

Minutes of a meeting of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE on Tuesday 6 December 2016

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Committee members:

Councillor Gant (Chair)	Councillor Hayes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Azad	Councillor Chapman
Councillor Coulter	Councillor Fry
Councillor Henwood	Councillor Pegg
Councillor Simmons	Councillor Tidball
Councillor Wilkinson	

Officers:

Paul Wilding, Programme Manager Revenue & Benefits
Ben Smith, Anti-Social Behaviour Prevention Officer
Mairi Brookes, OxFutures Programme Manager
Sophie Hearn, Contracts Manager
Shaun Hatton, Highways and Engineering Manager
Andrew Brown, Scrutiny Officer
Sarah Claridge, Committee Services Officer

Also present:

Councillor Susan Brown, Board Member for Customer and Corporate Services
Councillor Dee Sinclair, Board Member for Community Safety
Councillor John Tanner, Board Member for a Clean and Green Oxford

Apologies:

Councillor Taylor sent apologies.

62. Declarations of interest

Cllr Pegg declared she was a trustee of the Rose Hill and Donnington Advice Centre

63. 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.

The Scrutiny Officer said that a special meeting has been called on 12 January 2017 for the Committee to consider the report of the Devolution Review Group. Cllr Simmons asked if leaving the report to the new year was too late, and asked whether we should circulate it to CEB earlier. However the government is not going to be making any announcements on devolution until February so the current schedule is fine.

The Scrutiny Officer made the following announcements:

- A County Council officer has agreed to attend the meeting on 28 February 2016 to discuss air quality and the proposed workplace parking levy. The Committee is asked to agree lines of inquiry in advance of this session.
- A group of Scrutiny members visited the Recycling Team on 29 November and a report will come to the next normal Committee meeting. It has been suggested that a similar visit to Street Scene / Direct Services would be useful in 2017.

The Committee agreed to appoint a one-meeting panel to consider the Health and Wellbeing Board report on Health Inequalities in February/March 2017. Chaired by Cllr Coulter (lead member for inequality), a 4-member panel will be agreed at the 30 January meeting.

Cllr Simmons requested that the NHS Sustainability and Transformation Plan for Oxfordshire (STP) be added to the work plan for consideration. Consultation of the plan is taking place in March/April 2017.

Standing Panels

Cllr Henwood updated the Committee on the work of the Housing Panel. The Panel met with Oxford Brookes and the University of Oxford to review the council's limit of students living outside of student accommodation. Both universities put forward proposals to exclude specific students from the 3,000 limit.

These included excluding:

- nursing and teaching students (Brookes)
- postdoctoral researcher (university of Oxford)

The Panel are meeting informally on 20 December to review the suggestions.

Cllr Simmons updated the Committee on the work of the Finance Panel. They are meeting this week to discuss the budget.

Cllr Tidball updated the Committee on the work of the Devolution Review Panel. The group has finished collecting evidence and is now drafting recommendations which they will share with Cllr Bob Price and County Cllr Ian Hudspeth before the report is published on 4 January. She thanked the Scrutiny Officer for all his hard work.

Forward Plan

The Committee wishes to pre-scrutinise the following CEB reports prioritised in the order listed.

1. City Centre Strategy
2. East Oxford Community Centre – Improvement Scheme
3. Refresh of Carbon Management Plan

The Committee asked that a representative from the East Oxford Community Association be invited to speak on the report.

64. Report back on recommendations

The Chair presented the report on recommendations.

CEB responses to recommendations on the Planning Annual Monitoring Report and Digital Strategy. During the discussion at CEB the response to recommendation 4 on the Digital Strategy was changed from a No to a Yes.

The Committee noted the report.

65. Commissioned Advice Strategy 2018-2021

Cllr Brown, Board member for Customer and Corporate Services presented the report. She explained that the Council provides funding to four advice centres in the city for 3 years at a time. We are currently in the second year of the funding programme and are reviewing how we improve the way we commission advice in the future to make best use of taxpayers money and to meet the objectives of the financial inclusion strategy

It will take time to understand what the right services are for the city however we are discussing options with advice centres. No future structure has been agreed but we need to have consideration for.

1. Making use of scarce public funds
2. Improving the geographical equality of advice provision in the city

The current advice centres provide an excellent service and are located in areas of greatest need however there are other areas in the city that also requires assistance.

Geoffrey Ferres, trustee for the Rose Hill and Donnington Advice Centre spoke. He made the following points:

- That the report before the committee suggests that the Council won't give any more money after March 2018. Will there be funding for advice centre in 2018?
- The Council plans to tender for a single city- wide provider.
- Accepted there were geographical issues with the current set up as people aren't likely to access a centre that is more than a mile away but believed these could be fixed within the current structure.
- The sentence in the report that said "Advice centres were consulted and are broadly supportive of the proposal" is false

Cllr Brown regretted that Rose Hill and Donnington Advice Centre were not able to make the October meeting. She doesn't expect advice centres to welcome this report but the Council spends £500,000 a year on advice centres and it is important to work with them to find ways we can provide an equitable service to people across the city. She said the Council sees commissioning services as the best way we can achieve this. There is plenty of work to do with advice centres to make services fit for purpose and sustainable.

She said that the report did not give her the impression that the Council was fixated on a single contract. She doesn't have a clear vision of the future structure and needs to talk and discuss all the options.

The Committee voiced support in principle for the general approach taken and the aim of reducing geographical gaps in provision but expressed concerns about the language and tone of the report and the perception this gave. They suggested the report should be reworked before going to CEB.

Specific points included:

- The need to remove any room for perceptions that we already have a specific model in mind at this stage.
- The statement in para. 7 that current funding arrangements provide no incentives to reduce overheads – the committee felt that grant funding can be linked to outcomes.
- The Committee felt there was a 'false conflict' between services and overheads (which all organisations have).
- The Committee felt that there was 'pejorative language' in places that did not provide a fair representation of the advice agencies.
- The need for recognition that advice services are qualitative as well quantitative so the benefits they provide can't all be reduced to measureable outcomes.
- The need for more recognition in the report that this is the start of an exercise – mentioning the future CEB decision(s) would be helpful.

Cllr Brown agreed the points raised by the Committee about some of the language not being quite right and would seek to address this.

66. Safeguarding Language School Students

Councillor Sinclair, Board Member for Community Safety presented the report. She explained that the law only requires language schools to notify local authorities if a student is staying with a homestay for longer than 28 days, but many language students only stay for one to three weeks. Thousands of language students visit Oxford every year and there's a growing concern that students are being put at risk without authorities knowing about it. The Police Crime Commissioner is worried about the issue but the government feels the current arrangements are adequate.

The ASB Prevention Project Co-ordinator spoke on the work of the language school forum which has a strong partnership with the Police. The Forum works with language schools on monitoring their safeguarding responsibilities and promoting the welfare of

the students while they are in Oxford. The forum has been running for 4 years and most of the larger language schools attend.

Cllr Hayes asked what a scrutiny review group could do to add value to the work already being done. Cllr Sinclair felt it would be useful for a review group to be set up and suggested it could look at other practices in other cities – ie Brighton. She didn't want a review to add extra work to council officers.

Cllr Sinclair said she would ideally like to have a certification scheme which required language schools to meet certain criteria before they could operate under the Oxford name. However such a scheme would require officer time to implement and enforce.

The Committee decided not to form a review group as the responsibility lies with the County Council and they could see no areas where they could add value to the good work already being done.

The Committee felt there was scope for the Council (through CEB) to lobby for a strengthening of the legislation so that local authorities were informed when minors were staying temporarily in a private home for more than a few days.

Cllr Coulter agreed to approach the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) and the South East England Councils (SEEC) about forming a task and finish group to review the issue.

Cllr Hayes suggested asking Nicola Blackwood or Andrew Smith, the local MPs to convene a Westminster debate on the issue. They would have the resources to commission research into the best way forward. Cllr Sinclair agreed to contact the MPs and ask if they will invest effort in this.

The Committee recommended that:

1. Cllr Sinclair contact the MP(s) regarding convening a Westminster debate on the issue.
2. Cllr Coulter contact APSE and SEEC about setting up a task and finish group to review the issue.
3. CEB be asked to lobby for a strengthening of the legislation so that local authorities are informed by language schools when minors are staying temporarily in a private home for more than a few days.

67. Scrutiny Committee report on Air Quality

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report.

The Scrutiny Committee resolved to send the report to CEB.

68. Minutes

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2016 as a true and accurate record.

69. Performance Monitoring- Quarter 2

Cllr Fry, as Committee lead presented the report. He outlined his list of concerns with the way some of the indicators are measured, and the analysis of why some of the indicators had not met their target.

He made the following comments:

- BI002a & BI002b – queried why the target was zero is this an error?
- CS001& CS003 –breaking the information down into smaller sections would make it more useful. eg phone, email, face to face. The comments were difficult to understand and the target seemed contrary to the aim of encouraging customers to self-serve.
- LG002 – No results were presented by some initial reporting was already available.
- CE002 – target would be more useful if timed better with finance payments
- NI157c – reason for not meeting the target doesn't make sense as performance is being monitored using backlog cases as well as current ones.
- PC027 the result figure is in the thousands but the target for the year is only 400 is this an error in the figures?.
- Bi001 The target is zero but the result is 40% is this an error in the figures?

The Committee commented that the presentation and content of the report was not adequately accessible given that this document was in the public domain and expressed concerns about the extent of tracking and accountability.

The Committee agreed to take account of performance reports when considering items for inclusion in the Scrutiny Work Plan.

The Committee asked for confirmation that red indicators are highlighted to Board members.

The Committee agreed that the Scrutiny Officer and Cllr Fry should write to the Assistant Chief Executive outlining their concerns.

The response to be presented to the Scrutiny Committee.

70. Sustainable Energy Action Plan (SEAP) for Oxford

Councillor Tanner, Board member for a Clean, Green Oxford presented the report. He explained that the Council was a member of the Covenant of Mayors, which is a climate change mitigation initiative. Signatory cities have all pledged to reduce their emissions by at least 20% by 2020. The Council has pledged to reduce its emissions by 40% in total by 2020, which was equivalent to a 25% reduction in the Covenant of Mayors framework. The SEAP sets out how Council plans to reach this target.

The Committee discussed the difference between the Covenant of Mayors and the Compact of Mayors and the different reporting requirements for each. The two programmes are merging in January 2017 and the methodology for the SEAP might change.

The Scrutiny Committee made the following suggestions:

That the recommendations are made clearer to say that the Council is only just signing up to the Compact of Mayors.

That recommendation 3 is split into two to make it clearer to understand

That Council revisits the SEAP's methodology in the new year to see that we still comply.

71. Cycling Progress Report

The Contracts Manager presented the report. She explained that they had followed the wish list sent by the review group and done the achievable items. There are a couple of projects still to complete in the financial year; to amend the entrance signs to the city to say 'a cycling city' and install bike pumps around town.

The Committee discussed the need to promote the spending of CIL money to ward councillors and the possibility of pooling money to pay for cycling schemes.

The Committee asked why cycle sign on the Cowley road had not been done. Officers said that the County Council was planning on resurfacing the road and so it made sense to wait for this work to be completed before re-signing it. However the County had recently announced that they didn't plan to resurface the road until 2018. The Committee asked whether it was possible to re-sign the road anyway because they had already waited 2 years for the County to resurface it and 2 more years was unacceptable.

72. Dates of future meetings

The next meeting will be held on 12 January 2017.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.17 pm

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