

SAFER & STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Monday, 14 February 2011 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.45.

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Lawrie Stratford – in the Chair

Councillor John Goddard
Councillor Patrick Greene
Councillor Stewart Lilly
Councillor Lorraine Lindsay-Gale
Councillor Susanna Pressel
Councillor Bill Service
Councillor Alan Thompson

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Judith Heathcoat
Councillor Kieran Mallon

By Invitation:

Officers:

Whole of meeting Seán Gibson (Chief Executive's Office)
Nathan Travis (Fire & Rescue Service)

Part of meeting

Agenda Item	Officer Attending
5	John Jackson, Director for Social & Community Services), Colin Thomas (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), Richard Webb (Acting Head of Trading Standards & Community Safety)
6	Alexandra Bailey (Corporate Performance & Review Manager)
7	Richard Webb (Acting Head of Trading Standards & Community Safety)
8	Colin Thomas (Deputy Chief Fire Officer)
9	Colin Thomas (Deputy Chief Fire 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/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.

105/11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

Councillor Carol Viney (Councillor Timonhy Hallchurch substituting).
Councillor Sajjad Malik

106/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE

(Agenda No. 2)

None

107/11 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

Minute 91/10 – Colin Thomas, Deputy Chief Fire Officer to respond to question about proper standards for fire safety.

Minute 92/10 – Cllr S Pressel raised the concern that the proposed minimum unit price may be too low. The Chairman undertook to refer matter to relevant committees.

Minute 93/10 – Cllr Judith Heathcoat to provide update on work on simplifying the grant process for communities.

108/11 SPEAKING TO OR PETITIONING THE COMMITTEE

(Agenda No. 4)

None.

109/11 DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

(Agenda No. 5)

Updates were given by The Director for Social & Community Services, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, and the Acting Head of Trading Standards and Community Safety.

The Director for Social & Community Services gave an update on:

Library provision

Proposals to amend provision of libraries in Oxfordshire were announced in November 2010. A large amount of correspondence has been received which has been collated by staff in Chief Executive's Office with specific queries being responded to by the Director or members of staff in the Chief Executive's Office.

Councillor Judith Heathcoat and the Director have been holding public meetings about those libraries which may be closed. The Director stressed that council will work with community groups who wish to take on the responsibility of maintaining a

library at risk of closure. In light of this, he believed that he and local councillors have been able to work closely together on issue.

Council also working closely with Museums & Libraries Association (MLA) as one of the pilot authorities in the MLA's 'Future Libraries programme'.

Director reported that he has met with LSSi, John Lang (Hounslow Borough Council) and Tim Coates, former executive at Waterstones who has worked with Hillingdon Borough Council on its Library Service re-design, but this was more a consultancy offer than a bid to run local libraries.

Broad issues being raised to date can be considered as follows: (i) value of libraries, (ii) impact of proposals on vulnerable groups, (iii) 'pain' should be shared across all libraries, and (iv) belief that community libraries initiative will not work.

- i. The Director stressed that the library service is valued, and current proposals would have the least impact. (He noted that the 23 remaining libraries account for 82% of provision).
- ii. This has already been identified as an issue, said the Director, with many existing building not being suitable for people with disabilities.
- iii. Prior to current proposals being announced, a 30% reduction in opening hours which would have been a significant reduction for the Central Library (the fourth busiest in the UK) and would not reflect people's expectations vis-à-vis a 'big' central library with good opening hours.

The Director noted that we have experience of the effect of reducing opening hours in Oxfordshire's library as in 1998-1999 a 15% reduction was put in place to make savings, and book issues fell by 20%. He stressed that the current proposal should have no major reduction in book issues.

- iv. The Director did not agree that volunteers would not be found to help run local libraries, and referred to the public meeting at Benson which showed great support for the initiative. However, practical issues were being raised which would need to be addressed.

Formal consultation was expected to begin at the end of February 2011, and last three months. This would mean that a final decision of the current proposals was likely to happen in July 2011. A document outlining the broad approach along with specific information about libraries would be published at the beginning of the formal consultation.

Cllr Judith Heathcoat added to the Director's report that alternative providers such as LSSi were being considered cautiously, but that council is opened to other options or models. She stated that a review of the council's property was being undertaken with the view to see if there are any opportunities to co-locate services.

The Chairman noted that communication of the overall process should have been clearer.

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Members comments and discussion fell under the following headings: (i) guidance on proposals, (ii) impact assessment, (iii) options for running libraries, and (iv) training for volunteers.

- i. Communities were awaiting guidance on the proposals and how they may be involved. This was expected by end of February and would be linked to the Big Society exercise.
- ii. Some members voiced concern that any impact assessment was to happen late in the process. The director said that, at the moment, we were only in the position to give an overall assessment. A detailed assessment would follow based on the development or not of a community library.
- iii. Private sector as well as community-run solutions were welcomed. Concerns were noted about the experience of alternative provision elsewhere in the UK. For example, it was asserted that there have been problems with certain companies running a library service, and in keeping libraries open with voluntary support.

Cllr Pressel suggested a 'partnership model' between the county council and communities with the council providing 50% funding, and premises being shared with other services.

- iv. It was considered that training for volunteers was crucial if community-based libraries were to be sustainable, and able to offer a quality service. Details of how much funding may be available for training purposes was not known at this point.

Organisational change

SCS and CYPF to have a joint position (Head of Quality & Compliance) and will not be proceeding with the creation of Deputy Director, Communities at this time.

The County Librarian, Caroline Taylor, would be moving to Nottingham Trent University where she would be running the library. Caroline was thanked for her work at Oxfordshire County Council.

The Deputy Fire Officer gave an update on:

Fire Futures

Fire Futures is a strategic review of the Fire and Rescue Service with the objective of shaping the future structure and direction of the Fire and Rescue Service in England. The Fire Minister, Bob Neill MP, defined the content of the review earlier in 2010. Four workstreams were identified:

- Role of the fire and rescue service – Delivery models
- Efficiency, Effectiveness and Productivity
- Localism and Accountability

- National Interests

These workstreams were chaired by a range of people, including 3 elected members.

Reports, marking the output of the first stage of the review were published in December 2010, and present a series of options for the short, medium, and long term. The Minister will be reflecting on the reports over the coming months before responding. The authority will then consider this subject further.

Business Strategy Development and organisational structure

The former Community Safety Directorate continues to work on the delivery plans that underpin the 2011/12 business strategy, and are factoring items such as Fire Futures and more locally the evolving plans for the Communities and Quality and Compliance Joint Services. The intended transfer of the Road Safety Education team to the Fire and Rescue Service is being further refined with a proposal being available in March 2011.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer introduced the new Assistant Chief Officer, Nathan Travis.

The Acting Head of Trading Standards and Community Safety gave an update on:

The Consumer Landscape Review which concerns the transfer the consumer protection functions of the Office of Fair Trading to local authority Trading Standards Services. It is expected that a consultation document will be published in March 2011 with transfers beginning in 2012.

Funding for Community Safety Partnerships – the Area Based Grant which included funds for Safer Communities has ceased and the Local Government Settlement confirmed that a new unringfenced Community Safety Fund was in place.

110/11 THE BIG SOCIETY AND LOCALITY REVIEWS

(Agenda No. 6)

The Corporate Performance & Review Manager referred to the letter that all Councillors had received in December 2010 outlining the council's approach to the Government's Big Society initiative, the council's Locality Reviews and its Big Society Fund.

Locality Reviews

Three Locality Reviews had been held to date and would carry on until the summer. Briefings, covering information on community groups and assets were available for initial discussion. However, overall the focus of the reviews would be informed by local members.

Big Society Fund

A 'micro-website' dedicated to the Big Society Fund was scheduled to launch on 16 February 2011. The website would include information on what the county council was offering, information on applications to the fund, and service specific information. The website would be updated in line with locality review development.

Rather than a single deadline for applications, there would be instead 'waves of applications' allowing communities time to organise bids.

As part of the communication framework, a link would be placed in District Council websites, and Parish Council clerks would also be emailed the link.

Councillor Kieron Mallon (Cabinet Member for Police and Policy Coordination) emphasised that the approached envisaged councillors as community leaders within the localities, but stressed that it would be possible for pro-active groups within a locality to set the pace for change.

Councillor Mallon explained that pump-priming would cover set-up costs for community initiatives, but groups would have to organise long-term funding.

Members of the committee supported the involvement of District and Parish Councils, but were concerned about the sustainability of funding. However, they recognised that this was the beginning of the process. In light of this, it was agreed that regular updates would be useful.

111/11 CRIME AND DISORDER ANNUAL REVIEW

(Agenda No. 7)

The report was presented by Richard Webb and covered: legal context, the role of the Oxfordshire Safer Communities Partnership (OSCP), the work carried out by OSCP in the previous six months, the review of OSCP, challenges ahead for Community Safety, and changes to Policing in Oxfordshire.

Councillor Kieron Mallon (Cabinet Member for Policing and Policy Coordination) commented on the review of OSCP. He said that OSCP had achieved a great deal, but had to evolve to engage with changes to police and emerging government policy. The review would focus on the aims of the partnership, challenges, governance and Big Society.

Members welcomed the report and highlighted: changes to funding, increased activities for local police, alcohol treatment orders waiting list and challenges faced by families with complex needs.

Richard Webb would respond about the alcohol treatment orders waiting list query.

It was agreed that early intervention was important in helping families with complex needs. With this in mind, the Chairman asked for a report back on the 'Brighter Futures' project being run in Banbury.

**112/11 DRAFT OFRS INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN (IRMP)
2011-12**

(Agenda No. 8)

Committee supportive of IRMP and considered that limited consultation response more a comment on effectiveness of the plan than lack of interest. Deputy Chief Fire Officer noted that further consultation could be carried out on specific issues, and that other directorates, for example Environment & Economy had suggested that Fire & Rescue could assist with Area Stewards initiative.

Committee agreed that IRMP showed that the Fire & Rescue service were an integral part of the delivery of council services in Oxfordshire.

Councillor John Godden suggested that project should be tracked at committee.

113/11 REGIONAL CONTROL ROOM PROJECT CANCELLATION

(Agenda No. 9)

The briefing was given by Colin Thomas who confirmed that the Fire Minister, Bob Neil MP, had announced on 20 December 2010 the termination of the contract with Cassidian (formerly EADS) for the delivery of the fire control centres.

He asked the committee to note that the Delegated Decisions meeting would be considering a paper directing our nominated SEFRCC Director, Councillor Rodney Rose, to vote for the formal winding up of the company at its next meeting on 18 February 2011.

Oxfordshire would be considering its options for the future provision of call receipt, mobilising and incident management against the following strategic objectives:

- Operational resilience – technical and for spate conditions
- Ability to meet our local requirements, and
- Cost effectiveness

A formal invitation from Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Authority to work jointly with them and the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority to investigate if a Thames Valley approach is viable.

Oxfordshire would be well placed to secure the benefits of the early deliverables, for example; Mobile data Terminals in all 'red' fleet vehicles and 24 new station end mobilising systems. However the financial consequences also remain unclear at this time.

Colin Thomas paid tribute to our staff who have remained positive and professional during the 7 years of the project. He also thanked Members for their long standing interest, and commended the council for the continued financial support which has

proven to be prudent ensuring that a control room remains resilient in the interim before alternative arrangements can be implemented.

The Chairman thanked Colin Thomas and his staff for their work on this project over the years, and added that the quality of the information provided to the committee has been impressive.

114/11 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

(Agenda No. 10)

Management Review of Sweatbox Youth Centre, Wantage

Councillor Bill Service updated the committee on the Management Review of the Sweatbox Young People’s Centre, Wantage. He reminded the committee that the review had been undertaken after some events had to be cancelled due to health and safety concerns given the high numbers expected to attend and the interest being shown in the events by local and national media.

Councillor Service reported that the reports recommendations were adequate, and would ensure improved clarification of roles, expectations and communication between the centre and the programme managers and their Area line managers.

It was recommended that an update is received in 12 months.

Work programme

Agreed to update work programme, and bring in line with the committee’s remit.

115/11 FORWARD PLAN

(Agenda No. 11)

Nothing raised.

116/11 12.45 APPROX CLOSE OF MEETING

(Agenda No. 12)

..... in the Chair

Date of signing