

# Minutes of a meeting of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE on Tuesday 6 March 2018

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## Committee members:

Councillor Gant (Chair)	Councillor Chapman (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Azad	Councillor Curran
Councillor Henwood	Councillor Ladbrooke
Councillor Lloyd-Shogbesan	Councillor Lygo
Councillor Taylor (for Councillor Fry)	

## Officers:

Caroline Green, Assistant Chief Executive  
Helen Bishop, Head of Business Improvement  
Andrew Brown, Committee Services Manager  
Chris Harvey, Organisational Development and Learning Manager  
Paul Adams  
John Mitchell, Committee and Member Services Officer

## Also present:

Councillor Marie Tidball, Board Member for Young People, Schools and Public Health

## 81. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Fry (substitute Councillor Taylor) and Councillor Paule.

## 82. Declarations of interest

None.

## 83. Minutes

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2017 as a true and accurate record.

## 84. Report back on recommendations

The Scrutiny Officer spoke to the report. In relation to the update of the Corporate Plan while the first recommendation (relating to the monitoring leisure engagement) had not been agreed it was clear that there was a willingness to work towards what had been proposed.

In relation to the budget for 2018/19, the Finance Panel used a lighter touch than in previous years and most of its recommendations had been agreed. Cllr Fry, speaking to the recommendations at CEB, had argued that recommendation 5 (proposal to increase garden waste collection fees) could have funded recommendation 4 (proposal for additional resource for City Centre Management).

## **85. Work Plan and Forward Plan**

The Scrutiny Officer spoke to the Committee's Work Plan, which included items for the next meeting on 05 April which would be the last in the present Council year. While some items had been proposed for subsequent meetings, the new Council year would bring with it the need to determine a new programme, and, perhaps, new priorities, which could include consideration of those items currently shown as "to be scheduled."

The Finance Panel scheduled for 14 March had been cancelled with the agreement of the Panel's Chair for lack of substantive business.

The Housing Panel had met 6 times in the present year, more than originally planned. Its focus on issues to do with the Homelessness Strategy and Tower Blocks had meant that not all of the other items listed on its programme had been covered. There had been no consideration of tenant satisfaction because there had been no tenant survey this year (although there had been high levels of engagement with residents of Tower Blocks).

The Scrutiny Officer went on to suggest that the Committee should take every opportunity to engage with the finalisation of the Local Plan and proposed that it should be the subject of substantive discussion at the Committee's meeting on 03 July, followed by a more focused discussion on the housing elements of the Plan at the Housing Panel's meeting on 05 July. The Chair and Scrutiny Officer to lead on this piece of work.

## **86. Devolution plans for Oxfordshire**

Cllr Tidball, speaking as a previous member of the Committee and Chair of the Scrutiny Review Group, said the Group's report had been used in the Council's submission to the DCLG and in response to the County Council's submission. Following the election there had been no apparent appetite on the part of the Government to pursue devolution proposals. There had, however, been a great deal of exciting progress over the last year and the emergence of the Growth Deal is now seen as the preferred mechanism for joint authority working in Oxfordshire. The role of the Growth Board is evolving and the way it operates will change. Of particular note is consideration of the possibility of a shared scrutiny function. The City Council had played (and continues to play) a very significant role in the development of the Board and the benefits for the City, in terms of housing and infrastructure were considerable.

The Assistant Chief Executive said that while there wasn't, yet, any agreement to a combined scrutiny function, the Growth Board would be reviewing its Terms of

Reference by the end of April. The desirability of a more robust and structured scrutiny framework would form part of that discussion, if not at that meeting at a subsequent one. Initial feelings were that neither should such arrangements result in duplication nor cut across existing functions.

## **87. Annual Workplace Equalities Report**

The Head of Business Improvement introduced the report by noting a range of measures now in place to address matters of inequality. These included, among other things, outreach activities to communities; provision of unconscious bias training; and equalities recruitment guidance. She was keen to take the opportunity to review the Council's practice to ensure that recruitment resulted in a workforce which properly reflected the City's diverse community. The initial focus of this would be in relation to BAME issues, looking at recruitment and turnover by service area. As a first step it was necessary to understand the data and to make sure that any targets were appropriate. Some activities might be best aimed at service areas and others across the whole Council. She suggested that a further report in April or May would be helpful, setting out some worked up proposals, agreed by the City Management Team.

Members were disappointed that the data presented were not up to date. The Head of Business Improvement reassured Members that while more recent data had not come to the meeting, up-to-date data were regularly interrogated and acted upon by officers as necessary. She went on to say that the data for both 2016/17 and 2017/18 would be published in April.

In discussion the following points were raised among others:

- It was inescapable that the makeup of the Council's workforce did not reflect the City's community and there was, therefore "some way to go."
- Consideration of year to year comparisons/trends would be useful.
- The Head of Business Improvement confirmed that the City's Community Centres were often used by BAME groups and were locations which were therefore used to promote job opportunities.
- The original focus of Apprenticeship programme on regeneration areas and OX1 and OX4 postcodes was too narrow but had now been expanded.
- The number of "Not specified" entries in the data was regrettable as, if specified, would contribute to a more accurate picture and staff should be encouraged to respond
- Some broad categorisations (eg BAME) would benefit from further breakdown.
- More analysis of the reasons for employees' resignation would be useful.
- There should be a focus on why shortlisted applicants were not appointed with particular reference to BAME. The Head of Business Improvement confirmed that this would be looked at.
- Championship of these issues should come from the highest level in the authority.
- Some organisations had found it necessary to introduce elements of positive discrimination in order to ensure a properly representative workforce (eg bespoke training for BAME colleagues).

- Trade Unions elsewhere have put considerable efforts into addressing these issues. There would perhaps be merit on seeking advice from Union colleagues about good practice elsewhere.

In conclusion the Head of Business Improvement said that she would return to the Committee in May with up to date proposals for workstreams which had been agreed with the Corporate Management Team.

## **88. ICT restructure**

The Head of Business Improvement gave the background to the restructuring of the Council's ICT service which, with  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the posts in the new structure now in place, was nearing a conclusion. Among other things it was important to ensure that there was proper support for all applications; swift response to issues raised with the service desk; and out of hours service provision to support the Council's website.

The document before the Committee had been used at the beginning of the consultation process and included aspirational ambitions which were now tied down by detailed metrics in service level agreements.

Community Centres would benefit from computers (to allow online applications for applications for example) and any funding to support that would be welcome.

A major programme to upgrade employees' ICT kit was being planned with invitations to tender out in April and the ambition of rolling out over the Summer. A programme to upgrade Member's iPads was also underway. New devices would be issued from May following the local elections, initially to new members elected for the first time and then, on a phased basis, to all other members.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

## **89. Report of the Oxford Living Wage Review Group**

Cllr Ladbroke, as Chair of the Group, introduced the report. He said the work of the group had proved to be a hugely positive experience and a good example of cross-party working. This was a matter whose "time had come." It was, however, also at a time when the work environment for many was becoming increasingly precarious as a result of zero hours contracts etc. The report drew attention to a number of related issues such as the impacts of health and the stark difference in life expectancy between those who happen to live in different Wards in the City. There were strong connections too between low pay; female employees; those with a disability; and BAME.

The report had been informed by input from a wide range of organisations and individuals who had spoken with passion and commitment.

It was clear that improvements in wages, alone, whilst important, would not provide a 'silver bullet'. In Oxford in particular the cost of housing was bound to remain an issue, even for those in receipt of the Oxford Living Wage (OLW).

He was pleased to report that the Council had implemented the OLW for its own employees and major contractors. It was hoped that the Council could exercise some leverage and or promote the introduction of OLW amongst other employers and that, with the support of partners, it would become the 'social norm.' The Council should, when seeking tenders, give serious consideration to awarding contracts to those who pay the OLW, even if not the cheapest.

Members thanked Cllr Ladbrooke and other members of the group for an excellent report which was both "thorough and revealing." Thanks were also given to the Scrutiny Officer for his role in co-ordinating the work of the group and pulling together the report.

It was noted that the £100k threshold for contracts awarded by the Council was not lower because it was unlikely that such contractors would have employees.

There was universal support for the aspirations of the report but some concern about the ways in which and the extent to which its recommendations can be monitored. It was recognised that this was unavoidably dependent to a large extent on self-reporting and the trust associated with that.

The Committee noted that Council apprentices were not paid the OLW but did receive more than the statutory minimum. A previous recommendation that apprentices be paid the OLW had not been agreed.

It was noted that rates of poverty in the City varied widely from Ward to Ward and while the principle of the OLW was of universal application, particular attention should be paid to those areas where poverty was greatest.

Consideration might be given to an event to promote and celebrate good practice by employers who have embraced the OLW and agreed that this could be incorporated with recommendation 11.

There was concern lest the valuable work of the group might be lost as a result of subsequent inertia. The CEB should therefore be encouraged to be very active in its support of the report's recommendations. The Committee agreed to recommend to the Board that a member should be identified who will have responsibility for leading this work.

## **90. Q 3 Monitoring Report**

The Scrutiny Officer said that the Business Development and Support Manager recognised that improvements were still needed in the presentation of these data and associated commentaries and these were in hand. Cllr Fry had arranged to meet with the Business Development & Support Manager to discuss the list of indicators which it would be helpful for the Committee to engage with over the next year.

Cllr Chapman relayed a number of detailed observations on behalf of Cllr Fry all of which would be passed on to the Business Development & Support Manager.

The Committee questioned how the Youth Ambition figures were derived for indicator LP119 and requested a written response from the Head of Community Services.

It was noted that performance data in relation to *Fusion* would be the subject of a bespoke report later in the year and would also be provided on a quarterly basis.

## **91. Dates of future meetings**

Meetings for 2018 are scheduled as followed:

### **Scrutiny Committee**

- 5 April
- 17 May
- 05 June
- 03 July

### **Standing Panels**

Housing Standing Panel: 8 March; 09 April; 05 July.

Finance Standing Panel: 14 March; 07 June; 10 September.

Companies Panel: 14 March. *5pm start*

All meetings start at 6.00 pm unless otherwise stated.

**The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.00 pm**

**Chair .....**

**Date: Thursday 5 April 2018**