

Minutes of a meeting of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE on Tuesday 5 June 2018

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Committee members:

Councillor Gant (Chair)

Councillor Altaf-Khan

Councillor Bely-Summers

Councillor Fry

Councillor Simmons

Councillor Howlett

Councillor Henwood (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Arshad

Councillor Donnelly

Councillor Kennedy

Councillor Simm

Officers:

Ian Brooke, Head of Community Services

Linda Ludlow, Human Exploitation Coordinator

Rosie Woolcott, Safeguarding Co-ordinator

Stefan Robinson, Scrutiny Officer

John Mitchell, Committee and Member Services Officer

Also present:

Councillor Marie Tidball, Board Member for Supporting Local Communities

Councillor Tom Hayes, Board Member for Safer, Greener, Environment

Mark Munday, Fusion Divisional Business Manager

12. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Dafari-Marbini for whom Councillor Howlett was a substitute.

13. Declarations of interest

None.

14. Chair's Announcements

None.

15. Minutes

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 17 May 2018 subject to the addition of Councillor Donnelly in the list of those present.

16. Annual Work Plan Review and Forward Plan

Work Plan

The Scrutiny Officer introduced the item. He reminded the Committee that the Work Plan was a 'live' document the contents of which was in their gift. A longlist of potential items for the Scrutiny Work Plan was presented to the Committee, based on suggestions gathered from councillors and senior council officers. Each of the suggestions had been scored against a set of criteria to support the Committee in prioritising items. The Committee were invited to add and remove any items to the longlist, and agree this list as an indicative Work Plan for the year.

The Chair thanked the Scrutiny Officer for a thorough and well thought out report. The scoring mechanism had provided a robust approach for determining the order of the Work Plan and he saw no reason to depart from it. The Committee agreed to the longlist of items as the basis of its Work Plan for the year. The Scrutiny Officer would liaise with Councillor Howlett in order to schedule the Prevent initiative for a subsequent committee meeting.

The Committee also agreed to delegate the formation of each Standing Panel's work plan to the respective panels.

Review Groups

It was noted that the intensive nature of review group work meant that it was not practical to run more than one at a time. Previous practice suggested that 3 to 4 reviews could be conducted in a year, the actual number depending on their complexity. The Scrutiny Officer had had early conversations with officers to understand the Council's capacity to manage some of the suggestions for Scrutiny Reviews. Specifically, officers had raised concerns about their current capacity to support review groups into rough sleeping and air quality, given their current workload. The new Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-2021 had recently been agreed, and officers were working to implement this Strategy.

Officers working on air quality initiatives had advised that their workload was such that they had no capacity to support a review. This could be reviewed when the Scrutiny Committee considers the Annual Air Quality Status report in September 2018. Officers had however welcomed councillor interest in establishing a tourism management review group.

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

Cllr Simmons argued for a review group on homelessness/rough sleeping. While acknowledging that officers had resource and duplication concerns about the work already being done in this area, he was concerned that more attention needed to be paid to the need for a pathway for rough sleepers without a local connection. This could be a narrowly focused piece of work.

Cllr Bely-Summers supported the idea of a review group on rough sleeping, a need exemplified in her view by some of the distressing cases she had witnessed the previous winter. She drew particular attention to the 'local connection' criterion, which she saw as something which should be re-visited.

Cllr Simm suggested that it would be wise, first, to reflect on the efficacy of the new Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-2021.

Cllr Henwood said the City's provision for homeless people and rough sleepers was second to none considering the finite resources available, but agreed that it would be desirable to review the local connection criterion.

Cllr Howlett was supportive of this as a subject for review with the proviso that the lessons learnt were in place by the following winter.

Cllr Donnelly agreed that this was an important subject and one which came up regularly 'on the doorstep' but suggested that consideration should be given to subjects in relation to which the Committee could have most impact. The root causes of homelessness and rough sleeping lay with national policies in relation to which the Committee's influence was limited.

Cllr Arshad was also supportive of this as a theme, suggesting that the issue of no recourse to public funds was another element which should be looked at.

Cllr Simmons agreed that the City's Homelessness Strategy was very good and served those with a local connection well, but still maintained that the pathway for those who were homeless and rough sleepers did need examination. While the root causes did indeed lie elsewhere, if some mitigation could be offered it should be looked at. The practice of providing services to rough sleepers without a local connection was more generous in some other parts of the country such as Derby.

Tourism management

Cllr Gant argued for a review group on tourism management. Tourism was vital to the prosperity and image of the City. The Council could be a more proactive player and spearheading tourism initiatives rather than hanging 'onto the coat tails' of others. Other Cities (such as Bath) were more successful in this regard with such initiatives as a tourist levy and a 'visitor card' (to encourage/facilitate visits to the many and various tourist destinations in and around the City). Oxford had recently twinned with two additional cities but there was no increased officer capacity to capitalise on the potential benefits of that. A proper twinning strategy was needed. Thought had been given to seeking UNESCO status for the City but that had faltered. This was something worthy of proper consideration.

Cllr Donnelly agreed that this was a good subject for review. It was something which had the potential to raise revenue on the back of the considerable "historic cultural capital" of the City.

Cllr Simmons agreed that this was an important subject and worthy of examination.

Conclusion

It was agreed that the first three review groups of the new Council year should be on: homelessness/rough sleeping; tourism management; and air quality. These

groups to be chaired by Cllrs Bely-Summers; Gant and Henwood respectively. The reviews would be scoped by the Chairs of each of these groups, in conjunction with officers, and report back with further information to the next meeting at which the order in which the reviews would be taken can be decided.

Membership of Standing Panels.

Membership of the Standing Panels was agreed as follows:

Housing: Cllrs Henwood (Chair), Bely-Summers, Howlett, Arshad, Goff, Gotch, Wolff

Finance: Cllrs Fry (Chair), Munkonge, Henwood, Smith, Altaf-Khan, Simmons

Companies: Cllrs Fry (Chair), Henwood, Corais, Munkonge, Landell-Mills, , Simmons

17. Fusion Lifestyle's Annual Service Plan

The Committee Services Officer tabled a revised version of Appendix 3A to the report which contained a number of tracked changes.

The Board Member for Leisure and Housing drew the Committee's attention to the most significant of those changes. She went on to speak to the substantive report. Oxford remains one of the most physically active cities in the country however the recent performance of Fusion Lifestyle had been disappointing with a decline in visitor numbers. This was due, in large part, to the services provided being 'squeezed' by competition from, on the one hand, an increasing number of budget gyms and, on the other, luxury providers. In addition, an increasing number of people were taking advantage of opportunities to exercise in different ways in parks, open spaces and community centres. Steps were being taken with Fusion Lifestyle to drive up participation rates, particularly with certain target groups. Fusion Lifestyle's Performance was monitored monthly and the Council's Head of Financial Services kept a close eye on the budget position.

The Board Member for Leisure and Housing was clear that ambitious targets for improvement were necessary. The Committee recognised that the City Executive Board wants to be ambitious in its targets for Fusion, but these must also be realistic and achievable, particularly in the context of the increasingly competitive leisure market. The Committee questioned whether the target, set at a 3% increase in visitor numbers in 2018/19, was realistic.

The Committee expressed particular concern about the following statement in paragraph 19 of the report, "We do not have any investments planned for our leisure centres in 2018/19, so it is highly unlikely that the current trend of reducing visits will change." Reference in the report was also made in paragraph 20 to Fusion "working hard to tighten up their costs." Members believed that declining customer satisfaction coupled with a lack of investment was likely to result in a further loss of customers. Accordingly, it was recommended that there should be an action plan to address the matter of declining visitor numbers.

There was shared agreement that the performance was disappointing, but it was nonetheless good for the Council to have Fusion Lifestyle as the Council's not for profit provider.

Attention was drawn to a number of areas of concern including such things as high turnover of staff; IT difficulties; telephones not being answered; slow response to maintenance issues which, cumulatively, led to customer dissatisfaction and were difficult to reconcile with the QUEST accreditation. It was suggested that it would be interesting to see how the shift in patterns of leisure behaviour compared with other parts of the country. It would be useful if Fusion Lifestyle's performance, as measured by key indicators, should be a regular part of the Committee's quarterly monitoring and should include the total staff numbers which, in addition to turnover levels, it was suggested had gone down.

The Head of Community Services agreed that improvement was needed and that the customer experience needed to improve. With regard to staff turnover, he noted that the leisure sector was experiencing recruitment difficulties throughout the country. The squeeze referred to by the Board Member presented a real challenge. The poor performance needed to be addressed in a number of ways: increasing participation rates; tighter control of costs; an improved approach to maintenance and cleanliness.

Some Councillors drew attention to the importance of swimming lessons for children in a City with rivers and open pools, and suggested that this was something that warranted more active promotion and that more should be done to promote the use of the Hinksey pool to those schools and playgroups in its immediate vicinity.

Anecdotal evidence suggested that older people were discouraged from using some pools because the water temperature was too cool. It was suggested that the possibility of raising the temperature for, say, one day week should be considered. It was explained that all pools have different characteristics and that competitive swimmers (who comprise another regular group of users) require slightly lower temperatures. It was also noted that to change the temperature of such large volumes of water (both up and down) by just one or two degrees could take over 24 hours.

The Committee agreed that more emphasis should be given to marketing targeted particular groups such as pre-school age children; older people; and members of the BAME community. Some times of the week would, for example, always be difficult for certain women in the BAME community. Inconsistencies in timetables from week to week was likely to have a negative effect on attendance.

The Chair reminded those present that where targeting was based on socio-economic/geographical criteria, it should be remembered that other areas often contained pockets of deprivation not so easily distinguished.

In response to some of the points raised, the Divisional Business Manager said that 2017 had been a challenging year for the reasons described, but 2018 was already seeing improved performance assisted in part by the introduction of new, more flexible, membership types. In relation to recruitment issues, he described a range of programmes provided by Fusion Lifestyle, designed to provide career development

opportunities and improve management skills (via an externally validated provider). Fusion was also committed to bringing on young people through its apprenticeship programme. He agreed to look at the practicality of the suggestion about pool temperatures but emphasised that this would be necessarily constrained by the factors mentioned above.

In conclusion, the Committee **resolved** to make the following recommendations to the City Executive Board:

1. That the overall visitor numbers target set for Fusion Lifestyle leisure centres is reviewed to take account of emerging market pressures. Despite previous years of success, consideration should be given to whether the 3% year on year increase remains realistic and achievable;
2. That an action plan is developed to address the decline in the total number of visits recorded and is made available to members for review;
3. That further marketing, publicity and engagement activities are undertaken to raise awareness of swimming opportunities and concessions for u17s, older people, and members of the BAME community. Specifically, there should be more engagement at a local level, such as with schools and playgroups in the Hinksey Park area to promote learn to swim initiatives, and make better use of the outdoor pool; and
4. That quarterly quantitative data is made available (which the Scrutiny Committee will monitor) to enable the Council to better understand Fusion Lifestyle's performance in additional key areas, such as the proportion of calls answered, trends in staffing numbers and turnover, and responsiveness to repairs.

18. Safeguarding Annual Report

The Board Member for Supporting Local Communities thanked the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to discussion about this important matter. The report focused on three key elements: the outcome of the 2017 Safeguarding Audit; the Council's Safeguarding Action Plan; and the Council Policy for safeguarding children, young people and adults with care and support needs.

The City Council acted as the lead agency in relation to safeguarding matters on behalf of the other District Councils. The Board Member sat on the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board and acted as the link between it and the Districts. The outcome of the audit had been very favourable, with the Council achieving an overall 8 areas of best practice out of a possible 10. The Council had also asked two of its larger providers (Parasol and Aspire) to complete their own audits.

Members of the Committee were grateful for the report and the fact that previous Scrutiny recommendations had been woven into it was noted.

The Safeguarding Co-ordinator explained that her post was new and one which sought to engage with communities and services in relation to which there may be safeguarding challenges.

The Board Member said that the next area of focus would be on young carers and child exploitation. She spoke about the introduction of 'My Concern' an 'App' for recording concerns about safeguarding matters. The information held there would only be available to those with a proper professional interest. Councillors would be offered briefing on 'My Concern' in due course.

The Action Plan provided a snapshot of safeguarding activity which was driven by the policy. The Board Member reminded the Committee that the policy was of universal application throughout the Council and this included relevance for councillors given that they were frequently in receipt of information to do with safeguarding matters. Safeguarding training for councillors would be soon available. While many councillors received safeguarding training because of their other roles (e.g. being a school governor), this training would be tailored to their needs as councillors.

The Lead Officer for Human Exploitation said that the County Council had done a great deal of work to raise awareness amongst school pupils of safeguarding matters, citing the example of "Chelsea's Choice" (a play that had been offered to all secondary schools across Oxfordshire, raising awareness amongst pupils in years 8-10 of the risks of Childhood Sexual Exploitation). Members of the Committee were pleased to hear this but thought it would be helpful to hear more about the reach of safeguarding awareness training across the City and that this should form the basis of a recommendation to the City Executive Board.

The Committee were pleased to note the development of the 'Get Heard' buddy system for older people.

The arrangements for insisting on safeguarding training for Hackney Cab and Private Hire drivers licenced by the Council were commended. It was pleasing to note that the good practice in the City was being promoted in other districts.

The Board Member concluded by reminding the Committee of the importance of "Making Every Contact Count" which provided an opportunity for vulnerable residents to be identified in the course of day to day interactions and, if necessary, then referred to the appropriate team.

The Chair thanked the Board Member for a thorough and well thought out report.

The Committee **resolved** to submit the following recommendation to the City Executive Board:

"That the Council works with partners, such as the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Board, to gather data on the number of school aged children that receive face to face safeguarding awareness training, such as that delivered by the youth ambition team, to better understand the reach of safeguarding work in Oxford. Once collated, this should

be shared with partners such as the Children's Trust, together with any evaluation and analysis."

19. Modern Slavery Act - Transparency Statement 2017-2018

The Board Member for Safer, Greener, Environment, introduced the report which demonstrated that the Council was compliant with the new legal requirement. He said the Council should be proud of its unequivocal stance that it will not tolerate the exploitation of anyone and particularly those who are vulnerable. He noted too the importance of the Council exerting leverage on its supply chains to demonstrate similar behaviour.

The Lead Officer for Human Exploitation said that data were being sought from other parts of the UK for help in identifying an 'early warning system' for signs of exploitation.

The Committee noted that the Council's two trading companies would need their own statements and that the City Executive Board should be asked whether the companies should be acknowledged in the final version of the Council's statement.

The Committee **resolved** to make the following recommendation to the City Executive Board:

"That consideration is given to whether the Council's Modern Slavery Transparency Statement should be amended to include reference to the Council's wholly owned companies, highlighting that as separate entities they may also have their own statements."

20. Report back on recommendations

The Committee noted the responses of the City Executive Board to its most recent recommendations and the point of clarification included on the recommendation tracker document. In some cases it was felt that some clarification of the Committee's original intention may be helpful because the comments from the City Executive Board did not fully address the intention of the recommendations. The Chair agreed to raise this at the next meeting of the Board.

21. Dates of future meetings

Meetings for 2018 are scheduled as followed:

Scrutiny Committee

- 03 July
- 30 July (provisional)
- 06 September
- 08 October
- 06 November

- 04 December

Standing Panels

Housing Standing Panel: 05 July, 11 October, 12 November

Finance Standing Panel: 04 July, 10 September, 06 December

Companies Panel (*Provisional dates*) 31 July, 11 September,
29 October, 12 December, 03 January 2019

All meetings start at 6.00 pm

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.30 pm

Chair

Date: Tuesday 3 July 2018

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