

VALUE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 21 June 2011

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Brown, Seamons (Vice-Chair), Abbasi, Gotch, Keen, McCready, Rowley, Royce, Sanders, Sinclair, Van Nooijen and Williams.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Alec Dubberley (Democratic Services Officer), Helen Bishop (Head of Customer Services), Michael Crofton-Briggs (Head of City Development), Simon Howick (Head of People and Equalities), Hagan Lewisman (City Leisure) and Tim Sadler (Executive Director for City Services)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR 2011/12 COUNCIL YEAR

Councillor Brown was elected as Chair for the 2011/12 Council year.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR FOR 2011/12 COUNCIL YEAR

Councillor Seamons was elected as Vice-Chair for the 2011/12 Council year.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Humberstone and Malik.

Councillors Sanders and Sinclair attended as substitutes.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

5. STANDING ITEM: REPORT BACK ON THE COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CITY EXECUTIVE BOARD AND ON MATTERS OF INTEREST TO THE COMMITTEE

The Committee noted the recommendations made to the Executive Board and the response received.

6. DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANISATION - BUSINESS CASE

The Head of City Development submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) presenting the business case for the Destination Management Organisation set up to manage the tourism offer in Oxfordshire.

Michael Crofton-Briggs introduced the report reminding the Committee that the City Council had seconded its Tourist Information Centre staff to the new venture for a period of two years. The following points were raised in discussion:-

- It was noted that core funding from the City Council would reduce by 10% over the next four years and that the company would not be forecasting to make a profit due to its status as a not for profit company.
- The figures quoted in the business plan are best assumptions as there was no baseline data to enable an accurate forecast.
- The County Council and other Oxfordshire districts were also providing core funding although the exact amounts were still the subject of negotiations. There was no financial commitment from the City Council beyond the 4th year of the venture.
- The risk to the City Council, beyond the initial grant investment, was small with no further liability placed on the City Council. Seconded staff would return to being employed by the City Council should the venture fail.
- Buy in from the Oxfordshire tourism trade was progressing well although as the venture becomes more established, with a demonstrable track record, buy in should naturally increase.

Resolved to:-

- 1) Note the content of the business plan and financial information
- 2) Request that a progress report on the venture is brought before the Committee in one year.

7. PERFORMANCE REPORTING

The Head of Business Improvement submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) which contained non-financial performance monitoring information for Quarter 4 of the last financial year as well as the full year results.

Also submitted was a report from the Head of People and Equalities giving information on staff days lost to sickness during the some period.

Councillor Price presented the report highlighting the following information:-

- 82% of targets were met or exceeded most notably the number of days lost to sickness and reduced household waste sent to landfill.
- Targets that were not achieved included the percentage of household waste that was recycled and number of affordable homes provided. It was recognised that the affordable homes target would be very difficult to achieve and the authority deliberately set an ambitious target. A flats recycling officer had been employed in the hope of increasing the recycling rate right across the City.

The Committee was disappointed that target CP16.10, customers getting through first time on the telephone, was not achieved despite the allocation of extra resources. The Head of Customer Services explained that demand for the call centre had consistently increased over the past year with an extra twenty

thousand calls relating to the new recycling scheme being taken as well as spikes in demand during the cold winter weather. Measures to improve the performance had been taken including staff training and alterations to shift patterns, improved call handling technology. Further improvements were expected following the merging of two call centres into one. Another way to improve performance was to make more services available online which would be happening soon.

Resolved to note the report in particular the overall pleasing performance levels across the Council.

8. PROVISIONAL OUTTURN REPORT 2010/11

The Head of Finance submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) setting out the forecast outturn position for the Council's Capital and Revenue budgets for the year ended 31st March 2011 compared to the approved budget. In addition it provided explanations for variances from the outturn reported as at 28 February 2011.

The Head of Finance introduced the report highlighting that the general fund had a more favourable than expected surplus resulting in an additional transfer to the severance and HR reserve. He added that a one off income of recovered VAT of approximately £800,000 was paid during the year. Other reasons for pressure on the budget included slippage as a result of the appointed contractor for the Old Fire Station project going into administration.

Members thanked the Head of Finance for presenting the information in an easy to understand format. The Committee expressed some concern in the following areas:-

- A high level of unachieved savings seemed to account for a large amount of the overspend in some areas
- There was a particularly high level of underspend in Housing and Communities which would not be repeated in future years once staff posts were filled.
- There was an apparent underspend on the staff training budget.

Resolved to note the report and pass the above comment to the meeting of the City Executive Board on 22 June.

9. PROGRESS ON LEISURE MANAGEMENT CONTRACT 2010/11

The Head of City Leisure submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) providing a performance update for the leisure management contract.

Councillor Coulter, Board Member for Leisure, picked out the following points from the report:-

- Participation at all sites had increased, particularly at Barton where some of the most vulnerable members of the community were getting access to leisure provision.
- A reduced subsidy per user and an increase in customer satisfaction had been recorded as well as an overall reduction in Carbon emissions.
- The level of staff satisfaction at leisure centres was of concern.

In response to this the Committee raised the following points:-

- For future reports, a breakdown of subsidy per user per site would be useful to ascertain the true cost of the services provided. This was also true for levels of carbon emissions.
- Concern was expressed regarding the government's decision to withdraw free swimming for children. Take up of the free sessions provided locally had fallen since the national scheme was abolished.
- In response to a question about increased fees in response to a VAT rise, it was explained that although leisure admission charges were not subject to VAT, goods and services paid for at leisure centres were. This resulted in higher operating costs which unfortunately had to be passed on to leisure users.
- The Committee asked for the graphs to be presented in a more uniform way so that trends could be more easily identified.

Resolved to:-

- 1) Request that information on subsidy cost per user per centre as well as carbon emission for each site for each user be provided in future reports; and
- 2) Request that graphs submitted to future meetings be presented in a more meaningful way.

10. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee agreed to schedule a further informal meeting to agree a work programme for the forthcoming council year.

11. MINUTES

Resolved to approve, as a correct record, the minutes of the meeting held on 5 April 2011.

12. TIMES AND DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Resolved to set the start time for future meetings to 6 pm on the following dates:-

12 September 2011
21 November 2011
30 January 2012
26 March 2012

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 7.11 pm