

MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 6 October 2016

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

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Pat Kennedy (Young People, School and Skills), Councillor Bob Price (Leader of the Council) and Councillor Linda Smith (Board Member for Leisure, Parks and Sport)

INVITEES AND OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Professor Liz Browne (Brookes University) and Professor Debra McGregor (Brookes University)

OFFICERS PRESENT: Tim Sadler (Executive Director Community Services), Graham Bourton (Head of Direct Services), Val Johnson (Policy and Partnerships Team Leader), Stuart Fitzsimmons (Parks and Open Spaces Manager), Andrew Brown (Scrutiny Officer) and Sarah Claridge (Committee Services Officer)

41. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Coulter.
Apologies for lateness were received from Cllr Price, he was expected at 6.25 for item 6 Recommendation monitoring - Inequality Panel.

42. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Item 7- Educational Attainment
Cllr Gant – governor of Cutteslowe Primary School
Cllr Kennedy – governor of St Francis Primary School

43. WORK PLAN AND FORWARD PLAN

The Chair presented the report.

Work Plan

The Committee reviewed and noted the following changes in its work plan for the 2016/17 council year.

Safeguarding Language Schools – slipped to December
SEAP - slipped to December.

The Committee agreed to slip the workplace parking levies report from December to the January meeting to make room for the slipped CEB reports.

Standing Panels

Cllr Henwood updated the Committee on the work of the Housing panel.

Forward Plan

The Committee made no additional requests for reports from the Forward Plan.

44. REPORT BACK ON RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chair presented the report on recommendations.

The Committee noted the report.

45. DEVOLUTION PLANS FOR OXFORDSHIRE

Cllr Tidball, Chair of the Devolution Review Panel presented the proposed project scope.

She explained that the Panel had met last month to tighten the scope of the review She outlined the following points the Panel was to focus on:

- Review of the devolution proposals and to decide the best option for Oxfordshire.
- How best to deliver key service areas, infrastructure and adult and children care.

The Scrutiny Officer explained that an additional meeting was scheduled for 16 November.

The following was discussed:

Committee members can attend the meetings, but they are private meetings so members cannot discuss the findings.

Cllr Simmons asked whether the issues should be prioritised, as there are a lot of them. The Scrutiny Officer said that this would occur at the next meeting and lines of enquiry would be agreed. Cllr Tidball acknowledged that while the scope was broad, using service areas as case studies would help inform the discussion.

Cllr Price clarified three things: 1 There would be no devolution deals without all councils' agreement. 2. There needs to be a mayor. 3. Existing devolution deals are being pursued especially the Cambridge and Peterborough model.

Through the Growth Board the chief executives of the Oxfordshire local authorities are looking at governance issues.

The Scrutiny Committee resolved to **approve** the revised project scope for the Devolution Review Panel.

46. RECOMMENDATION MONITORING - INEQUALITY PANEL

Cllr Bob Price, Board Member for Corporate Strategy and Economic Development, and the Policy and Partnerships Team Leader updated the Committee on the implementation of the recommendations of the Inequality Panel.

The evaluation demonstrates what a lot of work goes into combating poverty and inequality in the city. Cllr Price said it was a core value of the Council which is reflected in the holistic approach taken across all services.

The Council does a lot of work with the voluntary sector/ partnerships and influences other organisations' policies and plans ie the clinical commissioners group (CCG) to tackle inequalities in health.

The Committee was reassured that their planning related recommendations would be included in the local plan review.

The Committee discussed the following:

Rec 2: The appointment of the Assistant Chief Executive has improved partnership working.

Rec 5h: There is on-going support to allow council tenants to downsize and relocate easily however quite often older people don't want to move.

Rec 6b: No figures are available on the uptake of keyworker housing interventions however the scheme has been extended and is promoted in schools and during the recruitment process. A conference is being run (by the universities) to retain and recruitment teachers in Oxford. The Policy and Partnerships Team Leader to ask officers whether this scheme includes teachers at free schools as well.

Rec 7: there is no work being done on whether the HMO scheme is affecting good landlords.

Rec 10 (a+b) – Can we have an update report on the work being done to offer council premises to promote health outcomes.

Rec 11 – The existing Barton medical centre will provide for the new Barton Park development.

Free NHS checks are offered to everyone aged 45-75 could the Council do more to promote this?

Rec 14a: The Committee felt there was scope for more Scrutiny work or a review of the Asylum Welcome scheme. Cllr Price said that an assessment of the number of Syrian refugees in the city would be useful as lots have arrived outside of the scheme.

Rec 19: It was suggested that the Council could decline to offer stands at job fairs to firms that don't offer the living wage. Cllr Price agreed with the proposal.

The Committee discussed the best way to review this report in the future. It was agreed that given the wide-ranging nature of the review, that a review group could be commissioned to monitor the implementations of the recommendations.

The Committee agree that Cllr Coulter (as chair of the initial Inequalities Panel) be asked to be champion this work and to feed back to the committee intermittently.

47. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Cllr Pat Kennedy, Board Member for Young People, Schools and Skills presented the report. She explained the background to the programme and its purpose. The report provides evidence that the programme improved the results of all participating schools, changed the culture in many city schools and most importantly gave teachers the confidence that improvements could be made.

The Committee welcomed Professors Debra McGregor and Liz Browne from Brookes University and the authors of the report. Professor McGregor explained the methodology of the report; they had interviewed 7 head teachers to understand what impact the 2 year intervention had had on children's abilities.

Professor Browne said that Table 10 of the report showed how pupils had made progress in their own rights. It shows data on the improvement of each school. She explained that only failing schools took part in the intervention (11 in total).

All the schools had large class sizes which is a problem in most Oxford schools.

Cllr Simmons asked whether the Council had taken forward any of the recommendations of the report. Cllr Kennedy said that there was a small networking programme of 3 schools, and there was a budget review to take some of the report's recommendations forward.

The Director for Community Services said that the leadership for learning programme was carrying on but slowly declining as funding reduced and only 2 schools had continued the KRM programme outside of the intervention.

Cllr Fry asked if the schools that dropped out of the programme regretted not participating. Professor Browne explained that there were various reasons why schools stopped participating in the programme. These were often either a new head teacher starting, who stopped the programme or teacher turnover. A lot of teachers that started the initiatives moved on to other posts over the 2 year period.

The teachers' network (established under the leadership for learning programme) continues to share good practice amongst schools.

The Chair asked if there were any connections between the nature of the KRM programme and the drop-out rate of schools. Professor McGregor said that the prescriptive nature of the KRM programme not always helpful for experienced teachers but can be very useful for newly qualified teachers.

The Director for Community Services explained that the City Council chose the KRM programme because they were looking for a programme with a proven track record for improving struggling schools. No school went backwards some just didn't approve as much as the Council would of like.

The Committee asked whether the programme had made a significant difference. The Director of Community Services said that it had made a material difference – for a relative small amount of money. The programme had cost £200,000 over 2 years, and at the time there was no programme available for supporting leadership before the City Council's programme.

The Committee provided the following feedback on the Council's educational attainment investments:

For the Council to progress through the recommendations

That the Scrutiny Committee **support** education funding bid in budget.

The Committee resolved to **note** the report.

48. REVIEW OF TREE MANAGEMENT POLICY

Cllr Linda Smith, Board Member for Leisure Parks and Sports presented the report and outlined the draft policy

She said that the policy had been written with a friendlier tone and focused on what the Council would do rather than what it would not do. The draft policy contains a more extensive arbitration and review section to assist customers who are unhappy with decisions. Officers reminded the Committee that the policy only extends to the management and maintenance of Council owned trees.

The Committee discussed the following:

The issue of trees blocking light and what the tree team would do in these cases. The Parks and Open Spaces Manager explained that there is no legal right to light but there is an obligation to keep the lamp posts clear. The Tree team considers each case on an individual basis.

Officers explained that the cost of maintaining the 100,000+ Council trees in the city put considerable budgetary pressures on the service. The tree team trades externally to subsidise these costs.

The Committee favoured the idea of fruit trees being planted in Council parks and asked for fruiting trees to be included in the tree planting list as an option for parks and for the policy to say that people can help themselves to the fruit off these trees.

The Committee agreed with the creation of a Customer Advice Guide and suggested a number of issues to be included (listed in recommendation 3)

That the Tree Planting Guide provide more information on the common trees listed and how they meet the requirements of the policy. That the planting guide list which trees could be pollarded; and for more information on which species are pollinators (specifically bee pollinators). The Committee also requested that a new section on trees that could be planted in parks (most notably fruit trees) be added.

The Committee raised concerns with the narrow focus of the policy in that it did not mention enough about the role of planning or the highways authority in tree management. Many tree issues faced by members of the public are the responsibility of other authorities and are not covered by this policy. To improve public understanding, it was requested that officers include a section at the front of the policy which highlighted what the policy covers and where people can find additional information on trees from the planning and highways authority.

The Committee noted a number of minor amendments to the report which the Board Member and Officers agreed to correct (listed in recommendation 1)

The Scrutiny Committee agreed the following recommendation to CEB

1: That the following amendments are made to the Policy:

- a) The phrase 'perceived to be causing medical issues' in the bullet points at the top of page 5 of the Policy is replaced with 'undocumented medical conditions'.
- b) Explanation is added that challenges under the arbitration and review process will be assessed against the Policy.
- c) The statement that 'every tree felled should be replaced' on page 8 of the Policy is strengthened to say that 'every tree felled will be replaced'.

2: That fruit trees are listed in the tree planting guide as an option for parks and that the policy mentions that people can help themselves to fruit from the fruit trees in Council parks.

3: That the following are included in the Tree Planting Guide or the Customer Advice Guide, as appropriate:

- a) How the common trees meet the requirement of the policy.
- b) Which trees could be pollarded.
- c) Which trees are pollinators.
- d) A new section listing (fruit) trees that are suitable for parks.
- e) General advice to householders on what trees are appropriate for planting in gardens.
- f) Guidance on which trees are suitable for planting in future council sites.

4: That the Tree Management Policy includes a clearer section at the start that highlights what the policy covers and what it does not cover, as well as signposting to where people can find additional information on trees from the City Council's Planning Department and Highways Authority.

49. FINANCE PANEL REPORT ON THE IMPACTS OF BREXIT

Cllr Simmons, Chair of the Finance Panel presented the report.

The Committee discussed EU funding being refused to UK based organisations, and whether the Council had an appetite to borrow more on low rates.

Cllr Tidball asked if it was too early to look at reducing business rates to encourage businesses to stay here. Cllr Simmons said that the Council doesn't set business rates but could give some businesses a rate holiday. However he was uncertain whether reducing business rates would encourage businesses to stay in the city.

The Committee agree to submit the report to CEB with the amended recommendation 2:

Recommendation 2: That the Council looks to partner with local Universities or economic institutions to study the wider impacts of Brexit on the economy of Oxfordshire, either through locally commissioned research or an Oxfordshire case-study in a national examination.

50. MINUTES

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2016 as a true and accurate record.

51. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting will be held on 7 November at 6.00pm

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.50 pm