

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 9 January 2020 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 2.50 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE – in the Chair
Councillor Jenny Hannaby (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Nick Carter
Councillor Tony Ilott
Councillor Liz Leffman
Councillor Charles Mathew
Councillor Glynis Phillips
Councillor Judy Roberts
Councillor Michael Waine
Councillor Liam Walker

Officers:

Whole of meeting Lorna Baxter, Director for Finance; Lauren Rushen, Policy Officer; Colm Ó Caomhánaigh, Committee Officer

Part of meeting

Agenda Item

	Officer Attending
5	Simon Furlong, Corporate Director Communities; Ansaf Azhar, Corporate Director of Public Health; Stephen Chandler, Corporate Director for Adult Services; Claire Taylor, Corporate Director Customers and Organisational Development; Ben Threadgold, Policy and Performance Service Manager.
5 and 6	Lucy Butler, Corporate Director for Children's Services
6	Jayne Howarth, Head of SEND

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.

1/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Mike Fox-Davies.

2/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - GUIDANCE NOTE ON BACK PAGE OF THE AGENDA

(Agenda No. 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

3/20 MINUTES
(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes of the meeting on 13 November 2019 were approved and signed.

Regarding 62/19, Councillor Glynis Phillips asked if the Council Leader has raised the issue of information sharing at the Health and Wellbeing Board and with the County Councils Network. The Council Leader confirmed that he had.

4/20 CORPORATE PLAN AND SERVICE AND RESOURCE PLANNING 2020/21 - 2023/24
(Agenda No. 5)

Lorna Baxter gave a presentation with a brief overview of Service and Resource Planning. Because the period for public consultation only closes after the Cabinet meeting and there is still information outstanding relating to the budget, the Council Leader and Director for Finance will need to be mandated to make any changes that emerge. The date for publication of amendments to the Cabinet's budget by opposition and other groups has been extended to Friday 7 February 2020.

Councillor Liz Leffman asked on behalf of Councillor Emily Smith if all motions passed by Council have been taken on board. Lorna Baxter responded that the Directors ensure that they are picked up.

Communities

Simon Furlong highlighted some of the proposals:

- Any changes to fees have been benchmarked against what other authorities charge.
- The increase in demand around planning applications needs to be met especially in relation to the natural environment aspects.
- A survey of our trees has identified that increased work will be needed over the next three years.
- S106 monies will be invested in a new software system to enable the Council to respond to planning consultations in a timely way.
- There is the potential to generate income from the Travel Planning Team's modelling for local planning and for developers on the travel impact of developments which is a chargeable service.
- LED replacement has not met the targets and so there will be a delay in the savings. A new procurement process is underway to minimise the impact.
- Increased charges at recycling centres apply only to non-residential waste.
- The costs of implementing the Permit Scheme for highways works are lower than predicted resulting in savings on previous estimated cost of the scheme.
- Two new vegetation clearing gangs will work on programmes developed with local member input.

- Four minor works gangs, currently revenue-funded will be reallocated to the Skanska contract and funded from the capital programme.
- The savings on SEN Transport come from a change in the operating model and will be delivered by the transport team.
- There has been a recalculation of the cost of firefighter pensions with an impact in Year 2.

Officers responded to issues raised by Members as follows:

- There is no specific budget for new trees, just for maintenance. The Council works with the District and City Councils as well as developers.
- The review of the system on planning consultations will include the provision of councillor information.
- The Strategic planning team is working with two bus companies on a bus strategy including connectivity.
- The Council is working towards having a cycle network across the county.
- Street lighting upgrading will ensure where appropriate it is coordinated with footpath renewal plans. The figures on LED installation can be circulated.
- Air quality is not specifically a climate action issue but is being dealt with by the same team.
- The administration costs of the Permit Scheme are significant but less than originally thought. It's not just about money though, the scheme gives the Council control over road works. There will be fines for works that do not comply with the Road Traffic management act through Fixed penalty notices.
- There is funding committed to undertake a study into the feasibility of civil parking enforcement in the districts.

Commercial Development, Assets and Investment

Simon Furlong summarised the proposals:

- Essential investment includes development of the facilities management (FM) team to provide coverage across the full property portfolio post-Carillion as well as improving the coverage of security services.
- The replacement of heating and other FM systems in OCC assets is profiled to be managed over the MTFP.
- The joint agreement on leisure centres for school use requires expenditure on a level of maintenance.

Councillor Judy Roberts asked about the savings on Joint Use Agreements in the following two years. Simon Furlong clarified that the budget pressure was a one-off pressure to complete the works in years 1 and 2 and it was then not required in future years and therefore shown as a minus figure in the budget line.

Public Health

Ansaf Azhar introduced this section noting that £30m from central government is ring-fenced for public health – about 80% of this is spent on commissioned services. Most of the commissioned services are delivered universally. However, health inequality is key issue. There are ten wards in Oxfordshire have areas that are in the 20% most deprived in the country. Therefore, there is a real need to deliver targeted services to these communities. Overall smoking prevalence has come down but in

certain groups the prevalence is still stubbornly high. Therefore, the Smoking cessation services will move more towards a targeted provision to focus on the sectors that retain a high-level of smoking such as mental health patients, routine manual workers and BAME communities. There will be more on upstream prevention; changing the environment to promote healthy behaviours through the healthy place shaping agenda.

Officers responded to Members' questions as follows:

- Smoking is still the biggest cause of ill health and a big driver of health inequality.
- Online testing in the sexual health area is more efficient and more popular with younger people who are the biggest users of the service. It involves receiving and returning self-testing packs. This will bring about a greater degree of impartiality and therefore improve access to sexual health services, especially in the rural communities.
- Weight management services are currently universal. The service is to double its capacity. Over 50% of Oxfordshire adults are overweight or obese. Other approaches are needed with this national problem.
- Public Health has chosen to take on the funding of School Vision Screening when OUH Trust funding ceases as it is an important preventative scheme.

Children's Services

Lucy Butler highlighted a number of items in this directorate. Early intervention on SEND is being introduced. Other increases are required to manage demand especially in High Needs SEND support. This includes additional and direct support to schools to enable children to remain in their current school.

Members raised a number of issues and officers responded as follows:

- The Council is not charging for the extra behavioural support to schools as this would be counterproductive. Spending on this is a good investment. Schools vary on how they handle these issues but the Council is sharing a model of good practice.
- The provision for early intervention on SEND is modest and more may be needed next year.
- The provision for care leavers up to the age of 25 includes a staff component – personal advisers provide help. The Council also works with district and city councils on housing.
- The Cabinet Advisory Group on post-16 school transport suggested some small savings but numbers are increasing. The lack of special schools in the county contributes to the problem as long distances can be involved.
- National policy is that the local authority takes responsibility for excluded students. The County Councils Network is lobbying on this. If children stayed on the school roll it would have high impact.
- Twenty new schools will be provided in the next six years – some will include SEND facilities. However, the Council does not control the location of all of these schools.
- Savings have not been made in the review of third party spend because there is an inadequate supply of services for children with complex needs driving the costs up.

- The increase in safeguarding support is related to the Council's statutory duties. However, recent Ofsted inspections have highlighted an increasing number of schools are not meeting their own safeguarding duties.
- Spending on the Family Safeguarding Model will lead to savings later.

The Chairman welcomed the additional investments proposed but expressed concern whether the Council had the capacity to deliver. Lucy Butler responded that staff retention had been a problem, but this will improve with the Family Safeguarding model because it involves more preventative work.

Adult Services

Stephen Chandler introduced this section. The goal is to help people to be as independent as possible and at home if possible. The Council does not do most of the work itself but works with providers and in some cases individuals. On average, home care costs £23 per hour but in places this can be £40 to £50.

Austerity resulted in a retraction of services to the Care Act duties only. High costs for many people could have been avoided with earlier intervention. The Council is trying to redress this including work with community groups.

Officers responded to Members' questions as follows:

- Assistive technology includes the use of smart phones. It is well tested. The spending on this is really a 'pump-primer'.
- Oxfordshire is paying the second highest for home care – £23 per hour while the recommended rate is £18.70. It should not be so different from neighbouring counties. The Council is establishing a new plan and intends to be more robust in its work with the market.
- The CQC report three years ago pointed to an over-reliance on beds. The Council will spend to strengthen community capacity. This has been successful elsewhere in reducing demand on beds.
- Demand with working age adults is increasing nationally. More are surviving for longer.
- Spending on home care is reduced because there is less home care available.
- The Council is working with self-funders to help them make good decisions.
- Government grants will be base-lined except for General Social Care of £12m which falls out.

The Chairman asked to see comparisons with other counties on home care costs when reporting on Delayed Transfers of Care at the February meeting of the Committee.

Customers and Organisational Development

Claire Taylor invited questions:

- There are no plans to change the procedures for the Priority Fund which is being continued.
- The IT strategy has now got a full technological roadmap. There is investment in video conferencing and agile working. The Council is ahead of the curve on this. The main challenge is ensuring health and safety when working from home.
- The Council does not need to pay to get out of the old data centre contracts.

Corporate Plan and Outcomes Framework

Claire Taylor gave a presentation. There is no change in the vision but this version of the plan is more accessible. The outcomes framework is still very much a draft for feedback. It is not expected that there will be much cost in printing. Only about 200 copies of the last plan were produced – mainly for libraries. This version is designed to be viewed online and is only half the length.

Members made the following comments:

- The inclusion of individual stories was welcomed.
- It should be made clear the areas in which the Council has direct responsibility and where it has not.
- There should be measures relating to quality of life.
- There is concern as to the value of data from “Fix My Street”.
- There is not enough about income generation from commercial organisations.
- Enforcement – especially in minerals and waste – should be included.

The Chairman thanked the officers and reminded Members that the Corporate Plan should be used to scrutinize the Council’s performance going forward.

Review of charges

Lorna Baxter summarised that a 2% increase applies generally except where the market allows or where the Council is not recovering costs.

Members raised a number of issues and officers responded as follows:

- It is policy to recover full costs and it has been flagged to managers that this should include overheads.
- The Government has signalled a review of business rates given increased competition from online businesses. It is unlikely that any review will affect funding of local authorities.
- New Homes Bonuses were paid for four years but those for 2020/21 will be for that year only. All payments will fall out by 2022/23 though a review is expected as the Government still wants some reward mechanism for house building growth.
- The level of reserves is believed to be appropriate over the medium term. These are earmarked for specific purposes.

There was a discussion regarding charges for advice on highways. Councillors Mathew and Carter suggested that charges could be doubled while the Chairman expressed concern that this might be a disincentive to developers at a time when houses are needed.

Capital Programme Strategy

Officers responded to Members’ questions as follows:

- The key areas in the IT Strategy are identity and access, hardware, unified communications and data. The amounts are in addition to those already earmarked.
- Money is being put aside for climate action which could be renewing heating systems for example.

- Property, including how we work with schools, is one of the themes being examined by the Climate Action Cabinet Advisory Group. This will lead to the development of a business case.
- Funding for responding to the Carillion legacy is included in the Capital Programme. The actual work and costs are still being assessed but some costs are less than expected.
- Suggestions such as using the pension fund for housing on Council land would need a business case to be examined by the Pension Fund Committee then to follow the investment strategy procedure.

Treasury Management

Lorna Baxter highlighted the increase in the limit for longer term lending to £200m until 2023/24 given the higher than forecast cash balances. She believed that the amount of external investments was at the appropriate level.

5/20 SEND INSPECTION FINAL REPORT (Agenda No. 6)

Lucy Butler introduced the SEND Final Local Area revisit report. Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission visited Oxfordshire in 2017 and issued a written statement of action against the Local Area (Oxfordshire County council and the Clinical Commissioning Group)

Ofsted revisited the Local Area in October 2019 to monitor progress against the 5 areas of significant weakness identified in the previous report. They found that sufficient progress had been made on three of the five areas identified. The two areas requiring further improvement were:

- The quality and rigour of self-evaluation and monitoring and the limited effect it has had on driving and securing improvement.
- The quality of EHC Plans.

Jayne Howarth added that the Council is committed to improving both areas but engaging more closely with young people and families was a high priority.

Officers responded to Members questions as follows:

- Staff are encouraged to use more accessible language in communicating with parents but the issues are often very complex.
- No formal further visit by Ofsted/CQC will be undertaken as DfE have only commissioned one revisit for each Local Authority when given a Written Statement of Action. A new round of inspections is being considered by Ofsted, starting in 2021, however due to the number of authorities who have been given a statement of action, this might be delayed.
- Headteachers were very involved and advised inspectors that they were now really being challenged on exclusions. The Council is held accountable for exclusions across the county but does not control most of the schools involved, as they are now Academies.
- Inspectors also met with parents. Parents expressed concerns over the lack of involvement in strategic decisions and this is being addressed with a number of focus group sessions being arranged.

- It is expected that the new Family Safeguarding model will address some of the problems faced by parents.
- HOSC looked at CAMHS at its November meeting and asked for a further report for its February meeting.

The Chairman thanked officers for the report and for the progress made. She agreed with the report's finding that many parents remain unclear about who is accountable for different aspects of SEND provision. She also said that early psychological intervention was needed.

RESOLVED: to note the outcome of the SEND Local Area Re-Visit report, published on 23 December 2019.

6/20 WORK PROGRAMME
(Agenda No. 7)

The Chairman invited Members to email her with any suggestions for the work programme.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing 2020