

Minutes of a meeting of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE on Tuesday 1 October 2019

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Committee members:

Councillor Gant (Chair)	Councillor McManners (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Altaf-Khan	Councillor Bely-Summers
Councillor Corais	Councillor Djafari-Marbini
Councillor Donnelly	Councillor Howlett
Councillor Tanner (for Councillor Fry)	Councillor Lygo (for Councillor Arshad)
Councillor Simmons	

Officers:

Caroline Green, Assistant Chief Executive
Bill Lewis, Financial Accounting Manager
Dave Scholes, Housing Strategy & Needs Manager (Affordable Housing Supply Lead)
Polly McKinlay, Senior Commissioning Officer
David Hunt, Commercial Manager
Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Officer
James Baughan, Performance and Impact Officer
John Mitchell, Committee and Member Services Officer

Also present:

Councillor Linda Smith , Cabinet Member for Leisure and Housing

Apologies:

Councillors Arshad, Fry and Lloyd-Shogbesan sent apologies.

33. Declarations of interest

None.

34. Chair's Announcements

The Committee agreed with the Chair's proposal to re-order the agenda for the benefit of the Committee's guests.

35. Performance Monitoring - 2019/20 Quarter 1

Bill Lewis, Financial Accounting Manager, alerted the Committee to the headlines from the report which would normally have been considered by the Finance Panel but, because of its late consideration by Cabinet, had come to the Committee instead. He drew attention to the overall adverse variance of £0.270m against the Net Budget Requirement; the revised budgeted surplus of £1.205m for the Housing Revenue Account; and the fact that an exercise was underway to review all capital forecasting with results of that exercise to be reported in Quarter 2.

The Committee noted the report, having no questions to raise or comments to make about it.

36. Commissioning of services at Floyds Row

The Cabinet Member for Leisure and Housing, Councillor Linda Smith, introduced the report. The Floyds Row initiative was part of the Council's commitment to doing all within its power to address the issues of homelessness and rough sleeping, driven by the ultimate ambition of no one having to sleep on the streets. Floyds row would, among other things, provide a new 'gateway' and significantly increase the amount of night shelter provision. The report drew attention to the increased costs of the project and made recommendations to the Cabinet about how best to respond to that increase. Despite the costs, she commended the project to the Committee given the contribution it would make to addressing one of the Council's priorities.

The Housing Strategy & Needs Manager, Dave Scholes said Floyds Row was innovative and set to be a transformative influence not just in the City but in the County. It built on national good practice and was of a significant scale, compared with facilities in other parts of the country, given the size of the City. The facility built, in part, of the outcome of the recent Scrutiny Committee No Local Connection review group and would provide a safe engagement space, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

In relation to the capital funding gap the Leader of the Council had written to the new Secretary of State at the MHCLG, outlining the costs of the scheme requesting a further contribution. While there could be no guarantees, early signs of further funding from this source were positive. The Chief Executive had also requested a funding contribution from the other local authorities and OCCG in Oxfordshire. Oxford Direct Services (ODS) are on-site constructing phase one of the project (working to end November 2019) and were well placed to deliver phase two with a target date for that of the end of March 2020. The new facility was being developed in close partnership with St Mungos and the architects, and other partners, including Turning Point, Crisis, Health, and Emmaus UK, seeking to create a homely rather than institutional feel.

The Committee was generally very supportive of this important project and went on to raise a number of detailed points. The project would doubtless have a positive effect on the demand for a number of other community services such as A&E, psychiatric and other support for those with mental health challenges. The significant increase in project costs over a relatively short time was a matter of great concern from a project management point of view and begged questions as to why these costs had not been

recognised and addressed earlier. Officers explained that the bid for the bulk of the project's original funding had had to be progressed in an atypically short time to meet a MHCLG deadline. This meant that some of the preparatory work was not as thorough as it might otherwise have been, notwithstanding that it had been through the Council's project 'gateway' process. It was also noted that the innovative nature of the project meant that some desirable improvements in the specification were being added as the project progressed.

St Mungos was evidently a key partner in the project but concerns had been raised about some aspects of their provision, notably the absence of measurable outcomes as a result of their input, a disinclination by some to make use of the service as they felt "safer on the street" and high staff turnover. Reassurance was needed that St Mungos involvement would lead to improved outcomes and that those who needed the provision would take advantage of it. Floyds Row was serving as a "catalyst for change" in St Mungo's provision and the nature of its relationship with the Council which was now seen as a strategic partnership.

The current contract with St Mungos is to be extended until March 2020 after which it was proposed that there would be a trial period of a further year for the revised operation before going to full tender. The trial period was considered necessary given that the new service will be different from anything delivered previously and lessons will need to be learnt to inform preparation of a full and evidenced specification. While St Mungos would be a key partner for the foreseeable future, the new provision would be multi-disciplinary and would involve other services too.

Why could the necessary provision not be made in-house? In-house provision would bring with it some additional complexities to do with using licenses for the residential element. It was noted that no other authorities made comparable provision in-house. Furthermore, funding uncertainty mitigated against bringing the provision in house at this stage.

An interim winter night shelter and 'somewhere safe to stay' would be opened in late October 2019 as an interim service from Simon House. This will close as Floyds Row opens the first wing (early January 2020).

It was recognised that there were many and various reasons why people would not engage and therefore no simple means of ensuring that those who could benefit would. The new provision was intended, among other things, to provide a safe and appropriate environment which would at least make the offer as attractive as possible with a view to getting people off the street as swiftly as possible.

The importance of "move on" was recognised by the Committee and officers alike and the new provision would be geared to expediting that as much as possible.

In conclusion the Committee repeated its warm support for this important project and endorsed the proposed recommendations being made to Cabinet but added the following recommendations of its own:

1. That the contract with St Mungos be extended to require that outcomes from its involvement be better recorded to include, for example, reasons for clients'

engagement or failure to engage; number of client contacts; and staff turnover. Data to also be collected about how rough sleepers support their lifestyle (eg bicycle theft) which will in turn inform how best to address their needs;

2. Not to exclude the possibility of in-house provision when it comes to market testing;
3. While recognising the great pressures of tight government deadlines for submission of bids, that any project management lessons are learned and the project gateway process be streamlined and improved to lessen the likelihood of similar cost overruns in the future, especially for funding bids that require a fast response;
4. To congratulate officers for progressing the scheme at pace and making the progress to date towards opening the service this winter; and
5. To recommend Option A

37. Modernising Leisure Concessions

The Cabinet Member for Leisure and Housing, Councillor Linda Smith, introduced the report. Recent changes to the benefits scheme necessitated a redesign of the concessions scheme. The simple expedient of, for example, offering concessions to those in receipt of Universal Credit (UC) was too blunt an instrument which would not target those who should benefit with sufficient accuracy. The housing element of UC was however proposed as an appropriate criterion which, in parallel with entitlement to the Council Tax Reduction scheme would serve as the two primary criteria for concessions. Many options had been considered before settling on those proposed in the report going to Cabinet.

The Committee was broadly supportive of the report given the widespread recognition of the health and therapeutic value of exercise for everyone. Given this value the Committee expressed some unease at the proposal to raise the threshold for entitlement to the older person concession from 60 to 65 and the consequent jump in cost for that group. This should not be taken as an indication that older people would not still be encouraged to take exercise. It was held that cost of provision was not a disincentive to the majority of older users. There were limited data about some aspects of current concessionary memberships and it was hard to say with confidence how many current beneficiaries would lose out under the new proposals, however it was felt that numbers would be low.

It was noted that the number of those with Personal Independence Payments (PIP) with current membership was very low (just 7 or 1% of the possible number) and it was agreed that more should be done by Fusion Lifestyle to encourage participation by this group, among others. Social prescribing by GPs accounted for very small numbers of users, the costs of which Fusion Lifestyle would be expected to pick up.

It would be desirable, with the help of other data which should be held by the Council, to reach out to those families and individuals in receipt of benefits who do not take advantage of the facilities on offer.

The report included a reference to Fusion Lifestyle's agreement to consider recognising an existing MOD discount scheme for UK armed forces and veterans which was recognised elsewhere and therefore distinct from the other concessions being proposed. It was noted that this was often a very vulnerable group, which would benefit greatly from access to affordable exercise opportunities. There were contrasting views about the desirability of this proposal in parallel with discussion about the desirability of such arrangements for other groups of public servants such as those in the NHS.

In conclusion, while the Committee generally agreed with the proposed changes, it recommended that the impact of raising the older person concession from 60 to 67 should be looked at, with a view to ameliorating its consequence by phasing the increase.

38. Work Plan and Forward Plan

Work Plan

The Scrutiny Officer brought the Committee up to date with proposals for the Work Plan:

Community Wealth Building: The Economic Strategy was being worked up over the next few months and would not be available until May/June 2020. It was agreed that the earlier version should come to the Committee.

Apprentices and NEETS: To the January meeting

Public Participation: A report to the December meeting (see also subsequent review group decision below). The Committee noted that this should build on a useful report on the same theme which came to the Committee a few years previously.

Cycling: Drop from Committee's programme given the existence of a Council "Cycling Review Group."

Annual Workplace Equality Report & Gender Pay Gap Report: The Annual Workplace Equality report will still go to the November meeting but the Gender Pay Gap report will go to the January meeting.

Tourism Management: Follow up from the review group will go to the April not the May meeting.

Review Groups

The Scrutiny Officer had tabled an indicative timetable for review groups. The Chair drew attention to the firm officer advice it would be prudent to have just one full review. This was principally because of the limited time available in the present Council year

(due to an unavoidable late start for review work and pre-election purdah at the end of the year).

Two proposals had come forward and scoping documents tabled: one for a review group on the Climate Emergency and one for a group on strengthening citizen engagement.

Both proposals were recognised as being important but it was agreed that, on balance, the proposal for a review group on the Climate Emergency was the greater priority and, on being put to a vote agreed that it should be chosen. In relation to citizen engagement, that could be dealt with in the short term by a report to the Committee in December.

Councillor Simmons noted that a motion to be proposed at the Council meeting on 7 October would ask for proper resources to fund a standing panel on the Climate Emergency for this and future years. The outcome of that debate would inform the final scope of the review group.

The Committee agreed that Councillor Howlett should Chair the review group with Councillor Simmons as Vice Chair, and for the Chair and Vice Chair to develop a detailed scope, agree membership numbers and plan an indicative timetable.

39. Report back on recommendations

Cabinet had, at its meeting on 11 September, agreed the Committee's recommendations in relation to the report on Monitoring the Community Grants Programme 2018/19.

The request for the number of children getting safeguarding training had not been provided as the County Council did not hold that information.

40. Reports for approval

The Committee had before it three reports:

- 1) Draft Scrutiny Annual Report 2018/19;
- 2) Report to Cabinet on the Annual Air Quality Status Report 2018; and
- 3) Report to Cabinet on Performance Monitoring Quarter 1

all of which were agreed without comment.

41. Minutes

The Committee resolved to **approve** the minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2019 as a true and accurate record.

42. Dates of future meetings

Meetings are scheduled as followed:

Scrutiny Committee

- 05 November
- 03 December
- 14 January
- 04 February
- 03 March
- 06 April
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All meetings start at 6.00 pm.

Standing Panels

- Housing Standing Panel: 07 November, 05 March, 08 April
- Finance Standing Panel: 05 September, 05 December, 06 January
- Companies Panel: 14 November, 12 March

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.40 pm

Chair

Date: Tuesday 5 November 2019