

# 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, 1 DECEMBER 2015

**Councillors Present:** Anthony Chadley, Dave Goff, Clive Hooker, Rick Jones, Alan Macro, Richard Somner and Emma Webster (Chairman)

**Also Present:** Andy Day (Head of Strategic Support), Cathy Dodson (Housing Strategy Team Leader), Carolyn Richardson (Civil Contingencies Manager), Stuart Clark (Principal Engineer (Projects)), Councillor Hilary Cole (Executive Portfolio: Adult Social Care, Housing, Countryside, Community Culture & Leisure Services), David Lowe (Scrutiny & Partnerships Manager), Councillor Garth Simpson (Executive Portfolio: Highways, Transport, Emergency Planning) and Charlene Myers (Democratic Services Officer).

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Councillor Ian Morrin, Councillor Virginia von Celsing and Councillor Laszlo Zverko

#### PART I

##### 30. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2015 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

##### 31. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

##### 32. Actions from previous Minutes

There were 6 actions followed up from previous Commission meetings. David Lowe advised that the West Berkshire Parking Task Group was due to hold one last meeting to conclude its work before a report would be issued to the Commission for final consideration.

Members were advised that a response to item 2.4 had been received and the total remaining value of the Risk Reserve was £220,000. Councillor Alan Macro felt the value of the Reserve Fund was very low and was subsequently concerned that the Council was not suitably prepared to respond to unforeseen risks.

**Resolved that** the update report be noted.

##### 33. West Berkshire Forward Plan 16 December 2015 to 31 March 2016

The Commission considered the West Berkshire Forward Plan for the period covering 16 December 2015 to 31 March 2016.

Councillor Mike Johnson asked whether further consideration had taken place to move the Commission into a format of Pre-Scrutiny and, if this was going to be the case, that the existing schedule of meetings would provide very limited time to conduct Scrutiny effectively. Andy Day advised that, since the previous Leader had stepped down from his role, it was necessary to revisit this proposal with the new Leader and review the proposed alterations to the Executive cycle (designed to facilitate the introduction of Pre-Scrutiny). David Lowe added that the purpose of the Forward Plan item on this agenda

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was to highlight opportunities for Pre-Scrutiny and that a revised timetable should allow the opportunity for this to take place ahead of the each Executive meeting.

**Resolved that** the Forward Plan be noted.

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

The Commission considered its work programme for 2015/16.

David Lowe highlighted Appendix B to Members of the Commission. He stated that the proposed topic sought to provide an oversight of the Council's progress against the delivery of its adopted strategy. The appendix detailed specific subjects for discussion which in turn could provide the basis for ongoing monitoring thereafter. Members accepted the recommendation to add the item onto the Work Programme.

David Lowe then asked Members to consider Appendix C – a proposal to establish a Task Group to identify the most effective method in which the Commission might scrutinise the activities of the Children and Families Service. This suggestion followed the feedback from a recent OFSTED inspection during which it was noted that scrutiny could contribute towards the work of the service. David Lowe stated that the group would meet to consider methods and report back to the Commission to recommend areas of work going forward. Members accepted the recommendation to accept the item onto the Work Programme.

**Resolved that:**

- Proposed topic of scrutiny – The Children and Families Service would be added to the work programme;
- Proposed topic of Scrutiny – Delivery of the Council Strategy would be added to the work programme;
- The work programme be noted.

### 35. **Items Called-in following the Executive on 19 November 2015.**

No items were called-in following the last Executive meeting.

### 36. **Consideration of Urgent Items**

There were no Urgent Items to consider.

### 37. **Councillor Call for Action**

There were no Councillor Calls for Action.

### 38. **Petitions**

There were no petitions received at the meeting.

### 39. **Severe Weather**

Carolyn Richardson (Civil Contingencies Manager) introduced the report to Members of the Commission. She advised that the action plan had been in place for 18 months and that during this time there had been a lot of positive work undertaken.

Members were reminded that a debrief took place following the severe weather in 2013/14 and that, through this process, the Commission contributed to an action plan for ongoing review. The report explained that the action plan contained 60 items in total and that, to date, 34 of those had been concluded. Carolyn Richardson explained that the remaining items were under regular review and:

- 3 of the remaining items would form business as usual and the action plan would be amended to reflect this;

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- 12 of the remaining items would be completed by March 2016;
- 3 items related to Business Continuity updates and that, due to an unforeseen resourcing issue, progress had been hindered. The issue had recently been resolved so Members could be assured that work would recommence;
- 3 items related to actions reliant on external agencies progress on which were difficult to influence. However, every effort would be made to ensure progress was continuously monitored and obstacles addressed;
- 3 items referred to the work of the Highways and Transport team and it was likely that these would form business as usual with the action plan being amended to reflect this.

Councillor Rick Jones noticed that a lot of resource was used to administer the Repair and Renewal Grant and asked what the level of take-up had been like across West Berkshire. Carolyn Richardson advised that the scheme was promoted through various avenues and on multiple occasions direct to homes which had flooded and to the wider community. Lack of up-take depended on to a variety of reasons including concerns about insurance. She added that although the scheme concluded in June 2015, agencies continued to promote the property level protection measures available to protect homes at risk of flooding, particularly where no engineering solution was viable, confirming it is the property owners responsibility to protect their homes and not the Councils.

Councillor Alan Macro was concerned to hear that there had been a delay with Business Continuity items. Carolyn Richardson assured him that work was underway to address these actions now that an Officer was in post.

Councillor Macro asked whether the Communications Strategy was on track – noticing that the update suggested that work would commence in July 2015. He highlighted that communication and sharing information regarding vulnerable people had been an area of concern. Carolyn Richardson advised that the item had progressed well. It was intended that a Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum Communications Strategy & Plan would be finalised shortly and a West Berkshire Communications Strategy would be developed to compliment this and provide local context. In addition, a lot of work had taken place to develop an Information Sharing Protocol to assist agencies with sharing vital information regarding vulnerable people during emergencies.

Councillor Macro asked whether any work had taken place to understand the management of weirs along the River Kennet. Stuart Clark (Principal Engineer) advised that a bid had been submitted to the Environment Agency (EA) to conduct a study of the area but this was rejected because the EA had a statutory responsibility for the river. Members heard that this prompted the EA to recognise a need for a study so Stuart Clark was pleased to say that the same bid had been submitted through the EA to DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs). Councillor Emma Webster suggested that the bid process might benefit from the support of the local MPs. It was agreed that a copy of the bid should be sent to them with a request to support the request.

Councillor Jones highlighted concerns that Thames Water had failed to provide the necessary support to affected residents. He wondered whether, through the process of the review and ongoing actions, that Thames Water would now be better placed to deliver assistance if the need arose. Carolyn Richardson advised that Thames Water's level of engagement with partners had improved and this had assisted with the preplanning process. However, she was not in a position to specify their state of

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preparedness during an emergency, although she believed they were better equipped now than for previous events. Carolyn Richardson reminded Members that the action plan requested that a letter be issued to the DCLG (Department for Local Governments) to request clarification on the provision of portals. Members recalled the difficulties and costs associated with this request in 2013/14.

Councillor Garth Simpson commended Carolyn Richardson and Stuart Clark for their efforts to address concerns or gaps and for their ongoing management of the action plan.

Councillor Webster extended her thanks to Carolyn Richardson, Stuart Clark and everyone within the Council who supported the event and continued to support ongoing actions to prepare for incidents which impacted local residents. The Commission echoed the comments of the Chairman.

### **Resolved that:**

- Carolyn Richardson would confirm the spread of RRG's approved across West Berkshire;
- Copies of the bids to DEFRA re weir management would be sent to local MP's to look for support;
- Support would continue to be provided to Officers to ensure the successful progression of the actions to a satisfactory conclusion;
- The report be noted.

## **40. Housing Allocations Policy**

Cathy Dodson (Housing Strategy Team Leader) introduced the report to Members of the Commission. Members heard that the Allocation Policy was adopted in October 2013. In December 2014 the Executive approved amendments to the policy in light of new Statutory Guidance. Cathy Dodson advised that the report sought to update Members on the implementation of those amendments.

The key changes agreed by the Executive were as follows:

- Qualification Criteria – amendment made to the local connection qualifying criteria to residency or meaningful paid employment of at least 16 hours a week for 2 consecutive years - other aspects of local connection criteria remained the same.
- Social Tenants and Labour Mobility – amendment made to allow for exceptions to local connection qualifying criteria to be applied to certain social tenants who need to move in order to sustain or take up employment.
- Foster Carers – inclusion in the policy to award an additional bedroom for approved foster carers.
- Homeless Households – new wording inserted to allow deferral of a Common Housing Register (CHR) application when a household is placed into temporary accommodation following acceptance of a full homelessness duty to allow the Housing Service to identify support needs.

To be able to fully implement the changes some modifications had been required to the Housing Register data base. To ensure the amendments were implemented with minimal impact on both housing staff and service users, the software provider was requested to build a semi automated assessment. Cathy Dodson explained that the service user would be required to answer three questions about their local connection as opposed to completing a whole new application form. The application was then automatically determined as Qualifying or Non Qualifying.

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These changes were implemented on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2015 at which point there were 2973 live applicants on the Housing Register. Due to the system changes all applicants were required to answer the three questions before they could access their Home Choice account.

Applicants received advanced warning of these changes through a notice on the Home Choice website followed by a letter or email. Applicants were clearly advised that if they failed to answer the three questions by 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2015 then they would be removed from the Housing Register. Cathy Dodson stressed that multiple attempts were made to contact people during this time to make sure they were aware of the impending changes (through letter, text or phone call).

Members heard that a minimal number of people failed to re-register their interest and that every effort had been made to capture anyone who had previously been listed on the Housing Register.

Councillor Hilary Cole stated that a considerable amount of effort had had been made by the team to contact account holders and this was reflected in the numbers which re-registered successfully. Councillor Cole congratulated the team for their hard work.

Councillor Jones was impressed by the methodology used by the team – it seemed very thorough. He asked whether the team understood the reasons for those who had failed to re-register. Cathy Dodson stated that it was difficult to know the exact reasons but she anticipated that some may not have been eligible so decided they would not re-register.

Cathy Dodson advised that the implementation of the amendments had been completed with minimal disruption to the service user. It was expected that the overall number of applications would reduce as a consequence of some applicants failing to respond to the review request. The overall percentage of qualifying applicants had not changed significantly which confirmed the position that the team did not believe that the amendments would affect a high number of applicants.

Councillor Webster advised that she had received feedback from a local resident regarding how the changes were communicated and she was pleased to hear that residents felt the process was outlined clearly.

**Resolved that** the report was noted

### 41. Scrutiny Recommendations Update

David Lowe introduced the Recommendation report to Members of the Commission. The report outlined the recommendations that had been presented by the Commission to the Executive in the previous 12 months and the progress against those which had been accepted.

Councillor Johnston requested that the report included the target dates in order to contextualise the suggested status of progress. David Lowe confirmed that this would be included in future reports. He explained that, in reference to The Utilisation of Shaw House review, there had been a degree of delay due to a vacant post. Members heard that the post had been filled and that actions were progressing.

Councillor Jones highlighted that there were a few updates outstanding from the Domestic Abuse update. Andy Day advised that this item had also been affected by a vacancy but he would ensure that updates were provided and that an Officer was in place.

**Resolved that:**

- The report would include target dates as agreed from the service area in order to determine rate of progress;

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- Updates would be obtained for items outstanding in relation to the Domestic Abuse actions;
- The report be noted.

*(The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.20 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

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