



DEMOCRATIC AND ELECTORAL SERVICES

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Date: 13 March 2015 Direct Line: 01895 837225/837227

Dear Councillor

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be held as follows:

DATE: **MONDAY, 23RD MARCH, 2015**
TIME: **6.00 PM**
VENUE: **ROOM 6, CAPSWOOD, OXFORD ROAD, DENHAM**

Only apologies for absence received prior to the meeting will be recorded.

Yours faithfully

Jim Burness

Director of Resources

To: The Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Dr. Pope
Mr Harding
Mr Anthony
Mr Chhokar
Mr Griffin
Mrs Plant
The Earl of Stockton

Audio/Visual Recording of Meetings

Please note: This meeting might be filmed, photographed, audio-recorded or reported by a party other than South Bucks District Council for subsequent broadcast or publication.

If you intend to film, photograph or audio record the proceedings or if you have any questions please contact the Democratic Services Officer (members of the press please contact the Communications Officer).

Declarations of Interest

Any Member attending the meeting is reminded of the requirement to declare if he/she has a personal interest in any item of business, as defined in the Code of Conduct. If that interest is a prejudicial interest as defined in the Code the Member should also withdraw from the meeting.

A G E N D A

(Pages)

1. **Apologies for Absence**
2. **Minutes**
To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2015. **(1 - 4)**
3. **Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust**
To receive a presentation from Sir Andrew Morris OBE, Chairman of the Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust, on the work of the Trust, particularly in relation to Wexham Park Hospital.
4. **Chiltern and South Bucks Corporate Peer Challenge**
To consider the attached letter dated 14 January 2015 from the Local Government Association. **(5 - 20)**
5. **Pension Fund Deficit**
Presentation by Graeme Muir of Barnett Waddington the Pension Fund's firm of Actuaries.
6. **Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel**
To note the minutes of the meetings of the Crime Panel held on 21 November and 30 January 2015 (to follow if available) **(21 - 28)**
7. **Buckinghamshire Overview & Scrutiny Committee for Public Health Services**
To note the minutes of meetings held on 25 November and 11 December 2014 (previously circulated).
8. **Members Questions and Answers**
An opportunity for Members to raise questions about items:
 - during the meeting
 - written questions submitted previously
 - raised by information items
9. **Work Programme**
To note the work programme timetable **(29 - 30)**

10. **Any other Business**

To consider any matters which the Chairman agrees as urgent in accordance with Section 100B of the Local Government Act 1972

The next meeting is due to take place on Monday, 15 June 2015

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**Meeting - 26 January 2015**

Present: Dr. Pope (Chairman)
Mr Harding, Mr Anthony, Mr Chhokar, Mr Griffin, Mrs Plant and
The Earl of Stockton

Absent: Mrs Burrows

19. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 October 2014 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

20. SOUTH CENTRAL AMBULANCE SERVICE NHS TRUST

The Committee received a verbal briefing by Andy Battye (Area Manager, Chiltern, SCAS). The Committee also received a copy of the SCAS Annual Health Scrutiny Committee report for information.

Mr Battye explained that there had been an unprecedented increase in demand over the Christmas period resulting in the service having to declare a major incident as it was so busy. The demand affected not only the ambulance service, but the hospitals as well. The increased levels of demand and the challenges faced with staffing levels meant that the service had to utilise private providers. The SCAS released a press statement over the Christmas period urging the public to use their services appropriately and only call 999 if absolutely essential.

During the discussion, Mr Battye responded to a number of questions and issues as follows:

- The SCAS coped with the increased demand over the Christmas period as well as any of the other ambulance service trusts.
- Queuing at Wexham Park Hospital: some major refurbishments have taken place at the hospital which have helped to reduce queuing. The hospital did experience issues over the Christmas period following the increase in demand, but were able to cope better than some hospitals did.
- Handover times at Wexham Park Hospital: the discharge process can take time and the freeing up of bed spaces in the hospital can be an issue. SCAS, through winter resilience funding, has introduced a Hospital Ambulance Liaison Officer to work with the hospital to manage issues and assist with patient flow.
- Frequent callers: SCAS had procedures in place to analyse the needs of frequent callers and to work with partner agencies to put the necessary plans and services in place.
- Initiatives being used to reduce the number of patients needing to go to A&E included the early bird GP scheme and the SOS bus.
- The Committee were updated on the progress of the co-responding scheme, including the fact that Fire and Rescue Service had received training in December to be able to respond on blue lights.
- To address the issue of recruitment problems in the ambulance service, the SCAS had recently recruited paramedics from Poland. The Committee were assured that these paramedics were experienced and that they all had a good level of English.

After the discussion, the Chairman thanked Mr Battye for his attendance and the briefing he provided.

21. CONSULTATION OF 2015/16 BUDGET PROPOSALS

The Cabinet on 9 February 2015 would be receiving a report on the Council's Budget Proposals and Council Tax for 2015/2016 and, in accordance with the Council's Constitution, the Committee was invited to comment on the proposals.

The Committee's attention was drawn to the following key points:

- The proposed budget requirement is £7,651k, which will result in a District council tax of £143.00 for a Band D property, unchanged from the current year.
- By freezing the council tax the authority would receive a grant of £48k, which would be equivalent to a 1% increase in council tax. There is the option of increasing the council tax by 1.99% without triggering a local council tax referendum, which would generate an additional £96k of council tax income per annum but the Council would not receive a one off grant of £48k in 2015/16.
- The draft budget proposes using reserves as follows:
 - Local Development Document (LDD) reserve £98k
 - Funding for the May District Elections £70k
 - Transformation reserve for support of shared service work £62k
 - Government funding change reserve £76k
- It is being proposed that an earmarked reserve for the impact of major national infrastructure projects of £80,000 be established.
- The suggested prudent level of general reserves for 2015/16 is £770k. As there is no planned use of General Reserve in 2015/16 the prudent level of reserves will be achieved and also would keep reserves above the £1,250k aimed for within the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- The Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2015/16 which is being recommended to Cabinet following consideration by the Resources PAG, sets out the approach aiming to deliver investment income for 2015/16 of £400k, which is £150k less than the current year. This reflects a view of a continuing low level of interest rates during 2015/16, and the declining level of cash balances as a result of the significant capital expenditure on waste last year.

The Committee were also made aware of the key risks and the main issues facing the authority in the medium term, and that budget decision needed to be mindful of the medium term situation facing the Council.

Members asked a number of questions and sought clarification and explanation of certain issues surrounding the revenue budget and use of reserves.

The Committee noted that whilst the proposed budget would not result in an increase in council tax, a 1.99% increase in council tax might help support the Council's medium term position.

Whilst discussing Section B of the Cabinet report on Investment Income, a view was raised that the approach being taken by the Council to deliver investment income for 2015/16 was too cautious and that in view of the fact that current market returns on cash investments are historically low with the likelihood that this will continue for years to come, the Cabinet should be more proactive in exploiting other investment opportunities based around using the funding on projects to generate income e.g. increasing car parking spaces and investing in property in the district. With regards to investing in property, the Committee recognised that

Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 26 January 2015

the speed of decision making usually required when acquiring commercial property would need to be addressed as the normal Council processes in most cases would be too long and a disincentive to vendors.

With regard to the Farnham Park budget, the Committee highlighted the importance of the business plan for the operation to be successful and to move the service into a surplus as soon as possible.

With regard to planning decisions, whilst understanding the need for Officers to point out the potential financial consequences to the Council of refusing a planning application contrary to the recommendations in the report and risking appeals which the Council might lose, Members felt that it was important that these consequences were not over-emphasised to the detriment of the decision making process which requires Members to make a balanced judgement based on all the relevant planning issues involved.

Following the discussion, the Committee agreed that Cabinet be informed that, apart from the comments over the approach to investments, the Farnham Park business plan and planning decisions it had no other comments to make on the 2015/16 budget proposals.

22. JOINT WORKING ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee noted the Joint Working Annual Report which went to the Chiltern and South Bucks Joint Committee on 16 October 2014. The report set out the progress of the joint working between Chiltern and South Bucks in 2014 and was divided into the following sections:

- Shared Services Reviews
- Harmonisation
- Joint ICT
- Other Shared Service Working
- Issues and Learning Points

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

23. THAMES VALLEY POLICE AND CRIME PANEL GENERAL ISSUES REPORT

The Committee noted a general issues report which was submitted to the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel on 21 November 2014.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

24. BUCKINGHAMSHIRE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

The Committee noted the minutes of the meetings of the Select Committee held on 16 September and 28 October 2014.

25. MEMBERS QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

In response to a question which had been submitted by Cllr Hollis, the Committee were advised that a report on the issues related to the Pension Fund Deficit would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee and that this was reflected in the work programme.

26. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received the work programme.

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

27. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust

The governance arrangements of the new trust were still unclear. The Chair stated that she would try to find out some more information regarding the governance arrangements and would report back to the next meeting.

The meeting terminated at 7.30 pm

Alan Goodrum
Chief Executive
Chiltern and South Bucks Councils

King George V Road
Amersham HP6 5AW and
Capswood
Oxford Road
Denham, Bucks UB9 4LH

14 January 2015

Dear Alan

Chiltern and South Bucks Councils - corporate peer challenge

On behalf of the peer team, thank you for your invitation into Chiltern and South Bucks Councils to deliver the recent peer challenge. The team felt privileged to be allowed to conduct its work with the support of you and your colleagues who were open and engaged with the process.

You asked the peer team to provide an external view of the Councils and give recognition of progress made; and supportive challenge and feedback on how you are prepared to meet future issues and opportunities at Chiltern and South Bucks.

The two Councils asked the team to provide specific feedback on testing their thinking on the:

1. Effectiveness of shared arrangements and the future direction of the Partnership?
2. Partnership's fitness to deliver on future challenges faced?
3. Direction of the Partnership's work with external partners? How effective are these relationships/partnerships?
4. Extent to which governance structures are conducive to delivering Partnership priorities?
5. Councils having skills, capacity and expertise to deliver the Partnership's agenda?
6. Plans for Phase 3:
 - Based on progress so far, where next on the journey?
 - Options for the next Phases?
 - Challenges that need to be overcome.

In addition the peer team considered the ability, resilience and capacity of the councils to deliver its future ambitions by looking at:

- Understanding of local context and priority setting: do the Councils understand their local context and have they established a clear set of priorities?
- Financial planning and viability: do the Councils have financial plans in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that these are being implemented successfully?
- Political and managerial leadership: do the Councils have effective political and managerial leadership and is it a constructive partnership?
- Governance and decision-making: are effective governance and decision-making arrangements in place to respond to key challenges and manage change, transformation and disinvestment?
- Organisational capacity: are organisational capacity and resources focused in the right areas in order to deliver the agreed priorities?

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement-focused and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement plans. The peers used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

This letter provides a summary of the feedback that was presented at the end of our recent on-site visit. Recommendations are made in the body of the letter and are collated as a set at the end.

In presenting this report the peer challenge team has done so as fellow local government officers and members, not professional consultants or inspectors. Our intention is to provide recognition of the progress Chiltern and South Bucks Councils have made in recent years while also stimulating debate and thinking about future challenges.

Organisational context and summary

Chiltern and South Bucks offer a good environment for residents and businesses. There is good infrastructure, proximity to London, good transport links and a high proportion of Green Belt and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Chiltern and South Bucks Councils are good performing councils that benefit from political stability with all-out elections every four years.

The two Councils decided in 2011 to join together to provide shared services. This is known by the two Councils as the Partnership, and is underpinned by an Inter Authority Agreement. More recently the two Councils agreed a joint Business Plan 2013-14, which clearly sets out that individual Council sovereignty would be retained.

Moving to a single management team of one Chief Executive, two Strategic Directors and Heads of Service, in what was called Phase 1, has been completed and is delivering an effective point of reference for further shared arrangements. Phase 2 is focusing on a programme of service reviews leading to shared services, where a business case is proven. These are also delivering efficiencies and, where agreed, joint

service teams. The service reviews are mid-way through and so far both Phases 1 and 2 have delivered combined savings in excess of £1m.

The Councils have undergone significant change in a short period. For some staff and Members in South Bucks there are concerns about a perceived loss of, or threat to, Council sovereignty and the service reviews have been uncomfortable for staff who have had to apply for jobs in the new structure. Some Members appeared to be unsure of the original intentions signed up to three years ago and uncertain about how the Partnership will develop in future.

The Partnership is now at a critical stage. There are all-out elections for both Councils in May 2015. The recommendations from the recent Local Government Boundary Commission review will lead to a reduction at these elections in the number of South Bucks Members from 40 to 28.

In addition there is an emerging funding gap, first at South Bucks (2016-17) and then in the following year at Chiltern (2017-18). Funding pressures will continue, as they will for the rest of the local government sector in England, for the foreseeable future. The Partnership recognises the need to maintain the momentum of change in moving to Phase 3, but there is not yet formal agreement on what this will look like. Successful negotiation of this critical stage, to develop a vision for Phase 3, will be of great importance for the continuing success of the Partnership.

The Councils have retained the model of Local Strategic Partnership working arrangements, with these now merged into a single Joint Strategic Partnership (JSP) and sustainable community strategy. This will be a potentially important vehicle for partners to co-ordinate activity in the face of continuing public spending pressures.

There has been a debate initiated recently by Buckinghamshire Business First, which commissioned research on different potential unitary models for the county. This research estimates that up to £20m of annual savings could be achieved by moving to a unitary county model. This comes at a sensitive time for councils in the county who are approaching council and General elections in May 2015 and the uncertainties of the future direction of English local government after this time. The Councils have since the peer challenge issued a statement on this.

Local context and priority setting

Both Chiltern and South Bucks enjoy a high quality environment. This reflects positively on the Councils' recognition of their responsibility for stewardship. An example of this is the Councils "taking up cudgels" against the High Speed 2 rail route (HS2) and fulfilling a community leadership role in doing so. This opposition has strong local support and appears to have been a well marshalled and co-ordinated campaign led by the two Councils.

The HS2 and Heathrow extension proposals offer positive and negative challenges, although in different ways, for the two Councils. The HS2 campaign is an example of how opposition effectively shifts to a focus on mitigation so that the best arrangements can be obtained for the community. In due course the Councils will need to plan for what this might mean for the local economy and how benefits can be maximised. This will be similar

for the Heathrow extension proposals although that is some way behind HS2 in determination.

It is a feature of the local population that it is well-educated and articulate (more than 50 per cent hold a degree or equivalent, where the national average is 27 per cent). This is able to mobilise opposition on local issues and has strong views on the local environment and the need for this to be protected. This provides an additional sensitivity and challenge for the Councils and Councillors on day-to-day planning matters and when undertaking initiatives such as the Green Belt review.

The character of the local population is that of an active local community and service users. There is a willingness for many to be involved in community and voluntary activity and this could be important in the future as the Councils, in the face of continuing public spending pressures, consider options for the devolution, co-design and co-delivery of services.

Both Councils are regularly ranked highly in the top twenty districts of the Halifax Quality of Life index. This confirms that the two districts are very desirable areas for people to live and work in.

This is supported by good infrastructure, especially road and rail networks to London. This supports a buoyant economy, with proximity to London that provides ease of access to markets along with good connections for commuters. The economy appears to have an inbuilt resilience to downturns and, to some extent, can be depended on to manage itself.

The Buckinghamshire Councils are working together to develop an aligned timetable for the review of their Local Plans. This will not only fulfil the Duty to Co-operate (under the Localism Act 2011), on spatial planning requirements beyond council boundaries, but will also provide a strategic understanding of housing and economic market areas and how this informs the future economy at a sub-regional level. This will be a crucial piece of work.

The opportunity and scope for sustainable development is limited. A large proportion of land in both Councils is either Green Belt (80 per cent in Chiltern and 87 per cent in South Bucks) or designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This provides a significant challenge to both Councils to plan and provide for the future growth needs of their communities. It will require a fine balance to manage environmental stewardship while also finding a way to support future economic growth. An Economic Development Strategy will be important to plan for the future economy while continuing the stewardship of the environment.

There are no obvious deprivation challenges although there are undoubtedly challenges around housing. This is exacerbated by the review of Local Plans that is expected to see evidenced future housing need increase significantly – this could be more than double current Local Plan figures. This was confirmed while the team were on-site with the Examination in Public (EIP) for Chiltern being deferred because of the shortfall on housing numbers.

In addition there is an ageing population (currently at 20 per cent over 65 years, whereas the national average is 17 per cent. This is forecast to increase faster than the national average to 2026). This will prefigure a need for extra care housing and support for

independent living. There is also a recognised shortfall of affordable/social housing provision that will need to be addressed.

Health is a priority in the Partnership's Business Plan. To progress this it will be important to build on the working relationships with the JSP, the Health and Well Being Board, the Clinical Commissioning Group and Buckinghamshire County Council. Of importance will be the resources made available through the Better Care Fund (BCF). The BCF pool is expected to rise to circa £100m for the county and it will be important for partners to work together on needs assessment, priorities, respective partner responsibilities and delivery mechanisms.

A notable feature of the current economy is the significant number of small medium enterprises (SMEs) and micro-businesses. It is expected that this will continue to be a key feature of the future economy. This throws up a question as to how the Councils can fulfil a potentially important role to support SMEs to become established and expand. This could include business advice, business support, provision of premises etc. but will need to complement activity and services provided by organisations such as the Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), the Chamber (s) of Commerce etc.

The Partnership's strategy for economic growth appears to be contained within Local Plan documents but it does not currently have an Economic Development Strategy. Although the economy is to a large extent self-managing the Partnership could consider its role to shape economic growth, through such a strategy, so that growth is appropriate and beneficial for the two districts, their residents and businesses. This will also be important to ensure that the region remains competitive and can continue to be largely self-managing but directed to serve the needs of the community.

Management and political leadership

The Partnership is being guided by good leadership. The peer team witnessed strong and effective working relationships between the two Council Leaders and the Senior Management Team (SMT). The two Leaders appear to work well together and are prominent figureheads leading their respective Councils and the Partnership. This is supported by a Chief Executive who is well respected internally and externally.

The Heads of Service told the peer team that they feel well supported by Members who became involved in service reviews. During a time of change it is important for Officers and Members to work well together. The service review process is unquestionably a complex process to navigate, with some difficult decisions to be made, so good working relations and understanding of issues is crucial.

Both Councils have retained their Local Strategic Partnership, referred to as the Joint Strategic Partnership (JSP). This is unusual as many councils in England have discontinued these arrangements. It demonstrates how much the Partnership values working with partners and how it has successfully moved from two separate bodies to a single JSP. This is a strength which should not be underestimated and the JSP is at a point now where, with the support of assembled partners, it can become an important partnership vehicle. To achieve this the Councils need to move the JSP from strategy to

action planning and delivery. This will demonstrate the potency of partnership working and ensure continuing partner commitment.

The Community Safety Partnership, within the JSP, was reported as having a positive impact, in particular around acquisitive crime. Burglary reduction is the highest in the force area and is attributed, in large part, to more efficient Partnership working and targeted programmes. This is a positive building block for future partnership working and delivery.

The value of partnership working is supported by external stakeholders who told the peer team that they like and support the two Councils. One partner described as being “quite bowled over” by the responsiveness and consideration given to his approach. This can save the effort of contacting and accessing two councils when it is simplified to one service and one set of service contacts. The peer team were not certain that the two Councils were fully aware of how positively they are regarded when they work seamlessly together to tackle local issues and challenges. This is a strength for the Partnership and one that might be communicated and projected so that it might be seen as the ‘partner of choice’.

The Councils are engaging well with the LEP. This is an important partnership for Chiltern and South Bucks with a number of local projects to be funded by the LEP’s recently approved Local Growth funding, including links to Crossrail stations at Taplow and Iver and A355 road improvements. Working with the LEP to shape future growth is another reason for the Partnership to consider developing an Economic Development Strategy so as to influence LEP growth programmes that affect the Partnership.

The Councils have taken a positive step to agree a Green Belt review that may support and address future sustainable development requirements. However, it is also understood that this will be challenging, with a number of public concerns expected to strongly object to any perceived encroachment of the Green Belt. Developing viable options from the review will require great care and brave decisions to enable sustainable longer-term development.

The peer team engaged with backbenchers from the two Councils and encountered some low level understanding of the purpose of the shared services Partnership. This is a crucial issue. The two Councils have unambiguously stated that the Partnership will not infringe each Council’s sovereignty and this is generally well understood. What is not so well understood is the distinction between shared services, which is the stated objective of the Partnership, and shared management. There were some mixed views and understanding on this with some backbenchers seeing the objective of the Partnership working arrangements as shared management while others thought it was a ‘pick and mix’.

The priorities of the JSP and the Partnership Business Plan are not directly aligned. For example, economic prosperity is a priority for the JSP but not for the Partnership. Although absolute alignment is certainly not a requirement, future iterations may benefit from reflecting on whether the absence of alignment on some issues demonstrates inconsistency and could be confusing for Members, Officers, and the wider community.

Finally, staff recognise that the two Councils have undergone a huge amount of change, with consequent pressure on senior managers to progress service reviews. However, staff told the peer team that they want SMT to be more visible than they currently are. The staff briefings, although valuable, can inhibit staff due to the limited time and the number of

people present to engage in the issues that are important for them and their service. Smaller service-by-service scale discussions with SMT would be valued.

Financial planning and viability

The Partnership has completed Phase 1 and is midway through Phase 2 of its shared service schedule. This work has achieved a good level of savings of £1.2m which has enabled the continued provision of front-line services without cuts.

The Partnership is open to a mixed economy of provision and partnership arrangements. The recent waste and recycling contract, between Chiltern and Wycombe councils, is expected to deliver savings of £750k. (South Bucks are tied into a separate contract until 2021). At the same time the Partnership is making effective use of service outsourcing, where appropriate, to deliver important savings, for example both Councils have contracts with Greenwich Leisure Limited and South Bucks use Northgate for Revenues and Benefits.

The Partnership recognises the potential to grow its economic and housing base to deliver increases in Business Rates and New Homes Bonus (NHB). This points to the importance of linking the Local Plan review and the Green Belt review with a longer-term financial strategy, so that the emergent thinking in the former can inform the latter.

There has been some investment in capacity in order to deliver the transformation of services. An award of £50k was achieved from the Transformation Challenge Award (2014-15) to enhance customer services. However, the amounts invested are relatively small. For example the this letter refers to personnel support for the service review process which was not as strong as some services felt was needed due to lack of resources. This suggests resource and capacity shortfalls for a strategically managed transformation programme.

Both Councils are currently in a strong financial position. For example, both Councils have a healthy level of reserves. In addition both Councils are debt free. The peer team believe that it would be advantageous for the Councils to consider how they might use this strong financial position to prepare for the financial pressures that will come.

For example, this could be beneficial in smoothing out shorter-term financial pressures while developing a longer-term savings strategy to meet future financial gaps. It could also allow the Councils to develop a revised investment strategy to address the marked reduction in investment income due to low interest rates. Similarly, it could allow the Councils to consider how it develops and invests in asset management to deliver on Partnership priorities, such as affordable housing, and/or create an income stream.

The Councils' financial information highlights that the funding gap occurs sooner for South Bucks and is significantly larger than that at Chiltern. At South Bucks this gap is projected to be £443k by 2016-17 and increases cumulatively to £1.53m by 2018-19. Chiltern's gap of £136k emerges in 2017-18 and rises to £490k by 2019-20

This data also highlights the importance placed by the Councils on use of NHB to support revenue budget expenditure. Both councils are using NHB to support the revenue budget.

This does present a financial risk if the arrangements for awarding NHB change, particularly following the General election in May 2015.

The financial history of Chiltern DC shows a record of sizeable underspends. For example, for 2013-14 it was £1.31m, equating to more than 12 per cent of the revenue budget. While underspends are generally more welcome than overspends they can bring reputational damage if the local taxpayer believes they are paying too much Council Tax to maintain council services. They are also a sign of poor financial planning, which misses the opportunity to make more informed spending decisions on priorities. The peer team were assured that this was now being addressed with the involvement of the portfolio holder.

The Partnership's shared services arrangements have delivered savings to date but there is not yet in place a clear savings strategy to meet impending financial gaps. This is even more important as once the service review process is completed there are no readily available options for savings. The Councils are recommended to devise a longer-term strategy as significant pressures on local government funding will extend to the end of the decade, with the likelihood of it continuing beyond. Longer-term, and more consistent, financial planning, will be crucial for the Councils to face challenges ahead, and to press ahead with deeper transformation in Phase 3 and beyond.

New ways of approaching income generation is an under-developed area of work across the Partnership. This is a fast developing area in local government out of necessity and in response to funding pressures. Newly developing areas of potential income generation include investment opportunities, for example house building, town centre regeneration etc. There are innovative models of investment model being utilised to support income generation, for example, joint venture, local asset based vehicles (LABV), Tax Incremental Funding (TIF). The peer team recommend that the Councils explore the opportunities for new forms of income generation and build this into future financial forward planning.

Capacity

The peer team encountered positive views from some staff about their experiences of working together, gaining service resilience, and learning from each other. This was a positive message from staff who have gone through a difficult period of service reviews with the uncertainty of whether they would have a job at the end of the process.

At the same time we found Heads of Service to be a vital, energetic group in the service review process. This will be important in the future as they are an essential part of the organisation to assist the leadership meet future challenges and provide the interface between senior Members and Officers to front-line staff.

The role of personnel in service reviews was valued. It was felt by many that this could be beneficially deepened and extended. For example, during the implementation of joint service teams, following a service review, personnel were not available to provide support to new working teams, just at a time when many service managers felt this was most important. This lack of availability was due to insufficient staff resources which the peer team were told was below establishment numbers.

The peer team recommends that the Councils evaluate the personnel resources required for the significant service review change programme and whether this could be temporarily increased for the remainder of Phase 2, and to build capacity for Phase 3.

The service review process has been useful to consider not just specifications for future service delivery but also the resources necessary to support that delivery. For example, the process involves consideration of emerging/changing needs, such as ICT needs, with bids accordingly made for these. Likewise consideration is given to where the team will be based and the presence to be provided at the other district.

However, not surprisingly there are a number of organisational creaks showing in the recent staff survey, probably a consequence of the change programme the Partnership has undergone. It will be important to devise an action programme in response once the survey data has been analysed and for staff to be involved in that.

As would be expected there has been a loss of capacity and experience in the staff resource (estimated at 11 per cent). The resilience and capacity of the Partnership has been tested with a demanding service review programme and maintaining the 'day job'. It will be necessary for the Partnership to consider what investment will be needed to rebuild resilience and capacity, in particular to be ready for Phase 3 and deeper transformation.

The service review programme not only affects organisational capacity but it is a protracted process which, until it is completed in late 2015, delays the move to Phase 3. It also makes it difficult for staff who are understandably apprehensive as they wait to go through this. It would be beneficial for the Partnership and its staff if service reviews could be fast tracked to complete Phase 2 sooner than the current timetable.

The Partnership currently makes use of interims. This has been a sensible approach given the uncertainty of service review outcomes. However, this can extend uncertainty where some interim managers have been in post for some time and for services who have become accustomed to these people being in post. This is another reason, along with the cost implications of employing interim managers, to consider fast tracking the service review programme.

The two Councils have complex and demanding governance arrangements, overlaid by joint arrangements for the Partnership. Supporting these arrangements is sucking up resources and capacity and is not, in the view of the peer team, adding value nor is it likely to be sustainable. Work to streamline these arrangements is underway but this needs more pace.

The significant changes wrought by working in Partnership do not appear to be leading to organisational expectations being moderated during time of great change and less resources. It will be important to be clear that with the reduction in resources and capacity the Councils can no longer do more with less, rather it needs to be less with less.

The Partnership to date has focused on joint working and efficiency, while endeavouring to maintain service quality. The next phase will need to shift to transformation and new ways of working in order to find new solutions to meet the financial challenge. To support this approach it will be important to evaluate the future skills and behaviours needed for transformation. To support this shift it will be important to have an Organisational

Development Strategy to plan effectively for the future, and establish the skills and behaviours required.

The two Councils are working to integrate their ICT infrastructures, although currently they have separate ICT providers. The contract at South Bucks is scheduled to end in 2017-18. To avoid delaying the potential of ICT to support transformation the peer team believe that it will be important to consider: how ICT might be utilised as a key transformation enabler; how this can be provided during the interim period; and future ICT provision. This should feature in the joint Business Support (ICT) strategy that is being developed to run to 2017.

Some staff, and Members, told the peer team that they feel they are being “Chilternised”; that is to say that as Chiltern is the larger council in terms of budget and staff numbers, that some staff and Members in South Bucks feel that it is a Chiltern take-over. The peer team is mindful of the need not to set up an overreaction to this. This may sometimes be more a perception than fact but it will be important nevertheless to address this. Such concerns are common in shared service arrangements and it is important that Members and senior managers model the behaviours and manage internal communications effectively and proactively to ensure that all staff and Members fully understand that it is a partnership of equals.

Governance and decision making

The Councils’ governance arrangements appear robust and meet and respond to audit recommendations.

There is recognition by both Councils that the governance and constitution arrangements need to be streamlined. The team were informed of the rise of the number of meetings at Chiltern from 71 in 2001-02 to 166 in 2013-14. This level of activity requires considerable resources to service and will not be sustainable, particularly when working in Partnership with an additional layer of governance. Action on this is being taken to mitigate this, for example review of Member numbers, committee cycles, the number of Overview and Scrutiny committees and the establishment of the Constitution Working Group.

The complexity of each Council’s governance arrangements has diverted management capacity to focus on internal matters rather than strategic issues. The additional layer of Partnership governance adds to this complexity.

The use of Policy Advisory Groups (PAGs) by South Bucks was recognised by Chiltern as transferrable good practice and PAGs are now operational there. This signals that the Councils are prepared to look across the two councils to consider where better practice lies and to use that in Partnership working. The risk, depending on how this is configured in practice for Chiltern, is that this could result in additional bureaucracy and add to delay in decision making.

The joint meetings established by the Partnership work well and provide an important mechanism for not only Partnership decision-making but also for Members of the two Councils to know each other. This will be an important model for future joint working.

Ethical governance across the two Councils appeared to the peer team to be working well. More alignment in other areas, for example on delegated authority and

financial/contract regulations would increase operational efficiency as well as helping with more consistent and robust financial planning. For example, there is a low level of delegated authority, particularly in South Bucks where proposed spend of £3,000 has to go to full Council for approval. This is currently being addressed by the South Bucks Constitutional Working Group as it needs to make essential changes to its constitutional arrangements before the May 2015 elections when its membership reduces in number. A revised scheme should not be reinvented: instead, the Councils should pick up models from other councils and quickly adapt these for their purposes.

The next phase of the Partnership should consider extending the appropriate use of joint committees. This can be achieved without sacrificing sovereignty but has the benefit of streamlining governance arrangements and strengthening the Member role in developing the Partnership.

Overview and Scrutiny is acknowledged not to be effective and it appeared to the peer team that its role was not well understood. There are a number of issues around Overview and Scrutiny, including:

- A lack of understanding or willingness to use scrutiny powers and ‘call-ins’
- Uncertainty of the function of PAGs – are they for policy development or operational matters?
- Are PAGs duplicating effort and delaying decision making? Do they nullify the Overview and Scrutiny role? Is the PAG role – as distinct from Overview and Scrutiny - understood?
- Overview and Scrutiny has tended to be limited to involving backbenchers on new issues as a means of familiarisation
- The limited use of Overview and Scrutiny has been tolerated as it was felt by some to be less important where the administration majority is large. The peer team believe that the function of Overview and Scrutiny is important to ensure that the checks and balances to the executive are in place as well as providing a resource for policy development. This is even more important with Partnership working and where there are two councils with large majority administrations.

In summary, the current governance arrangements of the two Councils are unwieldy. Work to streamline these arrangements needs to be continued and taken forward faster. Current governance arrangements are: heavily reliant on organisational resources; not well understood; and delay decision-making. The Partnership and the two Councils’ Members and Officers need to achieve clarity on these arrangements.

The Partnership

Chiltern and South Bucks made a commitment three years ago to work across two Councils. Clear terms of reference and working arrangements were put in place. Completing Phase 1 and progressing Phase 2 are considerable achievements delivering important levels of savings. The service review model for Phase 2 is clear; governed by the criteria of savings, quality and service resilience

However, there are important challenges for the Partnership to consider. The two Councils have decided to retain separate Local Plans. It would make good financial and

resource sense to have a single Local Plan. Savings would be achieved in commissioning one set of evidence instead of two and a single set of planning policy staff would also achieve savings and provide service resilience. More importantly it would provide a spatial vision for the Partnership for sustainable planning for the future development needs of residents and businesses in Chiltern and South Bucks. It would also help address issues such as the Duty to Co-operate, the provision of a 5 year housing land supply and the spatial planning alignment occurring across Buckinghamshire councils.

Planning is acknowledged as one of, if not the principal, service provided by the two Councils. The reason for this appears to be the important role of environmental stewardship referred to earlier and the sensitivity of planning for local people. A question the peer team would pose for the two Councils is whether they regard planning as a regulatory/controlling service or one that facilitates the future needs of residents and businesses? It should be the latter but this does not come through convincingly.

The Partnership decided to postpone the Planning (Development Management) service review until after the elections in May 2015. The peer team were informed that significant savings might be expected from this of circa £250k. Given the importance of savings to address future funding gaps, and that service review delay is painful for staff and costly for the Councils, the peer team recommend that the earlier service review timetable be reinstated. This would fit with the earlier peer team recommendation to invest resources to fast track the completion of service reviews.

It is not unusual for shared service Partnerships to lose sight of what they were originally designed to do. This was raised as a question a number of times on-site. The original intentions were very clear but there is now some ambiguity on whether there is a clear shared aim. Does the Partnership:

- Commitment mean that partners/services can opt out of what was formerly agreed?
- Want shared services or simply shared management?
- Want shared services as an end in themselves or is it a means to achieve objectives as well as efficiency savings?
- Want to transform the way that public services are designed and delivered for their communities, or simply to realise the most efficiencies they can through joint working?

One analogy given to the team was of driving north on the M1 and not being clear on which junction you turn off – do the two Councils know how far they want to go? This might have been clear three years ago but it is not so clear now. The Partnership will need to work further on this issue so that after the elections in May 2015 the new administrations can restate, reconsider and recommit to Partnership objectives. However, it will be crucial that preparatory work is conducted now, in advance of the elections, so that the new administration can move quickly on these matters.

Partnership - next steps

There are some steps that the peer team recommend Members undertake that will strengthen the work of the Partnership. These include:

- The joint Cabinet currently meets quarterly but more frequent informal meetings, on Partnership working and transformation, will build understanding and relationships. Investing time in building trust and relationships is the key to successful partnerships.
- There is a need for more joint Member workshops to work on Partnership themes, topics and issues. These will need thoughtful structuring and support but will be important to build an inclusive working approach and beneficial to tackle potential Partnership obstacles. It will also be valuable to clarify the strategic direction of the Partnership.
- Designate Member Champions to promote/communicate the Partnership to colleagues
- There are distractions for the Partnership which need to be answered and then put to one side. For example, is merger of the Councils, proposed as a viable option, on or off? Where does the Partnership stand on the unitary debate – continue as you are, closer working with Wycombe or other partners? Members will need to make key decisions on these questions and having done that not allow the Partnership to keep revisiting these.
- Begin planning Phase 3 - there needs to be a model ready for post May 2015.

Finally, the direction and depth of the future Partnership will be determined by Members. They have a responsibility/duty to set the direction of the Partnership and to ensure that this is clearly conveyed and understood by the two Councils and external partners.

Phase Three

The shape and direction of Phase 3 has not yet been determined and the peer team were asked to consider what this might look like.

The Partnership's progress is influenced by a number of drivers. These include the financial pressures on local government being addressed by Phases 1 and 2 to integrate services and achieve financial efficiencies.

However, this does not, by itself, amount to transformation, which will need to be a key driver for Phase 3, in particular if the Partnership intention is not to lose front-line services. The shift from service efficiency, joint working and integration to transformation will require consideration of entirely new ways of service delivery and new ways of working, including some or all of:

- The use of ICT as a key enabler
- Channel shift – moving transactional services from face-to-face to online provision
- Demand management – understanding the demand for services and considering how this might be influenced
- Invest to save – recognising that some projects will carry an upfront investment before making a return on investment

- Co-design and co-delivery of services with, for example with town and parish councils, the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), and Buckinghamshire County Council
- Transfer of assets/functions to other providers
- Succession planning will be necessary, to include: an evaluation of what Officer skills will be required for Phase 3; ensuring that political succession planning is in place to ensure continuity; making arrangements for future senior managers; building sustained capacity within the organisation to meet future demands.
- Working with partners will become increasingly important in order to initiate conversations on joint delivery and service redesign. The role of JSP will be an important building block for this.
- Solve the accommodation conundrum as this is a potential Partnership blocker. The lease for Capswood until 2026 is fixed but there may be a way to sub-let the accommodation, even at a subsidised rate, that leads the Partnership to consider a move to shared accommodation whilst retaining a Council presence in each of the two districts.
- New models of income generation, as set out in the Financial Viability section above.

Making the shift to Phase 3 will need to be more than a commitment to transformation. It will also need the Partnership to evaluate where it has got to and identify where it wants to go next.

There are a number of models to facilitate such a discussion. One that the peer team, in their on-site feedback, referred to was the recent Grant Thornton/Inlogov (University of Birmingham) publication '2020 Vision: Exploring finance and policy futures for English local government as a starting point for discussion'.

<http://www.grant-thornton.co.uk/en/Publications/2014/2020-Vision-Exploring-finance-and-policy-futures-for-English-local-government-as-a-starting-point-for-discussion/>

This paper sets out a thesis that 'disruptive innovation' driven at a local level may be the only way for local government to survive the longer-term funding pressures. The paper posits six scenarios that councils might currently find themselves in and where they might want to move towards or avoid. The Partnership could use this model as the basis to plan Phase 3. Of course this is one model and there are others that could also be used.

Moving forward – Our recommendations for consideration

Based on what we saw, heard and read we suggest you consider the following actions to build on the council's undoubted successes. These are things we think will help you improve and develop the effectiveness and capacity to deliver your future ambitions and plans.

Phase 3 recommendations:

1. Fast track the completion of Phase 2 service reviews
2. Apply additional (temporary) personnel resources to support the completion of Phase 2

3. Create space for senior Members and managers to evaluate where the Partnership has got to and where it will go next. This work should be undertaken before May 2015.
4. Develop a Phase 3 Transformation Strategy and programme
5. Strengthen partnership working by closer working between Members from the two Councils as described in this report
6. Develop an Organisational Development Strategy to plan effectively for the future, including the skills and behaviours required
7. Establish succession planning arrangements to support future Partnership requirements for political and managerial leadership
8. Continue work and pick up the pace to streamline current governance arrangements. Develop a clear action plan prioritising the work that needs to be completed before the elections in May 2015
9. Consider options for occupancy at Capswood for the remainder of the lease period that may permit the Partnership to develop shared accommodation options after May 2015.

Recommendations that will support Phase 3

10. Revisit the decision to retain two separate Local Plans after the elections in May 2015. A single Local Plan will save costs, provide service resilience and provide a spatial vision for future sustainable development for the two separate sovereign Councils.
11. Develop a joint housing strategy, in association with partners, to plan the provision of future housing for an ageing population and affordable/social housing
12. Prepare a Partnership Economic Growth Strategy to inform sustainable economic growth and to support working with the LEP in delivering economic growth
13. Develop an understanding of new income generation opportunities that can be developed to offset future funding pressures
14. Devise a longer-term financial strategy to address the imminent funding gap and longer-term local government funding pressures, including common ways of presenting financial information to aid longer term planning.
15. Develop a unified position on future local government structures.

We have attached a set of slides that summarise the above feedback. The slides are the ones used by the peer team to present its feedback at the end of the onsite visit.

Next steps

You will undoubtedly wish to reflect on these findings and suggestions made with your senior managerial and political leadership before determining how the council wishes to take things forward.

As part of the peer challenge process, there is an offer of continued activity to support this. What may particularly useful for the Partnership would be being pointed towards

good practice elsewhere in English local government on transformation and income generation. The LGA would be pleased to assist in this.

In the meantime we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with you and colleagues through the peer challenge to date. Heather Wills, Principal Adviser (South East) is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Heather can be contacted via email at heather.wills@local.gov.uk (or tel. 07770 701188) and can provide access to our resources and any further support.

In the meantime, all of us connected with the peer challenge would like to wish you every success going forward. Once again, the peer team are grateful to you and your colleagues for inviting the peer challenge and to everyone involved for their participation.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Winfield
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On behalf of the peer challenge team:

- Stephen Baker, Chief Executive, Suffolk Coastal District Council and Waveney District Council
- Cllr Philip Sanders, Leader of West Devon Borough Council
- Dave Barnes, Strategic Director at Christchurch and East Dorset District Councils
- Richard King, Strategic Director (Democratic, Development and Legal Services), Lichfield District Council
- Susanne Nelson-Wehrmeyer, Assistant Corporate Legal Adviser, LGA
- Ellen Care, Internal Communications Officer, London Borough of Bexley

Appendix 1 – Feedback slides

Minutes

Minutes of the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel held on Friday 21 November 2014, in The Oculus, Aylesbury Vale District Council, The Gateway, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury. Bucks HP19 8FF, commencing at 11.00 am and concluding at 1.40 pm.

Members Present

Bill Bendyshe-Brown (Wycombe District Council), Noel Brown (Chiltern District Council), Councillor Margaret Burke (Milton Keynes Council), Terry Burke (Independent Co-opted Member), Councillor Anita Cranmer (South Buckinghamshire District Council), Trevor Egleton (Buckinghamshire County Council), Councillor Kieron Mallon (Oxfordshire County Council), Councillor Iain McCracken (Bracknell Forest Council), Councillor Tony Page (Reading Borough Council), Councillor Barrie Patman (Wokingham Borough Council), Pam Pearce (Aylesbury Vale District Council), Councillor Mohammed Sharif (Slough Borough Council), Councillor Dee Sinclair (Oxford City Council), Councillor Quentin Webb (West Berkshire Council) and Councillor Michael Welply (South Oxfordshire District Council)

Officers Present

Reece Bowman, Helen Fincher and Clare Gray

Others Present

Christopher Anstey (Country and Landowners Association), Anthony Aston (Chairman of Bucks Local Branch NFU), Alan Baldwin (Thames Valley Police), Anthony Stansfeld (Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner), Ian Thompson (CFO and Deputy Chief Executive), Ruth Vigor-Hedderly and Mitchell Phillips Wright (Youth Council)

Apologies

Councillor Mark Booty (West Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Jesse Grey (Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead), Councillor Bill Jones (Vale of White Horse District Council), Councillor George Reynolds (Cherwell District Council) and Vacancy

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest. Mr Iain McCracken introduced Mr Mitchell Phillips Wright from the Youth Council who was shadowing him.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 September 2014 were agreed as a correct record.

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The Vice-Chairman referred to recommendation 5 relating to Female Genital Mutilation and asked Members if they had put a motion to their Council to raise awareness. He was pleased to report that Cherwell District Council had debated this issue and supports the PCC in his actions.

Reference was made to page 7 of the minutes (bullet point 5) which referred to the Policy Development Manager at the OPCC giving Members a briefing on rehabilitation programmes and that this should be added to the Work Programme.

3. Public Question Time

There were no public questions. The Chairman reported that the procedure for public questions would be highlighted on the Panel's website.

4. Themed Item - Rural Crime

The themed item for this meeting related to rural crime. The Panel had received an update on the steps being taken in respect of rural crime at their meeting held in July 2014.

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) reported that rural crime covered a wide area including serious organised crime and wide scale intimidation including slavery, people trafficking, firearms and metal theft. It was an area he took seriously and was a Strategic Objective.

The Chairman introduced some local subject experts who were attending this meeting to discuss rural crime:-

Christopher Anstey – Buckinghamshire Branch of the Country and Landowners Association

Anthony Aston – Chairman Aylesbury Branch of the National Farmers Union

Ruth Vigor-Hedderly – Green Yard Policy in Chilterns and South Bucks

Anthony Aston made the following comments on rural crime:-

- Thames Valley Police had helped decrease rural crime through their targeted initiatives.
- He referred back to the Hunting Act 2004 which was a time when there were mindless acts being carried out in the countryside. Since then farmers have been threatened and machines stolen, often at night and some farmers live in fear.
- Farmwatch is a network which has been set up to keep an eye on criminal activity in the countryside.
- CCTV has been used in problem areas and there is also an emergency helpline.
- Dogwatch is another organisation which targets criminals who steal dogs to order.
- It was crucial to have close liaison with the Police Community Support Officer and provide them with as much detail as possible.
- Farmers have been informed about the best way to keep their machinery secure with mobile cameras, gates and barriers and there is a trackable assets system.
- A machine can be moved to Europe within 24 hours and some vehicles cost approximately £150,000. Some gangs are highly organised.

Christopher Anstey made the following comments on rural crime:-

- Thames Valley Police have been very supportive to the Country and Landowners Association.
- They have made a huge improvement to rural crime but it was important not to be complacent.
- With reducing budgets in future year's rural crime should remain a priority. The PCSO's provided amazing support to rural areas.
- Phoning 101 or 999 provided immediate police action.
- There were still concerns about hare coursing and deer poaching which was increasing.
- He also referred to machines and trailers being taken abroad to be sold.
- Anything suspicious should be reported to the police.
- Livestock were also stolen.

Ruth Vigor Hedderly, Cabinet Member for Transportation (BCC) had set up the Green Yard Policy with Sergeant Lucy Price from Iver Police Station. The initiative had started with concern about horses stranded on the highway. The Police could spend a long time chasing horses which took them away from other police work. They therefore set up this initiative where abandoned horses were first identified, where there would be a direct dialogue with the owner. If they were not initially identified they had 14 days to come forward and claim the horse and they would have to pay to have the horse returned. If the horse was in a poor condition they would be destroyed otherwise if they were not claimed they would be rehomed. The initiative had been extremely successful in South Buckinghamshire and some constant offenders were paying up to £500-600 per horse and they were looking to roll this scheme out across the Thames Valley. Surrey were also looking at adopting this policy.

Ruth Vigor Hedderly also referred to the amount of horse tack being stolen often worth £1,000 which took years to accumulate. It was good to have a sign on gates saying Rural Crime Police Aware.

During questioning the following points were noted:-

- There was a recent food scare in the national press referring to illegal slaughter and unsafe uninspected food being supplied. The representative from the National Farmers Union reported that he was aware of this being raised but he was not conscious of this being a widescale local problem.
- A question was asked about the base for organised crime and the routes used. Some organised crime could be based in the cities and towns and gangs travel into the countryside or they could be based outside towns or cities. There was a relationship between urban and rural crime but it was not the same in every area.
- The Assistant Chief Constable who was Chairman of the Rural Crime Steering Group reported that there had been significant improvements in rural crime and the different types of crime impacted on the rural community in different ways. The Group had highlighted a number of priority areas.
- In terms of hare coursing gangs can travel from out of the county and obtain a substantial amount of money for dogs to chase hares. Farmers find it difficult to confront the gangs as they are often violent and use firearms. Eradicating hares was not good for biodiversity. They were also difficult to catch in the act of hare coursing and having evidence of a dead animal.
- There were different types of deer, some of which were highly prized for hunting. Weapons used to kill deer included cross bows and centre pin rifles. Use of firearms at night was especially frightening.
- There were livestock thefts with animals being slaughtered and butchered. Up to 200-300 sheep could disappear. The Assistant Chief Constable reported that this was not a significant issue for the Thames Valley but was causing concern in other areas such as North Wales who had an action plan to address this.
- Countryside Watch Notices were a good deterrent and community awareness was key.
- A Member expressed concern about emphasis on smaller crimes in the rural community, which should be prevented by the farmers through proper protection of their property and that other crimes such as slavery and people trafficking should be addressed. In response it was noted that rural crime was a serious issue from a number of aspects including stealing valuable machinery using violence and firearms by organised crimes.
- A question was asked about how crime was analysed. The Assistant Chief Constable referred to a number of initiatives including the Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) Scheme and working with Surrey in employing an analyst to draw a picture of data intelligence which for example, had led them to track down a gang committing crimes in different Force areas.
- A Member asked about the use of cameras. The Assistant Chief Constable reported that ANPR was a good scheme to use in the countryside but cameras were more difficult as they needed to be moved around frequently and positioned in the right place to catch travelling gangs.
- Reference was made to working with other agencies, particularly animal welfare associations. Ruth Vigor Hedderly reported that they work with the Horse Trust in Speen who have taken in abandoned horses and rehomed them. There was also an organisation called Horse Watch and horses could also be freeze marked so that they could be recognised. Each Force had a Police Wildlife Liaison Officer who liaised with organisations such as RSPB, RSPCA and a site visit could be arranged if required.
- Since 2009 legislation has required that all horses should be micro chipped and have a passport; horses cannot be registered unless this has taken place. If difficult horses were stolen and could not be sold they were often abandoned. The PCC referred to a serious incident where a donkey had smashed through a car windscreen and caused serious damage to a lady in the car.

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- Ruth Vigor Hedderly also expressed concern about young children driving horses along the highway which was often extremely dangerous. The police had currently little power to address this because of an antiquated law but she was looking at developing a new policy to stop this taking place.
- The representative from Milton Keynes reported that they had not received enough data from Thames Valley Police on rural crime in order to complete their Annual Report. The Assistant Chief Constable reported that they have a clear definition of rural crime but they had introduced a new crime system which was bedding down currently. He would investigate why the data was not being submitted.
- A Member referred to the international element of organised crime and how Thames Valley Police were working with police abroad. The Assistant Chief Constable reported that they were working with Europol, European Policing Agency and Interpol. There was a new body set up by the Government to look into international and domestic crime.
- In terms of funding the Green Yard Policy, this was run by a company as a private enterprise. It had been difficult to find suitable premises to run Green Yard because of the need for tight security and there was no requirement for extra funding.
- The Deputy PCC asked Ruth Vigor Hedderly how PCSO's contributed to this area of work. Ruth Vigor Hedderly found them extremely valuable as they had time to gather intelligence, communicate at grass roots level and were fundamental to communities providing good value for money. Christopher Anstey also echoed the views regarding PCSO's and their invaluable contribution.
- A question was asked about a new electronic surveillance system which was being piloted. The Assistant Chief Constable reported that there were a number of different technical systems and he was not familiar of one being taken from Devon and Cornwall. He would investigate this further.
- The Assistant Chief Constable reported that the priorities identified by the Rural Crime Steering Group were raves, hare coursing and poaching, theft of quad bikes and organised crime.

The Chairman thanked all the contributors for this item on rural crime, which was an important issue affecting a large proportion of the population. The Panel thanked the PCC for making this one of his strategic objectives and for all the initiatives that were being undertaken. It was important to have a consistent approach across the Thames Valley to rural crime and for the Panel to continue to monitor performance.

5. Frontline Policing Numbers in the Thames Valley

The PCC introduced the item to inform Members on the current plans concerning police officer numbers. The Force has to make savings of £45 million over the next three years against the backdrop of £58m already taken out of the organisation. However, because of new innovative approaches whilst this may mean a reduction in establishment there does not have to be a reduction in the frontline service.

The reduction in establishment is happening nationally across Forces. £45million reduction (£1million equates to approximately 20 police officer posts) was a large amount of savings when huge efficiencies had already been made. Areas such as Automatic Number Plate Recognition, CCTV and forensics were counted as back office services but contributed highly to solving crime so some difficult decisions would have to be taken in the future.

The following points were made during questioning:-

- A Member from Milton Keynes referred to the large population growth in her area and emphasised the need to take this into account when making cuts to police officer numbers. The PCC reported that there was a formula which calculated police numbers however the population was increasing throughout the Thames Valley and there should be an increase of 100 officers per year to account for the increase in population, when in fact they were losing 200 officers.
- Reference was made to the Property Asset Management Plan which had referred to a review of Neighbourhood Policing. A Member commented that it was important to make a decision about the use of property in line with the neighbourhood review to ensure effective use of resources. The PCC reassured Members that he had visited every Police Station across the Thames Valley and he was happy with the decisions being taken on these assets, except for one or two areas where he wanted an adequate replacement in place. The Member welcomed the co-ordination of this and that they had not ruled out use of some police stations where concerns had been raised.
- One innovative change was to outsource training into the wider educational market. A Member asked how this would be monitored to see if performance had been impacted. The PCC reported that taking this

decision would save the Force the equivalent of 94 fte officer posts. It would be more cost effective to co-operate with other Forces on this area to generate savings.

- A Member asked whether the precept had been factored into the calculations including the Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 funding. The PCC and Chief Finance Officer confirmed that this had been factored into the budget with 1.5% increase in the tax base.
- There was a further discussion about frontline officers. This could be a grey area and could include civilian staff. However, they linked it to direct contact with the public but back office staff, such as CCTV and data analysis staff etc played a key role in reducing crime.
- The PCC was asked about IT systems and whether there would be one system across all Forces. The PCC reported that the responsibility for this lay with the Home Office who were keen to pass this to the PCC Working Group. The PCC in Essex was taking a lead role on this issue but there were a variety of opinions on this subject. Two systems that were being looked at included Athena and Minerva.
- In terms of workforce modernisation a question was asked to the PCC about the merger of blue light services. The PCC reported that some smaller areas were looking into this but it was incredibly difficult to co-ordinate in bigger areas. Some areas were highly unionised and would only be forced to address this if it was mandated by Government. The Ambulance Service also operated in a different way with its triage system. There would need to be some obvious financial benefits before this was taken forward.
- There was further discussion about the workforce modernisation. The PCC referred again to the savings that he needed to make and the difficult decisions about what services were being cut. The Chief Financial Officer referred to 41.4 police officer posts which were being reduced across the organisation. However there was no reduction in net workforce but they were looking at whether a member of police staff could undertake this role rather than police officers.
- In terms of different ways of working was this being pushed in the Force and were there any barriers to this? The PCC reported that there were no barriers to this and they were moving to technology like ipads etc. so police officers could work effectively without going back to police stations. Work was being undertaken on communications with Hampshire (and SE Police). Security implications and access to systems were an issue which could be solved but did need careful handling. There was a Digital Policing Working Group which was run jointly with Hampshire looking at mobile technology such as body worn videos and digital case files. With digital files information could be uploaded by the police officer which could be used as evidence by the Crown Prosecution Service. There was a two year programme to bring Wi-Fi into courts.
- In terms of body worn video's Thames Valley was one of the first forces to use this technology. They have 340 but there was more funding for this area.
- In terms of Community Safety Partnership funding the PCC spent more money in this area than the average of all other PCCs.
- In terms of the budget the PCC reported that he was glad he had raised the precept by 2%. The PCC in Surrey is considering going for a 25% increase and would have to go to a referendum; the increase may be kept at 1.5%.
- With Community Safety Partnership funding there will be a slight shave on this funding for 2015/16 to pay for a software system.

The Chairman reported that frontline policing was a major issue and they were aware of the complexities regarding the definition of frontline staff. The numbers of frontline staff were uncertain in future years and the Budget Task and Finish Group will look at this and make recommendations.

6. Operation Bullfinch - Six monthly update

An update was given to the Panel on Operation Bullfinch, which is the operational name for the Police/Council investigation that focussed on offences related to the sexual exploitation of a number of vulnerable girls, in Oxford from 2004 onwards. The PCC reported that the response to child sexual exploitation (CSE) remained a complex issue and tactics and responses are developing across the Country. He also expressed concern about Female Genital Mutilation.

During discussion the following points were noted:-

- A Member referred to the work of Oxfordshire County Council in addressing child sexual exploitation. There was a joint team called 'Kingfisher' which was based at Cowley Police Station whose aim was to safeguard children who were being sexually exploited or are at risk of sexual exploitation.

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- There were currently 16 cases under review and the Panel welcomed the transparent way that the Police Force are dealing with this issue.
- Reference was made to a Government video on this area and the different types of female genital mutilation. The PCC reported that levels 2 and 3 are against the law but level 1 was more difficult to define. The whole area of FGM was a matter of education.
- In terms of item 5 of the Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan and ensuring police officers are trained to a minimum standard on safeguarding so that they can recognise children at risk of CSE a Member expressed concern that they were not trained to a reasonable standard. The PCC reported that the key word was that they could recognise children at risk so that they could refer this issue to people who were qualified. Often junior officers were not experts in particular areas but if they were able to recognise issues then they could be referred to specialist units such as the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs. The Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Milton Keynes MASHs were launched in September 2014, with Reading and Slough following next year. A Member reported that there were a large number of children at risk, who were not all in care and that standards of training were important to identify this at an early stage. The PCC reported that he did recognise the risks and that some children were difficult to control. For example one child in care went missing 100 times. The MASH were vital in identifying any concerns at an early stage through good partnership working.
- The Chairman suggested that there should be a site visit for Panel Members to the MASH in the Thames Valley and in addition it would be helpful to have an officer speak at a Panel meeting about their work.
- A Member expressed concern that the action plan performance indicators were all green and therefore they may not be stretching targets. The PCC reported that there had been a huge amount of effort to set up the MASH and therefore the green indicators showed the actions taken. However, he did have concerns that some areas of the Thames Valley were not reporting child sexual exploitation which was difficult to address.
- Reference was made to the Female Genital Mutilation recommendations made by the Panel and a Member asked that a brief update be given at the next meeting of the Panel on how Councils have responded to the FGM issue and what actions are being taken to address this across the Thames Valley.

The PCC was thanked for his update report.

7. Complaints, Integrity and Ethics Panel Update

The Chairman reported that the PCC was one of the first to establish a Complaints, Integrity and Ethics Panel. There are currently eight independent Members on the Panel with one vacancy and the Panel meets every two months. The Deputy Chairman is an Independent Member and the PCC receives a report on the Panel's work after each meeting. The area of complaints was difficult with some people voicing concern about the performance of the IPCC, which was taking money from Forces to fund itself. The PCC commented that the IPCC was supposed to reduce the work of the Professional Standards Department but this was not the case. The Shadow Police Minister did not want the IPCC to continue. Complaints were not dealt with in a satisfactory manner on a national basis but the PCC was pleased with the work of the Panel.

The Deputy PCC who chaired the Panel reported that the Panel was promoting transparency and independence and the independent Members selected their own Deputy Chairman. After each meeting a summary and action plan was fed back to the PCC, Chief Constable and Audit Committee. The Panel was being used as an example of good practice.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- A Member asked how many complaints were handled at each meeting. The Deputy PCC reported that there were approximately ten complaints and the complaint files were scrutinised by Members. Following discussion there may be recommendations and actions arising from the meeting.
- A Member asked what recommendations were being made at the Panel. The Panel is different from the Police Authority Complaints Panel as it looks at the wider ethics/integrity issues. The PCC reported that they were unable to make them public because the complaints were confidential but if there were any wider issues coming out of the discussion they would be reported to the Panel.
- The Deputy Chairman invited one of the Panel Member's to observe the meeting. However, it was not a public meeting as it looked at individual complaints

The Chairman thanked the PCC and Deputy PCC for their report.

8. General Issues

The following general issues were raised by Members:-

- The PCC would like to see GPS tagging being used on people who came out of prison and suggested that it should be a condition of bail.
- A Member expressed concern about the transparency regarding the closure of neighbourhood police stations. The PCC reported that if she was aware of any specific issues she should discuss this with him. With closing police stations there was the operational need to do so weighing against public perception; the public were usually protective about their own local police stations.
- Reference was made to the headlines regarding terrorism issues in High Wycombe. The PCC reported that this was concerning. There was a large Muslim population in High Wycombe. Some people could be taken in by fundamentalist/radical preaching. If people become radicalised they could be dangerous. This emphasised the importance of neighbourhood policing and having local intelligence. A Member asked about preventing radicalisation and the PCC reported that the law was weak in this area and it was difficult to provide evidence and go against freedom of speech. The Member from Slough reported that work was being undertaken by the Community Cohesion Group who were liaising with Community Leaders. The PCC reported that preventative work was also being undertaken in High Wycombe and other areas.
- A Member referred to crime reporting and particularly expressed concern that sex crimes were not reported. The PCC reported that Thames Valley was in the top quartile in terms of integrity of data. However it was a subjective area particularly with issues such as domestic violence and rape. Cases have been withdrawn because of bringing evidence to court.
- The PCC was asked if he had been out in a police car at night. The PCC reported that he had recently been in Reading, Windsor and Maidenhead late at night and also Oxford. There were a lot of alcohol issues.
- Following on from this question a Member referred to the difficulties in deciding if a crime had been committed and whether this led to complaints. The PCC commented that very few of them resulted in complaints; some of them however could be justified. He referred to a report which stated that the Thames Valley Police Chief Officer's Team provides ethical working practices including crime reporting which is understood at senior levels but not with frontline officers. This needs to be addressed and action was being taken. However, they were not in the bottom quartile like Hampshire Constabulary.
- A Member who had experience in security referred to dealing with crime in cities. Some police officers need to make judgemental decisions very quickly in dangerous situations. This requires attention to detail and supervision. This is one area that the Panel could look at in detail to see if the PCC was achieving his aims. The PCC provided brief information on one investigation he knew about which supported the Members experience and concerns. The PCC emphasised the need to look at these cases in a timely fashion.

9. Work Programme

The Work Programme was noted.

The Chairman of the Partnership Task and Finish Group, Iain McCracken reported that the Group had met and would be undertaking a survey of partner organisations to look at partnership working with the PCC.

Terry Burke, Chairman of the Complaints Panel reported that this was his last meeting as he was moving out of the Thames Valley area. The Panel thanked him for his invaluable contribution as an independent Member and for his work with the Complaints Panel. Rajinder Sohpal had also resigned so the Panel would need to recruit two new Independent Members. Panel Members were asked if they would be interested to sit on the interview panel for recruiting new Members or to sit on the Complaints Panel.

10. Date and Time of Next Meeting

30 January 2015 – 11am at South Oxfordshire District Council

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SBDC O & S WORK PROGRAMME - TIMETABLE 2015						
Ref	Topic	Target date	Meeting Date	16-Jun-14	06-Oct-14	23-Mar-15
Programmed Reviews of services/issues						
1	Review tbc	As and when	As recommended by Cabinet			
2	Review tbc	As and when	As recommended by Cabinet			
Regular monitoring of performance/activities						
3	Performance Monitoring	Annually	After Year End & in Year		Update on 2013/4	
4	Monitoring of Comments, complaints RIPA and FOI	Annually	After Year End	Report Due		
5	Consideration of Cabinet Budget proposals	Annually	Feb Meeting			Update
6	Police Commissioners	Annually	As & when			
7	SCAS NHS Trust Ambulance Service	As and when	Annual update		Report Due	SCAS Briefing
Other Non recurring issues						
8	HS2 & Central Railway - Update	As and when	As & when			
9	Census 2011 Analysis of demographic changes in the District	As and when required	As & when required			
10	Civil Enforcement	As and when required	As & when required			
11	Car Park Policy	As and when required	As & when required			
12	Car Parking Charges	As and when required	As & when required			
13	Homelessness Strategy	As and when required	As & when required	Postponed 2015		
14	Housing Strategy	As and when required	As & when required	Postponed 2015		
15	LG Pensions Investment	As and when required	As & when required	Postponed 2015		Briefing
16	Wexham Park NHS Trust	As and when required	As & when required	Postponed 2015		Briefing

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