

CABINET

MINUTES of the meeting held on Tuesday, 15 December 2009 commencing at 2.00 pm and finishing at 3.30 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Keith R. Mitchell CBE – in the Chair
Councillor David Robertson (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Jim Couchman
Councillor Ian Hudspeth
Councillor Louise Chapman
Councillor Michael Waine
Councillor Rodney Rose
Councillor Mrs J. Heathcoat

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Jean Fooks (Items 9 & 10)

Officers:

Whole of meeting Chief Executive, S. Whitehead (Corporate Core)

Part of meeting

6 Kathy Wilcox (Financial Planning)
7 Assistant Chief Executive & Chief Finance Officer
8 Sian Rodway
9 Corporate Performance & Review Manager

The 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, and decided as set out below. Except insofar as otherwise specified, the reasons for the decisions are contained in the agenda, reports and schedule, copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes.

121/09 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(Agenda Item. 1)

Apologies for lateness were submitted from Councillor Louise Chapman who was on Council business.

122/09 MINUTES

(Agenda Item. 3)

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2009 were approved and signed, subject to the following correction:

Page 1 and Minute Nos 113/09 and 117/09 – The name of the speaker to be corrected to read Councillor Patrick rather than Councillor Altaf-Khan.

123/09 QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

(Agenda Item. 4)

Councillor John Sanders had given notice of the following question to the Cabinet Member for Children, Young people & Families

“1. Is it the intention of the Cabinet to propose to Council that funding for the County Youth Service be cut in the next financial year?”

Councillor Mitchell (in the absence of Councillor Chapman:

Cabinet proposals to Council for the 2010/11 budget will be published on 8 January 2010.

Supplementary question:

Councillor Sanders referred to concern that in his area good work being undertaken by youth workers to combat gang related crimes such as drugs, guns and knives could be put at risk of restriction or privatisation. He sought an assurance that the problems of youths, particularly in deprived areas would be looked at carefully?

Councillor Mitchell replied that the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families was detained on Council business so was not here to respond in person. It was not possible to give assurances about the outcomes of the service and resource planning process. In noting that youth work was not part of the Council's statutory duty, he would share concerns if the process resulted in the loss of provision for young people.

Councillor Zoe Patrick had given notice of the following question to the Deputy Leader:

“2 When will the Vale County Councillors be given their Locality briefing? This event has now been cancelled on two occasions without any further attempt to make a new date.”

Councillor Robertson:

The Senior Democracy Officer in Democratic Services has been asked by the Chief Executive to re-arrange the locality briefings for the Vale and West as both had to be cancelled a second time. She will be contacting Group Leaders and the relevant lead officers to find suitable dates for the New Year, taking account of other councillor events due to take place.

Councillor Zoe Patrick had given notice of the following question to the Leader:

“3. The County Council's Audit Commission report was published last week and I have read the Leader's comments regarding making

improvements. However, according to the new OnePlace website Oxfordshire has no less than 70 areas in which the indicators are described as 'deteriorating' including adult social care, safeguarding children, educational achievement, NEETs etc. (far too many to list here but I am assuming he is fully aware of them all). When is he going to address this - or is he content to take this council's rating down from 3 star to 2?"

Councillor Mitchell:

I must confess that I have taken little notice of the discredited CAA process and look forward to its disappearance shortly after the General Election next year. I have not accessed the One Place web site, having been rather more pre-occupied with the future of this council in terms of its finances than its past. I do understand that officers who have attempted to access the site have been unable to do so.

I will respond to the Leader of the Opposition's question although I do wonder whether she actually accessed the Oxfordshire part of the web site herself because I do not recognise a great deal of what she has to say in her question.

Context - The CAA inspectors use the performance information as ' part of the evidence that we use to come to our conclusions - or judgements - about how well things are going now and whether they will get better or worse in the future'. Oxfordshire has no Red Flags which indicates that the inspectors do not seem to share Cllr Patrick's concerns on the council's direction of travel. Furthermore, Oxfordshire received a 3 out of 4 rating for 'managing performance'.

CAA Report - Specific Comments on Performance Three of the issues specifically raised in the question are addressed by the Audit Commission in their report.

- On adult social care: *“People in Oxfordshire get generally good social care services.”*
- On safeguarding children: *“Children are being kept safer through better systems in Social Services that mean that children at risk or in need of help are identified faster.”*
- On educational achievement: *“Like many parts of the country, some vulnerable children and young people do not do as well at school. This is getting better but partners recognise that more can be done and they are targeting actions to help these children fulfil their potential better”.*

I am not clear whose report Cllr Patrick was reading on which web site?

Local Area Agreement The County Council reports performance to the Public Service Board each quarter. These reports show a good performance

in most of the indicators contained in the Local Area Agreement. Among these priority targets, it is recognised that areas such as housing, benefits and NEETs are being adversely affected by the current financial situation and that targets will have to be renegotiated.

Where performance is below target the relevant thematic partnership is taking action, take for example the ten indicators graded Red in the latest PSB Report:

- Housing/Affordable Housing: An upward trend was identified for both indicators. Performance has been affected by the recession - with a reduction in planning applications coupled with a number of major sites where development has not been brought forward. District Councils are now progressing with actions to encourage sites to come forward. The CAA finding was that *“Oxfordshire councils are delivering high numbers of affordable homes.”*
- Teenage Conception Rate: Considered by the Audit Commission in the CAA: *“Too many teenagers in Oxford are getting pregnant. Numbers are much higher than in other areas, and although there are fewer pregnancies than in the past, the numbers are not falling as fast as they are elsewhere. Partners are working with teenagers in the poorer parts of the county to help bring numbers down, but they have some way to go to meet Oxfordshire's target for reducing teenage pregnancies by 2010.”* A scrutiny review on this issue has just been completed.
- NEETs – Downward trend. There are detailed plans in place to mitigate against the effects of the recession and performance is being monitored in monthly reports and contract management meetings. I have been taking a personal interest in this issue since July.
- Number of working age people on out of work benefits – If the global recession continues, then the current target will not be met. A meeting to discuss the refresh of the target is scheduled with GOSE.
- Educational Attainment – The trend continues to be upward year on year however it is still below target and Oxfordshire continues to fall short of its statistical neighbours. A major review of educational attainment is now underway. The Children’s Services Scrutiny is also currently conducting a piece of work on this issue. The Children’s Trust has provided a list of actions to improve performance, however further scrutiny is required to determine the likely effectiveness of these plans.
- Educational Attainment of LAC – two indicators have a downward trend, one indicator has an upward trend. The small cohort size means small changes in actual performance leads to large changes overall.

Councillor Jean Fooks had given notice of the following question to the Deputy Leader

“4. I understand that there has been a change in the way the Council advertises for new staff. Is the local press now not used for job advertisements? What has been the effect of the apparent change in policy – has the number of applicants stayed the same, gone up as might have been expected in the current economic situation, or decreased? Will the policy be reviewed to see if it is cost-effective and attracting suitable applicants?”

Councillor Robertson:

Since September 2009 our recruitment advertising policy has been to minimise press advertising. Adverts are placed on the Council's website which is more immediate so can reduce time to recruit and incurs no cost and also on appropriate web sites which are generally cheaper than press advertising. There are some specialist posts which may be hard to fill that fall outside of this and advertising media is then agreed between the Recruitment Team Leaders and the Appointing manager with a view to utilizing the most cost effect recruitment advertising to fill the post and this may be a printed media.

All our jobs are also advertised at the Job Centre plus, local community groups and where appropriate are advertised locally in public places.

As a comparison the year on year savings and applications received please see below - this is for non-schools recruitment.

Time Period	Spend	Jobs advertised	On-line Applicants	Off-line Applicants
June – Nov 08	£274,333	504	3856	738
June – Nov 09	£92,737	432	5862	595

We are continually reviewing the advertising processes and are currently investigating the possibility of using talent banks as a further more effective way to recruit to vacancies within the Council.

Supplementary:

In noting the figures Councillor Fooks asked whether the Deputy Leader would consider a review to see if there were areas where the approach was not working?

Councillor Robertson replied that the responses received were regularly reviewed but that he was always interested in any examples or anecdotal evidence of how the process was working, and Councillor Fooks referred to the vacancies for Clerks to Governing Bodies.

124/09 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda Item. 5)

The following requests to address the meeting had been agreed:

Speaker	Item
Councillor Jean Fooks	9. Performance Management: 2 nd Quarter Progress Report Against Priorities and Targets.
	10. Establishment Review – December 2009

125/09 FINANCIAL MONITORING - DECEMBER 2009

(Agenda Item. 6)

The Cabinet received the seventh financial monitoring report for the 2009/10 financial year covering the period up to the end of September 2009 for revenue, balances, reserves and capital.

The in – year Directorate forecast was an overspend of £3.238m.

The current position for general balances showed an unchanged forecast of £14.088m and after taking into account the forecast Directorate overspend, the consolidated revenue balances forecast was £10.850m.

The report also included Capital monitoring against the programme agreed last month.

Officers drew attention to the supplementary report and additional recommendation contained in the addenda.

The Leader highlighted areas where pressures had been identified and in particular out of County placements in Children's, Young People & Families, the pooled budget figures for Social & Community Services and ICT services. Cabinet noted the action being taken as detailed by individual Cabinet Members and the Chief Executive.

RESOLVED: to:

- (a) note the report;
- (b) note the use of £0.472m one – off funding from the Highways Agency to offset the overspend in Transport (paragraph 42);
- (c) approve the virements as set out in Annex 2a;
- (d) agree the proposed changes to Adult Learning charges from January 2010 (paragraph 59); and

- (e) approve a one off payment of £1,887,000 for the early repayment of SAP and associated licences to be funded through prudential borrowing.

126/09 SERVICE & RESOURCE PLANNING REPORT FOR 2010/11 - 2014/15

(Agenda Item. 7)

Cabinet considered one in a series of reports on the Service and Resource Planning process for 2010/11 to 2014/15, providing information on budget issues for 2010/11 and the medium term. The report set out the review of charges, provided an update on the Service and Resource Planning process and included the Directorate Business Improvement & Efficiency Strategies. The strategies set out the identified pressures and priorities over the medium term and the proposals for savings.

Cabinet also considered a supplementary report providing further information relevant to the financial position of the Council that had become available since the publication of the main report.

The Leader highlighted the implications of the Government's pledge on personal care at home which he felt should be fully funded by Government. Referring to the level of council tax he stated that the figure reached was a balance between the need to maintain and improve services and to constrain the burden on council tax payers.

RESOLVED: to:

- (a) note the report;
- (b) note those charges prescribed by legislation;
- (c) approve those charges where there is local discretion as set out in Annex 4; and
- (d) approve those charges for which an increase will commence before April 2010.

127/09 OXFORDSHIRE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN 2010-13

(Agenda Item. 8)

Cabinet considered a report on the Oxfordshire's proposed second Children and Young People's Plan. It outlined the outcome of the formal consultation and the priorities, aims and objectives of the plan. The full plan was attached to the report.

During discussion Cabinet noted the consultation that had taken place on the plan, particularly with users and stressed that the plan was a partnership document. It was hoped that it would lead to even more joined up working including joint resourcing and the opportunity that provided for savings.

RESOLVED: to recommend to Council to approve the Children and Young People's Plan, subject to any final editorial adjustments by the Oxfordshire Children and Young People's Trust Board in consultation with the Director for Children, Young People & Families.

128/09 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT: 2ND QUARTER PROGRESS REPORT AGAINST PRIORITIES AND TARGETS

(Agenda Item. 9)

Cabinet considered a report showing the council's performance for Quarter 2, 2009/10 in the four key areas of: customer, projects, finance, and people. Progress against targets was shown by directorate, including a summary of what was going well, what needed to develop, and what required attention.

Councillor Fooks expressed disappointment that some of the same issues appeared in each report such as the restructuring of the Children's, Young People & Families Directorate. She expressed concern over a number of areas including educational attainment, the speed of assessments with regard to safeguarding children and the completion levels for staff appraisals.

Councillor Robertson replied that it was important to have ongoing information on achievement in schools and that there was a review on performance being undertaken by officers with a report to come back to Cabinet. Councillor Waine added that although the increase in GCSE results had been disappointing this year it followed four years of increases. The re-organisation of the Raising Achievement Team had been brought forward to October 2008 and the finishing touches had taken place as recently as September 2009.

On appraisals Councillor Robertson was personally aware that the completion figures were higher than that recorded and that there seemed to be some problem with the managers not completing the reporting form.

Councillor Waine responded in respect of the restructuring that it was always known that it would be an ongoing process taking two years.

Councillor Chapman referred to a recent independent inspection that had found the work of the Safeguarding Board to be excellent. Twelve new posts had been created in children's social care. Awareness of potential problems had been heightened by the baby p and other cases leading to far more referrals. She refuted any claims that Looked After Children reviews were failing. She was glad of Councillor Fook's interest and would be happy to go through the figures outside the meeting.

RESOLVED: to note the report.

129/09 ESTABLISHMENT REVIEW - DECEMBER 2009

(Agenda Item. 10)

Cabinet considered a report giving an update on activity since the implementation of the Establishment Review and associated Recruitment Approval process on 1 August 2005. It provided detail on the overall objectives of the review and summarised progress made against the targets which were agreed to ensure delivery of those objectives. Details of the agreed establishment figure at 30 September 2009 in terms of Full Time Equivalents was provided, together with the detailed staffing position at 30 June 2009. These were shown in the report by directorate and service area.

The report also provided information on current activity and in addition there was information on grant funded posts and those vacancies which are being covered by agency staff and at what cost.

Councillor Fooks, Opposition Deputy Leader, commented on the figures and in particular expressed interest in being given information on the numbers of people who had not been successfully redeployed. She noted that the figures had gone up and queried whether the review was meeting the requirements.

The Deputy Leader responded to the comments made and undertook to provide the information requested on people not redeployed. He noted that the figures were not up to date and that the December figures did show a drop. He thanked officers as he was aware of the great deal of effort that went in to the reports and indicated that the next one would be available a month earlier.

During discussion of agency staff cabinet members stressed that their use was sometimes essential.

RESOLVED: to note the report and to confirm that the Establishment Review continues to meet the Cabinet's requirements in reporting and managing staffing numbers.

130/09 FORWARD PLAN AND FUTURE BUSINESS

(Agenda Item. 11)

The Cabinet considered a list of items (CA11) for the immediately forthcoming meetings of the Cabinet together with the following changes and additions:

Oxford – Highfield Traffic Management - Added to 7 January 2010 meeting of the Transport Decisions Committee

Provision of Alarms, Daytime Support, Emergency Response and Telecare Services – It was noted that it would be considered at the 3 February delegated decisions session by the Cabinet Member for Adult Services.

RESOLVED: to note the items currently identified for forthcoming meetings.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing 2010