

MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday 5 September 2016

www.oxford.gov.uk



COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Gant (Chair), Hayes (Vice-Chair), Azad, Chapman, Coulter, Henwood, Pegg, Simmons, Taylor, Tidball, Wilkinson and Pressel.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Bob Price (Leader of the Council)

OFFICERS PRESENT: David Edwards (Executive Director City Regeneration and Housing), Pat Jones (Committee and Member Services Manager) and Sarah Claridge (Committee Services Officer)

29. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Fry (substitute Councillor Pressel).

Councillor Wilkinson sent apologies for lateness

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

31. WORK PLAN AND FORWARD PLAN

The Chair presented the report.

Work Plan

The Committee reviewed and noted the change in its work plan for the 2016/17 council year.

Standing Panels

Cllr Henwood updated the Committee on the work of the Housing Panel. They had met once and had had two reports considered and approved by CEB. The panel are busy putting together a work schedule for the year.

The Finance Panel are meeting on Wednesday 7 September. Cllr Simmons listed the panel's work schedule which included; reviewing the council tax

support scheme, the implications of Brexit for local government, budget monitoring annual report, and scoping the Panel's budget review.

Review Panels

Cllr Tidball updated the Committee on the work of the Devolution review group which is meeting on 19 September before reporting back in October with a tighter scope. The first meeting will review both the City and the County's devolution reports and two subsequent meetings could focus on the proposals for children services, and adult social care and how to move these findings forward in partnership.

Cllr Coulter said that as there is no agreement between the Oxfordshire councils (on the current proposals). The review group should focus on the decision reached (by the councils) in December.

Cllr Tidball said that any review of the devolution reports could help to push the City and County into future negotiations. She felt that the review group should focus on children services as it was the City's greatest need. The panel could focus on the effect of children services and adult social care within both proposals.

Cllr Hayes felt that regardless of the current situation any review would contribute to future devolution discussions in Oxfordshire.

Forward Plan

The Committee wishes to pre-scrutinise the following CEB reports in October:

Digital strategy - November

Sustainability report – during consultation between December and April 2017

32. REPORT BACK ON RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chair presented the report on recommendations.

CEB had asked the Committee to reconsider the Equality and Diversity group's recommendation 15 in light of a submission from Stonewall Diversity Champions.

Recommendation 15 sought the council to seek better value from its status as a Stonewall Diversity champion and failing that to stop membership.

Cllr Hayes, Chair of the Equality and Diversity review group felt that despite the new information, the recommendation should stand. He said that officers had said that engagement with Stonewall was on occasions problematic and did not produce outcomes of value. The money, however small, could be spent more productively elsewhere.

The Scrutiny Committee resolved to agree that the Equality and Diversity recommendation 15 should stand in light of the attached submission from Stonewall.

Cllrs Simmons was unhappy that recommendations 17 and 20 were refused by CEB; he felt that further clarification was needed to explain them to the Board. The Committee Services Manager said that the Committee had no right to send the recommendations back to CEB, however given that a report on recommendation 15 was to be presented to CEB further clarification for the recommendations could be sought.

33. PERFORMANCE MONITORING - QUARTER 1

The Chair presented the report and directed the committee to the error in the report – CE001 end of year 2015/16 figure should read £7.3 M not £73M. The Chair explained that Cllr Fry had put himself forward to be the lead member for performance monitoring.

The Committee Services Manager explained that a lead member is a member of the Scrutiny Committee who works with the Scrutiny Officer between meetings and gives a members perspective to commentary. Other members could approach Cllr Fry directly if they had queries on the information.

The Committee Services Manager explained that Cllr Fry had suggested four additional performance measures:

Members queries,

Empty units in the covered market

Empty units in the town centre

Performance of ICT services – officers and councillors.

The Scrutiny Committee resolved to appoint James Fry as lead member on Performance Monitoring.

34. RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS ON FUSION LIFESTYLES SERVICE PLAN

The Scrutiny Committee noted the additional information report but were not happy with the quality and content of the response. They felt it was thin and lacked detail.

The Committee would like more details on all the questions in terms of outcomes measured and wished to invite the Community Services Manager and Board member for Leisure, Parks and Sports to discuss the questions with the committee, at a date to be determined.

35. DRAFT 2015-16 ANNUAL REPORT OF OXFORD CITY COUNCIL'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Cllr Simmons presented the report. The Committee agreed to insert the following paragraph into the Chair's report:

"There is an increasing need for scrutiny and in particular "critical friend" challenge within the current climate. Members across the Council recognise the importance of this and regularly present more topics for scrutiny than can be accommodated within the officer resources available. This restriction on influence remains a challenge and frustration for non-executive councillors."

The Scrutiny Committee resolved to approve the Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2015-16, subject to any stylistic changes to be agreed by the Chair. The report will be submitted to Council on 29 September 2016.

36. FINANCE PANEL REPORT ON CREDIT UNION SERVICES

Cllr Simmons, Chair of Finance Panel presented the report.

The Scrutiny Committee resolved to approve the report of the Finance Panel to be submitted to the City Executive Board on 15 September 2016.

37. EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND (ERDF) INNOVATION PROJECTS - MATCH FUNDING

The Director for Regeneration and Housing presented the report. It is an opportunity to bring an empty space back into use in the town hall and to pitch for EU funding. The space will be transformed into office space for small high tech or innovative business start-ups.

The Council will pay for the capital works and will get the money back from the rent. The EU match funding (if secured) will pay for a programme manager for 3 years.

The Chair asked whether the EU funding was under threat by Brexit or guaranteed if received before the Autumn statement. The Director for Regeneration and Housing didn't know the status of the funding but said if the EU funding wasn't awarded then the management element of the project would not happen.

Cllr Taylor asked whether there was a chance of such a venture happening outside of the city centre. The Director for Regeneration and Housing said that in terms of the principle absolutely – however it tends to happen in property the city council owns and businesses are more attracted to venues in the city centre so they're close to collaborators.

Cllr Simmons asked why a 5 year lease had been agreed when most are 3 years in length

The Director for Regeneration and Housing said 5 years was agreed by the partners. Lease terms would be favourable and the Council expects the manager to actively manage the space.

The Chair asked whether the project maximised best value for council. The Director said that it's not ideal office space and the Council could get more money for it but doing so would not yield the same social value.

The Committee noted and endorsed the recommendations in the report.

38. OXLEP STRATEGIC ECONOMIC PLAN REFRESH

Cllrs Pressel and Azad left the meeting

Cllr Price, Board Member for Corporate Strategy and Economic Development presented the report. He outlined the four themes of people, place, enterprise and connectivity outlined in the plan and explained that the SEP provided a framework for how local plans are developed and a basis for funding bids.

The Chair asked how the devolution proposals and the scrutiny function fitted into the work of the LEP. Cllr Price said that if there was a restructure of local authorities in Oxfordshire then there would be a requirement for a new agreement between the LEP and any new authority.

The draft plan has been publically consulted on and it now required approval from each authority, which required it going through the scrutiny process.

The Committee made the following comments on the SEP:

Cllr Simmons was concerned with the measure identifying climate change as a risk to sustainable development but not providing any conclusions for how climate change could be addressed.

Cllr Wilkinson asked why there had been such a low response from businesses during the consultation. Cllr Price said that there were several well attended workshops for businesses had taken place, but they hadn't necessarily resulted in business owners making a submission. The LEP had also consulted business organisations such as the chamber of commerce and had incorporated their ideas into the plan.

Cllr Hayes asked that the report be amended to say that businesses have been consulted and their views have been captured through workshops and that business owners preferred the workshops approach.

Cllr Tidball asked about the connectivity theme, in particular how intercity bus connectivity could be improved. She felt there was a gap in investing in connecting the city's bus routes and the use of the ring road and maximising the use of the Park and Ride system.

The Committee discussed the demands of growth and the pressures it causes on housing and infrastructure. Unaffordable housing affected businesses ability to expand, as they struggle to attract employees who can afford to live in the city.

There is an on-going need for councils to work together within the planning parameters to encourage housing developments whenever possible.

At the same time it is equally important for councils to encourage people to learn skills which are in demand by city businesses.

The Scrutiny Committee AGREED the following recommendations to the City Executive Board:

1. The report sets a clear goal on page 19 to deliver sustainable growth in line with the Brundtland Commission definition. The SWOT analysis (p29) identifies the risk that, as it stands, this will not be achieved with regard to climate change targets - a key indicator of sustainable development. Nowhere are the conclusions of this aspect of the swot analysis addressed. Where is the detail of how the climate change targets are to be met?

2. The report and framework should make it clear that whilst the formal response from the business community was low this does not mean that views were not given and captured as part of this exercise. Businesses engaged through workshops and other informal channels with representatives of OxLEP.

3. The poor connectivity of buses across the City is identified as a threat but not closed off. This position has been made worse by the reduction in subsidised bus services. The document should include actions and solutions in this area including better use of trips around the ring road and additional stops along established routes

Cllr Price suggested the Committee review the LEP's revised Skilled Strategy due out in November and the Local Growth fund report.

39. MINUTES

The following corrections to the minutes were made:

Declarations of Interests:

Cllr Tidball – Trustee of the South Oxford Community Association

Cllr Taylor – Board Member of Agnes Smith Advice Centre

Minute 26 – paragraph 2 correction of Cllr Simmons name

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes as amended of the meeting held on 4 July 2016 as a true and accurate record.

40. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting will be held on 6 October 2016 at 6.00pm.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.15 pm