishop-Firth (Executive Member for Equalities, Inclusion and Fighting Poverty), Sarah Kerr (Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services), Ian Shenton (Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Resources and Assets)), and Glynn Davies (Head of IT) attended the meeting to answer member queries.

The Executive Member for Finance commented that Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) was facing significant financial pressure due to inflation, and emphasised that every saving and income generation opportunity was important.

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

- In relation to business rates, had any downturn in the economy been factored into assumptions? Officer response – Business rates was a complex area, where the actual debit had increased (more new businesses had entered the area over time) and the multiple had also increased, whilst collection remained quite reasonable at approximately 99%. The main concern in this area was about a re-evaluation, which would almost certainly not come into play in 2023/24 due to the level of work required by the Government, however any re-evaluation would likely not be favourable for authorities such as WBC who had historically grown;
- In relation to 3G pitch bid, where was the £45k saving going to be generated? Executive Member and officer response – This was based on mimicking the performance at other 3G pitches in the area, whilst being in line with the business case presented to the Executive. This was a modest surplus after the cost of running the site and capital financing costs. The whole scheme was under review as cost assumptions had changed significantly;
- In relation to bid RA R3, car parking fees – Cantley Park, it was guaranteed last year that no car parking fees would be introduced at Laurel Park. Were the same guarantees given to Cantley Park? Executive Member response – More active discussion needed to be had regarding this proposal before it could go ahead;

- In relation to bid RA R3, car parking fees – Cantley Park, there was a lot of alternative options for people to park for free. Did the projected savings factor in people choosing to park for free elsewhere and people choosing to walk or cycle to Cantley Park, and was there an option to place all country park car parks under one set of management with one set of policies? Executive Member response – This proposal needed very careful consideration to ascertain if savings were realistic and to measure any impacts on use of the site and its facilities. The possibility of one set of management for the country park car parks was already under consideration in its early stages;
- In relation to bid RA R12, sport and leisure income generation (unachievable income generation), why was there a growth bid and had options been explored closer to the Wokingham Town Centre, for example at Elms Field? Executive Member response – There would originally have been a savings bid associated with this income, however, as the event was not very successful this savings line now had to be taken out of the MTFP. There were no firm plans to look at hosting the event elsewhere, however this could be explored in future;
- It was noted that Wokingham Theatre needed to be included within the impact statement for the proposed changes to the Cantley car park;
- In relation to bid RA R12, sport and leisure income generation (unachievable income generation), it was suggested that officers speak to Winnersh Parish Council about an outdoor gym, which they had experience with;
- In relation to bid RA R19, one off growth to support leisure income recovery, what was the background to this bid? Officer response – This bid was to support the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of lost revenue as a result of lower uptake of subscriptions and activities. The figure of £70k could potentially be too low to plug the gap. Places Leisure were doing well in some areas, however the Council's overall offering went a lot wider than private gyms including classes and support for the vulnerable and elderly;
- In relation to bid CE R4, removal of telephone lines when Teams telephony went live, was the cost of Teams telephony included in the saving? Officer response – Yes, the proposed saving was the net position after switching to Teams telephony;
- In relation to bid CE C1, Microsoft E5, was there a proposed increase in the number of licences? Officer response – Microsoft E5 was an expensive service, and the contract was reviewed every 4 years. Based on the regulations, this contract could be capitalised;
- In relation to bid CE R2, effective use of Council owned community spaces, was the £150k saving achievable? Executive Member response – This was at an early stage where officers were exploring if partner organisations could operate out of WBC sites. A community strategy was being developed which would prove informative;
- In relation to bid CE R1, reduced provision of mobile phones, could this potentially reduce staff morale and had the business continuity aspect of solely relying on Microsoft teams been considered? Executive Member and officer response – This saving represented 50% of currently deployed phones. Certain teams required phones whilst others did not, whilst Teams telephony would allow the implementation of 'bring your own device'. Staff were becoming very aware of the need to make savings



wherever possible. Almost all staff were issued a phone during the pandemic and many no longer required them, whilst business continuity aspects and security implications needed additional work;

- In relation to bid CE R3, removal of two apprenticeship posts, were WBC still dedicated to keeping apprentices across the organisation? Executive member response – Absolutely, this was fundamental for the organisation and removal of these two posts were most certainly not part of the ‘norm’;
- Had open-source software solutions been evaluated as a saving opportunity? Officer response – This had not been looked at in terms of collaborative tools, as WBC was bound by procurement regulations and staff may struggle with open-source software productivity wise;
- In relation to bid CE R6, new WBC website, was work being done to maximise the revenue generation from advertisement? Officer response – WBC used to advertise on the current website however this was removed as the income was relatively small. This could be re-evaluated in line with current rates for advertisement;
- When would the next contract for mobile phones be renewed? Officer response – This would begin next year, and a year-by-year scaling back would be in operation;
- Would laptop refresh rates for staff be scaled back? Executive Member and officer response – The current refresh rate was between 3 and 4 years, and options were being explored to move this to 4 to 5 years. Some laptops needed critical upgrades which could not be delayed, whilst technology needed to be of a certain standard to allow access to the public service network;
- Had chrome books been considered for staff laptops, as they were generally cheaper? Officer response – Many officers needed to work in a Microsoft Windows environment. The average cost of a laptop was £750, with some staff requiring more powerful hardware and some requiring less powerful hardware. WBC typically bought laptops at the wholesale price plus 3%. Officers were exploring options for ‘Windows as a service’, and WBC did need to continue to move away from legacy applications. It was requested that officers explore market opportunities, including the use of virtual machines to facilitate Microsoft Windows use;
- Did WBC receive revenue for recycling old hardware, and could hardware be donated to local schools? Officer response – A contract was in place which provided a relatively small amount of money for recycling hardware. WBC would like to send used hardware to schools but due to licencing requirements this could prove difficult and even expensive for schools. It was noted that Microsoft offered special rates for students, and officers were requested to explore whether this could help old equipment being donated to schools;
- Was it possible to get more solar farms online at a faster rate? Executive Member response – Future sites would be smaller than the Barkham site, and they would be taken forwards as quickly as was feasible;
- In relation to bid CE R7, budget required to deliver sustainable organisational change, could the cumulative movement (a reduction in year 2) be explained? Officer response

– There was an associated growth bid in year 2 which would ‘top-up’ the ongoing funding;

- In relation to bid RA R11, salary funding pressure from cost of abortive feasibility works, could some further explanation be given? Officer response – Capital projects were explored on an annual basis, and where problems occurred and the project did not progress there was an associated revenue cost. These costs could not be capitalised, and it was prudent to put an estimated annual cost via a growth bid into the revenue budget;
- With regards to the proposed reduction of the Borough News, had this saving included postage costs and had the impacts on vulnerable residents be considered? Executive Member response – There were reservations about this proposal which were being reviewed. The idea to move to one edition would allow them to be posted alongside annual Council Tax receipts;
- In relation to bid CE R7, budget required to deliver sustainable organisational change, was this revenue cost of delivering the savings? Officer response – The funding included support for teams working on the user experience, user interface, organisational change, graduate scheme, and business analysts. This was considered a key corporate issue to deliver savings across the organisation, and this spend would facilitate these savings;
- In relation to bid RA R1, income generation from solar farms, what did the £500k saving in year 3 represent? Officer response – This was the result of a part year effect of the introduction of a 2<sup>nd</sup> site in year 2, after the costs of running the site and the costs of capital financing;
- In relation to bid RA R17, investment and estates property pressures from depressed markets, were options being explored to see how WBC could work with businesses to make them as successful as they could be? Executive Member response – This was a very difficult area where the original forecasts were no longer achievable due to the changing retail environment and individuals’ incomes being squeezed. WBC would continue to work with businesses to try and get them to enter the Borough on good terms;
- It was noted that large proposed spends such as CE R7, budget required to deliver sustainable organisational change, should have additional detail provided as they were very significant spends. Officers agreed to provide additional detail to the Committee with regards to this specific bid, and agreed to provide additional detail with regards to large proposed spends in future;
- In relation to bid RA C1, community investment, it was noted that Councils could no longer borrow (through the public works loans board) to invest in property for purely commercial purposes, due to a change in legislation. Investments now needed to provide a community benefit, and a return on investment was secondary to this. There was £93.5m left for investment, and this would only be spent if the purchase covered all borrowing costs and demonstrably provided a community benefit, for example the purchase of a care home;
- Had leasing vacant units on a short-term basis for ‘pop-up’ shops been considered? Executive Member response – This had been suggested to officers to explore;

- With regards to a recent news article concerning the possible redevelopment of shops in the Wokingham Town Centre which would involve existing businesses having to vacate, were early proactive conversations taking place with these businesses to discuss potential spaces that they might be able to relocate to? Executive Member response – Whilst there was no active planning application relating to this proposal, officers and members could proactively engage to explore any potential options;
- Were there opportunities to use Town and Parish Councils to send out the Borough News? Executive Member response – This could be explored, however it was uncertain if this could be feasible;
- In relation to bid CE R8, equality and tackling poverty community engagement, did this cover staffing or coordination? Executive Member response – This would pay for two staff to provide support to the equalities and tackling poverty agenda, including writing the strategy;
- It was noted that reducing the number of issues of the Borough News could impact how often critical information was seen by vulnerable residents;
- With regards to the bid for an inclusion officer, was this funding for one post and was this agenda being pushed at the moment? Executive Member and officer response – This would fund one post until 2025 and would help to drive this agenda forwards;
- With regards to the proposed bid for the HR operating model, what were the existing HR department doing and why did they require this extra support? Executive Member and officer response – There was a very high turnover within HR, and they needed someone to come in and re-organise the team and get them to a good place. The 21<sup>st</sup> century re-organisation had reduced HR staff number to a minimum based on staff across the organisation 'self-serving', which proved to be too ambitious. The appointment of the Assistant Director HR had been a significant addition to the team, however the team also needed additional support from outside of the organisation on a short term basis;
- In relation to bid RA R13, increased demand through Council Tax relief scheme due to cost of living pressures, was this a change in policy? Executive Member and officer response – This was the same scheme with a reflection of the increasing demand on the scheme from residents as a result of inflationary pressures and Council Tax increases;
- In relation to bid RA R14, insurance premiums, had self-insurance options been explored? Officer response – WBC did have quite a sizeable excess which helped keep premiums down, but it did require a sizeable insurance fund to cover the excess. Officers would come back on the specifics of self-insuring of small items;
- It was noted that WBC had previously done very well out of the joint legal services item, which had now ceased;
- In relation to bid RA R6, increased income from collection improvements, was the proposed savings target ambitious given the general financial climate? Officer

response – Current collection rates were current higher than previous years. This bid was about managing our accounts in a responsible manner;

- In relation to the proposal to move to paperless democratic meetings, how might this be implemented? Officer response – There were a number of ways this could be achieved, for example by asking members to request paper copies for particular meetings rather than printing unwanted copies, and reducing colour printing where this was not strictly necessary. It was recognised that many members found paper agendas extremely useful some meetings, such as Planning and Budget Scrutiny. This proposal was not suggesting the complete cessation of paper copy agendas, but instead working with members to understand their specific needs and reducing unnecessary or unwanted printing;
- In relation to bid RA R8, revenue and benefits automation, did this savings proposal result in the reduction of staffing? Officer response – Yes, however any affected staff could be re-deployed to other vacant posts within the organisation;
- In relation to bid RA R9, increased court costs for Council Tax and Business Rates, would this impact vulnerable people who could not pay? Executive Member response – This proposal would target individuals who refused to engage with WBC over a period of time, despite a number of chasers. Officers always worked sensitively with vulnerable residents to provide help, support and guidance, and this proposal was in no way aimed at these individuals;
- In relation to RA R4, benefit realisation from commercial activities, what potential ideas were being explored? Executive Member and officer response – A consultant had carried out a review as part of an ongoing work programme. Staff were in place to explore income generation and cost reduction opportunities;
- In relation to RA R5, contracts and commissioning reviews, could this be explained further? Officer response – CIPFA had undertaken a review which had led to an enhanced governance structure, and this bid would allow consultants to come in to upskill the Council’s negotiations team;
- How were we interacting with commercial entities to make the best use of the Council’s assets? Executive Member response – All of WBC’s assets were being reviewed, and if aspects of the organisation could be made more commercial for the benefit of the community then ideas could be progressed;
- At a recent meeting of Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee it was noted that the cost of childcare and the cost of running childcare facilities was increasing. Could options be explored to lease under-utilised WBC assets and space to childcare providers? Executive Member response – This option could certainly be explored;
- At this point of the meeting, the Committee resolved to extend the meeting by a maximum of 30 minutes;
- Had options been explored to extend the offer of WBC’s contact centre to other services such as the Police or Fire services? Executive Member response - This option could certainly be explored.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) Clive Jones, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Rachel Bishop-Firth, Sarah Kerr, Ian Shenton, Graham Ebers, and Glynn Davies be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) Further consideration be given to bid RA R3, car parking fees – Cantley Park;
- 3) Officers speak to Winnersh Parish Council about outdoor gyms, which they had experience managing;
- 4) Officers consider exploration of other venues, for example Elms Field, for hosting future Christmas markets;
- 5) Officers re-evaluate the use of advertisement on the new WBC website to help maximise revenue;
- 6) Officers explore market opportunities for staff laptops such as the use of chrome books, including the use of virtual machines to facilitate Microsoft Windows use;
- 7) Officers explore whether student discounted Microsoft Windows license could facilitate old WBC hardware being donated to schools;
- 8) Further consideration be given to the proposal to reduce the number of editions of the Borough News, including an impact assessment on vulnerable residents;
- 9) Additional detail be provided with regards to bid CE R7, budget required to deliver sustainable organisational change, including how success would be measured;
- 10) Additional detail be provided for future bids which represented a significant spend;
- 11) Options be explored to see if it could be possible for Town and Parish Council's to distribute the Borough News, or something similar;
- 12) Officers come back on the specifics of self-insuring of small items;
- 13) Officers explore options to lease under-utilised WBC assets and space to childcare providers;
- 14) Officers explore options to extend the offer of WBC's contact centre to other services such as the Police or Fire services.

**58. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered their work programme, set out in agenda pages 137 to 140.

The Committee agreed to move their January meeting to 23 January 2023 to allow officers additional time to understand the implications of the Local Government Finance Settlement (due on or around Christmas Eve).

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) The Callum Wernham be thanked for attending the meeting;

- 2) The Committee's January meeting be moved to 23 January 2023 to allow officers additional time to understand the implications of the Local Government Finance Settlement (due on or around Christmas Eve).