

STRATEGY & PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 15 March 2012 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.30 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Nick Carter – in the Chair

Councillor Sandy Lovatt (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Jean Fooks
Councillor Norman Bolster
Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE
Councillor Tim Hallchurch MBE
Councillor David Wilmshurst
Councillor Ian Hudspeth (In place of Councillor Dr Peter Skolar)
Councillor Lawrie Stratford (In place of Councillor Hilary Hibbert-Biles)

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Jim Couchman, Cabinet member for Finance & Property.

By Invitation:

Officers:

Whole of meeting Lorna Baxter, Deputy Chief Finance Officer
Huw Jones, Director Environment & Economy
Julia Lim, Scrutiny Officer

Part of meeting

Agenda Item	Officer Attending
Item 6	Sean Collins, Service Manager Pension, Insurance & Money Management
Item 8	Simon Pickard, Finance Business Partner CEF
Item 9	Stephen McHale, County Procurement Manager
Item 10	Jonathan McWilliam, Director of Public Health
Item 11	Steve Munn, Head of HR

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.

18/12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Hilary Hibbert-Biles (Councillor Stratford substituting), Councillor Peter Skolar (councillor Hudspeth substituting) and Sue Scane (Lorna Baxter attended in her place).

19/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE

(Agenda No. 2)

None

20/12 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

Minutes from 12th January and 2nd February meetings were agreed. Councillor Brighthouse asked for an update on the query raised at the February meeting regarding section 35 of the Education Act 2011.

Huw Jones AGREED to provide an update to the committee via email.

21/12 SPEAKING TO OR PETITIONING THE COMMITTEE

(Agenda No. 4)

None.

22/12 DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

(Agenda No. 5)

Huw Jones provided the Director's Update. He highlighted to the committee that the council had recently entered into a strategic partnerships with Hampshire County Council in relation to system support and SAP. This will deliver significant savings for the council.

There followed a discussion about the ICT needs of councillors, the particular difficulties when attempting to use council networks off site especially via Apple products were raised. Huw Jones explained that Apple products do not meet national standards of security and offered to look at the council's ICT Strategy in the round at a future meeting.

Councillor Hallchurch asked whether we could look to unify ICT systems across the county particularly to help support the work of double-hatter councillors.

Councillor Carter **AGREED** to add the ICT Strategy to the committee's work programme.

Huw Jones also provided an update on the property and facilities management procurement process. The evaluation of bids from three companies was almost

complete, Cabinet will be making a decision about the successful organisation on 23rd March.

23/12 PENSIONS UPDATE

(Agenda No. 6)

Sean Collins joined the table and provided an update on the current position regarding the local government pension scheme. The government is now looking to deliver one major change to the scheme in 2014, rather than the previous approach which involved increased contributions 2012 and further changes in 2015.

Employers and Unions are currently working on the detail of a new scheme, if they can develop a model that fits within the Treasury cost envelope without increasing employee contributions it will be signed off.

A consultation is due to take place in September / October 2012.

The Oxfordshire Pension Fund is looking at working more closely with Berkshire and Buckinghamshire to help deliver efficiencies in administration. The government is keen to reduced the overall figure of 89 separate schemes nationally.

Councillor Couchman highlighted to the committee that the Cabinet had particularly considered the issue of academies and non teaching staff pensions. The Department for Education recommends the pooling of academies pensions with local councils pension funds.

Cabinet do not support this view and the Pension Fund Committee is considering other options. A decision is likely to be delayed whilst academy numbers grow.

Councillor Brighthouse stressed it is important that schools are aware of the implications for their non teaching staff pensions when considering academy conversion.

Huw Jones explained that the council's cautious strategic approach is designed to protect the council's interests and help us understand the risks in practice. Alongside this focus the council is working with schools as quickly as possible to help them more fully appreciate academy related risks.

24/12 FINANCIAL MONITORING OVERVIEW 2011/12

(Agenda No. 7)

Councillor Couchman took the committee through the financial monitoring report. He highlighted that 94% of savings are on course and there are other plans in place for the remaining 6%.

SYP3

Councillor Fooks queried the under spend on school intervention as performance remains poor. Councillor Fooks also asked why there was a large under spend on DSG. Lorna Baxter explained that this was additional in year funding from the Department for Education and the funding will be carried forward.

Councillor Lovatt asked whether funds could be moved across to help reduce the pressures on Social and Community Services budgets.

Councillor Couchman highlighted that physical disabilities will be given further funding to support it, and that the CEF under spend will be used on work to be completed next year.

The committee noted the report.

25/12 ACADEMIES AND LACSEG FUNDING

(Agenda No. 8)

Simon Pickard gave a presentation to the committee which explained the key aspects of Academy funding in particular LACSEG (Local Authority Central Services Equivalent Grant), and also alerted the committee to the functions which will remain a local authority responsibility in future which include:

- School place planning
- School transport
- Special educational needs

Councillor Carter was keen to ensure that school transport remains on the agenda of the scrutiny committees more broadly. Huw Jones highlighted that Growth and Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee have been looking at access to transport in general, home to school transport is the largest aspect of supported transport the council provides.

The committee were concerned about the future management of the academy system and the challenges the council might face in providing transport and planning places when it has no control over the decisions that academies take in relation to practical issues such as the length of a school day.

The committee REQUESTED a joint meeting with Children's Services scrutiny to look together at the development of academies and help to shape policy were possible.

26/12 OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S APPROACH TO STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING

(Agenda No. 9)

Stephen McHale gave an outline of the council's approach to the externalisation of services. He explained the emphasis that the council places on achieving quality in procurement first time and the re-organisation of resources in adults and children's commissioning which will help to drive quality going forward. The council's long history and experience in externally commissioning services was also highlighted.

Councillor Carter asked what does the future look like in terms of the continued externalisation of services?

Stephen McHale pinpointed the Children, Education and Families directorate as the area with most capacity to expand its commissioning approach.

Huw Jones explained that the next area of development for the council in its approach is developing our ability to specify and commission for outcomes. This will become increasingly important in the future mixed economy of public service providers.

Councillor Fooks asked how the council's approach to commissioning supports the local economy.

Stephen McHale explained that any potential provider's workforce record and broader policies are assessed as part of the procurement process. Around 50% of the council's supplier base are Oxfordshire based businesses. The location of an organisation is always taken into account as part of the full economic assessment of a provider.

The committee **AGREED** that how the council supports the local economy would be a useful subject to return to later in the year.

27/12 HEALTH, WELLBEING AND SOCIAL CARE (Agenda No. 10)

Dr Jonathan McWilliam gave a presentation to the committee on the new health, wellbeing and social care role of local authorities.

The committee welcomed the presentation and were keen to understand:

- To what extent the council's role will be about provision as well as commissioning of health and wellbeing services?
- Will the council be commissioning abortion services in future?
- What resources there will be to support the council's new responsibilities.

Jonathan McWilliam explained that the council's role will be almost exclusively about commissioning, the authority will not be responsible for abortion commissioning but the council will have responsibilities for the commissioning of sexual health clinic and contraception services.

Existing public health budgets will transfer to the council, there is no additional funding to support health and wellbeing boards at the moment, but with their prominence nationally this may change in future.

28/12 OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL RESTRUCTURING (Agenda No. 11)

Steve Munn explained the approach to restructuring that the council has adopted over the last 18 months. Significant savings have been achieved on the top three tiers of management. The restructure aimed to ensure that there were no more than 5 layers of staff between the chief executive and frontline services, and with this in mind was used as an opportunity to review job titles.

Councillor Fooks asked what proportion of those people at risk of redundancy it was possible to redeploy.

Steve Munn explained that redeployments in the last two years have been less than 100,. Redeployment becomes increasingly difficult as the organisation reduces in overall size. But all job opportunities at the council are advertised internally initially to help support existing staff.

Councillor Wilmshurst asked when the restructuring was likely to end.

The committee were informed that major restructures are due to be completed by the end of September, however with continuing change within local government funding and the development of new ways of working within the council the organisation is likely to continue to experience change for sometime to come.

29/12 FORWARD PLAN

(Agenda No. 12)

The committee had no comments on the Council's formal Forward Plan. However it highlighted the following issues for inclusion on the committee's own workplan:

- Changing health landscape and OCC's new responsibilities
- Academies – continuing to understand the detailed implications

30/12 CLOSE OF MEETING

(Agenda No. 13)

Meeting closed at 12.30pm.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing