

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 25 September 2014 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 1.42 pm.

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE – in the Chair

Councillor Neil Fawcett (Deputy Chairman)

Councillor Lynda Atkins

Councillor John Christie

Councillor Sam Coates

Councillor Yvonne Constance

Councillor Janet Godden

Councillor Mark Gray

Councillor Steve Harrod

Councillor Simon Hoare

Councillor Charles Mathew

Other Members in Attendance:

Councillor Hilary Hibbert Biles, Cabinet Member for Public Health & the Voluntary Sector (for Agenda Item 5)

Councillor Melinda Tilley, Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Families (for Agenda Item 6)

Councillor Rodney Rose, Deputy Leader (for Agenda Items 5, 8 & 9)

By Invitation:

Officers:

Whole of meeting

Part of meeting

Agenda Item

5

Officer Attending

Maggie Scott, Head of Policy; Jackie Wilderspin, Public Health Specialist

6

Lucy Butler, Deputy Director, Children's Social Care & YOS

7

Sue Scane, Director for Environment & Economy; Mark Kemp, Deputy Director for Environment & Economy (Commercial)

8 & 9

Dave Etheridge, Chief Fire Officer; Nathan Travis, Deputy Chief Fire Officer

10

Peter Clark, Monitoring officer and Head of Law & Culture

The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports are attached to the signed Minutes.

31/14 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 July were approved and signed.

A change to the order of the agenda was then agreed.

32/14 HIGHWAYS PARTNERSHIP CONTRACT WITH SKANSKA

(Agenda No. 7)

The Director and Deputy Director for Environment & Economy reported on the progress of the Highways Partnership Contract since the Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme Review highlighting a number of issues:

- Customer satisfaction although there was always room for improvement currently Oxfordshire was in a good place lying 8th out of 21 nationwide.
- Challenge to achieve spend profile due to rise in available budgets and difficulties in securing delivery of materials. Also some problems in balancing work though the partnership had proven to be flexible enough in conjunction with the County's membership of the Midlands Highway Alliance to absorb those pressures.
- The Peer Review had identified good feedback on dealing with the public and a desire by staff to do a good job and good budget planning. Public feedback suggested general satisfaction especially when compared to other authorities.

Areas for improvement included:

- More planned work to respond to problems of managing a declining road system.
- Communication skills between County Council and provider.
- Manage performance on a monthly basis

The Deputy Director then responded to questions and comments:

The contract had been agreed for 10 years with options to extend for a further 10. It was currently in its fourth year and no extension had yet been agreed.

With regard to concerns regarding the subscription to the National Highways and Transport survey and whether it represented value for money they confirmed that it offered more than just a ranking system. It increased effectiveness in challenging Skanska and was more than just a benchmark figure offering real value in looking at what other people did. Despite reductions in staffing levels it was considered that service delivery had improved since the start of the contract with more clarity regarding what the County Council was trying to achieve. Skanska had made a difference offering different ways of working and the County Council was now beginning to see the benefits through its ability to utilise fully the funding available.

With regard to concerns regarding the potential for a monopoly service they outlined many advantages to be gained from a single contract including access to large reserves and it was felt that the County Council would not have achieved what it had without that contract. Whilst it was accepted that in certain circumstances individual service providers could be cheaper overall it was considered a better all-round service.

It was noted that the headings on the Operational Performance Indicators in Annex 1 were incorrect and officers undertook to recirculate those to members of the Committee.

Also noted that lines of communication with councillors and the public needed to be retained.

There was discussion regarding level of costs quoted for minor works and improvements to the website to give a clearer message regarding limitations of finance. Also further discussion regarding availability of funding to parish councils now that the system for area stewardship funding had come to an end. Suggested this issue be referred to the locality groups for discussion.

The significant rise in prices could be aligned to the significant rise in available finance which had resulted in increased demand for materials as more work was being undertaken. There had also been problems of recruitment.

The Chairman thanked the officers for their comprehensive report and attending. There seemed to be consensus that improvements had been made. However, there was no room for complacency, particularly with regard to customer satisfaction and it was important to maintain good communications to highlight what was being achieved.

33/14 BUSINESS MANAGEMENT MONITORING REPORT FOR THE FIRST QUARTER 2014/15 (Agenda No. 5)

Maggie Scott and Councillor Rodney Rose presented a paper outlining the Council's performance for the first quarter of 2014/15. Also attending were Jackie Wilderspin and Councillor Hilary Hibbert-Biles with regard to the public health element of the report.

Agreement on need to target meetings and discussion in a more efficient and balanced way in order to use time effectively.

Specific issues raised for future discussion:

- Rise in numbers of people waiting for assessment
- S106 funding
- Looked after children

Discussion regarding drug treatment and rehabilitation. A number of changes recognised including policy, where measurements were now based on getting people

through and out of treatment and provision of a new provider. Problems had been experienced early on but improvements now being achieved through new service provider and a more holistic approach.

Further discussion regarding:

- level of integration of services with Oxford University and target levels;
- GP care and after care;
- Working with joint agencies on identifying new drugs including dangers associated with legal highs.

Councillor Hibbert-Biles advised that plans for a County Council summit on these issues were in hand

The Chairman thanked officers and Councillor Rose and Councillor Hibbert-Biles for their attendance.

34/14 PRESSURES AND DEMANDS IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

(Agenda No. 6)

Lucy Butler and Councillor Melinda Tilley attended for this item. Presenting the report Lucy Butler highlighted the encouraging Ofsted report following their inspection in May 2014 and responded to questions :

- Oxfordshire reflected national trends with regard to caseloads. There was a greater awareness now of the issues involved and whilst there was still work to do progress had been made. Agreed that a front line worker should attend the next meeting.
- With regard to higher caseloads for workers there had been some improvement but again still work to do. Reference made to pilot study in the north of the county which would help identify real need.
- Confirmed that better engagement with schools included *all schools*.
- Agency staff were inducted and fully supported.
- Regular reports on caseloads. As Ofsted had stated that Oxfordshire had low caseloads the inference could be drawn that Oxfordshire was in a good position. Noted that there seemed to be a long term trend for increases and with it budget pressures, although it was difficult to be precise about what that rate of increase might be.
- Looked after children out of county were mainly older and there remained a challenge with arrangements for foster care.
- Collaborative work was undertaken with Adult Care.

Councillor Tilley highlighted that although 3% of cases of children needing help and protection were high profile child sex exploitation it was important not to lose sight of the remaining 97% where neglect had been a major contributor. That needed to be identified and tackled at an early stage.

Agreed that officers prepare a detailed breakdown of information with regard to 1 – 4 year olds placed out of county.

Noted that a seminar would be arranged in the spring 2015 to be attended by a worker from the north of the county.

35/14 OXFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE (OFRS) PERFORMANCE UPDATE

(Agenda No. 8)

Chief Fire Officer, Dave Etheridge, and Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Nathan Travis, attended to present their annual performance update. Councillor Rose also attended for this item. The update included the Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service (OFRS) Annual Report & Response Standards Report, Peer Challenge Report – Response and Action Plan and a presentation on the 365alive Outcomes and new targets.

Councillor Rose commented that it was vital that the OFRS remained part of the County Council. The County Council appreciated all that the Fire & Rescue Service did. He referred to the work of the previous Cabinet Member with responsibility for the OFRS and highlighted the 365alive campaign and the benefits it had brought.

During discussion the following points were made:

- 1) Members supported the importance of public accountability through the locally elected councillors as demonstrated by the annual report.
- 2) Members generally congratulated the OFRS for the excellent service they provided. They noted the actions in areas where they had not achieved.
- 3) Members expressed their appreciation of the level of communication from OFRS both to themselves and the public.
- 4) In response to comments about nuisance calls Dave Etheridge explained the risk based approach of OFRS which included call challenging. Attendance at malicious calls had plummeted.
- 5) Responding to a question on station availability and the effect on call times, Dave Etheridge explained how cover was provided and detailed call times.
- 6) There was some discussion over the possibility for charging for some services provided by OFRS. Dave Etheridge explained that the Cabinet Advisory Group on Income Generation had looked at this. It was not possible to charge for the core emergency service but it was possible to charge once the emergency phase of an operation was over. The issue had been discussed at a national level with regard to attendance at road traffic accidents. He had some concerns with increasing charging as it could damage the trust in the 999 number if people believed they may be charged.
- 7) Responding to a question on the provision of funding for OFRS from S106 monies it was explained that officers in OFRS worked closely with colleagues in Environment & Economy. In addition as statutory consultees. they engaged wherever possible with the aim of ensuring the ongoing safety of people and that attendance times were not unduly affected. The Chairman indicated that the Committee was going to do a piece of work on S106 funding and these matters could be picked up then.
- 8) Members supported the stretch targets announced for 365alive.

RESOLVED: to:

- (a) endorse the publication of the OFRS 2013 / 2014 Annual Report
- (b) note the findings of the Operational Peer Challenge and support OFRS Strategic Management Team's aim to further add value to OCC in line with the peer review recommendations and associated action plan; and
- (c) support the new 365alive stretch targets for the last two years of the vision, which will be reported through the existing quarterly business management and monitoring reports.

36/14 OFRS COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN (CRMP) - DRAFT ACTION PLAN 2015/16

(Agenda No. 9)

Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Nathan Travis, will present a report that proposed a number of projects to be included within the Fire Authority's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) draft action plan for the fiscal year 2015-16. The proposals summarised areas where the Service's Senior Leadership Team believe service improvements and/or greater value to the wider OCC corporate priorities may be achieved.

RESOLVED: to:

- (a) endorse the proposed projects to be included for further consultation in the draft CRMP Action Plan 2015-16; and
- (b) note that the Chief Fire Officer will report back to Cabinet following consultation.

37/14 GOVERNANCE & CONSTITUTION REVIEW

(Agenda No. 10)

In April 2013, the Council adopted new governance arrangements which came into effect following the May 2013 elections. The Council asked its Monitoring Officer to review the effectiveness of these decision-making arrangements a year after their coming into operation, along with the underlying Constitution. His recommendations will be considered by Full Council on 9 December. Peter Clark, Monitoring Officer and Head of Law & Culture attended to present a report summarising the emerging issues from his review.

During discussion the following points were made:

- 1) Members endorsed the positive comments about locality meetings and suggested that as a longer term issue there may be a need to look at the divisional make-up of the localities.

- 2) Members agreed with the need to raise awareness of Cabinet Advisory groups (CAGs) to encourage involvement: it was suggested that it would be helpful to have a regular update to Cabinet on the CAGs and their work.
- 3) Members did query whether CAGs should always be chaired by the cabinet member and always involve the Cabinet Member.
- 4) There was some discussion on the level of work for the Scrutiny meetings particularly Performance Scrutiny Committee with its wide remit. It was noted that the development of the use of seminars, informal workshops was beginning to address this issue.
- 5) It was suggested that the report painted too positive a picture of Scrutiny given the figures on member responses.
- 6) There was some discussion around the effectiveness of Council meetings. A member suggested that a fuller minute of the meeting could impact positively on members' behaviour. It would be useful to record some of the colour and flavour of the meetings. The Monitoring Officer explained the reasons for the current format of minutes for full Council meetings.
- 7) On Council questions a member was unhappy with the proposal to restrict questions on notice. An alternative was suggested to manage questions like motions with councillors allowed 2 questions and then going to the bottom of list. Peter Clark commented that this would not be possible due to officer time constraints.
- 8) There was general agreement with the view that at Cabinet, members were not being listened to. There was a need to look further at councillor engagement.
- 9) Responding to concerns over non-members of Committees not being able to receive paper copies of agendas Peter Clark clarified that in exceptional circumstances (such as disability) copies would be available.
- 10) Responding to comments that it was important to see the detail Peter Clark agreed to make a draft constitution, including changes, available to members when it went to full Council.
- 11) Peter Clark indicated that he was happy to meet with councillors individually should they wish.

Following consideration the Committee:

RESOLVED: to endorse the direction of travel of the review.

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38/14 FORWARD PLAN
(Agenda No. 11)

During discussion of the Forward Plan it was agreed that the Chairman consider with Eira Hale how best to consider the issue of social deprivation.

In response to a suggestion that the Committee should consider communication by officers with councillors the Chairman suggested that this was best considered by locality meetings.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing 2014