

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 18 JANUARY 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.30 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Jim Frewin (Chair), Andrew Mickleburgh (Vice-Chair), David Cornish, Andy Croy, Peter Dennis, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen and Alison Swaddle

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Morag Malvern, Rachel Bishop-Firth, Clive Jones and Sarah Kerr

Officers Present

Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Graham Ebers, Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Resources & Assets
Steve Moore, Director of Place and Growth
Susan Parsonage, Chief Executive
Will Roper, Customer Insight Analyst and Performance Manager
Sally Watkins, Chief Operating Officer
Callum Wernham, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist

20. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Graham Howe, Adrian Mather and Stuart Munro.

Morag Malvern attended the meeting as a substitute for Adrian Mather.

21. STATEMENT BY THE CHAIR

Jim Frewin made the following statement:

“Good evening and a belated Happy New Year.

I want to start tonight with a quick refresher of our Overview and Scrutiny aims.

At our first meeting of this Municipal Year, we asked all Committee members to tell us what you wanted from Overview and Scrutiny. On top of this, we also had a Scrutiny review from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, which we reviewed at our last meeting.

We have been working to try to achieve these aims and look to implement a more structured approach to Overview and Scrutiny so that we all get better opportunities for earlier engagement, take a more structured approach across all our Scrutiny, do fewer things well rather than lots of things in a rush and try to improve our “constructive critical friend” relationship.

I thank all those who participated in our last meeting which, in my view, was a step in the right direction and an example of a constructive and beneficial meeting.

As an example of an improvement initiative, it has been agreed that the trial of regular meetings between the Leader, Chief Executive and the O&S Chair and Vice-Chair is to be adopted as “business as usual” and will be scheduled for the next 12 months, beyond any election. We will be looking to get this approved and embedded into our Constitution as

soon as we can. Other initiatives to improve Overview and Scrutiny are being explored and will be shared to enable appropriate overview by this Committee.

As I have previously said, coming to Overview and Scrutiny need not need to be a “Spanish Inquisition” for officers or Members!

So, a reminder of the top aims you wanted from Overview and Scrutiny:

- Scrutiny that adds value for our residents;
- Working towards a culture of greater openness, transparency and honesty;
- Scrutiny that is forward looking and ambitious through early engagement;
- Scrutiny that reviews delivery – if something has not been achieved then understand why, dig down to root causes and help identify the lessons learned;
- Direction – check strategy – influence strategy but don’t try to set strategy – that is the role of the Executive and the officer Corporate Leadership Team (CLT);
- Influence measures and reporting that enable better understanding of how residents experience Council services which can, in turn, be used for better Scrutiny leading to service improvements;
- Ask concise and meaningful questions – be prepared;
- Engage as a team with CLT, the Executive and officers in order to add value;
- Try to be non-political, stop political point scoring – be a true critical friend.

We have made progress on many of these aims, so let’s keep that momentum going.

22. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 November were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Note: Members commented that they had not received details of the Corporate CRM System Procurement proposal, as requested at the meeting.

23. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Morag Malvern declared a personal interest in Item 69 – Q2 Corporate Performance Monitoring Report – on the grounds that a relative received support from the Adult Social Care service.

24. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

25. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

26. LEADER 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 progress relating to key priorities and challenges facing the Council over the coming year.

The presentation covered the following points:

Starting Position May 2022:

- Unprecedented financial position – spiralling inflation and Budget gap;
- Cost of living crisis – increasing financial pressures on communities;
- Inconsistency in partnership relations, resulting in missed opportunities;
- Opportunities to improve governance, scrutiny and review.

Addressing the Gaps:

- Making difficult financial decisions – car parking charges and waste collection;
- Support for the cost of living crisis – funding for free school meals;
- Prioritised Special Education Needs – bid for new SEND schools;
- Developed specialist accommodation – supporting residents to stay in their own homes;
- Reduced use of temporary accommodation – support for residents in need.

Making the Changes:

- Investment in new library in Twyford and dementia care home at Toutley;
- Cost of living crisis response - partnership with the Hardship Alliance;
- Violence against Women and Girls Strategy approved by the Executive;
- 900+ children engaged in holiday activities and food programme;
- Sheltered housing provision inspected and awarded accreditation;
- Positive feedback from the LGA Peer Review follow-up visit – palpable and positive change in tone, style and purpose.

Priorities Moving Forwards:

- Changing the way we work with partners – e.g. voluntary/community sector and Town and Parish Councils;
- Maintaining a strong financial grip – efficiencies through innovation and demand management;
- Tackling climate emergency – net zero target for 2030 – reducing fuel poverty;
- Prioritise services for vulnerable residents – amplifying the voice of residents;
- Focus on improving the customer experience – new website with easier to use digital services;
- Developing long term aspirations – Borough Vision and 2050 Borough Plan.

Following the presentation, Members raised the following comments and questions:

How many opposition Members engaged with the Peer Review follow up visit? It was confirmed that the Peer Review team spoke to Executive Members and the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT).

The presentation referred to 36,700 Council Tax energy rebates to residents in need. Did this constitute a financial risk to the Council? It was confirmed that the impact of support for the cost of living crisis was included in the quarterly budget monitoring reports to the Executive. Other impacts of the cost of living crisis included the effect on the usage of the Borough's leisure centres.

What was being done to develop the long-term Borough Vision? It was confirmed that community events were being planned with the Council's key partners. Development of the Vision would be reported back to Overview and Scrutiny as part of the process. Emerging WBC priorities could be included in the Overview and Scrutiny work programmes as part of the "horizon scanning" process. Members knew what the issues were in their local communities, so it was important that their knowledge was utilised. It was essential that Members were updated on any emerging issues in their wards in order for them to carry out their roles effectively.

Residents wanted high quality services and some of these could be provided in partnership. However, it was important to minimise bureaucracy and focus on delivery. An example of effective partnership working was the approach to arts and culture. The development of a shared vision and shared partnership approach could maximise available resources and lever in funding from regional and national bodies.

It was important to establish clear lines of accountability in partnership working. As an example, what was the working arrangement between the Council and the Hardship Alliance – how were issues escalated and reported?

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Clive Jones and Susan Parsonage be thanked for attending the meeting to provide an update on key challenges and priorities;
- 2) Clive and Susan be invited to attend future meetings on a six-monthly basis;
- 3) issues highlighted during the discussion be considered for inclusion in the Overview and Scrutiny work programmes for 2023/24.

27. Q2 2022/23 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Committee considered the Q2 Corporate Performance Monitoring Report, as set out at Agenda pages 13 to 50. The report covered the period July to September 2022.

Sarah Kerr (Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services) and Rachel Bishop-Firth (Executive Member for Equalities, Inclusion and Fighting Poverty) attended the meeting to answer Member questions, supported by Sally Watkins (Chief Operating Officer), Emily Higson (Head of Insight, Strategy and Inclusion) and Will Roper (Customer Insight Analyst and Performance Manager).

The report stated that Executive Members had agreed 40 Key Performance Indicators, details of which were set out in Appendix A to the report. Each KPI had a SMART target and was assigned a RAG status (Red, Amber or Green) to indicate the level of performance achieved in the quarter. Overall, Q2 showed good performance in spite of some significant challenges such as high inflation and financial uncertainty. The majority of KPIs were rated as Green (23) with eight Amber and two Red. There were also seven KPIs without targets. These included new KPIs which needed to be monitored until baseline performance was established.

The two KPIs showing Red performance in Q2 were:

- AS1 – Percentage of adult safeguarding concerns, leading to an enquiry, completed within two working days;

- CS4 – Percentage of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) Assessments completed within 20 weeks of referral.

The report gave details of the Red KPIs along with context and the corrective action being taken.

In the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points:

In relation to changes to the KPI reporting system and the provision of more timely data, would the Committee receive an update report? It was confirmed that a report would be submitted to the Committee in the next few months.

AS1 – Percentage of adult safeguarding concerns, leading to an enquiry, completed within 2 working days – in relation to the various contributory factors set out in the report, was this indicator back on track? It was confirmed that a detailed progress report would be submitted to the next Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

RA8 – Capital budget monitoring forecast position – was the projected underspend (Q2) seen as a positive or a negative? It was confirmed that, due to the unprecedented financial situation, a conscious effort had been made to postpone Capital spending where possible. The aim was to reduce borrowing costs where possible and appropriate. The detailed monitoring report would be submitted to the January meeting of the Executive.

The upward trend of leisure attendances and participation was reported as a positive. Was this trend continuing? It was confirmed that the overall trend contained some positives and some negatives. For example, usage of the Borough's swimming pools had bounced back post Covid. However, the contractor, Places for Leisure, was struggling with increased costs such as the soaring cost of energy to heat the pools.

PG2 – Number of households for whom homelessness has been prevented – Q2 indicated an improved performance with the number of households increasing to 44. What steps were being taken to ensure that this trend continued? It was confirmed that the Housing team had been successful in managing down the number of households in temporary accommodation. Work was ongoing, for example through the landlord forum, to identify potential properties which could be used to accommodate homeless residents.

CEX6 – WBC staff sickness absence – it was noted that staff sickness absences had increased above pre-Covid levels. However, WBC's rate compared favourably with neighbouring authorities. It was confirmed that staff sickness absence guidance was being revised alongside additional training for managers. Further support was being provided through the Employee Assistance Programme, mental health first aiders and workshops on mental health and wellbeing.

Pothole repairs and performance in planning appeals were important issues within Place and Growth but were not currently reported through the quarterly KPI reports. Could these two issues be included in future reporting? It was confirmed that these issues could be included in future performance monitoring reports. This should be discussed with the relevant Executive Members in the first instance.

Members were aware of reports relating to increasing complexity in key frontline services such as Adult Social Care and Children's Services. This increased complexity represented

a multi-agency challenge. One aspect was the factors which the Council could control versus the factors outside the Council's control. It was felt that this issue may be suitable for a "deep dive" by the Children's Services or Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Chair referred to a number of questions submitted in advance of the meeting, viz:

Adult Services Transformation Programme – early sight of the programme and associated timelines would assist Overview and Scrutiny. How do we improve the quality and timeliness of information provided to Members on major change programmes?

Adult Services – impact of Covid-19 – what are the ongoing impacts and how are they being measured and mitigated against?

Adult Services – workforce pressures – an overview of the recruitment and retention plan would be useful alongside an update on progress.

Adult Services – AS1 – in relation to "out of scope referrals" what actions are being taken with the South Central Ambulance Service and Thames Valley Police?

Chief Executive's Office – how is the Equality Forum developing and what opportunities will it create?

Chief Executive's Office – what is the new HR structure and how will it support workforce improvements and resilience?

Place and Growth – Ukrainian refugees – what are the risks linked to the end of the current hosting arrangements?

Place and Growth – Residential Extension project at Bluebell Way, Thatcham – what are the potential benefits for properties in the Borough?

Place and Growth – what are the main contractual challenges and how are they being addressed?

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Executive Members and officers be thanked for attending the meeting to present the Q2 performance report and respond to Member questions;
- 2) the performance of the KPIs relevant to the Committee be noted;
- 3) further information be circulated to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees in response to the points raised at the meeting.

28. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMMES 2023/24

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 51 to 55, which gave details of the process to be followed in developing the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programmes for 2023/24.

The report stated that effective work programming was a Member-led process aimed at shortlisting and prioritising issues of community concern together with issues arising out of

the Council Plan and major service or policy changes. The report proposed a timeline for developing the work programmes in consultation with the Executive and non-Executive Members, the Corporate Leadership Team, community stakeholders and residents. The final draft of the 2023/24 work programmes would be submitted to the Committee's March 2023 meeting for approval.

The report referred to the Scrutiny Improvement Review (SIR), carried out in 2022. The SIR report had emphasised the importance of effective work programming and greater emphasis on the role of Overview and Scrutiny in shaping new policy initiatives. The SIR findings would be reflected in the development of the work programmes for 2023/24. The SIR report also highlighted the effectiveness of carrying out detailed Scrutiny reviews through small Task and Finish Groups.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the suggested process and timeline for developing the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programmes for 2023/24 be approved;
- 2) the suggested process for public consultation on the draft work programmes be approved;
- 3) the 2023/24 work programmes be finalised at the meeting of the Committee on 15 March 2023;
- 4) each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees carries out one or more detailed Scrutiny reviews during 2023/24;
- 5) the Borough's MPs be invited to suggest items for inclusion in the 2023/24 Overview and Scrutiny work programmes.

29. CONSIDERATION OF THE CURRENT EXECUTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER FORWARD PROGRAMMES

The Committee considered a copy of the Executive Forward Programme and the Individual Executive Member Decision (IEMD) Forward Programme as set out on Agenda pages 57 to 70. Members discussed whether any of the items in the forward programmes should be considered by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Executive and IEMD Forward Programmes be noted;
- 2) scrutiny of the Tackling Poverty Strategy be added to the Committee's work programme;
- 3) a report on proposed changes to the waste service be considered at the Committee's meeting on 22 February 2023.

30. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES 2022/23

The Committee considered its forward work programme and that of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees for the remainder of 2022/23, as set out on Agenda pages 71 to 80.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the Overview and Scrutiny work programmes for the remainder of 2022/23 be noted;
- 2) the report of the Estate Infrastructure Task and Finish Group be circulated to Members prior to its consideration at the March meeting.

31. ACTION TRACKER REPORT

The Committee considered the latest Action Tracker report, set out at Agenda pages 81 to 84.

RESOLVED: That the Action Tracker report be noted.