

## **Minutes of a meeting of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE on Tuesday 3 September 2019**



### **Committee members:**

Councillor Gant (Chair)	Councillor McManners (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Arshad	Councillor Bely-Summers
Councillor Corais	Councillor Djafari-Marbini
Councillor Lygo (for Councillor Donnelly)	Councillor Fry
Councillor Howlett	Councillor Lloyd-Shogbesan
Councillor Simmons	Councillor Harris (for Councillor Altaf-Khan)

### **Cabinet Members:**

Councillor Tom Hayes, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford.  
Councillor Marie Tidball, Cabinet Member for Supporting Local Communities

### **Officers:**

Andrew Brown, Committee and Member Services Manager  
Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Officer  
John Mitchell, Committee and Member Services Officer  
Mai Jarvis, Environmental Quality Team Manager  
Julia Tomkins, Grants & External Funding Officer

### **Apologies:**

Councillors Altaf-Khan and Donnelly sent apologies.

## **24. Declarations of interest**

None.

## **25. Chair's Announcements**

The Chair welcomed Tom Hudson the new Scrutiny Officer to his first meeting of the Committee.

With the Committee's agreement and at the Chair's suggestion the agenda was re-ordered to take account of the convenience to guest speakers.

## **26. Monitoring the Community Grants Programme - Report for 2018/19**

The Cabinet Member for Supporting Local Communities, Councillor Marie Tidball, introduced the report which would be considered by the Cabinet at its meeting later in the month. At a volatile and challenging time for the charitable and voluntary sector, grants from the City Council provided vital support which had a significant social impact. It was particularly noteworthy that the £1,515, 043 awarded by the council leveraged a further £4,264,575 of funding for the sector, or nearly £3 for every £1 invested. This support benefited some 200,000 people in one way or another (this would include some people who benefitted from more than one opportunity as well as some from outside the City). Particular attention was being paid to ensure that the programme supports those with protected characteristics in an equitable fashion. An event was being held later in the year, intended to alert the BAME community in particular to the opportunities available via the grant programme.

The introduction of the Oxford Lottery in March 2019 was an innovative means of securing additional funding to support local voluntary and community groups in the city. Simplifying the process for applying for funding had encouraged applications from organisations which might otherwise not have done so. Support for social enterprises was something that could be looked at (they were generally not eligible). It was difficult to quantify the extent to which the help provided by grants supported statutory and other services which had been cut (e.g. loss of Children's Centres). Julia Tomkins, the Grants & External Funding Officer, said that there was however a discernible increase in both demand and support for those experiencing multiple difficulties. Councillor Tidball agreed to take this question to the Children's Trust. Similarly, it was difficult for grant holders to measure and for the Council to aggregate data relating to the returns on investment of the programme arising from negative outcomes avoided.

The Grants & External Funding Officer agreed to find out how much funding was directed to supporting those who are homeless and rough sleeping.

The Committee were very appreciative of the contribution made by the grants programme and agreed to make the following recommendations to Cabinet:

1. That the Council produces a plan of action to raise the profile of the Oxford lottery, particularly through promotion to residents, large local businesses and within the Council itself.
2. To consider how the grants programme eligibility criteria may be altered to enable social enterprises in the City to access and deliver grant funded projects.

The Chair thanked Councillor Tidball and the Grants & External Funding Officer for their contribution to this important discussion.

## **27. Annual Air Quality Status report - 2018**

The Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon, Councillor Tom Hayes Oxford introduced the report by reminding the Committee of the unequivocal connection between poor air quality and people's health. Progress in improving air quality in the city had been good but the rate of improvement was slowing down. The period 2008- 2018 had seen a 37% reduction in NO<sub>2</sub> levels in places where it was measured. Air quality was measured at 72 city locations and the air pollution levels at 4 of them exceeded the annual mean legal limit value for NO<sub>2</sub> (compared with 17 locations five years previously). The Council had built up considerable expertise in this area and its innovative and proactive approach had led, among other things, to grant funding which will enable the purchase of electric delivery vehicles, the installation of EV charging points across the city and the development of an 'Energy Superhub'. As a result of this investment good progress was now being made with introduction of buses, taxis and the council's own fleet of vehicles with reduced emission levels in anticipation of the introduction of a Zero Emissions Zone in 2020 in the city centre. There was a growing consensus about the risks associated with poor air quality it was important for everyone to do what was necessary to reduce the risks associated with air pollution.

The question of being more prescriptive in relation to the Low Emissions Zone than is currently the case (e.g. that it should apply to HGVs as well as buses) was constrained by the fact that the Council is not the transport authority and any proposals must be agreed in partnership with the County Council, notwithstanding the good and growing relationship the City Council had with the County about these matters. Consideration would be given to exploring the initiative made in Sheffield which has run vehicles on biogas generated from the raw sewage treatment process.

It was noted that some parts of the city were not subject to air quality monitoring but were, at the same time, areas of relative poverty. In these areas it was likely that some residents would suffer from poor health and therefore be more vulnerable. Mai Jarvis, Environmental Quality Team Manager, said that while monitoring for the purposes of the annual status report was subject to strict guidelines, the Oxair project offered the opportunity to use low cost sensors much more flexibly.

The anti-idling campaign which had focussed on schools had been valuable. Consideration might be given to extending it to other areas. It was noted that while powers are available in relation to idling, the legislation make it difficult to take action against individuals. The Government however intends to introduce revised powers which will address this point.

The Committee noted that harmful emissions from diesel train engines and engines in canal and river boats close to residential areas should be subject to controls. The Environmental Quality Team Manager said that analysis of NO<sub>2</sub> emissions from trains in the city had shown that, because of their distance from residential areas and the speed of dispersion, they did not reach levels which would justify action being taken.

In relation to boats, a letter had been written to the then Environment Secretary arguing that emissions from boats should be capable of being subject to control. No response had been received but a further request could be sent.

In seeking to limit access to vehicles to parts of the City, sight must not be lost of the parallel need to make those areas pleasant and practical to use for pedestrians and cyclists alike.

There might be merit in alerting drivers to the perhaps less obvious risks to them of sitting in vehicles in slow or heavily congested traffic as an added incentive not to travel by car.

The Committee agreed to recommend to the Cabinet that:

1. Further consideration be given to measures to control emissions arising from the exemption of trains and canal boats from the Clean Air Act, particularly with regard to boats at non-permanent moorings close to residential areas.
2. The County Council be encouraged to consider implementing parking exclusion zones close to schools in the City; and
3. It seeks in every way to ensure that the City Council is empowered in the forthcoming Environment Act to take enforcement action against idling vehicles.

The Chair thanked Councillor Hayes and the Environmental Quality Team Manager for their contribution to this important matter.

## **28. Minutes**

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 04 June 2019 as a true and accurate record subject to the correction of a number of minor typographical errors.

## **29. Work Plan and Forward Plan**

Councillor Lygo left during this item.

The Scrutiny officer alerted the Committee to suggestions for changes to the Committee's work plan consequent upon slippage in the Cabinet Forward Plan and other factors. This included adding the Quarter 1 Monitoring Report to the October Committee's agenda as no Finance Panel meeting was scheduled for that month. The Committee agreed to these suggestions.

In discussion about potential review groups for the present council year, the Chair noted that capacity to run them would be constrained to some extent by the limited time available (a later Autumn start than usual and an earlier end as a result of pre-local election purdah in April 2020). In practice there would be time for one substantive review or, perhaps, one slightly less substantive review and one very short and focused review, the latter to take place during February.

In discussion it was suggested that Community Wealth Building could be merged with the Monitoring Social Value item on the Finance Panel work plan. An item on early outcomes from the Citizen's Assembly would be desirable at some point, perhaps in December, in addition to a wider item on Public Participation in Decision Making and Citizen Involvement. It was agreed that the scheduling of these items would be subject to decisions the Committee makes on establishing review groups.

The Committee agreed to decide upon review group subjects at its next meeting. It was also agreed that Members should scope their proposed subjects in advance of the meeting. Suggestions (and draft scopes) should be sent to the Scrutiny Officer as soon as possible in order that they may be circulated before the next meeting.

### **30. Performance monitoring - quarter 1**

Councillors Arshad, Djafari-Marbini and Bely-Summers left during this item.

Councillor Fry had, prior to the meeting, posed a number of detailed questions about the performance monitoring report and provided them to the Scrutiny Officer. The questions were tabled for the benefit of the Committee and the Scrutiny Officer was able to read out responses received from officers. Those questions and responses are attached as an appendix to these minutes.

The Committee agreed to recommend to the Cabinet that:

1. There should be clarification about which, if any, of these indicators included data from Oxford Direct Services or Oxford City Housing Limited and the way in which these were used, particularly in reference to whether under measure BI001 – Percentage of Council spend with local businesses - Oxford Direct Services is recorded as a recipient of Council spend, a contributor to Council spend or both?;
2. That the wording of indicator ED002 – Implementation of measures to reduce the City Council's carbon footprint by 5% each year - should be reviewed as it could, at the moment be misinterpreted as meaning that it is Council policy to become carbon neutral in 20 years rather than making a reduction against a notional projected level of emissions.
3. That LP220 – the number of people from the Council's target groups using its leisure facilities - be supplemented with two further measures: i) revenue vs previous periods, and ii) progress against maintenance targets.
4. CoS031 – Effective delivery of the capital programme. It is recommended that the measure be changed to either i) disbursements, or ii) contractual commitments as a percentage of budgetary targets. It is currently unclear what the percentage measure actually refers to: milestones, total spend or projects?
5. WR001 – Number of people moved into work by the Welfare Reform Programme. It is recommended that in light of the challenges facing this team, the criterion is no longer realistic and that a revised target be agreed.
6. CS054 – Time taken to determine DHP applications. It is recommended that in light of the growth of Universal Credit and the increasing influence factors external to the Council have on the delivery of this criterion that Cabinet considers whether this measure remains fit for purpose.

The Chair asked for thanks to be passed to officers for their swift responses to the questions raised in advance. It was agreed that this represented an effective model for the future working of the committee.

## **31. Report back on recommendations**

In discussion about the Cabinet's response to the Committee's previous recommendations the Chair agreed to go back to the Cabinet in relation to:

1. The desirability of more regular (quarterly) reporting on the reasons for slippage in the capital programme;
2. To note that the Committee's challenge to the Seacourt Park and Ride was based on the fact that it was not, in the Committee's view, a sound financial investment and that this point had not been sufficiently addressed;
3. The absence of a number provided in response to the question about the number of children having received face to face safeguarding awareness training. An explanation regarding the County Council's role in delivering such training was provided instead; and
4. A request to see the report referred to in response to the recommendation about actions flowing from the Guest House Scrutiny Review Group.

## **32. Dates of future meetings**

Meetings are scheduled as followed:

### **Scrutiny Committee**

- 1 October 2019
- 5 November 2019
- 3 December 2019

### **Standing Panels**

- Housing Standing Panel: 3 October, 7 November, 5 March
- Finance Standing Panel: 5 September, 5 December, 6 January
- Companies Panel: 19 September, 14 November, 12 March

All meetings start at 6.00 pm

**The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.55 pm**

**Chair .....**

**Date: Tuesday 1 October 2019**