

MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday 30 January 2017



COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Gant (Chair), Chapman, Coulter, Fry, Henwood, Pegg, Simmons, Taylor, Tidball, Wilkinson and Lygo.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Christine Simm (Board member for Culture and Communities), Councillor Linda Smith (Board Member for Leisure, Parks and Sport) and Councillor Susan Brown (Board member for Customer and Corporate Services)

INVITEES AND OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT:
Mr Nigel Gibson

OFFICERS PRESENT: Caroline Green (Assistant Chief Executive), Ian Brooke (Head of Community Services), Lucy Cherry (Leisure and Performance Manager), Julia Tomkins (Grants & External Funding Officer), Paul Robinson (Energy and Natural Resources Team Manager), Andrew Brown (Scrutiny Officer) and Sarah Claridge (Committee Services Officer)

78. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Hayes (substitute Councillor Lygo) and Councillor Azad.

79. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following non-pecuniary declarations of interest were made for Item 6 Grants Allocations to Community and Voluntary Organisations 2017/18 (refer minute 83):

Cllr Gant – member of Ark T Centre and Cutteslowe Community Association
Cllr Pegg – member of Rose Hill and Donnington Advice Centre
Cllr Taylor – member of Dovecott Voluntary Parent Committee
Cllr Lygo – member of Oxford Play Association
Cllr Simm – member of Donnington Doorsteps

80. 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 made the following comments:

Health inequalities review: The committee agreed the panel would be made up of Cllrs Coulter, Taylor, Thomas and Wade.

The Committee agreed to invite the chair of the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel to a future meeting.

County officer(s) to attend the Committee's February meeting to discuss air quality. The Committee nominated Cllr Simmons as lead member, to liaise with the Scrutiny Officer on the approach to take.

Standing Panels

Cllr Henwood told the Committee the Housing Panel had not met since the last Scrutiny meeting.

Cllr Simmons updated the Committee on the work of the Finance Panel. He said the panel were busy on the budget review and would circulate a copy of their budget report to members once it was finalised. He invited members to attend the finance panel meeting on Wednesday 1 February to discuss the budget proposal.

Forward Plan

For the March meeting, the Committee requested the Oxford Railway Station SPD from the Forward Plan.

They also agreed to see the Trading Company report after the Audit and Governance Committee had commented on it.

81. REPORT BACK ON RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chair presented the report on recommendations.

Cllr Simmons asked whether the review group had commented on the County's One Oxfordshire proposal. Cllr Tidball said she had addressed it at CEB, the review group had concluded that a mayoral combined authority option was more likely to succeed than a unitary authority. This was based on the evidence they had gathered. Cllr Tidball said that she would wish to highlight recommendations 18 and 19.

The Scrutiny Committee considered and noted the report on recommendations.

82. LEISURE PERFORMANCE UPDATE

Mr Nigel Gibson addressed the Committee. He said that benchmarking was merely a tool to support increasing prices. He felt the customer satisfaction comments were handpicked to show only good comments, and that no work had been done to track which leisure centres the former Temple Cowley pool users were now going too.

The Head of Community Services and the Leisure and Performance Manager presented the report. The Head of Community Services said that at the start of the Fusion contract 800,000 visits to the leisure centres took place annually, now it was up to 1.4m. The annual cost to the Council was nearly £2m at the beginning of the contract and now it is nearly zero.

Fusion is a non-profit, social enterprise organisation and there is a surplus sharing principle in the contract with the Council. Most surpluses made are invested back into the centres.

Benchmarking with other authorities is used to ensure prices are competitive and comparable with the market rate. Prices are reviewed annually and scrutinised by the Leisure Partnership Board. Prices are regularly reviewed and tested and have in some cases reduced.

Users are involved in the Leisure Partnership Board and the Council wants to strengthen this to get more users involved.

Fusion doesn't just rely on customer comments and complaints but is proactive at collecting user feedback. Council Apprentices have also recently contributed to actively seek feedback from younger users.

The Committee made the following comments:

Cllr Fry said that the user group he attends use to have a large number of maintenance complaints which has gone down significantly

The Head of Community Services said that no centre has a maintenance backlog. The budget is available, but the challenge is finding the time to repair things as the centres are busier which leads to more wear and tear.

Cllr Lygo asked about the progress made in providing healthy food at the centres. Cllr Smith, Board Member for Leisure and Sport said that a trial of healthy vending machine had been promising. Fusion's contract with their providers for vending machines and food and beverage concessions are up for renewal at the end of 2017 – so at that point we could look at a wider offering of healthier food.

Cllr Fry asked about the user group figures in the report. Are they correct, because the figures suggest the focus should be on young people?

The Head of Community Services agreed and said activities are provided to young people through the youth inclusion programme. He said that social return on investment (SROI) is built into the Fusion contract and it is their responsibility to show how social impact can be measured.

Cllr Henwood asked if the customer satisfaction comments were from the reference group or general public and could we see the survey results?

The Leisure and Performance Manager said they came from a selection of surveys including the monthly customer comments, national benchmarking surveys and proactive feedback requests.

Cllr Simmons said that Council had invested £14m in leisure centre infrastructure. What was the return on the Council's capital money put into leisure centres? The Head of Community Services said that it was not measured because no other authority does, so it does not provide a helpful comparator.

Cllr Chapman asked what are the things users complain about?. The Leisure Performance Manager said complaints are mostly received about:

- Responsive to repairs: Fusion has installed a facility management tracking system with priority ratings to complete rectification within a certain timescale. This has assisted and improved completing repairs promptly.
- Opening hours and timetabling: Fusion has introduced a static programme which changes 3 times a year and differentiates between school and non-school term times.
- Cleanliness: This has improved in the last 18-24 months

Cllr Chapman asked what work was being done to tackle carbon emissions, as one third of the council's carbon emissions come from leisure centres.

Cllr Smith said the new Blackbird Leys Pool and Leisure Centre is as efficient as it can be. The Council continues to improve the centres and Fusion's contract includes working to reduce carbon emissions. The Council investigated installing a heat exchange system at Hinksey Outdoor Pool but it's not currently financially feasible. Having a pool cover has also been dismissed for health and safety reasons (i.e. people accessing the pool out of opening hours)

Cllr Tidball said she would like to see a disability audit of all centres included in the annual report. An accessibility rating system could be used to compare centres. The Head of Community Services agreed to work on this.

Cllr Tidball asked whether the pricing structure could be adjusted to give preferential treatment for local users' i.e. discount rate if you live within a certain radius of a centre.

The Head of Community Services said he preferred advocating concessions on financial need rather than postcode.

Cllr Wilkinson asked whether officers' engaged with people who don't use the facilities. Officers said they review national surveys on non-users to understand why people chose not to use leisure centres.

Cllr Henwood asked if more data could be provided on the GP referral system especially how many people finish the programme and the health related outcomes. Officers agreed to provide this information.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

83. GRANT ALLOCATIONS TO COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS 2017/2018

Members who declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item (refer to Declarations of Interest minute 79) took part in the discussion.

Cllr Simm, Board Members for Culture and Communities and Cllr Brown, Board member for Customer and Corporate Services introduced the report. They said that that County Council funding reductions were having an impact and that the financial pressures facing many community and voluntary groups were likely to get worse. The City Council was committed to protecting funding for this sector and the approach set out in the report was similar to that taken in recent years.

The Committee welcomed the report and commented that relatively small grant awards could be very valuable to community and voluntary organisations, and that multi-year awards enabled organisations to plan ahead.

The Committee received confirmation that £20k had not yet been allocated from the Advice and Money Management theme, which has a budget of £518k. The Committee considered whether to recommend that this funding should be allocated but concluded that it would be useful to keep some headroom in case there were additional calls on this funding during the year, for example due to additional unexpected County Council budget cuts. The Committee suggest that the unallocated funding should be kept under review during the year to ensure that all of the £20k is spent.

The Committee noted that relatively few funding applications had been received from BME groups and questioned whether more could be done to encourage and support under-represented groups. The Grants and External Funding Officer advised that the small grants programme tended to be more appropriate for these groups and that two workshops had been offered; in Rose Hill Community Centre and the city centre. Locality Officers were encouraged to work with under-represented groups across the city and a new Diversity Officer was also now in post. The Board Member for Customer and Corporate Services added that it was important to try to step back and look at the overall picture rather than to automatically fund the same groups each year, and the new Commissioned Advice Strategy would better enable this type of approach. The Committee suggest that offering additional workshops in different locations across the city would also help to enable an inclusive approach to the allocation of small grants.

The Committee asked whether groups applying for grants through the Annual Open Bidding programme had access to examples of completed applications or to the council's assessment criteria, and heard that this was not the case. The Committee suggest that providing details of the council's assessment criteria on the application forms would help to support community and voluntary groups in applying for grant funding and improve transparency.

The Committee noted that the recommended amount of grant funding awarded to groups and projects through the Annual Open Bidding programme varied from nil to 100% of the amount requested. The Committee commented that the rationales provided for the recommended awards (the 'Why?' column in Appendix 2) were inconsistent and some explanations were not particularly revealing. The Committee suggest that transparency would be improved if a more consistent approach could be taken in future years.

The Grants and External Funding Officer said that the proposed grant of £9,900 going to the Rose Hill Junior Youth Club would not be needed as the club had secured the funding from their Big Lottery bid. This money is available for other priorities.

The Scrutiny Committee resolved to make the following recommendations to CEB:

Recommendation 1 – That the unallocated funding for the Advice and Money Management commissioning theme is kept under review with a view to ensuring that all available funding is allocated during the year.

Recommendation 2 – That workshops aimed at encouraging and supporting under-represented groups to bid for small grants are offered in a wider range of locations across the city.

Recommendation 3 – That details of the criteria used to assess applications received through the Annual Open Bidding programme are made available to applicants (e.g. on the application forms).

Recommendation 4 – That in future grant allocation reports a consistently transparent approach is taken to explaining the rationale for the levels of grants awarded through the Annual Open Bidding programme.

84. CORPORATE PLAN 2017/2018

The Assistant Chief Executive presented the report, she said that the Corporate Plan had previously been rewritten each year. This year the report provided a progress update that set out key things that had been achieved as well as priorities for the year ahead, reflecting the draft budget proposals.

The Committee noted that some of the key achievements had not happened yet and that priorities for next year were subject to a budget that had not yet been agreed. The Committee also commented that the number of new homes

unlocked by the Northern Gateway development (given as 900) also included new homes at the Oxpens development and that this should be made clear. The Assistant Chief Executive said that a final accuracy check would take place and that numbers for year-end would be provided against the success measures in the final version, rather than a projected outcome of achieved or exceeded (no corporate success measures were expected to be missed).

The Committee said the report gave the impression that the council had funded or delivered certain schemes in isolation when in fact these had been achieved in partnership with other bodies (e.g. the council had contributed £200k towards an £800k scheme to refurbish Cutteslowe Park Lower Pavilion). The Committee suggest that clarity should be provided where the council has funded or delivered schemes in partnership with voluntary groups and other organisations, as the recognition of their time and efforts can go a long way.

The Scrutiny Committee resolved to make the following recommendation to CEB:

Recommendation 1 – That the report makes it clearer where the council’s key achievements have been funded or delivered in partnership with voluntary groups and other organisations.

85. REFRESH OF CARBON MANAGEMENT PLAN: 2017 -2022

The Energy and Natural Resources Team Manager introduced the report and said that it set out in detail how the Council aims to meet its ambition to reduce carbon emissions by 5% per year.

The Committee questioned the level of Salix funding available to the council and whether this was a limiting factor. The Committee heard that the council has achieved a Salix revolving loan fund of £605k, 50% of which was provided by the government - who take a cautious approach to allocating Salix funding. This translates to c.£100k-£150k per year to spend on carbon reduction measures in buildings with a payback of 5 years or less . The council had been able to reach this level of funding by building good business cases and demonstrating that additional funding allocated to the council would be spent. The Committee suggested that the Council could release revenue from the transformation budget to fund invest to save carbon reduction schemes. The Council could also consider prudential borrowing where schemes would generate a good return.

The Committee noted the wider options for carbon reduction (listed on page 19 of the Plan) and suggested that there was an opportunity to influence the development of the Local Plan review and to factor carbon reductions into future planning policies, for example in relation to the designing of new homes and infrastructure, spatial planning and tree planting. The Energy and Natural Resources Team Manager said that he would be contributing guidance and best practice to the Local Plan review and the Committee wanted to support this with a recommendation.

The Committee also had a wide ranging discussion covering opportunities to use bio-fuels in fleet vehicles, emissions at leisure centres, 'load shifting' to reduce energy costs and the possibility of switching void council-owned properties to alternative energy suppliers such as Robin Hood Energy, which is wholly owned by Nottingham City Council.

The Scrutiny Committee made the following recommendations to the City Executive Board:

Recommendation 1 – That consideration is given to releasing revenue from the transformation budget and prudential borrowing in order to fund carbon reduction schemes, subject to robust business cases.

Recommendation 2 – That guidance and best practice in relation to carbon reduction measures are taken into account during the Local Plan review and influence future planning conditions on new developments.

86. REPORTS FOR APPROVAL

The Scrutiny Officer presented the reports on Safeguarding Language School Students, Cycling and Recycling.

Safeguarding Language School Students Report

Cllr Coulter said that in paragraph 11 he had contacted the District Council Network not APSE. He had also written to the minister but had yet to receive a response.

The Scrutiny Committee agreed the amended report

Cycle review report

The Committee felt there should be a third recommendation to seek clarity on what type of cycling projects members could spend their CIL budgets on – and to promote the use of pooling budgets to pay for larger projects.

The Scrutiny Committee agreed the amended report

Recycling report

The Scrutiny Committee agreed the report.

87. MINUTES

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2017 as a true and accurate record.

88. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting is scheduled for 28 February 2017

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.00 pm

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