

SAFER & STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Monday, 30 November 2009 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 3.38 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Lawrie Stratford – in the Chair

Councillor John Goddard
Councillor Steve Hayward
Councillor Peter Jones
Councillor Stewart Lilly
Councillor Susanna Pressel
Councillor Bill Service
Councillor Nicholas P. Turner (in place of Councillor Alyas Ahmed)
Councillor Carol Viney (Deputy Chairman) □

Other Members in Attendance: Leader of the Council: Councillor Keith R. Mitchell CBE
Cabinet Member for Safer & Stronger Communities:
Councillor Mrs J. Heathcoat

By Invitation:

Officers:

Whole of meeting I. Alvi & K. Coldwell (Corporate Core); D. Etheridge, J. Parry & C. Thomas (Community Safety).

Part of meeting

Agenda Item Officer Attending

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| 5. | L. Baxter (Corporate Core); D. Etheridge, J. Parry, C. Stevenson & N. Strick, (Community Safety); J. Jackson, R. Munro & C. J. Taylor (Social & Community Services); T. Paul (Shared Services) |
| 6. | D. Etheridge & J. Parry (Community Safety) |
| 7. | C. Thomas (Community Safety) |
| 8. | I. Alvi (Corporate Core) |

The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting, together with the following additional documents:

- *a paper providing information on external arts organisations core funded by Community Services in relation to Agenda Item 5;*
- *data on Brigade retained non availability and a paper which answered the Committee's previous questions in relation to Agenda Item 6;*

- *A gantt chart in relation to Agenda Item 7;*

and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda, reports and additional documents are attached to the signed Minutes.

31 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS
(Agenda No. 1)

Councillor Nicholas P. Turner attended in place of Councillor Alyas Ahmed.

Councillor Sajjad Hussain Malik sent his apologies.

32 MINUTES
(Agenda No. 3)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2009 were approved and signed.

33 SERVICE AND RESOURCE PLANNING 2010/11 - 2014/15
(Agenda No. 5)

The report before the Committee (SSC5) set out the Business Improvement & Efficiency Strategies for the Directorates relevant to this Committee. The strategies contained the identified pressures and proposed savings over the medium term from 2010/11 to 2014/15. The Committee was invited to consider and comment on the strategies and pressures and savings contained therein.

The Committee also had before it a paper setting out detail around external arts organisations core funded by Community Services which was circulated at the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Safer & Stronger Communities, together with the Director for Community Safety & Shared Services and Chief Fire Officer, the Director for Social & Community Services, the Head of Community Services, and Heads of Service and other officers attended for this item in order to answer the Committee's questions in relation to the identified pressures and proposed savings. The Assistant Head of Finance (Corporate Finance) also attended to answer any questions from the Committee.

Mr Richard Munro (Head of Community Services) gave a presentation on budgetary pressures and efficiencies in relation to Community Services, a copy of which is attached to the signed Minutes.

Key points are listed below:

- those areas of Community Services included within today's budget consideration comprised: the Library Service, Heritage and Arts (with the exception of the Music Service), the Registration Service and Cultural & Community Development;
- Pressures facing those areas were:

SSC3

- the existing commitment to £190,000 of unidentified savings rising to £689,000;
 - the cost of prudential borrowing for invest-to-save schemes: £18,000 possibly rising to £60,000;
 - loss of income (eg decline in take up of audio visual facilities);
 - renegotiation of the Victoria County History contract;
 - contribution to the Directorate savings target: £61,000 rising to £583,000.
- The cost reduction strategy comprised:
 - service transformation
 - one off investment to create efficiencies
 - better cost effectiveness through partnerships
 - a reduction in management capacity
 - other savings options
 - Savings proposals covered the following areas:
 - The Library Change Programme
 - Self Service
 - Mobile Library Service
 - Oxfordshire Studies and Archives Service
 - Victoria Community History
 - Arts grants
 - Earned income
 - Management capacity – structures would have to be looked at in order to reduce expenditure.

The Committee then asked a number of questions. A selection of the Committee's questions, together with the responses, is listed below:

- **In relation to the introduction of self service in the county's libraries who would check the records of automated returns and give out any fines?**

Self service would be introduced in twelve of the county's larger libraries. The self service terminals would be able to handle cash transactions and would be very flexible.

- **Had money for repairs and maintenance been factored in? Would repairs and maintenance be the remit of the suppliers rather than the County Council?**

The larger libraries would have at least two self service terminals and the largest would have four, so there would always be a backup in place. The technology was well tested and had been around for some time. Any issues with the network would fall to the Council and any hardware issues would lie with the suppliers. In Wallingford, where self service had already been introduced the suppliers had been quick to respond when needed.

- **Would self service be extended to the mobile libraries?**

The usage of the mobile libraries was not high enough to warrant this.

- **Would officers consider co-locating other services in the mobile libraries eg post office services?**

Officers had already considered doing so and would look at alternative provision when they looked at the mobile libraries. Internet access was already available.

- **Surely reducing management capacity had its limits, as officers could risk reducing the capacity to deliver front line services as stated on p64**

'but inevitably services' ability to develop flexibly in response to community and user needs and demands will be affected. It will also restrict opportunities to engage in activities such as partnership working, outreach and pursuing external funding'.

The precise impact of bringing in new management structures would not be known until those structures were in place and staff were in new roles. Therefore it would be necessary to monitor the impact of those changes including the effect of cutting outreach services.

- **In relation to the Library Service it was intended to reduce staffing by 15 fte posts over the next five years. Were officers confident that this could be delivered without seriously damaging the service as this was dealing with a very high figure by 2013/14 (£556,000).**

The Head of Community Services stated that he was confident in the work that had been undertaken by the County Librarian. He concurred that the staffing reductions would amount to the equivalent of fifteen senior and middle management posts within the service. Engaging staff to come up with ways of working to enable these savings to be made would be key to the proposal.

The Director for Social & Community Services stated that there were very difficult choices to be made in relation to budget savings in both Community Services and throughout the Council. As the Library Service comprised 70% of the budget for Community Services it was inevitable that the focus was on this area.

The Leader of the Council stated that the proposed reductions throughout the Council were within the context of the country being £800 billion in debt, with severe cuts in public spending on the horizon.

- **In relation to SC6 – Reduction in management and professional capacity – and the restriction of opportunities to engage in activities such as pursuing external funding – could someone else pursue external funding and how much money would the service be likely to lose if this was not done?**

The Head of Community Services stated that this mainly related to the Heritage and Arts Service where there was a good track record of securing grant aid, although it did also relate to the Library Service and it would be harder for managers to pursue this. He undertook to supply information to Members regarding current successes in pursuing external funding in relation to Library and Heritage Services in terms of the amount of income gained and therefore the potential loss of income if this was curtailed.

- **In relation to SC5 – reduction in book expenditure, with £63k expected to be built back in by 2013/14, wasn't this just putting off bad news for a few years?**

The temporary reduction in the book fund was to bridge the gap before larger numbers could be introduced, but an underlying principle in relation to the Library Service was that there should not be a large reduction in the book fund.

- **Wouldn't moving towards online books (e-books) save time and space? What progress had been made in relation to this?**

Service users already had access to online reference resources. All transactions in relation to the Library Service could be handled virtually, apart from borrowing a book. Officers were looking very carefully at what was available in relation to e-books. The content was not good enough compared to print at the moment but they expected to have a mixed economy of provision within a few years.

- **Essex County Council was providing e-books. Why couldn't Oxfordshire County Council just direct users to their website rather than spending money purchasing e-books?**

This would be possible. However, investment in e-books just required officers to buy access to the books. There were a number of different sources of e-books, not just libraries. It would be possible to direct users to other libraries and other suppliers. Choice was important. Many people still wanted to borrow print copies, especially children and older people. The illustrative content of e-books was quite poor.

- **What capacity was there to deliver other services from the county's libraries?**

Officers were interested in working with partners to do this, for example, with schools. They were also looking into the delivery of one stop services with the

District Councils. However, the potential revenue savings of doing so should not be overestimated as the main cost was still for the member of staff.

- **What would be the impact of terminating the contract for the Arts Consultant?**

The County Heritage and Arts Officer had been undertaking arts as well as heritage work, so this role was no longer needed. Oxford Inspires had also helped with partnership work.

- **Did the paper which set out detail around external arts organisations core funded by Community Services refer directly to SC16? If so would the reductions be made to those organisations listed and would each organisation receive the same reduction in funding?**

Those organisations listed would be affected but the cuts would not be applied on a pro-rata basis. Consideration would be given to where reducing funding would have the least impact and where the Council received the best return for its investment.

Mr Dave Etheridge (Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Head of Service Delivery) then gave a presentation on budgetary pressures and efficiencies for the Fire & Rescue Service and Emergency Planning, a copy of which is attached to the signed Minutes.

Key points are listed below:

Fire and Rescue Service

Pressures:

- CSP1 – Increase the number of Watch Managers to support the Retained Duty System

Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS) comprises 24 fire stations – 18 of which are staffed by retained firefighters, the remaining by a mix of whole time and retained fire fighters. This pressure reflects the need to ensure the sustainability of the retained duty system in Oxfordshire to ensure continued operational resilience as OFRS is largely a retained Fire and Rescue Service supported by whole time fire engines;

- CSP2 – Maintenance/support and selective replacement of software and hardware systems in current Fire Control/mobilising centre (control room);

This related to the need to ensure that Oxfordshire's emergency control room remains viable and effective up until the transference of this function to the Regional Control Room, now expected to be in 2012. The slippage in the national project means that some critical components must be replaced.

- CSP3 – Ownership and some financial responsibilities of New Dimensions vehicles (designed to react to terror and climate change incidents);

The CLG government department which originally funded and supplied the three Oxfordshire units wishes to formally transfer ownership to Oxfordshire

SSC3

County Council (OCC). Maintenance and replacement costs are anticipated to be met centrally, but local insurance and minor maintenance costs are not, which produces this pressure.

Efficiencies and Savings:

Service Delivery

- CS2 – 10% reduction of non-pay controllable & discretionary budgets (supplies & services, employee travel expenses, premises maintenance, operational equipment, public education campaigns);
- CS3 – Through the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) it is proposed to alter crewing arrangements at two of the service's day crewed fire stations (Abingdon and Didcot) which will result in the opportunity to alter and reduce a housing allowance payment which will no longer be needed;
- CS4 – The proposed IRMP in 2010/11 incorporates a project to examine the operational resilience requirements in terms of appliances and equipment and to review the locations of all of the county's fire stations. An outcome of this review will be an opportunity to remove one fire appliance from the Retained Firefighter Duty System complement, which would have the least impact on service delivery. Both CS3 and CS4 are subject to public consultation before implementation can be considered.
- CS7 – Closure of all of the Fire Cadet units in Oxfordshire currently based at Slade Fire Station (Cowley), Banbury, Kidlington, Witney and Watlington. The closure of these units is intended to protect OFRS' other youth initiatives including the Phoenix Project where officers work with young people who are underachieving in schools and work with young people referred from the Youth Offending Service.

Service Support

- CS10 – 10% reduction in selected delegated discretionary/controllable budgets;
- CS13 – Reduction in operational and specialist training. This will be a selective approach, protecting where possible risk critical courses/qualifications. This reduction is not without risk. The outcome of the programmed Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspection in November could threaten deliverability of this saving if improvement notices or binding recommendations are made in this area;
- CS14 – Extend the life of the new style (plastic body) fire appliances from 12 to 14 years.

Emergency Planning

Efficiencies and Savings

- Delete 0.5 fte post (retirement). Post deals with business continuity.

The Committee then asked a number of questions. A selection of the Committee's questions, together with the officers' responses, is listed below:

- **What would be the likely cost of training per annum if additional training was recommended by the HSE?**

Two of the Brigades which had already been inspected had received improvement notices. It was thought unlikely that OFRS would receive an improvement notice. There would probably be a need for internal reprioritisations in order to provide further breathing apparatus training for retained firefighters. Moving instructors around would enable the retained firefighters to receive the training they needed. Other Brigades had received between 17 and 20 recommendations, some of them minor. Some were in the region of £25,000 additional cost. It was not possible to say what the recommendations or the costs were likely to be. The official report would not be received until April.

The Chief Fire Officer undertook to provide information relating to the informal feedback from the HSE (to be received in January 2010) to all members of the Committee and to provide detail of any costs once this was known.

- **In terms of Brigade retained non availability hours, what were the figures in terms of the percentage of time per annum that retained fire fighters were not available?**

The figures equated to two fire engines permanently off the road across a year. The reality was that 7 or 8 retained fire engines were off the road between 9 am and 5 pm during the week on a number of occasions. Many people who lived in Oxfordshire did not work in Oxfordshire; hence one of the factors why it was difficult to recruit and retain retained firefighters.

- **How could CS2 be justified when public education was a core function of OFRS in terms of fire risk prevention?**

Education was the first line of defence. This proposal would result in fewer adverts in magazines and possibly no face to face delivery in schools. The quality of educational activities delivered would be reduced.

- **Was it really necessary to close all of the Fire Cadet Units in Oxfordshire? Surely the focus on protecting work with young offenders and young people at risk of offending was penalising those young people who did not get into trouble?**

This had been a very tough decision. A cost benefit analysis had shown that there was more societal benefit in engaging young offenders. If the Cadets scheme continued to be funded, then savings would have to be made elsewhere and there was no room for manoeuvre. Closing the Cadets Scheme was less of a risk than removing another fire engine.

- **Could the funding for Fire Cadets come from elsewhere, for example, from Children, Young People & Families or from schools themselves?**

Officers had investigated the possibility of obtaining external funding and there was already some support provided from the City and District Councils. However, the Service did have to contribute significant resource to maintain the scheme. The Brigade intended to develop a different scheme involving secondary schools. However, unless the outcome of funding such a scheme could be quantified schools could not afford to contribute, which is why OFRS had opted for a BTEC qualification which resulted from attending. At this stage the initiative was untested.

- **What was the cost to the Directorate of the work with young offenders?**

OFRS did not fund all of the work with young offenders, for example, work with HM Young Offenders Unit at Huntercombe was funded by the prison service. Initially volunteers worked with the young offenders, and received minimal recompense. The salaries for the two full time officers whose work included youth offending and the Phoenix project were paid by the prison service and therefore the work with young offenders was cost neutral to the Oxfordshire taxpayer.

- **In terms of New Dimensions, following transfer, for how long would the government continue to fund the vehicle and equipment maintenance costs? Was this funding likely to be ring fenced?**

The maintenance funding for usage was mandatory and officers were confident that the funding would continue indefinitely as OFRS was not the legal signatory for that expense. However, the periodic refresh of the vehicles was an unknown and this was a risk.

Mr Nigel Strick (Head of Community Safety) then gave a presentation on budgetary pressures and efficiencies in relation to other areas that sit within Community Safety (Gypsy & Travellers Service, Safer Communities Unit (SCU) and Trading Standards (TS)), a copy of which is attached to the signed Minutes.

Pressures

NOT Part of Star Chamber Process

- Pressures already planned for – contract fee reduction, intelligence analysis, court costs, street lighting (Traveller sites), etc
= £100,000 year-on-year
- Increase in doorstep crime cases – from 32 to 380 cases per year,
= £52,000 for the next 3 years
- Domestic Violence Specialist Support – 83 high risk cases April to October
= £120,000 year-on-year

Efficiencies & Savings

£0.5 Million from £3.5 Million

More efficient ways of working

- Delete external conferences budget for TS
 - £5,000 year on year;
- Reduce operating budget for SCU
 - £3,000 year on year. This will have an impact on support to the partnerships;
- Traveller site repairs & maintenance to be provided by in-house team
 - £20,000 year on year.

Maximising year on year income

- Gypsy & Traveller services – external contracts + £98,000;
- TS petroleum services – external contracts + £17,000;
- TS grants/funding increase
 - + £90,000 net;
- Traveller site rents increase + £4,000;
- Weights & Measures fees increase + £1,000.

Service Reductions

Job losses:

- TS Group Manager - £56,000. This will mean a reduction in partnership and corporate activities;
- TS Community Engagement Officer (Junior Citizen, Electric Blankets, etc) - £26,000;
- TS Enforcement Officer - £30,000;
- Consumer Advice – Team Leader + 2 Advice Officer posts (10,000 calls redirected to national call-centre) - £102,000.

Job changes:

- TS Operational Assistant post becomes apprenticeship - £4,000;
- Animal Health support reduced by 0.4 FTE - £4,000;
- Head of Service post merged with another - £50,000;
- Emergency call-out rota/flexible working payments - £10,000.

The Committee then asked a number of questions. A selection of the Committee's questions, together with the officers' responses, is listed below:

- **What would be the effect of the deletion of the TS Community Engagement Officer post on the Junior Citizen Programme, Electric Blanket testing and other activities?**

The Head of Community Safety had gathered intelligence in relation to electric blanket testing and had found that the service was not being used by vulnerable groups, but by people that could have carried this out themselves. It was also notable that this activity had not reduced the number of electric blankets that were faulty over the years. Therefore the electric blanket testing programme would be downgraded but targeted at vulnerable groups. The Junior Citizen Programme would not be downgraded as it would be supported by the voluntary sector.

- **What would be the effect on consumer advice of deleting the Team Leader and Advice Officer posts and redirecting this service to a national call centre provider?**

The County Council might be developing its own call centre for enquiries. Business plans were currently being developed. If this went ahead the consumer advice could be delivered in house via the call centre, alongside other advice. Any service change would require an Equalities Impact Assessment to be made.

- **What impact would deleting both Group Manager posts have on service delivery?**

This would reduce OCC's ability to undertake prosecutions in relation to doorstep crime. However, Trading Standards would still have an effective group of public protection officers in place.

- **Was there any news regarding both income generating proposals relating to the Brent Housing Partnership?**

Threats to staff had curtailed OCC involvement in this area. Negotiations were on hold until this had been resolved. Other contracts were also being pursued.

- **Couldn't many of the activities and services facing cuts that fell under the remit of this Committee be funded by the Council's reserves instead?**

Any additional money in the Council's balances could only be used on a one off basis for unplanned events. It could not be used to prop up the revenue budget.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** to advise the Cabinet via the Strategy & Partnerships Scrutiny Committee, that whilst recognising that difficult choices had to be made, it supported the proposals for savings as listed within the relevant Directorate Efficiency Strategies.

34 **PRESENTATION ON DRAFT FIRE AUTHORITY INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN PROJECTS 2010/11** (Agenda No. 6)

Mr Dave Etheridge (Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Head of Service Delivery) gave a presentation to the Committee on proposal (a) of the Draft Fire Authority Integrated Risk Management Action Plan 2010/11 (Day Crewing Review at Abingdon and Didcot

Fire Stations), a copy of which is appended to these Minutes (Refer Annex 1) and attached to the signed Minutes.

The Committee also had before it data on Brigade retained non availability (hours) between and including 2004-05 and 2008-09 and the worst performing stations in terms of the same criteria for each of those years. A paper which answered the Committee's previous questions in detail was circulated at the meeting.

The Committee noted that 80% of the county was covered by fire engines which were wholly crewed by Retained Duty System personnel and therefore the decline in retained non availability was of serious concern.

The Cabinet Member for Safer & Stronger Communities asked that her thanks to the Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Chief Fire Officer for their work on the proposal be recorded.

Following a question and answer session the Committee **AGREED** the following:

This Committee:

- recognises the detailed work that has already been carried out to prepare the proposal, with particular regard to the close working with staff and the Fire Brigades' Union;
- agrees that the proposal will provide a more robust means of delivering fire service cover across the whole of the county;
- fully supports the proposal and would welcome its implementation next year.

35 FIRE SERVICE COMMAND AND CONTROL ROOM - THE FIRECONTROL AND FIRELINK PROJECTS
(Agenda No. 7)

The Committee had before it a written update on the progress of the Fire Service Command and Control Room (FiReControl and FireLink Projects), together with a GANTT Chart which was circulated at the meeting.

Mr Colin Thomas (Assistant Chief Fire Officer and Head of Service Support) updated the Committee on progress.

The Committee then thanked officers for their informative and user friendly GANTT Chart, which provided an excellent overview of all of the activities required to implement the FireLink/FireControl programme.

36 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME
(Agenda No. 8)

The Committee noted the updated work programme timeline and that more focussed work in relation to the provision of debt and money advice was still being scoped.

37 FORWARD PLAN
(Agenda No. 9)

No items were identified for consideration.

38 TRACKING SCRUTINY ITEMS
(Agenda No. 10)

The Committee noted the tracking information, as listed on the face of the agenda.

..... Date of signing
In the Chair

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