

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 21 January 2019

Present:

Cllr I Johnson (Chairman)

Cllr Mrs H J Addison Cllr M I Raja
Cllr G G Chrystie Cllr J E Bond
Cllr K Howard

Also Present: Councillors A-M Barker and Mrs B Hunwicks, Jacqui Hutton, Woking Borough Council Solicitor, Matthew Smyth and Richard Bisset from Joint Waste Solutions.

Absent: Councillors S Hussain, R Mohammed, C Rana and D E Hughes.

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Monday, 26 November 2018 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D E Hughes, S Hussain and R Mohammed.

3. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business to discuss.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

5. WASTE MANAGEMENT CONTRACT REVIEW

The Chairman introduced Richard Bisset and Matthew Smyth from Joint Waste Solutions (JWS). Mr Bisset and Mr Smyth explained that they were the client between Woking Borough Council and Amey Waste Contractor, which covered the boroughs of Mole Valley, Surrey Heath and Elmbridge as well as Woking. They provided a presentation on the overview of complaints received and waste performance updates which included statistics on waste recycled, waste composted and missed bins etc. The Committee also reviewed JWS Improvement Plan, which focused on safety and well-being for employees and cross boundary working.

The Chairman thanked Mr Bisset and Mr Smyth for the presentation and the Committee were happy with the statistics and noted the improvements that had already been actioned.

Questions were raised on the topics of disposable nappies, collection dates over Christmas and contaminated recycling. Mr Bisset confirmed that details of the collection dates over the festive period had been sent to each household but could have been updated online to avoid confusion and JWS would take that approach next year. Councillor Mrs B Hunwicks, Portfolio Holder for Environmental and Well Being Services, added that any residents who were confused by the different bins were educated to avoid further rejected loads of contaminated recycling. JWS had resolved any teething issues since the beginning of the contract, though residents' had raised concerns over the placement and access of private and communal bins. Mr Bisset mentioned that those issues tended to be investigated and resolved on the day they were made aware of them.

The desire to be more sustainable with the waste being disposed of was expressed by the Committee. Mr Smyth then explained the producer responsibility aspect of the recently published Strategy, noting that the Strategy would be reviewed in the coming months. The strategy would require producers to pay for the disposal costs of the waste element from their products, thereby encouraging them to use more recyclable materials.

Councillor M I Raja raised a concern in regards to fly-tipping along Walton Road, which would be re-directed to Mr Bisset after the meeting to resolve.

The Chairman suggested an annual Update and Review with JWS moving forward, which was supported by the Committee.

6. WORK PROGRAMME OSC19-001

Councillor A M Barker suggested adding an Environmental Health Review to the Work Programme for the meeting of the Committee in March 2019, which would include information on zero rated food outlets and the process involved.

RESOLVED

That the Work Programme be noted.

7. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING INFORMATION

The Committee reviewed the Green Book, and it was noted that more information on investments, details on contracts and approved projects would be useful.

A point was raised following a recent news article about incorrect valuations of shopping centres and it was suggested that Woking Borough Council's assets should be re-valued to ensure an accurate valuation. The Chairman advised that the suggestion would be put forward to the Finance Task Group to discuss and review.

8. OVERVIEW OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED - BIENNIAL UPDATE OSC19-006

Jacqui Hutton, Solicitor, introduced the Overview of Complaints Biennial Update report and, following a query on the variation in timeframes, explained that it was due to different resources measuring in different time periods and the need to provide the most up to date information. However it was agreed that the next report would be based on a 6 month period.

It was added that Jacqui would follow up on any outstanding complaints and report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee along with details of the contract and the level of work covered by New Vision Homes.

The Chairman pointed out some of the downward trends in complaints and the most common complaints reason, which was “poor standard of work” and suggested it would be useful to invite New Vision Homes to a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for a review. The Members of the Committee agreed and it was suggested that it would be useful to confirm the definition of a complaint and how the complaints were received.

9. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION OSC19-005

Jacqui provided an update on the newly launched Freedom of Information (FOI) system, which had gone live on 1 October 2018. Jacqui detailed the functions of the system and noted that Woking Borough Council had received 241 FOI requests to date.

Councillors requested a detailed report of the FOIs received. However due to the volume of FOIs and data protection regulations, it was recommended by Officers that it would be more suitable to review the performance, looking at elements such as the quantity sent to each department, the most common responses and the number that had breached. It was requested that any FOI complaints submitted to the Information Commissioners Officer (ICO) would be recorded in the Overview of Complaints Report.

It was also noted that information commonly sought through FOIs, on topics such as Council Tax and Business Rates would be published online, therefore reducing the amount of time Officers spent responding to the FOI requests.

Councillor Chrystie referred to a historic FOI which had been submitted to the Information Commissioner and sought assurances that the new system had taken into account the recommendations from the ICO. The Committee was advised that the newly established system had recently been successfully audited by Internal Audit. To demonstrate the capabilities of the system, Councillors were invited contact Jacqui Hutton or Hanna Taylor (Democratic Services) to run through the system.

10. IMPACTS OF BREXIT ON THE COUNCIL

The Chairman advised the Members of the Committee that the report thought to be published by Surrey County Council had actually been a response to an FOI request. A report on the possible impacts of Brexit on Surrey was therefore not available. It was noted that until the Government reach a decision, it would be difficult to prepare for future impacts. In the meantime the priority remained to continue helping the residents of Woking Borough.

11. REVIEW OF CONFIDENTIALITY AND PART II ITEMS OSC19-002

[NOTE: In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor I Johnson declared a non-pecuniary interest in any items under which Westfield Avenue was discussed, arising from his wife's position as the Chairman of Woking Football Club. The interest was such that speaking and voting are permissible.]

Jacqui introduced the briefing paper and referred to the Constitution and the information it provided about exempt items.

The Councillors voiced concerns over the number of items which were classified as Part II, the length of time an item was kept confidential and that, within the last six months, Woking Borough Council had the highest number of exempt items in Surrey. It was noted by the Chairman that Woking had been very pro-active in developing the Borough which naturally resulted in more Part II items due to the negotiation of contracts and sensitive data.

Councillors suggested that an item could be reviewed after being in Part II for a particular length of time and that some information could be in Part I, with only the most sensitive information kept in Part II.

12. TASK GROUP UPDATES

Housing Task Group Update

The Chairman updated the Committee on the recent work undertaken by the Housing Task Group, which included the need to redevelop Claremont Avenue and the demand to get empty properties in operation again.

Finance Task Group Update

The Committee reviewed the Finance Task Group Update, and Councillor Chrystie provided information about the work on the Community Infrastructure Levy and how it would work at ward level. It was noted that it was being discussed in various Groups and the need to synchronise the work was identified.

It was also advised that more detail would be required in the next update from the Finance Task Group in order to provide an accurate description of the meetings that had taken place.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and ended at 8.59 pm

Chairman: _____

Date: _____