

# **Minutes of a meeting of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE on Tuesday 4 June 2019**

www.oxford.gov.uk



## **Committee members:**

Councillor Gant (Chair)

Councillor Arshad

Councillor Corais

Councillor Donnelly

Councillor Howlett

Councillor Simmons

Councillor McManners (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Bely-Summers

Councillor Djafari-Marbini

Councillor Fry

Councillor Lloyd-Shogbesan

## **Officers:**

Ian Brooke, Head of Community Services

Andrew Brown, Committee and Member Services Manager

Daniella Granito, Policy and Partnerships Team Manager

David Hunt, Commercial Manager

Stefan Robinson, Scrutiny Officer

Paul Walker, Interim Projects Director, Regeneration Team

Rosie Woollcott, Safeguarding Co-ordinator

John Mitchell, Committee and Member Services Officer

## **Also present:**

Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities and Customer Focused Services

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Sustainable Transport

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Leisure and Housing, Deputy Leader

Councillor Marie Tidball, Cabinet Member for Supporting Local Communities

## **Apologies:**

No apologies were received

## **14. Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.

## **15. Chair's Announcements**

The Chair reminded Members that this was Stefan Robinson's last Scrutiny meeting and, on behalf of the Committee, thanked him for his valuable contribution to its work over the last year and wished him well in his new role supporting the Growth Board.

## **16. Minutes**

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2019 as a true and accurate record.

## **17. Work Plan**

The Scrutiny Officer introduced this item which sought to agree an indicative work plan for the Committee for the remainder of the Council Year. A longlist of over 50 items, compiled in response to suggestions by Members, Senior Officers and members of the public suggested, had been provided. This included recommendations on which items to include based on the previously advised TOPIC scoring criteria. As a starting point, his recommendation was that items scoring less than 9 should not be included in the Work Plan but Members would of course wish to bring their own perspective.

After discussion the recommendation was agreed, subject to the addition of topics on Community Wealth Building and Private Rental Registration and regulation, and a 12 month update on progress against the Tourism Management recommendations

The Committee resolved to:

1. Agree that items scoring 9 and above should be included in the Scrutiny Committee Work Plan for 2019/20 together with items on; Community Wealth Building, Private Rental Registration and progress against the Tourism Management recommendations
2. Elect Councillor Fry as Chair of the Companies Panel
3. Appoint Councillors Munkonge, Fry, Smith and Simmons to the Finance Panel
4. Appoint Councillors Muknonge, Fry Landell-Mills and Simmons to the Companies Panel
5. Appoint Councillors Gotch, Wade and Wolff to the Housing Panel, with the additional two labour group nominations to be agreed by the Head of Law and Governance. Councillor Bely-Summers as Chair retains the third Labour group seat.
6. Note that the subject of the first scrutiny review group to be scoped will be discussed at the July 2019 meeting.

## **18. Accessibility and Disability Support Review**

Councillor Tidball, Cabinet Member for Supporting Local Communities introduced the report, reminding the Committee that the Chief Executive had convened an officer working group tasked with reviewing how the Council meets the needs of elected members and election candidates with disabilities.

This had been a very thorough piece of work with which she had been closely involved and dealt, among other things, with issues which might be faced by councillor from the moment they were elected, how to ensure effective engagement with meetings, what reasonable adjustments should be made etc. It should be regarded as a “living piece of work” and would feed into the Council’s wider Equality Review over the coming year.

The Committee and Member Services Manager drew attention to the support now available to Members in relation to mental health via the Council’s Employee Assistance Programme. Members had also been given access to corporate Mental Health First Aiders. It was suggested that it might be helpful if some councillors could themselves be trained as Mental Health First Aiders given that they might feel more comfortable about approaching another Member rather than an officer with concerns.

The Committee agreed that this was a thorough and valuable piece of work. The recognition of the desirability of a second lift in the Town Hall was welcome but the provision of one was still subject to a feasibility study and the practical and financial constraints were considerable. There would, however be investment in and improvement of the current lift. Recommissioning the older lift in the part of the building not currently used by the Council at some point in the future was unlikely to provide a solution partly because of its age and capacity, and partly because access to it was via a step.

Oxford University had considerable expertise in addressing the challenges faced when tackling issues of accessibility in old (and frequently listed) buildings. Councillor Tidball had been able to tap into this resource both via individual colleges and the University’s Estates Office. Wheelchair access to the Council Chamber was an example of a matter which could be addressed, subject to feasibility.

The induction and buddying support for councillors had been well received. The Chair thanked all those involved for a valuable report noting that, irrespective of the policies in place, it was clear that officers always did what they could to help and support those who needed it.

## **19. Fusion Lifestyle Annual Service Plan**

Councillor Linda Smith, Board Member for Leisure and Housing, introduced the report and was pleased to be able to draw attention to a number of positive indicators: a 25% increase in active participation visits; a 35% increase in Member visits; and an increase in non-member visits. The data now included raw numbers as the Committee had requested. The Committee would be aware that an independent Audit of Fusion Lifestyle had confirmed that the data being provided were robust.

Both the Leys and Barton Leisure Centres were now rated as “Quest Plus – Very Good” (Quest being the leading UK quality award scheme for sport and leisure). A crèche was now running at the Leys and the first opening of one on a trial basis at the Ferry Centre had been the day before. Free swimming continued to be on offer for under 17 year olds, an initiative that the Council should be very proud of and all employees continued to be paid at least the Oxford Living Wage.

The Committee, while pleased to see these positive outcomes observed that a failure to address basic maintenance issues swiftly and effectively would always compromise Fusion Lifestyle's ability to compete effectively with other providers.

In discussion Councillor Smith agreed that there was merit in seeking higher levels of engagement from areas of deprivation and suggested that this might form the basis of a recommendation to Cabinet and one which might be achieved, in part, by community events. She was also able to confirm the imminent rescheduling of swimming sessions for mothers with toddlers at the Leys at a more suitable time for them and that the possibility of introducing Steam Rooms was on a long list of possible future developments for Fusion.

The Committee was pleased to note that the City was seen to have one of the highest overall levels of activity in the Country. This was, in part, attributable to savings being invested back into provision and the contribution of the Council's Active Communities team.

Given recent improvements it was questioned whether the target of a 3% increase in participation for a range of user groups was ambitious enough. It was explained that recent increases in attendance were partly accounted for by improved data capture.

The Committee resolved to recommend that the Council undertakes outreach work in the most deprived areas within the City to further encourage the use of local leisure facilities, and confirms that there will be a robust action plan for increasing participation in these communities. This, along with increasing BAME participation, should be considered a priority within the Fusion Lifestyle contract.

## **20. Safeguarding report and action plan**

The Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Customer Focused Services, Councillor Chapman, introduced the report, explaining that he had just taken on this portfolio responsibility a few days previously.

The Safeguarding Coordinator, Rosie Woolcott, gave the background to the report, noting that the City Council worked in partnership with the County Council, Thames Valley Police and the Clinical Commissioning Group to protect the safeguarding interests of children and adults in the region. The 2018 Audit of the Council's safeguarding provision was very positive with all 10 aspects deemed to have achieved the highest rating.

The Committee recalled the outcome of its previous review on the safeguarding risks posed by the practice of some guest houses in the City. None of the recommendations of that review appeared to be reflected in this report. Given the significance of the issues raised by that review, it was agreed that the issue should be revisited.

Following the deaths of 5 individuals who were or had previously been through the Oxfordshire Homeless Pathway, there would be an investigative review into the systems in place to support those who are on the pathway but not engaging with

services. However, given the very different circumstances of the 5 cases, it was unlikely that any key themes would emerge.

The introduction of “My Concern” throughout the Council had been a success and enabled a number of safeguarding concerns to be logged and responded to where appropriate. This highlighted, among other things, a high incidence of mental health issues, including suicide threats.

Relevant council staff had been given training in how to respond appropriately and sensitively to residents who might, for example, express suicidal thoughts. It was important also to be aware that communications from the council could, unwittingly, be a source of great distress to vulnerable people and care needed to be taken to avoid that.

The Policy and Partnerships Team Manager was confident that there was good engagement with women who might be considered hard to reach about safeguarding matters via, for example, the Refugee and Asylum Seekers Group and noted that the Council had commissioned professionals to work with refugee and asylum seeking children who had been traumatised as a result of their experiences.

The Chair noted that the previous year’s discussion had included a commitment to report back on the number of children who had received safeguarding training face to face. Officers agreed that this would be revisited.

## **21. Seacourt Park and Ride Extension**

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning & Sustainable Transport introduced the report, reminding the Committee that planning permission for the scheme had been granted and this report sought to take forward the next step, the appointment of a contractor to carry out the work.

The Interim Projects Director updated the Committee on two changes that had taken place since the report went to press. These were the replacement of a ground source heat pump with an air source heat pump, which was still a good source of low carbon energy, and the provision of extra ducting to facilitate the installation of additional electric vehicle charging points, when required, in the future.

The Interim Projects Director said the proposal to appoint Oxford Direct Service Limited (ODSL) had followed a very robust tendering process. The relationship with ODSL would be subject to the same constraints and conditions as with any other commercial contractor. The report included details of some changes to the scheme which were expressed to be minor.

The Committee challenged the contention that the proposed reduction in parking spaces (685 to 596) was a minor change and asked if some of the lost spaces (necessary to enable progress with the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme) could be returned after the work was complete. The Interim Projects Director said that he thought that the works meant that this would not be able to be considered for at least three years, but highlighted that the reduction was technically minor in planning terms.

The Committee questioned whether the scheme provided value for money given a low rate of financial return compared with what could be achieved by other means. There was also a risk associated with possible reductions in car use and other parking opportunities. The Board Member for Planning and Sustainable Transport agreed that measured on purely financial terms other investments could be more profitable but this scheme needed to be considered in wider terms and to take account of broader traffic considerations.

The importance of including environmental considerations, where relevant, in Cabinet reports was noted (as was the case in this report).

The report presented to the Committee would request Cabinet on 12 June 2019 to grant final scheme approval to enable the scheme, as amended, to be delivered within the budget of £5,156,122; a budget formerly agreed by Full Council.

The Committee received a proposal that the final scheme approval should not be given, and to make a recommendation to Cabinet accordingly.

On the casting vote from the Chair the Committee voted in favour of this proposal to recommend that Cabinet that the final scheme approval should not be given.

## **22. Report back on recommendations**

The Chair was pleased to report on the Cabinet's positive response to the Committee's recommendations on the future strategic direction of the Council's group of housing companies and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Draft Charging Schedule.

Responses to the recommendations flowing from the Tourism Management Review Group were, however, disappointing and in which the Cabinet could have better engaged with the spirit of the review. Some of the detailed responses did not seem to chime with the claims of acceptance or rejection of some recommendations.

This led to a wider discussion about the value of prioritising future recommendations to take account of the likelihood of acceptance on resource grounds; the importance of involving portfolio holders throughout; and the need to challenge ambiguity of final Cabinet response; notably the increasing use of recommendations agreed "in part."

At the same time, it was important to recognise that rejected recommendations by no means rendered the work undertaken by scrutiny as valueless. Rather, the work of review groups as standalone works provided credible evidence and developed meaningful discussion on priority issues for residents; regardless of whether the recommendations are accepted. The Cabinet could be held accountable for their response to recommendations in years to come.

## **23. Dates of future meetings**

Meetings are scheduled as followed:

### **Scrutiny Committee**

- 2 July 2019
- 30 July (provisional)
- 3 September 2019
- 1 October 2019

### **Standing Panels**

- Housing Standing Panel: 27 June, 3 October
- Finance Standing Panel: 01 July, 5 September
- Companies Panel: 3 July

All meetings start at 6.00 pm

**The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.45 pm**

**Chair .....**

**Date: Tuesday 2 July 2019**