

Great Langborough Residents' Association

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GLRA and Chief Executive WBC meeting 28th July 2020

Present

Susan Parsonage (SP): Chief Executive WBC
Pat Smith (PS): Chair GLRA
Robin Cops (RC): Committee Member GLRA

Background

Following the GLRA AGM in September 2019, it was agreed to have a follow-up meeting with SP to further establish her strategy and priorities for Wokingham in the future. Due to a variety of factors that meeting could not be held until now. However, in the intervening time, the Community Vision and behind it the Corporate Delivery Plan 2020-2024 published were published. These can be found at <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/council-and-meetings/open-data/community-vision/>

It contains the following documents which are straightforward and worth reading in line with SPs view that the Council should be clear and transparent in its policies

- [Wokingham Borough Community Vision 2020 to 2024](#)
- [Wokingham Borough Council Corporate Delivery Plan 2020 to 2024](#)
- [Draft Borough Plan Public Engagement Summary](#)
- [Public Engagement Summary Results](#)
- [Medium Term Financial Plan 2020 to 2021](#)

The meeting therefore was focused on some of the organisational changes that SP has and is putting in place in WBC to achieve the vision for Wokingham in the future. That vision is:

“A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business”

WBC Organisation

SP has adjusted the organisation and details can be seen at

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/council-and-meetings/open-data/datasets-and-open-data/?categoryesct191f252ff-550d-4cfa-a838-92ef2cb5f83c=7777>

The purpose of the re-structure is to strengthen the corporate core of WBC in order to deliver the strategy. Also to create a more flexible culture whilst putting residents at the heart of the council's services.

SP has 5 direct reports :

Graham Ebers; Deputy CE and Resources & Assets

Keeley Clements: Communities, Insight & Change

Chris Traill: Place & Growth

Carol Cammiss: Children's Services

Matthew Pope: Adult Social Care & Health

SP explained Keeley's role as creating a stronger corporate drive and focus on customers by incorporating Strategy, Comms, HR, Localities, Customer Service and Digital. Chris' role drives the vision for the borough as a place and includes universal and operational services e.g. Planning, Infrastructure, Housing and Highways, waste collection and recycling

As an example of flexibility SP said that during the Covid-19 emergency library and leisure staff had been moved to a community hub at St Crispin school which co-ordinated the delivery of thousands of food and toiletries parcels to families across the borough. This also involved creating positive partnerships with voluntary organisations such as Citizen's Advice Bureau, where Wokingham council staff sat alongside CAB staff taking calls during the peak of the crisis. The community response in Wokingham has cemented great partnership working between the council and community and voluntary sector organisations.

Children's Services

This needed to improve following poor past Ofsted inspections and WBC has put in place a clearer vision of how they want better outcomes for children including intervening earlier to tackle and prevent children needing social care provision, a policy of recruiting more permanent social workers and less use of agencies so children in need have the same social worker. In addition, better use of performance management with reviews and metrics is being adopted. SP reported that as a result, WBC had been able to maintain a good service to

their families during the Covid-19 emergency. Her aim is to attain better outcomes for children supported by a range of measurements.

Adult Services

During the Covid-19 period, staff from other services were seconded to Adults services. This resulted in a more flexible council provision and regular contact with thousands of vulnerable adults in the borough in the midst of the crisis. For example, a manager was allocated to get PPE for all borough Care Homes and council services early in the crisis which helped to reduce the spread of Covid-19.

The impact of Covid-19 on Care homes in the borough had been reduced by the policy adopted by WBC that no residents should be returned to Homes from hospitals without being tested and the patients could be discharged into a safe setting . It is likely this impacted on the death rate. SP had shared Wokingham's policy across the country.

Housing

Grazeley is still the Council's preferred option for the location of the majority of our housing needs to 2036 and beyond. Since the Draft Local Plan was published, there have been several substantial issues that need to be worked through which impact. Our Housing Infrastructure Fund bid to Government was unsuccessful and there was an extension of the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone around AWE Burghfield. WBC continues to engage with our partner local authorities, the government and agencies on potential implications and solutions.. Affordable homes targets are still a high priority for the future.

Follow up

The GLRA were appreciative of the time given to PS and RC and the openness of the meeting. SP stated that she was anxious to run an open and transparent Council. PS hoped that we could have another meeting within a year.