

PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday 12 June 2023

Present: Councillors Siân Martin (Chair), George Blundell (Vice-Chair), Clive Baskerville, Alison Carpenter, Jodie Grove, Gurch Singh, Kashmir Singh and Genevieve Gosling

Also in attendance: Councillor Jack Douglas

Also in attendance virtually: Councillor Maureen Hunt

Officers: Mark Beeley and Andrew Durrant

Officers in attendance virtually: Alysse Strachan and Chris Joyce

Election of Chair

Councillor Blundell proposed that Councillor Martin be Chair of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the 2023/24 municipal year. This was seconded by Councillor Baskerville.

No other nominations were received and therefore a named vote was not required.

AGREED: That Councillor Martin be elected Chair of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the 2023/24 municipal year.

Election of Vice Chair

Councillor Grove proposed that Councillor Carpenter be elected as Vice Chair of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the 2023/24 municipal year. This was seconded by Councillor Carpenter.

A named vote was taken.

Election of Councillor Carpenter as Vice-Chair of the Panel for municipal year 2023/24 (Motion)	
Councillor Siân Martin	Against
Councillor George Blundell	Against
Councillor Clive Baskerville	Against
Councillor Alison Carpenter	For
Councillor Jodie Grove	For
Councillor Gurch Singh	Against
Councillor Kashmir Singh	Against
Councillor Genevieve Gosling	For
Rejected	

The result was 5 against and 3 for, so the motion fell.

Councillor Gurch Singh proposed that Councillor Blundell be elected as Vice Chair of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the 2023/24 municipal year. This was seconded by Councillor Martin.

A named vote was taken.

Election of Councillor Blundell as Vice-Chair of the Panel for municipal year 2023/24 (Motion)	
Councillor Siân Martin	For
Councillor George Blundell	For
Councillor Clive Baskerville	For
Councillor Alison Carpenter	Against
Councillor Jodie Grove	Against
Councillor Gurch Singh	For
Councillor Kashmir Singh	For
Councillor Genevieve Gosling	Against
Carried	

AGREED: That Councillor Blundell be elected as Vice Chair of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the 2023/24 municipal year.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Walters and Councillor Majeed. Councillor Gosling was attending as substitute.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

Minutes

The panel noted and approved the minutes of the meetings held on 12 April 2023 and 20 April 2023.

Resident Scrutiny Suggestion - Weekly Bin Collections

Alysse Strachan, Head of Neighbourhood Services, said that a suggestion had been received from a resident on bin collections. The resident had felt that bin collections should be weekly, particularly in hot weather, as they had noticed that there was an increase in rats. Responding to the topic, Alysse Strachan said that collections could not be altered for a temporary period as this would require significant additional resource. The main part of the problem was the rats which had been sited, this would be more likely due to food waste and this collection was done weekly all year round. The Environmental Health team had also responded and had been visiting businesses in the vicinity of the affected area to ensure that trade waste was being handled and dealt with correctly. At the current time, it was recommended that waste collections were not increased during the summer period.

Councillor Kashmir Singh noted that there were areas of his ward which had not had their waste collected for over two weeks. He felt that there were issues with the report it tool on the website.

Councillor Carpenter asked whether the resident was referring to waste in bags or in large bins, it would be difficult for rats to get into large waste bins. In Windsor, some residents had bag collections and these were still weekly.

Alysse Strachan said that this was not confirmed either way, as long as residents secured waste properly within bins there should not be any issues.

Councillor Gurch Singh said that he had not been supportive of the original decision to move to fortnightly collections. In his ward of St Marys, there were a number of flats and houses of multiple occupants and they had waste collected weekly, which was good to see. He felt that

most residents were sensible when it came to sorting their waste, however he thought that there was an issue with rats in Maidenhead. Councillor Gurch Singh considered whether it would be worth looking at the pest control offer which the council could provide for residents.

Alysse Strachan said that Environmental Health had visited all the food commercial businesses in the area and a review had been undertaken in the surrounding parks and green spaces. A pest control service was provided by the council and there were concessionary rates for those on income support and various other support schemes.

Pat McDonald, Co-optee, asked if it was known how much it was costing the council to catch rats.

ACTION – Alysse Strachan to ask the Environmental Health team how much pest control cost for the council.

Councillor Grove had recently noted that it was possible for residents to apply for a second food waste bin, this should be communicated to residents so that they knew it was option.

Alysse Strachan suggested that this could be advertised on the website again, the team were looking to recruit some extra officers who would be able to help educate residents on the options possible in tackling waste and recycling effectively. However, a second food waste bin was not the preferred choice as this was a significant amount of food waste for one household and waste minimisation would be explored first.

Councillor Baskerville asked what the situation was for residents who had damaged black bins which needed to be replaced and if there was a stock of them. He had heard of one case from a resident who had been offered a smaller black bin by the council.

Alysse Strachan confirmed that there was a stock of black bins, if a bin was damaged residents were encouraged to apply for a replacement by completing a report it form.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel noted the report and did not recommend a further consideration of seasonal changes to the frequency of waste collections.

Work Programme

Mark Beeley, Principal Democratic Services Officer – Overview and Scrutiny, explained that Panel Members could suggest items for inclusion in the work programme by completing a scoping document. A recent good example of how the process worked was the cost of living item which had been considered by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel. There were also two items from the previous municipal year, on the River Thames Scheme and the Community Infrastructure Levy, the Panel needed to consider whether it wanted to bring these items forward for consideration.

The Chair read out an email from Councillor Bermange, who had suggested that the Panel could look at the resource and capacity within the planning development management and enforcement teams.

Councillor Gurch Singh felt that this needed to be scrutinised to ensure that the planning process was performing as expected.

Councillor Grove was supportive of the topic, in her ward there were planning limitations but she had found that these limitations were often being pushed and sometimes even ignored by developers. If pre-application was being brought back, it would be worth reviewing the advice that was given as part of the pre-application stage. The Panel could also look at cases where planning enforcement had not been effective on some applications. Councillor Grove added that she would appreciate the opportunity to scope the topic on the River Thames Scheme.

ACTION – Mark Beeley to send Councillor Grove the context behind the topic, including the original suggestion and minutes from the meeting where the item was discussed.

Councillor Carpenter requested that grass cutting schedules were considered, the timing had been late and she felt that quality had been poor.

Andrew Durrant, Executive Director of Place Services, said that there was a planning service improvement plan so that could feed into the item. Pre-application advice was offered and this could be discussed. Recruitment and retention was a wider issue in local authorities across the country. In terms of performance, the Citizens Portal showed that for major applications the planning team were above the target, while minor and other applications were very close to the target. There had been some difficult conditions around the Tivoli contract and there had been a back log.

Alysse Strachan said that officers had worked hard with Tivoli to improve performance after issues had been identified. It had been a wet season and the grass was difficult to cut frequently. The cemeteries and parks had been prioritised, a number of verges were wild verges and were therefore only cut twice a year. A Parks and Open Spaces Contract Manager had been recruited and they would be able to closely monitor the contract performance, this would improve scrutiny internally.

Councillor Kashmir Singh said that it would be useful to receive a schedule from officers on where and when Tivoli were planning to cut the grass and also which grass verges had been designated as wilding areas. He asked if financial penalties had been applied to the contractors.

Alysse Strachan confirmed that there were schedules but these were not widely publicised as they could change at short notice. She was happy to share the schedules with Panel Members.

ACTION – Alysse Strachan to share Tivoli cutting schedules with Panel Members.

Councillor Kashmir Singh commented on the grass trimmings which had been left were often caught up in drains and had caused flooding issues in recent weeks.

Alysse Strachan said that normally this was not an issue as the grass was cut at a shorter length but admitted that this had been problematic with longer grass now being cut. Changing to a cut and collect schedule would have significant costs on resource, both staffing and machinery.

Councillor Gurch Singh asked if the report on the planning performance was available to Panel Members. He asked if the planning service improvement plan could be considered by the Panel.

Andrew Durrant suggested that the planning service improvement plan should be linked to the planning resource scrutiny item. The performance could be monitored by Councillors and the public through the Citizens Portal, which was available through the RBWM Together website. The exact link could be shared with Panel Members.

ACTION – Link to planning performance to be shared with Panel Members.

Councillor Baskerville raised concern about hedge cuttings, there were some in his ward which had not been cut for a significant amount of time. He asked how regularly were drains and roadside gutters cleaned out.

Councillor Grove raised the issue of rural connectivity from Datchet, Horton and Wraysbury into Windsor. A petition was currently live which requested that a bus route was explored and

funded. A number of residents were isolated from essential services like health centres. Parking was also difficult for residents and therefore made for a greater reliance on bus services.

Councillor Gurch Singh highlighted a report from Greenpeace which suggested that plastic recycling was not being recycled properly and it was costing more environmentally to collect plastic when it could not be recycled.

Alysse Strachan said that plastic was difficult to recycle but the government were looking at placing more responsibility with the producers of plastic. The government were also reviewing consistent collections and investigating what could be collected at the kerbside. A waste composition analysis was planned by the council which would look to influence communications with residents.

Councillor Gosling raised the issue of potholes, the council fixed them on a temporary basis before going back to fix them permanently. She asked if there was a way for potholes to be sorted in one trip.

Andrew Durrant said that he was aware of the impact of potholes, this was an issue for both RBWM and other neighbouring local authorities. Officers were looking into other fixes and treatments to ensure that temporary fixes lasted for enough time for the permanent fix to be implemented. The team were also exploring whether the communication around temporary fixes could be relayed better so that residents were aware.

Alysse Strachan added that the temporary fixes were designed to minimise disruption and ensure that issues were resolved until the permanent solution would be brought in. The new highways contract would be coming in from April 2024 and new solutions would be explored with the contractor. Early intervention was key to ensuring the longevity of the road surface.

Councillor Grove picked up on the work done by the Panel in the previous municipal year on street lighting with the Youth Council. She had received various bits of casework from residents in her ward who were concerned about the level of street lighting and that this had led to an increase in crime. She asked if this was something to look at further, particularly the key performance indicators on the contractors.

Andrew Durrant said that bringing together community safety and street lighting was a good topic, hot spots could be identified. Key performance indicators were part of the contract, the contractors were currently not hitting the target in one area. There had been issues with stock levels but this had now been resolved.

Councillor Gurch Singh suggested that the Panel should invite the relevant Cabinet Members to the next meeting to outline their priorities over the coming municipal year. The work programme and meetings could then be planned around key reports coming to Cabinet, which would allow the Panel the opportunity to scrutinise reports before a decision was made.

Mark Beeley encouraged Panel Members to have a look at the Cabinet Forward Plan so that more pre-decision scrutiny could take place.

Councillor Kashmir Singh highlighted some roadworks which had been taking place on the border of the Riverside and Furze Platt wards, there had been a number of examples where the temporary traffic lights had been stuck on red. He asked how much the council had to pay to residents who had made a damages case against the council due to potholes not being repaired.

Andrew Durrant confirmed that there was an insurance team who looked after liabilities and costs, this could be reported to the Panel.

ACTION – The amount of money paid to residents from damage caused by potholes to be reported back to the Panel.

Mark Beeley asked if there was any interest in bringing a topic forward on Community Infrastructure Levy.

Councillor Gurch Singh confirmed that he was happy to explore the scope of this topic.

The meeting, which began at 7.00 pm, finished at 8.03 pm

Chair.....

Date.....