

VALUE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 5 January 2012

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Brown (Chair), Seamons (Vice-Chair), Abbasi, Gotch, Humberstone, Keen, Rowley, Royce, Van Nooijen, Williams and Fooks.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Alec Dubberley (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer), Helen Bishop (Head of Customer Services), Karen Tarbox (Customer Services) and Tim Sadler (Executive Director for City Services)

31. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor McCready with Councillor Fooks attending as substitute.

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

33. OUT OF HOURS CALL HANDLING CONTRACT

The Chair introduced the item explaining that the decision to grant project approval to award a new contract for the provision of an out of hours call-handling contract had been called-in from the City Executive Board by Councillor Fooks with support from Councillors Wilkinson, Rundle and Campbell. The Committee was required to either agree with the original decision or refer the decision back to the Executive Board with recommendations from this meeting.

Councillor Fooks was asked to explain her reasons for initiating the call-in and highlighted the following concerns:

- There had been a lack of input from members to date and the decision taken by the Executive Board did not allow for any member involvement in future.
- A service based away from Oxford would be detrimental to service provision as the area would not be known by the staff taking the phone calls.
- Concern over the value for money of the contract and what level of service would be provided for the contract price.
- Unsure how the contract could be stopped or modified in the event that the supplier does not perform adequately.

In response to Councillor Fooks' concerns, Councillor Price assured the committee that the out of hours service was an important service to the administration and a high quality service was vital. He said that he regretted that,

due to the cost, an in house service could not be provided. Councillor Price went on to explain that a joint service with other Oxfordshire authorities would save money.

Tim Sadler assured that Committee that officers had taken action to address early teething problems with the current out of hours provision and the service was now performing well.

During the debate the following was covered:

- The calls were currently charged in the region of £2 per call. A new contract would incur an annual flat fee rather than a charge per call.
- Any new contract would be more expensive than the current arrangements as the true cost of the service was not built into the original contract.
- The sustainability policies of the tendering companies would be an important factor when selecting a supplier
- Should the new supplier fail to meet the service standard required by the Council there would be penalty clauses built into the contract. It was however noted that officers would be closely monitoring service performance which should mitigate any risk to a decline in the service.

At the conclusion of the debate the Committee voted by majority on whether or not to make any recommendations back to the City Executive Board. The decision taken at the City Executive Board meeting in December would therefore stand.

Resolved to not refer the decision back to the City Executive Board for reconsideration.

34. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Noted.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 6.47 pm