

STRATEGY & PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 29 September 2011 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.20 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Nick Carter – in the Chair

Councillor Jean Fooks
Councillor Norman Bolster
Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE
Councillor Tim Hallchurch MBE
Councillor Hilary Hibbert-Biles
Councillor Dr Peter Skolar
Councillor David Wilmshurst
Councillor Charles Mathew

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Jim Couchman (Cabinet Member for Finance and Property)
Councillors Keith R Mitchell (Leader of the Council)

Officers:

Whole of meeting Sue Scane (Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer)
Claire Phillips (Senior Policy and Performance Officer)

Agenda Item	Officer Attending
7	Mark Tailby (Service Manager – Asset Strategy, Property & facilities)
8	Claire Moore (Strategic Partnership Manager)

The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting [, together with a schedule of addenda tabled at the meeting/the following additional documents:] and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports [agenda, reports and schedule/additional documents] are attached to the signed Minutes.

41/11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS
(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Lovatt (Councillor Mathew substituting) and Councillor Sherwood.

42/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE
(Agenda No. 2)

None

43/11 MINUTES
(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st July 2011 were approved and signed subject to minor corrections.

44/11 SPEAKING TO OR PETITIONING THE COMMITTEE
(Agenda No. 4)

None

45/11 DIRECTOR'S UPDATE
(Agenda No. 5)

The Assistant Chief Executive & Chief Finance Officer gave an update on key work areas of the directorate. The following points were noted;

Chief Executive's Office

The Local Governments Resource Review has been a key item for the team.

Pensions: We have been notified that we will soon receive details of the content of the new pensions legislation. There are two issues:

- i. The government hopes to recoup £900 million in savings. The Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) is a funded scheme, so there is a commitment to treat this separately to other public sector schemes. Local Government Group (LG Group) has put forward an alternative proposal.
- ii. We are also awaiting details of how the scheme will be redesigned around the findings of the Hutton Report.

It was asked what freedom there was to vary from central government on pensions. It was responded that there was none as the Oxfordshire Pension Fund is part of the Local Government Pension Scheme.

Human Resources

- In 2010 there were 79 redundancies. It has been possible to keep this number relatively low by managing this early on through natural turnover.
- In 2011 the number of redundancies has increased as planned in business strategies.
- HR has also been working on a single council wide pay policy.

Councillor Brighthouse asked a council-wide scheme will include teachers, as a different method of pay negotiation is built into their contract and over which

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governing bodies have some control. Sue Scane **AGREED** to investigate and send a response to the Committee.

Sue Scane **AGREED** to provide the Committee with details of how many early or ill health retirements there have been.

Law and Governance

Recently it has been business as usual with some specific high profile cases such as the Ardley incinerator case. We are facing a personal hearing on the unsuccessful appeal against the appeal which went in Viridor's favour.

It is expected that this hearing will be the conclusion of the case and is likely to take place in December. In the meantime it continues to cost the council each month under the terms of our contract.

The need for foreign exchange when the case is resolved was noted and the potential to purchase Euros in advance. Whilst this had been investigated, but requires a fixed date to reserve Euros which is too much of a risk given the current situation.

Strategy and Communications

- The past few months have been dominated by the restructure which is now in place. Claire Phillips **AGREED** to circulate details to the Committee.
- Big Society Fund assessment process underway for the second round is underway.

Finance and Audit

The Audit Commission has recently approved the 2010/2011 accounts. The team were praised for their working papers.

The Committee acknowledged the work of Sue Scane and her team in improving the accounts.

Repatriation

Transfer of repatriations went well. The public turned out in large numbers. The location was good to accommodate the numbers. The national and local news coverage was positive.

The Committee acknowledged the hard work of the team and, good cooperation across parish, district and county councils with the police and the RAF.

46/11 FINANCIAL MONITORING OVERVIEW 2011/12 (Agenda No. 6)

Councillor Couchman introduced the Financial Monitoring Overview. He drew attention to the following items:

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- Carry Forwards considered by Cabinet (21/06/2011) and agreed are included. Larger carry forwards were only agreed by Council 13th September 2011 will be reflected in the report at the end of September.
- Children Education and Families (CEF) and Social and Community Services (S&CS) have indicated overspend on pooled budget: reasons have been requested.
- A saving of £200,000 has been made by the closure of Cricket Lane.
- Changes to treasury management as outlined in paragraph 41-47 of the report. Note: paragraph 41 should read July 2011 and not 2010.
- No changes in the capital monitoring in part three. It was noted that the utility suppliers change in night time tariffs for street lighting may mean planned savings cannot be achieved.

The strain on the CEF and S&CS pooled budgets was noted .This will also be impacted by the Primary Care Trust (PCT) finances and asked how this could be managed.

It was asked whether the over spend in the Older People's and Physical Disabilities Pooled Budget would be cancelled out by the £6 million expected from Health. It was responded that a series of agreements have been carefully negotiated and agreed with the PCT concerning the expenditure of the £6 million. The money is an addition to what has already been agreed.

There was some discussion about the importance of the calculation of the pupil premium which is based on the number of children eligible for free school meals on a specific date. The reluctance of some families to declare this was noted and schools are encouraging them to do so. Members can support their communities to get these figures right.

Councillor Fooks also asked what was happening with the money in Iceland. It was responded that we are currently awaiting the outcome of a court decision about our status as preferential debtors, if the decision goes in our favour we will recoup approx 95% of the funds, however if the decision is not in our favour we will still be able to recoup although less.

An overlap with the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) was identified around the cost of continuing care. In addition, it was noted that there was a clear overlap with Adult Services Scrutiny Committee regards the Adult Social Care. The Chairman undertook to liaise with the other scrutiny chairmen to address this issue.

It was noted that the language in these reports could benefit from being clearer in order that the Scrutiny Committee are able to scrutinise and understand remedial action better.

47/11 PROPERTY AND FACILITIES MANAGEMENT STRATEGY (Agenda No. 7)

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Mark Tailby, Service Manager, Asset Strategy, Property & Facilities, introduced the Property and Facilities – Asset Strategy and Implementation paper. He summarised the aims of the strategy and progress towards each of them as outlined in the paper.

Councillors welcomed the more streamlined approach to property and facilities procurement.

Councillor Bolster suggested that in disposing of properties it is advisable that the council considers neighbouring properties too. In the current market we have to make properties as attractive as possible and there may be opportunities to work with partners on this.

Councillor Brighouse noted that school properties were not included in this portfolio and urged officers to look at how these buildings are used in the evenings and out of term time.

Councillor Fooks welcomed the locality reviews and asked Mark Tailby to enlarge on what was meant by needing to develop more effective working with partners. It was responded that there was an opportunity to develop a more systematic approach to partnerships. It was noted that there is not currently a definition of *partnerships*.

It was asked whether there were any other issues rising, besides partnerships. It was responded that the corporate Landlord approach, procurement and reduction in energy consumption were all relevant current issues.

It was **AGREED** that Mark Tailby would liaise with Claire Phillips and that these issues would be brought to future meetings as appropriate.

48/11 PARTNERSHIP WORKING - OUR WORK WITH THE MILITARY AND THE COMMUNITY COVENANT

(Agenda No. 8)

Councillor Mitchell, Claire Moore, Chief Executive's Office and Sarah Wareing Ministry of Defence (MoD) introduced the paper and the Oxfordshire Commitment to the Armed Forces Community Covenant 2011-16.

Councillor Mitchell talked about how the covenant was initiated, introduced the liaison staff based in County Hall and highlighted some of the social care, health and education issues many of the 11,000 service personnel face in Oxfordshire. He explained how a champion system has been developed with lead Councillors providing a close link to each base.

Claire Moore highlighted that Oxfordshire was the first county to develop a military covenant and we have been invited to be a key note speaker at the local government conference. It is important that we keep pushing this and getting more pledges of support. She highlighted the six bids that have been put forward to the £30 million fund available from the MoD for projects to support the military.

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Sarah Wareing described the work of her team in the military on key issues in the military civilian partnership. There are only 6 counties in the country with a civil and military covenant.

The Committee welcomed the military covenant.

The Committee noted the recommendations put forward in the paper. While there is nothing to resolve at this stage it was **AGREED** to engage in these issues in future and were interested in the proposal to visit one of the bases and meet with a commander.

Councillor Hallchurch noted that service members were keen to mark Armed Forces Day, and would like the opportunity show their wares and suggested the Oxford Castle for this.

The interest and success of opportunities to talk about experiences by members of the forces was noted and councillors were keen to support more of this in the future. Sarah Wareing agreed that these are always welcomed but hard to arrange although it is hoped to be able to host a future post operation presentation.

While Councillor Brighouse welcomed the work done under the military-civil partnership, she indicated that support for veterans should be included.

The impact of changes to the school funding calculation on schools serving the military was highlighted.

Councillor Skolar asked about health issues that ex service personnel face on leaving the military and suggested as member of HOSC, that this was potentially a future agenda item for that Scrutiny Committee. Sarah Wareing advised that all military personnel are given an assessment on leaving the military and those with mental health issues are provided with six months of support. A great deal of effort was made to ensure that the transition to public health services from the military health service was as smooth as possible.

The recommendation concerning discounts for service personnel and to encourage more businesses to engage in existing schemes and to display this clearly on their premises was welcomed.

The issue of Housing needs for those members of the forces who are leaving was discussed. Sarah Wareing confirmed that she is in contact with relevant strategic housing officers in the District councils and that MoD Joint services representatives have presented to relevant staff across the county about a joined up service for this group across the county.

It was noted that County Council influence in this area is limited in the scope of what it could provide, but that there may be a coordination or scrutiny role.

Sarah Wareing **AGREED** to provide a written update on the provision of accommodation at Carterton.

It was noted that the six bids to the MoD £30 million fund were from a range of organisations including the voluntary sector and are supported by the Partnership. The British legion were also able to put in bids and were aware of the funds.

49/11 LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESOURCE REVIEW
(Agenda No. 9)

The Committee noted the paper and agreed to return to issues as relevant and further to the briefing for all members to take place after the scrutiny meeting.

50/11 FORWARD PLAN
(Agenda No. 10)

In addition to future issues already noted it was agreed that the Chairman would discuss potential items for the next agenda outside the meeting including performance and partnerships.

51/11 CLOSE OF MEETING
(Agenda No. 11)

..... in the Chair

Date of signing