

Notice of Meeting



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Scrutiny Commission

Thursday, 25 April 2024 at 6.30 pm
in Committee Room Council Offices
Market Street Newbury

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Date of despatch of Agenda: Wednesday, 17 April 2024

For further information about this Agenda, or to inspect any background documents referred to in Part I reports, please contact Gordon Oliver on (01635) 519486
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Agenda - Scrutiny Commission to be held on Thursday, 25 April 2024 (continued)

- To:** Councillors Carolyne Culver (Chairman), Dominic Boeck (Vice-Chairman), Antony Amirtharaj, Paul Dick, Ross Mackinnon, Geoff Mayes, Erik Pattenden, Justin Pemberton and Christopher Read
- Substitutes:** Councillors Jeremy Cottam, Laura Coyle, Billy Drummond, David Marsh, Richard Somner, Joanne Stewart and Howard Woollaston

Agenda

| Part I | Page No. |
|--|-----------------|
| 1. Apologies for Absence To receive apologies for inability to attend the meeting (if any). | 5 - 6 |
| 2. Minutes To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meetings of the Commission held on 28 November 2023, 18 January 2024, and 6 February 2024. | 7 - 36 |
| 3. Actions from previous Minutes To receive an update on actions following the previous Commission meeting. | 37 - 40 |
| 4. Declarations of Interest To remind Members of the need to record the existence and nature of any personal, disclosable pecuniary or other registrable interests in items on the agenda, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct . | 41 - 42 |
| 5. Petitions Purpose: To consider any petitions requiring an Officer response. | 43 - 44 |
| 6. Environment Strategy Operational Review Purpose: To review progress in implementing the Council's Environment Strategy Delivery Plan. | To Follow |
| 7. Task and Finish Group Updates Purpose: To receive updates from the chairmen of task and finish groups appointed by the Scrutiny Commission. | 45 - 46 |
| 8. Sports Hub Task and Finish Group Terms of Reference Purpose: To approve the terms of reference for the Sports Hub Task and Finish Group. | 47 - 48 |

Agenda - Scrutiny Commission to be held on Thursday, 25 April 2024 *(continued)*

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|-----|--|---------|
| 9. | Health Scrutiny Committee Update | 49 - 50 |
| | Purpose: To receive an update from the Chairman of the Health Scrutiny Committee. | |
| 10. | West Berkshire Council Forward Plan 1 May to 31 August 2024 | 51 - 68 |
| | Purpose: To advise the Commission of items to be considered by West Berkshire Council's Executive and to decide whether to review any of these items prior to the meeting indicated in the Forward Plan. | |
| 11. | Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Work Programme | 69 - 72 |
| | Purpose: To receive new items and agree and prioritise the work programme of the Commission. | |

Sarah Clarke
Service Director Strategy and Commissioning

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Agenda Item 1.

Scrutiny Commission – 25 April 2024

Item 1 – Apologies

Verbal Item

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DRAFT

Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

SCRUTINY COMMISSION**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON
TUESDAY, 28 NOVEMBER 2023**

Councillors Present: Carolyne Culver (Chairman), Dominic Boeck (Vice-Chairman), Antony Amirtharaj, Paul Dick, Ross Mackinnon, Erik Pattenden, Justin Pemberton, Christopher Read and Billy Drummond (Substitute) (In place of Geoff Mayes)

Also Present: Nigel Lynn (Chief Executive), Paul Coe (Interim Executive Director – People), AnnMarie Dodds (Executive Director - Children and Family Services), Joseph Holmes (Executive Director - Resources), Sarah Clarke (Service Director (Strategy and Governance)), April Peberdy (Acting Service Director - Communities and Wellbeing) and Dave Wraight (Service Manager - Youth Offending Team), Councillor Dennis Benneyworth (Chairman), Councillor Clive Hooker, Councillor Paul Kander, Councillor Biyi Oloko, Nicola Thomas, Kevin White (Montagu Evans), Gordon Oliver (Democratic Services) and Vicky Phoenix (Principal Policy Officer - Scrutiny)

Attending Remotely: Councillor Dennis Benneyworth, Councillor Clive Hooker, Councillor Paul Kander, Councillor Biyi Oloko, Councillor Howard Woollaston, and Sarah Clarke (Service Director (Strategy and Governance)).

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Geoff Mayes

PART I**31. Minutes**

The Minutes of the meetings held on 14 September 2023 and 11 October 2023 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

32. Actions from previous Minutes

Members noted the updates on actions from the previous meetings.

A typo was highlighted in Action 90.

It was noted that an issue had been raised at Health and Wellbeing Board in relation to Council Tax, possible reductions and also debt collection mechanisms. This was to be discussed at the Mental Health Action Group, to which Councillor Carolyne Culver had been invited. It was asked that this be added to the action log.

33. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Justin Pemberton declared an interest in Agenda Item 7, and reported that, as his interest was a disclosable pecuniary interest or an other registrable interest, he would remain to take part in the debate, but would not take part in any vote on the matter.

34. Petitions

There were no petitions to be received at the meeting.

35. Items called-in following the meeting of the Executive on 2 November 2023

The Commission considered the call-in of the Executive Decision (EX4402) on 2 November 2023 regarding the Property Investment Strategy Review (Agenda Item 6).

Councillor Iain Cottingham (Executive Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Services) presented the background to the Executive report and the reasons for the decision. Key points were as follows:

- There was considerable pressure to deliver a balanced budget in 2023/24 and various options had been considered to achieve this.
- The main reason to divest the investment property portfolio was to comply with government policy, which stated that local authorities should not take undue risk with taxpayers' money. The administration considered that being a buy to let commercial landlord constituted undue risk.
- Although the Council had borrowed funds at a low rate of interest, and the portfolio was well diversified, the value of the assets had decreased since purchased 5-6 years ago.
- Government guidance was to use capital receipts in order to achieve a balanced budget in current and future financial years. Capital receipts would allow investment of these funds rather than borrowing via the Public Works Loan Board at current interest rates (circa 5.7%).
- There would be a capital saving by reusing capital receipts to reinvest for the benefit of West Berkshire residents rather than investing in assets right across the country, which would require capital investment of around £2 million over the next 10 years for maintenance.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon presented the reasons for the call-in:

- A publicly stated strategy of divesting the whole portfolio by a certain date put the Council at a severe commercial disadvantage when negotiating with potential buyers.
- The Executive paper included financial projections, which indicated that the properties could be sold at a significant capital loss.
- Publication of the above strategy would mean that the Council would receive much less than they otherwise would have done.
- There was an error in the financial description – savings of £6.9 million would be cumulative over the life of the Medium Term Financial Strategy rather than annual savings.
- During the debate at Executive, more than one councillor had indicated that they did not fully understand the report's financial implications, and Members of the Executive may also have struggled to understand these.
- It was suggested that Members of the Executive did not have the competence to make the decision, since the Budget and Policy Framework reserved decisions on the Property Investment Strategy for Full Council. Any in-year changes could only be made by the Executive in very narrow circumstances, which had not been met.
- The Monitoring Officer had indicated that the Executive had not actually made a decision to change the Strategy.

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 28 NOVEMBER 2023 - MINUTES

The Chairman invited Joseph Holmes (S.151 Officer) and Nicola Thomas (Deputy Monitoring Officer) to provide their advice as to whether the decision had been contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework:

- It was acknowledged that the report should have been clearer that it would be taken to Full Council in February 2024 where there would be the opportunity for a full debate.
- There would be no changes made to the strategy until a sale occurred. In the meantime, the Council would continue to generate receipts and maintain its properties.
- The Part II report had proposed a disposal.

In considering whether or not the decision had been in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework, the following points were discussed:

- The report did not say that the Strategy Review would be referred to Council, and this had not been mentioned in the debate. Also, it had not been clear that the Property Investment Strategy was not being changed by the Executive. It was suggested that this position had been put up after the fact.
- It was queried whether the Executive was acting in accordance with the current Strategy, or if they were actively seeking to divest. The latter was against the Strategy, which was part of the Budget and Policy Framework.
- While the Property Investment Board had the power to dispose of individual assets, the change in strategy to disinvest would be considered at Council. This was as per the recommendation in the Executive report, accepting that the wording was not as clear as it could be.
- Councillor Cottingham conceded that he thought the Executive had been asked to make a decision regarding the Property Investment Strategy Review on 2 November 2023.
- The Executive paper should have clearly indicated that Council would be the ultimate decision making body, and that the Executive was only giving a view on the proposal.
- The Forward Plan had listed the Executive as the decision making body.
- If no decision had been made, then how could it be called-in?

The Chairman indicated that she was minded to debate the matter at this meeting rather than referring the matter to Council. This was agreed by the other Members present. Key points raised in the debate were:

- The current administration had applauded the Property Investment Strategy when it had been introduced - it was supposed to be a long-term strategy that, if maintained, would ride out rises and falls in the market.
- While the Council had been fortunate to achieve 100% occupancy and rental income, the current economic climate was different to six years ago. Retail rental was falling, office rental was not strong, and the commercial rental sector was heading for stormy waters. If the council's portfolio was in line with the industry average of 70% occupancy, then it would not cover its costs. Divesting the portfolio now would reduce the risk to taxpayers.
- The approach was perceived to be laced with prejudice and it was difficult to see how there could be a robust discussion.

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 28 NOVEMBER 2023 - MINUTES

- Making public the intention to divest the portfolio weakened the Council's position in relation to the value that could be realised from the sale of the properties. The decision was felt to represent a change to the agreed Strategy.
- It was suggested that the only sensible course of action was to maintain the status quo.
- The public was being consulted on the basis of a decision that had not been made.
- The competence of the Executive to make significant decisions was questioned.
- While the reasons for the proposed change in approach were understood, the speed with which it had been published would jeopardise the value of the capital receipts that could be secured.
- It was explained that when local authorities had started buying commercial properties, they had collectively accounted for just 4% of the market. Montagu Evans had confirmed that publicity about the intention to sell, would make no difference to the price achieved - properties would be sold on the open market, and if offers were too low, then the properties would not be sold.
- The Council was legally obliged to publish the book value price of its assets and the Executive was simply being transparent.
- Unless there was an urgent need to sell, it was suggested that the Council should retain its assets, otherwise it would be selling at the bottom of the market.
- A recent Council press release had indicated that the need for capital was just £1.5 million, so it was not clear as to why the Council needed to sell now.
- Members asked to see the research that had shown that announcing the intention to divest the portfolio would not affect the sale price. It was suggested that the press release had created the impression of a 'fire sale'.
- Kevin White was asked if advice had been sought from Montagu Evans on the timing of the sale. It was confirmed that the Property Investment Board had asked for advice on how best to realise £10 million by selling some or all of the assets, based on: current market conditions; the asset management plans for each of the assets; and the likely value of the assets after costs.
- Kevin White was asked if a rise in capital value could be expected if interest rates were to fall. He indicated that it was difficult to speculate and the right time to sell depended on the needs of the owner. Yields were set with reference to gilts, property related risk and illiquid asset risk. As gilt rates fell, then this would have a knock-on effect on total yield.
- Kevin White was asked if advice had been sought from Montagu Evans about the wisdom of publicising the strategy with a specific end date. It was confirmed that they had not been asked this particular question. However, when a client started to sell assets, it affected the balance of risk across the portfolio, so it was logical to consider divesting over a period of time, so risk was not concentrated in a few assets.
- The Council was in financial distress, the UK economic forecast was poor and interest rates were forecast to remain high. In order to create a fair deal for taxpayers, it was important to consider options. The Executive was being transparent rather than naive, and the proposed approach would give fair value to residents. Residents would expect the administration not to have political bias on this matter.
- It was suggested that the Council should not be a commercial buy to let landlord in the current economic climate.

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 28 NOVEMBER 2023 - MINUTES

- While the Liberal Democrats may have previously supported the Strategy, they had grown from four Members to 28 and the economic climate had changed in that time.
- It was queried whether this was the appropriate forum to have the debate, since the matter would be discussed at Council. It was explained that the intention was for all Budget proposals to go through Scrutiny. The Property Investment Strategy (PIS) would be considered as part of the Investment and Borrowing Strategy (IBS), which would go to Council in February. This call-in was allowed to provide a proper and transparent debate around the PIS, which may not be possible as part of the wider IBS.
- It was suggested that selling commercial property assets would contribute to rather than alleviate the Council's financial distress, since their net profit was £1.3 million.
- While transparency was welcomed, Part II items were necessary to deal with commercially sensitive matters. It was suggested that telling commercial property markets that the Council needed to sell its assets by a hard deadline was not commercially sensible and there were times when the Council should not be transparent in order to achieve best value for residents.
- It was noted that if Members wished to discuss the individual asset proposed for sale, then that would need to be as a Part II item. It was confirmed that there was no need to discuss this aspect.
- Councillor Cottingham could not recall a statement being made that the administration wished to dispose of all its properties in the short-term. The plan was to dispose of properties over a three year period.
- It was noted that when the Council was buying its assets, it had made a similar announcement to that made recently in relation to the proposed sale. However, this was a very large market with thousands of potential properties, so there would have been very little impact on the market.
- A question was asked as to what could be done to get a better deal for the taxpayer.
- Members noted that in March 2023, Appendix D of the Capital Strategy had said that the Council was reviewing its assets and regularly challenging the purposes of assets, including the commercial property portfolio, and there may be opportunities in 2023/24 or beyond to sell assets to fund transformation activity.
- The Leader of the Council expressed concerns about the call-in, if a decision had not been made by the Executive, but he welcomed the views of Scrutiny Commission Members. He noted that the proposed sale was in line with the Council's published Capital Strategy. Values for the Council's commercial properties had been published every year in the Annual Report. He reiterated the point that if offers did not represent best value, then they would not be accepted.

The Chairman suggested that while a decision had not been made, the Scrutiny Commission could still make recommendations to the Executive about what they would like to see in the Property Investment Strategy report prior to consideration at full Council, noting that the Property Investment Board had the power to dispose of properties up to the value of £15 million.

Resolved to recommend to the Executive that:

- a) they should not seek to dispose of all of the Council's commercial properties;
and**
- b) they should not seek to dispose of properties by a particular date.**

36. Fostering in West Berkshire

Dave Wraight presented the report on Fostering in West Berkshire (Agenda Item 7).

The following points were raised in the debate:

- Members were very supportive of the report and congratulated the officers.
- Members asked about the differences in outcomes for fostered children compared with those in other forms of care. It was explained that stability was important. Fostered children cited having someone who cared / looked out for them and was interested in them as being the most important thing to them. Foster carers provided stability, love, care and attention and were de facto parents. This made a tangible difference to those children.
- A question was asked about how many children were in a care home who didn't need to be. Officers explained that children were not placed into residential homes who did not need it or unless there were no other placements available. There were around five children who were in residential homes where foster carers were being sought, but there was a shortage of places.
- Members asked about the potential saving from moving children from residential care to foster homes. Officers indicated that children who they were looking to step down into foster care currently cost between £3,500 - £4,500. The overall cost was £6,500, but that included some children with particular needs who required 2:1 staffing, where it would not be possible to step them down into foster care.
- Members asked whether having a dedicated officer for foster carer recruitment would improve the timeline for approval of new foster carers. Officers indicated that there would be time savings, because the function would not be in addition to an individual's other responsibilities. However, some aspects had a fixed timescale, such as training of new foster carers. Normally, it would take 7-8 months, but it was suggested that this could be reduced by a couple of months.
- A question was asked about whether foster carers would be entitled to the 30 hours of childcare per week announced in the March 2023 Budget. It was confirmed that they would be eligible.
- Members asked about families who were hosting refugee children. It was explained that unaccompanied refugee children would be placed by Children and Family Services. If they were under-16, they would be placed in foster care. Supported lodgings were used for 16-17 year olds. Arrangements were different for refugee children who were with their families, but families who were no longer hosting refugees had been approached to see if they would be interested in fostering.
- There was discussion about private fostering arrangements where children went to live with other family members. While Children and Family Services would need to know about such arrangements, that was the limit of their involvement. However, where children were removed from their home environment and relatives were asked to care for them, that was covered by kinship care or connected fostering arrangements, which would need to be assessed and regulated. The level of funding and support provided under those arrangements were the same as for other foster families.
- A suggestion was made for the dedicated officer for foster carer recruitment to be part of HR rather than Children's Services.
- It was noted that the job description stated that it was essential to have experience of using social media platforms, but only desirable to have worked in recruitment or

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 28 NOVEMBER 2023 - MINUTES

marketing. However, Members felt that the role was mostly about going into the community for face-to-face discussions to develop relationships and build trust. Support / training for using social media could be provided by IT / the Comms Team.

- Members felt that it was important to improve the remuneration and allowances for foster carers. The proposal to participate in regional fostering recruitment partnerships was also welcomed.
- There was some discussion about the relative benefits of payments vs Council Tax relief. It was suggested that providing Council Tax relief for foster carers would set a difficult precedent, since other parties may ask for similar relief, so it might be better to give foster carers more money and Members felt that the upper level of the 5-10% range would be appropriate. However, it was also recognised that paying people more money might result in them paying more tax - much would depend on the particular circumstances of the individual.
- Remuneration was recognised as a key issue, and while allowances were good, in some cases, they were not sufficient, especially for more complex cases, where the carer was unable to work.
- It was noted that the 3.5% increase from April 2023 was the first increase paid in five years.
- Officers stressed that the offer to foster carers needed to be competitive in terms of payments and support, since local authorities were fighting for the same small pool of people.
- Officers reiterated that West Berkshire Council was performing well in terms of the number of children it had in foster care and exceptionally well in terms of in-house foster care placements. This was testament to the support provided. Within the industry, a lack of support was often highlighted by foster carers as a reason for leaving. Having a dedicated officer for recruitment was seen as essential, and it was recognised that there may be merit in looking at marketing or HR professionals. Marketing was acknowledged to be key in terms of getting people through the door. Officers also highlighted that small increases in allowances may go unnoticed by foster carers, but the most successful local authorities tended to offer Council Tax relief, which would be more significant. It was suggested that foster carers should be asked about what they would see as being most beneficial. The aim was for West Berkshire to be the local authority of choice for foster carers.

Resolved to note the report.

37. Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Framework

April Peberdy (Interim Service Director – Communities and Wellbeing) presented the item on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Framework (Agenda Item 8).

The following points were raised in the debate:

- Members questioned the text on P104, which said *'this will align with one of the goals of the newly elected Liberal Democrat administration to demonstrate that West Berkshire is a good place to work'*. It was suggested that reports or strategy documents should not refer to individual political parties. It was also noted that the priority was similar to that of the previous administration.
- Members noted the aim to progress to achieving Stonewall accreditation. However, in recent months, several large organisations had left the Stonewall Champions Scheme due to concerns related to its Chief Executive's comments about people with gender-

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 28 NOVEMBER 2023 - MINUTES

critical views. Also, an independent review had found that any organisations who followed Stonewall's advice risked committing unlawful discrimination itself. Members were reluctant to pursue Stonewall accreditation, and it was suggested that the Executive may wish to reconsider this.

- In relation to support for Armed Forces personnel, Members noted that there was only one reference to Dennison Barracks and asked if the commitment should be widened to include those who had retired from the Armed Forces. The Council should be actively seeking to identify them and engage with them. It was confirmed that officers would be engaging with retired Armed Forces personnel to understand their needs and ensure they were met. It was noted that the Armed Forces Champion was Councillor Stephanie Steevenson.
- Officers indicated that the aim was to have EDI Champions across the Council, including a Member EDI Champion.
- On page 104, it was suggested that economic, health and economic opportunities be expanded to include social opportunities to address issues with social isolation.

Action: Add social opportunities to the list on page 104.

- It was noted that the appendices referred to 'equity' rather than 'equality'. This was not part of the Equalities Directive, and it was suggested that achieving 'equity' might be an unachievable goal. Members noted that previously there had been no mention of equity. Officers suggested that the aim should be to achieve 'equity' as far as possible, so everyone had the same ability to access services.
- It was noted that equity could be achieved in different ways, and some were easy to achieve (e.g., presenting information in different formats for people with dyslexia).
- Surprise was expressed that some Members may not wish to aspire to equity, and it was suggested that it was incumbent on the Council to address inequity wherever possible.
- It was highlighted that p103 of the report talked about transport initiatives, before noting that funding was not available to deliver them. Officers were asked if more should be done to address transport issues, particularly in rural areas. Officers explained that issues could be addressed by delivering services in different ways (e.g., outreach services within communities rather than providing transport).
- Councillor Lee Dillon indicated that he was happy to accommodate the comment around tackling social isolation, although this was picked up in other strategies. In relation to the equity vs equality issue, he suggested that equity would require allocation of the correct resources so individual could achieve an equal outcome. He suggested that this was a point of difference between the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives.
- It was suggested that equity was wrapped up within equality and it was highlighted that it may be helpful to have these terms defined within the document. Councillor Ross Mackinnon indicated that Conservatives were fully supportive of measures to promote equality of opportunity.

Action: Definitions of equity and equality to be incorporated into the EDI Framework, possibly within a glossary.

- It was suggested that the Framework was setting ambitions that would not be achievable. For example, one issue highlighted in the action plan was around inequity amongst Councillors, with some communities / individuals with particular characteristics not represented. However, it was not clear how the Council could

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 28 NOVEMBER 2023 - MINUTES

address that issue, since this was governed by the election process. However, it was accepted that the political parties could do more.

- It was noted that the Framework set out what needed to be done and the aspiration to go beyond that with particular groups / communities so they could access services in the same way as others.
- It was noted that page 201 set out how the Council would engage with LGBT communities, disabled people and others. Members asked how the Council engaged with these groups already. Officers explained that the Council had held recent events for LGBT families at the West Berkshire Museum. Also, work was ongoing within Adult Social Care around supported employment for people with disabilities. Adult Social Care sought to cater for individual client's additional needs and to support them to engage with their community. The Care Act set out requirements to support people within their local community and to enjoy a successful life.

Resolved to note the report.

38. 2023/24 Revenue Financial Performance Quarter Two

Joseph Holmes (Executive Director – Resources) presented the Revenue Financial Performance Report for Quarter Three 2022/23 (Agenda Item 9).

The following points were raised in the debate:

- Members noted that the forecast savings required for 2024/25 had increased to £14 million, which represented an increase of £11 million over 3 years. Officers highlighted that a report to Executive on 2 November had set out the reasons for the increase, including an increased in demand and forecast model growth for adults' and children's social care costs.
- A question was asked about the £2.3 million flexible use of capital receipts for transformational activity. It was noted that government guidance set out what Councils could use capital receipts for, including to reduce future borrowing requirements and to fund the capital programme. Since 2015, government had allowed councils the flexibility to use capital receipts to fund transformation activity. The definition for this was pretty wide. Previously, the main constraint in West Berkshire had been the lack of capital receipts, because the Council was not rich in capital assets. The emphasis was on invest-to-save projects. The report to Executive had separated planned and new spend. Examples included nearly £1 million for recruitment and retention payments for Children's Social Care Workers where the aspiration was to reduce agency costs. It was also proposed to use capital receipts against the work of the Projects Team and Digital Team in areas where the Council was seeking to reduce unit cost of delivering services.
- Members commended the measures that had been taken by officers to manage cost pressures around procurement, staffing and agency costs, and asked about the levels of savings that would be delivered in future years. Officers indicated that it was hard to quantify savings in the long-terms, but agency costs for the most recent four-week period were £580,000 compared with just under £750,000 a year ago. Agency costs were expected to come down further in Q3. The Council had been successful in permanent recruitment to posts, but there were still significant numbers of agency staff in Children's and Adults' Social Care.
- Members noted that the £3.7 million overspend for Children and Family Services, was after use of reserves, mitigations and transformation funding and asked for more detail. It was explained that there had been an investment around enhancing

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 28 NOVEMBER 2023 - MINUTES

children's social workers' package to secure more permanent staff and reduce reliance on agency workers. The flexile use of capital receipts would reduce the overspend position.

- A question was asked around the seasonality of spend on agency staff. Officers confirmed that there were some peaks and troughs with spend in December being slightly lower due to the additional bank holidays. It was noted that the report made like for like comparisons.
- Members asked if savings were being achieved from agency staff moving to full-time contracts or just reaching the end of their temporary contracts and not being replaced. Officers indicated that it was a mix of both – 22 agency staff had become permanent.
- There was discussion around the difference in cost between agency and in-house staff, taking account of on-costs. Officers indicated that this varied, with agency costs being higher in posts where nationally there were large numbers of vacancies, but uplift could be 30% or more.
- Members asked about the amount spent on posting neighbour notification letters for planning applications to date.

Action: Joseph Holmes to confirm postage costs to Councillor Mackinnon.

- It was noted that Table 5.3 of the report referred to Executive approving the sale of capital assets, which implied that a decision had been made.
- Members sought clarification around whether selling Willows Edge Care Home or having it run by a private provider would save money. It was noted that the figures in the report related to the current year, while those quoted in a recent press release referred to future years.
- Members asked what was involved in applying for a capital directive and how concerned officers were about the next stage of the process. Officers explained that the Chief Executive would have to write to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), requesting a specific amount of funding. The application would be accompanied by answers to standard questions about aspects such as: levels of reserves, benchmarking against other councils, debt levels, the Council's commercial property portfolio, etc. The next stage would be to get a 'minded to decision'. DLUHC would commission an external review of the Council. If that review was satisfactory, then the funding would be allocated and the report made public. It was noted that West Berkshire Council was in a better position in Q2 than Q1, but it remained below the minimum level of reserves set out in the budget papers. Nevertheless, it was projected to still have a general fund balance. The Medium term Financial Strategy sought to increase the reserve by around £1 million per year. However, that figure may change as Q3 figures were calculated. Officers did not expect any additional funding as a result of the government's autumn statement.

Resolved to note the report.

39. Health Scrutiny Committee Update

CouncillorCarolyn Culver provided an update on the work of the Health Scrutiny Committee (Agenda Item 10). Key points were as follows:

- The Health Scrutiny Committee had not met since the last Scrutiny Commission meeting.
- The Healthcare in New Developments Task and Finish Group had met recently. The scope of the review included:

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 28 NOVEMBER 2023 - MINUTES

- consideration of the health needs of the local population;
 - how future primary care / public health services were planned with consideration for housing growth and demographic changes;
 - clarity around planning policy and planning consultations with key stakeholders;
 - greater understanding around commissioning of health services for new developments.
- The Task Group had started its review before the election and its membership had changed following the election. There had been just one meeting since the election, but a further three sessions were planned.

Resolved to note the update.

40. **Appointment of Task and Finish Groups**

The Chairman provided an update on the Appointment of Task and Finish Groups (Agenda Item 11).

It was confirmed that Councillor Paul Kander had replaced Councillor Dominic Boeck on the Covid and Recovery Task and Finish Group.

The Task Group had met once, but a further session was planned for December 2023, with further sessions planned in the New Year.

Resolved to note the update.

41. **Sports Hub, Monks Lane, Newbury**

The Chairman presented the item on the Sports Hub, Monks Lane, Newbury (Agenda Item 12).

Previously, the Scrutiny Commission had asked for costings related to the Sports Hub. These were reported to Executive on 2 November 2023.

The Chairman outlined a proposal for a Task and Finish Group to be set up to undertake a review of the Sports Hub for the following reasons:

- **Value for Money** – Despite the Council being in a challenging financial position, funds for the scheme had been reprofiled rather than being put back into the pot for reallocation. It was not clear what the funds would be used for if the Monks Lane scheme was not to be progressed.
- **Project Management** – The London Road Industrial Estate (LRIE) Task Group had made recommendations on how the Council could improve its project management processes. It was important to learn lessons from the Sports Hub project.
- **Advice Received** – There was inconsistency in the advice to Planning Committee and Executive. Lessons needed to be learned in order to avoid similar issues in future.
- **Strategies** – The Council's Playing Pitch Strategy identified the top priority as Faraday Road, but numerous references were made at meetings to Monks Lane being the top priority. If Monks Lane was the top priority then it was a de facto replacement for Faraday Road, but District Planning Committee and the High Court were told that it was not a replacement.

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 28 NOVEMBER 2023 - MINUTES

It was suggested that the Task Group could consider whether Members of the Executive should be on a Planning Committee where the Council was the applicant, as had happened with Monks Lane.

It was suggested that the Task Group could be concluded quite quickly.

The following items were raised in the debate:

- The Conservative Members supported the proposed review and suggested that 'replacement' could be taken to mean replacement in planning or strategic terms.
- It was highlighted that the new administration had different priorities and was already delivering football at Faraday Road. It was questioned whether it would be worth spending time and effort on a review of the Sports Hub. The LRIE review had already looked at project management and lessons learned were being implemented. It was suggested that scrutiny reviews should focus on the work of the current administration.
- Members noted that the Financial Review Panel were scrutinising all spend over £500, which showed that lessons had been learned and were being applied. It was suggested that if a future project was to have issues with project management, then that would be the appropriate time for a review, and the Commission should be forward looking.
- It was suggested that the Council's priorities had not materially changed, but there had been a significant change in tactics. It was noted that the Leader of the Council had welcomed scrutiny.
- Members recognised that it was important to look at lessons learned and best practice. It was suggested that if the review could be concluded quickly then it would be worthwhile in order to inform future decisions.
- It was highlighted that the mismanagement / spend on project management consultancy had been acknowledged and was being looked at by the Executive, and the review would be unlikely to come up with different recommendations.
- A comment was made that the Scrutiny Commission was not supposed to be political. The current administration disagreed with the idea of the Sports Hub, and it was suggested that it was not a good use of time to look at a defunct project.
- It was suggested that the review should be about more than cost control.
- The Chairman indicated that it was not proposed to rake over ancient history.

Resolved to set up a Task and Finish Group to review the Sports Hub.

42. Thames Water Update

The Chairman provided an update following the review of Thames Water's activities at the meeting on 11 October 2023 (Agenda Item 13).

The Chairman had kept in contact with parties who had spoken at the previous meeting. She offered to circulate a detailed update with the minutes of this meeting.

Action: Councillor Carolyne Culver to circulate an update with the minutes.

It was recognised that it was important for the Scrutiny Commission to follow up with Thames Water on issues raised at the meeting, including:

- Tankers were once again being used at East Garston and Brimpton.

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 28 NOVEMBER 2023 - MINUTES

- Thames Water had acknowledged that sewage had been released into the River Pang and had issued an apology.
- Councillor Stuart Gourley had been seeking a meeting with Thames Water and the Environment Agency regarding the London Road Pumping Station and pollution in the Northbrook Stream.
- Councillor Paul Dick had followed up on questions asked at the meeting.
- Stakeholders who had spoken at the meeting had provided feedback on performance metrics – this had been passed to Thames Water.
- There had been flooding at Standford Dingley since the lining and sealing works had been completed.

It was noted that Thames Water had been responsive to queries. Members were encouraged to report issues to Richard Aylard and Karen Nelson.

Resolved to note the update.

43. **West Berkshire Council Executive Forward Plan**

The Commission considered the West Berkshire Forward Plan (Agenda Item 14).

It was noted that the Waste Strategy was on the agenda for 27 February 2024.

A question was asked about the item related to the response to the Rwanda motion. It was suggested that this related to a motion proposed by former Councillor Steve Masters.

Resolved that the Forward Plan be noted.

44. **Scrutiny Commission Work Programme**

The Commission considered its work programme (Agenda Item 15).

At the workshop with the Executive Members and senior officers in September, a number of ideas had been put forward, which had been run through the PAPER prioritisation methodology. The Chairman read out the list of proposed items and invited comments.

It was noted that the scores had been reviewed in light of feedback received from Scrutiny Commission Members.

Issues that Members felt should be included in the work programme included:

- Waste
- Housing
- Bus services
- Active travel
- Attainment of children on free school meals

Councillor Christopher Read declared an interest in relation to the proposal to consider Wraparound Care on the basis that his wife was an early years manager. He noted that the decision to offer more generous wraparound care may accelerate the closure of nurseries, which could be particularly problematic for lower income families in rural communities.

It was suggested that the review of attainment of children on free school meals could be carried out in autumn 2024 once the next round of exam results had been published.

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 28 NOVEMBER 2023 - MINUTES

It was felt that the review of Wraparound Care could be deferred until the outcomes were better understood.

It was noted that the Royal Mail's performance had been reviewed by Ofcom at the national level.

In relation to the proposed review of the Broken Market for Children's Social Care Placements, it was noted that this had been partially covered by the Fostering item. The Regional Fostering Partnerships were aimed at tackling this issue, and it was suggested that the Commission wait to see how that developed.

In relation to the proposed review of Recruitment and Retention, Members suggested that the Personnel Committee be approached to understand what information they gathered. It was suggested that this should come to the meeting on 27 February 2024. As part of the report, it was suggested that we should seek to provide comparisons with appropriate private sector organisations.

It was suggested that Housing should be considered by a Task and Finish Group. Councillors Justin Pemberton and Antony Amirtharaj asked to be part of the Task Group. Affordable rents and vacant social housing units were highlighted as issues of concern. It was suggested that this could commence when the Covid Task Group concluded.

It was proposed that the review of the Libraries Service should be considered once the 2024/25 budget had been agreed.

It was suggested that the focus of the review of bus services should be connectivity from rural wards. It was noted that the Bus Survey results were due at the end of October. Again, it was suggested that the Budget report could better inform the focus of the review.

Action: Gordon Oliver to check if the Bus Survey results were available and when the Transport Advisory Group would be looking at the Bus Strategy.

It was noted that the Cultural Heritage Strategy Delivery Plan had a low priority rating. It was suggested that this strategy may change in future. If so, then the Commission may wish to review the new strategy. It was suggested that this was not a priority.

Resolved that the changes to the work programme be noted.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.20 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature

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SCRUTINY COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 18 JANUARY 2024

Councillors Present: Carolyne Culver (Chairman), Antony Amirtharaj, Paul Dick, Ross Mackinnon, Justin Pemberton, Christopher Read, Jeremy Cottam (Substitute) (In place of Geoff Mayes), Billy Drummond (Substitute) (In place of Erik Pattenden), and Howard Woollaston (Substitute) (In place of Dominic Boeck)

Councillors Attending Remotely: Councillor Richard Somner and Councillor Joanne Stewart

Also Present: Councillor Denise Gaines (Executive Portfolio Holder: Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel), Councillor David Marsh, Nigel Lynn (Chief Executive), Jon Winstanley (Service Director (Environment)), Neil Stacey (Network Manager (Highways)), Beth Varcoe (Solicitor), Nicola Thomas (Service Lead - Legal & Democratic Services), Gordon Oliver (Principal Policy Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Services) and Thomas Radbourne (Apprentice Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Dominic Boeck, Councillor Geoff Mayes, Councillor Erik Pattenden and Councillor Lee Dillon

PART I

45. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

46. Items called-in following the meeting of the Executive on 14 December 2023

The Commission considered the call-in of the Executive Decision (EX4416) on 14 December 2023 regarding Newbury Town Centre Pedestrianisation Extension Trial (Agenda Item 3).

Councillor Denise Gaines (Executive Portfolio Holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel) presented the background to the proposed pedestrianisation extension trial and the reasons for the decision. Key points from the presentation were as follows:

- The Executive wished to implement an experimental traffic regulation order (ETRO) instead of a permanent traffic regulation order (TRO) to ensure that the final decision was based on the actual impact of the scheme rather than perceptions of what the impacts might be.
- Councillor Gaines was confident that:
 - due regard had been given to duties under S149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the Act);
 - there had been no breach of Council duties defined in the Act;
 - the Highways Department's Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) was robust enough to deal with the requirements of ETROs, but it was acknowledged that

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 18 JANUARY 2024 - MINUTES

further information could have been provided to evidence their reasoning and give greater confidence in the assessment;

- it was considered that another EIA was not required;
- a consultation process was not required at this stage, but a 6 month consultation would take place from the day the ETRO came into effect.
- The Council had a duty to consider how its policies and decisions affected people with characteristics protected by the Act and the purpose of the Public Sector Equalities Duty (PSED) was to ensure that the Council undertook its public functions while consistently considering how it could promote equality. The Council had to keep reviewing how it promoted equality.
- The Council had to have due regard to advance equality of opportunity between persons who shared protected characteristics and others.
- Duties under the Act did not require the Council to eliminate every negative impact – the requirement was for the Council to have due regard to removing / reducing negative impacts. ‘Due regard’ varied according to circumstances, including the period that the scheme would be in place, and the nature / scale of consequences. The level of assessment for ‘due regard’ was likely to be less demanding than for a permanent scheme, especially where the scheme was experimental and included a more robust assessment of equality impacts later in the process. A consultation with all stakeholders was planned as part of the ETRO.
- In preparing the report and the EIA, Highways had given due regard to the Council’s duties under the Act, with consideration given to who may be affected by the ETRO, including those with protected characteristics.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon presented the reasons why the decision had been called in and the alternative course of action proposed. Key points from the presentation were as follows:

- It was suggested that the Council had breached the PSED. Attention was drawn to Section 2 of the EIA, which asked about: the groups that might be affected by the decision, the nature of those impacts, and the information used to determine those impacts. The EIA indicated that there would be a potential impact on disabled people due to restricted access for parking between 5pm -11pm. The EIA indicated that no survey had been undertaken to understand the extent of the potential impact, but it stated that the ETRO would provide an opportunity for consultation.
- Section 3 of the EIA indicated that there were no aspects of the decision that could contribute to inequality. This answer was inconsistent with the answer provided in Section 2 of the EIA, which acknowledged the potential impact on disabled people.
- The EIA was flawed because there had been no pre-consultation to understand the effects of the scheme on disabled residents’ lives.
- It was acknowledged that the scheme was experimental, but it would be in place for 6 months before consultation feedback was taken into account. This was considered unacceptable.
- It was suggested that the EIA was flawed and should be corrected.
- The assertion that due regard had been given to the Council’s duties under the Act was an unsound conclusion.
- It would not be onerous or costly to consult with disabled residents before the scheme was implemented. There would be nothing to lose and everything to gain by doing so.

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 18 JANUARY 2024 - MINUTES

Councillor Gaines responded to the points raised as follows:

- Although the ETRO would be in place for 6-18 months, the scheme could be removed earlier if it did not work as planned.
- If significant inequality was observed, then the ETRO allowed the trial to be stopped immediately. That would not be permitted if a TRO was used, where consultation was carried out prior to implementation.
- The aim of the ETRO was to avoid pre-conceived ideas about how the scheme might work.
- It was acknowledged that there was insufficient information in the Executive report to give confidence that the EIA had been carried out correctly.

Officers confirmed they were not aware of any residents living within the pedestrian zone whose access to their properties would be affected by the trial.

During the course of the debate, the following points were discussed:

- Pre-consultation with blue badge holders had not been carried out, but as part of the ETRO process, the Council would go out to stakeholders, to inform them of the scheme and to highlight any issues around access. There was just one blue badge holder known to be living within the pedestrian zone, but they had 24 hour access to their vehicle.
- It was noted that data protection legislation may preclude blue badge holders being contacted for other purposes.
- Members were reminded that the proposal was to extend rather than introduce a pedestrianisation scheme.
- In 2020, a temporary pedestrianisation scheme had been introduced to support social distancing and there had been no calls for the impact on disabled people to be assessed at that time.
- This was a second trial scheme, and any impacts could be assessed as part of the trial.
- It was suggested that the call-in was politically motivated and the decision should not have been called in.
- The TRO approach was likened to the Waterfall project management approach where all requirements were identified and consultation carried out at the start, with the expectation that this would provide all the required knowledge at the outset. However, this approach did not work (e.g., the Fujitsu Horizon IT system). The ETRO approach, was similar to the newer Agile methodology, which involved releasing a product early and using feedback to inform development. This allowed for products to fail early. In the same way, the ETRO could be stopped before 6 months. It would allow for an experience-led response from the public.
- The assertion that the call-in was politically motivated was refuted - the primary consideration of the Members who called-in the decision was residents' welfare.
- Members asked if it would be easy to stop the trial, with no need to apply for Secretary of State approval.
- It was suggested that the scheme would have had a significant impact if recent, major roadworks had still been in place.

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 18 JANUARY 2024 - MINUTES

- Members indicated that residents, businesses, bus and taxi operators would need to be clear about the implications of the restrictions.
- The previous pedestrianisation extension trial during the Covid pandemic was considered irrelevant since circumstances had been different.
- When consultation had been carried out previously, responses had been evenly split between those supporting and opposing the scheme, which reinforced the need for pre-consultation.
- It was confirmed that the Council had the power to stop the trial or amend the order. The Secretary of State had only been involved to determine whether the scheme should be a TRO or ETRO.
- Reservations had been expressed prior to the pedestrianisation being introduced in 1999. However, there had been no objections once the scheme was in place.
- It was highlighted that there was convenient parking at Northbrook Multi-Storey Car Park, which also had the Shopmobility service to facilitate access for disabled visitors. As a result, it was rare to see blue badge holders parking in Northbrook Street.
- Members could not recall objections to the 2020 pedestrianisation trial. However, officers highlighted that there had been some representations from blue badge holders about the lack of access to shops before 10am.
- It was noted that a proposal for one-way traffic had been dismissed. This would have permitted al fresco dining in Market Place, and would have allowed disabled access / drop-off at either end of Market Place, as well as reducing congestion and facilitating business deliveries in Northbrook Street and Bartholomew Street. However, it was noted that this would cause issues for people with visual impairments since there were no kerbs and complete pedestrianisation was considered to be a better option.
- Members asked if the scheme was considered to be 'shared space'. Officers explained that while there was no difference in levels, pedestrians and vehicles did not mingle freely, and vehicle movements predominated. It was noted that with vehicle flows of >110 vehicles per hour, pedestrians did not feel comfortable mingling. Also, visually impaired people did not feel comfortable in trafficked areas where they could not detect the edge of the footway. Furthermore, older people felt intimidated in shared space.
- It was considered that the ETRO would give a genuine response rather than a hypothesis.
- It was highlighted that the call-in had been made on the basis of what had been said in the EIA. The EIA had indicated that there were no aspects of the decision, including how it would be delivered, that could contribute to inequality. Although it was conceded that it could contribute to inequality, there was no evidence to suggest that it would.
- Councillor Gaines confirmed that the answer given in Section 3 of the EIA was correct. This was challenged on the basis of the response given in Section 2. While it was conceded that the scheme could have an impact, the impact was unknown.
- While it was recognised that there was insufficient information provided about the EIA in the report to the Executive, assurance was provided that the assessment had been properly completed.
- It was suggested that pre-consultation could be carried out without causing a delay to the scheme.

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 18 JANUARY 2024 - MINUTES

- Members stated that EIAs should be appended to Executive reports, since they provided evidence that due regard had been made to the needs of people with protected characteristics. If the EIA was not appended, then the Executive should not have made the decision, particularly since the EIA appeared to be flawed.
- It was reiterated that due regard had been given to the Council's PSED and the Highways Department's EIA process had been sufficiently robust to deal with the requirements of an ETRO. However, it was recognised that more information could have been provided to evidence this. Information was not incorrect and had not been missed out deliberately. A further EIA was not required. Also, pre-consultation was not required, but a six month consultation would be carried out when the ETRO came into force.
- It was confirmed that the Highways EIA was not different to the one submitted in the report.
- It was suggested that any concerns about the EIA could have been resolved via off-line clarification rather than through a call-in, which would have avoided delay to the implementation of the scheme. It was suggested that the call-in was "political posturing".
- It was stressed that the trial would be supported by a consultation, and the Scrutiny Commission could review the data from the trial and the consultation responses and provide constructive feedback. It was suggested that the scheme could deliver positive benefits for disabled people.
- It was noted that while local schools had an excellent environment for disabled children, Newbury town centre was seen as a 'no-go area' by their families because they could not access the facilities and it was suggested that the proposed scheme would exacerbate the problem. Visitors would be affected as well as local residents. The lack of up-front consultation was challenged as being undemocratic and insensitive to the needs of disabled residents.
- Members noted that scientific hypotheses were based on experimentation, with the results being used to refine these hypotheses so they better modelled reality.
- It was highlighted that pre-consultation and a TRO would result in a delay to the implementation of the scheme, causing it to slip from May to December.
- It was noted that there was a broad spectrum of disability, so it was difficult to give 'yes' or 'no' answers about potential impacts, and pre-consultation would not provide the right answers. It would be better to get real-life feedback from May onwards when footfall would be highest.
- A question was asked about the circumstances under which the ETRO would be reviewed. It was confirmed that the consultation would start when the ETRO was implemented. If significant numbers of people expressed concerns, then the scheme could be stopped or amended. ETROs could last for up to 18 months.
- The Commission was assured that feedback mechanisms would be clear. Previous consultations had utilised QR codes, with information in the Residents' Bulletin, libraries, social media, etc. The Council would seek to reach as many people as possible.

Councillor David Marsh was permitted to address the Commission – key points from his address were as follows:

- He felt that the call-in was a "political smokescreen".

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 18 JANUARY 2024 - MINUTES

- After years of promoting active travel, the government had performed a U-turn and were opposing traffic reduction measures to win votes from motorists. This view had been echoed by local election candidates.
- Experts and campaign groups advocated accessible, safe and attractive town centres.
- Disabled pedestrians made 30% fewer walking trips to town centres, and accessibility improvements were needed to address this.
- The call-in argument was technical and hinged on one response in the EIA.
- None of the above aims were incompatible with removing traffic from the town centre in the evening.
- The consultation should consider wider issues, not just where and when people were permitted to drive.
- The pedestrianisation extension trial had been proposed in the Newbury Town Centre Masterplan, adopted by the previous administration. The Masterplan had been the subject of two extensive consultations, one of which had attracted more than 4,000 responses. However, the pedestrianisation extension had not been implemented.
- Young people attending the Good Vibes Academy at 5pm were exposed to air pollution from queuing traffic.
- It was difficult for pedestrians to cross Mansion House Street after 5pm.
- As well as consulting disabled people, it was important to hear from other groups such as older people and people with asthma who were affected by traffic and emissions.
- Removing traffic from town centres had been shown to be good for business.
- The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP had previously said that the UK had a “once in a lifetime opportunity to reduce reliance on the car”.
- Councillor Marsh urged the Executive to implement the scheme and not give in to those who wanted to keep Northbrook Street as a rat-run.
- Extending the pedestrianisation would be cleaner, safer, quieter, healthier and more pleasant for all, and would bring more people to the town.
- The scheme would be popular with residents and visitors and would be good for business.

In concluding the debate, Members made the following points:

- Councillor Marsh’s comments were considered to be political and were not related to the call-in which was focused on the adequacy of the EIA.
- It was suggested that Members should be pedantic about potential impacts identified in the EIA.
- Officers were challenged about the response given in Section 3 of the EIA, but it was confirmed that the question had been answered correctly, since there was no evidence that the scheme would contribute to inequality and the scheme would restrict access for all users of the town centre. This would be kept under review as part of the ETRO process.
- Officers were challenged that an absence of evidence was not proof that there would be no impact.

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 18 JANUARY 2024 - MINUTES

- Members who called in the decision confirmed that they were happy with the ETRO approach, but asked that disabled residents be consulted first.
- It was noted that the proposed trial was for an extension of the existing pedestrianisation and traffic was already prohibited from the town centre between 10am and 5pm, and the current scheme had been in place since 2011. A full and robust consultation had been completed at the time. This contradicted the assertion that the impact of the new scheme was completely unknown.
- The EIA stated that there was no evidence of disabled people being dropped off / picked up within the pedestrianised area. It was suggested that this be taken at face value unless anyone had evidence to the contrary.
- Members highlighted that there were parallel streets that allowed disabled people to get close to shops / services in the town centre.
- It was noted that the response to the ETRO consultation could be positive, since it would create a nice space for people to enjoy in the evening.
- Again, the Executive Portfolio for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel was asked to actively consult with disabled residents prior to the ETRO coming into force or at the point at which the ETRO commenced.
- It was confirmed that consultation would start on the date that the ETRO commenced, that all relevant parties would be informed and that all possible communications channels would be used to get the message out. The consultation would run for the lifetime of the ETRO.

RESOLVED that the Executive Decision (EX4416) of 14 December 2023 should stand and be implemented with immediate effect.

(The meeting commenced at 6.01 pm and closed at 7.41 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature

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Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

SCRUTINY COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 6 FEBRUARY 2024

Councillors Present: Carlyne Culver (Chairman), Dominic Boeck (Vice-Chairman), Antony Amirtharaj, Erik Pattenden, Justin Pemberton, Christopher Read, Jeremy Cottam (Substitute) (In place of Geoff Mayes), Richard Somner (Substitute) (In place of Ross Mackinnon), Howard Woollaston (Substitute) (In place of Paul Dick) and Iain Cottingham

Also Present: Nigel Lynn (Chief Executive), Paul Coe (Interim Executive Director – People), AnnMarie Dodds (Executive Director - Children and Family Services), Joseph Holmes (Executive Director - Resources), Jon Winstanley (Service Director (Environment)), Shannon Coleman-Slaughter (Chief Financial Accountant), Melanie Ellis (Acting Head of Finance and Property), Nicola Thomas (Service Lead - Legal and Democratic Services), Dawn Bond (Legal Services Manager), Gordon Oliver (Principal Policy Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Services) and Benjamin Ryan (Principal Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Paul Dick, Councillor Ross Mackinnon and Councillor Geoff Mayes

PART I

47. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

48. Investment and Borrowing Strategy 2024/25

Councillor Iain Cottingham (Executive Portfolio Holder: Finance and Corporate Services) and Joseph Holmes (Executive Director – Resources) presented the Investment and Borrowing Strategy (Agenda Item 3).

The following points were raised in the debate:

- Concerns were expressed about risks associated with commercial property investments in the current economic climate. The portfolio's valuation as of March 2023 was £52.3M and delivered a net margin of just over £1M (1.7% return). Approval had been given to start divesting the portfolio, which would reduce risk exposure. There had been devaluation of the assets, but the government had confirmed that local authorities were no longer allowed to borrow through the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) for this purpose. Sales would only be made at the right price, and it was emphasised that it was not a fire sale. The aim was to reduce risk for West Berkshire residents.
- Members asked if Council funds were invested ethically. It was confirmed that most of the investments were through financial institutions or money market funds where there were no specific equity investments, but investigations were ongoing as to how these they could be rated. Meetings had been held with external parties who provided ethical investment ratings.

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 6 FEBRUARY 2024 - MINUTES

- There was a question related to the current economic climate and why this presented an opportunity to review the investment portfolio. It was noted that since interest rates were higher than in recent years, the Council had an opportunity to sell and forego future capital financing needs and thus reduce costs.
- It was confirmed that the Property Investment Strategy had not been revised, but the Board's terms of reference had been updated to reflect the Scrutiny Commission's recommendation to not have a hard end date for disposal of the commercial property portfolio.
- Members asked about any anticipated change in the portfolio's value since the last valuation. Officers were unwilling to speculate as to changes in individual valuations, however further significant decreases in valuations were not expected. It was emphasised that book value did not necessarily equate to the price realised upon disposal and until the Council tested the market, it was difficult to gauge interest in its assets. It was hoped that the assets would be attractive to potential buyers. While the assets currently enjoyed 100% rental income, this was not guaranteed for the future and any future reduction would put pressure on returns. It was also highlighted that a sinking fund would be required to pay for maintenance of the assets, estimated at £2M over 10 years.
- A question was asked about how predictions about future interest rates by the International Monetary Fund and Bank of England were being taken into account. It was stressed that while there would be many unknown factors affecting the economy over the coming year, interest rates were expected to remain broadly stable in the short-term, then fall over the medium term.
- It was noted that the Council was a long-term borrower and Members asked how the Council compared to other local authorities. Officers directed Members to information on the Office for Local Government (Oflog) website (<https://oflog.data.gov.uk/>). This showed that West Berkshire Council's debt levels were lower than average. West Berkshire's debt was around £1,000 per head of population, while some local authorities had debts of £4,000 - £5,000 per head of population.
- Officers explained that the Council was undertaking short-term borrowing in the expectation that PWLB rates would start to drop, but at some point, it was explained that the Council would need to revert to long-term borrowing in order to reduce exposure to interest rate risk.
- Members asked if the Council had considered issuing retail bonds for infrastructure projects. Officers explained that individual local authorities' investment programmes were mostly too small, but some larger public bodies had issued bonds (e.g., Transport for London). Officers explained that the Local Government Association had set up a Municipal Bonds Agency to allow local authorities to package investments of a sufficient size to be attractive to the market, but no bonds had been issued to date. In order to issue bonds, local authorities had to be rated by credit agencies, which incurred an up-front cost.
- Officers were asked about future rounds of community bonds. It was confirmed that the new solar farm would be funded partly through the UK Infrastructure Bank and partly through a community bond.
- A typo was identified in Appendix C where % had been used instead of £.
Action: Joseph Holmes to correct the typo in Appendix C of the report.
- It was suggested that this was not the time to sell commercial property investments if it could be avoided, since the market was at a low point in the cycle.

Resolved to note the report.

49. **Medium Term Financial Strategy**

Councillor Iain Cottingham (Executive Portfolio Holder: Finance and Corporate Services) and Joseph Holmes (Executive Director – Resources) presented the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) (Agenda Item 4).

It was noted that the funding settlement had only just been received on the day before the meeting, which meant that the papers were already out of date.

The following points were raised in the debate:

- It was highlighted that the local government settlement for 2024/25 would boost local authority budgets and Members asked how West Berkshire would be affected. Officers confirmed that the government had announced £600M for local authorities across the country. An increase of around £2M for West Berkshire had been assumed in the MTFS. This appeared to be fairly accurate, with the increase now expected to be around £1.9M.
- Members queried the assumption in 3.4.2 that proposed care reforms would have no impact on funding in future years. It was explained that the government had previously proposed significant reforms to adult social care, capping contributions that individuals would have to make to their adult social care, but the reforms had been delayed and were not expected to be introduced for several years.
- While it was noted that the main objective of the MTFS was to maintain the resilience of the Council budget, Members sought assurance that spend across the People and Place Directorates would be ring-fenced. It was explained that the Council was projected to have £4M of reserves by the end of the financial year, which equated to just 8 days of spend, leaving the Council vulnerable to unexpected events, so it was impossible to guarantee that additional savings would not be needed. It was highlighted that 10 high-needs social care clients were costing the Council £10M per year and any additional high-needs clients could quickly deplete remaining reserves. It was noted that speculative investors were making significant profits from the deregulated care market.
- Members noted that business rates were a significant source of revenue, but the Council had no control over this and suggested that this was a risk. Officers indicated that of £100M of business rates collected, the Council retained around £30M. The Council did not have control over property valuations, nor the level of rates charged. There were also risks around appeals. A key risk was that West Berkshire was currently around £10M above the baseline set 10 years ago. Government had proposed to reset business rates, however, it was likely that there would be a transition period.
- It was noted that the Council retained 100% rates income from renewable energy schemes and Members asked about the value of this income and if more schemes were being considered. It was confirmed that the Council benefited from all renewable schemes not just its own. The Council was proposing to build a solar farm, which would be a net financial benefit.
- A question was asked about the new funding system to replace the New Homes Bonus, Services Grant and Funding Guarantee. It was assumed that where funding schemes ended, they would be replaced by an alternative that gave a similar funding level. However, it would be some time before Government reforms were agreed. Members suggested that this should be added as an identified risk with suitable

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 6 FEBRUARY 2024 - MINUTES

mitigations put in place. Officers indicated that any changes would most likely have a transition period. There had been one-year settlements for a number of years. This was likely to continue until there was a wider government spending review and a return to four-year allocations. Also, this was not considered a material risk, since it was only equivalent to 0.4% of the budget.

- Members asked about the ideal level of reserves. It was suggested that 3-4 weeks of spend would be comfortable (i.e., £8M - £8.5M of general reserves) plus risk reserves (i.e. circa £5M).
- It was noted that reserves used to be significantly higher. Reserves were boosted during Covid due to various grants, which were subsequently allocated, but it was suggested that the Council should seek to return to pre-Covid levels of reserves. Members recognised that there had been several major unexpected events in recent years, and the Council needed resilience to cope with future events.
- Members questioned whether the Council was seeking to replenish reserves too quickly and asked how this would be achieved. It was confirmed that this would be achieved through savings, income and transformation. It was suggested that building reserves also had benefits in attracting new staff, who would want reassurance that the Council was financially resilient.
- It was noted that the Council had amongst the lowest levels of reserves in the country and Members asked if that mattered, given that it also had a lower level of debt than some other local authorities. It was explained that other local authorities had risk reserves to draw upon, which gave additional financial resilience. Comparator data highlighted the Council's lack of financial resilience compared to its peers.
- Members asked if historic data was available about the reserves of those local authorities that had issued S114 notices. While this data may be available, it was noted that some of these local authorities had thought they had higher levels of reserves than they did. Also, because external audits were often delayed, many local authorities had not had their accounts signed off. As such, results may be misleading.
Action: Joseph Holmes to provide details of where historic financial information could be accessed for other local authorities.
- A question was asked around requirements for stress testing around anticipated risks. Officers confirmed that there were no requirements to undertake stress testing, but S151 officers were required to set out risks and set appropriate levels of reserves. The Council was required to report on various performance indicators (e.g., investment as a percentage of income, money spent on capital financing, etc).

RESOLVED to note the report.

50. **Capital Strategy, Financial Years 2024/25 to 2033/34**

Councillor Iain Cottingham (Executive Portfolio Holder: Finance and Corporate Services) and Joseph Holmes (Executive Director – Resources) presented the Capital Strategy (Agenda Item 5).

The following points were raised in the debate:

- Queries were raised in relation to Appendix C. It was confirmed that this set out the minimum revenue provision policy. This showed that the Council had historically set aside significant capital financing costs through the revenue budget for minimum revenue provision (MRP). Following an external review, the Council was looking to move in line with other local authorities' MRP repayments. It was proposed to

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 6 FEBRUARY 2024 - MINUTES

significantly reduce payments and move to a lower weighted average annuity basis. This delivered a saving in the short-term but created a higher pressure in the long-term. This was a technical accounting adjustment recommended by the external review. Repayments would be made at a future date when the value of the debt was much lower.

- Members highlighted issues with readability due to the small font size used in tables.
- Members welcomed the pie chart in section 4.2, which showed how spend was linked to the Council Strategy priorities, but it was suggested that this chart should include percentages.

Actions: Joseph Holmes to review the font size used in tables and to include percentages in the chart in 4.2.

- Proposals for capital strategy investment in 5.3 were highlighted and Members queried why there was nil spend for CIL/S106. It was explained that there were restrictions around what this could be used for, so it was allocated to general fund items (e.g., Education, Highways, etc) rather than Capital Investment or Invest to Save.
- Members queried comments about investments in the Vodafone Radio Access Network. It was confirmed that the Council was looking to work with Vodafone rather than invest in their network. Other local authorities had used technology to monitor adult social care users in their homes to help detect problems as they occurred, but connectivity was a challenge in rural areas. West Berkshire was exploring potential trials with Vodafone, which could help to transform the service and reduce unit costs in the longer-term.
- It was noted that the report still referred to London Road Industrial Estate rather than Bond Riverside.

Action: Joseph Holmes to update LRIE references to Bond Riverside.

- Members queried whether Bloomfield Hatch Solar Farm was mentioned in the report. This was listed under Renewable Energy Provision (Project No. 127).
- A question was asked about the Council's debt to capital investment ratio compared to those of other local authorities. Officers did not know.
- It was noted that 6.7% of revenue was spent on debt finance and Members asked how that figure compared to other local authorities. It was confirmed that this information was available via Oflog. Only around 10 upper tier local authorities had a higher debt servicing cost to core spending ratio, including some that had substantial debt financing (e.g., Warrington). There would need to be a good business case for taking on further debt. Money could not be borrowed to increase reserves – it had to be for a capital project. An announcement was awaited from government around the flexible use of capital receipts to alleviate short-term pressures.

RESOLVED to note the report.

51. Revenue Budget 2024/25

Councillor Iain Cottingham (Executive Portfolio Holder: Finance and Corporate Services) and Joseph Holmes (Executive Director – Resources) presented the Revenue Budget (Agenda Item 6).

The following points were raised in the debate:

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 6 FEBRUARY 2024 - MINUTES

- It was noted that the report quoted different figures for the Council's tax base in the executive summary and introduction.

Action: Joseph Holmes to check the figures for the tax base.

- Members asked about the state of the Collection Fund. Officers confirmed that the collection rate was holding up well but was slightly below pre-pandemic levels. Although the assumption about the number of new properties completed had been overly optimistic, it was expected that this would catch up in the following year. Business Rates had seen a £3M surplus in the previous year, but a £1M deficit this year. This was due to a number of factors, including revaluations.
- Members commended the work that had gone into reviewing the budget.
- It was highlighted that data was missing for parish expenses. Officers confirmed that figures would be added as soon as they were available.
- Members noted proposed cost savings on grass / verge cutting and expressed concerns about the road safety implications of this, particularly in rural areas. It was also noted that previous proposals to make savings by reducing gully clearing had been dropped – this was welcomed by Members, since recent flooding events had highlighted the importance of this activity. It was explained that the public consultation had proposed around £1.5M of cost savings, but around £300,000 of these had been dropped in response to consultation feedback, including those related to gully clearance and waste / dog waste bins. Useful feedback had been received around location of dog waste bins.
- Recent conversations related to recent flood events had highlighted that many landowners were not aware of their riparian responsibilities. It was suggested that this had implications for reducing Council costs for clearing ditches in future.
- It was highlighted that the Council was looking at the 'adopt a street' initiative, which could help to reduce grass-cutting costs.
- In relation to the 'green bin charge', Members noted that it was proposed to stop printing the stickers that showed which residents had taken out the subscription in order to achieve a saving. They asked how operatives would know who had paid their subscriptions. It was explained that the contractor had details of all subscribers. Members asked if the £3 reduction reflected the cost of the stickers. It was confirmed that the cost of the reduction was £100,000 and the saving from not printing the stickers was £43,000, so there was a net impact of £57,000.
- It was suggested that the public may have ideas about where additional savings could be made. Officers agreed and indicated that discussions were ongoing with parish councils about where services could be devolved. Members highlighted some parish councils' concerns about the Continental contract, where bins had gone unemptied. It was suggested that if services were to be devolved, then parish councils would need sufficient notice to be able to make appropriate provision within parish precepts.
- It was noted that spend on home to school transport was expected to increase by £700,000. Members asked if this was due to higher costs or service extensions. A review of the Home to School Transport Service was also proposed, which could result in a saving of £100,000. Officers confirmed that the changes reflected increased costs to the Council and the £700,000 increase included the £100,000 saving. Any changes would be subject to consultation.
- It was highlighted that Reading Borough Council used approved drivers for home to school transport rather than taxi operators, which was proving more cost effective. It

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 6 FEBRUARY 2024 - MINUTES

was confirmed that opportunities would be taken to learn from best practice and make savings when contracts were reviewed at the end of the school year. It was noted that expenditure was particularly high for individuals with complex needs. Members also noted that demand in some villages exceeded the capacity of school bus services, so taxis had to be used to accommodate excess demand.

- Members asked what the Customer Experience Officer would do. It was confirmed that they would support the move towards online services.
- In relation to dedicated schools grant, it was noted that schools had agreed to transfer 0.25% to the high needs block. It was explained that the maximum that could be transferred was 1%. 0% had been transferred in the previous year. There was a significant deficit in the high needs block. The Council was part of the Department for Education's Delivering Better Value Programme, which looked at how to reduce the growing deficit.
- Members queried proposed savings on bridge maintenance. It was confirmed that this would be a one-off saving of around 44%. This was possible because the condition of bridges in West Berkshire was generally good, which allowed for a temporary maintenance holiday. Members asked how this related to the £400,000 allocated in the capital programme for bridge maintenance. It was explained that revenue funding was for surveys, while capital funding was for improving assets.
- It was noted that there were no bullet points under 'A Prosperous and Resilient West Berkshire' on page 109. Officers explained that this was not an area where investment was proposed in the coming year.
- On page 295, Members highlighted concerns in relation to proposed changes to transport services to day services, and asked for guarantees that access for service users would not be adversely affected. It was confirmed that options were being considered to ensure that the most vulnerable were not penalised. It was recognised that there would be knock-on impacts on parents and ultimately on care needs if clients could not access these services. These could result in additional costs that would be much greater than the initial savings.
- Members noted that temporary housing costs were rising and asked how these could be reduced in the long-term. Officers confirmed that the Council was purchasing properties for displaced persons through the Local Authority Housing Fund and officers were looking at other opportunities within the wider market. It was highlighted that until the current financial year, this had not been a significant financial pressure, but it would remain an issue unless the Council acted.
- Members asked when houses purchased for displaced people would become available for local people. It was noted that some of the tenants were already in the district. It was anticipated that these would become available as temporary accommodation for local residents in the medium term.
- The district's ageing population was highlighted, which would have implications for adult social care. Noting previous comments about the cost of high-need individuals, Members asked if it would be possible to have some anonymised case studies about individual care needs and costs incurred, which would help to provide context for the financial challenges.

Action: Paul Coe to provide a briefing on adult social care cases.

- The value of reviewing adult social care was recognised, including prevention, getting people out of care, and achieving the best outcomes, as well as understanding the cost base. Members stressed the value of prevention and highlighted the work of the

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 6 FEBRUARY 2024 - MINUTES

Healthcare in Major Developments Task Group, which was seeking to ensure that new housing developments had the necessary health facilities.

- The Chairman noted that the Commission had a review of SEND services on its programme, which would be timely given current pressures on the High Needs Block. It was suggested that this should come to the May meeting. It was noted that the Delivering Better Value programme would have commenced by then. An update on the Adult Social Care Strategy was also requested.

Action: Gordon Oliver to programme reviews of SEND services and the Adult Social Care Strategy.

RESOLVED to note the report.

52. 2023/24 Revenue Financial Performance Quarter Three

Councillor Iain Cottingham (Executive Portfolio Holder: Finance and Corporate Services) and Joseph Holmes (Executive Director – Resources) presented the Revenue Financial Performance Report for Quarter Three (Agenda Item 7).

The following points were raised in the debate:

- Around 17% of current spend at unitary authorities was by councils that had issued a S114 report or had requested exceptional financial support - this highlighted the scale of financial pressures across the country.
- Members welcomed the reduction in employment agency spend across the Council but questioned the spend in the Place and Resources Directorates. It was explained that spend was needed to cover gaps in specialist technical staff where the Council had been unsuccessful in recruiting to vacant posts. Where possible, posts were held vacant, or staff acted up to provide cover, but some agency staff would always be needed to cover key posts.
- A question was asked about vacancy rates and how these compared to other local authorities. Members were informed that information for West Berkshire Council was provided to the Personnel Committee.

Action: Joseph Holmes to liaise with Catalin Bogos regarding comparator data for staff vacancy rates.

- Members of the Executive and Officers were thanked for their efforts to reduce the deficit and agency spend. It was suggested that the Transformation Programme would have a significant role to play in reducing costs. It was also suggested that the Scrutiny Commission should have a presentation on the Transformation Programme at a future meeting.

Action: Gordon Oliver to programme a report on the Transformation Programme in discussion with the Chairman and Gabrielle Mancini.

RESOLVED to note the report.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.32 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature

Actions arising from previous Meetings

Members are requested to consider the following list of actions and note the updates provided.

| Ref No: | Date | Item/Action | Member/Officer | Comments/Update |
|---------|------------|--|----------------------|---|
| 89 | 07/03/2023 | Libraries Review Consult with town / parish councils to understand what they wanted from the service | Felicity Harrison | In Progress - The libraries report did not go to Executive on 21 September as originally planned. Instead, the vision for libraries, based on the recommendations of the Libraries Review, was presented to Strategy Board on 9 November. A new Libraries Manager position was advertised in March and the role should be filled by summer 2024, so the review has been deferred. |
| 90 | 07/03/2023 | Libraries Review Ensure that 'priorities', 'review recommendations' and 'opportunities for future investment are aligned and that targets are set | Felicity Harrison | |
| 91 | 07/03/2023 | Libraries Review Libraries report to be updated before submitting it to the Executive | Felicity Harrison | |
| 111 | 11/10/2023 | Thames Water and Environment Agency Arrange a site visit for Councillor Geoff Mayes to the Burghfield and Mortimer sewage works. | Thames Water | Complete - Councillor Mayes has been provided with contact details for Thames Water and will arrange a site visit in due course. |
| 112 | 11/10/2023 | Thames Water and Environment Agency Set up a meeting with Councillor Stuart Gourley and council officers to discuss the London Road pumping station | Thames Water | In progress - Held initial meeting prior to Christmas, TW committed to come back before end of March to present firmer plans for London Road Pumping Station and Lower Way Sewage Treatment Works. They have now done this, albeit no firm plan was provided, but they have talked through the initial plan, and the various governance and business case processes it needs to go through to secure and ringfence funding for the upgrades required, subject to approval. |
| 114 | 11/10/2023 | Thames Water and Environment Agency Send a link to the Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan to Councillor Christopher Read | Thames Water | Complete - The Drainage Wastewater Management Plan is available on Thames Water's website: https://www.thameswater.co.uk/about-us/regulation/drainage-and-wastewater-management |
| 116 | 11/10/2023 | Thames Water and Environment Agency Meet with the EA and West Berkshire Council to discuss the Northbrook in Newbury | Thames Water | In progress - Thames Water have supported with testing of the Northbrook. WBC have started an initial business case, and had initial conversations with the Environment Agency on potential funding opportunities for flood alleviation. |
| 117 | 28/11/2023 | Actions from Previous Minutes Attend meeting of Mental Health Action Group to discuss possible Council Tax concessions and debt collection mechanisms. | Cllr Carolyne Culver | Complete - The Mental Health Action Group had highlighted these issues to Health and Wellbeing Board and Councillor Alan Macro then suggested that the Scrutiny Commission may wish to undertake a review. However, given the health and wellbeing focus of these issues, the matter has now been referred to the Health Scrutiny Committee. |
| 118 | 28/11/2023 | Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Framework Add social opportunities to the list on page 104 of the agenda pack. | Pamela Voss | Closed - Unfortunately, this change was missed off the final report to Executive. |

Actions arising from previous Meetings

Members are requested to consider the following list of actions and note the updates provided.

| Ref No: | Date | Item/Action | Member/Officer | Comments/Update |
|---------|------------|--|---------------------|---|
| 119 | 28/11/2023 | Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Framework Incorporate definitions of Equity and Equality into the EDI Framework, possibly within a glossary | Pamela Voss | Complete - Definitions added to accompanying report (4.3) : <i>References to “equality” may be a familiar term to most; it essentially means providing the same to all. As the equality agenda has evolved, other terms have been used too, including diversity and inclusion. The term “equity” has emerged and also needs to be considered to create fairness and justice in all decision making and everything we undertake.</i> |
| 120 | 28/11/2023 | 2023/24 Revenue Financial Performance Quarter Two Confirm postage costs incurred to date for neighbour notification letters to Cllr Ross Mackinnon. | Joseph Holmes | Complete - Confirmed postage costs of £412.50 on 4 December. |
| 121 | 28/11/2023 | Thames Water Update Circulate an update on Thames Water actions following the meeting. | Cllr Carlyne Culver | Outstanding |
| 122 | 28/11/2023 | Scrutiny Commission Work Programme Check if the Bus Survey results are available and when the Transport Advisory Group would be looking at the Bus Strategy. | Gordon Oliver | Complete - The bus survey closed on 10 September 2023 and the revised Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) was published in November 2023. |
| 123 | 06/02/2024 | Investment and Borrowing Strategy 2024/25 Correct the typo in Appendix C of the report (% to £) | Joseph Holmes | In Progress - To be amended for 2024/25. |
| 124 | 06/02/2024 | Medium Term Financial Strategy Provide details of where historic financial information could be accessed for other local authorities. | Joseph Holmes | Complete: Information is available on the Oflog website. The online tool allows for comparison with up to three other local authorities at a time. https://oflog.data.gov.uk/corporate-and-finance?area=E06000037 |
| 125 | 06/02/2024 | Medium Term Financial Strategy Update LRIE references to Bond Riverside | Joseph Holmes | Complete - Reference to LRIE removed |
| 126 | 06/02/2024 | Revenue Budget 2024/25 Check the figures for the tax base to ensure they are consistent. | Joseph Holmes | Complete - Updated for final revenue budget report |
| 127 | 06/02/2024 | Revenue Budget 2024/25 Provide a briefing on adult social care cases | Paul Coe | In progress - Session proposed for May 2024 along with member training on ASC scrutiny. |
| 128 | 06/02/2024 | Revenue Budget 2024/25 Programme reviews of SEND services and the Adult Social Care Strategy. | Gordon Oliver | In progress - SEND Reviews are proposed for 2024/25. Scrutiny structures are currently being reviewed, but it is likely that responsibility for scrutiny of Adult Social Care will move to another committee. |

Actions arising from previous Meetings

Members are requested to consider the following list of actions and note the updates provided.

| Ref No: | Date | Item/Action | Member/Officer | Comments/Update |
|----------------|-------------|---|-----------------------|---|
| 129 | 06/02/2024 | 2023/24 Revenue Financial Performance Q3 Liaise with Catalin Bogos regarding comparator data for staff vacancy rates | Joseph Holmes | In progress - To be considered using information from the Local Government Association |
| 130 | 06/02/2024 | 2023/24 Revenue Financial Performance Q3 Programme a report on the Transformation Programme in discussion with the Chairman and Gabrielle Mancini | Gordon Oliver | In progress - Scope of the report needs to be further defined before it can be programmed. |

Last updated: 16 April 2024

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Scrutiny Commission – 25 April 2024

Item 4 – Declarations of interest

Verbal Item

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Agenda Item 5.

Scrutiny Commission – 25 April 2024

Item 5 – Petitions

Verbal Item

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Agenda Item 7.

Scrutiny Commission – 25 April 2024

Item 7 – Covid & Recovery Task & Finish Group Update

Verbal Item

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Agenda Item 8.

Overview and Scrutiny Review Matrix

Review Topic: Sports Hub

Timescale

Start:

Finish:

Review Rationale:

To determine whether there was a strategically and financially sound business case for the Sports Hub, and whether reliable and consistent advice was given to members about the project to assist them in their decision-making roles.

Terms of Reference:

To determine whether the Sports Hub project was value for money.

To determine whether the project would have delivered on the council's strategic objectives.

To determine whether the project was well managed.

To determine whether reliable and consistent advice was given to members about the project to assist them in their decision-making roles.

To determine whether the council's decision to abandon the project in its original form was a strategically and financially sound decision.

To establish whether the council intends to deliver any elements of the original project at Monks Lane (bearing in mind planning permission remains and project funds are being carried forward).

To determine what lessons can be learned from this project.

Review Membership:

Councillor
Councillor
Councillor
Councillor

Chairman:

Vice-Chairman:

Scrutiny Officer:

Information Required

Documents/Evidence:

Sports Hub business case and all associated costs
Playing Pitch Strategy including Stage E Review 2022 and documentation relating to the planned 2024 review
Sports Hub planning application and associated papers
Western Area Planning Committee agenda pack (15 December 2021)
Executive decision 4149 (16 December 2021)
District Planning Committee agenda pack (2 March 2022)

WBC 'Defendant's Detailed Grounds of Resistance' presented to the High Court (22 September 2022)
Executive decision 4332 (23 March 2023)
LRIE task and finish group final report presented to OSMC (as Scrutiny Commission was formerly known) on 28 July 2020

Witnesses:

Internal

Councillor Woollaston, former Executive member for Internal Governance Leisure & Culture
Councillor Janine Lewis, current Executive member for Public Health, Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside
Nigel Lynn, CEO
Joseph Holmes, Executive Director Resources
April Peberdy, Service Director Communities and Wellbeing
Sarah Clarke, Solicitor – Service Director, Strategy & Governance
Masie Masiwa, Senior Planning Officer, Development & Regulation
Simon Till, Team Leader (Development Control), Development & Regulation

External

Sport England
Newbury Community Football Group
Rugby Club
Lynne Doherty, former Leader of WBC
Consultants who worked on the project who have since left WBC – acknowledging that they would not be obliged to attend to give evidence

Measures Available

Desired Outcomes:

To meet the objectives outlined in the terms of reference and produce a document of findings for Scrutiny Commission.

Health Scrutiny Commission Update (April 2024)

The most recent Health Scrutiny Committee meeting was on 12 March 2024. The two substantive items on the agenda were Early Years Health Inequalities and Pharmaceutical Provisions.

The Committee brought together key partners to review public health data, highlight key concerns and to review health visiting services and key NHS service areas. The focus of the debate was to understand the inequalities in West Berkshire and to consider partnership working, barriers and opportunities for improvement. This work will move forward with the early years health inequalities group and will return to the committee with an update.

Pharmaceutical services were scrutinised in response to concerns raised about pharmacy closures and changes to the services provided at pharmacies. There was representation from the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the Local Pharmaceutical Committee (Community Pharmacy Thames Valley).

In addition, Adult Social Care provided their Social Care Inquests annual report and there were updates from Healthwatch and the Integrated Care Board on their key priorities and activities.

The Health Scrutiny Committee takes a collective approach by ensuring commissioners, service providers and public health are involved in preparing reports and answering questions. Healthwatch and the voluntary sector are also involved.

Members of the public were asked to input any concerns in relation to the key items on the agenda. This was done through a request in the resident's newsletter. The most recent request brought many points raised about pharmacy provision.

The Health Scrutiny Committee has an ongoing work programme and action log and are keeping the following items in their view:

- Continuing Healthcare – All Age Continuing Care Transformation Plan.
- The redevelopments of Royal Berkshire Hospital.
- The redevelopment of North Hampshire Hospital.

On 25 January 2024, Councillors Martha Vickers and Nigel Foot attended the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Joint Health Scrutiny Committee (BOB JHOSC). The Draft BOB Integrated Care Board (ICB) Primary Care Strategy and the BOB ICB Communication and Engagement Strategy were on the agenda with a detailed discussion. The BOB JHOSC followed this with a written response to the ICB on the draft Primary Care Strategy. Councillor Foot has raised concerns with dentistry provisions, and this will be considered on the BOB JHOSC work programme, or on the Health Scrutiny Commission work programme.

There have been four meetings of the Healthcare in New Developments Task Group. These sessions have brought together Planning, Public Health, Developers and the ICB to consider the draft health planning protocol and to review engagement in

planning policy and the planning process. The final report is being drafted and will be submitted at the next Health Scrutiny Committee in June.

Councillor Martha Vickers

Health Scrutiny Committee Chairman

WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL'S FORWARD PLAN 1 MAY 2024 - 31 AUGUST 2024

The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

1. This document gives 28 clear days notice of key decisions which the Executive and Individual Executive Members or Officer expect to take.
2. The document is updated as required and is available to the public on the Council's website.
3. The Executive is made up of the Executive Leader, Deputy Leader and eight Executive Members with the following portfolios:

| | |
|---|----------------------------|
| Executive Leader of the Council Public Safety (on sabbatical) | Councillor Lee Dillon |
| Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Strategy, Communications, Governance and Transformation | Councillor Jeff Brooks |
| Finance and Corporate Services | Councillor Iain Cottingham |
| Economy and Regeneration | Councillor Louise Sturgess |
| Adult Social Care and Health Integration | Councillor Alan Macro |
| Children, Education and Young People's Services | Councillor Heather Codling |
| Public Health, Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside | Councillor Janine Lewis |
| Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity | Councillor Stuart Gourley |
| Executive Member for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel | Councillor Denise Gaines |
| Planning and Community Engagement | Councillor Tony Vickers |

4. Key decisions are those executive decisions which are likely to result in spending or savings which are "significant" in relation to the budget for the service or function in question, or in terms of the effect on communities living or working in two or more wards or electoral divisions. All contracts above £500,000 require a key decision in accordance with the Constitution.
5. The Regulations and the Council's Constitution provide for urgent key decisions to be made, even though they have not been included in this document in accordance with General Exception and Special Urgency provisions.

6. The Forward Plan will also contain details of intended review activity by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission and its Sub-Committee(s) or another body e.g. Task Group associated with the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission.
7. Copies of the Council's Constitution and agenda and minutes for all meetings of the Council may be accessed on the Council's website.
8. For copies of reports or other documents, and for detailed information regarding specific issues to be considered by the Executive, individual Member or officer please contact the named Lead Officer for the item concerned.
9. For further details on the time of meetings and general information about the Plan please email executivecycle@westberkshire.gov.uk or by writing to the address below.

Publication Date: 1 May 2024

Nicola Thomas
Service Lead
Legal & Democratic Services
West Berkshire Council, Council Offices
Market Street
Newbury
RG14 5LD

| Decision Due Date | Title | Purpose | Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No | Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision | Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members | Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer) | Lead Officer e.g report author | Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information) |
|-------------------|--|--|---------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
| 10 Apr 2024 | Contract Award for Thatcham Memorial Fields - Flood Alleviation Scheme | For information - contract award following full tender process. Expected cost £1.3-£1.6m. | Yes | Jon Winstanley - Service Director | | | Vickie Collins | Open |
| 1 May 2024 | School Streets Francis Baily School - Experimental Traffic Order | To consider the responses received during statutory consultation. | No | Portfolio Holder: Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel | | | Gareth Dowding | Open |
| 2 May 2024 | 2024-25 Network Management Works Programme | To seek approval of the proposed Network Management Works Programme for 2024-25 | Yes | Portfolio Holder: Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel | | | Neil Stacey | Open |
| 2 May 2024 | Proposed Allocation of the Household Support Fund April-October 2024 | To propose a continuation of the programme and agree the allocations for the funding period. | Yes | Portfolio Holder: Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel | | | Sean Murphy | Open |

| Decision Due Date | Title | Purpose | Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No | Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision | Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members | Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer) | Lead Officer e.g report author | Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information) |
|-------------------|--|---|---------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
| 16 May 2024 | Bond Riverside programme update | To update and refresh the Bond Riverside regeneration programme to bring it into alignment with the position and goals of the Council administration. | Yes | Executive | | | Sam Robins | Open |
| 16 May 2024 | Rights of Way Improvement Plan | To present the revised plan following public consultation. | Yes | Executive | | | Elaine Cox | Open |
| 16 May 2024 | 2023/24 Performance Report Quarter Three | To highlight successes and where performance has fallen below the expected level, to present information on the remedial action taken, and the impact of that action. | Yes | Executive | | | Catalin Bogos | Open |
| 16 May 2024 | New Mental | To provide an update on the | No | Executive | | | Rachel | Open |

| Decision Due Date | Title | Purpose | Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No | Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision | Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members | Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer) | Lead Officer e.g report author | Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information) |
|-------------------|--|---|---------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
| | Health Fund 2024 | Surviving to Thriving fund. The report will outline a proposal to close the current fund and redirect the remaining funds to a new 'Let's Get Mindful' general mental health fund for adults and children | | | | | Johnson | |
| 16 May 2024 | Care Experienced as a Protected Characteristic | | No | Executive | | | Dave Wraight | Open |
| 16 May 2024 | Standing item: Asset Disposal | | Yes | Executive | | | Shannon Coleman-Slaughter | Open |
| 16 May 2024 | Armed Forces Covenant Update Report | | Yes | Executive | | | Carolyn Richardson | Open |
| 16 May 2024 | Review of CIL | To review how | Yes | Executive | | | Katharine | Open |

| Decision Due Date | Title | Purpose | Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No | Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision | Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members | Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer) | Lead Officer e.g report author | Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information) |
|-------------------|---|---|---------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
| | | CIL exemptions are granted to householders, including approval of (1) a CIL Enforcement Policy and (2) an appeals process which could lead to reimbursement for those who were disqualified for exemption due to mistakes in their paperwork. | | | | | Makant | |
| | Newbury Racecourse S106 Contribution Review | The Highway Authority will not seek further funding towards highway improvements to the A339/A343 junction from the Racecourse Development in accordance with the terms | No | Jon Winstanley - Service Director | | | Jon Winstanley | Open |

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|-------------------|--|---|---------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
| | | of the S106 agreement as detailed below | | | | | | |
| 4 Jul 2024 | Revenue Performance Report Outturn 2023/24 | | Yes | Executive | | | Melanie Ellis | Open |
| 4 Jul 2024 | 2023/24 Performance Report Year End | | No | Executive | | | Catalin Bogos | Open |
| 4 Jul 2024 | Capital Financing Performance Report Outturn 2023/24 | | Yes | Executive | | | Shannon Coleman-Slaughter | Open |
| 4 Jul 2024 | Efficiency Statement | | No | Executive | | | Gabrielle Mancini | Open |
| 4 Jul 2024 | Home to School Transport Policy | | Yes | Executive | | | Gabrielle Mancini | Open |

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|-------------------|---|---|---------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
| 4 Jul 2024 | Peer Review Report | To share the findings of the recent peer review. | No | Executive | | | Catalin Bogos | Open |
| 4 Jul 2024 | CQC Inspection report | To share the findings of the recent CQC inspection. | Yes | Executive | | | Paul Coe | Open |
| 4 Jul 2024 | Market Failure Policy | | Yes | Executive | | | Karen Felgate | Open |
| 4 Jul 2024 | Dunstan Park - land clawback | To seek to agree how to treat the clawback for the open space land at Dunstan Park, Thatcham. | No | Executive | | | Richard Turner | Open |
| 19 Sep 2024 | Waste Strategy | | Yes | Executive | | | Kofi Adu-Gyamfi | Open |
| 19 Sep 2024 | 2023/24 Performance Report Quarter Four | To highlight successes and where performance has fallen below the expected level, to present | Yes | Executive | | | Catalin Bogos | Open |

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|-------------------|--|--|---------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
| | | information on the remedial action taken, and the impact of that action. | | | | | | |
| 19 Sep 2024 | Revenue Financial Performance Report - Q1 of 2024/25 | To inform Members of the latest financial performance of the Council. | Yes | Executive | | | Melanie Ellis | Open |
| 19 Sep 2024 | Capital Financial Performance Report - Q1 of 2024/25 | To present the Q1 capital financial performance for Members to note. | Yes | Executive | | | Shannon Coleman-Slaughter | Open |
| 19 Sep 2024 | Future of Turnham's Green | | No | Executive | | | Gabrielle Mancini | Open |
| 19 Sep 2024 | Customer Charter | To review and update the Council's customer charter. | No | Executive | | | Sarah Clarke | Open |
| 19 Sep 2024 | Corporate Accommodati | | Yes | Executive | | | Gabrielle Mancini | Open |

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|-------------------|------------------------------------|---|---------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
| | on Review | | | | | | | |
| 19 Sep 2024 | 2024/25 Performance Report Q1 | | Yes | Executive | | | Catalin Bogos | Open |
| 19 Sep 2024 | Risk Management Strategy 2024-2027 | To set out the overarching framework for managing risk at the Council, the Council's risk appetite and the risk management objectives for the next three years. | Yes | Executive | | | Catalin Bogos | Open |
| 19 Sep 2024 | Domestic Abuse Strategy 2023-27 | | Yes | Executive | | | Jade Wilder | Open |
| 7 Nov 2024 | Care Homes Contract Award | | Yes | Executive | | | Gabrielle Mancini | Open |
| 7 Nov 2024 | Capital Financial Performance | To present the Q2 capital financial | Yes | Executive | | | Shannon Coleman-Slaughter | Open |

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|-------------------|--|---|---------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
| | Report - Q2 of 2024/25 | performance for Members to note. | | | | | | |
| 7 Nov 2024 | Procurement activity annual report | To inform the Executive of the procurements undertaken by the Council over the past 12 months and the impact of the Social Value procurement policy. | Yes | Executive | | | Kate Pearson | Open |
| 7 Nov 2024 | Future of the Shared Partnership for the Public Protection Partnership | To fulfil the requirement of the IAA which is due to expire in January 2027, which requires the partner authorities to review the current arrangements and adopt any changes 2 years before | No | Executive | | | Sean Murphy | Open |

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|-------------------|--|---|---------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
| | | the current arrangement expires. | | | | | | |
| 12 Dec 2024 | Revenue Financial Performance Report - Q2 of 2024/25 | | Yes | Executive | | | Melanie Ellis | Open |
| 12 Dec 2024 | 2024/25 Performance Report Q2 | | Yes | Executive | | | Catalin Bogos | Open |
| 13 Feb 2025 | Capital Financial Performance Report - Q3 of 2024/25 | To present the Q3 capital financial performance for Members to note. | Yes | Executive | | | Shannon Coleman-Slaughter | Open |
| 13 Feb 2025 | Revenue Financial Performance Report - Q3 of 2024/25 | To inform Members of the latest financial performance of the Council. | Yes | Executive | | | Melanie Ellis | Open |
| 22 May 2025 | 2024/25 Performance Report Q3 | | Yes | Executive | | | Catalin Bogos | Open |

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|-------------------|--|---|---------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|---|
| | Leisure Strategy Delivery Plan | To present the plan for implementing the Leisure Strategy. | Yes | Executive | | | Paul Martindill | Open |
| | Community Infrastructure Levy- Customer Journey Independent Review | Response to motion to Council March 2023 by Councillor Brooks | No | Executive | | | Bryan Lyttle | Open |
| | Joint Legal team (JLT) Review | To agree a revised Heads of Term Agreement and to delegate authority to the Service Lead, Legal and Democratic Services to finalise the same. | Yes | Executive | | | Leigh Hogan | Fully exempt Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) Information which reveals that the authority |

| Decision Due Date | Title | Purpose | Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No | Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision | Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members | Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer) | Lead Officer e.g report author | Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information) |
|-------------------|-------------------------|--|---------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|---|
| | | | | | | | | proposes to give under any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person Information which reveals that the authority proposes to make an order or direction under any enactment. |
| | LRIE lease acquisitions | To seek Executive sign-off to make an offer to buy-back the leases on plots 13U and 13T on the LRIE, subject to a satisfactory price being | Yes | Executive | | | Sam Robins | Open |

| Decision Due Date | Title | Purpose | Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No | Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision | Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members | Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer) | Lead Officer e.g report author | Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information) |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|---|---------------------------|--|--|--|--------------------------------|--|
| | | agreed at negotiatuons which are currently underway with the leaseholders on the sites. | | | | | | |
| | Review of Libraries Service | To evaluate the impact of the transformation of the library service which took place in 2017-18 and put forward any additional options for improving the service for residents. | Yes | Executive | Community Needs Assessment Stakeholder Surveys – volunteers, staff, service managers, hard to reach groups Public Survey including library users and non-users Parish and Town Council engagement sessions | | Felicity Harrison | Open |
| | Parking Strategy 2023-2033 | To consider and approve the West Berkshire | Yes | Executive | | | Ian Martinez | Open |

| Decision Due Date | Title | Purpose | Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No | Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision | Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members | Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer) | Lead Officer e.g report author | Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information) |
|-------------------|--|---|---------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
| | | Council Parking Strategy 2023-2033. | | | | | | |
| | Contract Award report for West Point House Refurbishment Project | Contract value estimated to be £990k therefore included on the Forward Plan for information | No | Joseph Holmes - Executive Director | | | Vickie Collins | Open |
| | Kennet Valley Primary School SEMH Provision | Contract award report for the Kennet Valley expansion works following a full tender process. Contract value estimated at £1.8 million | Yes | Paul Coe - Executive Director | | | Vicky Pearce | Open |
| | Contract Award report for Mrs Blands Infant and Nursery School Heating Replacement | Contract award report for heating replacement works at Mrs Blands School following a full tender process. Contract value estimated at | Yes | AnnMarie Dodds - Executive Director | | | Vicky Pearce | Open |

| Decision Due Date | Title | Purpose | Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No | Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision | Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members | Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer) | Lead Officer e.g report author | Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information) |
|-------------------|-------|---------|---------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
| | | £500k. | | | | | | |

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Scrutiny Commission Work Programme

The following items will be considered as standing items: Capital and Revenue Financial Performance Reports (Quarterly), and Performance Report (Annually)

Last Updated:
17 April 2024

| Item | Scrutiny Theme | Purpose | Lead Officer | Portfolio Holder/ Lead Member | Pre or post decision? |
|---|----------------------------------|---|--|---|------------------------------------|
| May 2024 (tbc) - Private Briefing Session | | | | | |
| Adult Social Care Briefing | <i>Corporate Effectiveness</i> | To understand ASC spend with reference to anonymised case studies (joint session with Health Scrutiny Committee) | Paul Coe / Maria Shepherd | Adult Social Care and Health Integration | Scrutiny Commission Decision |
| 21 May 2024 | | | | | |
| Waste Strategy | <i>Policy Effectiveness</i> | To review the development of the Waste Strategy | Jon Winstanley / Kofi Adu-Gyamfi | Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity | Pre-decision |
| Review of SEND and the High Needs Block* (*To be reprogrammed) | <i>Corporate Effectiveness</i> | To review current spend and transformation activity in this area | AnnMarie Dodds | Children, Education and Young People's Services | Scrutiny Commission Decision |
| 24 September 2024 | | | | | |
| Community Safety | <i>Partnership Effectiveness</i> | Meeting in its capacity as West Berkshire Council's Crime and Disorder Committee, to receive a presentation from the Building Communities Together Partnership. | Supt Andy Penrith/ Nigel Lynn | Public Safety | Scrutiny Commission Decision |
| IT Project Management | <i>Corporate Effectiveness</i> | To review the Council's approach to managing major IT and identify lessons to be learned from recent projects (e.g., Care Director) | Andy Best / Melanie Best | Acting Leader; Strategy, Communications, Governance and Transformation | Post-decision |
| Covid and Recovery Task Group Report | <i>Corporate Effectiveness</i> | To present the Task Group's report | Gordon Oliver | N/A | Scrutiny Commission Decision |
| October 2024 (Special) | | | | | |
| Thames Water | <i>Partnership Effectiveness</i> | To understand how Thames Water is upgrading its water supply and foul water networks to support planned development and pollution incidents in West Berkshire and how the Environment Agency is holding the water company to account. | Karen Nelson (Thames Water) Dave Willis (Environment Agency) | Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity | Scrutiny Commission Decision |
| Section 19 Water Act Report on 2024 Flooding | <i>Partnership Effectiveness</i> | To review the findings of the report and understand lessons learned in terms of flood alleviation and river management authorities. | Jon Winstanley / Paul Bacchus | Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity | Pre-Decision |
| 26 November 2024 | | | | | |
| Attainment of Children on Free School Meals | <i>Corporate Effectiveness</i> | To review the reasons for the persistent gap in attainment between those on free school meals and other children living in West Berkshire and the measures to address this. | AnnMarie Dodds / Rose Carberry(?) | Children, Education and Young People's Services | Scrutiny Commission Decision |

| | | | | | | |
|--|--|----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| | Review of SEND and the High Needs Block* (*To be reprogrammed) | <i>Corporate Effectiveness</i> | To receive an update on spend and transformation activity in this area | AnnMarie Dodds | Children, Education and Young People's Services | Scrutiny Commission Decision |
| | Budget Headlines | <i>Corporate Effectiveness</i> | To review the emerging draft budget, budget consultation and expected government settlement. | Joseph Holmes | Finance and Economic Development | Pre-decision |
| February 2025 (Budget Scrutiny) | | | | | | |
| | Investment and Borrowing Strategy 2025/26 | <i>Corporate Effectiveness</i> | To consolidate the investments and borrowing strategy for the year ahead by detailing how and where the Council will invest and borrow in the forthcoming year, within a particular framework. This strategy is monitored throughout the year, with a mid-year report going to the Government and Ethics Committee as well as an annual report being presented to Members. | Joseph Holmes | Finance and Economic Development | Pre-Decision |
| | Medium Term Financial Strategy | <i>Corporate Effectiveness</i> | To set out the financial planning assumptions for future years and how these align these with the Council Strategy to ensure that the Council Strategy will be delivered. The MTFS highlights the overarching key issues facing the Council's finances as well as how there are many different scenarios and uncertainty concerning the future revenue streams for the Council in the future. | Joseph Holmes | Finance and Economic Development | Pre-Decision |
| | Capital Strategy. Financial Years 2025/26 to 2034/35 | <i>Corporate Effectiveness</i> | To outline the Capital Strategy covering financial years 2025/26 to 2034/35 and the supporting funding framework, providing a high-level overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of local public services along with an overview of how associated risk is managed and the implications for future financial sustainability. | Joseph Holmes | Finance and Economic Development | Pre-Decision |
| | Revenue | <i>Corporate Effectiveness</i> | Purpose: To consider and recommend to Council the 2025/26 Revenue Budget. | Joseph Holmes | Finance and Economic Development | Pre-Decision |
| 13 March 2025 | | | | | | |
| | Libraries Service | <i>Corporate Effectiveness</i> | To review the performance of the Libraries Service and its funding model. | April Peberdy / Felicity Harrison | Public Health, Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside | Scrutiny Commission Decision |
| | Housing Task & Finish Group Terms of Reference | <i>Partnership Effectiveness</i> | To agree the terms of reference for the Housing Task and Finish Group. | Gordon Oliver | N/A | Scrutiny Commission Decision |

| Standing Items | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|--|---|--|--------------|
| Quarterly Capital Financial Performance Report | <i>Corporate Effectiveness</i> | Reports on the under or over spends against the Council's approved capital budget. | Joseph Holmes / Shannon Coleman-Slaughter | Finance and Economic Development | Pre-decision |
| Quarterly Revenue Financial Performance Report | <i>Corporate Effectiveness</i> | To report on the financial performance of the Council's revenue budgets. | Joseph Holmes / Melanie Ellis | Finance and Economic Development | Pre-decision |
| Performance Report (Annual) | <i>Corporate Effectiveness</i> | To provide assurance that the core business and council priorities for improvement measures in the Council Strategy 2019-23 are being managed effectively. To highlight successes and where performance has fallen below the expected level, present information on remedial action taken, and the impact of that action | Joseph Holmes / Catalin Bogos | Internal Governance and Strategic Partnerships | Pre-decision |

Council Strategy Priorities

- Services We Are Proud Of
- A Fairer West Berkshire with Opportunities for All
- Tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergency
- A Prosperous and Resilient West Berkshire
- Thriving Communities with a Strong Local Voice

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