

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 1 April 2014

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

OFFICERS PRESENT: Lois Stock (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer), Pat Jones (Principal Scrutiny Officer), Jarlath Brine (OD & Learning Advisor, Equalities & Apprenticeships), Ian Brooke (Head of Leisure, Parks and Communities) and Lucy Cherry (City Leisure)

82. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None given.

83. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None made

84. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT - EVALUATION OF THE LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

The Educational Attainment panel submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) concerning the first year of the "Leadership for Learning" programme.

The Committee welcomed Professor Ian Menter (Department of Education, University of Oxford, and Programme Director) and Linda Rowe (Programme Co-ordinator); who were in attendance to answer questions and support the debate.

Councillor Pat Kennedy, Board Member for Education, Crime and Community Safety, introduced the report and outlined the three elements of the Educational Attainment programme:-

- Leadership for Learning – which was under discussion at this meeting;
- KRM programme – which would be the subject of a report in June;
- Digital Inclusion – aimed at secondary schools in the City and the subject of a future report.

Introduction from Professor Menter and Linda Rowe

Professor Menter provided the following information and updates:-

- He was very pleased with the partnership working – Oxford University, Oxford Brookes and local schools via the Oxford Teaching Schools Alliance;
- The report that the Committee had before it provided information on the first year's progress, and is based upon material taken from the participants;

- This is a distinctive programme – Professor Menter is now aware of anything similar anywhere else - and it covers a wide range of activities;
- The focus is about leadership for the sake of improved learning;
- It is very important that Headteachers are behind the programme and that they support their staff growing through it;
- It has proved difficult to engage Governors in the process; although many are very supportive in the background;
- An additional advantage is that it has given schools an opportunity to work together, and it has opened up a dialogue between them.

Questions and Comments from the Committee

- The Committee wished to thank Professor Menter, Linda Rowe and Councillor Kennedy for all their hard work on this programme;
- The Committee noted that this was a long term project, and would welcome a further update at the end of the second year;
- It would be helpful if the Scrutiny Panel could continue to be involved;
- It is important that Governors are involved (and helped to become involved) given their increasingly important role within schools. The Committee was disappointed to hear that they were not more engaged, and would welcome suggestions on how this process can begin;
- There is concern about the turnover of staff within schools – no matter how good a leader someone is, staff turnover will be a problem. Leadership is about relationships, not simply capabilities. Good leadership is when you can take people with you, and staffing turnover impacts this. Management can be delegated, relationships need to be built;
- Part of the problem with staff turnover is that Oxford is an expensive place to live. How can the Council make it easier for teachers to stay here? Is it possible to do as Runnymede Council did, and invest in affordable housing for teachers?
- It is important to have representatives from different communities involved, both as Governors and as parents. This should include people who run after-school activities;
- Additional data, to help with the interpretation of the programme and the lessons learned so far, the benefits of the programme and how it has helped, would be useful;
- It is important to deal with the issue of bullying in schools, especially that of children from BME communities;
- The Committee was mindful of the fact that, with the evolution of Academies, the educational landscape had changed. Academies can run their own attainment programmes far more easily, and Governors become advisory boards;
- Some teachers can benefit from “cultural learning” sets.

Responses from Professor Menter, Linda Rowe and Councillor Kennedy

- A housing scheme to assist people coming to live in Oxford is being looked at;
- Some staff move between schools in the City – not all who contribute to staff turnover move away completely. Inter-school collaboration helps with this process, and teachers need professional development opportunities in order to become leaders;
- Parent involvement is a definite advantage;

- At least 3 schools have sent Governors regularly to leadership for Learning events;
- The point about performance indicators is recognised and there will be more information around these in the final report. It is important that we do not read too much into statistics too early in the process;
- Bullying has not been identified as an issue but it will be taken back to the programme team;
- The primary focus has been on the development of staff as leaders in schools – the programme has not targeted external groups (such as after-school club leaders);
- The issue of staff turnover could be the subject of its own programme, as this is a complex issue with a complex pattern;
- Accommodation remains a matter of concern, but it is not the only matter that affects the programme. An accommodation scheme might help;
- It is recognised that some schools provide a challenging teaching environment, and the programme tries to support teachers in facing and dealing with these challenges.
- Anna Wright and Councillor Pat Kennedy have been visiting KRM schools from January to May 2014 to prepare a report that will be written in June. The first real test of the KRM scheme will be the National SAT results in December 2014.

Summary

The Committee had raised the following substantive issues:-

- (1) Affordability of accommodation for teaching staff;
- (2) Key performance indicators – the usefulness of these to make judgements on what is happening in schools;
- (3) The role of Governors – how can they be encouraged to engage with the programme?
- (4) Cultural learning sets – should these be included in the programme?

Resolved to:-

- (1) Ask Pat Jones to write to Councillor Pat Kennedy to ask that any lessons learned (including consideration of the usefulness of a scheme to assist with affordable accommodation for teaching staff) be included in the second year of the Leadership for Learning Programme;
- (2) Note that Councillor Pat Kennedy will be writing a report concerning the KRM scheme in June 2014;
- (3) Thank Councillor Kennedy, Professor Menter and Linda Rowe for their hard work, and for their attendance and useful input to the Committee meeting

85. WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

Pat Jones (Democratic and Member Services Manager) presented the Work Programme and Forward Plan to the Committee, and highlighted the following issues:-

- The Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy has slipped back, and is not expected until later in the year;
- Most Scrutiny Committee meetings in the new Council Year will be held on a Monday – a full list of meetings dates will be circulated to members shortly;
- The end of year report will be presented at the last meeting of the Committee in May;
- The two standing panels are still very active, and Lead Members were invited to provide a short update.
- There will be a special meeting of CEB on 23rd April at 5.30pm, at which three items will be considered:-
 - Flood Support package;
 - Town Hall – North Wing letting;
 - Headington Neighbourhood Plan.The Committee did not wish to pre-scrutinise any of these items.

Housing Panel – update from Councillor Val Smith

The Panel has two more meetings left in the current Council year. It is carrying out some important work for the Council around the Decent Homes Standard, and it hopes to emerge with a viable plan that tenants want.

There is also a Tenant Scrutiny Panel, and there will be a joint steering group that involves members of the Housing Panel and members of the Tenant's Scrutiny Panel.

Finance Panel – update from Councillor Craig Simmons

The Finance Panel carried out some very valuable work on the Budget, and it is now looking at the Capital Programme. The Finance Panel noticed that the Council does not have an Ethical Investment policy, and so it is proposing one – this is currently with the Board Member (Councillor Ed Turner) for consideration.

Pat Jones reminded the Committee that the its last meeting for the 2013/14 year will be held on 6th May.

86. REPORT BACK ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Pat Jones (Democratic and Member Services Manager) presented the report back on recommendations to the Executive Board from the Committee. The latest items on the list were:-

- Quarter 3 spending (from the Finance Panel);
- Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan.

Resolved to note the report and the outcome of the latest recommendations.

87. FUSION LIFESTYLE SERVICE PLAN - PRE SCRUTINY

The Head of Leisure and Parks submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended). Ian Brooke (Head of Leisure and Parks), Lucy Cherry (Leisure and Performance Manager) and Councillor Mike Rowley (Board Member for Leisure) resented the report to the Committee and provided some background to it.

It was explained that the report would be presented to the City Executive Board on 9th April, with a recommendation for its adoption.

Ian Brooke observed that, in 2008, the Council had a leisure service that was failing, that did not provide a high quality service and that did not attract as many users as the Council would have liked. But since the start of the contract with Fusion, there had been significant improvements and uplift in usage. The challenge now was to continue to increase usage year on year. It was intended that the service would be provided at zero cost to the Council by 2018.

Councillor Rowley added that there a commitment to continuous improvement remained, however a great deal of work identified in the Leisure Strategy had been undertaken already. Even so, the Council wanted to maintain the quality of the leisure service and to ensure that leisure centres could cope with increased usage.

Questions and comments from the Committee

- Is it fair to say that the service is in transition, from a heavily subsidised service originally, to a less subsidised one, to eventually a service that can stand alone?
- A leisure service must still be affordable for all, whilst maintaining an god quality;
- The Council should make sure that activities aimed at certain groups – such as women only swimming sessions – are maintained;
- There is a dividing line between investments made buy the Council and those made by Fusion. It seems that the incentives for Fusion to invest are not strong. Fusion should have its own capital and maintenance budget;
- How is feedback from user groups and mystery shoppers monitored?
- Some leisure centres are heavily used, some under used; is there a way to target users in order to increase usage at some centres and thus achieve a better balance of use?
- Greater transparency over finance is desirable;
- More “social return” on investment is wanted. How can the Council see the health benefits of greater activity?
- Some environmental targets are a cause of concern;
- Why is the contract being extended now, since the Council did not have to do so until 2019?
- Please make sure that Cutteslowe is added to the list of wards in the City that face problems;
- Attendance at the Leisure Partnership Board was beneficial in that much more information was imparted. Could some officers from Fusion attend future scrutiny meetings, perhaps to present a half yearly report?
- Could the adult/child ration be adjusted on some activities to take account of those people who have three (or more) children?

- Can we be told when the new Blackbird Leys Swimming Pool will open please?

Responses from Ian Brooke, Lucy Cherry, and Councillor Rowley

- There is confidence that the Council will have zero cost leisure facilities by 2017;
- The contract has specific user targets in it, and target user groups have increased since 2009. In addition, concessionary costs have been held since 2009;
- The social inclusion target was 50/50 with finance – it is important that the leisure service is for everyone.
- There is robust performance measuring in place and the Council can check Fusion’s “base camp” performance measures twice a day in order to see how things are going and how any maintenance will be done. Fusion reports monthly to the City Council as well;
- One suggestion is to have an investment review of leisure centres yearly – to see what new ideas there are, to explore what else might be done;
- Fusion is not shy of making investments, however the Council is often better placed to borrow money at a favourable rate;
- There are regular inspections of mechanical, electrical and other systems in all buildings, and these are carried out by Zurich;
- It would be wonderful to even out usage between leisure sites, and the leisure team would welcome any ideas on how this could be done. At present sites show what is available elsewhere so that people might be tempted to venture further afield to try different things;
- Currently, scoping of the Leisure and Well Being Strategy is underway, and this will go to CEB in autumn;
- Fusion is very committed to the contract, and it is now desirable to extend it for a further 5 years. If that is done, there is a saving made of £1.5 million over the lifetime of the contract;
- NNDR and VAT savings are built into the baseline figures;
- Ian Brooke is happy to feedback to Fusion comments about financial transparency so that this area could be explored to see how this might be achieved;
- Fusion is looking at the “social return” on investment over a period of time; and Ian Brooke will take away the Committee’s comments on the environmental assessments, transparency of accounts, and the inclusion of Cutteslowe, so that these can be examined;
- The Leisure Partnership Board is useful, and there is no issue with a representative from Fusion attending the Scrutiny Committee if desired;
- The observation about parent/child ratios was noted. It isn’t easy to change this, but the concern is understood.

Resolved to:-

- (1) Thank Ian Brooke, Lucy Cherry and Councillor Rowley for their attendance and useful participation at the meeting;
- (2) Note that a report concerning the engagement in leisure of hard to reach groups will be considered in the next scrutiny work programme;

- (3) Note that Ian Brooke would take away comments made by the Committee (such as financial transparency) for further consideration;
- (4) Consider the issue of the inclusion of a Scrutiny Councillor on the Leisure Partnership Board as part of the next scrutiny work programme

88. REVIEW OF ESSENTIAL CRITERIA FOR ENTRY LEVEL JOBS WITH EMPHASIS ON YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE NEET

The Head of HR and Facilities submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) concerning criteria for entry level jobs, with particular emphasis on young people who are NEET. Jarlath Brine (Organisational Development and Learning Advisor, Equalities and Apprenticeships) presented the report to the Committee and provided some background and context.

Jarlath Brine provided some additional information:-

- Environmental Development had now formed an “inclusion group”;
- A community engagement event had been held at the Asian Cultural Centre, from which some good ideas had emerged; one being the display of job adverts in key community shopping venues;
- It was slightly disappointing that all of the 17 attendees at the above event were from the same community – Polish – but it was still a worthwhile venture. The Somali community has now indicated that its members would like a similar event to be arranged for them.
- There is a need to look at the Council’s website and see how jobs are being profiled;
- Another idea put forwards is to use existing staff to disseminate information about job vacancies by talking to people they know;
- Current apprentices have visited schools to demonstrate what opportunities are available. It has been noted that not all communities in Oxford are aware of the availability of apprenticeships.

Resolved to note:-

- (1) The contents of the report;
- (2) That information about the Talent Management Strategy will be presented to a later Scrutiny Committee meeting – possibly in May.

89. MINUTES

Resolved to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 4th March 2014.

90. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Resolved to note that the last meeting in the current timetable would be held on 6th May 2014.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.05 pm

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