

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 2 JULY 2013

Councillors Present: Peter Argyle (Substitute) (In place of Mike Johnston), Jeff Beck, Brian Bedwell (Chairman), Jeff Brooks (Vice-Chairman), Dave Goff, Alan Macro, Gwen Mason, Tim Metcalfe, Andrew Rowles, Tony Vickers, Virginia von Celsing, Quentin Webb, Emma Webster and Laszlo Zverko

Also Present: Mel Brain (Service Manager - Housing Strategy and Operations) and Rachael Wardell (Corporate Director - Communities), Councillor Roger Croft (Strategy & Performance, Housing, ICT & Corporate Support, Legal and Strategic Support), David Lowe (Scrutiny & Partnerships Manager), Andy Mancey (Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service), Bryan Morgan (Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service), Charlene Myers (Democratic Services Officer) and Elaine Walker (Principal Policy Officer)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Marcus Franks and Councillor Mike Johnston

Councillor(s) Absent: Councillor Garth Simpson

PART I

15. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 May 2013 and 21 May 2013 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment:

- Minutes of the meeting held 21 May 2013, Page 4, Item 8: 'agree' would be amended to 'agreed'.

16. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

17. Actions from previous Minutes

The Commission received an update on actions from the previous meeting and raised the following comments:

Paragraph 2.13: Councillor Brian Bedwell queried the suggestion that there had been no requests for placement at Secondary Schools in Wiltshire. Some Members of the Commission were aware of a case which they expected would have been included in the report.

Paragraph 2.15 point 3: Councillor Tim Metcalfe advised that the Elvian School, Reading, planned to move to a free school status and suggested West Berkshire would experience a reduction in the number of prospective pupils crossing the border as a result. Members were advised that West Berkshire and Reading Borough Council Officers planned to discuss the possible avenues that might secure financial contributions for the provision of school places in the east of the district.

18. West Berkshire Forward Plan August 2013 to November 2013

The Commission considered the West Berkshire Forward Plan (Agenda Item 5) for the period covering August 2013 to November 2013.

Resolved that the Forward Plan be noted.

19. Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Work Programme

The Commission considered its work programme for 2013/14.

Councillor Quentin Webb drew the Commission's attention to the Adult Social Care Eligibility Criteria task group, OSMC/12/143 and advised that Councillor Dominic Boeck's participation ceased following his appointment as Executive Member. The Commission were informed that a public consultation was underway and planned to conclude on 7 July 2013 after which the task group would review the information gathered.

Councillor Webb informed the Commission that item OSMC/12/135, Annual Target Setting had concluded and recommendations were incorporated into the strategy for submission to Management Board and the Executive for consideration and approval.

Councillor Tony Vickers drew the Commission's attention to the suggested scrutiny topic of the Newbury town centre parking policy. Members were advised that the topic was discussed at the Resource Management Working Group, during which it was agreed that the topic would be submitted to the OSMC for consideration. Councillor Vickers explained that the topic was considered an asset management issue and a concern for local residents. The suggested scope of scrutiny was to explore the utilisation of Council owned parking spaces and opportunities to extend their use for local residents. Councillor Vickers and Councillor Mason provided the Commission with examples of new developments in Newbury that did not have designated parking spaces, therefore, which further reduced the parking availability for residents in the area.

Councillor Vickers raised the concern that current reviews underway by the Business Improvement District (BID) and Council Officers considered related to parking matters for commuters and visitors to Newbury. Councillor Jeff Brooks advised the Commission that it had been ten years since the last review of and suggested a holistic review was required.

The Commission discussed the scope of the reviews underway by the BID and Council Officers respectively and recommended that they conclude their activity before the item was considered for scrutiny.

Resolved that the item was added to the forward plan for consideration following completion of the existing reviews.

Councillor Vickers drew the Commission's attention to the suggested scrutiny topic of asset disposal involving the Community Right to Bid. Councillor Vickers advised that the item proposed to explore the decision making policy. Councillor Vickers held that the Community Right to Bid process required an opportunity for public review and without this the decision lacked transparency.

Resolved that a report detailing the decision process should be provided at the next OSMC meeting.

20. Items Called-in following the Executive on 9 May 2013

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The Commission considered the report calling in the decision to adopt the Homelessness Review and Strategy 2013-2018.

The Homelessness Review and Strategy 2013-18 was presented for consideration at a meeting of the Executive on 9 May 2013. The recommended action was to adopt the review and strategy which the Executive duly did. Councillor Vickers explained to the Commission that a scrutiny review had identified a number of recommendations to be considered as part of the revised strategy. Due to the lack of a formal response from the Executive it was not clear why the recommendations had not been adopted.

Councillor Goff suggested that clarification was required in order to understand how the recommendations had been considered as part of the revised strategy.

Following questioning, Councillor Roger Croft and Mel Brian were able to provide the following:

- An update report was presented to the Commission at the meeting held on the 16 April 2013. Within the report a response was given on each of the recommendations issued from the review;
- The strategy considered strategic recommendations only. Not all recommendations, some of which were about operational matters, could form part of the revised document;
- In response to the recommendation made at the Homelessness review in November 2012 a new suite of leaflets was created. Feedback suggested that the format and information was useful and beneficial;
- The consultation results had not been distributed as part of the review process. The results consisted of six responses in total, of which five had referred to factual amendments. For this reason sharing the results of the consultation was not considered beneficial.

The Commission conveyed its disappointment that the review failed to distribute the consultation results and provide the output from the review in a formal and structured manner.

Members of the Commission agreed that a formal response was required in respect of each of the recommendations issued from the review. It was debated whether the strategy could be adopted without a formal response and the ramifications if delayed further.

RESOLVED that the strategy be adopted and a formal response be provided to each of the recommendations made following the scrutiny review.

21. **Councillor Call for Action**

There were no Councillor Call for Action.

22. **Petitions**

There were no petitions to be received at the meeting.

23. **Fire Service**

Andy Mancey (Assistant Chief Fire Officer) and Bryan Morgan (Area Manager) of the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) presented to the Commission information on the RBFRS coverage of West Berkshire.

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Andy Mancey explained that the role of the fire service was three-fold: to prevent fires, to protect the public and to respond to incidents. In recent years, the fire service had prioritised its role in community safety, undertaking home fire risk assessments in the homes of vulnerable people in order to raise awareness of fire safety, for example through fitting smoke detectors, and assisting with the development of an exit plan in the event of fire at the dwelling.

Andy Mancey illustrated the improvements that had been made in the prevention of fires over the past ten years stating that the number of fires had reduced significantly, and that the number of home fire risk assessments and the number of volunteer hours had increased. However the number of fire deaths remained at seven. Each death had been of a vulnerable person known to other agencies but unknown to the RBFRS. Andy Mancey explained that the fire service intended to address this gap in information by working more closely with other agencies. A comprehensive understanding of where vulnerable people were located would enable more targeted home fire risk assessments to be carried out.

In relating the improvements seen when the RBFRS had responded to incidents, Andy Mancey informed the Commission that road traffic collisions were classified into two categories, those where people were trapped, which were always attended, and those where no one was trapped, to which a response might be made, for example if there was a petrol spillage to be made safe. Compared with national figures, the number of road traffic collisions was considered low at 135.

The RBFRS was also targeting a further reduction in the number of unwanted fire signals, explained as a false alarm where an appliance attended unnecessarily.

The reduction by 90% in the number of malicious calls to the fire service was attributed to successful partnership working.

Since 2002 the RBFRS had seen slower response times; this was explained through a growing difficulty in attracting volunteer, or 'retained', fire fighters and therefore a reduction in the availability of fire appliances across the area. The requirements for being a retained fire fighter meant that it was necessary for them to live and work locally, and have flexible working arrangements. This was a reducing trend with people frequently working further away from their home, and businesses appeared less willing to release staff.

The target response time for an appliance to reach incidents was ten minutes, and there was a requirement for retained fire fighters to turn out within five minutes of a call being raised, and full time fire fighters were required to turn out within one minute, leaving five or nine minutes respectively to reach the incident. This limitation meant that large areas of rural West Berkshire were not accessible within the target time. Andy Mancey explained that any areas that could not be reached within the ten minute target time were prioritised for high impact community safety work.

Following an incident, the immediate area was designated a 'hot street' and community safety work was undertaken at this time when it was recognised that residents were generally more willing to engage with preventative advice.

Bryan Morgan continued by explaining proposed changes to the location of fire stations. He advised the Commission that the RBFRS intended to establish a new fire station at Theale, to replace the one currently at Tilehurst. This location would provide improved access to the surrounding area, and provide greater support into Newbury, in addition to the Pangbourne and Mortimer areas.

Newbury fire station currently held the only full time fire engine in West Berkshire, alongside a retained crew and second appliance. The intention was to remove the retained section and replace it with a second full time crew. This would allow the second

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appliance to provide cover to other areas of the district when they were not covered (for example Lambourn and Hungerford areas).

During questioning, Andy Mancey and Bryan Morgan were able to provide the following information:

- Several sites had been explored for the new fire station in Theale, however the costs were proving to be prohibitive, and the fire service was not able to be competitive against other businesses. The search was extending across junction 12 of the M4, however the preference was for the new location to be south of the junction;
- Two appliances were sent to a dwelling fire or road traffic collision, and crews were adept at travelling through busy or blocked roads and motorways. The fire service worked closely with the Highways Authority to ensure the public remained safe;
- The new headquarters were due to be operational by April 2014 and this would house the control centre for Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. The headquarters were separate from the new fire station intended for Theale;
- It was rare for no crew to turn out to an alarm call, but occasionally it did happen due to unforeseen circumstances. Any incident that was not attended underwent a detailed review to reduce the risk of reoccurrence;
- Information was available to indicate the proportion of dwellings that could be reached within the ten minute target response time, and would be circulated to the Commission;
- Mapping systems on board fire appliances were able to highlight dwellings with vulnerable people, where this information was known to the fire service;
- Private fire services (for example those based at the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE)) worked closely with the fire service, and might be called to attend certain incidents, however their primary role remained to manage risks associated with their site. Some sites with private fire services would be required to shut down operations if the fire appliance left the site, so could not be relied on to be available at all times;
- The location of fire appliances was assessed on the basis of availability of resources, cost and risk;
- The fire service would encourage new developments to install sprinklers in all buildings;
- There were no plans to keep the retained fire fighters at Newbury should the second appliance become crewed by full time fire fighters;
- If Neighbourhood Action Groups were willing to contribute to fire safety, their coordinators should contact the RBFRS for information regarding fire safety risk assessment training.

The Commission thanked Andy Mancey and Bryan Morgan for attending and for providing information about the proposed reorganisation of fire service coverage in west Berkshire.

RESOLVED that Andy Mancey would provide information to illustrate the proportion of dwellings within the ten minute target response time area.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.25 pm)

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CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature