

MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 2 February 2016



COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Simmons (Chair), Hayes (Vice-Chair), Coulter, Darke, Gant, Hollick, Lloyd-Shogbesan, Pegg, Smith and Taylor.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Susan Brown

OFFICERS PRESENT: Caroline Green (Assistant Chief Executive), Julian Alison (Licensing Manager), Elizabeth Bohun (Environmental Sustainability Projects Officer), Jo Colwell (Service Manager Environmental Sustainability), Michelle Iddon (Customer Contact Manager), Julia Tomkins (Grants & External Funding Officer), Andrew Brown (Scrutiny Officer) and Catherine Phythian (Committee Services Officer)

86. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Fry and Councillor Henwood.

87. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were noted with regard to agenda item:

Cllr Gant: as a member of the Ark T Centre and of Cutteslowe Community Association

Cllr Hollick: as an employee of the South Oxfordshire Adventure Playground

Cllr Pegg: as a member of Rosehill and Donnington Community Associations

Cllr Smith: Chair of the Management Committee of Blackbird Leys Adventure Playground

88. TAXI LICENSING

The Chair welcomed the Licensing Manager to the meeting and thanked him for the comprehensive report on Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing.

The Committee considered the following points:

- The main problem facing the Trade and the Licensing Authority was the volume of vehicles licensed by other councils operating in the city as this increased competition and reduced income for the Trade and that this negatively impacted on the objectives of the Licensing Authority as this diluted the standards for vehicles and drivers imposed locally, as Officers have no powers to improve standards set by other councils.
- That the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Sub-Committee took a robust approach to ensure license applications were in line with policy
- That a Joint Operating Framework had been agreed within Oxfordshire, aimed to replicate the standards set by this Council to be those achieved by the other authorities across the county. It was vital that any move to introduce national minimum standards should be benchmarked against the best available and should not preclude local authorities from implementing higher standards appropriate to local issues
- Since 2009 there had been a significant programme of modernisation of the licensing functions resulting in increased enforcement activity and a more visible and constructive profile with the Trade aimed at promoting the councils vision of Oxford being a world-class city.

The Licensing Manager said that he had recently been invited to submit a report to the Police Crime Commissioner on standards for licensing activity within the Thames Valley. He said that he had made the following proposals, supported by the portfolio holder for licensing:

- To develop national minimum standards for taxi and private hire services (drivers, vehicles, operators), including bring Hackney Carriage radio-circuits within the licensing regime
- To develop a national database for vehicles and drivers in order that information sharing between authorities and police was prompt and readily available
- To develop centrally set national fees to remove the need for vehicles and drivers to seek a licence where the fee may be cheaper and / or standards are less robust
- To widen Officers powers to enforce any vehicle or driver licensed by another authority and to have this on a national level.

The Committee AGREED to notify the General Purposes Licensing Committee of their support for these proposals.

The Committee also AGREED to ask the General Purposes Licensing Committee to consider the scope to recharge other local authorities for licensing activities and enforcements relating to out of district vehicles and to explore the idea of a promotional campaign to encourage the public to use licensed vehicles.

The Committee NOTED the report and thanked the Licensing Manager and his team for their hard work and success in delivering improvements to the taxi licensing service.

89. CUSTOMER CONTACT PERFORMANCE

The Customer Contact Manager presented the report. Councillor Brown, Executive Board Member for Customer and Corporate Services was also present to answer any questions from the Committee. They explained that the main area of concern and poor performance related to the Resilience Contract which had been outsourced to Capita. This contract had ended on 31 January 2016 and the work had been brought in-house. The Customer Contact Manager was confident that this would result in improved performance levels.

The Customer Contact Manager explained that the service was targeting the following priorities:

- Improving capacity through process reviews
- Working with other service areas to identify routes to make contact with traditionally “hard to reach” groups
- Promoting “channel shift” opportunities (e.g. text messaging, improved speech recognition) to deliver budget savings
- Promoting service specific initiatives (e.g. working with the housing repairs team to create a housing repairs app)

The Committee NOTED the report and recorded their thanks to the Customer Contact Manager and her team for their hard work and the excellent service provided.

90. CORPORATE PLAN 2016 - 20

The Assistant Chief Executive presented the report.

The Committee questioned some of the statements and numbers contained in the paperwork and heard that the figures would be reviewed by Finance but that there were no other inaccuracies or fundamental changes to be made. The Committee also noted that Area Forums were referenced in the Plan but that some Area Forums in the city were not functioning as well as others. The Committee focused the remainder of its questioning on the consultation feedback and corporate success measures.

The Committee noted that thirty-two consultation responses had been received (compared to over fifty last year), of which the majority related to the budget and only six to the Corporate Plan. The Committee heard that the Council had been in dialogue with key partners during the development of the Corporate Plan and was planning to review its Community Engagement Strategy. The Committee expressed disappointment at the number of consultation responses received and questioned what scope there was to improve this number in future, including perhaps through more active engagement with target groups and by consulting on the Council’s Budget and Corporate Plan separately.

The Committee noted that the number of corporate success measures had been reduced and considered the merits of some of the selected measures compared to other measures not included. The Committee suggest that as the Council has a special responsibility as a social landlord, one of the corporate measures should be focused on tenant satisfaction, and that this measure could perhaps replace the measure on limiting the use of temporary accommodation.

The Committee also questioned whether there was a better measure available for new homes in the city because the number of new homes granted planning permission did not necessarily reflect the delivery of new homes on the ground due to other barriers to development. It was suggested that the numbers of Council Tax completion Notices could be a more useful measure in this respect.

The Committee AGREED to submit the following recommendations to the City Executive Board:

1. That the Corporate Plan should be fact-checked in light of funding and national policy changes.
2. That consideration is given to whether and how the number of responses received to the public consultation on the Budget and Corporate Plan could be maximised in future years.
3. That consideration is given to the following suggestions on the corporate success measures:
 - a) That there should be a corporate success measure on tenant satisfaction given that the Council has special responsibilities as a landlord;
 - b) That the corporate success measure for new homes granted permission in the city should better reflect the actual delivery of new homes.

Cllr Hollick left the meeting.

91. GRANT ALLOCATIONS TO COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS FOR 2016-2017

The Grants & External Funding Officer presented the report. Councillor Brown, Executive Board Member for Customer and Corporate Services was also present to answer any questions from the Committee.

The Committee noted the following points:

- Since 2014 there has been a steady increase in the number of applications under open bidding
- The Council recognises that small organisations have limited resources available to bid for grants and in response there are 2 workshops to explain the application process and support organisations making submissions
- The Council does receive grant repayments on occasion

- When awarding grants to county-wide organisations the Council makes it clear that the funding is to support Oxford city residents
- The Council welcomes applications from new organisations and ward councillors are encouraged to publicise the grants allocation process within their community
- The grant allocation evaluation criteria reflect the Council's priorities and areas of responsibility

Modern Art Oxford's Oxford City Council representative, Cllr Smith, said that she was working with the organisation to develop a new service level agreement and to improve the value for money derived from grant funding. The Committee endorsed this approach.

The Committee NOTED the report.

Cllr Hollick rejoined the meeting.

92. GO ULTRA LOW OXFORD GRANT FUNDING

The Service Manager Environmental Sustainability and the Environmental Sustainability Projects Officer presented the report. They said that a major barrier to the uptake of electrical vehicles was the difficulties of accessing on street charging points especially in areas of terraced and communal housing. This project would procure and test various on-street charging technologies with volunteer households. They asked the Committee to promote the scheme within their wards and encourage residents to volunteer to join the scheme.

In discussion the Committee considered the following points:

- the interface between the scheme and existing pressures concerning on street parking and residents parking permits
- the scope to involve local car clubs in the scheme
- the benefits of working with the partner organisations: BMW Group UK, Oxford University Transport Studies Unit and the County Council

The Committee agreed that all City Councillors should be encouraged to promote the scheme within their wards.

The Committee applauded the Sustainable City Team Leader, the OxFutures Programme Manager and the Environmental Sustainability Projects Officer colleagues for their hard work and success in securing the Go Ultra Low Oxford grant funding.

93. WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

The Committee reviewed the work programme and Forward Plan and AGREED to consider the agenda items detailed in the report at the March and April meetings.

The Chair advised that he had requested a report on the proposed demolition of a building at Westhill Farm.

The Chair of the Finance Panel commented on the positive contribution of officers and members to the budget review work which had resulted in 24 recommendations to the City Executive Board.

The Chair of the Housing Panel was pleased to report a positive response from the City Executive Board to the recommendations on Rents Performance and Choice Based Lettings. She said that she would be presenting the Panel's report on the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy at the next City Executive Board meeting, the recommendations focused on the approach to consultation, waste management in HMO properties and promoting the facility to report suspected unlicensed HMOs. She said that the Housing Panel meeting in April would be a joint meeting with the Tenant Scrutiny Panel to consider tenant involvement.

94. REPORT BACK ON RECOMMENDATIONS

The Scrutiny Officer reported that the City Executive Board responses to the Guest Houses Review Panel recommendations would be tabled at the next CEB meeting. The Chair said that the overall acceptance rate remained high as the Housing Scrutiny Panel recommendations had been accepted. The Committee NOTED the report.

95. MINUTES

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2016 as a true and accurate record.

96. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted the dates of the future meetings.

The meeting started at 6.15 pm and ended at 8.00 pm