

CITY EXECUTIVE BOARD

Wednesday 10 September 2014

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Price (Chair), Turner (Deputy Leader), Sinclair, Simm, Brown, Kennedy, Rowley, Seamons, Tanner and Simmons.

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Craig Simmons (Chair of Scrutiny Committee)

OFFICERS PRESENT: Peter Sloman (Chief Executive), David Edwards (Executive Director City Regeneration and Housing), Tim Sadler (Executive Director Community Services), Jackie Yates (Executive Director Organisational Development and Corporate Services), Nigel Kennedy (Head of Finance), Helen Bishop (Head of Customer Services), Lindsay Cane (Law and Governance) and Sarah Claridge (Committee and Member Services Officer)

39. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received

41. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Full written questions with answers were distributed as a supplement before the meeting. Questions were asked on:

1. Commissioning Advice Services 2015-18 (minute 45) by Sue Tanner (Rose Hill & Donnington Advice Centre) and Fran Bennett (Agnes Smith Advice Centre)
2. Integrated Performance Report Quarter 1 2014/15 (minute 47) by Nigel Gibson

The Board noted the public questions.

42. COUNCILLOR ADDRESSES ON ANY ITEM FOR DECISION ON THE BOARD'S AGENDA

No Councillors addressed the Board.

43. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORTS

The Scrutiny Committee's recommendations on the Integrated Performance Report for Quarter 1 2014/15 (minute 47), Treasury Management Annual Report (minute 48), Oxford Growth Board (minute 49) and Business in the Community – Working in Partnership (minute 50) were discussed during the Board's discussion of the items.

44. DESIGNATION OF HEADINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM

The Head of City Development submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) which detailed the designation of the Headington Neighbourhood Forum.

Cllr Price, Executive Board Member for Corporate Strategy, Economic Development and Planning presented the report

The City Executive Board resolved to designate the proposed Headington Neighbourhood Forum as a neighbourhood forum for the Headington Neighbourhood Area.

45. COMMISSIONING ADVICE SERVICES 2015-18

The Head of Customer Services submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) which sought approval of a new service specification for commissioning advice services.

Cllr Susan Brown, Executive Board Member for Customer Services and Social Inclusion presented the report.

The Head of Customer Services outlined one change to the report, in paragraph 12; the first sentence should read "For 2015/16 the priority area will be in line with the Council's Financial Inclusion Strategy"

Cllr Tanner said the discussion should focus on teaching people how to spend money well rather than telling them how to spend their money. Personal catastrophe causes people to get into debt rather than financial mismanagement.

Cllr Seamons asked how the Board was to monitor the outcomes. Cllr Price said a monitoring report would come back to CEB once the priority areas and measures had been agreed.

The City Executive Board resolved to:

1. Approve the specification for commissioning advice services as set out in Appendix 1.
2. Agree that the identification of the priority area to be included in the service specification together with the associated outcomes and measures are delegated to the portfolio holder for Customer Services and Social Inclusion and the Head of Customer Services to agree with the commissioned advice agencies prior to 1 October 2014.

46. AWARD OF CONTRACT FOR A NEW TELEPHONY SOLUTION

The Head of Business Improvement and Technology submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) which will deliver the telephony savings assumed within the Medium Term Financial Plan and request delegated authority to award a contract to deliver the solution.

Cllr Turner, Executive Board Member for Finance, Asset Management and Public Health presented the report. He explained it would be an effective cost saving measure which would free up funding for other projects.

The City Executive Board resolved to give project approval and delegated authority to the Director of Organisational Development and Corporate Services to award a new telephony contract.

47. INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 1 2014/15

The Heads of Finance and Business Improvement and Technology submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) which detailed the Council's finances, risk and performance as at the end of Quarter 1, 30th June 2014.

Cllr Turner, Executive Board Member for Finance, Asset Management and Public Health presented the report. His response to the scrutiny report is attached.

Cllr Simmons, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee highlighted the loss of subsidy related to benefit over payments. The Head of Customer Services said she had already taken action to avoid claw back and that the position have been adversely affected by the removal of council tax benefit from the calculations. This will be common to all local authorities.

Cllr Price said that the separation of the Council tax benefit from the housing benefit made the figures appear worse than they actually were. The benefit team's performance was the best it had ever been.

The Blackbird Leys Swimming Pool is within budget and is on target for completion by the end of the year, which is pleasing.

The City Executive Board resolved to:

- a. Note the projected outturn for finance and performance as at the end of the first quarter of 2014/15 and also the risk position as at 30th June 2014;
- b. Recommend to Council the approval of a £160,000 capital investment in a Heavy Goods Vehicle Testing Facility.
- c. Recommend to Council the bringing forward of a £2 million capital investment in Homelessness Property acquisitions from 2015/16 to 2014/15 with the balance of the £10 million budget being profiled £2 million each year over four years from 2015/16.

48. TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT

The Head of Finance submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) which detailed the Council's treasury management activity and performance for 2013/2014.

Cllr Turner, Executive Board Member for Finance, Asset Management and Public Health presented the report. He highlighted the subject of ethical investments to comply with Council's recommendation. His response to the Scrutiny Committee's report is attached.

Cllr Simmons, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee asked the Board to consider a more flexible approach to the capital programme to avoid slippage. A delay in one programme shouldn't cause a delay in other programmes.

Cllr Price said it was great news that the Council should get all its investments back from the Icelandic banks.

The Board noted that the Total Borrowed estimate for 31 March 2014 in Table 5 of the report should be £249,000M not £238,000M.

The City Executive Board resolved to note the report.

49. OXFORDSHIRE GROWTH BOARD

The Head of Executive Director of City Regeneration and Housing submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) which detailed the terms of reference of the Oxfordshire Growth Board and to make an appointment to it.

Cllr Price, Executive Board Member for Corporate Strategy, Economic Development and Planning presented the report. He explained that the Board would be a joint committee under the Local Government Act 1972 and would therefore comply with all meeting requirements of the act (like any other council committee) and would be open to the public. Not all partners have equal status; the local authorities have full voting rights while the University and other partners are non-voting representatives. Oxford University is heavily engaged in the partnership while other partners are less so.

Cllr Simmons, Chair of Scrutiny Committee outlined Scrutiny's concerns around getting timely access to the Growth Board's agendas so that effective scrutiny work could be done.

The Chief Executive said that West Oxfordshire District Council is clerking the meetings of the Growth Board and will be publishing the agendas and minutes on their website. He would ask for a list of proposed meeting dates to be presented to members and for a link to the Growth Board's agendas to be added to the Council's website.

Cllr Tanner congratulated Cllr Price and the officers on the work done. He asked how transparent the Board was going to be. It was agreed that keeping all members informed of Growth Board decisions was critical to enabling proper scrutiny.

Cllr Brown asked for a members' briefing on how the Growth Board fits with other partnership bodies and how members could stay informed and engage with decisions being made.

The City Executive Board resolved to:

1. Approve the City Council becoming a member of the Oxfordshire Growth Joint Board and the draft Terms of Reference appended to this report.

2. Appoint the Leader of the Council as the City Council's representative on the Board and any other Executive Member as substitute, to be determined by the Leader of the Council.

50. BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY - WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

The Head of Human Resources and Facilities submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) which detailed the background to the development of the Business in the Community programme which seeks to foster business links with Oxford cluster schools.

Cllr Price, Executive Board Member for Corporate Strategy, Economic Development and Planning presented the report.

Cllr Simmons, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee presented the Scrutiny report. He said that Scrutiny thought it was an excellent scheme and highlighted the focus on career advice.

Cllr Simms raised the concern of civics not being taught in schools and the reluctance of young people to vote. She asked whether this scheme could be a way to engage young people in civics and introduce them to how local/ central government operated.

Cllr Brown was concerned that some schools had stopped offering career advice and she endorsed any scheme that would offer career advice to young people.

Cllr Price said that the County's skills deal was looking into re-creating an Oxford Career Scheme.

The City Executive Board resolved to endorse the partnership connection with Cherwell School under the Business in the Community initiative.

51. FUTURE ITEMS

Nothing was raised under this item.

52. MINUTES

The Board resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2014 as a true and accurate record.

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 5.42 pm

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To: City Executive Board

Date: 10 September 2014

Report of: Scrutiny Finance Panel

Title of Report: Budget Monitoring 2014/15 – Quarter 1

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To report the conclusions and recommendations of the Scrutiny Finance Panel on the Budget Monitoring 2014/15 – Quarter 1 report.

Key decision? No

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Simmons

Executive lead member: Councillor Turner

Policy Framework: Improving value for money and service performance

Recommendations: For the City Executive Board to say if it agrees or disagrees with the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1

That urgent action is taken to avoid a loss of subsidy relating to the overpayment of benefits.

Recommendation 2

If necessary to avoid slippage, a flexible approach should be taken to spending the £2m investment in Homelessness Property Acquisitions in 2014/2015. This could include investing in social housing instead.

Recommendation 3

The premises for the heavy vehicle testing facility should be flexible enough that it can be used for other purposes in the event that the testing facility is not successful.

Recommendation 4

The capital programme should be a red risk in performance reports until the new capital gateway process proven to be effective.

Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Finance panel considered the Budget Monitoring 2014/15 – Quarter 1 report. The Panel would like to thank Bill Lewis and Anna Winship for supporting this discussion. The Panel agreed the following conclusions and recommendations.

Conclusions and recommendations

2. The overall financial position is general positive but a £257k overspend relating to the Local Cost of Benefits is a particular concern.

Recommendation 1

That urgent action is taken to avoid a loss of subsidy relating to the overpayment of benefits.

3. High staff turnover is a concern in areas where the Council is losing skilled and experienced staff and the costs of replacing them are significant.
4. The rephrasing of the investment in homelessness property acquisitions is welcome but the possibility of slippage is a concern. The £2m should be spent in the current financial year and a flexible approach should be taken in order to avoid slippage, such as by spending on social housing instead.

Recommendation 2

If necessary to avoid slippage, a flexible approach should be taken to spending the £2m investment in Homelessness Property Acquisitions in 2014/2015. This could include investing in social housing instead.

5. The proposal to invest £160k in a heavy goods testing facility is welcome. The premises should be flexible enough to be used for other purposes in future in the event that the testing facility is not successful.

Recommendation 3

The premises for the heavy vehicle testing facility should be flexible enough that it can be used for other purposes in the event that the testing facility is not successful.

6. The capital programme should be a red risk in performance reports until the new capital gateway process has been implemented and proven to be effective.

Recommendation 4

The capital programme should be a red risk in performance reports until the new capital gateway process proven to be effective.

Director and Board Member Comments

Recommendation 1 – Officers have put an action plan in place to address this issue and managers are reviewing performance on a weekly basis. It is worth noting however, that since the removal of Council Tax Benefit from the subsidy calculation the thresholds in cash terms for local authority error are more stringent than previously.

Recommendation 2 – It is unlikely that the procurement of social housing could be delivered within a shorter timeline than the procurement of homelessness accommodation. However, the sentiment in terms of flexibility is noted.

Recommendation 3 – Currently there is only one heavy vehicle testing facility within Oxfordshire at Bicester. It is extremely busy and the Council currently takes its vehicles to Newbury or Gloucestershire to be tested due to wait times. Soft market testing with local businesses indicates there is demand for a new facility within the City and the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency are also supportive of the project. Due to current lack of provision it is unlikely the project will be unsuccessful.

Recommendation 4 - The Council has an agreed Risk Management Framework which allocates a Red, Amber or Green status dependant on the respective impact and probability of a risk occurring. This methodology is applied to all identified risks.

Name and contact details of author:-

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List of background papers: None

Version number: 1

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To: City Executive Board

Date: 10 September 2014

Report of: Scrutiny Finance Panel

Title of Report: Treasury Management

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present conclusions and recommendations of the Scrutiny Finance Panel on Treasury Management.

Key decision? No

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Simmons

Executive lead member: Councillor Turner

Policy Framework: Treasury Management Strategy

Recommendation: For the City Executive Board to say if it agrees or disagrees with the following recommendation:

Recommendation

That consideration is given to how the capital process can be made more flexible so that approved projects can be brought forward to mitigate slippage elsewhere in the programme.

Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Finance panel considered the Treasury Management Annual Report 2013/2014 and Treasury Management Performance 2014/15 – Quarter 1. The Panel would like to thank Anna Winship for supporting this discussion.
2. The Panel was pleased to note that the overall treasury management position remains healthy, with good performance against most prudential indicators. The Panel agreed the following conclusions and recommendation.

Conclusions and recommendation

3. Where financial information was presented as a percentage change, the context should also be provided. Officers agreed to take this point on board.
4. High rates of return from the CCLA fund were welcome although transaction costs are also high. Caution against withdrawal early
5. The policy decision of the Co-operative Bank not to renew contracts with local authority customers was regrettable. The Panel received assurances that ethical policies and strategies were being considered as part of the procurement process for a new banking provider.
6. The extent of capital slippage in 2013/2014 and early indications of further slippage in 2014/2015 was a big concern. The Panel wished to see a more flexible approach to capital where projects can be brought forward to mitigate slippage elsewhere in the programme.
7. The focus on reviewing the capital process was endorsed and the Panel agreed to review progress at its meeting in January 2015.

Recommendation

That consideration is given to how the capital process can be made more flexible so that approved projects can be brought forward to mitigate slippage elsewhere in the programme.

Director and Board Member Comments

Officers will and do where possible substitute schemes within the existing Programme to mitigate slippage where it is within approved delegation limits. Where the value of a scheme exceeds officer delegation limits a recommendation will be made to members.

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List of background papers: None

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