

Minutes of a meeting of the CITY EXECUTIVE BOARD on Wednesday 20 December 2017

www.oxford.gov.uk



Committee members:

Councillor Price (Chair)	Councillor Brown (Deputy Leader)
Councillor Hayes	Councillor Hollingsworth
Councillor Rowley	Councillor Sinclair
Councillor Smith	Councillor Tanner
Councillor Tidball	

Officers:

Gordon Mitchell, Interim Chief Executive
Tim Sadler, Executive Director Sustainable City
Jackie Yates, Executive Director Organisational Development and Corporate Services
Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services
Anita Bradley, Monitoring Officer
Paul Wilding, Programme Manager Revenue & Benefits
Fatheya Latif, Housing Options Manager
Naomi Winniffrith, Syrian VPRS Officer
John Mitchell, Committee and Member Services Officer

Apologies:

Councillor Turner sent apologies.

117. Declarations of Interest

None.

118. Addresses and Questions by Members of the Public

None.

119. Councillor Addresses on any item for decision on the Board's agenda

None.

120. Councillor Addresses on Neighbourhood Issues

None.

121. Items raised by Board Members

None.

122. Scrutiny Committee Reports

There were no Scrutiny Committee reports for this meeting.

123. **Budget 2018/2019**

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report to propose a Medium Term Financial Strategy and the 2018/19 Budget for consultation.

In introducing the report, Councillor Price drew attention to some of its key features including, among others: an increase (of £200,000) in funding for homelessness prevention; an additional £5m to purchase properties for local homeless families; an additional £100,000 for energy efficiency works in Council properties (on top of an existing programme of over £24m); anticipated surpluses from the newly formed trading companies; investment in the Museum of Oxford (and consequential leveraging in of £1.3m from the Heritage Lottery Fund); and a continuation of the grant programme of £1.4m.

The Head of Financial Services updated Members with key points from the provisional local government finance settlement for 2018 to 2019 announced by the DCLG the previous day. At its heart was the opportunity for councils to raise Council Tax by a total of 3% (an additional 1%) without recourse to a referendum. Thought will now be given as to how best to respond to this opportunity.

The Council had bid (alongside Oxfordshire's other authorities) to be included in the 100% business rate pilot but had, unfortunately, been unsuccessful; officers could seek feedback as to why. There may be an opportunity to bid again for 2019/20.

The long awaited Fair Funding review was now likely to be effective for 2021 but meaningful details were still awaited.

It would now be possible to increase planning fees by up to 20% (with the proviso that the fee is recycled into planning work).

The public consultation on the Council budget would be launched the following day.

The City Executive Board resolved to:

- 1) **Approve** the 2018-19 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budgets for consultation and the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Plan as set out in Appendices 1-9, noting :
 - a) the Council's General Fund Budget Requirement of £23.281 million for 2018/19 and an increase in the Band D Council Tax of 1.99% or £5.77 per annum representing a Band D Council Tax of £295.96 per annum
 - b) the Housing Revenue Account budget for 2018/19 of £43.241 million and a reduction of 1% (£0.85/wk) in social dwelling rents from April 2018 giving a revised weekly average social rent of £104.58 as set out in Appendix 4
 - c) the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme as shown in Appendix 6.
- 2) **Agree** the fees and charges shown in Appendix 7.

124. Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2019/20

The Executive Director Organisational Development & Corporate Services had submitted a report to consider feedback from the recent consultation on the proposed changes to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme and to agree the principles of the new scheme to be drawn up for approval by Council on 29th January 2018.

Councillor Brown, Board Member for Customer & Corporate Services, introduced the report. While there had been relatively few responses to the consultation they had been well informed and of high quality. The report's recommendations were supported by the majority of respondents; would allow officers to respond to some of the consequences of the introduction of Universal Credit for hard pressed families; and represented a significant contribution to financial inclusion. It was noteworthy that the City was one of only a few councils to provide such support.

In discussion it was observed that the opportunity to raise Council tax referred to in the previous item could have cumulative consequences for families if, for example, the City Council, County Council and Thames Valley Police all chose to take advantage of it. This was something which Members and officers would have to have regard to.

The City Executive Board resolved to:

1. **Note** the outcome of the consultation on the proposed Council Tax Reduction Scheme;
2. **Instruct** the Executive Director Organisational Development & Corporate Services to draft the details of the new Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2018/19, including provision for uprating the proposed income band scheme, and submit the new Local Council Tax Support Scheme to Council for approval at its meeting on the 29th January 2018; and
3. **Recommend** Council to resolve to adopt the new Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

125. Impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Head of Housing Services had submitted a report to set out the changes and new duties in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, and to note their possible impact. The report also set out areas for service change in response to this and sought approval for the new Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme.

Councillor Rowley, Board Member for Housing, introduced the report observing that the changes would not make a significant difference to the Council's core activity in this area. The supporting administrative and other processes would, however, have to be re-engineered to some degree. A budget to secure these changes was in place for the current year, if more was needed beyond that there would be a further report to the Board.

He was pleased to note that the City had intervened successfully (and so prevented homelessness) in over 1,000 cases in 2015/16. This was a better record than the City's geographical neighbours and gave cause to be 'firm' with those neighbours in the 'relief' phase of the new arrangements.

In discussion the following points emerged. An increase in the number of those presenting as homeless was almost inevitable as would the number of appeals against decisions; temporary accommodation arrangements were likely to become longer; there would be a (continuing) strong focus on prevention; the response to those presenting as homeless (assessment and plan) would have to be mutually agreed; and there would be a particular focus on the needs of those who were at a high risk of becoming homeless (eg. care leavers; prison leavers; armed forces personnel; domestic abuse victims; hospital leavers and those suffering with mental health issues) and officers were working with relevant organisations accordingly.

Cllr Hayes drew Members' attention to the Parliamentary Homelessness Reduction Act inquiry, recent evidence to which had been critical of the new arrangements. He argued that to make a material difference to the challenges faced by homeless people there should be a focus on affordable homes; reversal of recent welfare changes; and proper support/funding for organisations supporting those with mental health/ substance abuse.

The City Executive Board resolved to:

1. **Note** the changes and new duties imposed on the Council by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the potential impacts on service delivery and resourcing;
2. **Endorse** the proposed service changes highlighted in this report, and welcome the further strengthening of homelessness prevention measures;
3. **Note** the additional 'new burdens' funding and that the 18/19 budget reports will include recommendations with respect to homelessness prevention funding from 18/19 onwards; and
4. **Note** the proposed arrangements for Oxfordshire Trailblazer Programme, led by Oxford City Council.

126. Quarterly Integrated Performance 2017/18 - Q1

The Head of Financial Services and Head of Business Improvement had submitted a report to update Members on Finance, Risk and Performance as at 30th September 2017.

He spoke to the report which was, essentially, very positive, noting over achievement of the Direct Services budget; a slightly adverse variance on the Housing Revenue Account; and slight slippage in the capital programme. Neither of the last two gave cause for concern.

In relation to the missed target for the number of people using leisure centres, Councillor Smith said steps were being taken to promote the centres in a more targeted way than hitherto. Competition from 'budget' providers remained a significant challenge.

In relation to the target of the percentage of customers satisfied at the first point of contact, more work was needed to assemble an accurate picture of satisfaction and reasons for dissatisfaction. Steps to improve the Council website were already being taken (eg removal of on-line forms that do not work well and the introduction of a 'webchat' facility).

The ambition of enabling customers to access the majority of Council services electronically was good but it was recognised that this was not practicable for all services.

The City Executive Board resolved to:

Note the projected financial outturn and current position on risk and performance as at the 30th September 2017.

127. SVPRS/VCRS Continuation 2017-18

The Head of Housing Services, had submitted a report to approve the continuation of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme (SVPRS) and Vulnerable Children's Relocation Scheme (VCRS) in 2017 to 2018 including families supported under Community Sponsorship schemes.

Councillor Price introduced the report which sought to continue and expand the two schemes, notably through the offer of accommodating a further 10 families and the inclusion of families supported via the Community Sponsorship model.

The Syrian VPRS Officer said the success of the schemes to date was in no small measure because of the good relationship that officers had with partners. It was recognised that the consequences of benefit changes and lack of familiarity with English would be particularly challenging for this group of people.

The positive outcomes for the children and young people supported by the schemes were commended.

It was noted that the Council had entered into the schemes voluntarily and there should, perhaps, be a more open and celebratory approach to discussions about and references to them .

A further report about progress would be provided in due course.

The City Executive Board resolved to:

1. **Approve** the continuation of the SVPRS and VCRS scheme to accommodate a further 10 families by the end of 2018; and
2. **Approve** the inclusion of families supported under the Community Sponsorship model in this offer.

128. Treasury Management Performance: Annual Report and Performance 2017/18

The Head of Financial Services has submitted a report on the performance of the Treasury Management function for the 6 months to 30th September 2017.

He spoke to the report and noted that while base rates had changed since the period covered by the report it was not anticipated that it would make a significant difference to the position that would be described in relation to the current quarter.

The City Executive Board resolved to:

Note the performance of the Treasury Management function for the six months to 30th September 2017.

129. Minutes

The City Executive Board resolved to:

Note the minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2017 as a true and accurate record.

130. Dates of Future Meetings

Meetings are scheduled for the following dates:

- 23 January
- 13 February
- 20 March
- 17 April

All meetings start at 5pm.

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 6.15 pm

Chair

Date: Tuesday 23 January 2018