

# Minutes of a meeting of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE on Wednesday 14 June 2017

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## Committee members:

Councillor Gant (Chair)	Councillor Chapman (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Altaf-Khan	Councillor Brandt (for Councillor Thomas)
Councillor Curran	Councillor Fry
Councillor Henwood	Councillor Ladbrooke
Councillor Lloyd-Shogbesan	Councillor Pegg

## Officers:

Andrew Brown, Scrutiny Officer  
Patsy Dell, Head of Planning, Sustainable Development & Regulatory Services  
Cathy Durance, Lawyer  
Daniella Granito, Safeguarding Officer  
David Growcott, Communities Team Leader  
Fiona Piercy, Interim Assistant Chief Executive, Regeneration and Economy  
Val Johnson, Policy and Partnerships Team Leader  
Jennifer Thompson, Committee and Members Services Officer

## Also present:

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Board Member for Planning and Regulatory Services

## Apologies:

Councillors Azad, Lygo and Thomas sent apologies.

## 7. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest made.

On Minute 11, Councillors stated for the record that they were members or had involvement in community associations although these were not pecuniary interests:

Councillor Henwood	Florence Park Community Association
Councillor Ladbrooke	Barton Community Association
Councillor Pegg	Rosehill advice centre
Councillor Gant	North Oxford Association, Cutteslowe Community Association

Councillor Fry	North Oxford Association
Councillor Lloyd-Shogbesan	Bullington Community Association
Councillor Altaf Khan	Asian Cultural Centre
Councillor Curran	Donnington Doorstep; Donnington community centre

## **8. Report back on recommendations**

The Chair deferred this item as the paperwork attached to the agenda was incorrect.

## **9. Planning and Regulatory Services improvement plan**

The Head of Planning and Regulatory introduced the report and answered questions. She highlighted the very positive improvements for the service area over the past year including the introduction of career grades, the recruitment of good staff and five apprentices who were proving to be an asset to the service.

Councillor Hollingsworth, Board Member for Planning and Regulatory Services, also answered questions.

The Committee noted in answer to questions:

1. The service had invested in the introduction of career grades, apprenticeships and improved recruitment and retention. The vacancy rate was now much lower and remaining vacancies were being filled.
2. The number of complaints about customer service had reduced.
3. Building control provided a statutory service and sought work in competition with the private sector, successfully bidding for a number of large contracts. The changes to recruitment and retention policies would hopefully improve the service's ability to recruit permanent staff, as there was a shortage of suitable skilled staff and a competitive recruitment market.
4. Enforcement action was taken when breaches were brought to the service's attention, in line with usual practice across the country. It was not possible to provide a proactive inspection and enforcement service unless this was resourced.
5. The ability to enforce planning permission had to be balanced against the resources this involved, and against the reasonable expectation that developers would comply with their permissions and conditions. There was an added complication with an inspection regime that developments can start at any point within the three-year permission period. Reported breaches were taken seriously, and action taken.
6. A risk-based approach was taken to pro-actively inspecting particularly sensitive or controversial works on listed buildings and conservation areas, but there were strong incentives to carry the work out correctly given the liabilities if this was sub-standard.
7. There was a project to review the list of requirements to be met before an application was accepted. This would improve the quality and completeness of applications before submission – at present only half of applications provided

information to the required standard. Better quality and complete applications would reduce the workload on staff; the number of conditions required; the time taken to issue permission; and the work involved for both parties in discharging conditions. There was a related project reviewing all standard conditions to ensure these were adequate and comprehensive.

8. The recent neighbourhood planning bill set out changes to the pre-commencement conditions that could be applied.
9. The contract for the Oxford Design Review Panel had ended and was under review. A design panel was part of a quality planning process for the city and the current providers were the national lead.
10. The key indicators for performance were those set by government: currently over a rolling 24-month period 70% of non-major applications had to be determined within the time limits. Internal targets to exceed these could be set if appropriate.

The Committee asked for information about the numbers of complaints and why 2015/16 was chosen as a baseline.

The Committee asked for a further update in twelve months, and congratulated the Head of Planning and Regulatory and her staff on their hard work and resulting improvement in performance.

## **10. Oxford Railway Station Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)**

The Interim Assistant Chief Executive for regeneration and economy introduced the report. The Head of Planning and Regulatory and the Board Member for Planning and Regulatory Services, Councillor Hollingsworth, answered questions.

Councillors asked for the milestones and times in the document to be updated before it was issued for consultation.

They noted that the consultation on this SPD would run concurrently with that for the Local Plan, and noted the steps taken to ensure that the SPD was appropriately publicised as a separate document and to relevant special-interest groups.

The Committee made no recommendations and commended the document to the City Executive Board.

## **11. Community Leases**

The Acting Communities Manager and the Council's lawyer with responsibility for leases introduced the report and answered questions.

The Committee noted in answer to questions:

1. Two different types of lease are being offered: eight community associations currently operate a community centre on a licence and the Council is offering these associations an 'unprotected lease'.
2. Protected leases had been given to some community associations about 15-20 years ago and this type of lease could not be rescinded: such leases would not

be offered now as they were no longer the preferred means of achieving the good management of council property.

3. Unprotected leases offer a 25 year term with a rolling twelve month rolling break for either tenant or landlord. This gives flexibility to both the council (to manage its assets in the best interests of the city) and the community associations (to provide activities and management to best support the changing needs of their growing communities) with sufficient control by both parties.
4. Performance measures allowed both parties to work to make the centres effective.
5. The poor state of repair of three of the buildings, and Florence Park community centre in particular, was known. The protected leases had break clauses which allowed either party to terminate the lease at fixed points. There was a clause permitting the council to terminate the lease if the cost of repairs exceeded £100,000 but this was not intended as a mechanism to avoid the Council's responsibilities.
6. The community centres' opening hours and activities relied on demand; volunteers; and paid staff. The Communities team was helping the associations to manage centres and attract and retain volunteers which should help improve the centres' activities and increase their opening hours. However, while the council should make good use of valuable assets, expectations of the associations and the use of the centres had to be realistic.

The Committee commented that they would want all community associations to be satisfied with their lease arrangements and received assurances that the Council was actively supporting community associations to help them ensure that the centres were accessible to all of the diverse communities they served.

The Committee asked for information about the reason for the large grant given to offset all of the rent paid by Museum of Modern Art, and the benefit this offered to the wider community in the city. They suggested that, to distinguish between those organisations actually paying a low rent and those where the rent was off-set by grants, the information on rents should show the actual rent charged; the grant (if any) off-setting this; and the residual rent (if any) paid.

The Committee made no recommendations to the City Executive Board.

## **12. Safeguarding Report 2017/18**

The Policy and Partnership Manager, the Safeguarding Co-ordinator, and the Board Member for Community Safety, Councillor Hayes, introduced the report and answered questions.

The Committee noted in answer to questions:

1. The full Self-Assessment Audit had been completed and the full report was available. The action plan was not fixed for the year but would be updated as necessary.
2. There had been a significant investment in safeguarding training.

3. In state schools, teachers and other staff had detailed training and the schools completed a safeguarding audit. There were monitoring and reporting systems in place to report concerns, including absences, involving the home and then a multi-agency panel and the police. The communities team worked directly with schools on some issues.
4. Independent schools were not subject to the same requirements as state schools and did not participate in the same reporting or monitoring regime. There was no mechanism by which local authorities could oblige them to do so.
5. Licensing authorities across the county now contributed to monitoring, information sharing and joint working on taxi licensing, and with other councils through shared service arrangements.
6. Targeted mental capacity training had been offered to nearly 130 key staff.
7. Information sharing across IT systems was complicated: the proposed corporate system would help but may not interface well with existing systems.
8. Training in safeguarding for the voluntary sector (such as community associations and parish councils) could be provided through the safeguarding boards rather than this council, although there may be a cost for this. The council had offered awareness training to its own volunteers.
9. It was currently too early to assess the full effectiveness of the training.
10. The team were working on how to ensure adults and mental health referrals were always adequately followed through.
11. The team were working with county council and community centre colleagues to ensure that the most effective service possible was offered within the resources available and without duplication. Staff were aware of the impacts of cuts to services.

The Committee asked for:

- the next report to set out how far the councils' ability to intervene where issues and concerns were identified has been compromised by the changes to the supporting and surrounding service provision, and on the risks that raised.
- as well as the annual report, any key issues that arise should be put before the committee mid-year
- the action plan to be clear and readable for a wide audience.

The Committee thanked the Policy and Partnerships Manager for her work on this.

The Committee made no recommendations to the City Executive Board.

### **13. Performance Monitoring - quarter 4**

The Committee noted the report and made the following observations:

- The quarter 4 report was an improvement on previous reports.

- It was not clear how the targets were set and who was involved.
- It would be helpful to know which (if any) targets were set by government.
- CE002 – The level of commercial property income achieved significantly exceeded target but it seemed odd that Financial Services were unable to provide figures that exclude VAT.
- It would be useful to have more targets for ICT.
- CS054 – This needed to be clearer as it looked like targets had not been set.
- LG002 – Jeremy Thomas’s name should have been removed.
- CS025 & BV009 – Is the Council being penalised for missing the collection rates targets?
- WR002 & WR003 – Why is under-recording taking place; what’s wrong?
- NI195a-c – These targets were not useful to the Committee and there could be a more useful target around responding to reports of graffiti.
- NI008 – Will we drop the Sport England measure?
- BI001 – An estimate would have been useful in the absence of information on the tower block project.
- It would be useful to see some key Fusion Lifestyle measures in this report as that information is collated quarterly for other forums.
- Column headers should appear at the top of every page.
- It would be useful to see some historical context in this report.
- There should be a role for Scrutiny in sense checking the performance measures for the year ahead before they are set in stone.

The Committee agreed that Cllr Fry would continue as lead member for performance monitoring and would select performance measures for Scrutiny to monitor in the year ahead.

## **14. Scrutiny Operating Principles 2017/18**

The Committee considered and agreed the operating principles as set out in the report.

## **15. Preparation of the 2017/18 Scrutiny Work Plan**

The Committee considered the list of topics and schedule for the 2017/18 work plan.

### **The Scrutiny Committee resolved to:**

1. Re-establish the Finance and Housing standing panels.
2. Re-establish the Shareholder Panel as a third standing panel to scrutinise issues and decisions relating to Council-owned companies.
3. Appoint to the panels as follows:

- a) Finance (4 members): Councillors Fry, Landell Mills, Simmons & Taylor.
  - b) Housing (6 members): Councillors Goff, Henwood, Pegg, Sanders, Thomas & Wade.
  - c) Shareholder (5 members): Councillors Chapman, Fry, Gant, Henwood & Simmons.
4. Include all suggested items rated 6 or higher in the work plan.
5. Agree priority topics for review in 2017/18 including:
- a) A Finance Panel review of the Council's annual budget and medium term financial plan (December to February)
  - b) One other review topic (August to December), the topic itself to be agreed at the July meeting which could be one of the following suggestions: child obesity, Disabled Students' Allowance, the use of restorative justice to resolve low level instances of antisocial behaviour, impacts of the Westgate Centre, implementing the Oxford Living Wage across Oxford.
6. Note the meeting agenda schedules for July 2017.

## **16. Dates of future meetings**

The Committee noted the dates.

**The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.35 pm**

Chair .....

**Date: Tuesday 4 July 2017**

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