

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday 2 March 2015

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Simmons (Chair), Hayes (Vice-Chair), Anwar, Coulter, Darke, Hollick, Henwood, Lloyd-Shogbesan, Smith and Fooks

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Susan Brown (Customer Services and Social Inclusion)

OFFICERS PRESENT: Jane Lubbock (Head of Business Improvement and Technology), Peter McQuitty (Head of Policy, Culture and Communications), Sadie Paige (Policy, Culture and Communication), Paul Wilding (Benefit Operations Manager), Andrew Brown (Scrutiny Officer) and Sarah Claridge (Committee Services Officer)

87. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Altaf-Khan (substitute Councillor Fooks), Councillor Fry and Councillor Upton.

88. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

89. UPDATES SINCE THE LAST MEETING

Cllr Darke update the Committee on the Thames Water flooding work, he had received two letters of support from MP Kris Hopkins, Under Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and MP Dan Rogerson, Under Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) stating that they will engage with Thames Water regarding the on-going flooding issues faced in Oxford.

Cllr Simmons announced that the next Finance Standing Panel organised for 25 March. An item on local financing might have to be re-scheduled as the two planned speakers can't make the date.

The next Housing Standing Panel is scheduled for 24 March.

90. LIVING WAGE

The Head of Business Improvement & Technology and the OD & Learning Advisor presented a report (previously circulated, now appended) which updated the Committee on how the Council's commitment to paying the Oxford Living Wage has been implemented internally and within our supply chain.

The Committee raised the following comments:

- Officers formally monitor agency staff and contactors to make sure they are complying with the Oxford Living Wage requirements set out in their council

contracts. These are recorded monthly. It's more difficult to monitor contract further down the supply chain, officers plan to survey all contractors for compliance.

- Apprenticeships are not currently paid the Oxford Living Wage, raising apprenticeship pay is something that needs further consideration.
- The Oxford Living Wage is calculated at 95% of the London Living Wage, which is reviewed annually in November and any changes are implemented in April the following year. This allows businesses time to adjust their pay scales accordingly and times with the new financial year.
- Promotion of businesses that pay the Oxford Living Wage needs to occur on the Council website to encourage other to pay it.

The Scrutiny Committee recommended to the City Executive Board that:

1. A survey is conducted to monitor OLVW compliance amongst council contractors.
2. The level of the Oxford Living Wage being 95% of the London Living Wage be reviewed.
3. Council be more pro-active at encouraging employers to pay the Oxford Living Wage in the city and employers that do pay the wage are promoted on the Council website.
4. The Apprenticeship hour wage be reviewed.

The City Council considers encouraging the Oxford Living Wage by offering discounted business rates

91. CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The Consultation Officer presented a follow up report (previously circulated, now appended) which addressed the recommendations made by the Committee on the Community Engagement Plan 2014/17.

After reviewing the data, the Consultation Officer made the following observations:

1. that a low number of responses does not necessarily mean an unsuccessful consultation, because in some cases the target is also low; and
2. it would appear that better response rates are proportional to the amount of resources allocated to a consultation.

The Consultation Officer explained that because consultations are run on-line or are emailed to groups of people, the exact number of people we invite to consultations cannot always be quantified. The Committee asked for a further explanation which the Consultation Officer said she would provide.

The Committee made the following comments:

- The Council deals with consultation fatigue by having a panel board responsible for approving every consultation that the council runs. To avoid fatigue the panel challenges whether consultation is needed and often merge surveys so that the same groups are not targeted twice.
- The Council benchmarks itself against other authorities but we don't currently compare our consultation methods with what other authorities are doing.
- When a consultation is interested in the views of hard to reach group – the Consultation Officer will flag up this need and request additional support from

relevant officers. They will make sure the process is managed to maximise involvement from these groups.

The Committee thanked the Consultation Officer for all her hard work.

92. RESEARCH INTO THE LOCAL IMPACT OF WELFARE REFORM

The Programme Manager for Revenue & Benefits presented a report (previously circulated, now appended) which set out research on the impacts of welfare reforms in Oxford. He explained that the field work in the report had been done in 2014.

Cllr Brown, Board Member for Customer Services and Social Inclusion explained that the report was the basis of the Council's Financial Inclusion Strategy.

Since the publication of the report, the Council has found that:

- The effects of the changes in disability payment have not been as bad as anticipated
- The cap on the Local Housing Allowance is a huge issue in the city, as there are very few rental properties available for below the cap. Many people have to "top up" the allowance to pay their rent.
- The research in the report was done before conditionality was added to the Discretionary Housing Policy.

The Committee made the following comments:

- The Council is leaning towards more of a caseworker model through the use of JobCentre+ staff.
- In terms of debt to the Council, Cllr Brown explained that she would like to create one system that would show all the different debts that an individual owed to the council in one place. This would allow officers to be fully informed of individuals' financial situations.
- Simplifying the letters sent out to claimants is a service priority for the Housing Benefit department.

The Committee recommended that the report be sent to the Inequalities Panel for further reflection.

They thanked officers for the high quality work.

93. DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENT POLICY

The Programme Manager for Revenue & Benefits presented a report (previously circulated, now appended) on the revised Discretionary Housing Payment Policy which the City Executive Board will be asked to approve on 12 March.

Cllr Brown, Executive Member for Customer Services and Social Inclusion explained that from 2015/16 Oxford City Council's DHP grant will reduce from £514,496 to £288,092, a reduction of 44%. The government has made it clear that the DHP policy is a temporary funding measure which will continue to be reduced. It has also said that councils cannot give more than double the amount given by government. It is therefore important that individuals not become reliant on DHP funding as they will need to manage without it in the future. The Council

had written conditionality into the policy to prioritise those most in need and has chosen not to contribute the maximum they could.

The Committee discussed whether the Council should contribute more towards funding DHP and whether prioritising individuals was necessary.

The Committee requested an update report on the DHP policy/payments be presented in September 2015.

94. THE CULTURE STRATEGY 2015-18

The Head of Policy, Culture and Communications presented a report (previously circulated, now appended) on the adoption of the Culture Strategy. The City Executive Board will be asked to approve the strategy on 12 March.

The Head of Policy, Culture and Communications went through the Committee's recommendations made at their meeting in October 2014.

1. That non-council culture offering in the city had been added to the Strategy.
2. That a paragraph had been added to the strategy acknowledging the affects that licencing and planning and Direct Services can play in delivering cultural events.
3. That the list of organisations invited to contribute to the Culture Strategy had been shared with elected members.
4. He explained that in regards to encouraging visitors to spend more time in Oxford, It had been agreed that this was not the primary purpose of the Culture Strategy but was the responsibility of Experience Oxfordshire. Experience Oxfordshire were prepared to brief members on their role.

The Committee recommended that

A briefing from Experience Oxfordshire be arranged for members.

An objective be added to extend cultural opportunities to excluded communities under priority for culture 2.

95. PERFORMANCE MONITORING - QUARTER 3

The Scrutiny Officer presented the Quarter 3 Performance Monitoring report (previously circulated, now appended) which detailed the list of Council's performance measures chosen by the Scrutiny Committee for monitoring.

The Committee made the following comments/queries:

BV017a - Queried why anonymised shortlisting had ended

BIT022: This measure was red and the £180k savings figure provided was rolled over from the previous month

BV016a: The Committee welcome efforts to make the City Council a supportive environment for staff to declare disabilities but this approach should not be relied upon to deliver

ED002 – would like more information

The Scrutiny Officer will seek more information and report back to the Committee.

The Committee requested that coloured copies be provided of future performance monitoring reports in the public agendas.

96. WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

The Scrutiny Office presented the work programme and Forward Plan (previously circulated, now appended).

The Committee recommended that a survey be sent to all non-committee members to gauge their perception of Scrutiny's work.

97. REPORT BACK ON RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee noted the report.

98. MINUTES

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meetings held on 19 January 2015 and 3 February 2015 as true and accurate records.

99. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted the next meeting would be held on Monday 23 March 2015.

The meeting started at 6.15 pm and ended at 8.15 pm

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