

Note: These Minutes are approved subject to the amendments listed in the minutes of 26th January 2021

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2020

Councillors Present: Jeff Brooks, James Cole, Lee Dillon (Vice-Chairman), Lynne Doherty, Gareth Hurley, Alan Law (Chairman), Thomas Marino, Steve Masters, Garth Simpson and Tony Vickers

Also Present: Paul Anstey (Head of Public Protection and Culture), Catalin Bogos (Performance Research Consultation Manager), Sarah Clarke (Service Director (Strategy and Governance)), Kevin Griffin (Head of Customer Services & ICT) and Joseph Holmes (Executive Director - Resources), Gordon Oliver (Corporate Policy Support), Phil Rumens (Digital Services Manager) and James Townsend (Policy Officer- Executive Support)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Pete Campbell

PART I

17. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2020 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

18. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Tom Marino declared an interest in Agenda Item 10 by virtue of the fact that he was on Tilehurst Parish Council, but reported that, as his interest was a personal interest, but not a disclosable pecuniary interest, he determined to remain to take part in the debate and vote on the matter.

19. Petitions

There were no petitions to be received at the meeting.

20. Actions from previous Minutes

There were 6 actions followed up from previous Commission meetings:

- (18) Catalin Bogos noted that this would be brought to the OSMC meeting in January 2021
- (20) Completed
- (21) Completed
- (22) Completed
- (23) Councillor Dillon noted that this was in progress
- (24) Councillor Simpson noted that this was in progress

21. ICT / Digital Transformation Task Group Report

The Commission considered a report (Agenda Item 6) concerning the work undertaken by the task group created to review the Council's Digital Strategy and the Corporate Digitisation Programme.

Councillor Marino noted that it was recommended to:

- note the changes made to the Digital Strategy in response to comments made by the Task Group prior to the Strategy being approved;

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- approve the proposal for the Task Group to continue to meet on an on-going basis to monitor delivery of the Digital Strategy.

He noted that there were a number of findings in the report, notably:

- References to procuring commercial off-the-shelf software was a key principle;
- Highlighting the need for sufficient funding and resources to be made available in order to deliver the projects identified in the Programme;
- Additional detail on performance indicators, baselines and targets to be used to measure delivery of the strategy and achievement of desired outcomes;

Councillor Brooks stated that the success of the strategy was a question of resources. He noted that the strategy was front-loaded in first 18 months so was crucial to get off to a good start.

Kevin Griffin noted that the front-loaded plan was more a reflection of the detailed plans ready to go and that six months in would show the next steps. He noted that outside consultants were also being utilised to supplement the resources available.

Councillor Law stated that he was pleased to see the continued scrutiny of the strategy by the task group. He noted he was disappointed not to see a 5 and 10 year vision of what IT will look like structurally, particularly on cloud and server based functions. He also noted he would have liked to have seen some detail on shared services.

Councillor Brooks noted that the terms of reference centred on looking at the detail of the plan, and that shared services was more of a broad topic with the Council overall. He stated that the group took the micro approach on how it could be improved.

Councillor Dillon asked about the governance of the task group and how frequently it would meet.

Councillor Cole noted that the strategy was not too dissimilar from 2017 and he hoped the phraseology on project management would be a bit stronger. He wanted to see more of a challenge to IT structures in the strategy.

Councillor Brooks noted that there was a lot of challenging and probing in the meetings and if certain elements weren't in the report, it was because they were satisfied they were handled.

Councillor Cole noted that he did ask to be included in the task group as he had some strong views on the matter, but he looked forward to seeing how the strategy panned out.

Resolved that the report and recommendations were noted.

22. Shared Services Report

The Commission considered a report (Agenda Item 7) concerning the Council's shared services and to provoke discussions on whether any other Council services should be shared with other authorities. Gordon Oliver noted that the report provided an overview of the shared service agreements that West Berkshire Council currently has with other local authorities. It set out the original rationale and business cases on which the shared

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services were based and provides an update on how they are currently performing where information is available.

Gordon Oliver also noted that the report also provided information on studies that the Council has undertaken, or is currently undertaking, to consider the potential for other services to be shared, focusing on HR, ICT, Legal Services and Planning. Furthermore, he noted that the report considered what shared service agreements other local authorities have put in place, drawing on evidence and case studies produced by the Local Government Association. He stated that further work has been undertaken in relation to a few case studies to look at how these have evolved and if they were still delivering the expected benefits. He stated that the report concludes that West Berkshire Council is already party to a large number of existing shared services, and that with a few exceptions, the majority of these arrangements are continuing to perform well. However, there were a number where the original business cases are no longer being achieved, or where improved governance is required to better control expenditure.

He stated that current shared services have been identified in consultation with the Chief Executive, Executive Directors, and other senior managers. A summary of current shared services was provided in Appendix A. This included information on: the services affected; the partner authorities; the start and end date for current agreements; the business case for the shared services; and the most recent annual expenditure. He noted that these shared service agreements had been put in place for a variety of reasons, such as: delivering cost savings; delivering improved customer service; and improving service capabilities, flexibility and resilience.

He noted that the report highlighted some of the key benefits that can be derived from shared service agreements, which are often as much about improving service resilience, flexibility and quality of service, as well as financial savings. However, it also identified some of the challenges and risks associated with setting up new agreements or maintaining established shared services. Issues with ICT systems are amongst the most commonly cited barriers to setting up new shared services, including the availability and usage of common systems. He also stated that even where there may be a sound business case on paper, the decision to enter into a shared service agreement may also be affected by political considerations. This is particularly notable in respect to Planning. Lastly, he noted that it may be beneficial to have a strategy and a systematic consideration of assessing and deciding on sharing opportunities, potentially as a component of the Corporate Programme due to the transformational nature of such initiatives. Ideally, this should be done independently to avoid internal bias. However, it should be noted that the process of conducting a review of the potential for sharing services is very resource-intensive and can be disruptive to the services involved.

Councillor Dillon noted that he thought it was a great report that summarised all the Council's shared services and asked if this could be sent to all Councillors.

Action: shared services report to be sent to all Councillors.

Councillor Law agreed with Councillor Dillon's comments. He noted there was a feeling of negativity when shared services were recommended in certain services and perhaps it was a question of culture.

Councillor Vickers stated he thought was a very good summary of the shared services within the Council and that there was perhaps a case for a scrutiny task group. He

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pointed to the Public Protection Partnership (PPP) and the fact it only included parts of shared services which could lead to service management issues. He pointed to paragraph 5.24 and 'mistakes in establishing the partnership'. He noted he was in favour of shared services.

Councillor Cole noted that the shared services for the PPP worked well. He noted the report did not mention specialist expertise in trading standards in the PPP and it failed to mention Brexit. He stated that the report could be updated in many areas in relation to the PPP.

Councillor Hurley asked if there was a quantification of the benefits of the shared services compared to West Berkshire running the services themselves.

Joseph Holmes noted that there were value for money statistics that could be looked into to provide a comparison. On the culture of against shared services, he noted that it was important to make sure there were the right partners, which at times could prove to be a hindrance in creating a shared service. He also stated that the local government re-organisation agenda and seeing what happened here would be a hindrance to the shared services sector in the short-term.

Paul Anstey noted that benchmarking, quantifying the benefits and availability of data for regulatory services was a tricky concept to quantify. He also noted that the PPP had agreed methodologies with how to deal with cost recovery and that the PPP had enabled the Council to have expertise that many local authorities did not.

Councillor Doherty stated that the driving force for shared services must be whether it will benefit the residents of West Berkshire, whether that be improving the service or reducing costs.

Councillor Dillon, on the issue of culture around shared services, noted that he would like to see more explanation from IT around the barriers to shared services.

Resolved that the recommendations were noted

23. **2020/21 Performance Report - Quarter One**

The Commission considered a report (Agenda Item 8) concerning the 2020/21 Performance Q1 and to provide assurance that the core business and council priorities for improvement measures were being managed effectively. Catalin Bogos also noted that the report sought to highlight successes and where performance had fallen below the expected level, present information on the remedial action taken, and the impact of that action.

Catalin Bogos noted that the measures shown in the report, monitoring performance from April to June 2020, had been greatly affected by the restrictions introduced by the government to manage Covid-19, starting with the national lockdown on 23 March 2020. However, prompt response at local level ensured that the strong performance of the Council's services has been maintained. He noted that the majority of performance measures reflecting the core business areas are however on track to achieve the targets for the year. As an exception, the following area had been impacted by the Council's conscious measures put in place to support local businesses:

- Non domestic rates collected as percentage of non-domestic rates due

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He noted that the Council's strong performance position was further confirmed when performance is compared with other local authorities. The majority of the Council's measures rank in the first and second quartiles. It is also clear that this already positive relative position will continue to improve in many areas, as performance improves in activities such as the speed with which decisions are made on Housing Benefit Claims and determinations made on planning applications.

He asked for OSMC to note the report, including the following recommendations approved by the Executive:

- To note progress and achievements.
- To review the appropriateness of any remedial actions taken to improve performance, in particular for:
- Non domestic rates collected as percentage of non-domestic rates due

Councillor Brooks pointed to page 69 and 'ensuring the wellbeing of older people and vulnerable adults'. He noted that the Council's RAG rating of 66.7% was a long way off the national level of 84%.

Catalin Bogos noted that the small number of adult social care inspected services, detailed on page 89, was the reason behind the low percentage, but that the services had worked with external consultants to try and improve and that the Care Quality Commission were not conducting their inspection yet. Therefore, the percentage would remain the same until the inspection had been carried out.

Councillor Doherty noted that Councillor Bridgman was keeping a very close eye on these figures.

Councillor Hurley pointed to 'non domestic rates collected as percentage non domestic rates due' on page 68. He asked why the percentage was so low.

Councillor Mackinnon noted that this was down to the decision to defer rates to later in the year.

Councillor Law pointed to page 66, supporting local employers and the target of retaining 10. He noted that this was not the target, but the target was to meet with these employers on a regular basis.

Councillor Dillon pointed to domestic abuse numbers climbing back up. He asked if there was any news on the impact of the partnership.

Councillor Doherty noted that work was on-going and additional work was being put in place to develop the partnership.

Resolved that the recommendations were approved

24. **2020/21 Revenue Financial Performance Report Quarter One**

The Commission considered a report (Agenda Item 9) concerning the in-year financial performance of the Council's revenue budgets and to note the Quarter One forecast of £590k under spend, which was 0.5% of the Council's 2020/21 net revenue budget of

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£130m. He stated that there were a number of uncertainties around Covid-19, which would become clearer in Q2.

Councillor Simpson pointed to page 108 and noted that 232 changes not requiring corporate approval in legal and strategic support. He asked why.

Joseph Holmes noted that he would need to look further into the detail and report back to Councillor Simpson.

Action: Joseph Holmes to provide further information to Councillor Simpson on the figures in appendix 2.

Councillor Hurley noted that there was a general underspend across all the Directorates. He asked if that was a saving or poor forecasting.

Joseph Holmes noted that it did tend to fluctuate yearly and Covid-19 had led to a dramatic change, particularly in adult social care where there were low numbers in care. He also noted that extra funding from central Government had offset some costs.

Councillor Mackinnon the People Directorate had the biggest under-spend due to adult social care.

Joseph Holmes stated that whilst an under-spend would not be expected given Covid-19, funding from central Government had helped dramatically.

Councillor Law noted that usually adult social care has seen an over-spend in previous years.

Resolved that the report and recommendations were noted

25. **2020/21 Capital Financial Performance Report Quarter One**

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 10) concerning the financial performance report provided to Members on a quarterly basis. The report outlined the under or over spends against the Council's approved capital budget. The report presented the Quarter One financial position.

Joseph Holmes asked Members to note:

- The forecast financial position as at Quarter One.
- £124k of additional external funding from the Phase One of the Emergency Active Travel Fund has been received by the Council. Under delegated authority, the S151 Officer and Portfolio Holder agreed allocation of the funding to the Transport and Countryside programme in 2020/21.
- A further application is to be submitted (August 2020) for Phase Two Emergency Active Travel funding, with an indicative sum of £495k.

Councillor Simpson pointed to paragraph 5.1 of the report. He noted that he was concerned about a future risk on costs due to contractor's failures.

Joseph Holmes noted that the main concern was around Highwood Copse, but he had not seen anything further that suggested he would not be able to deliver the capital programme.

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Councillor Hurley pointed to paragraph 5.7 and asked whether inflation costs had been considered in project costs estimations, especially given the likelihood of delays.

Joseph Holmes noted that each project when it started had contingency plans within it, including inflation costs.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

26. **West Berkshire Council Forward Plan 6 October 2020 to 31 January 2021**

The Commission considered the West Berkshire Forward Plan (Agenda Item 11) for the period covering 6 October to 31 January 2021.

Resolved that the Forward Plan be noted.

(The meeting commenced at 18:30 and closed at 19:54)