

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 6 FEBRUARY 2024 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.35 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Alistair Neal (Chair), Andrew Mickleburgh (Vice-Chair), Andy Croy, Catherine Glover, Chris Johnson, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Adrian Mather, Caroline Smith, Phil Cunnington and Graham Howe

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Rachel Bishop-Firth and Ian Shenton

Officers Present

Narinder Brar, Head of Enforcement and Safety
Steve Brown, Assistant Director, Enforcement and Safety
Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Louise Livingston, Assistant Director, Corporate Services

68. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Stuart Munro and Alison Swaddle.

Councillors Phil Cunnington and Graham Howe attended the meeting as substitutes.

69. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 January 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

70. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Phil Cunnington declared a personal interest in Item 73 – Recruitment and Retention Update – as he worked with a recruitment agency. However, there were no links to the Council's recruitment and retention activities.

71. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

72. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

73. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION UPDATE

The Committee considered a presentation, set out on Agenda pages 15 to 28, which provided an update on recruitment and retention issues at the Council.

Rachel Bishop-Firth (Executive Member for Equalities, Inclusion and Fighting Poverty) attended the meeting to answer Member questions, supported by Louise Livingston (Assistant Director Corporate Services).

The presentation reminded Members that a new Human Resources team had been established in November 2022. The team had developed strong relationships with the Council's Corporate Leadership Team and established a Workforce Programme in order to review all elements of human resources and organisational development. In addition, a dedicated resourcing team had been set up which was delivering improved value for money and a more professional approach to tackling specific skills shortages.

The presentation highlighted a number of improvements relating to recruitment and retention, including:

- Stable levels of staff turnover and a number of initiatives aimed at retaining talent;
- A new recruitment process resulting in increased application levels and savings on the use of recruitment agencies;
- A new microsite for senior management recruitment;
- A number of staff retention projects including employment projects, review of policies (including absence management), learning and development and health and wellbeing;
- Developing the Council's Graduate Academy;
- Utilising the apprenticeship levy to upskill existing staff.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points and questions.

The increased level of professionalism relating to recruitment was welcomed. Were officers monitoring the cost per hire? It was confirmed that officers were starting to introduce this type of monitoring.

The saving delivered in relation to more effective recruitment was estimated at £129k. What percentage was this of the total expenditure? It was confirmed that, at present, the budget came from individual service areas, so it was difficult to provide an exact figure. Savings were achieved through greater use of social media and Linked In. Job adverts in the Guardian and Municipal Journal were limited to targeted posts. It was noted that the budget for agency staff also sat within individual service areas.

What proportion of staff stayed on the books after the end of their probation period? It was confirmed that the proportion was high. Overall, turnover rates had decreased.

What steps were being taken to recruit and retain women, for example through an improved childcare offer? It was confirmed that increased flexibility and support for women was one of the issues being explored in the Modern Workforce programme (under development).

The list of staff retention projects did not refer to flexible working. What was the Council's approach? It was confirmed that the Council currently had a flexible working policy in place. This would also be addressed in the Modern Workforce programme.

In September 2023, Children's Services social workers had attended the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss recruitment and retention issues. One of the issues raised was the lack of flexible car parking spaces near to the Shute End offices. What steps were being taken to address this? It was confirmed that discussions were ongoing with relevant officers to address this issue. Officers were also looking at staff pay in specific areas where skills shortages resulted in the use of agency staff.

In relation to apprentices, what proportion of apprentices went on to become full-time employees? An example was given of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) which was a support programme for newly qualified social workers. Of 10 ASYE staff, nine had moved into full-time employment.

What steps were being taken to address any organisational culture issues which may result in staff leaving the Council? It was confirmed that a staff survey would be carried out later in 2024 which would provide feedback on any organisational culture issues which needed to be addressed. Steps were also being taken to improve the process for staff exit interviews.

How did the Council promote team working and positive mental health? Some organisations used “speak up” champions who were able to represent the views of staff who did not wish to raise issues of concern. It was confirmed that the Council was working to develop the wellbeing offer to staff e.g. through the Employee Assistance Programme and mental health first aiders. Suggestions and information on good practice elsewhere was welcomed.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Rachel Bishop-Firth and Louise Livingston be thanked for attending the meeting to give the presentation and answer Member questions;
- 2) the update on recruitment and retention issues at WBC be noted;
- 3) the Committee supports initiatives for working people with caring responsibilities, to help them to gain and retain employment with the Council;
- 4) the Committee supports the greater use of information, such as cost-per-hire, as part of the recruitment and retention data submitted to the Personnel Board.

74. AIR QUALITY

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 29 to 148, which provided an update on air quality monitoring and reporting in the Borough.

Councillor Ian Shenton (Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure) attended the meeting, supported by officers, to present the report and answer Member questions.

The report stated that the Council had a statutory duty to monitor air quality and identify areas where the national air quality objectives were not being met. Air quality in three locations had been identified as not meeting an objective, resulting in the declaration of three Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs). The pollutant of concern giving rise to the AQMAs was the annual mean Nitrogen Dioxide concentration.

The report stated that Annual Status Reports (ASRs) were required to be completed and submitted to the Department of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). The latest status report (June 2023) provided data up to the end of 2022. In 2022 there were no exceedances of the annual mean nitrogen dioxide objective either within or outside the AQMAs. Air quality had improved in the Borough to such an extent that it was considered appropriate that two out of the three AQMAs (Twyford town centre and the M4 motorway) be revoked. AQMA revocations were programmed to occur in the spring of 2024, subject to agreement of the Executive.

The report confirmed that local authorities with AQMAs were required to have Air Quality Action Plans in place and to keep these under review. The current air quality action plan was dated March 2018 and was overdue for completion of a formal review and update. The report recommended that an overview of Air Quality in the Borough be submitted to

the Committee in late summer/early autumn 2024, in order that the latest information could be considered shortly after the Annual Status Report was produced.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points and questions.

As the only ongoing AQMA was Wokingham town centre, what steps were being taken to improve air quality in that location? It was confirmed that officers would be reviewing the situation in specific parts of Wokingham town centre. The Council's wider policies would also have an ongoing impact, e.g. the LCWIP, Local Transport Plan 4, Bus Service Improvement Plan and the Local Plan Update,

Did the Council monitor air quality at industrial sites adjacent to residential properties? One site was mentioned which caused concern for local residents. It was confirmed that the site in question had been checked and was not a cause for concern for officers. Officers were happy to discuss specific sites with Members.

Would air quality monitoring continue across the Borough? It was confirmed that officers continued to carry out monitoring at specific sites, as and when necessary. Some old locations had been dropped with some new locations added. Similarly, officers monitored new planning applications and would consider new locations within the context of a limited budget.

What factors had led to the improvement of air quality in the Borough? It was confirmed that, post Covid, more residents were working from home which meant less traffic on the roads. There was also a growth in the number of electric vehicles and reduced emissions from petrol and diesel vehicles. Other council areas in Berkshire, such as Bracknell, Reading and West Berkshire, were also reducing the number of AQMAs. It was confirmed that data on air quality improvements in other areas could be shared with Members.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Ian Shenton, Narinder Brar, Steve Brown and Emma Choules be thanked for attending the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions;
- 2) the Committee note that air quality monitoring in 2022, indicated compliance with the nitrogen dioxide annual mean objective at all monitoring locations within existing Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) in the Borough and at all monitoring locations outside of the AQMA;
- 3) the Committee note that, due to ongoing compliance with the nitrogen dioxide annual mean objective it is anticipated that two out of the three Air Quality Management Areas will be revoked in spring 2024, i.e. Twyford Town Centre and M4 motorway.
- 4) the Committee note that one AQMA will be retained – Wokingham Town Centre;
- 5) the Committee note that a formal update of the Air Quality Action Plan is required and will be progressed in 2024;
- 6) a further update on Air Quality in the Borough be submitted to the Committee in late summer/early autumn 2024;

- 7) the Council be recommended to develop a strategy for communicating updates to stakeholders (residents, businesses, community groups, etc.) in the AQMAs;
- 8) officers be recommended to develop a mechanism for identifying appropriate new locations where air quality data can be collected, including data on particulates.

75. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMMES 2024-25

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 149 to 154, which set out details of the process for developing the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programmes for 2024/25.

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 Community Vision, Council Plan and major policy or service changes. It aimed to:

- reflect local needs and concerns;
- prioritise topics for scrutiny which have the most impact or benefit;
- involve local residents and stakeholders;
- be flexible enough to respond to new or urgent issues.

Each year the Committee approved work programmes for itself and the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The report considered the process for identifying potential items for inclusion in the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programmes for 2024/25. This included consideration of suggestions from residents, Town and Parish Councils and WBC Members.

The report stated that the 2024/25 work programmes would be finalised at the Committee's meeting on 6 March 2024.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the process and timeline for developing the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programmes for 2024/25, as set out in the report, be approved;
- 2) the process for public consultation on the draft work programmes be approved;
- 3) the 2024/25 Work Programmes be finalised at the Committee's meeting on 6 March 2024.

76. EXECUTIVE FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a copy of the Executive Forward Programme as set out on Agenda pages 155 to 162.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Forward Programme be noted.

77. O&S COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES 2023-24

The Committee considered its forward work programme and that of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees as set out on Agenda pages 163 to 174.

Members raised the following points:

In addition to the annual Budget Scrutiny process, the Committee consider the development of ongoing Budget Scrutiny during the year.

The draft update of the Council Constitution be submitted to the Committee for consideration.

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny work programmes, as amended, be approved.

78. ACTION TRACKER

The Committee considered the regular Action Tracker report, set out at Agenda pages 175 to 180.

RESOLVED: That the Action Tracker report be noted.