

SAFER & STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Monday, 1 February 2010 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 1.20 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Lawrie Stratford – in the Chair

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

Other Members in Attendance: Cabinet Member for Safer & Stronger Communities:
Councillor Mrs J. Heathcoat

Officers:

Whole of meeting Kath Coldwell (Corporate Core); Colin Thomas & Dave Etheridge (Community Safety).

Part of meeting

Agenda Item

Officer Attending

- | | |
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| 5. | R. Munro & C. J. Taylor (Social & Community Services) |
| 6. | R. Munro & J. Dixon (Social & Community Services) |
| 7. | R. Munro (Social & Community Services) |
| 8. | D. Etheridge & C. Thomas (Community Safety) |
| 9. | I. Alvi (Corporate Core) |
| 10. | I. Alvi (Corporate Core) |
| 11. | I. Alvi (Corporate Core) |
| 13. | D. Etheridge & C. Thomas (Community Safety) |

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.

39/10 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS (Agenda No. 1)

Councillor John Sanders attended in place of Councillor Susanna Pressel.

40/10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(Agenda No. 2)

Councillor Alyas Ahmed declared a personal interest at Agenda Item 2 in relation to Agenda Item 5 by virtue of being a member of The Mill Banbury Management Committee.

Councillor John Sanders declared a personal interest at Agenda Item 2 in relation to Agenda Item 9 by virtue of being a non voting member on the Management Committee of Rose Hill and Donnington Advice Centre.

41/10 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 November 2009 were approved and signed subject to the following amendment in strikethrough and bold italics:

Item 33/09 – Service and Resource Planning 2010/11 – 2014/15

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~~ **could** be an opportunity to remove one fire appliance from the Retained Firefighter Duty system complement, which would have the least impact on service delivery.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

It was **AGREED** to vary the order of business as indicated in these Minutes.

42/10 OXFORDSHIRE LIBRARIES TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

(Agenda No. 5)

A briefing paper was before the Committee at **SSC5**.

The Cabinet Member for Safer & Stronger Communities, together with Ms Caroline J. Taylor (County Librarian) and Mr Richard Munro (Head of Community Services) attended for this item in order to answer the Committee's questions.

The Committee received a presentation on the Oxfordshire Libraries Transformation Programme from Ms Taylor, a copy of which is attached to the signed Minutes. Key points are listed below:

- a key aspect of Oxfordshire's library service strategy is focused on increasing efficiency;
- a great deal of librarians' work is now cross cutting in that it spans different corporate priorities and Directorates. For example, the Book Start scheme helps to promote the sharing of reading and books with babies and toddlers and to develop early reading skills preparing children for school; the reading groups facilitated with MIND contribute to health and wellbeing and the Six Book Challenge often leads adults to engage in more learning;

SSC5

- the purpose of the Oxfordshire Libraries Strategy is to sustain core services, be customer driven, secure added value for communities (support literacy and reading skills, support health and wellbeing and independent and successful living) and to improve efficiency;
- the government, through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), was consulting on the future of public libraries, including whether or not they should remain a statutory responsibility, together with national and local governance arrangements. Nation wide it was likely that a mixed economy would develop alongside the public sector, for example, management through Trusts, management by the private sector, cross boundary management arrangements for some libraries and strategic commissioning;
- the change to library buildings as part of the Transformation Programme would be the most obvious change that the public would notice;
- the Transformation Programme would include some new build libraries (for example at Thame and Banbury), RFID self service - to be installed in Oxfordshire's 12 busiest libraries by June 2011, mobile services and community libraries;
- although book issues had risen in the past few years, library usage had declined nation wide over the past 20 years. This reflected competing priorities for the public's attention. The service now needed to understand its customers better in order to mitigate this decline and to meet customer demand. This would involve appealing to new customers as well as keeping traditional users happy. Improvements to book stock and opening hours had been achieved since 2005 and a transformation of library environments was now required to modernise and update them. People now expected to be stimulated and tempted in the same way that they were when shopping (which was now recognised as a leisure pursuit for many customers.) This was why many library services were now organising their stock on the retail model, for example, by displaying new stock at the front of the library to tempt readers, by adapting other bookshop techniques and by making the environment more conducive to quick visits (the average length of stay is 5 to 10 minutes);
- the service tested public satisfaction every three years, including children and young people and received high satisfaction ratings;
- the Oxford Central Library was the UK's 4th busiest library in terms of book issues in 2008-09;
- in terms of the mobile libraries, the service needed to consider whether more services should be targeted at specific groups and if other services could be delivered through them. The first phase would involve looking at how best to use the services; the second would be looking at how to do this effectively against a background of needing to identify £83,000 in efficiency savings from 2013 -14.

The Committee then conducted a question and answer session. A selection of the Committee's questions, together with the officers' and Cabinet Member's responses, is given below:

○ **Would 24/7 access to library buildings be a consideration?**

There were a few examples of this in other authorities, for example, a library in Sutton operated using self service on an unstaffed basis but in an otherwise staffed building. Self Service could enable this with a library card functioning as a smart card. Previous feedback had shown that there was not a great deal of demand for this as visiting a library was still viewed as a social activity. Although most public libraries were currently stand alone buildings, in future some might be in shared buildings. Most services would still need some staff presence for security reasons and for practical reasons eg. shelving and tidying returned stock.

○ **Could the library service charge for home delivery?**

Officers would need to act within the legislation (service is free at the point of delivery) and ascertain whether this would be permissible.

○ **How could officers ascertain what people who did not use their library wanted or why they were not using their library?**

A considerable amount of work had been undertaken nationally. The main reasons cited had been:

- that the library wasn't open when they wanted it to be;
- they didn't stock the books that they wanted;
- the buildings and general environment were of poor quality and the staff were not always perceived to be approachable.

Officers were undertaking consultation as part of the Transformation Programme to find out why more people were not using the smaller rural libraries in Oxfordshire. Past research had shown that some under usage was a result of misconception, for example, that libraries were not open on Saturdays.

○ **Could anything be done to help older people to get to grips with new technology where necessary?**

Most libraries had assistive technology such as screen enhancers. All staff were trained and able to help anyone that needed assistance, for example, to set up an email account. They also ran silver surfer sessions to help older people to use the world wide web.

○ **There were a number of areas in the county where there was not any 3G reception. Was this an opportunity to get everyone around the table to talk about joint use of masts for a shared service?**

Ms Taylor undertook to look into this. The Cabinet Member for Safer and Stronger Communities stated that there were already difficulties where masts were shared.

Following the question and answer session the Committee **AGREED** to thank the County Librarian and the Head of Community Services for their informative presentation and briefing paper.

All members of the Committee were asked to note the informal invitation to visit any of the County's new libraries in due course.

43/10 OXFORDSHIRE ADULT LEARNING
(Agenda No. 6)

The Committee had requested the opportunity to consider the provision of adult learning in light of the future abolition of the Learning & Skills Council.

A briefing paper was before the Committee (SSC6).

Ms Jane Dixon, Head of Adult Learning, gave a presentation to the Committee, a copy of which is attached to the signed Minutes.

Key points are listed below:

- Oxfordshire Adult Learning delivers courses, workshops, and individually tailored programmes to 15000 learners per year:
 - from 12 main centres and many other venues;
 - with 150 full time core staff;
 - with 250 sessional tutors;

mainly through LSC funding
- Main areas of work:
 - learning for people with low level skills;
 - workforce development;
 - learning for personal development, health and wellbeing;
 - young people, 16 – 18 years;
 - adults with learning disabilities
- Future Plans:

New leadership team in place focused on:

- income generation – officers were currently looking at a leisure learning scheme which is focused on income generation. Both future governments were looking at putting funding into the 14 – 19 agenda rather than into leisure learning;
- less dependence on government funding;
- premises review – a move towards roving classroom supervisors and having less of an administration base in all centres;
- building a good relationship with the SFA (Skills Funding Agency) and the 14-19 team in Oxfordshire County Council. The funding for 14 – 19 year olds was coming to the Council so this would be a growth area. Apprenticeships would also be lucrative;
- enthusing the whole Service with its vision for the future.

Following the presentation, the Committee conducted a question and answer session.

A selection of the Committee's questions, together with the officers' responses, is given below:

- **Would all of the apprenticeships be run by the County Council?**

The Service delivers apprenticeships within the County Council but also to other employers across Oxfordshire.

- **What was the future of leisure learning for Oxfordshire residents?**

No potential future government had suggested that they would be putting money into leisure learning. There was no clarity after the next few years. Policy documents suggested that people might be given the opportunity to bid for a pot of money in future, for example, to set up a book club. By 2012/13 it was likely that funding for leisure learning would be reduced by approximately 50% and possibly more, which was why the service was now focusing on income generation. People would have to pay more for leisure learning courses.

Members were reminded that this Committee's remit was in relation to having an oversight of the adult learning service in provider mode, whereas the Growth & Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee's focus was on commissioning.

44/10 COGGES MANOR FARM MUSEUM - REVIEW OF PROGRESS TOWARDS TRUST STATUS

(Agenda No. 7)

As part of its work programme the Committee had agreed that it wished to be kept informed of the progress of Cogges Manor Farm Museum towards Trust status.

A briefing paper was before the Committee (**SSC7**), which included an outline of the background to this decision.

Mr Richard Munro, Head of Community Services, updated the Committee on the progress of Cogges Manor Farm Museum towards Trust status. Officers were on a very tight timescale and it was hoped that the Trust would be in place by the end of March. A Shadow Board had been in place since the middle of the previous year. The individuals involved had been understandably cautious in relation to this new responsibility and had been exercising due diligence. It had not been possible to find a business partner to run the Trust without public subsidy as a heritage attraction and the Trust had not been able to draw up a business model as a heritage attraction. They were now trying to grow the business as outlined in the paper before the Committee. There was a need for capital investment. This would probably be from the Heritage Lottery Fund or a similar source and would probably take a few years to secure.

The Committee noted that funding of £160,000 per annum was to be made available to the Trust for two years (not £180,000 as stated in the report), thanked the Head of Community Services for the update and requested to be informed of Board membership in due course.

Councillor Lilly undertook to provide the Head of Community Services with the name of his contact who was looking for a venue to display his collection of old agricultural tractors and machinery.

45/10 FIRE SERVICE COMMAND AND CONTROL ROOM - THE FIRECONTROL AND FIRELINK PROJECTS
(Agenda No. 8)

Mr Colin Thomas (Assistant Chief Fire Officer and Head of Service Support) provided an update, accompanied by Mr Dave Etheridge (Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Head of Service Delivery). The Committee noted the following information:

- 16 stations had now been equipped with Early Station End Equipment;
- despite the national project delays, Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service (OFRS) was committed to its local project programme and all aspects of Station End Mobilising Equipment will have been renewed by the time the project was completed;
- the government select committee was due to meet on 8 February and would hear evidence from a range of people involved in the FiReControl project supported by written submissions. The select committee was causing a degree of speculation for everyone involved with FiReControl;
- Despite this OFRS believed that the most effective way forward was delivering the project against the current timescale and increasing its resilience;
- National clarification was not expected until September or October 2010.

In response to a question from a member of the Committee asking what impact that the new process for Ways of Working (WoW) from the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) might have, Mr Thomas stated that information on this had been provided to him and WoW would be renamed. The issue was to ensure that the national systems provided could accommodate local incident risk management plans. For example, OFRS had an innovative approach to reducing false alarms. He added that OFRS might have to change certain minor parts of certain processes in order to agree a national model.

Mr Etheridge stated that regardless of whether OFRS was eventually given a regional or sub regional control room or a different set up, the key priority was to ensure that call mobilising for Oxfordshire remained at least as good as its current standard and as good as it could be.

The Cabinet Member for Safer & Stronger Communities requested that her thanks to Mr Thomas and his team for their hard work be recorded.

INFORMATION SHARE

The Committee had before it a briefing note on various matters relating to Community Safety (Agenda Annex).

Mr Etheridge updated the Committee verbally including the process followed, extent of the response and the main concerns raised during the consultation on the Draft Fire Authority Integrated Risk Management Action Plan 2010/11 (IRMP) as at 29 January 2010 (the consultation had officially concluded on 31 January), including feedback in relation to proposal (a) (Day Crewing Review at Abingdon and Didcot Fire Stations).

Mr Etheridge reported that central government had provided very clear guidance on public consultation, which had been in existence for about six years. Over the years the service had learnt a great deal about public consultation and made contact with over 120 organisations who were representative of a wide range of groups in society as well as its six neighbouring Fire & Rescue Authorities when consulting each year on the IRMP. A mail shot had gone to key stakeholders, all of the relevant details had been put onto the internet and the intranet and there was a questionnaire that could be accessed by the public. Due to the sensitivity of proposal (a), this year the service had also put additional information onto both web sites including the risk analysis and background information. In addition to this, two public meetings about the IRMP were held each year. This year two further public meetings had been held in light of proposal (a). These had been publicised by the Council's Media & Communications Team, by all of the news agencies and by the Fire Brigades' Union (FBU). Press and radio interviews had also been held to publicise these meetings.

Approximately 80 people had attended the meeting in Didcot; predominantly OFRS personnel and their families. A similar pattern had been replicated in Abingdon. OFRS had also given briefings to the Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member for Safer & Stronger Communities, local members for Abingdon and Didcot, had presented to Scrutiny, had spoken to different District and Town Councils and had held internal briefings with managers and discussions with internal personnel.

As at 29 January 19 questionnaires, 18 emails (regarding non availability) and 2000 letters had been received (standard letters from the FBU Website), predominantly in relation to proposal (a) of the IRMP. The feedback from the public meetings had been that the number one concern was OFRS attendance times, which was always the main concern. Comment had been made regarding the service's over reliance on the retained duty system across the county - including at Abingdon and Didcot, the competency of retained fire fighters and fire fighter safety (from the FBU). Mr Etheridge stated that he could counter all of the above concerns and that if proposal (a) went into the IRMP these concerns could be addressed over time. Mr Etheridge then thanked Scrutiny for their challenge in relation to this matter.

The Cabinet Member for Safer & Stronger Communities stated that she was perturbed by the perception amongst some people that the county's retained fire fighters provided a second class service as this was not the case, especially given that many of the county's fire stations were wholly crewed by retained personnel.

SSC5

Mr Etheridge further stated that the Audit Commission Organisational Assessment 2009 had noted that fewer people than in the previous year had been satisfied with the length of time it had taken for OFRS to arrive at their home. Therefore the service needed to get to incidents faster. In relation to Proposal (a) third party statistical modelling based on past evidence had predicted that response times would only be missed on three occasions in three years in Didcot and on one occasion over that time period in Abingdon. The present Retained Duty system impacted heavily on the service's ability to meet its response times county wide and this situation was getting worse.

Other areas of interest were reported as follows:

The Audit Commission Organisational Assessment 2009 had been part of the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) and the evidence had shown that OFRS is the second joint highest performing of the 46 Brigades in England. Although more people had been injured in fires, this was a national pattern which was due to recording, which was now carried out more professionally.

The formal draft report arising from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Inspection was still awaited. Following receipt of the final draft the report would be formalised and the Brigade would be expected to complete an action plan in response. A full report would come to Scrutiny in due course.

A member of the Committee asked if funding for the anticipated recommendations relating to training arising from the above Inspection had been estimated or costed and if so, whether there was sufficient money in the budget.

Mr Thomas stated that the additional training for breathing apparatus revolved around the volume and frequency of certain types of training. The HSE appeared to accept the arrangements which had been made by the service. It was anticipated that some additional cost would be necessary (probably £25k), and was not in the budget, but this cost was likely to be mitigated by internal changes. The investment of 12 watch managers as identified in the budget papers would help to provide the necessary support. If the training recommendation was made, officers would seek ways of funding this effectively from within the training budget. Until the written report had been received and it had been signed off it was still speculation at this stage.

The Cabinet Member for Safer & Stronger Communities requested that her thanks to Mr Etheridge be recorded for his work during the recent snow.

46/10 DEBT ADVICE SCOPING TEMPLATE (Agenda No. 9)

In October this Committee had agreed its future work programme, including the wish to conduct further scrutiny activity in relation to debt advice.

The intention was to focus on the provision of advice in the County.

A scoping template was attached for the Committee's consideration (SSC9).

The Committee **AGREED** the debt and money advice scoping template and to nominate Councillors Lawrie Stratford, Bill Service, John Goddard and John Sanders to the Lead Member Review Group.

Councillor Stratford undertook to ascertain with Councillor Dr Peter Skolar when the Strategy and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee would be looking at grants in general, and in relation to the delivery and the provision of advice.

47/10 CRIME AND DISORDER SCRUTINY

(Agenda No. 10)

The Committee was reminded that the Home Office had produced guidance relating to the provisions in the Police and Justice Act 2006 on the scrutiny arrangements for crime and disorder. Every local authority must create or designate a crime and disorder committee. This committee may be new or an existing committee may take on this role. The committee may be at county level or be set up as a joint committee with the districts. The Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee is currently constituted to take on this role for the County Council.

The purpose of a crime and disorder committee is to:

- a) review or scrutinise decisions made/actions taken by the “responsible authorities” in the exercise of their crime and disorder functions; and
- b) make reports or recommendations to the local authority with respect to the discharge of those functions.

The responsible authorities in Oxfordshire are: Oxfordshire County Council, District Councils, Thames Valley Police, Thames Valley Police Authority, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority and Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust.

Dr Alvi stated that this committee in its role as a crime and disorder committee would need to look at how the different partners come together and what outcomes they were achieving, rather than focusing on one partner. All of the county’s district councils had already designated committees to scrutinise crime and disorder and there was a widely held view that work should not be duplicated. Therefore information sharing would be needed to ensure that this committee was not covering the same ground already scrutinised by a district council, especially in relation to avoiding questioning the same senior officers, who had many demands on their time. In relation to the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) it would be natural for this Committee to scrutinise the Oxfordshire Safer Communities Partnership (OSCP) rather than the individual CDRPs, which lent themselves more readily to scrutiny by the district council scrutiny committees.

The Committee discussed its new duty and **AGREED** to consider this in relation to its work programme at its July meeting, when it would undertake further discussion into how to take this new duty forward.

48/10 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

(Agenda No. 11)

Dr Alvi updated the Committee in relation to the latest version of its future work programme timeline (SSC11).

The Committee **AGREED**:

- that it wished to have sight of the facts and figures from Thames Valley Police as early as possible (Thames Valley Police Authority Three Year Strategic Plan 2008-11 would be scrutinised at this Committee’s May meeting);
- that it wished to receive the Health & Safety Executive Inspection report at its July meeting, together with the associated action plans, to enable members to challenge officers regarding their approach.

All members of the Committee were asked to let Ms Coldwell know as soon as possible what information they wished to be provided to them by Thames Valley Police.

49/10 FORWARD PLAN

(Agenda No. 12)

No items had been identified for noting.

50/10 TRACKING SCRUTINY ITEMS

(Agenda No. 13)

No items had been identified for tracking.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing