

EXECUTIVE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON
THURSDAY, 8 MAY 2014

Councillors Present: Pamela Bale, Dominic Boeck, Hilary Cole, Roger Croft, Marcus Franks, Alan Law, Gordon Lundie, Irene Neill and Graham Pask

Also Present: John Ashworth (Corporate Director - Environment), Nick Carter (Chief Executive), Caroline Corcoran (Education Service Manager), Andy Day (Head of Strategic Support), Steve Duffin (Head of Adult Social Care Change Programme), Mark Edwards (Head of Highways and Transport), Mark Evans (Head of Children's Services), June Graves (Head of Care Commissioning, Housing & Safeguarding), Robert O'Reilly (Head of Human Resources), Councillor David Allen, Councillor Jeff Brooks, Stephen Chard (Policy Officer), Councillor Adrian Edwards, Councillor Roger Hunneman, Councillor Royce Longton, Councillor Gwen Mason, Linda Pye (Policy Officer), Councillor David Rendel, Robin Steel (Group Executive (Cons)), Councillor Tony Vickers, Councillor Quentin Webb and Councillor Keith Woodhams

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Joe Mooney and Rachael Wardell

PART I

96. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2014 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Leader.

97. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

98. Public Questions

There were no public questions submitted.

99. Petitions

There were no petitions presented to the Executive.

100. West Berkshire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (EX2764)

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 6) concerning the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy for West Berkshire.

The Flood & Water Management Act 2010 placed a responsibility upon local authorities, as Lead Local Flood Authorities, to develop, maintain, apply and monitor a strategy for local flood risk management. This Strategy would form the framework within which communities would have a greater say in local risk management decisions. It would also set out clear and consistent plans for risk management in order that communities and businesses could make informed decisions about the management of flood risk, whilst encouraging innovative management of flood risk and taking account of the needs of communities and the environment. It would form links between the Strategy and local planning decisions and ensure that emergency plans and responses to flood incidents were effective and that communities were able to respond properly to flood warnings.

The Council had been required to consult the public and designated Risk Management Authorities which might be affected by the Strategy. This consultation had taken place in January and February 2014 and any comments received had been appended to the report. A Strategic Environmental Assessment under the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 had also been produced.

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Councillor Pamela Bale advised that the comprehensive Strategy took account of previous flooding incidents and built on the extensive work which had already been carried out in the district. There were six main objectives in the Strategy and 21 strategic measures which would assist in achieving the objectives.

Councillor Bale confirmed that this was a living document which would be monitored on a monthly basis and updated annually. An annual report would be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission each year and a Scrutiny Review in relation to the recent flooding incident would be undertaken over the next few months. This document was a statement of West Berkshire's commitment to managing flood risk across the district.

Councillor Roger Hunneman stated that the Strategy appeared to be premature but he recognised that this was something that the authority was required to produce. He hoped that lessons learnt from recent flooding events would be fed into the document in the future and he took the opportunity thank Officers for the support which had been given to Members during the flood incident.

RESOLVED that the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy for West Berkshire be approved.

Reason for the decision: To help manage flood risk across the District and comply with the Council's statutory duty.

Other options considered: N/A.

101. **Children's Services - External Placements (EX2827)**

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 7) concerning alternatives to the current external placement arrangements.

Councillor Irene Neill commenced her introduction to the report by giving her view that this would be an excellent project that would help improve outcomes for Looked After Children.

External placements were where the Council had to place a Looked After Child with an independent fostering agency (IFA), a residential children's home, a residential school or a specialist residential unit and not with the Council's own in-house foster carers. External placements were often not in the best interests of the child or young person. Many were outside the West Berkshire area, taking a child away from their family and local community. The costs of such placements varied widely and created significant budget pressures for Children's Services.

In order to put the needs of the child first, the primary aim was to reduce the number of external placements. It was therefore proposed that the Council should look to a model which enabled the Council to retain a small number of very highly skilled 'intensive' foster carers. These carers would be paid an allowance each week of the year whether they had a child in their care or not, they would be provided with an extensive training programme and an extensive support network would be put in place for them. 'Intensive' foster carers would be required to be available at all times in order to fulfil their role. This type of model was already being used by other local authorities.

Whilst the aim would be to reduce the number of external placements it would not be possible to eradicate them totally as it might be that the needs of a particular child could only be met in such a setting. It was recognised that Children's Services did not have the required procurement and contract management expertise and therefore it was proposed that this activity should be transferred to Care Commissioning, Housing and Safeguarding, subject to training of that team to better understand children and family placement requirements.

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It was also proposed to undertake some market development work in order to try to establish some more local specialist residential provision.

Councillor Neill sought approval to these proposals to help improve outcomes for the children and young people concerned.

Councillor Graham Pask highlighted that West Berkshire Council had a good record in caring for children. These proposals would be a very important addition to the Council's work and he seconded the proposal. He also highlighted the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel, the next meeting of which was scheduled for 16 June 2014.

Councillor Tony Vickers gave his support to the proposals. He questioned whether there was scope to consider the need for new housing developments to include provision for housing to accommodate foster carers who could potentially care for more than one child. Mark Evans agreed this could be investigated, but reiterated the intention to work with local providers to identify more local specialist residential provision as there was always a need for a small number of residential placements.

Councillor David Allen also gave his support to the proposals. He noted that the 'intensive' foster carers would be paid throughout the year regardless of whether or not they had a child in their care and questioned the number of foster carers not working at any one time. Councillor Neill explained that during periods of time when an 'intensive' foster carer did not have a child in their care, they would be able to provide support to other foster carers and provide training. There was also the potential for them to provide a placement that could be sold to another local authority.

Councillor Allen then queried whether there was potential for these foster carers to become Council employees. Mark Evans explained that the tax implications for foster carers made such an arrangement complicated. He then advised the Executive that occupancy levels for 'intensive' foster carers were expected to be very high, particularly when considering that at present, West Berkshire children were placed with 26 independent fostering agencies.

Councillor Allen then referred to the appendices to the report which made reference to a role of Social Media Administrator. He questioned what this role would entail. Councillor Neill explained that this was intended to increase the Council's ability to recruit additional foster carers and communicate more widely. Councillor Gordon Lundie added that he had previously raised a similar question and gave an assurance that this aspect of work would be monitored to ensure value for money was being achieved.

Councillor Jeff Brooks pointed out that as well as the £30k allocated in the budget for a Social Media Administrator, there was also an increased advertising budget of £20k. He questioned the number of foster carers that were hoped to be recruited from this investment and highlighted the importance of ensuring value for money was being achieved.

Mark Evans highlighted the importance of widening West Berkshire's fostering presence in what was a competitive environment with private providers and other local authorities. It was hoped that increased use of social media would help communicate the need for foster carers more widely, in particular with a younger audience. In terms of numbers to be recruited, Mark Evans commented that while a high number of applications could be received only a small number were likely to be successful.

Councillor Lundie reiterated the need to ensure value for money was being achieved from the Social Media Administrator role/advertising budget and requested that Executive Members and Councillors Brooks and Allen be kept informed of developments. He gave thanks for the report and the very useful proposals which would help to improve the quality of care, achieve better outcomes and increase the capacity of the fostering network as well as achieving cost savings.

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RESOLVED that:

- (1) the benefits of an 'invest to save' opportunity be considered in respect of recruiting additional foster carers and implementation of a 3 tier foster carer model;
- (2) responsibility for the commissioning and contract management of external placements be moved out of Children's Services and into Care Commissioning, Housing and Safeguarding;
- (3) engagement with suitable providers be undertaken to work up a business case for developing residential services for looked after children within West Berkshire.

Reason for the decision: To enable action to be taken to both improve outcomes for looked after children and reduce unit costs.

Other options considered: None.

102. Funding for Resurfacing of Flood Damaged Roads

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 8) concerning identification of funding to complete the full programme of repairs to roads damaged in the 2014 floods.

The Council's annual Highway Improvement Programme had been approved by Individual Decision on 18th February 2014. The 71 schemes in the programme had originally been assessed in late 2013 which was prior to the adverse weather and subsequent flooding which had affected large areas of the road network in early 2014.

On 9th March 2014, the Secretary of State for Transport announced that he would be making £140 million available to highway authorities in England to help repair damage to the local road network caused by the recent severe weather. Councils were given three days to submit a bid. The Highways and Transport Service had submitted its bid on 12th March 2014, meeting the deadline. The bid was not for a specific sum of money but related to road length and the number of highway bridges damaged by floods. The submission covered 41 roads.

On 20th March 2014, the Leader of the Council had received notification from the DfT that the Council would be receiving a Section 31 grant for additional highway maintenance funding to the value of £1,489,480 to be paid to the Council on 28th March 2014. However, the existing budget, together with the DfT grant, would be insufficient to enable the Flood Damage Programme to be completed and consequently there was a funding shortfall of £522k. Councillor Pamela Bale confirmed that a number of options had been considered but it was felt to be important that the programme should be fully funded in order to prevent further deterioration. Therefore the options for funding the shortfall had been considered by the Capital Strategy Group on 24th April 2014 and included:

- Funding from existing revenue provision for capital spend in the MTFs in the Capital Programme 2014/15-2018/19. However, this would reduce the availability of funding to meet other capital pressures e.g. the Council's IT Strategy;
- Increasing the existing revenue provision for Capital. This option would require an additional £60k revenue provision per year;
- Funded from balances.

The report was seeking approval for the shortfall to be funded from Council reserves as this would require no additional revenue provision whilst still leaving some flexibility within the existing Capital Programme to fund other pressures.

Councillor Keith Woodhams noted that some roads had flooded as a consequence of blocked drains and he asked whether this would be taken into account. He also asked for reassurance that roads would be repaired to a high standard. Councillor Pamela Bale confirmed that the Contractors would repair roads to the high standards set out in the

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contract and this was monitored on a regular basis. The drainage issues would be covered as part of the normal highway maintenance programme. This funding had been provided to specifically deal with damage to roads caused by flooding.

Councillor Jeff Brooks referred to page 140 of the agenda and noted that there was an estimated efficiency saving of £300k. Councillor Alan Law confirmed that the Head of Service for Highways and Transport had pushed the contractors for a discounted price and this was the saving which had been achieved.

Councillor Roger Hunneman made reference to Appendix A and he noted that the only road in the Newbury area on the list was Fifth Rod but he was not aware that this road had been flooded. Councillor Pamela Bale confirmed that some roads on that list might not have necessarily been flooded but had suffered severe weather damage and they had also been included.

Councillor David Rendel argued that if it was proposed to take £522k out of Council reserves then there would be a revenue implication. Councillor Alan Law confirmed that there would be a small cost to the Council but nothing like the sum involved if it had been decided to borrow the money. It was a case of Treasury cash flow management.

RESOLVED that additional capital expenditure of £522,000 in 2014/15 be authorised which would be funded from a one-off contribution from balances, to meet the shortfall in grant funding to enable the repairs programme to be completed.

Reason for the decision: To enable the condition of damaged roads to be restored to a good standard.

Other options considered: Reducing the size of the programme thus leaving some roads in poor condition.

103. Members' Questions

- (a) **Question to be answered by the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport (Operations), Emergency Planning and Newbury Vision submitted by Councillor David Rendel**

A question standing in the name of Councillor David Rendel on the subject of the implementation of proposals for additional 'Grasscrete' (or equivalent) parking areas was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport (Operations), Emergency Planning and Newbury Vision.

- (b) **Question to be answered by the Leader of the Council submitted by Councillor Keith Woodhams**

A question standing in the name of Councillor Keith Woodhams on the subject of investigation of the shoddy workmanship of the highways contractors responsible for repairing roads in the district was answered by the Leader of the Council.

- (c) **Question to be answered by the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport (Operations), Emergency Planning and Newbury Vision submitted by Councillor Adrian Edwards**

A question standing in the name of Councillor Adrian Edwards on the subject of the installation of recharging points for electric vehicles throughout the district was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Cleaner & Greener, Waste, Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Thatcham Vision.

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(d) Question to be answered by the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, Youth Service, Education submitted by Councillor David Allen

A question standing in the name of Councillor David Allen on the subject of an update on the Hungerford Education Plan was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, Youth Service, Education.

104. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED that members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the under-mentioned item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as contained in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the [Local Government \(Access to Information\)\(Variation\) Order 2006](#). [Rule 4.2 of the Constitution](#) also refers.

105. Efficiency Saving: deletion of a post in Education by reason of redundancy (EX2818)

(Paragraph 1 – information relating to an individual)

The Executive considered an exempt report (Agenda Item 11) requesting approval to make a redundancy payment to a member of staff when their post was deleted on the grounds of efficiency on 31 August 2014.

RESOLVED that the recommendations in the exempt report be agreed.

Reason for the decision: as set out in the exempt report.

Other options considered: as set out in the exempt report.

(The meeting commenced at 5.00pm and closed at 5.47pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature