

## PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES** of the meeting held on Thursday, 11 March 2021 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 1.00 pm

**Present:**

**Voting Members:** Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE – in the Chair

Councillor Jenny Hannaby (Deputy Chairman)

Councillor Nick Carter

Councillor Mike Fox-Davies

Councillor Tony Ilott

Councillor Liz Leffman

Councillor Charles Mathew

Councillor Glynis Phillips

Councillor Judy Roberts

Councillor Michael Waine

Councillor Liam Walker

**By Invitation:** Joe Kidman, Commander for Oxford City, Thames Valley Police

**Officers:**

Whole of meeting Louise Tustian, Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes; Colm Ó Caomhánaigh, Committee Officer

Part of meeting

**Agenda Item**

**Officer Attending**

5 Lorna Baxter, Director for Finance

6 Lara Patel, Deputy Director – Safeguarding; Hayley Good, Deputy Director Education; Hannah Farncombe, Deputy Director Children’s Social Care

7 Jane Portman, Interim Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for Climate Action; Sarah Gilbert, Climate Action Team Leader; Sandra Fisher-Martins, Programme Manager – Climate Action

9, 10 Rob MacDougall, Chief Fire Officer and Director for Community Safety; Jo Bowcock, Assistant Chief Fire Officer

*The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda, reports and presentations are attached to the signed Minutes.*

## **9/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS**

(Agenda No. 1)

There were no apologies received. The Chairman welcomed Councillor Liam Walker to the Committee having replaced Councillor Jeannette Matelot since the last meeting.

## **10/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - GUIDANCE NOTE ON BACK PAGE OF THE AGENDA**

(Agenda No. 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

## **11/21 MINUTES**

(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2021 were approved.

On Item 4/21, the second bullet point under Investment Strategy, Councillor Charles Mathew stated that he did not recall receiving any more information on the Eynsham West proposal and asked for that action to be followed-up on.

## **12/21 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS**

(Agenda No. 4)

The Chairman had agreed to a request to speak on Agenda Item 6 from Councillor John Howson.

## **13/21 BUSINESS MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING REPORT**

(Agenda No. 5)

The Committee had before it a report on the Council's progress towards Corporate Plan priorities during January 2021. The Committee was requested to consider any matters for future attention by the Committee and to report issues raised to the Cabinet meeting on 16 March 2021.

Louise Tustian, Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes, introduced the report. Of the 27 indices, 52% were rated Green and 44% were Amber. One additional Leadership Risk had been added: LR21 County Elections May 2021. The latest information was that all polling stations had been secured and work was continuing on preparations to make them COVID compliant. There were no score changes in the other risks.

Louise Tustian provided responses to questions from Members of the Committee that had been raised earlier:

- The Council was in procurement for new contract arrangements to deliver streetlighting maintenance and improvements, and returns were being evaluated.
- Improvements to FixMyStreet with better messaging were expected to be delivered the following week. There were regular meetings with the developers of

the software to feedback issues and further improvements had been agreed including better hand-off of issues to district partners.

- The Agency Educational Psychologists contract and the Annual Review team were both short-term agreements. For the Annual Review contract, it was based on 6 months or clearing the backlog if this happens sooner. The initial agreement for the EP team was to clear the backlog of 90 assessments. It was a fix to deal with the existing backlog of cases but recruitment of EPs is an issue nationally.

Lorna Baxter, Director for Finance, noted that the details of the COVID-19 government grants were outlined on Agenda Pages 115 and 116. The government had extended some of the grants to the first financial quarter of 2021/22 (April to June). It was estimated that around £10m of the costs to the Council of COVID-19 originally expected to fall in the 2020/21 financial year would now fall in 2021/22 and provision was being made for that.

Councillor Jenny Hannaby asked how bad debts were monitored as some of them were very large amounts. Councillor Glynis Phillips responded that the Audit and Governance Committee, of which she was a member, regularly examined the repayment situation.

The following suggestions were made by Members:

- There was a request to simplify the information in the commentary for “Listening to residents” under “Number of pothole enquiries ..” which currently contained too many layers of percentages. There was also a request to see the average times to do repairs.
- It was noted that there were a lot of drainage issues reported under Fix My Street but that many did not meet the criteria. Members asked if the criteria needed to be reviewed as drainage was a big issue in many areas.
- With regard to the backlog in assessments for Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and the shortage of education psychologists, Members asked if there was a problem with the terms and conditions being offered since agencies had staff available. It was also suggested that the Council develop its own EPs through apprenticeships.
- Members would also like more information on the quality of service delivered by CAMHS and their staffing levels.
- Members stated that they believed that the plans for installation of LED lighting were not ambitious enough. There was also a request for Members to be able to scrutinise the new contract since this had been such an ongoing problem.

Officers agreed to provide responses to the following questions raised by Members:

- Given that the highways resurfacing work was budgeted for, the Committee would like to know why there was a problem with funding.
- Members asked why the previous contract for LED lighting was being replaced with a new contract.
- There was a disagreement in the figures on Agenda Page 18 between the first and fourth bullet points. Officers were asked to confirm which were correct.

- On the Skanska contract Members asked whether workforce issues were responsible for delays in work and if Skanska still signed off on their own work. If so, was that is something that might be changed in the next contract?
- Members asked if the corporate assessment body, formed to deal with the infrastructure programme running behind schedule, was a temporary body and if so, for how long it was expected to be in place.

Louise Tustian noted that the Outcomes Framework was due to be reviewed at the next meeting in June and officers were working to make the information in the reports clearer.

It was agreed to recommend that the new Committee after the elections prioritise examining the Skanska contract and EHCPs / CAMHS.

**RESOLVED: to**

- a) note the report and consider any matters for future attention by the Committee;**
- b) report the issues raised to the Cabinet discussion of the papers on 16 March 2021.**

**14/21 CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING SERIOUS CASE REVIEW**

(Agenda No. 6)

The Committee considered the report commissioned by the Oxfordshire Children's Safeguarding Board on the case of Jacob. Kevin Gordon, Corporate Director for Children's Services, introduced the item stressing that some aspects of the case were confidential. The Chairman asked for the discussion to focus on improvement and learning from the case.

The Chairman had accepted the following request to speak on the item:

Councillor John Howson recalled that there was a great awareness of the difficulties in placing children taken into care in academy schools at the time of Jacob's case. The six Oxfordshire MPs and the Cabinet Member with responsibility had written to the Secretary of State on the issue. He asked then why no system had been put in place to tackle the problem.

Councillor Howson referred to the audit of cases of children missing from education ordered by the Local Government Ombudsman in 2019 and asked was Jacob's case not covered by that review or had it only focussed on excluded children. He believed that all academies must recognise that they had a responsibility to all children in respect of providing an education.

Lara Patel, Deputy Director - Safeguarding, presented slides summarising the case. She noted that it was unusual to name the child in a case such as this but it was the family's wish. One of the main conclusions was that Jacob had been let down by the education system – having not been in school for 22 months. There was a need to improve work with professionals and families to identify and tackle exploitation and to ensure that all parties were working together.

Joe Kidman, Commander for Oxford City, Thames Valley Police, added that there was now a violence reduction unit in place, the systems operating in Oxford City that were praised in the report had been rolled out across the county and there was greater cooperation with other forces such as West Midlands and London.

Hayley Good, Deputy Director Education, stated that the local authority could not direct an academy to take a child but that there was now a more robust challenge to schools that refuse to take a child. The In Year Fair Access Protocol had been revised to ensure that a child was placed within 20 days of them coming to the panel. A meeting had been held recently with multi-academy trusts to work on building relationships and this was attended by 21 representatives. There was also a new data sharing agreement across BOB (Bucks, Oxon, Berks West) on health visitor records which will help in tracing children.

Hannah Farncombe, Deputy Director Children's Social Care, concluded by emphasising the importance of the whole safeguarding system being on alert and to ensure that effective processes were put in place so that a situation was not allowed to drift.

Officers responded to issues raised by Members as follows:

- The new Youth Justice and Exploitation Service brings together the high-performing Kingfisher and Youth Justice Service teams. Kingfisher was put in place to tackle sexual exploitation but there was now a range of complex forms of exploitation which the new service has been set up to work with.
- It needed to be recognised that if children were offending then that was another reason for them to keep silent.
- Jacob had not experienced a lack of access to CAMHS but sometimes there was a need to encourage families and children to accept the help being offered.
- Children identified by TVP as in need of a service were prioritised for CAMHS on the basis of risk. They did not simply go in a queue.
- The Navigators initiative was specifically hospital based. There were other mentorship programmes including the Blueprint Project.
- Bringing children into the criminal justice system did introduce an element of 'must' into the situation but with children it needed to be handled with sensitivity and compassion. Overall the key goal was to have the right intervention for each child made early.
- The revised In Year Fair Access Protocol will come into effect on 1 April. Revisions to the national admissions code were unlikely to come into effect before September.
- Children we care for who were not in education had access to online learning and there may be the possibility of extending that to other children who were awaiting an education placement.
- The Council was participating in research by the University of Oxford called "Excluded Lives" that will examine the differences between approaches in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- Local MPs had been briefed on these issues to encourage them to take the points on education up at national level.

The Chairman thanked the officers from all of the services for their work in the very complex and fragmented area of education.

## **15/21 PROGRESS TOWARDS CLIMATE CHANGE TARGETS**

(Agenda No. 7)

The Committee had asked for an update on progress on climate change actions following the Council's recognition of the climate emergency in April 2019.

Jane Portman, Interim Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for Climate Action, introduced the item. Sarah Gilbert, Climate Action Team Leader, gave a presentation which summarised the Climate Action Framework developed to guide the mobilisation of a cross-organisational Climate Action Programme. Sandra Fisher-Martins, Programme Manager – Climate Action, presented a summary of the 80 work streams in operation. She emphasised that the Council's Green House Gas (GHG) emissions were reducing before the COVID lockdown and had continued on that trajectory.

Officers responded to Members' questions as follows:

- Councillor Yvonne Constance, Cabinet Member for Environment (including Transport), had responsibility for climate action. Bill Cotton will be the new Corporate Director for Environment and Place, starting the following week, and will take over as SRO.
- A series of in-year targets were being developed to ensure a clear trajectory to 2030. CEDR was considering how to report on the wider issues.
- The measurement of the Council's own-estate carbon emissions was based on fuel-use.
- OCC and CDC reviewed how to resource themselves to address their commitments on Climate Action. A new joint team has been created. A Service Level Agreement was in place with the County Council and CDC contributed £50,000 to the costs of the joint team.
- Hydrogen may have a role and was being primarily considered in relation to fleet replacement, especially for HGVs. i-Hub was also looking into how the Council can link in with and promote other developments around the county.
- The Thames cycleway was being considered as part of the review of priority investments in the Active Travel programme.
- The Council will work with academies as well as maintained schools to provide advice and support on reducing GHG emissions. There was recently put in a place a contract for zero-carbon electricity supply that the Schools Forum has been asked to opt into on behalf of schools.
- New legislation (Future Homes Standard) on building standards aimed at being carbon neutral or even carbon negative will drive measures like triple glazing.

Councillors Nick Carter and Jenny Hannaby expressed frustration that the expenditure on Active Travel was not being distributed fairly around the county.

The Chairman thanked officers for a very good update on the work being done.

**RESOLVED: to**

- (a) note the publication of the council's Climate Action framework in response to the climate emergency declaration
- (b) note the progress made in delivering the Climate Action Programme.

**16/21 OXFORDSHIRE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE'S COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN**  
(Agenda No. 9)

The Committee was asked to consider and adopt the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) Action Plan.

Rob MacDougall, Chief Fire Officer and Director for Community Safety, introduced the report and summarised the three ongoing projects: the pro-active role in improving housing standards, acting as community safety advocates and improving diversity in the service.

Rob MacDougall noted that they had made some improvements in the number of female firefighters but still had work to do to improve the recruitment of people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

While the service's 365 Alive outcome targets were in the document the current data on progress towards the targets will be added to the final publication.

Rob MacDougall and Jo Bowcock, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, responded to issues raised by Members as follows:

- The Fire Cadet programme did not have a direct entry into the fire service – there was still a recruitment and training process to go through – but it certainly gave cadets a good insight from which to make an informed decision. The service also had apprenticeship schemes including some for leadership roles.
- The service worked with the city and district councils, landlords and tenants on improving standards of accommodation and energy certification in the rental sector. They would have to come back with more information on the outcomes of the work.
- The work on water safety was focussed on advice related to people falling into water and was not about water quality. There was a pilot scheme in Henley and if it was successful, they would look at rolling it out to other areas. Officers and firefighters in Oxford City also had a high level of awareness and training on water safety given the presence of canal ways in the city.
- Fire service officers were integrated into the Council's work on climate action especially in relation to buildings and vehicles. Hydrogen power was in its early stages but might provide a solution for the fleet.
- The service was represented on a joint preventative group with Public Health and would make sure that they were aware of the potential benefits of the cotoneaster plant in absorbing air pollutants.

**RESOLVED: to accept the continuation of the projects and adopt in the final version of the CRMP Action Plan 2021-22.**

**17/21 HER MAJESTY'S INSPECTORATE OF CRIME FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE COVID-19 INSPECTION REPORT AND UPDATE ON PREVIOUS INSPECTION ACTION PLAN**

(Agenda No. 10)

The Committee had before it two reports from HMICFRS that were introduced by Rob MacDougall, Chief Fire Officer and Director for Community Safety. On the update with regard to progress on actions from the inspection in 2018, five of the actions were complete and it was expected that the rest would be completed in the next 12 to 18 months.

**RESOLVED: to note the report and accept the update from the Director of Community Safety setting out the continuous improvements being made by Oxfordshire County Council Fire and Rescue Service.**

The inspection in October 2020 of the service’s response to the COVID-19 epidemic was very positive. It acknowledged how the service maintained core operations while contributing to PPE distribution, driving ambulance crews and distributing laptops to schools for children who couldn’t be in school.

It was also the first report that acknowledged that having a fire and rescue service within the County Council had significant benefit. It recognised the good work done in supporting the wellbeing of staff.

**RESOLVED: to accept the report and the recommended actions for Oxfordshire County Council Fire and Rescue Service.**

The Chairman thanked the officers in particular for the leadership shown during the pandemic. She also thanked Councillor Judith Heathcoat, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member with responsibility for the fire service, for her work over many years and for being a regular attender at scrutiny committee meetings.

**18/21 WORK PROGRAMME**

(Agenda No. 11)

It was agreed to recommend to the new Committee elected in May to prioritise the following issues:

- Transport, Place setting and S106 monies
- Education, Health and Care Plans and CAMHS

Councillor Charles Mathew also asked that Air Quality be prioritised.

The Chairman thanked Members, especially Councillors Carter, Fox-Davies and Mathew who were not contesting the coming election.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing ..... 20