

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 4 February 2014

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Mills (Chair), Sanders (Vice-Chair), Abbasi, Altaf-Khan, Campbell, Coulter, Darke, Fry, Lloyd-Shogbesan, Simmons and Upton.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Lois Stock (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer), Pat Jones (Principal Scrutiny Officer), Jarlath Brine (OD & Learning Advisor, Equalities & Apprenticeships), Simon Howick (Head of Human Resources and Facilities), Nigel Kennedy (Head of Finance), Tim Sadler (Executive Director Community Services) and Anna Wright (Education Adviser)

64. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Smith – Councillor Pressel substituted.

65. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

66. WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

The Principal Scrutiny Officer introduced the Work Programme and Forward Plan to the Committee and highlighted the following:

- A verbal update will be made by Tim Sadler on the post-flood operational review;
- Councillor Darke will update the Committee on the work of the Flooding Panel;
- Two members of the public have asked to address the Committee on issues of flooding and sewage in Marston and Northway;
- The Scrutiny Finance Panel has completed its review of the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy and the Review report, which will go to the City Executive Board on the 12th. February is attached for information;
- The Covered Market Review Report is on this agenda and to allow members to see the complete picture officers have also attached the Officer recommendations to the City Executive Board on the same subject.

Councillor Simmons (Chair of the Scrutiny Finance Panel) gave a short presentation of the Budget Review Report:-

- The majority of recommendations have been accepted by the Board Member which is good;
- Of those that have not been accepted there may have been some misinterpretation of what was been recommended. Councillor Simmons will try to clarify some of these issues in his presentation of the report at the City Executive Board.

The Scrutiny Finance Panel has also made recommendations on the proposed Treasury Management Strategy for 2014/15; these will also be considered by the City Executive Board on the 12th. February. Councillor Simmons emphasised the importance of this document because of our increasing investment levels and healthy balances. The Council is generally doing well and Councillor Simmons said that officers were generally moving in the direction the Scrutiny Panel wished to see.

The Committee moved on to discuss flooding issues and agreed to take the addresses from the members of the public on this first.

Betty Fletcher spoke and raised the following issues:-

- Concern is for flooding in Northway and Court Place Farm “we have lost the sponge and this is making flooding worse”;
- Seeing increasing levels of road flooding which is getting worse;
- There is a lack of involvement of tenants and residents in the area and so the issues are not always understood, supported or delivered to best effect;
- Would like some form of Area Committee back in this area.

Elaine Bennett spoke on issues and concerns around flooding.

Councillor Darke (Leader Member of the Flooding Panel) updated the Committee on progress so far.

- Surface and sewage flooding is an issue in the City and the Panel has been set up to provide some impetus for this. The focus of the work will be on sewage flooding and improvements to the sewage infrastructure managed by Thames Water;
- £1.6m has been provided in the Capital programme as a large contribution towards a scheme to deal with flooding in the area the 2 speakers were talking about. We now need to get the County Council and Thames Water in on this. The speakers asked if matched funding was needed from the other agencies and Councillor Darke clarified that a contribution was sort rather than matched funding. The other issues are because of a culvert that is not fit for purpose. Saxon way culvert has been cleared recently but the proposed scheme will help problems here. Whilst accepting that building in the flood plain causes problem the City Council has not approved development of this type in recent years. Ms Bennett pressed the Committee to ensure that the issue of flood-plain development was taken seriously;

- The Panel is focusing on Thames Water to get them to take their responsibilities and duties seriously. The Panel is developing with officers a priority investment list and the intention is to match this with Thames Water proposals for the infrastructure to see where there is match and mismatch. The Panel will be pressing hard the City's case and inviting the Local M.P.s to be part of the debate;
- A letter has been sent from the Oxford Flood alliance to the prime Minister to ask for his support in providing a flood defence for Oxford.

Tim Sadler updated the Committee on the operational review that is underway. Before doing this, Mr Sadler said that the Pitt Review had recommended that water run-off from developments had to be contained within those developments. This had been confirmed in regulations and County Councils are responsible for delivering on this.

On the operation review so far we have bought 2 additional 6inch pumps to support our work. We are now working with partners to look at other issues and the City's priorities for these discussions are:

- Road Closures, how they are decided upon and enforced etc;
- How the Bronze, Silver and Gold commands operate in the County and at what point do things get serious enough for Oxford to have its own command centre;
- Evacuation/relocation co-ordination;
- Thames Water issues – how we get a response and some longer term issues.

Councillor Simmons asked if we could take up the issues raised by the public speakers in our Panel. After discussion it was agreed that the Panel should maintain its focus.

Councillor Coulter expressed his thanks to public sector workers for their response during the flooding; it is at times like this we see the value of public sector workers. Flooding affect the vulnerable more because they have less resilience to cope with it.

The effects of the impact on businesses in the City are about £30m with BMW having to close the line because of difficulties in obtaining parts. We need to address these issues urgently and prove a more secure situation for people and businesses.

The current scoring system for investment in flood prevention does not give sufficient weight to Economic Impact.

Councillor Upton asked if the Committee could consider in their work programme what the City Council can do for children in care. Councillor sanders expressed concern about this because of the complexity of the issues and the responsibility of the County Council. It was agreed to add this to the considerations for the next programme.

From the Forward Plan Councillor Simmons asked to see for pre-scrutiny the consultation results from the Community Engagement Strategy and the final recommendation to the City Executive Board. This was agreed by the Committee.

67. REPORT BACK ON RECOMMENDATIONS

The Principal Scrutiny Officer highlighted that all recent recommendations had been accepted. Committee members made no further comment on this.

68. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT PROGRAMME - PROGRESS

Councillor Kennedy, Board Member for Education, Crime and Community Safety presented the main points of the report to the Committee. In addition she added that she is a governor at a school that is part of the Leadership programme and she has seen first-hand the benefits of this.

In addition early discussions are showing that KRM is particularly affective with girls and has proved to be a catalyst for discussions in the staff room on improvement strategies.

Councillor Campbell (Scrutiny Lead Member for Educational Attainment) said that these were very important schemes. His Panel had been set to try to ascertain the value for money of the investments we are making but this is proving to be very difficult. He asked how we are going to evaluate overall the impact of the KRM programme and within this how we were going to look at comparator schools to check progress.

Councillor Pressel said that all 3 programmes outlined in the report were good and going well. She was interested to know how these schemes compared to other schemes particularly the County Scheme and were any schools participating in both the county and City offer. Specifically is Matthew Arnold involved in the digital exclusion programme?

Councillor Simmons asked when we will see the evaluation of the Leadership Programme and when could this come to the Committee. He was also interested to know how we will evaluate the digital exclusion programme.

Councillor Sanders asked how we were going to evaluate the effects of KRM when there are so many different improvements and changes going on in schools.

In response to these questions Anna Wright said:

- Schools cannot take part in the City and County schemes they were required to make a choice;
- Accepts the difficulty in evaluation. The only tangible outcome we have is improvements in the key stage results so these will be used. We will have un-moderated results in July 2014 and moderated results in December 2014;

- In terms of the targets and their link to national performance Ms Wright confirmed that our targets will not move upwards with national outcomes but will remain as 10% above the national target achieved in 12/13;
- The digital inclusion project is being evaluated by Oxford University. They have a lot of research data and this research will be followed through with each family involved;
- Matthew Arnold is not involved in the Digital Inclusion project because it said it could not afford to buy the lap tops

Ms Wright added that the other challenges were:

- To ensure KRM is being implemented consistently day to day in participating schools;
- The high level of turnover of Heads and also the high level (50%) turnover of teachers. This produced pressures for training.

Councillor Coulter said that we also have an issue with high pupil turnover which he understood to be about 25%. His view was that some of this is related to our difficult housing situation and caused a disconnect between school and parent. He highlighted the work done by Blackpool Council who had a universal free school meal programme which was having a significant effect on pupil attainment (10% increase in results).

Councillor Khan said he had made the point about teachers leaving at the launch of the City programme. We must understand that school places are not being offered at local schools because of pressure on places. We also need to consider more the performance of those children whose first language is not English. He said that new arrivals are said to be about 30%. All these issues might take generations to tackle. In response Councillor Kennedy recognised that there were problems with some groups whose first language is not English but there is little research on this. Teachers comment that where the child has good literacy skills in their first language, they quickly perform well in English. We see particular problems with white working class boys whose literacy skills are poor. This subject needs more research.

Anna Wright outlined a scheme for Key Workers accommodation in an effort to attract and keep teachers. Councillor Sanders commented that she had used this scheme in a recent recruitment exercise in her local school and it had made little difference.

The committee agreed the following recommendation to the City Executive Board.

To welcome the continued investment and work in this area and to see both the evaluation of the Leadership programme and the Key Stage results as soon as they are available.

69. COVERED MARKET - FINAL PANEL REPORT

The Covered Market Scrutiny Panel submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended). This presented the Panel's conclusions and recommendations on its inquiry into the economic health of the Covered Market to the Committee. It laid out a series of recommendations that it wished to see presented to the City Executive Board. Councillor Jim Campbell, as Lead Member of the Scrutiny Panel, introduced the report and its findings.

In his introduction, Councillor Campbell highlighted the following:-

- The workshop organised in January 2012 to consider the future of the Covered Market had been a major influence on the Panel's work;
- The Panel's key message is "the need for a clearer understanding of the role of the Covered Market and for greater flexibility and cooperation in fulfilling that role. *Doing nothing is not an option.*";
- The Panel's work and report is an important starting point on that work;
- There is a need to focus on the role of the Covered Market within the Council's Asset Management Strategy which highlights the need for the Market (amongst other assets) to "make the greatest possible financial contribution to the Council";
- The Panel was aware that a report into the Covered Market had been produced by The Retail Group who were experts in retailing. The Panel's report, whilst not produced by "experts", had been produced by people who have long experience of the Market and on-going contact with the traders. This two-tier approach was valuable.

Councillor Campbell ran through the recommendations that the Panel made in its report, and emphasised that the Panel wished to see them implemented by Council as soon as possible.

General Issues

In discussion with the Committee, the following issues were raised:-

- A leasing strategy presents a challenge. Many traders see their lease as permanent and lifelong. A dedicated Market manager could play a key role in encouraging traders to see that a more flexible scheme can be in their interest – for example, 3 month leases for traders to try out a new idea;
- Parking in Market Street was also identified as an issue. There is a need to review the loading/unloading requirements of traders, because some vehicles are parked there for a long time (in some cases most of the day). A better regulated scheme needs to be developed, in conjunction with the traders, and efforts should be made to ensure that the entrances to the Market are visible, accessible and uncluttered;

- There was concern that changes to rents and rental schemes did not penalise smaller traders. The Panel did not wish to be prescriptive, and it certainly had no desire to penalise smaller units, but it did wish to suggest things to look at;
- The Market does open on a Sunday but not all traders wish to join in. It would be desirable to have at least one late night opening (to 8pm?) each week;
- The Committee agreed that inaction was not an option!
- Some care should be exercised around outdoor trading – it should not adversely affect trading inside the Market;

Response from the Board Member

Councillor Colin Cook, Board Member for City Development, indicated that he was generally supportive of the recommendations made in the report.

He sought greater clarity on the Panel's suggestions concerning rental structures. The Council charged on a basis of square footage, but footfall and trades in the location were also taken into account. The Council took less rent from those traders with a lower turnover.

Councillor Campbell stressed that what the Panel sought was as flexible a system as possible. It wanted to avoid long drawn out arguments about the rent between the Council and traders.

Response from the Executive Director, City Development

David Edwards, Executive Director for City Development, noted that the recommendations were broadly similar to those made by the Retail Group, and that this was to be welcomed.

There are multiple issues here. It should be noted that tenants do have full legal protection under the Landlord and Tenant Act. Changes should be by mutual agreement, and it may not be present to change the lease structure easily. It was acknowledged that traders had differing views about Sunday trading. Issues around parking in Market Street, and signage, would be worked through. There had to be a genuine partnership with traders to make things work.

Councillor Campbell responded that the Panel worked closely with traders and officers while producing its report. Traders had been involved and they were aware of the Panel's report. The workshop held on December 10th, (referred to previously) showed that the Covered Market Traders wanted to move forwards with the Council, not against it.

Councillor Campbell thanked the Panel Members and supporting officers (Sarah Claridge and Pat Jones) for all their hard work. In return the Panel thanked Councillor Campbell for all his efforts on this matter.

Resolved to:-

- (1) Accept the report with the recommendations as shown below;
- (2) Ask that the report and its recommendations be presented to City Executive Board on 12th February for consideration.

Recommendation 1.

The Council should articulate its role in the Covered Market. The Panel believes that this should provide for greater emphasis on the civic importance of the Market and its contribution to the City.

Recommendation 2

The Council should appoint a Market Manager who will be based in the Market and accessible to the traders.

The role should include the following:

- Working with the Council and traders to develop the Market for the future, including discussions on the leasing structure and strategy, and the balance of trades
- Spending the Councils allocated budget for the Market and commissioning services delivered within that
- Promoting the market
- Offering training and support for traders
- Reviewing the website and keeping it up to date.

Recommendation 3

In the longer term to evaluate all the options for the management of the market around criteria to be developed by the Market Manager, traders and the City Council.

Recommendation 4

That early negotiations take place between the Council and traders to determine the best rental and licensing structure with the aim of moving as quickly as possible to a clearer and more flexible leasing and licensing arrangement needed to improve relationships and provide the flexibility needed for success.

Recommendation 5

That the Council moves as quickly as possible to improvements to the Market Street entrance to the Market, and begins negotiations with traders on their loading and unloading requirements with the aim of freeing space for the extension of outdoor trading. This should also include discussions on the provision of extra cycle parking.

Recommendation 6

To come forward with temporary arrangements for more visible signage for the Market on High Street including options using the buildings above and free standing signs.

Recommendation 7

To provide money as soon as possible for the improvement of the Market Avenues from High Street.

Recommendation 8

The Council move to commission design options for changes to the Covered Market and for these to include better use of the service yard.

Recommendation 9

That Council actively promotes and includes the Covered Market in their communications and event planning to take the opportunity to highlight the Market as a key destination and also attract a more diverse range of people into it.

70. EMPLOYMENT ANALYSIS - BME GROUPS

The Head of HR and Facilities submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended). This presented some headline analysis of BME applicants to the Council at shortlisting and appointment stages. Simon Howick (Head of HR and Facilities) and Jarlath Brine (Organisational Learning and Development Advisor, Equalities and Apprenticeships) attended the meeting and presented the report to the Committee.

The provided the following additional information to the Committee:-

- Many people struggle to make a good application for employment – this is not limited to BME groups;
- Applicants have a significant level of qualification; but too many applications fail because they miss the target. The Council needs to consider how it writes and targets its advertisements;
- The Council receives many “scattergun” applications which are not directly related to the job on offer;
- Some applicants are capable of making a good application, but perform less well when it comes to practical tests;
- The Council needs to consider where, when and how it advertises its jobs. It needs to look beyond what it normally does and seek fresh avenues – for example, placing adverts in the Leys News. Greater creativity in advertising is needed;
- The Council also needs to think about how is words job descriptions for entry-level jobs;

- Currently, HR is reviewing how it profiles recruitment for the next apprentice cohort.

Committee Observations

- There is a huge failing on the part of schools which are not teaching young people how to present themselves well, either through their CV, application form or at interview;
- There is a need to couch our adverts for vacancies in different terms, even if that means going far from what has become our norm. Then we might attract different people;
- If we want to see change, we need to put specific measures in place;
- Could we offer more volunteering/work experience opportunities in order to give people a taste of work here, as well as helping to mentor them and prepare them to make a full application?
- There is still the perception amongst some BME groups that working at the Council (or the University) is not for them. This perception needs to be changed;
- There seems to be some apprehension amongst applicants about the type of place the Council is – and we need to explain properly what the Council does and how potential employees can get involved and so help their community;
- Some places make small payments to staff if they recommend a vacancy to another person, and that person is subsequently recruited to the firm.

Response from Officers:

- Agreed that schools are, generally, failing to prepare young people to make good applications for employment. However, the Council intends to help people and coach them before they apply;
- 60% of the last apprentice cohort was from the BME community;
- It would be very useful if the Scrutiny Committee could support the idea of advertising in different ways and in different, non-conventional places;
- The Council tries to do as much in-house recruitment as possible, but it will consider looking at outside recruitment;
- The Council was considering creating a group of young apprentices that would go into schools to talk about their role and act as advocates for recruitment;
- The Council does not have the resources to replicate the Careers Service, but it can form stronger contacts with key schools. It would also be useful to develop links with local employers to discuss issues of mutual concern;

- Luke Nipen (from Communities) will be working with HR on initiatives around recruitment, especially from BME communities;
- It is intended that HR will give feedback to every candidate;
- The negative perception of the Council has been recognised, and HR has looked at creating a myth busting video about working in local government.

Resolved to recommend the following to Councillor Price, Board Member for Corporate Governance, Strategic Partnerships and Economic Development:-

- (1.) To support the use in job adverts of a variety of brandings and styles, rather than the rigorous application of the “Corporate Brand”, in an effort to engagement widely with target groups. To provide money within the Human Resources budget to support this and test the effectiveness of these methods;
- (2). For the Council to offer a greater number of meaningful work experiences places focused on BME groups to allow potential applicants to build a better understanding of the Council and be better prepared for selection processes;
- (3) To build on the success of appointing a significant number of apprentices from BME groups and use these staff as mentors and ambassadors. For this work to be part of the training offer as a development opportunity;
- (4.) To consider and bring forward ideas to break down the perception of some BME groups that “the City Council is not for us”. To consider within this how current employees can be used within outreach;
- (5.) To show our commitment to addressing the anomalies within the selection process by providing some initial investment money to prepare candidates or potential candidates from BME groups for the selection process, and to consider outcomes from this to support future investment in this area.

71. PERFORMANCE MONITORING - QUARTER 3

The Committee had before it the Performance Monitoring figures for Quarter 3. Pat Jones, Principal Scrutiny Officer, presented the report to the Committee and provided some background and context.

The following indicators were highlighted:-

CS003 – customers getting through first time – although the target is not being met at present, it is important to remember that there were over 211,000 calls of which some 15,250 were abandoned for various reasons. This still compares favourably with other Councils’ results.

LP106 – increase participation at leisure centres by target groups – a more detailed report will be presented at a future Committee meeting (probably in April).

B1002a – training places – the Committee received further information on this at a previous meeting;

Councillor Simmons asked for further information about the Council's carbon footprint and the recycling rate. He would like further information about current trends.

Resolved to note the report.

72. MINUTES

Resolved to approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd December 2013.

73. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Resolved to note the date of future meetings:-

4th March 2014

1st April 2014.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.40 pm