

Report back from the City Executive Board on recommendations made by this Committee and its Panels

7 December meeting

Resolved to thank the Scrutiny Committees and the Scrutiny Panel for their useful input and to accept the recommendations in the reports, namely:-

Benefits Fundamental Service Review

- (1) That the Board should be satisfied that the re-allocation of support service charges from Customer Services away from Benefits and towards other service users did not increase the total cost of those services;
- (2) That the Board should be more ambitious in its setting of economic targets for the Review and work towards a benchmark that reflected the best of those local authorities with similar ambitions.

Asset Management Framework

- (1) That the Board should agree to affirm its commitment to providing good and sustainable budgets to tackle the maintenance backlog and investment in order to provide for the most effective use of the Council's assets and that each political group should support this within their own budget proposals;
- (2) That the Board should set a target in the Asset Management Framework of a 5% rate of return on investment assets.

Housing Revenue Account Business Plan

- (1) To review as a matter of urgency the Council's current policy and partnerships for rent debt and debt advice management in order to ensure that the Council has in place the resources and systems to support tenants, and otherwise to do all the Council can to avoid or contain debt;
- (2) That the Housing Fundamental Service Review should aim for clear value for money targets and ambitions so that robust and transparent delivery could be achieved;
- (3) In the context of co-regulation and performance management, to take all opportunities to ensure that the Housing Service offered represented good value for money when compared to the best and that management costs per dwelling be set in comparable terms.

Corporate Plan Performance

- (1) That the information presented for the Corporate Plan targets should represent the accurate position at the point of measurement.

Partnership Working and increased public involvement in decision making

- (1) That an extension to the performance reporting framework that was already in place around the Corporate Plan be developed to show up to 12 targets from partnership action plans that were specific to the City and contributed to or directly delivered the Council's corporate priorities and to report to members twice yearly on progress;
- (2) That Scrutiny members should have early access to the organisational forward planning of the Policy Framework and strategies so they are clear on development and progress;
- (3) To agree that Councillor Wilkinson should take the lead on Scrutiny involvement in the Oxford Strategic Partnership refresh;
- (4) To agree that a Scrutiny member should 'shadow' the Board member engaged in the Health and Well Being Partnership;
- (5) That a quarterly newsletter on partnership working be produced for residents' groups and other interested parties.

8 February meeting

The Finance and Performance Panel of the Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee submitted two reports as follows:-

- Response to the 2012/13 Budget (item 74 refers)
- Response to 3rd Quarter Performance data (item 78 refers).

Councillor Seamons, on behalf of the Panel, highlighted a number of recommendations which are set out in full below along with the response of the Board Member.

Budget report

Recommendation 1

Based on organisational performance, to reduce the contingency set against the non delivery of all budget reductions and increases in income to 50% for those categorised as high risk.

Response - Whilst the Council has delivered significant savings in 11/12 it is no guarantee of future delivery. Indeed it could be argued that in the context of a four year MTFs, the easier savings were delivered first. It is also the case that less than 10% of the savings/additional income proposals have been classified as high risk, therefore reducing the contingency as suggested

would not release significant funds (£209k over the four year period, £59k in 2012/13), hence it is proposed that rather than reduce the contingency provision at this stage, all contingencies continue to be reviewed on an annual basis as part of the MTFS refresh process.

Recommendation 2

To publish to the RG the model used to produce the homelessness contingency along with what it is likely to be spent on if needed.

Response - Agreed. However, it should be noted that this is an area of uncertainty and this is based on our best estimate of what might happen. We will be keeping the situation under review.

Recommendation 3

To reclassify to low risk the new income in Direct Services in 15/16 and Environmental Development from 13/14 onwards.

Response - The income proposal in relation to Direct Services is dependent on the migration from Cowley Marsh and Horspath Road depots to a single integrated site. Having done initial site investigation, options for relocation are limited and feasibility work is only just commencing. It is therefore too early to say whether the move is achievable within the timescale and hence the additional income deliverable. For these reasons it remains high risk. The income proposal in Environmental Development relates to new income streams from fee from fault, new local licensing and taxi fixed penalty notices of around £50k in total. As these income streams are not yet 'tried and tested' a high amount of risk is considered appropriate

Recommendation 4

To see as soon as possible the detail of the models that have been used to produce the budget adjustments for the withdrawal of the housing benefit administration grant and the service requirement to be assured that they complement each other

Response - Agreed. However, it should be noted that the DWP have not yet outlined in detail the operation and transition arrangements for the new scheme. Hence this is our best estimate of what might happen. We will be keeping the situation under review and it is likely to change.

Recommendation 5

To consider in the coming year the affects on the customer service outlet and the call centre of the transfer of benefits to the DWP. To reflect this in future budgets.

Response - Agreed.

Recommendation 6

To maintain an open mind on the administration of the Council Tax benefit scheme to ensure that nothing is ruled out and the best possible value for money is achieved.

Response - Agreed. Officers will be working up proposals during the course of the year for member consideration. At this stage no detailed guidance has been issued by the government. However, the administration is clear that the aim of the scheme will be to minimise the increase in poverty caused by the cut to council tax benefit in Oxford.

Recommendation 7

To express disappointment that partners are not contributing to the upfront costs of the delivery of the Olympic Torch Celebration and ask the Board Member to raise this at least with the 2 Universities and the County Council.

Response - The County Council are contributing to the Olympic Torch Celebration through 'benefits in kind' for instance repairs to pot holes and road closures. Thames Valley Police are paying for the deployment of police for the event. Oxford University are organising and paying for the 'torch leaving' event.

Recommendation 8

To request that the Board Member considers with the RG information being prepared by officers on apprenticeships and to decide if the scheme as currently outlined presents the best opportunities for employment and training for young people in the City.

Response - We note Scrutiny's points on this, and will look to maximise the impact of the proposed scheme for young people in the City. Officers have been asked to work up papers and present options to maximise the outcomes from the apprenticeships, educational attainment and youth services funding.

Recommendation 9

For the RG to review the broad scoping of the Educational Attainment Improvement Project as soon as possible (April/May?) and in particular the mechanisms for focus and project selection as soon as they are available.

Response - Agreed.

Recommendation 10

To review at the end of the first year the investments made by the City Council and those made by the County Council in City Schools alongside progress against expected outcomes/milestones.

Response - Response - Agreed. However, at the end of the first year data will be limited in terms of outcomes.

Recommendation 11

For the RG to review the broad scoping of the Youth Services Provision as soon as possible (April/May?) and the detailed mechanisms for focus and project delivery as soon as this is available.

Response - We will look to involve Scrutiny as soon as possible in this work.

Recommendation 12

That a more simplistic approach is taken to the spending of money for free swimming rather than the complex measures and considerations of health and wellbeing discussed. The RG suggestion is that the money is used to teach “x” number of children from areas of deprivation to swim confidently who would otherwise not learn.

Response - Agreed. We will be advised by officers on an appropriate target.

Recommendation 13

For the organisation to consider all new investments as they relate to regeneration and young people together to provide for a coordinated steer, efficient use of resources and sound governance arrangements.

Response - All work of Oxford City Council should be coordinated, have sound governance and use resources efficiently. However, these are separate pieces of work being delivered by different sections of organisation so there will not be a single, detailed “project plan”.

Recommendation 14

For scrutiny to be part of arrangements to monitor delivery and outcomes.

Response - The ongoing input of Scrutiny in monitoring our ambitious plans to improve attainment by and provision for young people in Oxford will be welcome.

Performance Report

Recommendation 1

For the apprenticeship target to be rethought to include a reflection of the opportunities provided to City residents. To consider giving a target to each Service Head rather than leave delivery centrally.

Recommendation 2

To reconsider the mechanism used to measure the number of people volunteering in Oxford possibly in conjunction with our neighbouring authorities and the voluntary sector.

Recommendation 3

To reconsider the method used to measure all environmental outcomes so that they adequately and fairly reflect the views across all wards. To consider doing this through locally set panels and surveys.

Recommendation 4

To ensure that measures of customer satisfaction in future include those using the web. To consider a range of methods throughout the year that may combined to provide a more accurate and useful customer view.

Recommendation 5

To reset the target to measure the use of utilities in leisure centres to a weighted measure per customer.

Recommendation 6

To reset the target that measures complaints to one that reflects response and progress.

Recommendation 7

To reconsider all the financial targets set to ensure they are not duplicated elsewhere and are expressed in the most useful terms.

Recommendation 8

To take out all strategy milestone measures within the Service Framework and if appropriate replace these with measures against the key outcomes from strategies.

Recommendation 9

To include in the Corporate Performance Framework for 2012/13 onwards outcome measures that reflect the expectations of the new budget investments in young people.

The Board agreed all of the performance recommendations 1-9.