

Minutes of a meeting of the CITY EXECUTIVE BOARD on Wednesday 14 November 2018

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Committee members:

Councillor Brown (Chair)	Councillor Linda Smith (Deputy Leader)
Councillor Turner	Councillor Chapman
Councillor Clarkson	Councillor Hayes
Councillor Hollingsworth	Councillor Rowley
Councillor Simm	Councillor Upton

Officers:

Gordon Mitchell, Chief Executive
Tim Sadler, Executive Director Sustainable City
Caroline Green, Assistant Chief Executive
Anita Bradley, Monitoring Officer
Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services
Paul Adams, HR & Payroll Manager
Helen Bishop, Head of Business Improvement
John Mitchell, Committee and Member Services Officer

Also present:

Councillor Shaista Aziz
Councillor Nadine Bely-Summers
Councillor Andrew Gant
Councillor Richard Howlett
Councillor Craig Simmons

Apologies:

No apologies were received

87. Declarations of Interest

None.

88. Addresses and Questions by Members of the Public

David Thomas addressed the Board about the Scrutiny Committee's No Local Connection review group report, arguing that there was no reason in his view why the report's recommendations should result in an increase in the number of rough sleepers coming to Oxford.

Jackie and Hayley addressed the Board about their experiences of having been homeless and rough sleeping in Oxford, in part as a consequence of having no local connection. They highlighted some areas where they felt the accommodation provision in the City could improve. The Chair thanked them for their powerful contributions.

89. Councillor Addresses on any item for decision on the Board's agenda

No Local Connection Review Group Report (item 7 on the agenda)

Councillors Aziz, Simmons and Howlett, all of whom had served on the review group, spoke in support of the report's recommendations. There was gratitude that the majority of recommendations had been accepted but disappointment that not all had been. They drew attention to a number of matters referred to in the report including but not limited to:

- the risks to health and wellbeing faced by those living rough (particularly women)
- what was perceived as a failure to have grasped the "essence" of the report and the need to treat those who experience homelessness as individuals not a group
- *Shelter's* differing interpretation of the local connection legislation
- the lost opportunity of the decision not to trial some suggestions
- the view of *Crisis* that the present arrangements in relation to no local connection are a failure and its willingness to support securing funds for a piloted change to the Local Connection Policy
- that the Council should determine what it wishes to achieve and then find the resource to achieve it, not let its policy be driven by the availability of the resource
- The effectiveness of the present Adult Homeless Pathway was questioned and the fact that some rough sleepers regard the temporary provision available to them as being more dangerous than going without.

Oxford North (item 9 on the agenda)

Councillor Gant expressed some disquiet about the order in which decisions about this major development were having to be made, driven, it seemed, by the requirements of the Homes England Housing Infrastructure Funding mechanism. It would have been preferable to have a better idea of infrastructure and housing proposals first. Such details as there were suggested that there was a long way to go to achieve a plan that properly met the needs of the community.

90. Councillor Addresses on Neighbourhood Issues

None.

91. Items raised by Board Members

None.

92. Scrutiny Committee Reports

No Local Connection Review Group Report

Councillor Bely-Summers, as Chair of the review group, gave a brief introduction, thanking all those Councillors, people with experience of homelessness and officers who had contributed to it. The report was dedicated to the support of some of the most vulnerable members of the community and especially women. Since austerity took hold a decade ago homelessness had increased in the UK by 169%, and by 400% in Oxford in half that time. In Oxford there had been an increase in the number of people sleeping rough with no local connection, with 69% of all people counted in 2017 having no local connection and so no place to live. The report's 25 recommendations flowed from a strong evidence base, drawn from a wide range of sources. She hoped that implementation of its recommendations would make a tangible difference. Councillors should be providing political leadership and direction and this was an opportunity to do that.

Councillor Bely Summers gave particular thanks to CEB to accept recommendation 1a concerning offering a local connection to any person who has slept rough or 'sofa surfed' in Oxford for a continuous period in excess of 6 months. She also welcomed CEB's response to recommendations 8 and 12 which offered to bring forward additional data concerning the Adult Homeless Pathway and a report from the Outreach Team to the Housing Panel. She welcomed the prospect of receiving an update to the Scrutiny Committee on progress against the recommendations in 12 months' time.

The Chair thanked Councillor Bely-Summers, on behalf of CEB, for the work of the group and for having enabled so many to contribute to it.

Councillor Gant addressed the Board on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee as a whole. In relation to the review group's report he noted the following points among others:

- The Committee had received a report from officers responding to the recommendations in advance of its meeting. It was useful (if unusual) to have received this advice, but it had not been commissioned by the Committee.
- The officer advice contained opinion on legal questions which differed from the legal opinion of other organisations in some respects.
- In agreeing that the report should go forward to CEB the Scrutiny committee was not taking a view on legal questions: the Committee did not seek legal opinion of its own. It resolved, rather, that the proper place for those questions to be addressed was at CEB
- There was some intense and effective discussion both supporting and questioning aspects of the report, and that the resolution to adopt it to go forward to CEB was taken by a clear majority, but not unanimously.
- This was a thorough discussion around a detailed and well-evidenced report which takes a clear view on how the Council should approach an issue of fundamental importance. It was a good example of Members, officers, other stakeholders and the public engaging with the Scrutiny process in a very constructive way.

Councillor Linda Smith, as portfolio holder, responded on behalf of the Board. She thanked the group for its work and, in particular, the contributions made at the meeting by Jackie and Hayley. She was pleased to be able to confirm support for the majority of the recommendations. She hoped that the changes would provide greater clarity and confidence about how the rules around Local Connection are put into practice and improve service in a number of related areas. She was proposing support for the recommendation that the Council explores opportunities to extend provision which uses the 'Housing First' approach and that the Council looks at Critical Time Intervention programmes. It was important to review and adapt homelessness services continually, learning from best practice both in Oxford and further afield.

She proposed to accept the recommendation about calling on the County Council, neighbouring Councils and the Government to increase funding for homelessness services. The Council had prioritised funding in this area and successfully bid for government funding but this was time limited and assurances were needed about longer term funding.

While she agreed that the Local Connection guidelines were flawed, reform had to be made at a national level and it would be wrong to change them unilaterally: people with a connection to another authority should have their costs met by that authority; and people without a local connection have few options when it came to moving on out of the pathway which would only serve to block it.

She was not in a position to make any changes to the Housing Allocations Scheme at this meeting; to do so would require public consultation and agreement of the registered social landlords with whom the Council works in partnership.

The Council's eligibility criteria for having a local connection in relation to the housing register and being eligible for council or social housing were relaxed (6 months) compared with government guidelines (two years). Any further relaxation would raise questions of fairness, thinking of the 2,100 applicants with a local connection, as defined under the current policy, waiting for a home.

While not all the recommendations had been accepted it was important to be clear that the Council is not content for anyone to be sleeping on the streets and it was not the case that those without a local connection were denied help. There would, for example, be 74 bed spaces available in the coming Winter for those without a local connection. Day services were also supported by the Council to provide hot meals, showers and clothes. An outreach team could provide practical assistance to help with access to accommodation, benefits or a job or to reconnect to their home area where they can access long term support.

The report and officer comments made clear that the use of exemptions is important when it comes to operation of the local connection policy. It was important not to fetter the ability of officers to be able to use their professional judgment, on a case by case basis, in making good decisions about the application of the policy.

She concluded by paying tribute to the work of the housing services team who work on rough sleeping and homelessness for the excellent work that they do.

In the subsequent Board discussion there was recognition that the extent of the homelessness issue was largely attributable to a number of Government policies and decisions in recent years. The Chair recognised the importance of lobbying, both locally and nationally, for adequate funding; something which already happened and would continue. The importance of not taking unilateral action as referred to above was repeated. The testimony given to the meeting gave some pause for thought, raising questions about whether the service currently provided for rough sleepers might be better in some respects. It was right that decisions about these matters should be informed by the views of those immediately affected by them. There was appreciation that homelessness was a significant contributor to poor health outcomes.

CEB agreed to accept the recommendations and draft response provided by the Board Member for Housing and Leisure, and thanked all those who contributed to the report. In response to final question from Councillor Simmons, it was clarified that changes would be sought to the Oxfordshire Joint Operational Protocol, as a result of the accepted recommendations.

Work Place Equalities Report and Action Plan

Councillor Gant thanked Councillor Chapman for his contribution to the Committee's thorough debate about the report, something which had been enhanced by virtue of his previous role on Scrutiny Committee when he had challenged the adequacy of some of the data and plans to improve areas of weakness. The Committee had been pleased to note some improving trends in parallel with concerns at the levels of recruitment from members of the BAME community and women to senior positions. He thanked the Board for its agreement to the Committee's recommendations.

93. Workplace Equalities Report and Action Plan

The Head of Business Improvement had submitted a report to seek approval for the publication of the Annual Workforce Equalities Report and the resulting Action Plan to improve the diversity of the Council's workforce and make it more representative.

Councillor Chapman, as portfolio holder, introduced the report. He was thankful to the Scrutiny Committee for a constructive conversation about something which, in his view, was a matter of social justice. To ensure that the service provided by the Council meets the needs of the community, the workforce should reflect the makeup of the community; at the moment it does not. Once members of under-represented groups were recruited they needed to be nurtured and given opportunities to build their careers over time. He commended the action plan attached to the report to the Board. The plan would not transform the position overnight but represented an important start.

The Head of Business Improvement said the report and associated action plan had been built on a more thorough understanding of local demography than previously. A more representative workforce had many benefits for the organisation, making it more creative, relevant and better placed to respond to the community's needs. It would enable the Council to tap into parts of the labour market which currently it did not. Areas of particular weakness were the small number of colleagues from the BAME community, particularly at higher grades and the low number of women in senior positions.

The Chair noted the importance of unconscious bias training for officers and members. The Head of Business Improvement said that the principal method of delivery of this for officers would be online. It was acknowledged that this might not always be the most effective method given the nature of the subject but there would be other opportunities for staff to discuss and thoroughly engage with this important matter. This was something which had already been considered and an Equalities Week in early January has been scheduled. The first event would be “Let’s Talk Equalities” a briefing available to all staff and during the week training for all staff and managers will be launched. There will also be presentations on diversity and interactive workshops, all designed to engage staff on a face to face basis. It was suggested that there was merit in offering this training to Fusion Lifestyle for their employees too.

The shortfall and gaps in data about the current workforce’s protected characteristics were being addressed by reminding staff about the value of this data and encouraging them to respond if they had not already done so. The trade unions were also supportive of this.

The Head of Business Improvement said she would return with a further report in a year’s time.

The City Executive Board resolved to:

1. **Approve** the Workforce Equalities Report 2018/19;
2. **Delegate** authority to the Head of Business Improvement to publish the Workforce Equalities Report 2018/19 and to make any typographical changes as may be required before publication; and
3. **Approve** the Action Plan at Appendix 4 of this report for submission as part of the 2019/20 budget setting process.

94. Oxford North

The Regeneration and Economy Programme Director and Head of Planning Services had submitted a report to request an in-principle decision to use Homes England Housing Infrastructure (Marginal Viability) Funding (HIF) and CIL funds for infrastructure support at Northern Gateway/Oxford North.

The Chair introduced the report reminding those Members who might become involved in the subsequent planning decisions that they should not put themselves in the position of pre-judging any aspect of the proposals. She had made it clear that she would play no part in the planning process and noted that the scheme should be for the public good and must deliver appropriate social and other housing.

The City Executive Board resolved to:

1. **Identify** the Northern Gateway/Oxford North Housing Infrastructure Funding HIF and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) schemes as potential future Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) capital schemes with a provisional budget allocation (subject to receipt of external HIF and CIL receipts) of up to £18.85m;

2. Delegate authority to the Regeneration and Economy Programme Director to agree a contract with Homes England to draw down funds and secure their use/implementation in agreed infrastructure projects (subject to the £10m HIF funding to Oxford North being secured);

3. Recommend to Council to apply Community Infrastructure Levy receipts to the value of £ 8.85m (as generated from future strategic scale development at Northern Gateway/Oxford North) in order to fund investment in highways/transport infrastructure provision to support the delivery of the Northern Gateway strategic site allocation; and

4. Delegate to the Head of Planning Services authority to secure the completion of an appropriate legal agreement for this funding investment, prepared in conjunction with the Council's Monitoring and Section 151 Officers. The legal agreement to cover the specific infrastructure projects to be funded and arrangements for their procurement, delivery and adoption by the local authorities, and to be subject to the outcome of due consideration of necessary and contingent planning application(s) and associated processes.

95. Minutes

The Board resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2018 as true and accurate record subject to a change to the declarations of interest (Minute 75) which should record the Jericho Community Centre and not the Jericho Boatyard.

96. Dates of Future Meetings

Meetings are scheduled for the following dates:

29 November 2018
18 December 2018
22 January 2019
12 February 2019
13 March 2019
10 April 2019

The Board resolved that these meetings should start at 6pm rather than 5pm.

97. Matters Exempt from Publication

No exempt matters were considered .

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 6.40 pm

Chair

Date: Thursday 29 November 2018

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