

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 22 FEBRUARY 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.20 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Jim Frewin (Chair), Andrew Mickleburgh (Vice-Chair), David Cornish, Andy Croy, Graham Howe, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Stuart Munro and Alison Swaddle

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Morag Malvern, Alistair Neal, Ian Shenton and Sarah Kerr

Officers Present

Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist

1. STATEMENT BY THE CHAIR

Jim Frewin made the following statement:

“Members of the Committee will be aware that, at the start of the year, we received a number of actions and suggestions from a Scrutiny Improvement Review. We have worked hard to take on board the suggestions for improvement. The previous meeting was independently reviewed and we have now received feedback which suggests that we are moving in the right direction with Overview and Scrutiny. The next step is to hold an externally facilitated workshop for Overview and Scrutiny Members. This will be arranged at a suitable time for Members. In the meantime, a big thank you from me to everyone who took part in the Scrutiny Improvement Review”

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted by Peter Dennis and Adrian Mather.

Morag Malvern and Al Neal attended the meeting as substitutes.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 18 January 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

6. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

7. PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE

The Committee considered a report on proposed changes to the Waste Collection Service, set out at Agenda pages 13 to 26. The Committee also received two supplementary presentations providing more detail on specific issues raised by Members prior to the meeting.

Ian Shenton (Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure) attended the meeting supported by officers – Rebecca Bird, Richard Bisset, Oliver Burt (re3), Simon Dale, Fran Hobson and Emma Tilbrook (Eunomia).

Ian Shenton introduced the item, referring to the aims of the proposed changes – driving forward its commitment to waste minimisation, diversion, recycling and carbon reduction whilst helping to tackle the financial challenges facing the Council.

The report gave details of the proposal for the Council to move from its current arrangements of weekly refuse and recycling collections to an Alternate Weekly Waste (AWC) collection model for the Borough. The proposal was in line with WBC's environmental and climate commitments as a move to AWC would encourage residents to dispose of recyclable material more effectively as well as minimising overall waste generation. In summary, the proposal was that WBC would:

- move to a fortnightly collection of refuse in wheeled bins, ceasing the supply of blue bags;
- move to a fortnightly collection of dry recycling using the existing green reusable sacks, already available to residents;
- maintain the existing weekly food recycling collections and the paid-for garden waste collections.

The proposed changes would apply to kerbside properties only. Other arrangements would be put in place for flats and those properties without access to kerbside collection.

The report stated that, across England, many councils had been running AWC's for over 25 years. Nearly 80% of English councils already carried out AWC collections to boost recycling and restrict the amount of refuse produced. Neighbouring councils, Bracknell Forest and Reading moved to AWC some time ago. Bracknell Forest changed in 2007, increasing their recycling rate by 13% per annum. Reading changed in 2006, increasing their recycling rate by 10% per annum. Bracknell Forest had subsequently moved to three weekly collections.

The future of the Council's waste collection service had been considered initially by a cross-party working group. The working group had commissioned work on potential options from specialist organisations – WRAP and Eunomia. The modelling work had reduced an initial 12 options down to four. Two options were then subject to public consultation. The report stated that the two options would deliver savings and environmental improvements within the constraints of the existing waste collection contract. Option 1 would implement AWC for refuse and mixed dry recycling. Option 2 would implement three weekly collection of refuse with fortnightly collections for mixed dry recycling.

As a result of the modelling, benchmarking and two consultation exercises, the proposal was for Option 1, which would be submitted to the Executive in March 2023. The benefits of moving to AWC were summarised as:

- Savings upwards of circa £0.5m in 2024/25 rising to circa £1.5m in 2025/26;
- An increased recycling rate of circa 64%, up from 54% currently;
- A carbon saving of 2,400t CO₂ per annum – from reduced waste disposal, transport and fuel.

Officers gave details of the two consultation exercises used to inform the development of the proposed service changes. In October 2021, an initial consultation was launched to gain residents' high-level views on waste collection and recycling in the Borough. A more detailed consultation then followed between October and December 2022. The second consultation sought residents' views on the two final options outlined in the report. The key findings of the second consultation were:

- 74% of respondents liked, could accept or were neutral about fortnightly, refuse and recycling collections;
- 30% of respondents liked, could accept or were neutral about three weekly refuse and recycling collections;
- 78% of respondents liked, could accept or were neutral about wheeled bins for general rubbish.

Officers also confirmed that a full Equality Impact Assessment had been carried out in relation to the proposed changes. As a result, mitigations had been introduced for specific groups. For example, larger households would receive a larger wheeled bin and the assisted collection service would continue for residents who could not bring containers to the edge of the property.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

If wheeled bins were being introduced for refuse, why were they not being introduced for recycling as well? It was confirmed that the Government's position was not clear on the separation of recycling at the moment, so it was proposed to retaining the existing green sacks until the Government's position became clearer.

Operationally, would the proposed new arrangements be cheaper for Veolia? It was confirmed that contract efficiencies totalling £290k were included in the proposals (realised from 2025/26). The waste contract was due to be re-let in 2026. This would be a separate process. Discussions had already been held with Veolia about the proposed AWC arrangements. Negotiations about changes to the Waste contract, to reflect the new arrangements, had not yet commenced.

The cost of implementing the proposed option was estimated at £1.995m (funded from the Waste Equilisation Fund). Was there an additional cost to the Council in terms of lost interest on this money? Officers confirmed that there would be a loss of interest earned estimated at circa £300k over a 13 year period.

Why was it proposed to start buying the new bins in 2023 – there would be additional costs re storage, etc.? It was confirmed that the procurement process would start in 2023, with a long lead in time. The bins would be delivered in batches. Work was ongoing to identify potential storage/security options within the Council's own facilities in order to minimise any additional costs.

A key element of the proposed savings was behaviour change amongst residents. What evidence was there that the suggested 10% increase in recycling could be achieved? Officers commented that the projected increase was based on the experience of other councils. Benchmarking had taken place using similar councils to WBC who had implemented a similar change. The proposed service changes would be highlighted in an

extensive communications campaign across the Borough. It was likely that Government targets for recycling would increase, so it was important that the Council made progress on this issue.

The consultation information indicated that there were three under-represented groups. Did the Council hear the views of all sections of the community? It was confirmed that a postcard with details of the proposals was sent to every household in the Borough. A wide range of communication tools was used including social media and contact with specific community groups. It was suggested that a demographic analysis of the consultation responses be circulated to Members. It was also suggested that the communications plan supporting the new arrangements include the provision of information for people moving into the Borough – perhaps via the new WBC website.

Was the collection of glass a specific issue which needed to be addressed in the new arrangements? It was confirmed that the current arrangements worked well – residents were able and willing to use the Bring Banks. Collecting glass from the kerbside would have a significant financial impact.

In relation to the cross-party working group, what were the full range of options explored before the final two options were identified? Officers confirmed that there were originally 12 options which were assessed in terms of savings delivered, environmental benefits and carbon reductions. There was also an analysis of the “future proofing” of the service in relation to potential changes of Government policy and recycling targets. It was suggested that details of the original 12 options be circulated to Members for information.

If the new arrangements were approved and implemented, how would the impacts and savings be measured, monitored and reported? Officers commented that there were currently two KPIs which were reported as part of the quarterly performance reporting to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Executive. Further KPIs could be developed in order to measure specific aspects of the service. Progress would also be reported to this Committee as required by Members.

The report stated that the new arrangements would apply to properties with access to the kerbside. Of the 64,000 kerbside properties in the Borough, around 99% could accommodate a wheeled bin. Survey work would identify the actual number of properties that could not accommodate wheeled bins. It was suggested that details of the modelling be circulated to inform Members on the increased recycling performance required from kerbside properties to compensate for the properties which did not adopt the new arrangements. It was noted that specific measures would be introduced for residents in flats, such as the use of recycling champions and targeted campaigns for individual blocks.

In 2022, an increased target for food recycling was announced in order to save £350k. This was to be supported by a communications campaign. How successful had the campaign been and was there data available to demonstrate the increased levels of food recycling? It was suggested that evidence be circulated to Members to confirm the increased levels of food recycling and the impact of the communications campaign.

There was concern that the financial data in the Overview and Scrutiny report was not consistent with the data submitted to the Budget Council meeting on 16 February 2023. For example there was a difference of £200k in the assumed savings for 2024/25. There was also a difference in the residual amount of the Waste Equalisation Reserve following the proposed changes and a difference in the waste disposal costs set out in the Medium

Term Financial Plan. It was confirmed that the report to the Executive in March 2023 would contain accurate data on costs and savings and would be consistent with the Medium Term Financial Plan.

The report stated that the proposed new arrangements would deliver a carbon saving of 2,400t CO₂. How was this carbon saving calculated? Officers confirmed that the carbon saving was made up of reduced levels of waste disposal, transport and fuel costs. The projected carbon saving had been agreed with the Council's Climate Emergency officer team. It was suggested that a detailed breakdown of the carbon saving be circulated to Members and included in the report to the Executive.

It was confirmed that the report being considered by the Management Committee would form the basis of the report being submitted to the Executive in March 2023. Consequently the Recommendations box contained two sets of recommendations, one recommendation for the Management Committee and three recommendations for the Executive. The section headed "Recommendations to the Executive" did not apply to the Management Committee. The Management Committee was not being asked to recommend approval of the proposed changes set out in the report.

It was proposed by Pauline Jorgensen and seconded by Jim Frewin that a summary of the Committee's discussion be submitted to the Executive, alongside the officer report, together with the additional information and/or clarification requested by Members at the meeting.

Upon being put to the vote, the proposal was agreed.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Ian Shenton and the relevant officers be thanked for attending the meeting to give the presentation and answer Member questions;
- 2) a summary of the Committee's discussion be submitted to the Executive at its March 2023 meeting in order to inform its consideration and decisions on the proposed changes to the waste collection service;
- 3) the Executive also receive copies of the additional information requested by the Committee, viz:
 - the full Equality Impact Assessment;
 - a demographic analysis of the consultation responses;
 - details of the original 12 waste options reported to the cross-party working group;
 - details of the modelling on the increased volumes from kerbside properties required to compensate for the flats and other properties not adopting the new arrangements;
 - data showing the increased levels of food recycling in 2022/23 against targets and an assessment of the impact of the underpinning communications campaign;
 - confirmation that the costs and savings included in the Executive report are consistent with the costs and savings in the Medium Term Financial Plan;
 - a breakdown of the reported 2,400t CO₂ saving arising from the proposed new waste collection arrangements.

8. CUSTOMER EXCELLENCE PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Committee considered a presentation on the Customer Excellence Programme, set out at Agenda pages 27 to 34. Jackie Whitney and Sarah Zama attended the meeting to give the presentation and answer Member questions.

The presentation gave details of the aims of the Council's Customer Excellence Programme. These included:

- Customer experience – improved and consistent customer experience across services and ownership to be organisation-wide;
- WBC Website – new website which centred on the needs of customers;
- Customer Data & Insight – customer insight used proactively as part of a customer-centric strategy to drive continuous improvement across WBC;
- Customer Journey Management – easy access to services for all, focussed on customer need. Clear organisation-wide accountability for the success of customer journeys.

The presentation highlighted a number of activities over the next 3-6 months, including:

- bringing together Customer Excellence with the Community and Partnership Organisational Foundation Programme;
- developing Customer Experience key performance indicators, e.g. a service reporting dashboard for Housing;
- new website – design and develop new pages for the corporate website and six service-specific sites (to launch in July 2023);
- new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system – review existing digital customer journeys and build improved journeys (to launch in spring 2024);
- Customer Strategy – public consultation with a view to launch in early summer 2023 (report to the Executive in March 2023);
- customer journey mapping – Children's Services (SEND), Council Tax and Digital journeys ready for new CRM development;
- Library Offer – outputs of discovery phase and engagement with library teams/customers to inform a Community Strategy during 2023.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

In relation to customer accessibility, what steps were being taken to maximise the use of plain English in WBC services and publications? It was confirmed that three key principles were being applied: Care, Clarity and Confidence. Officers were working with CLASP to review the Council's communications with residents. The new Customer Charter was due to be launched in the summer of 2023.

In relation to the new website, it was important to ensure that map-based pages were kept up to date.

As with all IT projects, there was a risk of project failure. If the project failed, was there a recovery plan? If the project was a success, would it raise expectations in terms of additional resources? Officers confirmed that the risk of failure was mitigated by the strength of the team working on the project.

Were there safeguards in place to control the sharing of confidential data? It was confirmed that safeguards were built into the CRM system to ensure oversight of any privacy issues.

Was the system operationally critical? What safeguards were there in case of system failure? Officers confirmed that the CRM system was not the system used by WBC. For example, Social Care and Planning had their own systems. The new system would deal with high volume enquiries such as waste and recycling.

How had the voice of WBC staff been incorporated into the development of the new system? It was confirmed that staff workshops had been held together with customer mapping exercises.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Jackie Whitney and Sarah Zama be thanked for attending the meeting to give the presentation and answer Member questions;
- 2) Further updates on the Customer Excellence Programme be submitted to the Committee in due course;
- 3) The draft Customer Excellence Strategy be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee on 15 March 2023.

9. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORTS

The Committee considered the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Reports for 2022/23, set out at Agenda pages 35 to 56. As set out in the Council Constitution, each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees was required to submit an Annual Report to Council in March each year. The Annual Reports included an introduction to Overview and Scrutiny and a summary of the issues considered in 2022/23.

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Reports for 2022/23 be approved for submission to Council in March 2023.

10. CONSIDERATION OF THE CURRENT EXECUTIVE AND IEMD FORWARD PROGRAMMES

The Committee considered a copy of the Executive Forward Programme and the Individual Executive Member Decision Forward Programme, as set out on Agenda pages 57 to 68.

It was noted that the latest report on proposed increases to Off Street Parking charges would be considered by the Executive in March 2023.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Forward Programme and the Individual Executive Member Decision Forward Programme be noted.

11. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES

The Committee considered its forward work programme and that of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees as set out on Agenda pages 69 to 76.

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programmes for the remainder of 2022/23 be noted.

12. ACTION TRACKER REPORT

The Committee considered the latest Action Tracker report, as set out at Agenda pages 77 to 80.

RESOLVED: That the Action Tracker report be noted.