

To: City Executive Board

Date: 7th. December 2011

Item No:

Report of: Communities and Partnership Scrutiny Committee

Title of Report: Partnership Working and increasing public involvement in decision making

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present the recommendations of the scrutiny committee from their debate.

Key decision? No

Scrutiny Chair: Councillor Campbell

Executive lead member: Councillor Price

Policy Framework: All

Recommendation(s): That the City Executive Board says if it agrees or disagrees with the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1

To develop an extension to the performance reporting framework that is already in place around the Corporate Plan to show up to 12 targets from partnership action plans that are specific to the City and contribute or directly deliver on our corporate priorities. To report to all councillors twice yearly on progress against these.

Recommendation 2

To allow scrutiny councillors early access to the organisational forward planning of the policy framework and other strategies so they are clear what is in development and when.

Recommendation 3

The committee nominate Councillor Wilkinson to take the lead on their involvement in the refresh of the Oxford Strategic Partnership priorities.

Recommendation 4

To consider allowing a Scrutiny Councillor to shadow the Board Member engaged in the Health and Well Being Partnership.

Recommendation 5

To publish a short quarterly news letter (similar style to “Council Matters”) for residents groups and other interested parties. The content to be directed towards informing and encouraging input, engagement and feedback.

Introduction

1. The Communities and Partnership Scrutiny Committee included in their programme an item to:
 - Consider the value being delivered through partnership working, and
 - Plans to allow the public to have better input into policies and decision making.
2. The committee were supported in their debate by Councillor Price, Peter McQuitty, Val Johnson and Margaret Melling. The committee would like to thank them for their support.
3. The committee’s overall objective was to understand and critically appraise the Councils engagement with partners and the benefits of this to Oxford’s residents. In addition they were interested to hear how Service Plan developments to improve public input to policy and decision making were to be achieved.
4. The committee had a number specific questions:
 - Accepting that partnership working is somewhat in flux because of changing government directives and local/county priorities, what are the current arrangements for partnership working and how are things likely to "settle"? Which partnerships are still operational, who our representatives (officer and member) are and what are the reporting back mechanisms?
 - What is the City Council hoping to gain from the partnerships it is involved in i.e. what are our priorities for engagement and outcomes. How do we make judgements about progress towards our priorities, and how are strategies for engagement developed as the partnership progresses?
 - How much money do we spend on or through each of the partnership structures?
 - What are the priorities for the Oxford Strategic Partnership for the coming year and how does this group fit with and influence our decision making process?

Public input into policy and decision making:

- An assessment of how much influence the public have currently into policy and decision making and assuming this is variable across our different activities, where is our focus for improvement?
- What are the plans to deliver on the improvement objective in the service plan and within what terms and targets?

Conclusions and Recommendations

5. It is increasingly important that the Council works in partnership to deliver on its corporate aims. The complex nature of issues and demands mean that often one organisation cannot hope to be successful on their own. This is obvious and not in dispute. One of the consequences of partnership working, however, within a very broad and complex arena is that involvement in the decision making process is narrowed by necessity and local deliverables become subsumed within large and often complex action plans. Outside of the broad statements within our Corporate Plan it is not easy for backbench councillors to see what has been achieved and what hasn't. An improvement in engagement and dissemination of information is needed.

Recommendation 1

To develop an extension to the performance reporting framework that is already in place around the Corporate Plan to show up to 12 targets from partnership action plans that are specific to the City and contribute or directly deliver on our corporate priorities. To report to all councillors, twice yearly, on progress against these.

Board Member Comment

Since most partnerships do not produce quantifiable data that could be incorporated into CorVu on a systematic basis, this aspiration, while very sensible, would present significant resourcing issues for the Performance team. I would suggest that the Chair and vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Committee meet with Jane Lubbock to assess which data might be used for the reporting process that is envisaged, and report back to me and the Executive Director with some firm recommendations which take account of the resources available for this purpose. Ideally, the report to members that is proposed should be incorporated into the performance reports that are already prepared for the CEB.

6. Scrutiny Committees already contribute through their programmes to the development of policy and strategy and have through their Panel and Review work been active in influencing the direction of services. They will continue to do this within the capacity available to them. There has however been frustration amongst scrutiny councillors that they see some important organisation led policies far too late to inform the shaping of them and it was pleasing to hear some agreement that

scrutiny input at the early developmental stage is valuable. For this to work the organisation has to respond by providing the opportunities for scrutiny to add value.

Recommendation 2

To allow scrutiny councillors early access to the organisational forward planning of the policy framework and other strategies so they are clear what is in development and when.

Board Member and Head of Service Comment

The reference to the 'policy framework' here is confusing. The Council's policy framework is constitutionally anchored in a number of key documents. No partnership policy can modify or undermine that framework; indeed, it is the purpose of partnerships to deliver more effectively on the agreed policy objectives of the Council, not to supplement or replace them. Bill Reed and Sebastian Johnson are developing a document that will set out the timetables of the partnerships within which the Council is working and this might be of assistance to members in identifying when the outputs from that joint working might be expected to feed into the Council's performance.

7. The Oxford Strategic Partnership is of particular interest to the Committee as it offers the greatest opportunity to influence and focus action for the City. The offer to be involved in the refresh of its priorities is welcome.

Recommendation 3

The committee nominate Councillor Wilkinson to take the lead on their involvement in the refresh of Oxford Strategic Partnership priorities.

Board Member and Head of Service Comment

Noted. The intention is to submit the new OSP strategy for consideration by party groups and the XPWG before it goes to the CEB.

8. It was clear from the debate and information provided that involvement within partnerships at both officers and member level can be complex and demanding and maybe not quite as it may seem to the unengaged. The Committee would like an opportunity to understand more.

Recommendation 4

To consider allowing a Scrutiny Councillor to shadow the Board Member engaged in the Health and Well Being Partnership.

Head of Service Comment

I have agreed with Val Johnson that all the papers for the new Board and its sub Boards will be circulated to members. As the arrangements for the Board and the way it will conduct its business are still being worked out, it is too early to say whether shadowing will be either feasible or effective as a means of securing Scrutiny input. I would be happy to review this recommendation in the light of the first six months of the Board's operation.

9. Community engagement and leadership are important elements within the development of effective policies particularly when these are set towards regeneration. The Committee recognises that Neighbourhood Forums exist and the Communities and Neighbourhoods Team are developing new ways of working directly with communities to allow them to have influence. In addition to this the Committee would like to see regular and informative engagement with our network of resident groups that gives them data and headlines for their area or the council. This could possibly include, "chart of the month", information on the policies that are being developed (their effects and challenges), advertising and encouraging feedback sessions.

Recommendation 5

To publish a short quarterly news letter (similar style to "Council Matters") for residents groups and other interested parties. The content to be directed towards informing and encouraging input, engagement and feedback.

Board Member and Head of Service Comment

The Policy, Culture and Communications Team are already working on a publication of this kind.

10. Issues of engagement with hard to reach and "hidden" groups is of concern to the committee. It was clear we haven't got this right yet. **The Committee was pleased to hear a willingness to tackle issues of lack of engagement within these groups and as a contribution will run a Select Committee meeting in February 2012 to contribute towards improvements. This will be led by Councillors Lloyd-Shogbesan and Altaf-Khan.**

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List of background papers:

Report provided by the Leader of the Council to the Communities and Partnership Scrutiny Committee on the 17th. October

Minutes of the Communities and Partnership Scrutiny on the 17th. October

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