

# MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Monday 4 July 2016**

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**COUNCILLORS PRESENT:** Councillors Gant (Chair), Hayes (Vice-Chair), Azad, Coulter, Fry, Henwood, Pegg, Simmons, Taylor, Tidball and Wilkinson.

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Councillor Christine Simm (Culture and Communities) and Councillor Linda Smith (Leisure, Parks and Sport)

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Caroline Green (Assistant Chief Executive), Ian Brooke (Head of Community Services), Lucy Cherry (Leisure and Performance Manager), Julia Tomkins (Grants & External Funding Officer), Andrew Brown (Scrutiny Officer) and Sarah Claridge (Committee Services Officer)

## **17. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies were received

## **18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following declarations were made for item 8 Grant Allocations - monitoring report (minute 24)

Cllr Pegg – Trustee of Rose Hill and Donnington Advice Centre  
Cllr Tidball- Trustee of South Oxford Community Association  
Cllr Gant – Trustee of Ark T centre  
Cllr Taylor – Board Member of Agnes Smith Advice Centre

## **19. WORK PLAN AND FORWARD PLAN**

The Chair presented the report

### **Work Plan**

The report on education attainment is now expected in October as it is still with Brookes University.

The Committee **review and noted** the change in its work plan for the 2016/17 council year.

## **Standing Panels**

Cllr Simmons announced he was continuing as Chair of the Finance Panel and outlined the Panel's last meeting. The Panel had agreed their work plan, which included looking at the financial aspects of Brexit, divestment, a review of the housing company for Oxford, and the budget with a focus on council tax exemptions

The Panel also scrutinised the budget monitoring report which was seen after CEB and received a report back on the credit union services. Recommendations from this item will come to the Scrutiny Committee for approval to go to CEB.

## **Forward Plan**

The Committee wishes to pre-scrutinise five CEB reports from the Forward Plan in September:

- Waterways Public Spaces Protection Order,
- Sustainable energy action plan,
- Transfer station for recycled materials,
- Tree Management policy and
- Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).

The Committee heard that the Waterways decision has slipped to October but this workload was considered too much for one meeting and so the Finance Panel will pre-scrutinise the Waste Transfer Station decision

## **20. REPORT BACK ON RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Chair presented the report on recommendations. He mentioned the appendices report (which is attached to the agenda) and the minute from the Board encouraging the review of language schools accommodation.

## **21. DEVOLUTION PLANS FOR OXFORDSHIRE**

The Assistant Chief Executive outlined the background to devolution. In February PWC was appointed to do an independent analysis of unitary government options for Oxfordshire. There is a member's presentation on the report on Monday 11 July. She said the vision of the report would focus on which areas could be done better under unitary authorities. The proposal does not assume bigger is better but whether it's possible to get a better balance to reflect the needs of the city vs needs of market towns with the flexibility to make all of the authorities work together on some things.

Brexit and the resignation of the Prime Minister has caused some uncertainty to the timeframe of the project as there is concern about ministerial and governmental capacity to engage in the process.

The PWC report will discuss:

1. different options and whether they will deliver better outcomes for people
2. how integrated services with produce better outcomes
3. membership, accountability, staffing
4. Preventing increased risk to the vulnerable
5. Testing the scope and capacity to make change

The Chair asked why the report had been delayed when it was supposed to have been completed by 30 June. The delay was due to data analysis and report collation taking longer than anticipated.

Cllr Hayes asked if there was a level of confidence for devolution to continue. The Assistant Chief Executive replied that devolution was still on the government's agenda however the capacity to do it is uncertain.

Cllr Pegg asked since Oxfordshire County Council's plan had not been published, why they are already lobbying/ advertising it and can we do anything about it?

The Assistant Chief Executive explained that the City's public engagement hasn't begun yet and we wanted to provide evidence based approach rather than a PR one.

Cllr Pegg asked whether the other authorities are happy with the suggested merges. The Assistant Chief Executive said that PWC was going to look at all 4 options within the county. District councils have an open mind whether 4 or 3 authorities are formed.

Cllr Coulter questioned why there was no mention of a directly elected mayor, as DCLG has suggested only large changes would be considered if they included a mayor.

The Assistant Chief Executive agreed that previous deals had required the inclusion of a mayor and that the proposal would have to be clear on the issue – which was yet to be addressed.

Cllr Coulter said that the DCLG felt the ideal size of a unitary authority to be 325,000 residents which is much bigger than what we are proposing in Oxford.

The Assistant Chief Executive agreed that the traditional view of the civil service was a unitary of between 300-600,000 people. The County has over 600,000 but we need to consider population growth. We are considering a unitary authority over many authorities which is a different model to previous suggestions.

### **Scrutiny review -**

Cllr Simmons felt the Review Group's brief needed to be narrowed to focus on the real issues. Do we want to focus on:

1. making the PWC report better and scrutinising that, or
2. reviewing the County report or
3. Look independently at both reports and test both.

The Assistant Chief Executive suggested the panel did their work once they had seen the outcomes of all the reports commissioned and concentrate on the different proposition being offered.

Cllr Wilkinson asked whether there was a similar criteria for the two reports. The Assistant Chief Executive said that they should be able to measure them on the same framework. The City has talked to other authorities, the study was commissioned together and collective proposal will be agree on the basis of the PWC report.

Cllr Tidball asked that the panel reviewed proposals with Brexit in mind.

The Committee AGREED that the Panel should not meet until both the County and PWC reports are published. The first meeting (at the end of August) will be to tighten up the scope and decide the panel's meeting and length of review.

The Scrutiny Officer reminded the Committee that the Committee's review on language schools could not start until this one had finished.

The Panel membership was AGREED with Cllr Tidball appointed chair.

## **22. FUSION LIFESTYLE – PERFORMANCE REPORT 2015/16**

Item 6 (Minute 22) and Item 7 (minute 23) were taken together.

Cllr Smith, Board Member for Leisure, Parks and Sport introduced the reports and said that they contained some very positive headlines, such as a 71% increase in visits to leisure centres since the contract commenced and the expected achievement of a zero subsidy per user in 2017/18.

The Head of Community Services added that in 2008 the Council was spending £2M per year on subsidising visits to leisure centres and next year this would reduce to zero.

Cllr Fry raised concerns about how quickly minor maintenance requests and IT failures were dealt with and questioned whether these issues were considered in performance assessments. The Head of Community Services said that Fusion used a variety of assessments including mystery visits and customer journey mapping. He could not excuse failures to fix minor maintenance issues but was not aware of any continuous problems, and such issues should be seen in the context of a vast increase in usage over recent years.

In response to a question about tracking the numbers of individuals visiting leisure centres rather than the total number of visits, Cllr Smith explained that there were lots of casual users. She wanted these users to buy into the loyalty schemes and these needed to be promoted more.

Cllr Fry asked what user involvement there was on the Leisure Partnership Board and commented that a user representative had been unable to attend

recent meetings because they had taken place in the daytime on a week day. The Board meets quarterly and its minutes are published on the Council website. The membership included two elected members as well as customer representatives including older and younger people. The Committee suggest that the Council should look to strengthen user representation on the Board to provide useful consumer opinion on matters before the Board, and if necessary, the meeting times should be changed to facilitate this.

The Committee noted that Ferry Leisure Centre had a user group in place and suggest that the Council should encourage the formation of user groups at leisure centres that don't already have them, targeting regular customers if possible. The Committee commented that each user group could have a representative on the Leisure Partnership Board, which would help to strengthen user representation.

The Committee queried annual reductions in swimming visits by people under the age of 17 (from 48,400 in 2014/15 to 45,200 in 2015/16) and by people over the age of 60 (from 33,000 to 22,600) and asked what the explanations were. Work is taking place nationally to address a decline in swimming and officers wanted to address the reductions by attracting new swimmers, particularly amongst older people. The Committee noted that the Service Plan included a target to deliver a 3% year-on-year increase in over 60 swimming. The Committee suggest that, given the 32% drop in over 60 swimming in 2015/16, Fusion should be challenged to deliver a higher increase in 2016/17.

Cllr Tidball asked whether leisure centres linked in with other local community facilities and suggested that there may be opportunities to increase footfall at non-peak times by offering discounted entry to daytime users of nearby community centres or nursery schools, for example. The Committee heard that such changes would have contract implications and affect the subsidy.

The Committee considered a suggestion that differential membership pricing structures should be introduced at different leisure centres to encourage visits to less well used facilities. The Committee voiced some reservations around fairness and the accessibility of centres for people living in different parts of the City but indicated that it would support this proposal being pursued provided that no prices would increase and that all existing concessions would be unaffected. The Committee noted that consideration would need to be given to the implications of such a change on the Fusion Lifestyle contract.

Cllr Fry asked whether the Council benchmarked fees and performance with the wider market, including the private sector. As the insights gained may help the Council and Fusion Lifestyle to fine-tune performance targets in future years. The Head of Community Services said that neighbouring authorities are used as a benchmark and that all facilities in the City are QUEST accredited.

The Committee considered a proposal that gym-only membership package be introduced. Cllr Smith said that Fusion thought this could lead to a decrease rather than an increase in participation. The Committee suggested that further

consideration be given to introducing this type of membership option, perhaps on a trial basis at one centre so that its impacts could be assessed.

Cllr Hayes asked whether the five key strategic objectives for 2016/17 listed in the Service Plan should be read in priority order and suggested that it would be helpful to prioritise these. As it may help to inform considerations about things like the possible introduction of differential pricing, for example.

The Committee thought that information on the following would be useful in future years to supplement the performance dashboard provided to Scrutiny:

- The numbers of visitors as well as visits;
- Seasonal variations in usage;
- More analysis around changes in usage levels amongst different target groups and communities of interest;
- More detail around actions taken to address any reductions in usage;
- National trends such as changes in the take up of different activities;
- Contract performance over the longer term, perhaps through the inclusion of performance data for a base year as well the preceding year;
- Capital responsibilities and the capital spend profile for the coming years;

The Committee requested a written response in respect of the following points:

- The extent of competitor benchmarking against neighbouring leisure providers;
- How customer satisfaction is measured;
- The marketing and accessibility of leisure services to women from black and ethnic minority groups;
- The use of social media and the marketing and visibility of leisure services to groups who may be less likely to engage with these channels, such as older people.

The Committee AGREED the following recommendations to CEB:

1 That the Council encourages and seeks to facilitate stronger user representation on the Leisure Partnership Board, including by varying meeting times if required.

2 That the Council encourages the formation of user groups at the remaining Leisure Centres and considers how these user groups could link in with the Leisure Partnership Board, perhaps with each user group having a representative on the Board.

3 That the Council takes further steps to understand why the numbers of swimming visits have declined amongst some target groups and challenges Fusion Lifestyle to set a more ambitious target for increasing swimming visits by people over the age of 60 in 2016/17.

4 That further consideration is given to the case for and expected impacts of a proposal to introduce reduced non-concessionary membership fees at less well used leisure centres.

5 That benchmarking on performance, participation and price is undertaken with the wider market, including the private sector, not just with neighbouring local authorities.

6 That further consideration is given to the idea of introducing gym-only membership options, perhaps on a limited trial basis.

7 That consideration is given to the priority order of the five key strategic objectives for 2016/17.

### **23. FUSION LIFESTYLE'S 2016/ 2017 ANNUAL SERVICE PLAN**

Item 6 (minute 22) and item 7 (minute 23) were taken together.  
Discussion of this item can be found in minute 22

### **24. GRANT ALLOCATIONS - MONITORING REPORT**

Cllr Christine Simm, Board Member for Culture and Communities presented the report and outlined the positive impact the council grants were able to make during this time of austerity, despite there being less money to spend there was an increasing need in the City. The leverage of Council grant funding enables organisations to apply for money from elsewhere.

Cllr Hayes asked whether allocations could be conditional on recipients achieving match funding from other sources. Cllr Simms said that while this was taken into consideration, it should not be a requirement as the Council did not want to create barriers to small organisations seeking to access funding.

The Committee noted that the Council needed to achieve the best possible value for money from its grants programme. The amount of additional funding leveraged in and the number of beneficiaries were useful indications in this respect. The Committee noted that some types of interventions that benefit relatively few individuals, such as homelessness prevention, could deliver more social value than, for example, inclusive arts and culture schemes that benefit many more individuals. The Committee suggest that it would be useful to measure and monitor the social value impacts of grant allocations, perhaps at category level, in addition to leveraged funding and the numbers of beneficiaries.

Cllr Simmons asked how grant allocations were tied into service delivery and noted that he would like to see more research to inform how the Council could best focus resources (e.g. across homelessness grants and Discretionary Housing Payments). Cllr Simm said that the grant allocations were in line with the Council's strategic aims and that the Council's approach to advice commissioning, which was part of the Council's cross-cutting Financial Inclusion Strategy, was a good example of joined up thinking. Cllr Simmons suggested that consideration should be given to how the Council could do more of that and what the mechanism for doing so would be.

The Committee AGREED the following recommendations to CEB

1 – That consideration is given to how to quantify the social value achieved from the different grant programmes for community and voluntary organisations and to the inclusion of a measure of social value in future grant monitoring reports.

2. That consideration is given to whether and how the Council could better integrate its grant programmes for community and voluntary organisations with related aspects of service delivery, with a view to focusing resources as effectively as possible.

## **25. REPORT OF THE EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY REVIEW GROUP**

Cllr Hayes, Chair of the Equality & Diversity Review Group presented the report. He thanked his fellow panel members and the Scrutiny Officer for the work done.

Cllr Wilkinson asked whether having officers who spoke a second language on call (recommendations 7-9) was desirable by Human Resources (HR). The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that the report had been reviewed and signed off by HR officers.

The Committee discussed the merit of removing gender titles altogether (recommendation 20) from job applications. However after a vote it was resolved to leave recommendation 20 unchanged.

The Committee agreed the following amendments to the report:

Rec 1: That the suggested accessibility audits should be broadened out to include employment practices and processes as well as premises as it was important to have 'three dimensional thinking' about accessibility;

Recs 7-9: That these suggestions would need to be subject to advice on how the ability to speak a second language should be defined.

Rec 21: That the words "if this would be supported by the Trade Unions" be removed.

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the report for CEB as amended.

## **26. APPRENTICES REPORT**

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report.

Cllr Simmons asked why recommendation 2 only extended the age group to 24. The Scrutiny Officer explained that at these ages young people can be classified as being not in education or training (NEET). – The Committee asked that it included older aged people as well.

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the report as amended.



## **27. MINUTES**

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2014 as a true and accurate record.

## **28. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Committee noted that its next meeting would be on 5 September 2016

**The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.25 pm**