

# DRAFT

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

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 6 SEPTEMBER 2022

**Councillors Present:** Alan Law (Chairman), Adrian Abbs (Vice-Chairman), James Cole, Tony Linden, Steve Masters, Biyi Oloko, Tony Vickers and Dennis Benneyworth (Substitute) (In place of Claire Rowles)

**Also Present:** Councillors Steve Ardagh-Walter, Jeff Beck, Dominic Boeck, Owen Jeffery, Ross Mackinnon and Geoff Mayes.

**Members Present Remotely:** Councillors Lynne Doherty, Alan Macro and Richard Somner

**Officers Present:** Nigel Lynn (Chief Executive), Susan Halliwell (Executive Director - Place), Joseph Holmes (Executive Director - Resources), Andy Sharp (Executive Director (People)), Eric Owens (Service Director - Development & Regulation), Jon Winstanley (Service Director (Environment)) and Pete Campbell (Head of Children and Family Services), Katharine Makant (Economy Manager), Tom Dunn (Principal Policy Officer) and Gordon Oliver (Principal Policy Officer)

**Others Present:** Richard Aylard (Thames Water) and Nikki Hines (Thames Water)

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Councillor Jeff Brooks and Councillor Claire Rowles

## PART I

### 15. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2022 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman:

It was noted that Councillor Biyi Oloko had tried to give his apologies, but was out of the country and was unable to make contact.

### 16. Actions from previous Minutes

Members noted the updates on the actions from the previous Minutes. In addition, the following comments were made:

- Action 58 – Although West Berkshire Council had made initial approaches regarding recommencing the Kennet and Avon Canal Partnership and had allocated Members to it, so far there had been no interest from the other partners.
- Action 62 – It was noted that a report on appraisals would be brought to the November meeting.

### 17. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Tony Vickers and Biyi Oloko declared an interest in Agenda Item 6, but reported that, as their interest was a personal or an other registrable interest, but not a disclosable pecuniary interest, they determined to remain to take part in the debate and vote on the matter.

## 18. Petitions

There were no petitions to be received at the meeting.

## 19. Thames Water Activities

*(Councillor Tony Vickers declared a personal interest in Agenda item 6 by virtue of the fact that he had been nominated as Chairman of Newbury Flood Action Group. As his interest was personal and not prejudicial he was permitted to take part in the debate).*

*(Councillor Biyi Oloko declared a personal interest in Agenda item 6 by virtue of the fact that he had previously worked for Thames Water. As his interest was personal and not prejudicial he was permitted to take part in the debate).*

The Commission considered a presentation from Thames Water on their future investment plans for West Berkshire (Agenda Item 6). The presentation addressed issues raised by Members that had been sent to Thames Water in advance of the meeting. The presentation covered the following topics:

- Improving River Health
- Overflows
- Sewage treatment works
- Investment
- 'Go to Green'
- Groundwater Impacted System Management Plans (GISMP)
- Clean water
- Planning
- River Pang Chalk Stream Project
- Plan for Reducing Harm to Water Quality in the River Thames Catchment
- Leakage

Councillor Steve Ardagh-Walter was invited to address the meeting as Portfolio Holder for the Environment and Transformation. He highlighted that climate change resilience was a key plank of the Council's Environment Strategy. Concern was expressed that Thames Water lacked focus on sustained improvements for flood risk management. Thatcham had been badly affected by flooding in 2007, with other areas affected more recently. Thames Water had previously supported the Thatcham Flood Water Management Plan, but had not signed up to the most recent proposal. They were asked how they would help Thatcham and other local communities in future. Thames Water confirmed that known problem areas were being tackled. They offered to arrange a meeting to discuss the Thatcham scheme. It was stressed that investment had to be prioritised in terms of need and the ranking process was overseen by the Consumer Council for Water. Thames Water was also increasing spend on sustainable drainage which had a role in managing flood water, and they were keen to work with local authorities and others on such schemes. If the Council had specific issues then they would explain what they were doing to address these or explain why they could not help.

**Action: Thames Water to contact Councillor Steve Ardagh-Walter to arrange a meeting regarding flood protection works in Thatcham.**

Members asked why investment in capacity had lagged behind need and why things had come to a head now. It was noted that investment in the network took place to support

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION - 6 SEPTEMBER 2022 - MINUTES

new development and to support predicted increases in population. Thames Water always sought to have spare capacity at sewage treatment works. Occasionally development came forward more quickly than expected, or calculations were proved wrong, but often the problem was with surface water, particularly where a development was poorly designed or constructed with cross-connections between surface and foul sewers. If surface water could be kept out of foul sewers, then Thames Water could cope.

Members asked if the oversight process was fit for purpose. It was explained that approvals were often contracted out to third parties who did not check whether schemes had been built in accordance with agreed plans.

Thames Water was asked if they were lobbying central government on this issue. They suggested that the secondary legislation required to remove the automatic right of developers to connect to the network had not been enacted due to lobbying from housebuilders. The water industry was working with local authorities and MPs to lobby Defra on this issue. Challenges were greatest in areas with high groundwater levels and work was ongoing to find where surface water was going to foul sewers, but this was particularly challenging.

Members highlighted an issue with the sewer to the west of Theale, which was being extended to Aldermaston, and the local pumping station had been severely overloaded on occasion. Outline planning permission had been granted for a major development of circa 430 homes and Thames Water was asked about their planned investment. Thames Water confirmed that their Modelling and Operations Teams were working together to investigate the network and understand what improvements were needed to ensure that the network would be able to cope with the additional flows. The Systems Modelling Group had also done a study to consider growth across the whole of Theale.

Other developments at North Newbury and Compton had also been highlighted as concerns by Members. It was confirmed that in North Newbury, work to accept the sites was ongoing, and Thames Water was working with both developers to understand build and occupation rates so they could complete their works in time. An earlier blockage was thought to be a one-off event. There were no concerns upstream of Dene Way pumping station and efforts were focused on the downstream network. The pumping station would be upgraded in the medium to long-term. In the short-term, the downstream network would be kept free of debris and silt. For Compton, Thames Water expressed concern that a family had been restricted in their toilet use for 120 hours, and asked for further details. Improvements had been carried out in the village including 380m of leak-tight lining, sealed manholes, and patch repairs to a sewer. Thames Water was also looking at plans for redevelopment of the former animal research centre and it was agreed that the homes should not be occupied until existing issues had been addressed.

**Action: Thames Water to liaise with Councillor Carlyne Culver regarding the affected household in Compton.**

A question was asked about independent verification of discharge monitoring. It was confirmed that monitored discharges were reported to the Environment Agency (EA) annually. The EA could check the records and equipment at any time. Where there were local concerns about monitors not reading correctly, webcams could be installed. This had been done at Mortimer and an offer was made to do the same at Kintbury if necessary.

Members expressed concerns about the time taken to repair some leaks and highlighted long-standing issues at Kintbury and Enborne. Thames Water indicated that repair times were decreasing and targets had been achieved for the last three years. However, it

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION - 6 SEPTEMBER 2022 - MINUTES

could be challenging to find the source of leaks, particularly where they were not visible on the surface. In some cases, issues were found to relate to natural springs.

**Action: Thames Water to liaise with Councillor James Cole regarding installation of a webcam at Kintbury, as well as figures for repair times and long-standing leaks at Kintbury and Enborne.**

Members indicated that effluent was held and treated at the sewage treatment works in Thatcham before being discharged as potable water to the River Kennet. However, there had been an incident where a poisonous chemical had been put into a drain and this had subsequently been discharged into the river. Thames Water stated that treated effluent was not potable. It was recognised that unscrupulous individuals sometimes discharged illegal substances into manholes, which could kill the bugs that carried out biological treatment.

A further question was asked about whether there was sufficient storage capacity at Thatcham to avoid discharge of untreated effluent into the river. It was confirmed that where contamination was detected, effluent could be diverted to storm tanks, which would give up to 12 hours of protection. However, sewage was not routinely sampled. Members encouraged Thames Water to consider additional storm water storage facilities at Thatcham.

A question was asked about the use of technology and how Thames Water would reduce its energy consumption and decarbonise their operations (e.g. through hydrothermal processes). Thames Water explained that they used natural processes to treat sewage. The carbon impacts were associated with processing the sludge, which was taken to a treatment centre where it was subjected to thermal hydrolysis followed by anaerobic digestion and dewatering. This produced a high quality 'cake' product for use in farming. Thermal destruction was being considered due to issues with micro-plastics, anti-microbial resistance and pesticide residues. However, the costs would be huge. Currently, floating and land-based solar power and wind turbines on Thames Water's estate were supplying 25% of their power needs. Some sites were self-sufficient or net exporters to the grid.

Concern was reiterated about the Thatcham Flood Alleviation Scheme, which had been dropped by Thames Water after 14 years of partnership working.

An issue was raised in relation to streetworks - the process seemed uncoordinated and prone to delays and performance concerns. Members asked that these concerns be recognised and given a high level of focus. Thames Water acknowledged that streetworks were problematic everywhere. An offer was made to broker discussions between the Council and Thames Water's Streetworks Team and to look at individual concerns. It was noted that they sought to minimise disruption and to comply with regulations. Reassurance was provided that poor performance was not related to profits or cost-cutting – shareholder dividends had not been paid for five years.

**Action: Thames Water to arrange a meeting between Councillor Richard Somner and the Streetworks Team.**

Members expressed concern about the proposed Sandleford development, which would have significant implications for the Newbury network. It was noted that incentives for water efficiency measures could be worth £3.6 million to the developer. Thames Water was asked how reduced water supply rates for new developments could be incorporated into Local Plan policies. Also, Members asked if additional land would be required within the London Road Industrial Estate and about upgrades through to Thatcham sewage works. Thames Water offered to provide details of the Local Plan expert within the organisation. Thames Water confirmed that they wanted to reduce consumption, since

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION - 6 SEPTEMBER 2022 - MINUTES

that minimised the need for additional investment. It was noted that the revenue correction mechanism meant that Thames Water was penalised for additional water sold. It was suggested that major new developments could have dual potable and grey water systems, which would reduce demand for fresh water and reduce waste water. New developments should also have good surface water drainage / sustainable drainage. These issues needed to be resolved at the planning stage.

**Action: Thames Water to provide contact details for their Local Plan expert.**

Members noted that surface water was overloading the Mortimer Sewage Works and asked where this entered the system. Thames Water indicated that water was infiltrating sewers in wet weather when the ground was saturated, but they did not know where. There had been 34 discharges at Mortimer between January and March, but none since then. The monitor was being checked using a webcam. If the figures were confirmed, then it would go on the list of 'high spillers' and measures would be identified to address this.

An issue was highlighted with a development in Tilehurst South and Holybrook where residents were paying two fees because Thames Water had not adopted a pump. Thames Water requested further details.

**Action: Councillor Biyi Oloko to provide details of the affected development.**

A question was asked as to whether the £1.25 billion that Thames Water had committed to spend would be enough to prevent further discharges of sewage into watercourses. It was confirmed that the commitment was to achieve a 50% reduction in the duration of discharges by 2030, and an 80% reduction in sensitive catchments. However, the network had been designed to overflow to the environment when capacity was exceeded and it would take much more than £1.25 billion to address this.

Members asked for further information about sewage works that were operating close to capacity. Thames Water indicated that the issue was related to the quality of the effluent, which had to meet strict standards. Efforts were focused on improving the quality of the treatment in order to build more headroom. The more sewage put through the works, the less treatment it received.

Members queried a gap in the monitoring of discharges at Stratfield Mortimer. Also, a question was asked about a suspected pollution incident at Reading and the categorisation system. It was explained that a pollution incident was an acute problem when something went wrong – these were categorised from 1 (complete disaster) to 4 (no impact). All pollution incidents were investigated and categorised. These were different to discharges, which was how treatment works were designed to operate. Discharges would only be categorised as a pollution incident if fish were killed or if there was some other environmental impact. Thames Water offered to look into individual incidents if required.

Thames Water was asked about a recent incident affecting Northbrook Stream adjacent to the A4. This had been reported by local residents who had not received a satisfactory response. It was explained that pollution reports were fast-tracked through the customer centre and someone dispatched to investigate within two hours 24/7. Thames Water urged people to report pollution incidents immediately.

**Action: Thames Water to liaise with Councillor Steve Masters regarding the Northbrook Stream pollution incident.**

Members asked to see a copy of Thames Water's Carbon Net Zero Plan.

**Action: Thames Water to send a copy of their Carbon Net Zero Plan to Councillor Adrian Abbs.**

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION - 6 SEPTEMBER 2022 - MINUTES

Thames Water was asked about how they supported a river to recover after a pollution incident. They confirmed that Thames Water was prosecuted after each major incident. This could take 5-6 years, and any fines would go to the Treasury. Now, Thames Water undertook voluntary reparation - they would meet affected parties to discuss their financial losses and what could be done to put things right (e.g. compensating for lost income, renting fishing rights on alternative waters, etc). Fish could be restocked once water quality recovered, but fresh water, sunshine and fresh air helped invertebrates to recover. It was noted that Thames Water had very few incidents that resulted in major fish kills.

Officer provided further detail regarding the outstanding element of the Thatcham Flood Alleviation Scheme. The scheme was cited as an exemplar of flood alleviation, which included sustainable drainage to hold water back and relieved pressure on the Thames Water sewer. The Council had worked closely with Thames Water to ensure that it met their criteria. Although the funds sought were relatively modest, when match-funding was considered, this resulted in a major shortfall. The Council was disappointed that Thames Water had withdrawn their support and asked if the scheme could be reviewed. Thames Water undertook to find out why it had been rejected and to reopen discussions.

**Action: Thames Water to review the Thatcham Flood Alleviation Scheme in discussion with Jon Winstanley (Service Director – Environment).**

The Chairman thanked Thames Water for their attendance, and noted that a number of actions had arisen from the discussion, and that there were also things that the Council could do to support Thames Water particularly in relation to the Local Plan and new development.

**Action: West Berkshire Council to add its weight to lobby central Government to enact the relevant legislation to remove the automatic right of developers to connect to the sewerage network.**

**Action: West Berkshire Council to ensure that Thames Water's comments were fully considered in the new Local plan, particularly regarding the need for large new developments to have dual potable and grey water systems.**

## 20. Corporate Parenting

The Commission considered a report (Agenda Item 7) concerning Corporate Parenting. It was noted that originally, OSMC had been asked to look at the Fostering and Adoption service, but that service was being reviewed by the Audit Team, so the decision had been taken to review the Corporate Parenting Panel and how Corporate Parenting could be made more effective instead.

Pete Campbell (Head of Children and Family Services) introduced the report. Key points from the presentation were as follows:

- Corporate Parenting covered all children who were not able to live with their immediate birth family and were in the Council's care up to 18 years old.
- There were about 175 children in the Council's care, with a similar number of 'care leavers'.
- A recent Ofsted inspection had included an assessment of Corporate Parenting – the Council had been praised for its ambition for children in its care.
- Given the recent Ofsted inspection, there was no point in OSMC checking to see if the Council's Corporate Parenting function had a 'clean bill of health'. Instead the report focused on the general Corporate Parenting duty on Members and Officers.

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION - 6 SEPTEMBER 2022 - MINUTES

- Members had received Corporate Parenting training in 2019, with some refresher training since then, but Members did not receive regular updates on Corporate Parenting as a matter of course.
- Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel were well-informed, but there was an opportunity to communicate achievements of and ambitions for children in care more widely.
- A review had been undertaken of what other local authorities were doing. While some activities carried out by larger local authorities would not be practical in West Berkshire, some ideas could be implemented here.
- The Council was keen for children to provide feedback on services via social media or face-to-face.
- The report's recommendations took account of planned changes to Ofsted reviews, which would include care leavers in future, and also the findings of the MacAlister Review of Children's Social Care to which the Government was expected to respond before Christmas.
- It was noted that many Members already took an interest in Corporate Parenting, but the report's sought to improve communications and better celebrate achievements.

Councillor Dominic Boeck was invited to comment as Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education. He articulated his ambition to do an even better job of Corporate Parenting and for Members to be more aware of their responsibilities and to be more involved outside of the Panel.

Members noted recommendations to produce an annual report on Corporate Parenting to Full Council, and to improve information on the Council's website, and asked what was stopping this from happening. It was explained that the Council had previously organised an annual celebration event. This had lapsed during Covid, but would be re-introduced for October 2022. It was then planned to have an annual report 6 months later. This would be made as accessible as possible to a wider audience.

It was noted that the Scottish Government had moved to a system of Community Parenting. Members supported the idea and asked how it could be implemented here. Officers felt that this could be encouraged and enabled locally, and partners such as the police, schools and Berkshire Youth were very supportive. Officers suggested that similar legislation may be introduced in England in due course.

Members commented on previous memorable experiences of talking to looked after children about their experiences of the Council and agreed that there was a need to engage Members more. It was noted that other Members did not get minutes of Corporate Parenting Panel and they felt excluded as a result.

It was noted that there would be a number of new Members at the next election due to existing Members retiring and they would require a good briefing. A comparison was made with the Chief Constable's annual report, which was provided before the annual meeting of Council and was considered to be useful.

Members praised the briefings that had been provided previously by Children's Services. Members also noted that Pete Campbell would be leaving the Council and took the opportunity to thank him for his efforts.

Members agreed with the report's assertion that Corporate Parenting had a low profile within the Council and stressed that this needed to change. Officers highlighted that the Panel had been focused on scrutiny, which had been appropriate when Ofsted had concerns about the Council's performance, but this had missed the opportunity for celebration and promotion.

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION - 6 SEPTEMBER 2022 - MINUTES

It was noted that other local authorities had a Corporate Parenting Board that met in public and asked if there was any downside to doing this. Officers expressed concern that there was a risk of being able to identify individual children in a small local authority such as West Berkshire.

The report proposed a policy of having no housing evictions for care leavers. Members suggested that this may be a step too far. Officers explained that this had been introduced in Derby and the MacAlister review had picked it up as something for other councils to consider.

Members asked if there was care leaver representation on the Panel. Officers confirmed care leavers were represented and they became 'care champions'. The Government Advisor was expected to provide appropriate recommendations for engaging with care leavers.

Councillor Boeck concluded the item by stressing that Corporate Parenting should be about more than an annual report and made the appeal for Members to be involved all year round.

### 21. **2022/23 Revenue Financial Performance Report Quarter One**

The Commission considered a report (Agenda Item 10) concerning the Revenue Report for Quarter One 2022/23..

Joseph Holmes (Executive Director - Resources) introduced the report. Key points from the presentation were as follows:

- The Council was forecasting an overspend of £2.1 million after mitigations.
- There would be further impacts associated with inflation and the staff pay award.
- Within the People directorate, there was increased demand from both Adult and Children Social Care. Adult social care had gone up by 5-6%
- There were residual income pressures from Covid, particularly in relation to car parking and the leisure contract.
- The underlying position of savings was positive.
- Some mitigations were proposed, which would be reviewed at the end of Quarter 2.

Members asked about the likely future direction of the overspend and whether central government would provide additional support. Officers noted that in previous years, demand for adult social care places decreased in months five and six, but the last two years had been affected by Covid. There had been no announcement to date regarding additional central government funding. It was noted that other local authorities had similar overspends for Q1. Additional grants had been claimed for initiatives such as Homes for Ukraine, which would be recorded in the Q2 report.

Clarification was sought as to the meaning of the term "managing demand to the model". It was explained that this was about trying to keep clients out of care for as long as possible by offering advice and guidance or other support not delivered by the local authority. Clients were supported through lower level services for as long as possible, e.g. through reablement support.

Members queried why despite lower occupancy in our own care homes, clients were being placed in externally commissioned beds, which cost more. It was confirmed that some homes were unable to cope with the complexity of the individual's care needs, or there could be issues that meant it was not suitable for an individual to go to a particular care home (e.g. placement restrictions for certain types of care).

Members asked why the forecast increase was 20 clients in 2022, but the model only showed 10 in 2023. It was explained that this was down to the way in which the model



## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION - 6 SEPTEMBER 2022 - MINUTES

was calculated, which was based on trend analysis in previous years as well as local intelligence about clients. In previous periods, there had been government support for hospital discharge and these clients would subsequently be picked up by the Council.

Members noted that there were limited reserves and asked about the impacts of inflation, rising energy costs, rising interest rates and the pay award. Officers stated that the minimum levels of reserves was £7 million and the current level was £8.9 million. If the predicted outturn was achieved, then it would push the reserves below its minimum level. In relation to bank rates, it was noted that there would be an underspend due the Council not borrowing for the current year's capital programme. With respect to energy inflation, spend was forecast to increase from £0.75 million to £1.7 million. Some funding had been set aside for this, but energy prices had continued to rise. Similarly some funding had been set aside for adult social care inflation. Another area of inflation was around the waste contract, which had been provided for in the budget. Inflation would have a much larger impact in 2023/24.

Members asked about the underlying assumptions used to calculate the revised forecast. It was explained that some inflation would not be present in the Q1 report because inflation was not so high at that time, so there would be additional inflationary pressure in Q2. The current forecast included the best guess as to any additional inflationary impacts.

Members suggested that inflation could rise as high as 18-20% and asked if forecasts could be changed to reflect these rates. It was confirmed that more of this would be included in the Q2 report. Officers indicated that more paragraphs could be added on inflation. It was noted that Timelord 2 had reduced the Council's office needs and would help to offset some energy inflation impacts. However, Members pointed out that staff may want to return to the office rather than pay to heat their homes.

Members asked how figures on pages 7-9 related to each other and indicated that the report was not user-friendly. Specific queries were made in relation to the Planning Service, where a saving of £100,000 was forecast despite the service struggling to recruit staff and being reliant upon agency support. It was explained that the plan was not to make savings but to reduce agency costs in line with the budget. Members expressed concern that workload would increase and applications would be processed more slowly, which would have wider implications for the economy. Officers confirmed that there the efficiency of the Planning Service would be improved and processes would be sped up to support economic growth. Also, greater levels of income would be generated from Planning services.

Members asked for more quantifiable details of agency spend across departments with comparison against budget to be included in future finance reports.

**Action: Future finance reports to include details of agency spend across departments with comparisons against budgets.**

Members highlighted a reference to overspend in Adult Social Care due to agency cover in the report, and asked how much this was. Officers noted that there was further information in the table below. It was confirmed that agency costs had increased and this was being considered by Personnel Committee. Also, a Recruitment and Agency Panel had been set up, which would consider all new recruitment and agency staff requests. Members noted that increased costs were incurred by asking agencies to recruit staff rather than doing it in-house – this had been raised at Personnel Committee.

In relation to annualised client number for long-term Adult Social Care services, it was noted that the number had increased by 70 between 2020/21 and 2021/22, with a further increase of 113 into 2022/23. Clarification was sought as to the reason for the increases.

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION - 6 SEPTEMBER 2022 - MINUTES

It was explained that there was a gap around close-down when figures weren't monitored and reported. However, they were profiled into the base budget. Also, during Covid, a number of clients had been funded through different funding streams, who then became clients of the Council when funding structures had changed.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon was invited to comment as Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development. He reiterated the point that the pressures were not as a result of failure to achieve savings, or poor forecasting, but they were due to factors outwith the Council's control. He noted that the Adult Social Care model had been reviewed by an expert from the Local Government Association who had provided positive feedback.

### 22. Capital Financial Performance Report Quarter One 2022/23

The Commission considered a report (Agenda Item 11) concerning the Capital Report for Quarter One 2022/23..

Joseph Holmes (Executive Director – Resources) introduced the report. Key points from the presentation were as follows:

- The forecast was for a small capital underspend.
- There would be some reprofiling of spend in future financial years.
- Officers expected to deliver most of the capital programme, but there were some issues with rising costs – and there would be long-term cost pressures due to significant inflationary rises across a range of construction materials.
- It was expected that there would be increased volatility in the capital programme showing by Q3 and Q4.
- Cost increases were expected to show up more in the long-term programme for the next 5 to 10 years, which was due to go to Full Council in March 2023.

Members asked if capital projects would be delayed as a result of inflation and increased borrowing costs. Officers indicated that the Capital Strategy was continually reviewed to see how best to balance out the costs of capital financing and inflation. It was considered likely that there would be reprofiling shown in the report to Full Council in March 2023, which would take account of the Council's supply chain and inflationary pressures. While the previous strategy had been to borrow over the longer term, it was expected that the Council may undertake shorter-term borrowing as it started to pay off greater levels of debt over the next 5-10 years. This created opportunities to make savings on the revenue budgets, since shorter-term borrowing was a bit cheaper. It was noted that much depended on macro-economic factors, including borrowing rates and other investors, such as the UK Infrastructure Bank.

Members expressed concern that current contracts may be reduced in scope due to the impacts of construction inflation. While it was accepted that this would deliver capital savings, it would have implications for future revenue budgets. For example, reduced specification on road surfacing would mean that the repairs would not last so long. Members asked about the scope for moving revenue savings from future years into renegotiating capital costs for the current year. Officers confirmed that they were always looking for opportunities to generate revenue savings through the capital programme. There were examples of such schemes in the report related to Adult Social Care and care homes. It was explained that many of the schemes in the current capital programme had already been procured, which was why there was not an immediate inflationary pressure in many cases. However, there would be greater impacts on future schemes, which would either require additional borrowing, grant funding or changes to project scopes.

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION - 6 SEPTEMBER 2022 - MINUTES

Members noted that around £3 million was due to be spent on renewable energy provision. However, the Revenue Report had indicated that income from solar had been disappointing. It was confirmed that over the shorter-term there had been less income from solar projects, since fewer projects had been delivered than expected. A budget adjustment would be made for 20223/24 to allow the Council to catch up and deliver more schemes, which would generate more income.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon was invited to comment as Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development. He confirmed that 'invest to save' schemes and schemes that generated income would not be priorities for reprofiling.

### 23. **Economic Development Strategy - Operational Review**

The Commission considered a report (Agenda Item 8) concerning the Operational Review of the Economic Development Strategy .

Katharine Makant (Economy Manager) introduced the report. Key points from the presentation were as follows:

- The review was based on the refreshed version of the Strategy, which was approved in June 2021, in response to Covid related challenges.
- The Economic Development Team had administered significant amounts of grant funding.
- The team had set up the Business West Berkshire website, which was the first of a number of initiatives designed to encourage business investment in West Berkshire as part of an Investment Strategy.
- The Newbury Town Centre Vision and Master Plan had been progressed and a scheme was being developed for Newbury Wharf.
- A lot of work had been done to support employment, working in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions through Kickstart, and with the Skills and Enterprise Partnership to sponsor a STEM Zone in their careers fair.
- The team was looking to work more closely with rural businesses and was planning a conference in November.
- Relationships had been built both within the Council and with external partners such as the Chambers of Commerce to engage with local businesses.

Members noted that the Business West Berkshire website did not include links with LinkedIn or the main West Berkshire Council website. Officers undertook to review this.

**Action: Katharine Makant to look at how the website could be better linked to LinkedIn and the Council's website.**

It was noted that footfall in Hungerford had remained fairly static, but had fallen significantly in Newbury and Thatcham. Members questioned whether expenditure had been effective in supporting the High Streets. It was noted that a new provider of footfall information had been commissioned, which utilised mobile phone signal data. Discussions were being held with the provider, since officers were surprised by the data and the figures did not match those from the Newbury BID. Also, Newbury Town Centre had been highlighted as one of the top performing town centres towards the end of last year. Members felt that figures should not be published until they could be confirmed, since they appeared to show that revenue spend had been ineffective. Officers explained that funding had come from the Welcome Back Fund from Central Government and schemes had been put forward by Newbury Bid and Thatcham Town Council. Also, projects were directly funded that had been put forward by Hungerford Town Council. Members pointed out that this was still taxpayers money. Members also noted that car

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION - 6 SEPTEMBER 2022 - MINUTES

park revenues were still down, which suggested that there were fewer visitors to the town centres.

Members asked if they could attend the Rural Business Forum. It was confirmed that Members would be invited once the date had been agreed.

Members queried how the affordable housing completion figure could be negative. It was suggested that this may be as a result of the Council getting rid of some of its own rented accommodation.

**Action: Katharine Makant to query the affordable housing completions figure with Planning.**

It was highlighted that OSMC had previously requested a key performance indicator for the Council to visit the senior management of the top-10 employers at least once a year, but this did not appear in the report. Members stressed the importance of retaining existing businesses as well as attracting new ones. Officers provided reassurance that they were engaging with these businesses on a number of levels from chief executive downwards. These included AWE and Vodafone, and a number of supermarkets.

**Action: Katharine Makant to investigate the KPI for engagement with the top 10 employers in the district.**

Councillor Ross Mackinnon was invited to comment as Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development. He reiterated that Members would be welcome at the Rural Business Conference.

### 24. Task and Finish Group Updates

The Commission received updates from the Chairmen of the Task and finish Groups (Agenda Item 12).

Councillor James Cole presented an update on the work of the Customer Journey Task and Finish Group. He confirmed that the Task Group had gone a long way into what was a very wide subject. He noted that the Task Group's report was due to be presented to the November meeting of OSMC, but he sought a further extension to defer the report to the meeting on 7 March 2023.

It was suggested that the Task Group may be able to present some preliminary findings to the next meeting.

**Action: Gordon Oliver to arrange a meeting with Councillor Cole and the OSMC Chairman and Vice Chairman to discuss the reasons for the proposed extension.**

Councillor Tony Linden presented an update on the work of the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group. A pre-meeting had been held with officers where it had been suggested that it would be very challenging to complete the review in time for the November OSMC meeting given that the Task Group had started later than planned. The first meeting of the Task and Finish Group had been arranged for 15 September. Staff resources were identified as a potential concern going forward.

### 25. Health Scrutiny Committee Update

The Commission received update on the work of the Health Scrutiny Committee (Agenda Item 13) from Councillor Dennis Benneyworth on behalf of Councillor Claire Rowles.

The last meeting of the Health Scrutiny Committee took place on 14 June 2022. Representatives from Elysium Healthcare provided an update regarding Thornford Park Hospital and their plans for future investment in response to the Care Quality Commission report. Representatives from Royal Berkshire Foundation Trust also

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION - 6 SEPTEMBER 2022 - MINUTES**

provided an update on current performance regarding waiting times and referrals for cancer treatment and the mitigating measures introduced.

The next meeting was planned for 20 September, with South Central Ambulance Service and WestCall out of hours services on the agenda. Standing agenda items included updates from the Integrated Care Board and Healthwatch.

The Committee was also in the process of setting up a Task and Finish Group to look at provision of healthcare serving new development in the district.

Councillors Claire Rowles and Tony Linden had attended an informal meeting of the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) for Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West. The meeting had been very helpful as an opportunity to share forthcoming health scrutiny items and to learn how other councils approached committee meetings and best practice. A discussion had taken place about the experiences of working with Integrated Care System colleagues and shared information about the creation of the Integrated Care Board, Integrated Care Partnership and Place Based Partnerships. There was also a discussion about potential areas of work for the JHOSC. A further meeting was planned for the autumn.

It was also noted that a site visit was planned to the Royal Berkshire Hospital in response to the planned redevelopment proposal.

### **26. West Berkshire Council Forward Plan**

The Commission considered the West Berkshire Forward Plan (Agenda Item 14) for the period covering the period to March 2023.

Members noted that there were limited opportunities for scrutiny ahead of items going to Executive. The Chairman had met with the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council to highlight the need to the Forward Plan to have a longer timeline. This had been agreed in principle, but it would probably not be implemented until the next fiscal year.

The Chairman suggested that OSMC should consider the North and East Thatcham Flood Alleviation Scheme, which was due to go to Executive in February. He proposed to defer the Flood Risk Management Strategy Item to be considered alongside the Flood Alleviation Scheme report. This was agreed.

### **27. West Berkshire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy**

It was agreed that the item on the West Berkshire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (Agenda Item 9) be deferred to the next meeting and be considered alongside a report on the North and East Thatcham Flood Alleviation Scheme.

### **28. Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Work Programme**

The Commission considered its work programme for the remainder of the 2022/23 municipal year. The following amendments were agreed for the meeting on 29 November 2022

- An additional report on North and East Thatcham Flood Alleviation Scheme
- A possible Interim Report on the Customer Journey Task Group
- The Appraisal System Review report to be brought forward from 2023/24.

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION - 6 SEPTEMBER 2022 - MINUTES**

*(The meeting commenced at 6.31 pm and closed at 9.25 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature** .....