

To: Executive Board – 20 February 2006

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS AND REPORTS

Oxford Health Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee – 19 January 2006

72. SMOKING BAN

The Environmental Health Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended), concerning the results of a recent public consultation exercise about a smoking ban in Oxford. The Sub Committee welcomed Natalie Child (Consultation Officer, Oxford City Council), who attended the meeting to present this report to the Sub Committee.

Ms Child informed the Committee that 1,147 people had responded to the survey, 90% of whom supported the idea of a whole or partial smoking ban, particularly in the workplace. Key bodies such as the Oxford City PCT had also been consulted, and the PCT had been particularly supportive of a smoking ban.

It was noted that there had been (and still was) considerable controversy within Parliament over the concept of a whole or partial ban. It was acknowledged that there would be enforcement difficulties whichever route was chosen, but some useful points had been drawn from the consultation exercise, and it had given the people of Oxford a chance to air their views.

Resolved:-

- (1) That the following proposals be RECOMMENDED to Oxford City Council's Executive Board:-
 - (a) that Oxford publicly supports Government proposals to restrict smoking in public places;
 - (b) that a further report be produced concerning the resource implications of a ban when the legislation was finalised and became a reality;
 - (c) that consideration be given to the request that local businesses affected by the finalised legislation would need support, information and guidance from Oxford City Council to help them to understand the details and how it would be enforced.
- (2) To ask the Environmental Health Business Manager to investigate and report back on the suggestion made in his report concerning the agreement of public houses to a voluntary ban on smoking prior to national legislation being introduced.

The report considered by the Scrutiny Committee is attached – page 4.7.

73. BENEFITS IN PRACTICE – FUNDING FOR 2006/2007

The Sub Committee welcomed David Scott (Oxford Citizens' Advice Bureau) and Jim Vincent (Legal Services Commission) who had attended the meeting to present the Benefits in Practice scheme to members. A briefing note giving some background information about this scheme had been submitted (now appended) before the meeting.

The Benefits in Practice scheme enabled people to receive benefits advice and assistance at GP's surgeries, and had gained over £550,000 in benefits and grants for clients within the past year. The Council had supported the scheme in the past, and it was pointed out that every £1 given by Oxford City Council enabled £7.50 to be obtained for people who used the service. Demand for benefit advice and help far outstripped supply, but research had shown that any benefit gained went back five-fold into the local community. The Benefits in Practice scheme made a big difference to peoples' lives. Money had been promised from the Oxford City PCT and the Legal Services Commission, and it was now hoped that Oxford City Council would be willing to follow suit.

Resolved:-

- (1) To thank Mr Scott and Mr Vincent for their attendance and informative presentation;
- (2) To RECOMMEND to the Oxford City Council Executive Board a grant of £20,000 towards the work of Benefits in Practice, and that this funding should be targeted at GP's surgeries in the most deprived areas of the city;
- (3) To ask the Scrutiny Officer to request that the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider a recommendation that the County Council's Cabinet also made a grant to Benefits in Practice;
- (4) To ask that the Neighbourhood Renewal Business Manager arrange a meeting with David Scott in order to discuss the Super Output Areas, with particular reference to social exclusion indices and how these might be addressed.

A report concerning this recommendation, prepared by the Scrutiny Officer, is attached – page 4.15

77. EVENTS STRATEGY AND COMMUNITY AND COUNCIL CORE EVENTS

The Strategic Director, Physical Environment submitted two reports (previously circulated and now appended) which the Committee considered together.

John Wade introduced the reports and confirmed that the Events Strategy was a further element of the overall Leisure Strategy and due for public consultation subject to the approval of the Executive Board. On the Core Events report, Members noted the comments in relation to the Events budget. They also considered the core events which were currently funded by the Council and a number of events which had been previously funded through the Council but for which there was no existing budget provision. Members agreed that in some cases, the Council's role might become more of that of coordinator or enabler of activities taking place rather than the organiser of events. They asked in particular whether more might be done in future years to raise additional revenue through attracting sponsorship for events such as Jazz in the Parks. Members suggested that some local events such as the Eid Lights might be funded by the Area Committees.

Members then considered how they might be able to prioritise those events requiring funding. They noted that there might be a role for Area Committee which would also need to be carefully thought through.

Resolved:

1. To note the Events Strategy
2. To ASK the Executive Board to provide an additional £30k to fund further events in the following order of priority:- Lord Mayor's Parade and Car Free Day; Community Events; Jazz Festival.

The reports considered by the Scrutiny Committee were the same reports that were submitted to the Executive Board on 16 January 2006.

79. WORKPLAN

The Strategy and Review Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated and now appended).

Andrew Davies said that the work on increasing awareness and education on recycling needed to be completed for the April meeting. Agreed to set up a review group comprising of the Chair, Vice-Chair and Councillor Phelps with a view to making an interim report to the March meeting. Andrew said he would contact Justin French-Brooks at WRAP about involvement. The Chair said that the recycling review should take into account best practice in other local authorities.

Councillor Pressel said that she was looking forward to a thorough report on enforcement powers when it was submitted. Also referred to the Audit report on the Oxfordshire Waste Partnership and the potential for integrating other factors such as the Council's plans for recycling and information on waste disposal across the County as well as nationally.

Members commented that they were concerned that the Scrutiny Committee was not being given an opportunity to review and discuss reports with a major impact on Council services, such as the recycling review, before they were considered by the Executive Board. They asked that the Executive Board be made aware of this and to take action to ensure that officers follow the proper process when preparing reports, such as accurate use of the forward plan.

Resolved:

1. To note the workplan as minuted;
2. To ASK the Executive Board ensure that more effective planning takes place when preparing reports to enable effective scrutiny to the benefit of the Council's overall decision making process.

Finance Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday 24th January 2006

86. REVENUES AND BENEFITS – PRELIMINARY COST COMPARISONS

The Revenues and Benefits Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated and now appended).

Paul Warters also gave a presentation concerning the outcome of the exercise.

Resolved:-

- (1) to note:-
 - (a) the preliminary findings of the benchmarking exercise of Housing Benefits;
 - (b) that taking part in the national benchmarking exercise will produce results towards the middle of the year;
 - (c) the recommendations of the Audit Commission report into the administration costs of revenues and benefits;
 - (d) that Revenues and Benefits was one of those business units whose budgets were to be considered by the "Star Chamber";

- (2) to RECOMMEND the Executive Board that:-
 - (a) all of the options set out in the Audit Commission report for reducing costs and improving performance should be considered;
 - (b) once the proposals for assessing value for money have been drawn up and approved, the Revenues and Benefits Business Unit should be one of the first business units to which they are applied;
- (3) to ask the Revenues and Benefits Business Manager to submit a report to the Committee's July meeting concerning the outcome of the national benchmarking exercise.

The report considered by the Scrutiny Committee is attached – page 4.19. The Portfolio Holder (Councillor Dan Paskins) supports the recommendations.

Housing Scrutiny Committee – 25 January 2006

127. SUPPORTING PEOPLE STRATEGIC REVIEW

The Neighbourhood Renewal Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated now appended) which provided information on the decisions made in December 2005 by the Supporting People Commissioning Body with regard to the Supporting People Strategic Reviews.

Councillor David Rundle declared a personal interest, as he was a City Council nominated representative to the Oxford Night Shelter.

Val Johnson introduced the report and said that Supporting People was a Government Programme to fund services supporting vulnerable people in their accommodation. In Oxfordshire this was being provided through a Partnership of Local authorities and Health providers, with the County Council as the lead organisation. She said that all of the partners had to agree on any decisions taken. If there was no agreement between the partners decisions would be taken and implemented by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).

In response to questions Val Johnson said that with regard to the Bromford Floating Support, the Review Group could not finalise an agreement and because of this, 2 options had been presented to the Commissioning body, which had then decided to decommission the service.

Councillor Roberts asked how a £50K cut in the Young People budget would be absorbed in the city. In response Val Johnson said that it was unlikely that the Supporting People Scheme would fund a Foyer Scheme as it was not in the 5-year strategy to increase low level support services for homeless people. She added that the Commissioning Body wanted to see

services for the homeless provided in the other Local Authority areas in Oxfordshire.

Councillor Fooks said that she was concerned that the reviews would result in the loss of funding for some services and even the decommissioning of services and how this would affect the people already receiving support via these services. In response Val Johnson said that there had been a shift in service delivery, however individual services were unlikely to be withdrawn from individuals. She further added that the saving formula did not help Oxfordshire with funding and that consultation was ongoing with regard to this.

It was noted that as a result of the Strategic Reviews, services would be granted 3-year contracts. However, annual funding cuts of 5% had to be absorbed, with a 50% reduction in funding from £21.1m in the long term having to be met.

Councillor Turner said that the Government had been lobbied with regard to the funding issues, however it was difficult to persuade the more rural Local authorities in Oxfordshire of the issues facing Oxford City.

The Committee agreed:

- (a) To welcome and support the report;
- (b) To thank Val Johnson and Lisa Watson for their work;
- (c) To INFORM the Executive Board:
 - (i) of the Committee's extreme concern about the increase in the funding cuts in the medium to long term;
 - (ii) that the funding formula was still wrong for Oxfordshire and Oxford;
 - (iii) that despite the cuts in funding the Committee was pleased to see that the City Council was attempting to support good causes and services when no-longer provided by the Supporting People scheme (such as the Temporary Accommodation Managers)
 - (iv) that the call-in was not upheld.

A report concerning this recommendation prepared by the Neighbourhood Renewal Business Manager is attached – page 4.25.