COMMUNITIES AND PARTNERSHIP SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday 17 October 2011

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Campbell (Chair), Sinclair (Vice-Chair), Altaf-Khan, Baxter, Clarkson, Jones, Lloyd-Shogbesan, Sanders, Wilkinson, Darke and Seamons.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Lois Stock (Democratic Services Officer), Pat Jones (Principal Scrutiny Officer), Alec Dubberley (Democratic Services Officer), Peter McQuitty (Head of Policy, Culture and Communications), Val Johnson (Policy Team Leader) and Margaret Melling (Consultation Officer)

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from:-

Councillor Hazell – Councillor Seamons substituted;
Councillor Shah Khan – Councillor Darke substituted;
Councillor Young – no substitute available.

Councillor Baxter apologised for his expected late arrival.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

14. PARTNERSHIP WORKING AND INCREASING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN POLICY AND DECISION MAKING

The Head of Policy, Culture and Communications submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) concerning the current arrangements for the Council's partnership work in the City and County. The Committee welcomed Peter McQuitty, Val Johnson and Margaret Melling (all from Policy, Culture and Communications) to the meeting. Apologies from Sebastian Johnson and Mark Fransham were noted. The Committee also welcomed Councillor Bob Price (Board Member for Corporate Governance and Strategic Partnerships and Leader of the Council).

Peter McQuitty and Val Johnson introduced the report and gave a short presentation to the Committee. They, along with Councillor Price, provided the following additional information:-

- Policy review work now relies more on data gathering and analysis;
- There is no longer a requirement to have a city-wide community partnership and strategy;
- All the current Oxford Strategic Partnership (OSP) priorities were under review, and there was a desire to engage the public in this process;

- The OSP had existed for about 9 years. Some of its areas of work would continue independently, but there was a desire to refresh the other priorities to make them fir for the next 10 years;
- Each board and sub group consisted of different people who represented the wider community of Oxford. A new Health and wellbeing board was being established and the City council wanted a strong voice on any new structures;
- The Policy team felt it was important to ensure City officers and Councillors were aware of decisions taken in the partnership groups and boards so that they could take appropriate action where needed;
- The Oxfordshire Partnership was felt to be less effective than it might be, but some of the boards that sat beneath it were more interesting and effective;

Councillor Campbell reminded the Committee that its purpose at the meeting was to look at two aspects of this issue: the City's partnerships, and means by which the public could become more involved with decision making. Members of the Committee made the following points and received the following additional information (where given) in response:-

Public participation and managing expectations

It was difficult to involve people in the formation of structure plans because these had a relatively long life – local plans were an easier thing to deal with. There was a question around the means by which we handle the different issues of the strategic and the local.

There was a need to involve people in making constrained choices. They needed to know what was both legally and physically possible, and this was a learning process requiring intensive action from those seeking public involvement.

Expectations had to be managed well – people lost faith if the Council failed to deliver on its promises, so it was vital not to give people false hopes.

The various partnership boards published agendas and minutes which varied in quality.

How often was the Talkback Panel refreshed?

Response:

OSP was a well-run organisation. The Oxfordshire Partnership was in the hands of individual secretariats. Some areas of work were well publicised.

It was unclear what the long term future of Spatial Planning and Infrastructure Partnerships (SPIP) would be. They had been formed because of a need for local authorities to discuss housing needs and priorities across their area with the Homes and Communities agency; but this was no longer required. It was likely to be less easy to contain conflicts that would arise between different local authorities concerning the placing of housing within the County.

It was clear that only a tiny proportion of people would ever be involved with consultation. Consideration was being given to presenting specific pieces of

data to the public for debate, as a means of engagement in the consultation process.

The Talkback Panel was refreshed a year ago, and was not due to be reviewed this year – however, the profile of the panel was regularly tracked to see the current age range etc.

Means of public engagement

It seems as though a lot of consultation takes place, but it also seems that it does not reach a very large number of people. It should be acknowledged that not everyone has internet access. There is a need to think of imaginative ways to reach people with whom we wish to engage.

The monthly charts produced by the Social Research officer deserved wider publicity, and could be used to attract more comments and public interest.

Response

Thames Valley Police had considered this and now targeted their approaches adapting it differently for different areas and different target audiences. In some areas, leafleting would work well, but for others, social media was a way to reach a greater number of people. The policy team was looking to use intelligent data in the same way.

BME and "hard to reach" communities.

The next Census for Oxford was likely to show that approximately 25% of the population was from the BME community. There was a need to consider what was being done to ensure their needs were met. It would be useful to know how the City worked with the BME communities, which communities it engaged and upon what issues. There was concern about how BME communities were reached, and how consultation could be facilitated and made more accessible. Some communities had individuals who were very active in various fields of interest and they could be a useful contact.

There was a need to be more proactive in order to reach the BME community. It would be useful to know how this community was engaged with the various partnership boards.

This issue and especially that of "hidden communities" could usefully return to scrutiny for further consideration at some point in the future.

Response:

Thought is being given to a programme for communication with different communities. Recently, approaches to the BME communities have been through Age Concern UK, which already had specific BME workers. The policy team was keen to develop this area of work and understand people's needs. The Consultation Officer was keen to speak to concerned Councillors in more depth outside the meeting.

Partnership Boards

Did all thematic groups and boards have targets? On which boards had the City Council the most power to get things done?

How was partnership working with Oxfordshire County Council progressing?

Response

Every partnership board/group was different, but most would have plans and targets. The City Council had more influence in areas in which it delivered services, such as spatial planning and waste management. It had less influence on issues around children and older people – however it recognised that these issues were important and had, for example, its own Children and Young People's Plan. The City council also supported some partnerships within its service areas, and Val Johnson represented the Council where 1 officer could not take on the role.

Unfortunately, Oxfordshire County Council seemed to be moving away from partnership working with the City Council. It did not seem to see City issues as a priority, expect from education, which had become the subject of a number of taskforces recently.

Role of "Backbench" Councillors and scrutiny involvement

Was there a role for backbench Councillors is policy development, and if so, how could they best be involved? How could the Committee better support partnership working?

If scrutiny did wish to be more closely involved with partnership working, what options were open to it? It was suggested that it could look at the emerging priorities of the OSP and choose those it felt most important to focus on, or it could shadow the OSP over a period and monitor its work.

Response:

Exploration of the OSP's priorities by scrutiny was a useful suggestion, and now was a good time to do it

The Committee system would, arguably, have given "backbench" Councillors a greater role, but scrutiny can allow them an important role in developing and reviewing policy at an early stage. Scrutiny is especially important early on, when there is a chance to shape policy as it develops. Scrutiny work on educational attainment amongst the BME community was an example of especially valuable work.

Educational attainment was generally a major issue in Oxford which the City Council's corporate plan recognised. It also recognised that many corporate objectives could only be carried out in partnership with others. The City had taken part in a useful seminar on educational attainment in July 2011, and was trying to take things forwards with Oxfordshire County Council. There should be a revised educational strategy released very soon. The local press had played a useful role in highlighting educational issues within Oxford.

The Local Enterprise Partnership had no power, but it represented the business community, and had expressed concerns about the skills gap that existed in the City

Older People

It was important that older people were not overlooked. Many did not have access to the internet, and they could be excluded from consultation because of this. The percentage of older people in the City was increasing all the time and it was important to reach out to and include them.

Costs, gains and accountability

There was concern about partnership work, in that it could erode direct lines of accountability and transparency. It was also hard to itemise costs. Scrutiny needed to focus on these issues.

It was important to know, when entering a partnership, what the City Council's key aims were, and what it hoped to gain from being in the partnership.

Response

There was no erosion of transparency - the Council entered into partnerships with aims agreed by Council as laid out in the corporate plan.

RESOLVED:

(1) To thank Peter McQuitty, Sebastian Johnson, Val Johnson, Margaret Melling and Mark Fransham for all their hard work;
(2) That Councillor Campbell (Chair), Councillor Sinclair (Vice Chair) and Pat Jones (Principle Scrutiny Officer) would formulate recommendations that reflected the issues raised above, circulate them to all members of the Committee for agreement, and then pass them to the Board Member for Corporate Governance and Strategic Partnerships.

15. PANEL REPORT - CLEANER GREENER OXFORD

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) providing an update on the work of the "Cleaner Greener Oxford" scrutiny panel. The Committee welcomed Councillor John Tanner (Board Member for Cleaner, Greener Oxford), Councillor Val Smith (Panel Member) and Alec Dubberley (Democratic Services Officer) to the meeting.

Cllr Tanner explained that most people felt that the Cleaner Greener project had been very successful so far. It had raised people's standards and expectations, and has involved local people in Blackbird Leys. Councillor Val Smith added that, as a local ward member, people had spoken to her about issues with rubbish for a very long time. They had since expressed satisfaction with the standard of cleansing of the streets, but alleyways continued to cause concern. Problems with rubbish and litter at blocks of flats remained a major issue. Windale School had been involved with cleaning rubbish and litter, and

the Community Payback teams had been clearing up in parks. Councillor Smith would be keen to see their involvement continue and develop further.

Alec Dubberley presented the report to the Committee and explained the background to the recommendations. The Committee made the following points:-

(1) It was important to involve local people and especially the Civic Society which carried out a big spring clean every March;
(2) Residents' Associations were very well placed to influence people's attitudes towards litter and rubbish;
(3) It was important to ask how much the Cleaner Greener scheme had cost;
(4) There could be a role for ward members when the scheme expanded to other areas in the City;
(5) It had been observed that the Cleaner Greener scheme was going to move into Jericho next, and there was some concern about how this decision had been made.

Councillor Tanner suggested that, if the Panel wished to continue, it could have a valuable role in monitoring the pilot scheme to deal with litter at the blocks of flats in Druce Way, and in the general area around.

Resolved:-

(1) That the Panel should continue its work in the future;
(2) That the main focus of the work should be the evaluation of improvement measures taken in Druce Way, and to report further in the New Year;
(3) To thank Alec Dubberley and the Panel members for their hard work on this issue.

16. INTERIM REPORT - YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT

An update report concerning the progress of the Young People's Engagement Panel was submitted (previously circulated, now appended). Pat Jones (Principle Scrutiny Officer) presented this report to the Committee.

Pat Jones informed the Committee that the young people so far engaged came from dysfunctional backgrounds and lacked structure in their lives. The fact that they managed to turn up to something on time was a significant step for them. Neil Holman added that this was a new piece of work and that some young people were part of the hidden communities about which the Committee had expressed concern. They had a very narrow outlook on life and some had significant educational issues as well. The Positive Futures project was communicating via Facebook and other social media in order to reach them.

However, 11 young people had been selected from wider engagement work, and it was anticipated that approximately 5 would be able to form a Positive Futures Youth Forum. To launch this, the young people will be invited to make a film about themselves to show what they have to offer in a meaningful and positive light. Neil Holman (Community Safety) will continue with the work after the launch.

It was observed that the involvement of Councillors Sanders, Campbell and Sinclair, and Pat Jones, had been invaluable to the group. Councillor Campbell added that he was impressed by the work carried out by Pat, Neil and Ash, one of the Council's apprentices, who was now helping at the Youth Club at Littlemore (and doing very well).

Pat Jones urged members to support the launch night, which would take place at a bowling evening. Councillors would then be able to meet some of the young people so far involved with the project.

In answer to a question, Pat Jones confirmed that 4 boys and 1 girl were part of the Youth Forum. The Positive Futures scheme was funded by the Police, Criminal Justice Board and the Council and worked with the Early Intervention Hub – but it was not part of that Hub.

The Committee thanked Neil Holman and Pat Jones for their informative report and all their hard work so far.

The current position was noted.

17. WORK PROGRAMME AND REPORT BACK ON COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Pat Jones (Principal Scrutiny Officer) presented the work programme to the Committee.

It was agreed that the meeting planned for the 12th December would move to 14th December to allow Councillor Jones to attend. This meeting has been scheduled as a select committee meeting devoted to the issue of Public Health, and work on this has already begun.

It was noted that the Housing Panel had also started work and was progressing well.

It was also noted that the Housing Stock De-designation Panel was re-forming.

A second select committee devoted to the issue of regeneration has been scheduled for 7th February. Councillors Altaf-Khan and Lloyd-Shogbesan have volunteered to take this issue forward. Councillor Lloyd–Shogbesan suggested, and the Committee agreed, that the focus should be on "youth enterprise" rather than youth unemployment. Councillors Altaf-Khan and Lloyd-Shogbesan would initially define the groups they wished to reach and then work on a method of doing this.

Resolved to note the work programme and the information outlined above.

18. MINUTES

Resolved to confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 6th June 2012 as a correct record, with the following observations/comments:-

Minute 5, resolution 1 – The City Council has a volunteering scheme but take-up from staff is very low. This issue has not been overlooked;

Minute 5 – Capacity building – Alison Baxter had volunteered to provide details of the groups she mentioned as being associated with OCVA, but nothing had been supplied to date. This would be followed up;

Minute 5 – Equalities issues – the Committee would like to know how well the BME community was represented;

Minute 5 – monthly newsletter – this had been offered to members but not yet received – a reminder will be sent to OCVA;

Minute 8 – report back on the Household Waste Recycling Centre Strategy – Lois Stock to ask Councillor John Tanner to obtain information on differential charging from Oxfordshire County Council.

Minute 9 – Update on Area Forums – It had been suggested that training in Community leadership be provided for members. It seems that the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) also provides a range of training modules that might be suitable. This is being explored at present. There would be a further report on the progress of Area Forums in due course.

19. DATES AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Resolved to note the following dates:-

14th December 2011 – *please note change of date from 12*th *December*.
7th February 2012
2nd April 2012

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.18 pm