

CITY EXECUTIVE BOARD

Thursday 12 March 2015

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

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

OFFICERS PRESENT: Peter Sloman (Chief Executive), Tim Sadler (Executive Director Community Services), Jackie Yates (Executive Director Organisational Development and Corporate Services), Peter McQuitty (Head of Policy, Culture and Communications), Shaibur Rahman (Housing and Communities), Lindsay Cane (Law and Governance) and Sarah Claridge (Committee Services Officer)

142. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Nigel Kennedy, Head of Finance.

143. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

144. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Full written questions with answers were distributed as a supplement before the meeting.

The City Executive Board noted the public questions.

145. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORTS

The following Scrutiny Committee reports were discussed during the agenda item.

Discretionary Housing Payment Policy (minute 148)
Approval of the Culture Strategy 2015-18 (minute 152)

146. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT_ OXFORD LIVING WAGE

The Scrutiny Officer submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) which detailed comments from the Scrutiny Committee.

Cllr Price updated the Board on the further response to recommendation 2. Which read:

The Council motion which committed us to the LW, proposed a £7 OLW against the £7.20 LLW, taking account of the work undertaken by the original research by Loughborough University and the Mayor of London and using Oxford housing and transport data. That relationship was subsequently translated into a 95% figure, in order to ensure that the OLW was maintained in line with a figure for the LLW that was well researched and supported by time series evidence. This percentage link makes the administration of the OLW straightforward and avoids the need for complex research to be undertaken locally at regular intervals.

The City Executive Board resolved to AGREE

1. That the City Council surveys all suppliers to measure compliance with paying the Oxford Living Wage.
2. That the City Council reviews whether the Oxford Living Wage should continue to be set at 95% of the London Living Wage.
3. That the City Council seeks to increase apprentice pay in the next budget round.
4. That the City Council actively explores the merits of incentivising businesses to pay the Oxford Living Wage through offering business rate discounts.
5. That the City Council seeks to be more pro-active in engaging with employers and encouraging them to pay the Oxford Living Wage. This could also involve raising the profile of the Oxford Living Wage on the City Council website and listing employers that have committed to paying it.

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

Cllr Fooks addressed the Board on the following items:

Item 6: Discretionary Housing Payment Policy (minutes 148)

Item 7: Homelessness Grants Allocation (minute 150)

Item 10: Integrated Performance Report Quarter 3 2014/15 (minute 154)

Her comments were addressed during the discussion of each item.

148. DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENT POLICY

The Head of Customer Services has submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) which detailed the revised Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) Policy

Cllr Brown, Board Member for Customer Services and Social Inclusion presented the report. She explained that the Council had received fewer applications for DHP as fewer people were able to afford to live in Oxford. This was a failure of the national policy which didn't vary the amount of grant available depending on local housing prices.

The government's DHP grant had reduced significantly which meant the Council had introduced conditionality to its policy to prioritise need. The effects of this policy change will be monitored and an update report will be presented to the Board in 6 months.

Cllr Fooks noted that the Council had returned DHP grant money to the government in both the previous two years because it had not spend it. She disagreed with the policy change and the argument that prioritisation of need was needed to discourage welfare dependency. She felt that if the money was available the Council should spend it to help people.

Cllr Turner agreed that the Council shouldn't have excess money in contingencies; he believed that all Councillors agreed with the policy and it was the amount of funds allocated to DHP payments which was causing disagreement. It was the government's decoupling of rents from money available in housing allowance which was at fault.

The Chief Executive explained that officers had been very proactive in helping people through the welfare reform programmes. If there is a need, the council will meet it from the homelessness contingency budget.

Cllr Simmons said the Scrutiny Committee had requested a review report in a few months' time. He reminded the Board that the government allowed the Council to spend up to 2.5 times the government grant - to top up its DHP grant.

Cllr Brown said the Council had to be cautious as we don't know the amount the government grant will be in the future.

The City Executive Board resolved to

1. APPROVE the revised Discretionary Housing Payment Policy at Appendix 1
2. AGREE that an update report be presented to the Board at the end of quarter 2 (if not sooner) reviewing the Council's Discretionary Housing Payment Policy and its impact on the people of Oxford.

149. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT_ DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS POLICY

The Scrutiny Officer submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) which detailed comments from the Scrutiny Committee on the Discretionary Housing Payment Policy

Cllr Simmons, Chair of Scrutiny Committee presented the report. He explained the reason for the minority view on the amount allocated in the budget for DHP. Council had allocated more money to DHP payments in the draft budget, (before the government had announced its reduction in the DHP grant) than had been agreed in the final budget. A minority of the Scrutiny Committee felt that the extra money should be reinstated.

Cllr Price said the DHP policy would be continually monitored and if more support was needed than there was money available in the homelessness contingency grant.

The City Executive Board resolved to APPROVE the revised Discretionary Housing Payment Policy.

150. HOMELESSNESS GRANTS ALLOCATION

The Head of Housing and Property submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) which detailed the allocation of homelessness prevention funds with the purpose of meeting the objectives of the homelessness strategy.

Cllr Seamons, Board member for Housing and Estate Regeneration presented the report. He explained that the report was proposing ring fencing funds for single person homelessness (which is a non-statutory responsibility of the Council) to protect these vulnerable people.

The Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Manager explained that Oxfordshire County Council (the statutory authority responsible for single person homelessness) was planning to take full responsibility for the funding of pathway and the No Second Night Out (NSNO) hub from 2016/17. This will mean the City Council will no longer be asked to part fund these programmes.

The Board was concerned with the County's proposal as the County's housing related support grant was not ring-fenced to address single person homelessness.

Cllr Fooks welcomed the proposed funding for the prevention of eviction of young people. The money is available to keep under 25s in accommodation by paying their rent or arrears when necessary.

The City Executive Board resolved to:

1. ALLOCATE the full sum of the funds associated with 'Preventing Homelessness Grant' to the Homelessness budget, the majority of which shall commission services to prevent homelessness.
2. AGREE the allocation of the Homelessness Grant Budget for 2015/16 as detailed in paragraph 23.
3. DELEGATE AUTHORITY to the Head of Housing and Property Services in consultation with the Board member for Housing and Estate Regeneration to allocate the balance of the Preventing Homelessness Funds.

151. AWARD OF A SINGLE HOMELESSNESS AND OUTREACH SERVICE

The Head of Housing and Property submitted a report (previously circulated now appended) which sought authorisation to award a contract to deliver the Council's single homeless outreach and assessment service.

Cllr Seamons, Board member for Housing and Estate Regeneration presented the report.

The City Executive Board resolved to AWARD the Single Homeless Outreach and Assessment Service to St Mungo's Broadway for a period of 3 years initially with the possibility of an extension for up to 2 years.

152. APPROVAL OF THE CULTURE STRATEGY 2015-18

The Head of Policy, Culture and Communication has submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) which detailed the development of the draft Culture Strategy 2015 – 18.

Cllr Simms, Board member for Culture and Communications presented the report.

Cllr Sinclair asked if the encouraging words from Oxford University had resulted in any of the colleges making their open spaces available to cultural groups. The Head of Policy, Culture and Communication explained that 6 colleges had agreed to allow cultural groups to use their open spaces free of charges through the University Open Spaces initiative.

The City Executive Board resolved to

1. APPROVE the amended draft Culture Strategy 2015 – 2018 as set out at Appendix 1.
2. RECOMMEND to Council the amended Culture Strategy 2015-2018 for approval.

153. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT_ CULTURE STRATEGY 2015-18

The Scrutiny Officer submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) which detailed comments from the Scrutiny Committee on the Culture Strategy 2015-2018

Cllr Simmons, Chair of Scrutiny Committee presented the report. He elaborated on recommendation 1, the Scrutiny Committee felt the Culture Policy should encourage people from excluded groups to be involved in cultural events as artists as well as the audience.

Cllr Simm, Board member for Culture and Communities agreed to amend the Culture Strategy to include Scrutiny's recommendation 1.

The City Executive Board resolved to APPROVE:

1. That there is an objective to extend cultural opportunities to included communities under priority for culture 2.
2. That the City Council asks Experience Oxfordshire to convene a seminar with elected members.

154. INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 3 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 3, 31 December 2014

Cllr Turner, Board member for Finance, Asset Management and Public Health presented the report. The Council had done better than expected in trading services; he thanked the staff involved for the work done.

In terms of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) there was a slippage in the building of new council homes, the grant for this would be carried forward.

The Capital Programme was also facing slippages, it was a difficult climate for construction and an undersupply of materials was making it harder to get projects completed within budget and on-time. The Rose Hill Community Centre was one project that had taken longer than anticipated to begin.

Cllr Turner explained the proposal to create a property investment fund which would enable the Council to turn one off resources into revenue. There is a range of options of how property should be selected:

- does it have a social use?

- Liquidity

- Degree of return

Council's performance for the quarter was good. Council's CO₂ emissions will improve in the next quarter with the change in swimming pools.

Cllr Fooks said she supported the property portfolio proposal.

She asked how much of the £500,000 equity loan scheme had been taken up?

The Executive Director for Community Services explained that the scheme needed to seek approval to allow existing teachers in Oxford schools to apply. Schools would prefer to retain junior teachers rather than encourage teachers from outside the city. Funding could be used to help teachers pay a deposit for their first home.

Cllr Fooks noted that the lack of affordable homes being built was disappointing. This was due to the economic downturn.

She asked how the corporate lease renewals/rent reviews were progressing.

The Chief Executive explained that the Council was in the process of negotiating rent reviews. It had deliberately missed the deadline in the hope of securing higher rents. Any rents would be backdated.

Cllr Fooks asked why the total value of work as a result of Environmental Development intervention was 20% below target.

Cllr Tanner, Board Member for Cleaner, Greener Oxford, Climate Change and Transport said he would provide a written response outside of the meeting.

The City Executive Board resolved to:

1. NOTE the projected outturn for finance (showing a favourable General Fund position of £1.267 million, a favourable Housing Revenue Account position of £2.565 million and a favourable Capital Position of £3.890 million) and performance as well as the associated risk position as at December 2014;
2. RECOMMEND to Council a supplementary capital budget £200,000 for welfare facilities at Cowley Marsh depot as detailed in paragraph 5;
3. NOTE the risks and potential financial penalties relating to Homes and Communities Agency Grant Funding as outlined in paragraphs 6 and 7; and
4. RECOMMEND to Council that all end of year revenue surpluses from 2014/15 be transferred into a property investment reserve, subject to c) above, in order that the funds can be invested to provide future income streams or to further policy objectives including the allocation of £550,000 in relation to the purchase of the freehold of St.Aldate's Chambers.

155. MINUTES

The Board resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2015 as a true and accurate record.

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 5.55 pm