

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance and Performance Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee) on Monday 22 January 2024



Committee members present:

Councillor Fry (Chair)

Councillor Corais

Councillor Djafari-Marbini

Councillor Jarvis

Councillor Latif

Councillor Smowton

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy

Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services

Ian Brooke, Head of Community Services

Laura Bessell, Benefits Manager

Jason Jones, Finance Business Partner (HRA)

Sally Hicks, Business Intelligence Unit Lead

Alice Courtney, Scrutiny Officer

Also present:

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council

Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) - Finance and Asset Management

Apologies:

No apologies were received

32. Declarations of Interest

None.

33. Chair's Announcements

None.

34. Notes of the previous meeting

The Panel agreed the notes of the meeting held on 06 December 2023 as a true and accurate record.

In response to a question related to minute item 23, Integrated Performance Report Q2 2023/24, the Head of Financial Services clarified that the statement in relation to Godstow Road and Florence Park car parks: 'The car parking charges were anticipated to be operational from the New Year' was a reference to the calendar year rather than

the financial year. The Panel requested that the Head of Financial Services check whether charging at Godstow Road and Florence Park car parks had now been introduced and report back to the Panel.

35. Finance and Performance Panel Work Plan

The Panel considered the Work Plan and noted that it had one meeting left during the 2023/24 municipal year.

The Panel agreed the Work Plan as set out in the agenda pack.

36. Report back on recommendations

Cllr Corais joined the meeting.

The Panel noted the following Cabinet responses to its recommendations:

- Integrated Performance Report Q2 2023/24
- Treasury Management Mid-Year Report

37. Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2024/25

Cllr Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management introduced the report, which sought Cabinet approval for changes to the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25 following public consultation. The only proposed change compared to the current Council Tax Reduction Scheme was an increase in the income bands used in the scheme.

In response to questions, the Panel was advised that:

- It was usual for the income bands not to increase by the same amount across all bands; the current banding system had been in place for six years, since the banding system was first introduced.
- Consultation responses were not mapped in terms of geographical spread across the City, as this risked identifying respondents; the consultation included a question which asked whether respondents were currently in receipt of Council Tax Reduction.
- If the Council moved away from a banding system, this would incur additional costs as administration of Council Tax Reduction would become more intensive; having a banding system in place helped drive efficiencies for the Council.

The Panel noted the contents of the report; no recommendations were agreed.

Laura Bessell, Benefits Manager left the meeting and did not return.

38. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Rent Setting Report 2024/25

Cllr Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management introduced the report, which presented the outcome of the Council's annual rent review and associated rent setting proposal for 2024/25 in respect of Council dwellings within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), including the setting of associated services and facilities charges. The Panel was advised that the Council had very limited discretion in setting rents for social housing, as there was a Central Government-imposed cap. The proposal set out in the report reflected the Council's

longstanding policy of increasing social rents by the maximum amount permitted, as this income was required to support the HRA.

In response to questions, the Panel was advised that:

- The Council was not able to clawback any income from investing in energy efficiency measures which would save tenants money on their utility bills by way of any additional service charges; as such there would be no financial return to the Council on investments made on energy efficiency measures in HRA stock.
- The proposed charge for a garage had increased by 7%, rather than the 7.7% increase to social housing rents, as this amount had been factored into assumptions before the Government announced the 7.7% cap; the difference in income attracted by a 7% increase versus a 7.7% increase for garage charges was not significant, at around £7,300 per annum.

The Panel noted the contents of the report; no recommendations were agreed.

Cllr Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management and Jason Jones, Finance Business Partner (HRA) left the meeting and did not return.

39. Corporate Key Performance Indicator (KPI) Review [presentation]

Cllr Latif joined the meeting.

Cllr Brown, Leader of the Council introduced the item; the development of corporate key performance indicators (KPIs) was in the very early stages and the Panels views on the initial proposals were welcomed.

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy and Sally Hicks, Business Intelligence Unit Lead delivered a presentation which provided an overview of the development of the Council's updated Corporate Strategy and associated KPIs. A copy of the presentation slides is included in the minutes pack.

The Panel raised a number of points, including:

- Good, Affordable Homes priority:
 - Combining the number of rough sleepers without an offer of accommodation with the number of people in Temporary Accommodation into one KPI would give a better understanding of the local picture.
 - It would be helpful for the total number of affordable homes completed in Oxford in the year by Oxford City Council to be split into total number of affordable homes and total number of social homes; it would also be useful to expand the KPIs to include specific figures for direct delivery of those homes by Oxford City Council and total delivery across the city, as the Council had substantial levers to influence the delivery of homes.
- Strong, Fair Economy priority:
 - The number of Oxford Living Wage employers KPI would benefit from being a percentage figure (e.g. percentage of total employers) or having a specific denominator, rather than being an abstract figure which did not provide context.
 - Consideration should be given to how useful/measurable the KPI related to the Council's percentage spend with SMEs was, as historically this KPI had proved difficult to measure and performance was always accompanied by a lengthy explanatory note; it was also not clear how

larger companies which had a local Oxford branch were factored into this KPI.

- The number of Community Employment Plans KPI would benefit from additional drilldown into the number of jobs created, rather than just the number of Plans committed to.
- Thriving Communities priority:
 - KPIs under this priority should be developed in conjunction with the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership and the Integrated Care System to ensure joined-up thinking.
 - Further consideration should be given to whether the KPI related to the number of children able to swim a length when they leave primary school was the most appropriate measure to monitor tackling inequalities.
 - It may be more useful to monitor the number of children in Oxford living in poverty after housing costs as an indicator of deprivation; the Council should reach out to Oxford and District Action on Child Poverty to explore measures of deprivation which already exist and could feed into the KPIs, noting that addressing the causes of poverty was largely outside the Council's control.
- Zero Carbon Oxford priority:
 - The KPI related to Oxford greenhouse gas emissions measured by the Government tracking towards net zero by 2040 was influenced by a number of different things, not all of which were within the Council's control; it would be useful if these were separated out into the Council's own emissions, emissions within the city that the Council had a degree of influence over and emissions within the city which were outside of the Council's control.
 - Given that air quality was something the Council could influence, there should be a corporate level KPI related to air quality.
- Well-run Council priority:
 - The KPI related to the percentage of ethnic minority staff in the workforce would be better expressed in terms of pay gap; it was suggested that this KPI should also be broader in relation to a wider range of equality, diversity and inclusion issues.
 - Careful consideration should be given to the 'efficiencies against the Plan' KPI, to ensure the Council was measuring something meaningful.

The Panel agreed to recommend to Cabinet that:

1. The Council splits the KPI related to 'number of affordable homes completed in Oxford in the year by Oxford City Council' into number of social homes completed and number of affordable homes completed; and expands the measure to include number of homes completed by the Council (direct delivery) versus the number of homes completed overall across the city (total delivery).
2. The Council contextualises the KPI related to 'number of Oxford Living Wage employers' by presenting that figure as a percentage or including a specific denominator.
3. The Council expands the KPI related to 'number of Community Employment Plans which third parties commit to' to also include the number of jobs created as a result of those Community Employment Plans.
4. The Council engages with Oxford and District Action on Child Poverty to explore appropriate measures of deprivation which already exist and could feed into the

KPIs under the 'Thriving Communities' priority, noting that addressing the causes of poverty is largely outside the Council's control.

5. The Council splits the KPI related to 'Oxford greenhouse gas emissions measured by Government tracking towards net zero by 2040' into the Council's own emissions, emissions within the city that the Council has a degree of influence over and emissions within the city that are outside the Council's control.
6. The Council includes a corporate KPI related to air quality.
7. The Council reframes the KPI related to 'percentage of ethnic minority staff in total workforce' to focus on pay gap; and broadens out the KPI to focus on a wider range of equality, diversity and inclusion issues.

Cllr Brown, Leader of the Council, Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy and Sally Hicks, Business Intelligence Unit Lead left the meeting and did not return.

40. Dates of future meetings

The Panel noted the dates and times of future meetings.

41. Matters Exempt or part exempt from publication and exclusion of the public

The Panel agreed, in accordance with the provisions of Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the press and the public from the remaining item of business on the grounds that their presence would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

a) Budget 2024/25 - Draft Report of the Budget Review Group

The Panel held a discussion relating to the draft Budget Review Group report and recommendations in private. It was noted that the report would be published in due course once it was finalised.

The Panel considered updates on the following items as part of its discussion, which will be incorporated into the Budget Review Group report:

- Museum Income – modelling and assumptions
- Strategic Review of Services Provided Across Community Services – outline scope
- Leisure Management Contract
- Strategic Review of Services Provided by ODS – outline scope
- Park & Ride tariffs – modelling and assumptions

The Head of Financial Services advised the Panel that the terms of reference for the strategic reviews of services provided across Community Services and services provided by ODS could be presented to the Panel for consideration once available.

The Panel:

1. **Requested** that the terms of reference for the Strategic Review of Services Provided Across Community Services and Strategic Review of Services Provided by ODS be submitted to a future meeting of the Panel for consideration once available.
2. **Agreed** a total of nine recommendations for inclusion within the Budget Review Group report.

3. **Agreed** to circulate any proposed amendments to the narrative of the Budget Review Group report via email to the Scrutiny Officer by the end of 24 January 2024.
4. **Approved** the draft 2024/25 Budget Review Group report for submission to the Scrutiny Committee on 06 February 2024 for approval and submission to Cabinet, subject to any amendments to the narrative of the report proposed by Panel members.
5. **Delegated authority** to the Scrutiny Officer, in consultation with the Finance and Performance Panel Chair, to implement any proposed amendments to the narrative of the report and make any necessary minor editorial amendments prior to submission to the Scrutiny Committee.

Ian Brooke, Head of Community Services left the meeting and did not return.

42. Exempt Treasury Management Matters [discussion item]

The Panel received a brief update relating to Treasury Management matters in private.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 9.02 pm

Chair

Date: Tuesday 26 March 2024

When decisions take effect:

Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired

Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal decision notice is issued

All other committees: immediately.

Details are in the Council's Constitution.