

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION**

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2012**

**Councillors Present:** Jeff Beck (Substitute) (In place of Marcus Franks), Brian Bedwell (Chairman), Dominic Boeck, Virginia von Celsing, Dave Goff, David Holtby, Carol Jackson-Doerge (In place of Emma Webster), Mike Johnston, David Rendel, Tony Vickers, Quentin Webb and Keith Woodhams (Substitute) (In place of Jeff Brooks)

**Also Present:** David Appleton (Head of Cultural Services), John Ashworth (Corporate Director - Environment), Mel Brain (Housing Strategy Manager), Nick Carter (Chief Executive), Chris Jones (Arts and Leisure Services Manager), Gary Lugg (Head of Planning & Countryside) and Ian Pearson (Deputy Corporate Director (Communities) & Head of Education Service), David Lowe (Partnerships & Scrutiny Manager), Councillor Irene Neill (Children and Young People, Youth Service) and Elaine Walker (Principal Policy Officer)

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Councillor Jeff Brooks, Councillor Marcus Franks and Councillor Emma Webster

**Councillor(s) Absent:**

#### **PART I**

##### **83. Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2012 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

##### **84. Declarations of Interest**

Councillor David Rendel declared an interest in Agenda Item 13, but reported that, as his interest was personal, he would remain in the meeting and take part in the debate and vote on the matter.

##### **85. Actions from previous Minutes**

The Commission received an update on actions following the previous meetings (Agenda Item 4). Comments were received regarding the following items:

2.1 – A letter of response had been received from the Department for Education in relation to the Commission's concerns about representation of the views of parents of pupils at academies. A copy of this letter was circulated at the meeting.

Councillor Tony Vickers considered whether it would be beneficial for Members to offer themselves as representatives on Academy governing bodies. Concern was expressed that clarity would be required as to the role of Members so as to ensure that Academies did not assume the Councillor was representing the Local Education Authority. It was agreed that a letter would be sent to all Academies indicating that Members would welcome involvement on their governing bodies as community representatives.

2.6 – Councillor David Rendel expressed concern that analysis would be required in order to demonstrate that the two factors that have been put in place to reduce the number of young people entering the Youth Justice System were effective. The

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Chairman suggested that an analysis could be presented to the Commission in September. This was agreed.

2.7 - Members of the Commission sought clarification on the accuracy of the appeal figures presented in the report. Gary Lugg responded that an error had been discovered in the programmes used to prepare these figures, however this had been corrected and would not have affected any other reporting of these figures. It was requested that Gary Lugg provide an update to correct the figures shown.

Gary Lugg further explained that the end of year performance target would be achieved.

*(Note: 6.52pm – Councillor Mike Johnston joined the meeting.)*

The Chairman thanked Gary Lugg and staff within Planning for their work in being able to achieve their performance target.

2.8 - Councillor Dominic Boeck requested clarification as to how staff calls are silently monitored to measure soft customer care skills and technical accuracy.

2.11 – Councillor Quentin Webb requested further information as to when a working group would be established to help develop the measures and targets to be incorporated into the Council Strategy. David Lowe advised that this task group was likely to be established at the end of March or in early April 2012.

Councillor David Rendel expressed concern that targets were able to be set that allowed low performance for most of the year and a short period of excellent performance allowed the target to be met. He suggested that targets should be set that would ensure good or excellent performance throughout the year.

The Chairman thanked all officers for providing responses to questions raised by the Commission.

### **RESOLVED that:**

- (1) Information could be presented to the Commission in September 2012 to demonstrate that the two factors put in place to reduce the number of young people entering the Youth Justice System were effective, and what analysis had been done to show this.
- (2) A letter would be sent from the Chairman of the Commission to all Academies indicating that Members would welcome involvement on their governing bodies as a community representative.
- (3) The Head of Planning and Countryside to provide corrected figures regarding planning appeals.
- (4) The Head of Customer Services to clarify to Councillor Dominic Boeck how staff calls are silently monitored to measure soft customer care skills and technical accuracy.

### **86. Items Called-in following the Executive on 09 February 2012**

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

### **87. Councillor Call for Action**

There were no Councillor Calls for Action.

### **88. Petitions**

There were no petitions received at the meeting.

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### 89. **West Berkshire Forward Plan February 2012 to May 2012**

The Commission considered the West Berkshire Forward Plan (Agenda Item 8) for the period covering February 2012 to May 2012.

The Chairman informed the Members of the Commission that the forward plan gave guidance as to what work areas were to be addressed by the Council in the coming months. By reviewing the plan, Members of the Commission were able to determine whether any items may benefit from involvement from the Commission.

Councillor Tony Vickers suggested that it would be beneficial to scrutinise the process around the possible redevelopment of Taceham House since the land and property owned by the Council held high values. The Chairman suggested that the Resource Management Working Group should scope this work, considering the likely outcomes, prior to undertaking scrutiny.

Councillor Quentin Webb requested clarification as to which committee would be reviewing the draft pay policy statement and when.

#### **Resolved that:**

- (1) A review of asset management should be added to the work programme for the Resource Management Working Group.
- (2) The HR Manager to provide clarification as to which committee would be reviewing the draft pay policy statement and when.

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

The Commission considered its work programme and that of the Health Scrutiny Panel and Resource Management Working Group for 2011/12.

Councillor Quentin Webb requested that the following items be added to the work programme for the Health Scrutiny Panel:

- (1) Dignity and care in the home. This would be an extension of a current piece of work which looked at dignity and care in hospital but would be treated as a separate piece of work.
- (2) How the health service reorganisation would influence the financing of local health service provision and Private Finance Initiatives (PFI).

Councillor Tony Vickers commented that care in the home was interlinked with other government initiatives that support health and wellbeing such as the ability to heat homes.

It was agreed that these were suitable subjects for inclusion on the work programme, but that care should be taken to keep the workload manageable in relation to Member and Officer time and commitments.

Councillor Tony Vickers further requested an addition to the Commission's work programme to scrutinise the processes in place around domestic abuse. This request was made with particular interest in the follow on impact for example for the health service, or for children. It was agreed that David Lowe would prepare a report for the next meeting of the Commission before a decision was reached as to whether to include this item on the work programme.

#### **Resolved that:**

- (1) The following items be added to the Health Scrutiny Panel work programme:
  - a. Dignity and care in the home;

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- b. The effect of health service reorganisation on local provision and private finance initiatives (PFI).

(2) The Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager to provide the terms of reference for a review into the processes currently in place around domestic abuse.

### 91. GCSE Maths Results

The Commission considered a report on performance information for GCSE maths results in the District's schools.

Following questioning, Ian Pearson made the additional points that:

- It was recognised that Key Stage 4 maths classes were taught by maths specialists, however Key Stage 3 maths classes were more often taught by non-specialists. Over the last two years a government programme had been implemented to train and put in place maths specialists. To date there were 16 specialists who were able to communicate to school Head Teachers and others how the programme worked and what assistance was available to their schools.
- 55% of those achieving grade D in maths, achieved a grade C or higher in English;
- Opinion broadly suggested that it would always be beneficial to return to basics in order to provide a good grounding in maths principles and subsequently improve results.

Councillor Tony Vickers asked whether a difference had been noticed as a result of losing a full time mathematics consultant due to the loss of government grant for this post. Ian Pearson responded that there remained a part time post covering secondary schools, and went on to explain that there were two levels of monitoring that took place, that of the management of maths teaching and the quality of classroom teaching. Whilst the level of monitoring was depleted, this had been countered by coaching and peer support within schools.

Councillor David Rendel requested information on the likely impact of cuts to the School Improvement Programme. Ian Pearson responded that further posts would be lost this year following a significant reduction in numbers last year due to the loss of government grants. It would be necessary to retain a focussed leadership but where reconfiguration was found to be necessary, this would take place.

Councillor Mike Johnston requested clarification as to whether the percentages provided in the report were based on the number of pupils who took the exam or the number of pupils on roll. Ian Pearson responded that the figures were based on the number that took the exam, but that this was likely to be almost all pupils.

Councillor Mike Johnston went on to ask whether the grades achieved in maths had been compared to other, similar subjects, such as science. Ian Pearson responded that this information was not to hand and would be time consuming to analyse, although the information could be made available. However anecdotal evidence showed that grades in maths were not immediately comparable to science.

Councillor Mike Johnston requested information to understand whether higher achieving students were being pushed to achieve a higher grade, or whether the focus was on improving grade D to a C. this request was developed by Councillor David Rendel who was concerned about school league tables which encouraged schools to place most emphasis on improving grade D to C and that this could easily be to the detriment of other pupils. Ian Pearson responded that all pupils should be encouraged to improve their grades within their potential. Councillor Irene Neill added that schools were aware of

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the implications of achieving a C or a D grade for pupils when applying for further education places for example.

Councillor Dave Goff wondered if there would be value in gathering feedback directly from pupils as to their experiences of being taught maths, and considered whether this route might raise more general issues such as a lack of parental support. Ian Pearson responded that whilst this was not currently undertaken, there could be merit in it. He went on to explain that many primary schools offer parents training in order to assist parents in helping their children. Schools would cover what was going to be taught, how it would be taught and also aim to increase parent confidence in being able to help their children.

Councillor Dave Goff asked what the requirements were to teach in West Berkshire. Ian Pearson responded that many teachers were trained to teach more than one subject, specialising in one and having a secondary subject. Whilst there was always a desire to match teachers with their specialist area, when timetables are set in schools, there were often mismatches between teacher specialisms and classes that must be taken. In these cases, the most appropriate, available teacher would be appointed to take the class.

Councillor Dominic Boeck recognised the national debate regarding the lack of basic skills that children would need on entering the workplace. He asked whether the Council was aware how prepared local children were for the workplace. Ian Pearson responded that schools must teach with recognition of the different routes that pupils may take after school, such as further education or employment. The need is wider than maths and schools aimed to equip all pupils with the necessary skills in all areas to enable them to choose their future direction.

Councillor Virginia von Celsing asked whether there were plans within West Berkshire to offer and recognise the IGCSE (International GCSE) which can be offered in private schools. Ian Pearson responded that schools used a tiered system to enter pupils for exams at an appropriate level for their abilities.

Councillor David Rendel stated that maths was a subject that relied on teachers being able to enthuse their pupils and to provide sufficient encouragement so as to build confidence in pupils that they were able to achieve in the subject. He further asked whether pupil to pupil support was employed in West Berkshire schools. Ian Pearson responded that he agreed that it was important to build pupils' confidence in maths before imposing harder tasks. He was able to confirm that pupil to pupil support was in use in primary schools in the District, but was unaware of the extent of use.

Councillor Carol Jackson-Doege asked whether monitoring systems had been put in place to ensure that the factors identified in the report as contributing to lower performance in maths, were improved. Ian Pearson responded that schools had put in place their own systems to monitor improvements and the Council was working with schools as necessary to achieve improvements.

**RESOLVED that** the information be noted

### 92. Preparations for the London 2012 Olympics

The Commission considered a report updating them on the preparations being made in West Berkshire to celebrate the Olympics. Further information was presented by David Appleton and Councillor Carol Jackson-Doege.

David Appleton explained to the Commission that some updates remain outstanding until further information is received from the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG). Councillor Carol Jackson-Doege informed the Commission of how the media was being utilised to inform the public of the upcoming

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activities in the area including several press releases, 9 radio interviews, and the use of Twitter. The 'Seeds of Inspiration' initiative had been launched within the last week; and on Saturday 11 February, Park Runs launched at Greenham Common. This resulted in 317 participants which had been recognised as the largest inaugural Park Run nationally. Councillor Carol Jackson-Doege went on to inform the Commission that information would be presented at the District Parish Conference.

David Appleton explained the Olympic Games timetable over the coming months and noted in particular that the Olympic torch route would be announced in March, and would be carried through West Berkshire on July 11 2012 prior to the games starting in July.

David Appleton informed the Commission that there were likely to be some local torchbearers, however they may not be able to carry the torch through their own communities. This would become clear once the route and timetable became available on 21 March 2012.

David Appleton went on to demonstrate the information available through the West Berkshire *Enjoy!* website ([www.westberksenjoy.org.uk](http://www.westberksenjoy.org.uk)) to communities who might wish to organise their own celebratory events. Useful information such as how to organise a road closure, and how to obtain relevant licenses was available through these pages. There was also a news section to allow people to keep up to date with events, and a section to see what other organisations were doing to celebrate.

Councillor Tony Vickers asked what progress had been made in assessing the viability of a recognition event. David Appleton responded that although teams had not yet been selected for the Olympics and Paralympics, it would be expected that some athletes would be local. He also mentioned others involved in the Games such as volunteers and torchbearers who could also be included in any recognition event. He informed the Commission that LOCOG were encouraging community involvement at all stages of the games.

Councillor Jeff Beck noted that David Appleton would soon be leaving the Council and thanked him for his contribution.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted and that the Arts & Leisure Services Manager return to provide a further update in May 2012.

### 93. **Housing Allocation Policy**

The Commission considered a report (Agenda Item 12) on the Housing Allocation Policy.

The Chairman informed the Commission that the expectation from this item was to understand whether scrutiny could play a beneficial role in the process of amending the Allocations Policy, and what that role might be.

Mel Brain informed the Commission that a consultation process would be undertaken to allow comments to be made on the new proposals. Councillor Tony Vickers enquired who would be receiving the consultation questionnaire that is being amended. Mel Brain responded that it would be circulated to as many people as possible including everyone on the Common Housing Register, Registered Social Landlords, and all relevant stakeholders. It would also be available on the Council website and hard copies would be made available. In recognition of the range of people and organisations being consulted, there would be changes in the cover letter.

Councillor Tony Vickers further asked how the interrelationship between different reforms would affect the process of amending the policy. Mel Brain responded that all proposals had been scoped around the Statutory Allocation Policy.

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Councillor Jeff Beck questioned the allocation policy on bedroom assessment. Mel Brain explained that the wording was intended to take into account the needs of families with an odd number of children.

Councillor Quentin Webb asked whether the amendments could encompass mutual exchange. Mel Brain responded that this was a matter between planning and housing policy that could not be addressed in the allocations policy.

The Chairman asked whether a financial assessment of possible tenants should be undertaken. Mel Brain responded that an assessment was carried out at the point the tenant enters the system. Once in the system, the tenant would retain tenure even if their situation changed. A tenancy strategy would be developed by next year which would be able to address this.

Councillor Mike Johnston asked whether it would be possible to provide a more favourable position for military personnel who may not have roots in the area. Mel Brain responded that there was currently a consultation underway which suggested that military personnel would be able to choose themselves which area to settle in. Final guidance was awaited before this could be incorporated into the Council's policies.

The Commission expressed a desire to be involved in the process of amending the Housing Allocation Policy and agreed the following:

- A task group be established to join the officer group that would review the initial consultation responses;
- To have Members of the Commission in attendance at any open meeting where the public may discuss the issues;
- The Commission to review the revised policy once complete.

### **RESOLVED that:**

- (1) A task group be established to join the existing group that would review the initial consultation responses;
- (2) Members of the Commission to be in attendance at any open meeting where the public may discuss the issues;
- (3) The Commission to review the revised policy once complete.

## **94. Health Scrutiny Panel Update**

*(Councillor David Rendel declared a personal interest in Agenda item 13 by virtue of the fact that his wife was a GP in West Berkshire. As his interest was personal and not prejudicial he was permitted to take part in the debate and vote on the matter).*

The Commission considered a report (Agenda Item 13) on the work of the Health Scrutiny Panel (HSP).

Councillor Quentin Webb reported that at the meeting of the Health Scrutiny Panel held on 17 January 2012 the following topics had been discussed:

- Continuing Healthcare funding in West Berkshire. Comments had been received and a review across the rest of Berkshire was due to take place led by an independent facilitator. The dispute resolution process was also discussed and was ongoing.
- The scrutiny review into GP commissioning had been completed and removed from the work programme. The Panel wish to be kept informed of future activity and would now take on a monitoring role.

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

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**95. Resource Management Working Group Update**

The Commission considered a report (Agenda Item 14) on the work of the Resource Management Working Group (RMWG).

The RMWG would consider the following items at its next meeting:

- The Highways Asset Management Plan;
- The Timelord Programme;
- The Quarter three establishment report.

The Group would also review its terms of reference.

**Resolved that** the report be noted.

*(The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.43 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

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