

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 22 MAY 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.43 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Chris Johnson (Chair), Peter Dennis (Vice-Chair), David Cornish, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Charles Margetts, Alistair Neal and Marie-Louise Weighill

Executive Members Present

Councillors: Ian Shenton (Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure)

Officers Present

Boniface Ngu Azeh (Senior Specialist (Drainage Flooding Advice)), Narinder Brar (Community Safety Manager), Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist), Andy Glencross (Head of Environmental Services) and Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist)

Others Present

Phiala Mehring (Vice Chair of the Local Flood Forum and Community representative on the Thames Regional Flood and Coast Committee)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Peter Dennis nominated Chris Johnson to be elected Chair for the 2023/24 municipal year. This was seconded by David Cornish.

RESOLVED That Chris Johnson be elected Chair for the 2023/24 municipal year.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR

David Cornish nominated Peter Dennis to be appointed Vice-Chair for the 2023/24 municipal year. This was seconded by Al Neal.

RESOLVED That Peter Dennis be appointed Vice Chair for the 2023/24 municipal year.

3. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Laura Blumenthal.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 March 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

6. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

7. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

8. ANNUAL FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 13 to 18, which provided an update on the works in relation to the Council's flood risk management responsibilities over the past 12 months.

The report outlined a number of actions that had been undertaken, including CCTV condition surveys, repair works to the highway drainage system, delivery of capital drainage schemes, revenue drainage maintenance works, smart drainage trials and funding applications to reduce the surface water flood risks.

Ian Shenton (Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure), Boniface Ngu (Flood Risk & Drainage Manager) and Andy Glencross (Head of Environmental Services) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

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

- Could Members be informed when successful works were completed? Officer response – Members were informed of works prior to each set of works starting. Follow-up emails could also be sent, and this would be looked at going forwards;
- It was noted that CCTV condition surveys had been undertaken on Barkham Road, whilst a capital project had been completed on Barkham Ride;
- It was noted that funding was available for the Church Lane project;
- Given the impact of climate change on the potential for flooding, were we recalibrating how we accounted for climate change, specifically when assessing planning applications, in particular where sites were located near tributaries such as the Emm Brook or Barkham Brook? Officer response – Officers insisted on a 40 percent accommodation for climate change when attenuation basins were designed. For example, if a basin of 10m would be sufficient today, officers would insist that it be built to 14m;
- Which manholes and drain covers were contained on the ArcGIS system? Officer response – This could be confusing, as when residents saw a manhole they usually assumed it was the responsibility of Wokingham Borough Council (WBC). Most surface water drainage sewers were operated by Thames Water, whilst some were managed by WBC. When a resident reported an issue to WBC, officers checked mapping software to confirm the owner, and directed the resident to Thames Water where it was found to be their responsibility;
- Was it possible to have all manholes mapped on WBC's ArcGIS system? Officer response – Whilst WBC's assets were mapped on the ArcGIS system, assets from other owners such as Thames Water were not mapped. The issue was that whilst other assets could be mapped in theory, updates may not be regular and become out of date as WBC would be relying on third party data sources. As such, other assets were not mapped, and officers manually checked manhole covers and forwarded issues to Thames Water if necessary;
- How many reports were received per year in relation to manhole covers? Officer response – A written answer would be provided on this matter;

- It was noted that officers would look into an issue raised in relation to water flowing intermittently near the Lower Earley peripheral road, towards the Black Boy Roundabout;
- What was the relationship between WBC and Thames Water, and could WBC carry out CCTV works on Thames Water assets and forward the issue onto Thames Water? Officer response – WBC had a good relationship with Thames Water, however officers couldn't always put as much pressure on them as might be desired. For example, there were situations where WBC owned gulleys fed into the Thames Water network, and Thames Water did not always act as quickly as WBC might when issues arose;
- Was there a legal framework where WBC could charge Thames Water for repair costs due to negligence? Officer response – This was not an option available to WBC;
- Were officers tracking areas which were impacted by flash flooding, to enable proactive flood risk management prior to weather forecasts being issued? Officer response – Officers routinely cleared gulleys to create capacity ahead of flash flood warnings, within the approved budget. The engineering solution to changing the capacity of the network was not simple and involved modifications to the Thames Water network. Such works could be very expensive and involve a considerable amount of planning and preparation;
- What was done where an issue was identified with an asset which was not owned by WBC? Officer response – Officers sought to identify the owner of faulty assets, informing them of the issue and providing them with a date when remedial works should be carried out by. Officers also informed the owners that should works not be carried out within a reasonable timeframe, WBC would carry out the works and claim back the costs;
- What more could be done to protect drainage and sewerage systems installed on new developments during construction, and were these routinely cleared prior to occupation of the development? Officer response – It was very difficult for WBC to pressure developers to maintain new network infrastructure during development, and the leverage available to WBC was that we would not adopt a new network until it was clear, operational, and up to standard;
- It was noted that the issue in relation to the works to Church Lane predated the Strategic Development Location (SDL);
- Were households required to install adequate drainage measures where they paved over green areas on their property to create a paved driveway? Officer response – Where planning permission was required, officers could condition driveway surfacing to be a permeable surface. However, these surfaces did need to be maintained to ensure that they remained permeable;
- Did the Council take measures to ensure that ponds did not dry out in hot conditions? Officer response – This depended on how the ponds were designed, as some were designed to only hold rain whilst it rained. Detention basins were constructed with clay as the base layer, to keep the permanent water level at a particular level. Any loss of water would be due to evaporation, and there was very little that could be done in such situations;

- Who was responsible for animals, such as fish, where ponds and lakes evaporated and lost water and oxygen levels during hot weather? Officer response – This was the responsibility of the land owner, and for example WBC installed aeration machines to protect stocks of large fish. However, such events were a natural process, as when fish thrived this could be at the detriment of other types of wildlife;
- It was noted that the reactive maintenance team was fully staffed, whilst the planning side of the service currently had a vacancy which was due to be recruited for;
- Phiala Mehring, Vice Chair of the Local Flood Forum and Community representative on the Thames Regional Flood and Coast Committee, was invited by the Chair to address the Committee. Phiala stated that in an ideal world there would be more of a focus on strategic flood risk management, and added that some assets could not manage with the impacts of climate change. Phiala suggested that officers continue to place bids for natural flood risk management funding wherever possible. Phiala stated that it may be useful for officers to assess where water could be stored throughout the Borough, and apply for funding to carry out such works. Phiala stated that Thames Water worked differently to WBC, as they were predominantly focussed on the volume of reports. As such, Phiala suggested that residents were made aware to ask all impacted neighbours to report issues to Thames Water get issues resolved as quickly as possible. Phiala commented that there was general appreciation when Local Authorities took on the management of SuDS, as when these were operated by management companies there was often a lack of detail regarding maintenance programmes;
- What was the view in relation to dredging rivers? Vice Chair of the Local Flood Forum and Community representative on the Thames Regional Flood and Coast Committee response – In general, dredging rivers created more issues than it solved, as rivers would require constant re-dredging going forwards. Effective dredging would also have to be carried out deep into the riverbed and very wide across the span of the river. Natural flood management aimed to slow the flow of a river and give existing assets a chance to cope. In addition, 'greening' spaces can allow for water to naturally be absorbed and retained in strategic areas.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Ian Shenton, Boniface Ngu, Andy Glencross and Phiala Mehring be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) Officers aim to send follow-up emails to Members once flood risk management works had been completed in their Wards;
- 3) A written answer be provided as to how many reports were received in relation to manhole covers;
- 4) Officers look into an issue raised in relation to water flowing intermittently near the Lower Earley peripheral road, towards the Black Boy Roundabout;
- 5) Members consider encouraging residents to report issues to Thames Water individually, rather than nominating a spokesperson to raise an issue, as Thames Water tended to be more focussed on the volume of reports.

9. COMBATING DRUGS PARTNERSHIP

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 19 to 26, which outlined detail in relation to the Combatting Drugs Partnership.

The report stated that the strategy was now at the implementation stage, and would need to be progressed with key partners such as Thames Valley Police, Probation, and Health organisations. It had been agreed that Community Safety Partnerships were best placed to take the implementation of local delivery forwards, as such partnerships would have well-established frameworks for partnership delivery in place. Local agreements for the delivery and governance arrangements were due to be finalised at the next meeting of the Community Safety Partnership in June 2023.

Ian Shenton (Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure) and Narinder Brar (Community Safety Manager) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

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

- It was noted that the large number of reports in relation to Earley Fields was due to drugs being found at the Loddon Valley police station when suspects were searched;
- It was noted that the reported figures represented reported incidents, rather than convictions or arrests;
- Were there any other opportunities to receive this data, as many of the recorded incidents would include a large portion of Reading which was served by Loddon Valley. Officer response – Officers had asked whether data could be provided from the police, anonymised, and filtered for the Borough, however this was a resourcing issue at present;
- Had there been any noticeable issues raised by adults in treatment as a result of pharmacy closures? Officer response – Not at present, as many treatment options were still in situ whilst others had been moved to other spaces;
- What could be done to better advertise treatment services within the Borough, and was there an indication of the success rate of treatments? Officer response – Relapse data and data in relation to people who had successfully stayed in treatment for 6 months or 12 months was recorded and reported nationally, which gave a good indication of success rates. Datasets specific to Wokingham could be provided to the Committee. There were plans in place to raise the awareness and access opportunities to treatment, There was still a level of stigma with regards to accessing help, and there were a large percentage of people who were functioning on a day to day basis who had addiction issues. Whilst it could be very hard to reach out to such people, access to online resources and treatments provided opportunities for people to access self help and signposting to other organisations;
- It was proposed that the Committee have oversight of the delivery group, which could be reported at a future meeting of the Committee;
- It was noted that the previous report had highlighted a significant spike in reports around the Christmas period. This was lifted from a police operation, and emphasised that there were particular periods of the year where people were more likely to be

drawn towards taking drugs, or relapse. It was critical to offer support and messaging during these periods;

- It was noted that officers would liaise with the police with regards to whether the operation carried out over the Christmas period was intelligence based or based on random checks;
- Was glue sniffing an issue within the Borough? Officer response – Whilst this had not been totally eradicated, instances were very low throughout the Borough. Other substances tended to be more widely used, whilst online spaces created a certain ease of access to some substances;
- What help was available to children whose parents were receiving treatment for drug or alcohol addiction? Officer response – Family therapy was available for children and family members of substance misuse incidents, to ensure the wellbeing and health needs of individuals was being catered for.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Ian Shenton and Narinder Brar be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) Datasets in relation to relapses, 6-month and 12-month successive treatments for the Borough be provided to the Committee;
- 3) Officers liaise with the police with regards to ascertaining whether the operation carried out over the Christmas period was intelligence based or based on random checks;
- 4) The Committee receive a further report towards the end of the 2023/24 municipal year, giving them oversight of the delivery group. Officers disaggregate figures to be Wokingham specific as best as was possible.

10. ACTIVE TRAVEL TASK AND FINISH GROUP - APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 27 to 32, which set out the recommendation to appoint five Members to the Active Travel Task and Finish Group for the 2023/24 municipal year.

It was requested that Officers include information on the status of the £600k of funding given for the LCWIP at the next 6-monthly meeting of the Group.

Members requested that information be provided as to whether the Government had a preference as to our suggested schemes, in addition to an update on the proposed Woodley cycle scheme. It was agreed that these updates could be circulated via email.

RESOLVED That Alistair Neal, Peter Dennis, Charles Margetts, Pauline Jorgensen and Marie Louise-Weighill be appointed to the Active Travel Task and Finish Group for the 2023/24 municipal year.

11. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered their work programme for the remainder of the 2023/24 municipal year, set out in agenda pages 33 to 36.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Callum Wernham be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) Officers arrange a conversation between the Chair and the S151 officer, to ascertain the appropriate meeting for the Committee to consider an update on the status of WBC's earmarked reserves;
- 3) The Arts and Culture Strategy update aim to be scheduled this municipal year;
- 4) Officers liaise with Highways officers and the Chair to schedule relevant reports to be considered at the September meeting of the Committee, for example in relation to car parking, KPIs of the service and volume of requests and highways maintenance;
- 5) Officers seek to arrange an update on the progress of the Local Plan Update in October 2023;
- 6) Officers liaise with the Chair with regards to arranging a report on the Planning process at WBC, including how development management, strategic planning and enforcement officers operated within the Borough;
- 7) Officers seek to re-arrange the work programme into sections split by topics, for example highways issues or community issues;
- 8) Officers explore the possibility to invite representatives of housing management companies to the Committee, to ensure fees were fair and proportional.

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