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SAFER & STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Monday, 9 May 2011 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.30pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Lawrie Stratford – in the Chair

Councillor Carol Viney (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor John Goddard
Councillor Patrick Greene
Councillor Lorraine Lindsay-Gale
Councillor Susanna Pressel
Councillor Bill Service
Councillor Anda Fitzgerald-O’Conner
Councillor Ray Jelf

Officers:

Whole of meeting Sean Gibson, Corporate Performance Advisor
David Ethridge, Chief Fire Officer

Part of meeting John Jackson, Director, Social & Community Services

Agenda Item

Officer Attending

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.

117/11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

Councillor Anda Fitzgerald-O’Conner attended in place of Councillor Alan Thompson.

Councillor Ray Jelf attended in place of Councillor Stewart Lilly.

118/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE

(Agenda No. 2)

None.

119/11 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

Minute 107/11: Councillor Judith Heathcoat referred to the minute on simplifying the grant process for communities, and that work was on-going and being lead by Councillor Keiron Mallon.

Minute 109/11: Councillor Susanna Pressel said that she had been speaking about the 'on-going' training of volunteers to run libraries. As the minute stood, the impression was given that this would be one-off training. 'On-going' to be inserted as part of record.

120/11 SPEAKING TO OR PETITIONING THE COMMITTEE

(Agenda No. 4)

No requests to speak to the committee received.

121/11 DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

(Agenda No. 5)

Reports were received from David Ethridge (Chief Fire Officer) and John Jackson (Director, Social & Community Services).

David Ethridge reported on:

Trading Standards

1. A strategy document, 'Better Choices: Better Deals', has been published by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills and the Cabinet Office's Behavioural Insights Team, and will lead to more information being made available for consumers in order to be able to make informed decisions when purchasing. It will also allow consumers to know more about what information is held about them by businesses.
2. An inspection had been carried out in the first week of may into how the council manages the Regulatory Investigations Powers Act. Committee will be informed when inspection report is published.
3. Discussions had been held with Buckinghamshire County Council on joint managerial proposals for the councils' Trading Standards teams. A project Implementation Document has been drafted.

Oxfordshire Safer Communities Partnership

Partnership has undertaken a review of its direction of work in light of changes to community Safety and the Policing Bill currently going through Parliament. The policing Bill contains proposals which would move responsibility for community safety

funding from the county council to the Police Authority. This will lead to the partnership having even more closer working arrangements with Police.

David Ethridge explained in response to a question from the deputy chairman that annual budget is £600,000, and that county council has committed to maintaining current funding for 12 months. However, this will reduce to £400,000 the following year.

Fire & Rescue Service

The call on Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue service is the forest fire in Berkshire which has led to the need for national assets to be utilised and co-ordinated. Oxfordshire stores some of this equipment.

The fire is in an area of 300 hectares of mixed forest, and it is estimated that 55% has been destroyed. The fire is complicated by a thick covering of pine needles and a deep peat layer which has also caught fire.

Up to 200 fire fighters have been in operation every day for 11 days with 20-30 engines in place. Along with Oxfordshire, five other areas have been involved; London, Hertfordshire, Hampshire, Surrey and Buckinghamshire.

Oxfordshire is offering permanent support for Berkshire, this includes officer support, command and control, and communications support.

David Ethridge paid tribute to all staff in the Control Room particularly their work in co-ordinating joint logistical support. He noted that the additional investment has improved availability by 22%, and that Oxfordshire has benefitted from the retention of Control Room staff as their experience when a situation like the Berkshire forest fire arises.

The Chief Fire Officer would send a briefing on the incident to all members.

The Chief Fire Officer was asked about costs, and the likely cause of the fire. He said that the Fire & Rescue Act 2004, section 13, places a duty on brigades to work together regardless of where the incident is located. At present the cost stands at £100,000, but should not be viewed as one incident. For example, the requirements of the act means that Oxfordshire can keep a single engine at Henley rather than two as Berkshire is aware that it needs to be able to provide an engine when necessary.

David Ethridge added that 'Belwin scheme' could be used to help cover costs, but that Berkshire would have to instigate proceedings.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that two people have been arrested and are on police bail at the moment.

The deputy Chairman asked if the Control Room had benefited from the control room project coming to an end. The Chief Office said that Oxfordshire to consider alternatives over the next few months. He added that one off funding has been

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provided to refresh software for example, but though resilient it is getting old and maintenance costs will continue to rise.

Due to forest fire, resilience in Thames Valley area to be tested.

John Jackson reported on:

Cogges Museum

Julia Holberry has stood down as Chair of the Shadow Board. Judy Niner will replace her as Chair with Richard Munro as Vice-Chair. The two Oxfordshire County Council representatives on the Board are: Councillor David Robertson and Simon Kearey (Head of Strategy & Transformation, Social & Community Services).

The Shadow Board due to set up trust with charitable status, and is also in the process of appointing a Director. Some funding has been made available by Community Services and West Oxfordshire to support activities during March, a major bid to the heritage fund is underway. The museum plans to be open for the summer holidays.

The vision for the museum is to draw on Cogges past to reflect on the issues of the present, anticipate the priorities of the future, and explore the themes of food and its production. It is planned to return Cogges to be an active farmstead, run by a smallholder who will live in the Manor House. Planning permission is being pursued in order to make the necessary changes.

The museum will be reliant on volunteers, and will concentrate its activities on school holidays and weekends.

Members noted that work towards the opening of the museum was moving very slowly. John Jackson could not offer a precise opening date, but would circulate details after meeting.

Libraries

Consultation on provision of library service will start later in May. Council is working closely with Museums, Libraries & Archives Council on any proposed changes.

In response to a question from Councillor John Godden on whether the administration is striving to ensure a countywide system of public libraries, John Jackson explained that the council will take into account the Libraries Act remit to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' service.

Judith Heathcoat commented that some questions had already been covered at full Council.

122/11 THAMES VALLEY POLICE: PRESENTATION AND Q&A

(Agenda No. 6)

Sara Thornton, Chief Constable, Thames Valley Police gave presentation.

Management comment

Chief Constable spoke about|:

- Strategy for 3 years; 2011-2014
- Crime levels and performance of force during past year
- Budget

Strategy for 3 years, 2011-2014

- To cut crimes that are of most concern to the community
- To increase the visible presence of the Police
- To protect our communities from the most serious harm
- To improve communication with the public in order to build trust and confidence in our communities
- To tackle bureaucracy and develop the professional skills of all staff
- To reduce costs and protect the frontline

Delivery Plan targets for 2011-2012:

To cut crimes that are of most concern to the community

- Reduce the level of violence against the person by **12%**
- Reduce serious acquisitive crime by **5%**
- Increase the detection rate for violence against the person with injury to **42%**
- Increase the detection rate for serious acquisitive crime to **15%**
- Maintain the detection rate for serious sexual assault above **25%**
- Improve satisfaction levels for victims of domestic burglary, violence and vehicle crime above those achieved at 2010/11 year end

To increase the visible presence of the police

- Increase the number of Special Constables to **700**
- Achieve an annual recruitment target of **10%** BME for Police Officers, PCSOs and Special Constables

Protect our communities from the most serious harm

- Increase the number of confiscation orders achieved by **5%**

Crime levels and performance of force during past year

Data showed good performance against targets for serious acquisitive crime and violence against the person with injury. Number of Special Constables for the area

remained stable, and confidence in the police and satisfaction with overall experience showed an improvement in the year.

Budget

Thames Valley police face a £52m reduction over 4 years. The Chief Constable explained that Police Grant was reduced across the board with no consideration given to local differences. However, Thames Valley Police are in the middle range of budget reduction.

£47m savings has been identified via the force's Productivity Strategy, and a Zero Based Budget approach is always taken when drafting budget. Locally changes have been made to the managerial structure, and plans are in place to utilise technology better.

Questions

Main areas covered:

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Chief Constable said that though the priority is to protect the frontline a balanced approach must be taken to ensure that the proper 'back office' support is available. Otherwise efficiency gains may be undermined.

Councillor John Godden asked how targets are set, and was informed that they are set by the Thames Valley Police Authority in a public meeting. Police areas are grouped in 'families' to allow comparisons to be made.

Councillor Patrick Greene asked for data on fixed speeding cameras since they were re-activated. He also asked for information about the number of motorcyclists caught speeding. The Chief Constable said that she would have the details sent after the meeting.

Councillor Bill Service asked if the trial at Berkshire/Oxfordshire border on lorries only using inside lane of A34 at certain times should be extended to the whole of the A34. The Chief Constable replied that she would ask Road Policing for their view.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Constable for her presentation, and for the work of the police in Oxfordshire.

123/11 OPERATION OF BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL'S ILLEGAL MONEY LENDING TEAM IN OXFORDSHIRE

(Agenda No. 7)

Richard Webb (Acting Head of Trading Standards & Community Safety) reported that the Birmingham Illegal Money Team has been operating in Oxfordshire since January 2010. Agreement is necessary as team uses statutory powers.

The team works by using face to face interviews, and a communication drive to highlight the means by which people can bring a complaint. No evidence of illegal money lending has been uncovered during the past year, but the authority recognises

that time is needed for the team to gather intelligence, and build contacts and confidence.

Given the covert nature of the activities carried out by the team, reports are confidential, but are discussed with Richard Webb.

Richard Webb said that county council support is minimal as team works and acts independently. However, intends to consult on how the council can increase levels of support.

In response to questions asked by committee, Richard confirmed that the agreement had been extended, and that the local media have been helpful and supportive when they can. He said that the team tries to work with organisations who work with vulnerable individuals (eg, Citizens Advice Bureau).

124/11 ROAD SAFETY

(Agenda No. 8)

Colin Thomas reported that steady progress is being made in transferring road safety responsibilities from Environment & Economy Fire & Rescue. Priorities include re-aligning structure to provide management, supervision and guidance, transferring information and redeploying safety roadshows, and identifying priorities for a work programme to be launched in the summer.

Colin also referred to the launch of the United Nations Decade of Road Safety on 11 May 2011.

Councillor Susanna Pressel stated that it would be preferable to be able to comment on structure and focus of team prior to changes being agreed and fixed in place.

Councillor John Goddard stressed that an more integrated approach would be beneficial bringing together events, guidance and training, and area based rather than specialist based.

Councillor Bill Service raised the issue of HGVs and overtaking on A34 particularly the Newbury Bicester section.

Colin Thomas noted all comments, and said that a risk based approach would be used in deciding the work programme.

125/11 FIRE CONTROL

(Agenda No. 9)

Colin Thomas reported that a paper on 'Future Arrangements for Call Receipt, Mobilising and Incident management for Oxfordshire County Council Fire & Rescue Service' had been submitted for consideration by Cabinet (11 May 2011). Lessons from the forest fire in Berkshire would inform the work on future arrangements.

126/11 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

(Agenda No. 10)

The Chairman asked for the work programme to be considered by new committee at next meeting, and thanked current members for their contribution during the past year.

127/11 FORWARD PLAN

(Agenda No. 11)

Nothing of interest to committee noted.

128/11 12.30 CLOSE OF MEETING

(Agenda No. 12)

..... in the Chair

Date of signing