

Minutes of a meeting of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE on Tuesday 3 March 2020

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Committee members:

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

Also present:

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Leisure and Housing
Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities and Customer Focused Services

Officers:

Tom Bridgman, Executive Director (Development)
Helen Bishop, Head of Business Improvement
Anita Bradley, Monitoring Officer
Andrew Humpherson, Regeneration Manager
Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Officer
John Mitchell, Committee and Member Services Officer

Apologies:

Councillors Fry and Simmons sent apologies.

87. Declarations of interest

Councillor Gant declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to the draft report of the Climate Emergency Review Group (item 8 of the agenda) as a member of Oxford Co-Wheels Car Club.

88. Chair's Announcements

The Chair noted the need to go into confidential session if the Committee wished to discuss any of the confidential appendices in relation to items 5, 6 and 9.

89. Minutes

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 04 February 2020 as a true and accurate record subject to the addition of Councillor Altaf-Khan to the list of those present.

90. Blackbird Leys Development Project Detailed design

The Committee passed a resolution in accordance with the provisions of Paragraph 4(2)(b) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 to exclude the press and members of the public during discussion of this item on the grounds that it might involve disclosure of exempt information as described in the relevant paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. The minute of this item is therefore restricted too. At the conclusion of this item the Committee moved back into public session.

91. Annual Report on Gender Pay Gap

Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Customer Focused Services introduced the report which fulfilled a statutory requirement and drew attention to a mean gender pay gap of about 10%. The previous year's report had shown an almost negligible pay gap. The increase was accounted for by the separation of colleagues in Oxford Direct Services for the first time and who were not now included in the Council figures. In very broad terms, higher paid jobs were more likely to be held by men and women were more likely to work part time, both of which contributed to the gap. While the increase was regrettable, it compared favourably with an average pay gap elsewhere of about 18%. While some other authorities had a significantly smaller gap, this was probably attributable to the fact that they had not, like the Council, taken the step of setting up arms' length companies.

The pay gap calculation was partly determined with reference the "Partnership Payment" scheme. Helen Bishop, Head of Business Improvement, explained that this bonus payment was, like basic pay, determined on a pro-rata basis, which further contributed to the gap because of the high proportion of female staff working part time. This scheme had however now come to an end. The current pay deal was based on a percentage increase or fixed sum increase, designed to be of greater benefit to lower paid staff.

While not directly related to the matter of the pay gap, it was agreed that there would be merit in the Council providing an environment which encouraged men to take on greater levels of parental responsibility. This was something which could be facilitated by the increasing ease with which work could be done from home and opportunities for part time work, all of which would contribute to the message that the Council was an enlightened employer.

The Committee agreed to make the following recommendation to Cabinet:

That the Council gives greater prominence to promoting male take-up of shared parental leave within its current and prospective workforce. A particular suggestion is the inclusion of articles within Council Matters by male staff who have taken shared parental leave on their experiences and the benefits they have encountered.

92. Performance Monitoring 2019/20 Quarter 3

Councillor James Fry had commented on the report and his comments, together with the Scrutiny Officer's response to them had been published with the Committee's papers. The committee accepted the recommendations given in the later paper. Helen Bishop, Head of Business Improvement, had met Councillor Fry to discuss the Committee's role in relation to performance monitoring as a result of which there would be a review of the way in which these indicators were presented.

The Committee agreed to make the following recommendation to Cabinet:

That from the next civic year the Council adopts performance measures for the following:

- a) The proportion of total FTEs within the Council that are filled, and are vacant, preferably by service area
- b) Short and long term staff absences

93. Reports for Approval

The Chair commended the Review Group's report to the Committee as an excellent piece of work. In his role as Chair of the Growth Board's Scrutiny Panel he sought the Committee's agreement to submitting the report to the Panel. The Panel would be considering the matter of a Climate Emergency in a few days' time.

Councillor Richard Howlett, speaking as Chair of the Review Group, paid tribute to all those who had contributed to the review. It was noteworthy that the report's 56 recommendations covered all but one of the Council's 10 portfolio areas, illustrating the wide ranging relevance and importance of the climate change issue. The Review Group's recent visit to an innovative building programme in Southmoor had provided a thought provoking insight into the possibilities of building homes to a Passivhaus standard at a cost comparable to traditional building methods. The work of the group had made it clear that it while it would be a challenge to meet local and national targets for the reduction in carbon emissions, the availability of local skills, technology and enthusiasm made that challenge less daunting than it would otherwise be.

The Chair noted that the views of the witness from Oxford University given in the report were not, necessarily, those of the Conference of Colleges.

The recommendation relating to reviewing the Council's investment criteria to enable investment in energy co-operatives was welcome but it was recognised that it was too early to say how this might be achieved.

The Committee made a number of detailed suggestions and agreed to delegate responsibility for final adjustments to the report to Councillor Howlett and the Scrutiny Officer.

The Chair congratulated those involved in assembling the report and was pleased to hear that there would a press release to accompany its presentation to Cabinet in due course.

94. Report back on recommendations

The Chair reported back on the Cabinet's response to the Committee's most recent recommendations in relation to: Budget Review for 2020/21; Capital Strategy; Customer Experience Strategy; Performance Monitoring Strategy Q2; and Plans for the introduction of a ZEZ. It was pleasing to see that, with the exception of those in relation to the introduction of a ZEZ, most of the Committee's recommendations had been wholly or partly accepted.

95. Work Plan and Forward Plan

The Scrutiny Officer made recommendations to the Committee for changes to its workplan for the remainder of the Council year consequent upon changes to the Forward Plan.

Looking to the beginning of the next Council year it would be helpful to prepare a draft workplan for the new Committee. Items provisionally scheduled for the first meeting of the Committee in June included the Local Plan, Economic and City Centre Strategy, East Oxford Community Centre Improvement Scheme, and the Oxpens Redevelopment Update. There was concern that there would be insufficient time to deal satisfactorily with all of these significant matters at one meeting. The timing of Scrutiny items destined, subsequently, for Cabinet was however constrained by the timetable and process for production of those reports which meant that none of these reports, on the basis of the current Cabinet Forward Plan, could come to the Committee earlier than listed. It was noted however that Forward Plan items were frequently deferred and it was highly likely there would be no need to consider all of these items at the June meeting.

96. Dates of future meetings

Meetings are scheduled as follows:

Scrutiny Committee

- 06 April, 02 June

Standing Panels

- Housing Panel: 08 April
- Companies Panel: 12 March; 22 June
- Finance Panel: 30 June

All meetings start at 6.00pm

97. Matters exempt from Publication

**98. Blackbird Leys Development Project Detailed Design -
confidential appendices**

Discussed in confidential session.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.30 pm

Chair

Date: Monday 02 June 2020

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