

SAFER & STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Monday, 4 July 2011 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.30 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Stewart Lilley – in the Chair

Councillor Carol Viney
Councillor John Goddard
Councillor Alyas Ahmed
Councillor Anthony Gearing
Councillor Stewart Lilly
Councillor Susanna Pressel
Councillor John Sanders
Councillor Bill Service
Councillor Alan Thompson

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor (for Agenda Item)

By Invitation:

Officers:

Whole of meeting Sean Gibson, Corporate Performance Officer
Colin Thomas, Deputy Chief Fire Officer

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

Agenda Item **Officer Attending**
Martyn Brown, Heritage Officer
Bethan Morgan, Manager, Emergency Planning
Ruth Whyte, Manager, Safer Communities Unit

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.

129/11 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE CURRENT COUNCIL YEAR (Agenda No. 1)

Sean Gibson called for nominations for Chairman of the Safer and Stronger Scrutiny Committee 2011 to 2012. Two nominations were received:

SSC3

Councillor Stewart Lilly nominated Councillor Lawrie Stratford, Councillor Bill Service seconded nomination;

Councillor Susanna Pressel nominated Councillor John Sanders, Councillor John Sanders seconded the nomination.

On being put to a vote, Councillor Lawrie Stratford received 7 for and 2 against, and Councillor John Sanders received 2 for and 7 against.

Councillor Lawrie Stratford was elected Chairman.

130/11 ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIRMAN FOR THE CURRENT COUNCIL YEAR (Agenda No. 2)

Sean Gibson called for nominations for deputy Chairman of the Safer and Stronger Scrutiny Committee 2011 to 2012. Two nominations were received:

Councillor nominated Councillor Stewart Lilly, Councillor seconded nomination;

Councillor John Sanders nominated Councillor Susanna Pressel, Councillor Susanna Pressel seconded the nomination.

On being put to a vote, Councillor Stewart Lilly received 7 for and 2 against, and

Councillor Susanna Pressel received 3 for and 6 against.

Councillor Stewart Lilley was elected deputy Chairman.

131/11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS (Agenda No. 3)

Councillor Stewart Lilly informed members of the committee that Councillor Judith Heathcoat had sent her apologies as she had recently received treatment on one of her knees at the Manor Hospital, Oxford. Councillor Lilley said that Councillor Heathcoat was recovering well, but had been strongly advised by doctors to rest. Members agreed to send Councillor Heathcoat their best wishes for a speedy recovery.

Councillor Don Seale substituted for Councillor Lawrie Stratford.

132/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE (Agenda No. 4)

Nothing of note.

133/11 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 5)

Minute 121/11 (page 4) and Minute 122/11 (page 6): Councillor John Goddard noted that he had been referred to as Councillor John Godden, and asked for this to be rectified.

134/11 SPEAKING TO OR PETITIONING THE COMMITTEE

(Agenda No. 6)

None

135/11 DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

(Agenda No. 7)

Reports were received from Colin Thomas (Deputy Chief Fire Officer) and John Jackson (Director, Social & Community Services).

Colin Thomas reported on:

Consumer Safety Review

The National Audit Office (NAO) published 'Protecting consumers – the system for enforcing consumer law' on 13 June 2011. The report found that the effectiveness of the current arrangements to enforce consumer law was not delivering value for money due to a fragmented delivery landscape. Emphasis was placed on local priorities even though a great deal of consumer detriment takes place at national and regional levels.

It was noted that a national helpline was being set up.

On 21 June 2011, the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) published its consultation document, 'Empowering and protecting consumers – consultation on institutional change for provision of consumer information, advice, education, advocacy and enforcement'. The Government wishes to empower consumers to make wise decisions when purchasing goods and services. Its proposals for reform have been guided by the following objectives:

- Reducing complexity of the consumer landscape
- Strengthening the effectiveness of consumer enforcement
- More cost-effective delivery, closer to the consumer front line

The consultation ends on 27 September 2011.

Action

1. Lodge copy of NAO report in Members' library
2. Report on response to BIS consultation at 5 September 2011 meeting

Stronger Communities

SSC3

Oxfordshire Safer Communities Partnership are preparing to change its structure to reflect the new role of Police Commissioner. Though the law was still being drafted around this new position, it was thought best to consider options sooner rather than later. The new role would strengthen co-ordination and communication across Oxfordshire which is important given that the Basic Command Unit model has been abolished.

Drugs, Alcohol and Treatment (DAAT) consultation

DAAT are consulting on its proposals for a new business model. This will place recovery from addiction at the centre of its work. Members were appreciative of the one page summary provided.

Action

Lodge consultation documents in Members' library.

Gypsy and Travellers Service

Colin Thomas informed the committee that the service has been invited to tender to run the London Borough of Kensington & Chelsea Gypsy and Travellers Service. Colin noted that this is further recognition of the outstanding work carried by Oxfordshire's service.

Councillor Judith Heathcoat informed the committee that tender has been submitted.

Fire at Didcot Power Station

A fire was tackled at Didcot Power Station on 21 June 2011. Colin reported that the fire was a low level incident, but given the sensitivity of the site (it is one of the main sources of energy for the South East of England) a press release was issued. Cllr Lilly asked Colin Thomas to thank those fire crews who did a splendid task & thus avoid what could have been a more serious situation.

Power outage in central Oxford, 27 June 2011

A Scottish Electric sub-station failure happened on 27 June 2011. Much of central Oxford was without power including the Clarendon Centre which houses the council's computer servers. The power failure automatically triggered a controlled shut down of computer applications which meant that PCs etc were not functional for much of the day.

Colin Thomas said that the council is investing in generators at Clarendon and in County Hall as well as a back up centre based at the Fire & Rescue Headquarters in Kidlington which will mean that future events of this nature will have less impact on services.

Members requested an update on actions.

Members' questions and discussion

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Discussion focused on provision of DAAT consultation documents and power failure.

Councillors John Sanders and Susanna Pressel argued that the committee was not in a position to scrutinise the DAAT consultation if papers were not provided. Councillor Pressel added that the consultation should have been formerly tabled for discussion at committee, and was adamant that the committee should have a role to play in this consultation.

John Jackson commented that historically the council's involvement with DAAT was via the Adult Social Care committee, however he understood her point that checks should be undertaken to ensure that appropriate committees have sight of documents relevant to their remit in the future.

Councillor John Sanders was worried that concerns may not be picked up if documents are not scrutinised by all relevant committees.

Action

Councillor Stewart Lilly to arrange for consultation documents are made available to committee and will to speak to Cabinet Member on how best to co-ordinate

Councillor John Goddard noted that this is not the first major power failure which has shut down central Oxford. Commenting on Colin Thomas's remarks that the council has invested in new generator systems and a Disaster Recovery Centre, he said that this not engaging with the root cause of the problem, namely the energy suppliers.

Councillor Susanna Pressel suggested that the committee recommend that the Cabinet write to Scottish Power to ask why central Oxford is subject to regular power failures. Councillor Bill Service added that this is a countywide matter, and that all energy suppliers should be contacted.

Councillor John Sanders asked if the council has a Service level Agreement with Scottish Power.

Action

1. Councillor Stewart Lilly will raise matter with Cabinet Member.

Councillor John Goddard requested further information on the role of the police Commissioner.

John Jackson, Director, Social and Community services reported on:

Cogges Museum

Trust signing lease on 4 July 2011. A separate sub-lease will need to be signed regarding the land adjacent to the museum. Preparations are progressing to open on 17 July as are plans for a summer programme of events. However, he regretfully reported that the Director of the trust had resigned.

It was noted that a new Director has been appointed.

Libraries

Compared to when proposals to amend the provision of the library service were first announced in late 2010, correspondence in this area is relatively quiet. Individual libraries and communities have raised specific questions, but many want to work with their locality on provision.

The main issues being thought through at the moment were concerned with how volunteering might work, and the support needed for volunteers. John Jackson said that he would be publishing his thinking on these matters. It was noted that proposals on volunteering were available on the library pages on the Council website.

Discussion

Councillor John Goddard welcomed the shift in substance and attitude, but said that John Jackson had not mentioned:

- Job losses as a means of reducing costs, and what consultation was taking place on this
- Costs and savings associated with new systems
- Income generation by libraries

John Jackson said that there were still expectations of job losses, and that the Library Service was considering the following:

- Single person operation in mobile libraries
- Scope to organise Holton back office in order to make savings
- Savings from community/community+ funding
- Central library reductions due to introduction of a self-service system

He stressed that managers had been briefed prior to the consultation being published, and that changes would be phased in over three years. Furthermore, changes do not impact on this year's budget, but will do so next year and will be considered as part of the service and resource planning process.

Councillor Don Seale also welcomed change in attitude. He said that the council never said that they were going to close libraries, and there was a positive inclination to keep all libraries open. He added that the Adult Social Services budget might be reduced as a consequence of the decision to keep libraries open, and reminded the committee of the case of Birmingham City Council which was stopped by a court from reducing its Adult Social Care expenditure. Finally, he commented that budgets were limited and that the financial position of the Library service would remain precarious over the next two to three years.

John Jackson advised members to read the proposals which identified which libraries are part of an efficient system, and those which are not efficient.

Councillor Stewart Lilly introduced the draft work programme for 2011-2012. He said that it would be used as an 'aide memoire' to help prevent areas of committee responsibility from slipping off the agenda, and it would be reviewed regularly and updated as necessary.

Councillor Susanna Pressel stressed that the work programme for the year should include items on arts, community cohesion, Probation service and Oxfordshire Archives.

Councillor Pressel expressed concern about the effectiveness of the committee to successfully scrutinise policy, and queried its value for money in its present form.

137/11 REPORT ON CHANGES TO MUSEUMS SERVICE

(Agenda No. 9)

Martyn Brown, (Heritage Officer) presented a report on the changes the Museum Service is experiencing. He referred to a 145 cut to the budget which would mean a reduction in the service provided, staffing levels and an increasing reliance on volunteers to provide core services.

The service has applied for core museum status which the University of Oxford museums have benefitted from since 2006. Core museum status would mean that the service would receive funding direct from Government. All staff were being consulted on changes.

Councillor Susanna Pressel informed the committee that Martyn Brown would retire in August and wondered if his position would be retained. Councillor Stewart Lilly thanked Martyn for his excellent years of service and, on behalf of the committee, wished him well for the future.

Councillor Pressel argued that the level of the cuts reduced the ability of the service to apply to sources of external funding, and suggested that the council have in place an officer to work up funding bids corporately if separate services cannot support such a role. Other members noted that Districts employ people in such roles and Councillor John Goddard said that identifying and bidding to sources of external funding could be shared with other councils.

Councillor Pressel also proposed that the draft Heritage Strategy should be circulated to committee and a report tabled at the 5 September meeting.

Action

1. Councillor Stewart Lilly to pursue idea of corporate funding officer, after consultation with committee Chairman and cabinet member. Also, to check if we could share with neighbouring councils
2. A Draft Heritage Strategy to be considered at September meeting of committee

3. The committee discussed whether the cuts would be temporary or not and Councillor Pressel proposed that the committee formally ask Cabinet to confirm. However, Councillor John Sanders pointed out that making experts redundant would mean that it might take time to return to current level of service. Martyn Brown said that current proposals did not undermine future development of the service.

In response to a question posed by Councillor Bill Service on retention of artefacts, Martyn Brown explained that disposals are subject to a fundamental review and that a number of larger items have been sold. A review of smaller items is currently taking place. Many items are loaned or shared with District Parish Councils.

Martyn also explained that the ability to generate additional income by trading specialist services has been reduced due to other councils also having their budgets reduced.

Finally, Martyn Brown informed the committee that building work to house the Old Soldiers of Oxfordshire exhibition would commence in August 2011, and would open in 2013-2014.

138/11 EMERGENCY PLANNING PREPARATIONS FOR WINTER 2011-2012

(Agenda No. 10)

Bethan Morgan (Manager, Emergency Planning) presented a report on preparations for winter. Bethan said that the heavy snowfall in January 2010 was said to be 'unprecedented' then happened again 11 months later, and this underlined the need for emergency planning for severe weather conditions to be in place in good time.

The Severe Weather Plan is formally agreed with District Councils, and is currently under review. Key areas include:

- Forward plan for utilising 4X4s
- The role of the Customer Call Centre in an emergency especially when high volume calls are expected
- A multi-agency approach to managing A34 during a period of severe weather
- Strengthen community resilience by ensuring that people know how to respond individually and as a community.

There are two strands of work to support community resilience; 1) Environment Agency's Community Flood Plans, and 2) Community Emergency Plans which would cover, for example, actions on helping vulnerable people during severe weather conditions. A series of events on community plans are to take place in the autumn and members were encouraged to attend.

Councillor John Goddard referred to issues around capacity mentioned in the report. He also said that responses depend on advance warning of severe weather. Councillor Goddard pointed out that there is no mention of the City.

Bethan said that Customer Service in the event of severe weather will extend its out of hours support meaning that residents would be able to get up to date information. She said that warnings are co-ordinated with police and that radio Oxford is involved particularly on A34 matters. Her team is working the Oxford City to work with groups such as NAGS.

Councillor John Goddard asked to be informed who Bethan was in contact with at the City Council.

Routes to schools were to be given priority in gritting, and the suggestion that teachers could support a local school if they could not travel to their place of employment due to distance was being considered.

There is good co-ordination between the Highways Agency and Environment & Economy Directorate, but Bethan is working to enhance the co-ordination at the operational and tactical level. One tonne bags of salt are being delivered to Parish Councils who could safely store them by Oxfordshire Highways for local use.

139/11 COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIPS STRATEGIES 2011-2012

(Agenda No. 11)

Ruth Whyte (Manager, Safer Communities Unit) presented a report on Crime & Disorder Partnership plans for 2011-2012. She apologise for the short notice, but work had begun later than usual. The strategies would also be considered by Cabinet and full Council.

The strategies shared a common framework and were in line with Oxfordshire 2030 goals and priorities.

Councillor Carol Viney said that the committee would not have had time to fully consider the strategies and that an item should be included in the September meeting, but meanwhile members should email comments to Ruth Whyte. Committee unanimously agreed.

In response to a question about the role of the Police Commissioner, Ruth said that she would circulate a presentation that a colleague had given on this subject.

Action

1. Councillors to email comments on Crime & Disorder Partnerships' strategies to Ruth Whyte
2. Agenda item on the strategies to be added to 5 September meeting
3. Ruth Whyte to circulate to committee a presentation on the role of the Police commissioner

140/11 FORWARD PLAN

(Agenda No. 12)

No items identified.

141/11 CLOSE OF MEETING: 12.20 APPROX
(Agenda No. 13)

..... in the Chair

Date of signing