

# **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Monday 6 October 2014**

**COUNCILLORS PRESENT:** Councillors Simmons (Chair), Coulter, Altaf-Khan, Anwar, Henwood, Hollick, Lloyd-Shogbesan, Upton, Pressel and Hollingsworth,

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Councillor Susan Brown (Customer Services and Social Inclusion), Councillor Pat Kennedy (Educational Attainment and Youth Ambition) and Councillor Scott Seamons (Housing and Estate Regeneration)

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Peter McQuitty (Head of Policy, Culture and Communications), Val Johnson (Policy Team Leader), James Pickering (Welfare Reform Manager), Pat Jones (Committee and Member Services Manager), Andrew Brown (Scrutiny Officer) and Sarah Claridge (Committee and Member Services Officer)

## **23. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR**

Cllr Coulter was appointed chair in Cllr Simmons absence.

## **24. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Hayes, Cllr Fry (substitute Cllr Pressel) and Cllr Darke (substitute Cllr Hollingsworth)

## **25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **26. OXFORD STANDARD REPORT**

The Committee and Member Services Manager presented the Joint Panel's report on the Oxford Standard. Currently the standard of maintenance of council housing is set to achieve the government's Decent Homes Standard, however tenants and councillors wished for a more ambitious standard to be set in Oxford. The Joint Panel has made several recommendations that will embed the Oxford Standard into the developing Asset Management Plan.

The review was conducted by the Housing Panel alongside a panel of Council Tenants. The Scrutiny Committee is asked to comment on the report which will be presented to the City Executive Board in December 2014, alongside the Asset Management Strategy.

Cllr Simmons arrived and took the chair.

Cllr Scott Seamons, Board Member for Housing and Estate Regeneration spoke on the Joint Panel's recommendations. He agreed in principle with all of the recommendations, but said that there was some budget implication that needed to be considered.

The Committee went through the panel's recommendations and made the following comments

Recommendations 1 and 2: Agreed

Recommendation 3: Board Member will review the financial implication but noted that heating and energy efficiency were important –and will set a minimum standard.

In terms of the environment – more work is needed to consult with tenants and determine what they want i.e. cycle provisions etc. Cllr Seamons assured the Committee that a process is in place to progress this work.

Recommendation 4: The Council has lots of information regarding the condition of the housing stock and will review the priorities based on this information.

Recommendation 5: Agreed

Recommendation 6: Agreed that better communication with tenants was needed to explain proposed maintenance programme. It was important to manage the process and define the procedures clearly to tenants.

Recommendation 7: Agreed in principle

Recommendation 8: Need to make the maintenance programme easy and efficient to manage. Encourage tenants to do basic maintenance. Consider the whole life costs of the properties

The Housing Panel have requested 6 monthly progress reports on the action plan.

The Housing and Finance Standing Panels will be reviewing the HRA business plan in a joint meeting later this year as part of the Budget Scrutiny review.

## **27. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT INVESTMENT**

The Head of Policy, Culture and Communications submitted a report (previously circulated now appended) detailing the progress made in schools involved in the Council funded Educational Attainment programme.

Councillor Kennedy, Board Member for Educational Attainment and Youth Ambition presented the report. She explained the main challenges the programme was facing was staff turnover, which required new staff to be re-trained and new Head teachers withdrawing from the KRM programme. However she highlighted that the KRM programme was successful when fully implemented - KRM maths results are substantially above the national average.'

Schools can choose to opt out of the programme, as there cannot be a binding agreement either to join the programme or to adopt it for a minimum period.

It was pointed out that the data in Appendix 1 was misleading as it shows the progress made since the start of the programme in 2012 – however most schools didn't start the programme till April 2013.

The Committee asked how attainment was measured, and heard that this is mostly through SATs and KRM tests.

The Committee would like to have more commentary on why schools chose to leave the programme and the reasons why schools chose not to join.

A further progress report which will include future options, up to date results and moderated SATs will be presented to the Committee in December 2014.

## **28. OXFORD CITY COUNCIL'S EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND PROJECT**

The Welfare Reform Manager and Cllr Brown, Executive Member for Benefits and Social Inclusion presented the report (previously circulated, now appended) which detailed the Council's project to encourage customers affected by the benefit cap back into work. This project is targeted at people living in the private rental sector which is a group the council has not done a lot of engaging with before. It is funded by the European Social Fund.

The Committee welcomed the initiative and requested that any knowledge learnt in engaging with people in the private rental sector be shared across the Council.

This programme does not include housing association tenants.

It is a retrospective report as the funding has already been secured, but approval from CEB is needed as the value of the work exceeds £500,000.

## **29. TOWARDS MENTAL WELLBEING AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN OXFORD.**

The Policy Manager presented the report (previously circulated, now appended) which detailed the proposed action plan for how the Council will support the mental wellbeing of its staff and members. Most of the actions in the plan can be completed within existing budgets.

The Committee went through the action plan and made the following comments: Backbench councillors should be appointed onto the Mental Health and Wellbeing Challenge Panel. However, the Committee raised a concern that this new panel will need officer support which may result in resources being diverted away from other member support services such as Scrutiny.

There were a few actions that hadn't been costed and these needed to be worked out before the budget process started in December 2014.

The Committee felt that service personnel and veterans are important groups who should not be overlooked in efforts to improve mental health and wellbeing in Oxford.

The Committee suggested that the role of ethnic minority groups and faith leaders could also be considered and set out in this action plan.

The Committee agreed not to monitor the implementation of the action plan as this would duplicate the work of the challenge panel.

## **30. CULTURE STRATEGY 2015-18**

The Head of Policy, Culture and Communications presented the report (previously circulated now appended) which detailed the revised Culture Strategy 2015-18. The strategy outlines the Council's vision and priorities in

regards to culture and the arts. The strategy's priorities have been carefully aligned with the Art's Council's objectives to make seeking funding easier.

The Committee made the following comments:

- The Committee felt that the Culture Strategy does not provide the fullest picture of the City's cultural offering. For example, cultural events missing from the strategy included the Oxford Literary Festival, Lieder Festival and the Oxford Punt Festival.
- There needs to be a focus on making sure cultural venues don't shut. Council needs to offer support to cultural venues through the planning and licensing regimes, and this should be reflected in the strategy.
- A request was made to see the list of arts organisations the Council held. The Head of Policy, Culture and Communications will circulate and members are asked to add any missing organisations.
- It was noted that very little was mentioned about Oxfordshire County Council's contribution to the arts. It was agreed that the chair of Scrutiny would send a letter to the County seeking comment on the draft Culture Strategy.
- The Committee felt that extending the time that visitors and tourists spend in Oxford is crucial to maximising the economic benefits to the City, and that more thought should be given to how to encourage longer stays.

An evaluation report will be presented in April 2015.

### **31. UPDATES FROM STANDING PANELS AND REVIEW PANELS**

The Standing Panels are meeting this week, there was nothing to report.

The Committee reviewed its list of new review panels and agreed to reduce the list to four:

Budget Scrutiny – Finance Standing Panel

Tackling Inequalities – Cllrs Coulter, Lloyd-Shogbesan, Thomas and Gant

Support for the local economy – Cllrs Fry, Benjamin and Darke

Cycling – Cllrs Wolff, Upton and Pressel.

Growing a Low Carbon Economy and Community Engagement would be dropped but the work of last year's Recycling panel would continue as this requires minimal officer support.

The Committee believe they don't have enough officer resources to provide adequate scrutiny work. They would like a budget bid to be made for additional scrutiny support.

### **32. FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee decided to pre-scrutinise the following reports:

Banking Services Provider

Statement of Community Involvement 2014 Review

Westgate Community Infrastructure Levy

### **33. PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH AN 'INEQUALITIES' REVIEW PANEL**

The Committee discussed the need to narrow the scope of the Inequalities Panel. Child poverty and widening health inequalities are big issues and it will be difficult for the panel to add value if the scope is not narrowed. The panel will meet to re-fine its scope and terms of reference and report back to the Committee for approval.

Joseph Roundtree Trust is offering resources for research work into child poverty. The Scrutiny Officer will explore this and report back to the Committee.

### **34. REPORT BACK ON RECOMMENDATIONS**

Noted

### **35. MINUTES**

The Committee resolved to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2014.

### **36. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The next meeting will be held on 10 November. The Chair offered his apologies; the Vice-Chair will chair the meeting.

### **37. MATTERS EXEMPT FROM PUBLICATION**

Noted

**The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.35 pm**