

Public Document Pack Agenda Item 2

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 13 July 2020

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 13 July 2020

Present:

Cllr D E Hughes (Chair)
Cllr M A Whitehand (Vice-Chair)

Cllr S Hussain	Cllr J E Bond
Cllr R Mohammed	Cllr G G Chrystie
Cllr C Rana	Cllr J R Sanderson

Also Present: Camilla Edmiston (WBC Community Safety Manager), Gareth John (WBC Solicitor) Ray Morgan (WBC Chief Executive), Oli Walker (WBC Anti-social Behaviour Officer) and Detective Inspector David Bentley (Surrey Police).

Absent: Councillors M I Raja

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Julie Fisher and Councillor Raja.

2. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Monday, 15 June 2019 were received, noting the comment below.

Woking Football Club & Associated Developments Task Group

The Chair confirmed that a request by the task group for resources to be available should the task group wish to take external advice was denied, and that this was then omitted from the terms of reference. It was confirmed that Mr Morgan was not aware of this at the time.

3. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES**

Community Infrastructure Levy

Following a query raised, Ray Morgan, Chief Executive Woking Borough Council, confirmed that the Joint Committee had delegated authority to oversee the administration of the whole CIL money.

Since the last Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, the Chairman had received various correspondence regarding the neighbourhood CIL process, from member's and residents, to which Mr Amoako confirmed he had started work on the flowchart detailing

the process of requesting CIL funding and would feedback any comments to the next meeting of the Joint Committee.

Finance Task Group

Following Cllr Sanderson's request for the Finance Task Group to conduct a review of the Council's finances following the COVID-19 pandemic, it was confirmed that the item had been added to the agenda of the next Finance Task Group meeting.

4. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business to discuss.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

6. SURREY POLICE - INTRODUCTION OF DETECTIVE INSPECTOR & ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed Detective Inspector David Bentley from Surrey Police, who provided a presentation to the Committee on anti-social behaviour issues within the borough, the work undertaken by Surrey Police and their visions for the future.

The current focus for Woking Police was community engagement, problem solving and partnership working. On a positive note Inspector Bentley recorded only three incidents of ASB within the last month, and discussed the tools used to combat ASB in Woking. The need for accurate and detailed information was encouraged when reporting incidents, to allow Woking Police to allocate resources effectively. There had been increased presence online and in the community to encourage engagement with residents.

Inspector Bentley reported significant uplift in Neighbourhood Team resources, and praised the close working partnership with the Community Safety team at Woking.

Members praised the positive work of Woking Police, following questions raised Inspector Bentley explained that partnership working is extremely effectively and discussed the importance of issues interlinked with both the work undertaken at Woking Borough Council and by the Police.

When discussing the causes of ASB, Inspector Bentley advised he would share the "Public Health Approach in Policing" document, which drew attention to mental health and focuses on deprivation of residents. Another issue raised was that those showing signs of ASB were from other areas outside the borough, but were however meeting in areas such as West Byfleet unfortunately, this was currently under investigation to help combat the issue. The positive work of the drone was also noted, which had helped on various cases.

The Chairman thanked Inspector Bentley for his time and presentation.

7. WOKING ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY AND DELEGATED AUTHORITY REQUEST OSC20-014

Mr Morgan introduced the final version of the Anti Social Behaviour Policy and Delegated Authority Request report that was scheduled to go to the Executive on 16 July, and had been sent to the committee as a supplement. The details of the changes were also sent to members of the Committee prior to the meeting, noting no changes were made to the policy itself.

Mr Morgan explained that the act required an update to align with the legislation with the work that was already put into practise by officers. The updated policy would help to manage expectations and provide a clear direction to residents.

An issue of a possibly unregistered Home of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) property was discussed, it was advised that the landlord would need to be contacted in first instance, however to details would be shared with officers after the meeting to see if there was anything that could be done.

Concern was then raised by a member over the length of time taken to address noise issues within their ward, Mr Morgan praised the work of the Environmental Health team and was unaware of a complaint raised over this matter, and requested examples to be sent to him.

The report detailed that the delegated powers would sit with Mr Morgan as Chief Executive Officer of Woking Borough Council, as opposed to Julie Fisher due to her status and that lawyers were there to advise on the law. The common practise for the Chief Executive to work alongside the Police on such matters was explained noting that decisions such as closure notices would be approached in consultation with Woking Police and each situation would be reviewed on a case by case basis, and there were escalation routes that could be used for if someone were to breach a notice, as an example.

Multi-agency partnership work was also being implemented, however not through this policy, that would look to assist with mental health and substance abuse concerns, and raising awareness with colleagues who have safeguarding experience.

The Community Safety Partnership Plan that was due to be received by Committee in March, however the meeting was cancelled due to the pandemic. The rolling plan was still in draft form as the action plan was strained as a result of COVID-19 and therefore would be reviewed next year. Members were advised that the plan was available to them should they wish to view it.

Following further discussion, Mr Morgan agreed to amend the wording under recommendation ii) at the meeting of the Executive on Thursday 16 July 2020.

RESOLVED

That the comments of the Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be reported to the Executive.

8. PRE-SCRUTINY: CORPORATE PEER REVIEW FEEDBACK - OSC20- 018 (REPORT TO FOLLOW)

Mr Morgan introduced the papers and noted the background to the Peer Challenges which were introduced when the regime of Corporate Assessments ceased, the Peer Challenge then occurred every three to four years independently reviewing the Councils arrangement and proposals. The report detailed a positive outlook on the Council and also includes areas to improve on which would be expected from the review.

Members welcomed the report and discussed the recommendations.

The length of time it had taken for members to be able to view the Corporate Peer Review Feedback was raised, it was explained that the recommendations were reviewed by Corporate Management Group in January, however due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it unfortunately was not a priority during the reaction phase. Mr Morgan apologised for the delay in distribution. The report had recently been shared with Group Leaders but was not circulated more widely.

Councillor Chrystie added that he felt there should be an ongoing review of the Councils arrangements and proposals rather than every three to four years, and also suggested that papers should always begin in Part I and only use the Part II function when most necessary, for a short period of time, to provide as much transparency as possible. Mr Morgan explained the importance of Part II and that Woking Borough Council comply with the law and only put items in Part II when needed, and requested for Councillor Chrystie to continue the discussion outside the meeting and detail the items he was referring to.

Concern was expressed over the future succession plans for three members of the Corporate Management Group, noting that due to their age they would likely retire within the next three years, the possible effects of this on the Council was discussed. Mr Morgan advised that the planning process had been put on hold due to COVID, but there would be a series of member engagement sessions to determine members ambitions for the future, and would be picked up again in the Autumn.

The Chairman and Councillor Bond felt that political leadership was not mentioned and would like to see it addressed with a recommendation.

Recommendation IV

Members encouraged the citizens panel to consult on developments and budget processes. Following questions raised around the details of the panel, Mr Morgan advised how the panel would work and that it would be made up of approximately 1000 Woking residents to represent the borough.

Recommendation V

Members suggested that recommendation V needs to be strengthened, possibly by adding a summary to the Green Book. Mr Morgan advised that the survey would take place to ensure needs were met and were able to understand the Councils financial position. The Chairman felt that the survey should be circulated wider than members.

Recommendation VI

Members suggested more openness with Council subsidiary companies.

Recommendation VII

Following discussion Mr Morgan explained that the Director of Finance regularly reviews the budget setting and accounting, and that the debts are based on fixed long term assets. Councillor Sanderson would like to be a part of how the recommendation, if taken forward, and would discuss further with the Director of Finance.

Recommendation IX

Some members felt that the recommendation of conducting an internal audit review would not address the point raised in the LGA report. Members felt the training on Overview and Scrutiny function and responsibilities that was provided by SE Employers was excellent. This had been provided at the outset of this Committee commencing and therefore very timely. Mr Morgan added that Internal Audit would be the most suitable way to review the resources available to enable Overview and Scrutiny to work effectively.

To clarify Mr Morgan explained that the recommendation was to review the resources not the function of the Committee, which was set out in the Constitution, the wording of the recommendation would be amended and explained at the Executive meeting on 16 July.

The Committee also discussed the budget that was previously set for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Chairman suggested inviting representatives from the Corporate Review team to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in November to provide a follow up discussion and a review of recommendations, a year on from the original review. Mr Morgan advised that the request may be difficult due to the current situation and short timeframe, and that the Peer Review team would usually come back in 12 to 18 months to review the progress made with the recommendations. However Mr Morgan suggested he could look into liaising with the LGA on the matter if the Chairman felt it was appropriate given the difficulties previously discussed.

Recommendation XI

Some members felt that the new technology that had been put into place was not a long term tool that should be used, Mr Morgan explained that the technology had been necessary to protect members and employees during the COVID-19 outbreak and if possible would be utilised moving forward, this was not to suggest it was the most appropriate method for all meetings. The new software had many benefits such as providing increased communication in crucial departments, and flexible remote working for employees had increased work activity.

The Chairman advised that further comments on the report should be fed back to herself, and Mr Morgan also requested the comments from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee were fed back to him as soon as possible in order to assist with the running of business due to the short time frame between this Committee and the Executive on Thursday 16 July. The Chair offered to collate the feedback.

RESOLVED

That the comments of the Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be reported to the Executive.

9. NEXT STEPS REGARDING THE WOKING FOOTBALL CLUB & ASSOCIATED DEVELOPMENTS TASK GROUP REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OSC20-016 & OSC20-019

The Chairman introduced the paper that provided information on the recommendations from the previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The memo detailed the next steps in progressing the recommendations from the Woking Football Club & Associated Developments Task Group, including collaboration with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Standards and Audit Committee.

[Please note the error on page 22 in the last paragraph that should read Friday 19 June.]

The paper detailed some similarities that were identified from the Independent Sheerwater Scrutiny Panel from 2015/16, and would be used to support the report going to Council on 30 July.

RESOLVED

That the comments of the Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be reported to Council.

10. WORK PROGRAMME

It was noted that the members were looking forward to receiving an update on the work undertaken in private by the Finance Task Group.

It was suggested to have an updated paper on the Flood Alleviation Plan as members were concerned about the plans put in place ahead of the flooding predicted for later in 2020. However due to the economic climate, all items in the Councils spending ambition were currently under review at this stage in order to protect services, and would be discussed at the Finance Task Group.

RESOLVED

That the Work Programme be noted.

11. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING INFORMATION

Following questions raised by Cllr Bond, it was agreed to email Mr Morgan detailing the concerns discussed in regards to the Housing and ThamesWey Budgets, with the response being shared with the Committee and Finance task Group if necessary.

12. TASK GROUP UPDATES

The Chairman thanked Cllr Johnson on the Economic Development and Housing Task Group updates, which the Committee reviewed. The Housing Task Group update was not included in the agenda as it was scheduled to go to the Committee on 14 September however as it was already drafted, the Chairman read out the report. For informational purposes, the report would be circulated with the minutes.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and ended at 10.24 pm

Chairman: _____

Date: _____

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 13 JULY 2020

HOUSING TASK GROUP UPDATE

Executive Summary

Councillor Ian Johnson, Chairman of the Housing Task Group, provided an update from the last meeting of the Task Group that was held on 7 July 2020:

“On 7 July 2020 the task group held its first meeting since November, having cancelled a meeting in March due to the pandemic.

The group received an update on the arrangements made and the activities undertaken by the Housing Service in light of the pandemic. This had been a challenging time for the service, with government directions on the provision of accommodation for rough sleepers co-inciding with the closure of most hotels in the UK. Working with York Road Project the Council secured space at Woking Hotel and Travelodge, along with the conversion of the HG Wells centre with bedroom pods. At the time of the meeting there were 33 rough sleepers in these spaces.

In addition, there was a need to house a significant increase of people presenting as homeless due to sofa surfers having to leave their accommodation or relationship breakdowns. In conjunction with the York Road Project, work was ongoing to find sustainable housing and support pathways to reduce dependency on hotels and the key to this was securing long term affordable housing across the borough.

A paper noting the current housing data and needs was shared with the task group ahead of a discussion by the Overview and Scrutiny committee to review aspects of housing. The data showed there were currently 1,110 applicants on the housing register, of which 618 were in band D (i.e. less urgent need) which would involve a wait of over 10 years, and of which 41% were in need of 1 bed and 34% seeking 2 bed accommodation. Families requiring larger housing have a longer wait than those requiring smaller units. At the end of May 187 households were in some form of emergency accommodation. Further data would be added to the paper prior to the Overview and Scrutiny meeting and it was recognised that we would need to avoid duplication of work between it and the task group. There was a discussion concerning a housing needs survey which would give a broader picture across all housing sectors not simply the housing register. Given the amount of work currently taking place this wasn't considered to be an urgent priority but would be helpful in due course.

Housing policies were being updated and the next focus would be on the Housing Strategy which was last produced in 2011, with a view to approval in 2021. The task group receives a regular update of affordable housing in the pipeline which provides an opportunity to share outstanding issues and progress.

The annual report of New Vision Homes showed they had clearly gone to great lengths to support tenants despite changes in management and a high turnover of staff. Overall performance had been maintained, including estate inspections and property repairs. There had been calls to vulnerable tenants which had generated excellent feedback and tenant engagement continued. The sustainment of tenancies remains a key objective. NVH noted the significant collaborative and flexible work with WBC especially with the challenges faced in recent months.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 13 JULY 2020

The task group recognised the enormous contribution by the housing team to support residents at these most difficult of times.”

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

RESOLVE That the update be noted

Background Papers: None.

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