

## MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Tuesday 30 June 2015**

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**COUNCILLORS PRESENT:** Councillors Simmons (Chair), Hayes (Vice-Chair), Coulter, Darke, Fry, Hollick, Henwood, Lloyd-Shogbesan, Smith, Taylor, Upton and Fooks.

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Councillor Alex Hollingsworth and Councillor Mike Rowley

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Ian Brooke (Head of Community Services), Adrian Roche (City Development), Lyndsey Beveridge (Planner), Julia Tomkins (Grants & External Funding Officer), Andrew Brown (Scrutiny Officer) and Catherine Phythian (Committee Services Officer)

### 13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Altaf Khan (substitute Councillor Fooks).

### 14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

### 15. UPDATES SINCE THE LAST MEETING

No issues were raised.

The Committee NOTED the dates of the next meetings for the Standing Panels.

### 16. FUSION LIFESTYLE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2014/15

The Head of Community Services presented the report and highlighted a number of key points:

- The contract generated £1.36M annual saving
- £14.4M capital investment in the 5 centres
- the number of users had increased to 1.3 million and was projected to continue increasing to 2 million in 2020
- 134% increase in participation from the target groups

- A reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> levels per user had been achieved against the backdrop of increased participation

He said that the report contained a significant volume of data which had taken a lot of officer time to collate and asked the Committee to consider whether in the future a dashboard report could be used to update on the contract.

In response to comments from the Committee he explained that

- the subsidy for the Hinksey open air pool would always be relatively high simply because of the base costs of heating an outdoor pool combined with a weather limited operating season
- the assumptions supporting the projections for a continued increase in participation were robust and in any event the risk of reduced participation levels would be borne by Fusion Lifestyle
- the external appearance and standard of maintenance for the 5 centres was an important element in encouraging participation and asked members using the facilities to alert him or his staff if there were instances of poor standards or prolonged equipment outages

The Scrutiny Committee were pleased to note the excellent increase in participation resulting from the investment that the Council had made in the facilities and in the contract with Fusion Lifestyle.

The Scrutiny Committee AGREED that future versions of the annual Fusion Lifestyle Performance Report submitted to the Committee should adopt a dashboard approach.

## **17. GRANT MONITORING INFORMATION FOR 2014/15**

The Grants and External Funding Officer presented the report.

The Committee questioned why there was an under-spend on the small grants programme and the Social Inclusion Fund amounting to £21,040, and what happens to this money. The Committee heard that this is absorbed into a corporate pot and noted that there had been unmet demand in other parts of the Council's Community and Voluntary Organisations (CVO's) grant programme.

The Committee also commented on particular line items listed in the appendices and questioned whether attendees were confident that some of these were delivering best outcomes for the money - for example, the cost of around £5,000 per homeless person assisted. Could more be helped by a different mix of service provision? On the other hand, the Committee noted that some grant spending delivered exceptionally good value - for example, money spent on benefits advice delivered approximate 8x the value in additional benefits. The Committee heard that the project descriptions should be viewed in their full context of providing wider community benefits and officers offered to provide more information on particular projects if required.

The Committee resolved to submit the following recommendation to the City Executive Board:

That the under-spend of £21,040 is rolled forwards and spent on grants to community and voluntary organisations in 2015/16.

## **18. STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN PLANNING 2015**

Members of Planning and Regulatory Services presented the report, explaining that it was both best practice and a legal requirement that the Council had a formal Statement of Community Involvement in Planning. She explained that this document had been subject to public consultation and consideration by all councillors. An Action Plan has been added to capture suggested changes and improvements which cannot be immediately addressed, often because of the need for IT system improvements.

The Scrutiny Committee supported the adoption of the Statement of Community Involvement in Planning (2015) and commended officers on the document's tone and the way it was written. The Committee noted the statutory nature of the document and the need to refrain from designing a planning toolkit whilst considering it.

The Scrutiny Committee made the following observations:

- it was important to avoid becoming over reliant on the internet and social media to publish and communicate planning matters
- the Planning Review Committee and Area Forums were not mentioned in the Statement
- the use of visualisation tools was a welcome development and suggested that this should be made more explicit in the document, with a link to the help-sheet added
- whether resident groups were able to register an area of interest and receive auto-notifications. The Committee heard that the Council's IT systems did not currently enable this but that it was not technically difficult to do. Officers were looking to achieve wider involvement through methods such as the Council's app, and are exploring whether local groups could play a role in making planning documents available in paper form
- whether in addition to site notices, printed letters should be sent to neighbours to inform them of planning applications. The Committee noted that the cost of issuing notification letters for the 2,000 planning applications processed each year was 45k and that this cost had not been budgeted for. Members asked whether lower cost alternatives were available, for example, could officers post copies of site notices through nearby letterboxes when putting these notices up.

The Scrutiny Committee AGREED to make the following recommendations to the City Executive Board:

1. We endorse the draft Statement of Community Involvement in Planning subject to minor amendments to include a reference to the Planning Review

Committee, Area Forums and external guidance on the use of visualisation tools.

2. We recommend that the City Council continues to explore new and improved ways of informing residents and community organisations of local planning issues, using both on-line and off-line communication methods. In particular, enhancements to ICT systems should be prioritised so that individuals and groups that have signed up can receive automatic notifications when specific planning applications are progressed or amended.
3. We recommend that the City Council explores whether there is a lower cost means of informing local residents of planning applications as an alternative to “neighbouring property notification letters”. We suggest that proposals are brought forward in the next budget round.

## **19. REPORT OF THE INEQUALITY PANEL**

Councillor Van Coulter presented the report of the Inequality Panel: “Combating Inequality – Is Oxford City Council doing all it can to make Oxford a fairer, more equal place?”

On behalf of the Standing Panel he thanked all of the organisations and individuals who had contributed to the inquiry, in particular the Scrutiny Officer.

He explained that the report was still subject to some final drafting changes to ensure that the recommendations, if accepted, would allow the Council to work within the law. The Committee noted that the report would be submitted to the July meeting of the City Executive Board but given that the recommendations have significant resource implications a formal response would be made in September.

The Committee agreed that the reference to a Green Belt Review in Recommendation 5a) should be changed to a county wide land review.

Councillor Coulter agreed to speak to the City Executive Board to offer the assistance of the Inequality Standing Panel in reviewing the resource implications and prioritisation of the recommendations.

The Committee resolved to APPROVE that Inequality Panel report on Combating Inequality should be submitted to the City Executive Board meeting on 9 July 2015, subject to some minor drafting changes and with the following statement of support:

“That the Scrutiny Committee recognise that the recommendations in the report have significant cost implications for the Council and that there will need to be some prioritisation on the part of the CEB which members of the Panel would be willing to help with”.

## 20. WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report which detailed the topics for the 2015/16 work programme. The Committee noted the items carried forward from the 2014/15 work programme. The Housing Panel would meet separately to consider their work programme for the year and report back to the Committee with their priorities in September.

The Committee considered the 36 issues which had been suggested as potential scrutiny topics and discussed their suitability in terms of the level of public interest; whether the item related to a corporate priority or essential service; the level of expenditure; and the extent to which the Scrutiny Committee would be able to influence or add value.

The Committee agreed that:

1. the following should be confirmed on the work programme:

|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| Recycling Panel              | Councillor Fry would adopt a "watching brief" on the implementation of the scrutiny recommendations.                             |
| Economic Development Panel   | will continue & look at LEPs – scoping in early 2016   |
| Cycling Panel                | will end after report submitted  |
| single meeting review topics | Tree cover, biodiversity and the work of the Forest of Oxford / project to get even more trees planted in the city               |
|                              | Public Spaces Protection Order   |
| scrutiny panel review topic  | Guest House regulation – scoping document in September. 4 person review group: Cllr Van Coulter (Chair), Cllr Simmons + 2 others |

2. the following should be added to the work programme as provisional topics for a scrutiny panel review subject to further discussion at the September meeting of the Committee:

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| scrutiny panel review topic | 1. Tackling loneliness among the elderly |
|                             | 2. Youth Ambition                        |
|                             | 3. Planning enforcement & regulation     |
|                             | 4. Educational Attainment                |
|                             | 5. Equality and Diversity                |

## 21. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR FOR THE HOUSING PANEL

The Scrutiny Committee elected Councillor Smith to be the Chair of the Housing Standing Panel for the Council Year 2015/16.

## **22. REPORT BACK ON RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report back on recommendations. The Chair said that he had asked the City Executive Board to provide clear and unambiguous responses to scrutiny recommendations to aid monitoring.

The Committee NOTED the report.

## **23. MINUTES**

The Committee APPROVED the minutes of the meeting held on 2 June 2015 as a true and accurate record.

## **24. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Committee NOTED that the next meeting was scheduled for 7 September 2015 and that further meetings were scheduled on the following dates:

6 October 2015  
2 November 2015  
8 December 2015  
12 January 2016  
2 February 2016  
7 March 2016  
5 April 2016

All meetings start at 6.15pm.

The Committee recorded their congratulations to Sarah Claridge, Committee Services Officer, on the birth of her daughter.

**The meeting started at 6.15 pm and ended at 8.40 pm**