

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 15 December 2016 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 1.30 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE – in the Chair

Councillor Sam Coates
Councillor Janet Godden
Councillor Mark Gray
Councillor Jenny Hannaby
Councillor Stewart Lilly
Councillor Charles Mathew
Councillor John Sanders
Councillor Pete Handley (In place of Councillor Yvonne Constance OBE)
Councillor Michael Waine (In place of Councillor Patrick Greene)
Councillor Sandy Lovatt

Officers:

Whole of meeting Peter Clark, County Director
Kate Terroni, Director for Adult Services
Lucy Butler, Director for Children's Services
Bev Hindle, Acting Director for Environment & Economy
Graham Shaw, Deputy Director – Transformation
Val Messenger, Deputy Director of Public Health
Lorna Baxter, Chief Finance Officer
Steve Munn, Chief HR Officer
Maggie Scott, Chief Policy Officer
Simon Furlong, Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Steven Jones, Policy and Performance Officer
Colm Ó Caomhánaigh, Committee Officer

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 and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda, reports and additional documents are attached to the signed Minutes.

55/16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Yvonne Constance (Councillor Pete Handley substituting) and Councillor Patrick Greene (Councillor Michael Waine substituting).

56/16 ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIRMAN FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE 2016/17 COUNCIL YEAR

(Agenda No. 2)

It was proposed by Councillor Brighouse and seconded by Councillor Hannaby and it was:

RESOLVED: that Councillor Godden be elected Deputy Chairman for the remainder of the 2016/17 Council Year.

57/16 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 4)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 October 2016 were approved and signed as a correct record subject to the following correction:

Minute 51/16: Second bullet point, add: "An outside agency has been engaged to review the responses."

Regarding Minute 50/16 – Thames Valley Police and Police and Crime Commissioner's Annual Report, The Chairman reported that she will follow up with the Chief Constable on his response to the requests for further information.

Councillor Lilly reported that he had heard that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had agreed to provide funding for improvements to the A34.

58/16 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda No. 5)

The Chairman had agreed to provide an opportunity for Councillor Pressel to address the Committee. However, Councillor Pressel was not present at the time.

59/16 SERVICE AND RESOURCE PLANNING 2017/18 - 2020/21 AND CAPITAL BUDGET 2017/18

(Agenda No. 6)

Officers made a presentation outlining the council's future development, particularly via the "Fit for the Future" transformation programme. It was explained that this is the context in which the budget, savings and pressures should be seen.

A key element of the approach to making savings would be the “digital first” workstream within the Fit for the Future programme. This seeks to use digital tools to make services and back-office processes more efficient, and in doing so create the opportunity for the savings identified.

Members considered the budget, savings and pressures presented by officers, and discussed points of detail with the relevant directors in attendance. However, no substantial changes to the draft budget were requested at this point.

In discussion of the contextual presentation and budget, the following broader issues were raised and discussed:

The role and involvement of members

Members questioned their collective role in the council’s business. Members cited perceived difficulties in accessing information about the council’s business. Difficulties experienced in using the council’s website were part of this. Members also felt that more use should be made of their knowledge and experience of local and county-wide issues, both to properly help develop the council’s business and to ensure members are equipped to be accountable to local residents. Specific examples of difficulties experienced included:

- Announcements of Traffic Regulation Orders not including the reasoning for the decision.
- Difficulty of finding information on the council’s property assets.
- In situations where something cannot be done, the importance of members knowing why not

Mr Clark acknowledged members’ concerns and assured members that a strong relationship between councillors and officers remained at the heart of all future plans. It was agreed that a Councillor Reference Group should be re-formed, and that members’ involvement in the review of the council’s website would be sought.

Staffing

The opinion was expressed that some aspects of the Council’s administration seemed threadbare. There were also concerns that the reduction in staff numbers and costs set out in the proposed savings could result in existing staff being overloaded or demoralised, and that service levels could be affected.

Officers responded that the Transformation programme is looking at making processes more efficient so that the Council can be run better even with lower staff resources.

Potential over-reduction of service levels

Concern was expressed that savings in some services – especially preventative services – could be counterproductive if cut back too far. Officers acknowledged this potential, citing for example gully emptying services, where predicted savings were not now being sought because of this.

Child placements

Councillors asked the reasons why child placements were increasing at such a high rate (12%) and how this compared with other authorities. Officers noted the following points:

- Increased general awareness of issues leads to an increase in cases.
- OCC placements historically were low and there is an element of catching up
- The criticisms from the serious case reviews led to more placements
- Last year's comparable increase in other authorities was about 5%.

Links with voluntary sector

Councillors asked if the Council was working with the voluntary sector to coordinate social care services. Officers replied that they had good contracts and relationships with voluntary agencies and often worked with the agencies to bring more money to the service through their own fundraising efforts.

Fire service

Members asked if the service recouped costs, for example for ambulance service support, or from insurance companies for resources deployed after the Didcot power station collapse.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed that ambulance costs had been recouped, that the various emergency services are looking at recouping costs related to the post-emergency aspects of the Didcot accident. The service remained alert to opportunities to help reduce costs for other public services by providing them with expertise.

Planning / Environment

Councillors urged better enforcement of planning conditions and expressed concern that cuts in maintenance work, resulting in more potholes and road signs being lost in undergrowth, leads to reputational damage to the Council.

The officer responded that they were identifying and prioritising such pinch points and problems, but countered that there could be greater reputational benefit in improving the council's effectiveness in communicating its good performance to the public. For example, the council has completed over 21,000 road repairs this year despite financial cuts, and has greatly reduced its unit costs through more efficient working methods.

IT

Reference had been made by officers to streamlining and outsourcing certain IT systems. Councillors asked if this meant that we might no longer have our own IT support staff to call on. Officers assured the meeting of the intention that in-house support would be retained.

Adult Social Care Precept

Clarification was sought on how the increase in the precept would help general council finances given that the funds are ring-fenced for adult social care only. The Chief Finance Officer explained how the increased precept was to be used to help deliver social care pressures which have previously been funded from corporate

resources; in doing so it frees up corporate resources which then help to fund
..... pressures in other council Services.

Capital Programme

In response to members' interest it was agreed that there should be a quarterly report on the proceeds of capital sales and the uses of the proceeds.

Councillors asked how communities would be selected for Place Strategies. Officers said that it would start with the market towns.

It was noted that the Local Government Settlement, due to be announced that day, might yet impact on the budget and savings proposed. Therefore the Committee held over to its 5 January 2017 meeting the matter of its recommendation to Cabinet. Officers would schedule time on the 5 January agenda accordingly.

60/16 DAYTIME SUPPORT CONSULTATION
(Agenda No. 7)

It was agreed to defer this item to the meeting on 5 January 2017 as the previous item had overrun the meeting time.

..... in the Chair
Date of signing 200