

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 1 October 2013

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Mills (Chair), Sanders (Vice-Chair), Campbell, Clack, Humberstone, Jones, Lloyd-Shogbesan, O'Hara, Pressel, Upton and Williams.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Pat Jones (Principal Scrutiny Officer), Lois Stock (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer), Helen Bishop (Head of Customer Services), Ian Brooke (Head of Leisure, Parks and Communities), David Edwards (Executive Director City - Regeneration and Housing), Laurie Jane Taylor (Community Response Team Manager) and Alex Wrigley (Anti Social Behaviour Investigations Team Manager)

32. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The following apologies and substitutions were reported:

Councillor Abbasi – apologies;
Councillor Altaf-Khan – apologies, Councillor Jones substituted;
Councillor Coulter – apologies, Councillor Pressel substituted;
Councillor Darke – apologies, Councillor O'Hara substituted;
Councillor Fry – apologies, Councillor Humberstone substituted;
Councillor Simmons – apologies, Councillor Williams substituted;
Councillor Smith – apologies, Councillor Clack substituted.

The Committee noted that Councillor Paule had resigned from its membership and was replaced by Councillor Upton. Congratulations were offered to Councillor Upton on her recent election to the Council and she was welcomed into membership of the Scrutiny Committee.

33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

34. WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

Pat Jones (Principal Scrutiny Officer) introduced the current work programme and Forward Plan to the Committee, and provided some background and context.

The Committee:-

- (1) Agreed to add Councillor Hollick to the Flooding Panel in line with the request for additional members agreed at the last meeting;
- (2) Noted that Cllr. Paule had stood down from the Committee and was replaced by Councillor Upton;

- (3) Noted that a request for an additional Labour member for the Covered market Review had been made and to date there had been no volunteers;
- (4) Noted the explanation to performance measure LP106 requested at the last meeting and decided to ask if the target could be raised from 5%;
- (5) Noted the movement in items that have been called from the Forward Plan and request any additional items;
- (6) Noted that the first meeting to consider Thames Water investment was expected at the end of October;
- (7) Discretionary Housing Payments – noted that Pat Jones would meet Helen Bishop, Councillor Susan Brown and Councillor Van Coulter next week;
- (8) Scale of new buildings – evaluation of new pilot – noted that Pat Jones would speak with Michael Crofton Briggs shortly;
- (9) Noted that meetings with local communities for the Enfranchisement and Empowerment panel had been arranged for late October. The Committee may wish to look at the issue of Individual Elector Registration (IER), but noted that this was a separate issue. The Principle Elections Officer, Martin John, might be invited to a Scrutiny Committee in the spring (April?);
- (10) Agreed to extend the life of the Recycling Panel to in order to allow for consideration of the Waste and Recycling Strategy when it is produced later this autumn;
- (11) Educational attainment panel – noted that Councillor Clack was no longer a Board Member and so would re-join this group;
- (12) Noted that Student Council tax exemption would not come to the November Scrutiny Committee;
- (13) Noted that nothing further had been called from the Forward Plan

35. REPORT BACK ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Pat Jones (Principal Scrutiny Officer) introduced the report back on recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee to CEB.

Resolved to note the recommendations and their outcome as shown in the report.

36. CITY DEAL

The Executive Director, Regeneration and Housing, submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) concerning the Council's City Deal Bid to the Government. The Committee welcomed Councillor Bob Price (Board Member for Corporate Governance, Strategic Partnerships and Economic

Development) and David Edwards (Executive Director, Housing and Regeneration) to the meeting. Cllr Price introduced the report and provided some background and context to it.

Councillor Price explained that City Deal had changed a great deal since its inception. The focus was on growth, economic development and high-tech development. Transport and the development of necessary skills were key to this. Bids had been made to improve and develop the A40 and A34 transport links.

There were three especially important skills elements:-

- The creation of 500 additional apprenticeships between 2015 and 2020;
- An increase of up to 50% in training contracts in the retail, hospitality and catering sectors;
- An expansion of the Oxfordshire apprentice programme that links careers advice and access to apprenticeships in order to draw funding into the county.

As laid out in the report, the City Deal group would present their bid to the Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on 24th October.

Sietske Boeles (on behalf of CPRE Oxford) addressed the Committee. She asked about the governance and democratic accountability of the City Deal Joint Statutory Committee (JSC), public consultation, and scrutiny of the bid at local level.

The Committee then considered the following issues:-

Governance

The Committee noted that the JSC would look after the deal part of the City Deal. Any applications for road and house building would be under normal local control and the planning system. Voting rights on the JSC were limited to elected members. The City Deal had been agreed between the participating local authorities, but refined to reflect each Council's wishes.

It was noted that the Treasury was the determining partner because of funding. Scrutiny of the JSC's spending could take place through the Council's normal budget process.

The City Council would not know until the end of 2013 whether or not the City Deal bid had been successful, but Councillor Price felt there would be a role for scrutiny once this was known.

Public Involvement

The Committee felt that there was a need to make the City Deal relevant to the public, but focussing on housing and jobs as things that would affect people's lives. There was a need to provide high-tech, high-wage jobs for people within Oxford.

Role of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

The Committee noted that the LEP, although it had representation from Oxfordshire County Council on it, did not report to anyone. There were no “big hitters” involved in the LEP, and industrial input into it was relatively low. The two universities were involved with City Deal - but they were not industries. However, the LEP was the way to channel some growth funding and there was a need for the LEP and the City Deal processes to work together.

Housing

The City Council’s focus was on housing at Barton with smaller sites at Oxpens and the Northern Gateway. If the bid for the Churchill site was successful it would be subject to the normal planning process. The City Council was aware that it could not meet the pressure on housing within the city’s current boundaries. There was an aspiration to build south of Grenoble Road, but as this had not yet been agreed with the other Council in whose area this land lay, this remains an aspiration.

CPRE did not accept that there was a case for expansion to the south of Grenoble Road. The City Council felt that it was preferable to provide housing in an area where it was known there were jobs, rather than having a workforce travelling for some distance in order to access those jobs. The City Council needed to keep pressing this case.

Apprenticeships and skills.

The Committee observed that there was a good deal of city-based activity concerning jobs, skills and apprenticeships, and as a result it was important that good career information was also provided. There was a desire to ensure the City had a skilled workforce that was equipped to take on the new jobs.

It would be important to involve schools and the education system at an early stage so that people were prepared for the forthcoming opportunities. This was not something that could wait – it was important to start preparing now.

The Committee noted that the Oxford Skills Board was working well and that it aimed to develop a county-wide careers advice service by involvement with schools.

Recommendations to CEB on 9th October:

The Committee resolved to make the following recommendations:-

(1) For the expected future reports (recommendation 4 in the report) to establish the principle of public scrutiny through Local Authority Scrutiny Committees and discuss how this might work.

(2) In developing the ambitions and programmes within the “Skills “ heading for Joint Committee Members to ensure that education, training and apprenticeship programmes are accessible to all through local schools and other educational bodies with an emphasis on early advice and guidance to young people so they are “work ready” for real jobs. The emphasis of these programmes should be in areas of highest deprivation.

The Committee thanked Councillor Price and David Edwards for their attendance at the meeting and their informative presentation.

37. COVERED MARKET PANEL'S PROGRESS REPORT

The Covered Market Scrutiny Panel presented an interim report (previously circulated, now appended) to the Committee.

Councillor Jim Campbell presented the report to the Committee and explained that its purpose was to elicit comments from members of the Committee. He explained that the feeling from traders was that the review was just another consultation exercise and that nothing would change as a result of it.

One idea that had been suggested by the Retail Group (a body currently commissioned by the Council to draft a Strategy for the Covered Market) was the alteration of the main entrance into the market.

Meanwhile, the scrutiny review group was looking for some fairly modest quick wins that would be implemented within a nine-month period, and any ideas from the rest of the Committee would be most welcome.

Councillor Campbell provided the following additional information:-

Bespoke Manager

The review panel had visited several markets, as shown in the report. All had their own bespoke manager, sometimes employed by the relevant Council, sometimes independent, but the key feature was that the manager enjoyed the confidence of the traders.

Communications

Communication was a key issue. The market manager (should one be appointed) would be an ideal conduit for two way communication between the Council and the traders. The present Town Centre Manager had been very helpful to the review group, and had indicated that he would welcome a Market Manager. (It was not possible for him to also fill this role, as his role was entirely different, and he was naturally very involved with that.)

Timescale

It was envisaged that the final report would return to the Scrutiny Committee in November, and would progress to CEB after that.

Comments from Board Member

Councillor Colin Cook (Board Member for City Development) made the following comments:-

- The Council does, in some sense, subsidise the Covered Market because it does not make as much money from it as it could;

- The Council had moved away from a flat rate rent and was now seeking a rent that was relevant to each trade/stall;
- Advice was sought from an independent expert, to define an appropriate rent taking into account issues such as footfall.

The Committee resolved to note the current position and await the final report from the review group.

38. COMMUNITY SAFETY ISSUES - REPORT OF BOARD MEMBER

Councillor Pat Kennedy, Board Member for Education, Crime and Community Safety submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) that detailed her priorities and work to date as the Board Member for Community Safety.

Councillor Kennedy presented her report (previously circulated, now appended) to the meeting and spoke about her priorities as Board Member.

Laurie Jane Taylor (Community Response Team Manager) and Alex Wrigley (Anti-Social Behaviour Investigations Team Manager) attended the meeting to explain their respective roles and the work the Council was doing to tackle anti-social behaviour. They wished to raise awareness amongst the public of the means by which anti-social behaviour (ASB) could be reported, and how then the Council would act in response.

Local Offer

Alex Wrigley explained that a new local offer for dealing with ASB had been developed, focussed on 6 key points:-

1. Involvement & Empowerment

The Council would establish an ASB Champions Group (Service Task Team) to consider performance and recommend improvements.

2. Raising Awareness

The Council would work with the ASB Champions to develop a service standard leaflet to include:-

- What ASB is;
- What ASB is not;
- How to report ASB;
- What will happen for the victim;
- What will happen for the perpetrator.

A diary sheet would be included with each leaflet

3. Pro-active Service

The ASB team aimed to visit each neighbourhood twice per week, train tenants to undertake environmental visual audits and develop action plans, and work with the ASB Champions to monitor progress of action plans

4. Out-of-hours Service

The Council would provide an out of hours service for noise nuisance

5. Our Response

Following an initial report of Anti-Social Behaviour into the contact centre or the out-of-hours reporting service, the Council would contact a complainant as follows:-

- 24 hours for Category 1 ASB (all serious ASB including violent, threats of violence, hate related crimes and incidents including domestic abuse);
- 2-4 days for Category 2;
- 5-7 days for Category 3.

(Categories 2 and 3 were less serious cases, and most complaints were expected to fall within these categories.)

5. The Case

For all Category 1 & 2 cases, the complainant would have a dedicated Case Manager (and a Case Officer for Category 3 cases), who would agree an action plan with the complainant and a strategy for how often and when contact would be made about the case.

There would also be information provided on the likely outcome of the case, realistic timeframes for its resolution and the circumstances under which the case would be closed and a commitment to after care beyond case closure.

6. Victims and witnesses

Greater support to victims and witnesses could be provided by referring them to agencies and support groups as required, and by encouraging them to engage in Victim Peer Support by training ASB Champions to provide this service.

A pilot scheme would be run during December 2013 and it was hoped to have the scheme in place by December 2014.

The Committee welcomed the Local Offer and asked that full details be circulated to members of the Committee. A report back to the Committee should be made in approximately one year's time, including case studies, so that the Scrutiny Committee could monitor its progress.

Other Committee observations and questions.

The Committee made the following points:-

- (1) It is important that people are made aware of the service;
- (2) There should be training and support for victims;
- (3) The case should not be marked as "closed" too quickly, as this can lead to people feeling abandoned;

- (4) It is good that victims feel supported, and that they are supported, but what people most want is a resolution of their problem and to know that the perpetrator has been dealt with;
- (5) It should be noted that many situations are not what they seem at first and can contain vulnerabilities on all sides. We need to be well positioned to work with other agencies, such as the Police and Social Services;
- (6) There was concern that the ASB team may not be large enough to cope with the whole of the City;
- (7) There was concern that the Neighbourhood Police Groups (NAGS) were not well organised at present. The City Council no longer has anyone in the NAG co-ordinator's role.

The Committee thanked Councillor Kennedy, Laurie Jane Taylor and Alex Wrigley for their attendance and RESOLVED to:-

- (1) Ask that fuller details of the Local Offer be circulated to members of the Committee;
- (2) Request a report back (including case studies) in a year's time;
- (3) Request that Councillor Kennedy should reflect the views of the Scrutiny Committee when writing to the Police Area Commander; and that in particular she should seek an indication of how the Police viewed the priority of the NAGs.

39. GRANTS PROGRAMME COMMISSIONING REVIEW

The Head of Leisure, Parks and Communities, and the Head of Customer Service, submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) that provided information on the review of community and voluntary organisations grant programme.

Julia Tomkins (Grants and External Funding Officer) presented the report to the Committee and provided some background and context. Councillor Curran (Board Member for Youth and Communities), Ian Brooke (Head of Leisure) and Helen Bishop (Head of Customer Service) also attended the meeting in order to answer questions from members.

Questions and issues raised by the Committee

Advice Centres

The Committee noted that there was a pilot scheme to examine some of the welfare changes in order to determine how the Council could work with Advice Centres. With the advent of Universal Credit there was a desire for the Council (Customer Services) to work more closely with welfare advice providers. Advice Centres had been given a 1 year contract with the Council with a view to entering into a 3 year contract subsequently.

The Council sought a representative from each Advice Centre to sit on the welfare Officers Group. This group reported to the Welfare Reference Members' Panel. The Committee asked that this be broadened to include a representative from the Scrutiny Committee as Councillor Coulter had expressed an interest in taking on that role. Helen Bishop (Head of Customer Service) indicated that she was happy to add Councillor Coulter, subject to approval from City Executive Board.

Need

In answer to a question, Julia Tomkins indicated that the need grants funding far outstripped supply. Last year £400,000 was requested under the open bidding scheme – but the budget for that was £95,000. The Council made awards to some 20 groups, but very few received all the funding that they had requested.

Benefit

The Committee observed that there seemed, in some cases, to be a disparity between the amount of expenditure and the numbers that benefitted. It understood, though, that some smaller organisations supported fewer clients, and that they were often the most vulnerable.

There was concern that the Council might be subsidising people from outside Oxford to take part in arts activities. The Committee was interested to know (assuming that the organisations concerned) from which post code areas participants were drawn.

There was a need to be aware that a small number of beneficiaries did not mean that the work was not valuable. Statistics were useful but they did not necessarily show the full picture. Numbers were useful but the value and impact of a grant was arguably even more important.

Grant aid from the City Council could lever in further grants from elsewhere. In the case of the arts, this had totalled £8 million and for housing, a further £6 million. The Committee would be interested to have clarity particularly around arts issues and outreach work.

Recommendation to CEB on 9th October

That a member of the Scrutiny Committee be offered a seat on the Welfare Reform Members Panel. This would be Councillor Coulter until May 2014.

The Committee thanked Julian Tomkins, Ian Brooke, Helen Bishop and Councillor Curran for their attendance and useful input.

40. MINUTES

Resolved to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 5th September 2013.

41. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Resolved to note the following dates:-

5th November

3rd December

14th January 2014

4th February

4th March

1st April

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.25 pm