

Minutes of a meeting of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE on Monday 15 January 2018

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Committee members:

Councillor Gant (Chair)

Councillor Chapman (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Azad

Councillor Ladbrooke

Councillor Lloyd-Shogbesan

Councillor Lygo

Councillor Thomas

Officers:

Andrew Brown, Committee Services Manager

Mai Jarvis, Environmental Quality Team Manager

Pedro Abreu, Air Quality Officer

John Mitchell, Committee and Member Services Officer

Also present:

Councillor John Tanner, Board Member for a Clean and Green Oxford

63. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Altaf-Khan, Paule, Fry and Curran.

64. Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

65. Minutes

Agreed that BAME should replace BME throughout the minutes of the meeting held on 05 December.

Cllr Ladbrooke was disappointed that the minutes did not, in his view, reflect, the full extent of discussion and strength of feeling in relation to under-employment of BAME members of the community. Agreed that this part of the minute should be expanded accordingly.

This minute recorded agreement that the Committee should revisit the subject of equality and diversity in 2018 with additional data. Agreed that this should be sooner rather than later (and preferably March or April) and that the data should be made available to the Committee at the earliest opportunity. Once the data were provided

discussion could take place without the need for a supporting paper. It would be sufficient for an officer to be present to explain the data.

Subject to the above the Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 05 December as a true and accurate record.

66. Report back on recommendations

There were no recommendations to report back on at this meeting.

67. Work Plan and Forward Plan

The Scrutiny Officer spoke to the work plan and noted that the items on “Impacts of Westgate Shopping Centre” and “Restorative Justice” were now moved from February to April. This left 4 substantive items (all subsequently destined for CEB) for the February meeting. An item on the Living Wage review would go to the March meeting, once the Living Wage Review Panel had given a steer as to its final recommendations and their report written. An item on Oxfordshire Devolution was scheduled for the March meeting. While there had not been much progress on this matter, it was right that the Committee should receive an update given the time it had devoted to it in the past. This would also present an opportunity for Scrutiny to consider the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal.

68. Air Quality Annual Status Report for 2016

The Scrutiny Committee considered the annual report for the first time in 2017 and had agreed that it should be considered by the Committee annually thereafter. Councillor Tanner, Board Member for A Clean and Green Oxford gave a brief introduction to the 2016 report, noting that an analysis of the last 10 years showed that NO₂ levels had dropped, typically, by 35%, at roadsides in the City centre. However the rate of improvement had decreased. A range of measures were in place and proposed to mitigate the risks posed by polluted air.

The Environmental Quality Team Manager explained that the Council was required to submit an Air Quality report annually to DEFRA. The format of the report was very prescriptive. While the Council had an important role to play in monitoring air quality and taking some mitigating action, the County Council, as Highways Authority, had a particularly significant role and so close partnership with it was important.

There were 70 monitoring locations in addition to automatic continuous monitoring at three locations. Some data now provided a picture of trends over the last 13 years. The report noted 17 locations where the annual mean objective for levels of NO₂ had been exceeded. This was a reduction of 11% when compared with the previous year.

A range of actions were now in train to reduce levels of poor air quality. These included, among many others: preparation for the introduction of a Zero Emissions Zone; successful bid for provision of electric vehicle charging infrastructure for taxis; “Test

Drive the Future” event; promotion of electric vehicle car clubs; and launch of the Go Ultra Low Oxford project.

Work on the next report was underway but the data which would underpin it could not be shared until they were confirmed and corroborated. The Committee were very keen to have sight of the latest data as soon as possible, not least because of the possible consequences of the opening of the Westgate Centre. Cllr Tanner was clear however that data should not be shared until there was confidence that they were robust and that data needed to be considered over a period of time.

The particularly poor outcomes for St Clements were a matter of concern and a strategic group (with County Council representation) would meet presently to address those concerns. The County Council had conducted a traffic survey of the area and one possibility being explored was the re-phasing of traffic lights (to keep traffic flowing). Interestingly two monitoring sites in the area, just 10 – 15 metres apart produced markedly different results.

Air quality considerations were taken into account in large scale planning applications.

There was no dedicated budget for the provision of electric/hybrid vehicles to replace older Council vehicles but opportunities to invest in such vehicles were taken as they arose. It was noted that, currently at least, there were no commercially available electric or hybrid refuse vehicles (thinking of the possible future need for such vehicles by Oxford Direct Services Trading Limited).

The Committee questioned whether continued involvement with the Health Improvement Board or the launch of the STOP project would add to the Council’s knowledge or improve outcomes. Involvement with the former was not as productive as had first been envisaged but was still regarded as important. The STOP project would provide some additional data and, as importantly, would act as an educational tool, not just for pupils but for their parents also. More generally, the team were investigating the identification and supply of cheap but effective devices for measuring air quality which could be made widely available to interested members of the public.

The Council had not benefitted from the recently announced government funding pot of £4.5m to be put towards electric car charging points. The City had already made significant advances in this area and might well be used as an example of good practice for others. Nonetheless, no opportunity to secure a share of this funding should be lost.

The value of vegetation (and notably trees) to absorb pollutants was recognised. At the same time it was noted that in some circumstances trees could create a “canyon” effect, trapping polluted air in the short term and so exacerbating its detrimental effect. Cllr Tanner was disinclined to agree to a suggestion that there should be a pilot investigation into the benefits of planting because of the great difficulties in establishing a clear connection between the many and various mitigating strategies and their consequences. He was of the strong opinion that the focus should be on preventative measures.

Cllr Tanner said that the ambition of moving towards a Zero Emission Zone was a serious and significant commitment but not without its challenges (how to deal with heavy goods vehicles delivering to the City Centre for example). The message of intent in the relation to the ZEZ was as important as its final achievement.

The Committee suggested that the wording of the Action Plan was, in places, too vague and lacked 'gritty' objectives. Where strategies or plans had proved to have been ineffective or have added no value, there was no shame in being candid about the fact and ceasing the activity. The Environmental Quality Team Manager said that the wording in the plan needed to provide sufficient flexibility to accommodate detail which had, in some cases, yet to be determined, particularly when it involved working with partners. The plan was also constrained to some degree by the DEFRA template.

Seeking to quantify the consequences for individuals of pollution levels in different parts of the City would be problematic given the mobility of most people. Mortality attributable to air quality was given at a County level, it would be difficult to provide at a City level.

The Environmental Quality Team Manager said that work was being done with the Hackney Cab drivers' association about environmental matters.

The Chair reminded the Committee that it had been asked to note the report and comment if it wished.

The Scrutiny Officer noted the following key points has having emerged from the discussion that could be presented to the City Executive Board as recommendations:

1. That the Council looks again at whether there was an opportunity to bid for some of the £4.5m of government funding available for electric vehicle charging infrastructure
2. That the Council keeps a watching brief on the emerging science on the benefits of different types of vegetation as absorbers of pollutants.
3. That the Council engages with taxi drivers, as well as schools, about the issue of idling and continues with enforcement activities and the promotion of electric vehicles.

69. Report for approval

The Scrutiny Committee had considered a report by the Head of Community Services on preventing elderly isolation at its meeting on 5 December 2017 and agreed that recommendations should be made to the City Executive Board as a result.

The Chair introduced the report which proposed those recommendations. The Committee agreed that the report should be put to the City Executive Board at its meeting on 23 January.

70. Dates of future meetings

Scrutiny Committee

- 06 February 2018
- 06 March 2018

All meetings start at 6.00 pm

Housing Panel

- 08 March 2018

All meetings start at 5.00 pm unless otherwise stated

Finance Panel

- 24 January 2018
- 14 March 2018

All meetings start at 6.00 pm

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.15 pm

Chair

Date: Tuesday 6 February 2018