

SAFER & STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Monday, 5 July 2010 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 4.30 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Lawrie Stratford – in the Chair

Councillor John Goddard
Councillor Patrick Greene
Councillor Stewart Lilly
Councillor Lorraine Lindsay-Gale
Councillor Susanna Pressel
Councillor Bill Service
Councillor Alan Thompson
Councillor Carol Viney (Deputy Chairman)

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

Officers:

Whole of meeting K. Coldwell (Corporate Core); D. Etheridge and N. Wilson (Community Safety)

Part of meeting

Agenda Item

Officer Attending

- | | |
|-----|---|
| 5. | D. Etheridge (Community Safety) |
| 6. | P. James (Corporate Core) |
| 7. | R. Whyte (Community Safety) |
| 8. | C. Thomas (Community Safety) |
| 9. | D. Heycock, D. Etheridge & C. Thomas (Community Safety) |
| 12. | R. Webb (Community Safety) |
| 13. | D. Etheridge & N. Wilson (Community Safety) |

By Invitation

- | | |
|----|--|
| 6. | A. Foulkes (Barton Community Centre), P. Chirgwin (Volunteer Linkup), J. Edge (Sunshine Centre), C. Collett MBE (Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Parish Plan/Oxfordshire Rural Community Council) |
|----|--|

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

- a report on the progression of the Resident Research and Community Development Project Participants and a report on the progress of community development in Barton, Wood Farm and Northway in relation to Agenda Item 6

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

66/10 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Sajjad Hussain Malik.

67/10 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2010 were approved and signed.

Matters arising from the Minutes

57/10 – Fear of Crime in Oxfordshire – the Chief Fire Officer undertook to report back to Councillor Pressel and the rest of the Committee on her query in relation to funding for youth clubs and other school holiday activities (now actioned).

68/10 DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

(Agenda No. 5)

The Chief Fire Officer reported orally on new appointments and key issues as summarised below:

- Eric Pickles MP is now Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. He previously joined the Shadow Cabinet as Communities and Local Government Secretary in July 2007. His ethos is devolving power to local people.
- Bob Neill MP is the new Fire Minister. In 2007 he was appointed as Shadow London Minister, joining the Shadow Communities & Local Government Team. In 2008 he was made Shadow Local Government Minister and Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party. Mr Neill has had some fire and rescue experience and recognises the value of the Fire & Rescue Service (F&RS) as “an exemplar of what public service is all about”. His priorities are “localism, localism and localism”. He is not looking to go back to nationally prescribed response standards and believes that local resources should meet local risk. This reflects the situation in Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS).
- There will be a fundamental review of the Fire Sector. The Chief Fire Officers' Association will lead on this and it is due to report in time for the Comprehensive Spending Review in the autumn. Specific areas that are of relevance to OFRS include:

- Increased partnership working is considered as the way forward and was recognised as a strength in OFRS in the Comprehensive Area Assessment;
 - The main risks for OFRS in the next 10 – 20 years are the effects of climate change and OFRS being an integral part of national civil resilience (eg responding to the Carlisle floods).
 - OFRS has a unique brand and is one of the few services that is universally welcomed on people's doorsteps. The Service could do more work in relation to alcohol and drugs, healthy eating, citizenship and educational attainment, as fire fighters are role models and could deliver a broader agenda than road safety and community safety.
 - There is an opportunity for OFRS to lead on the localism agenda by virtue of the makeup of the service - 24 fire stations all with their own station and watch managers comprising local people who know their communities. For example, they could deliver a different community safety package for each area to meet local community concerns.
- Mr Neill recognises that operational resilience nationally is dependent on inter-operability between Fire and Rescue Authorities. Therefore the business case for the Regional Fire and Rescue Authority Control Centre is sound, but it is one of the projects that will be reviewed by the government. There is no additional money for this project and the project may be delayed by another six months. A report is anticipated during the Summer parliamentary recess.
 - In year cuts to the Area Based Grant will impact on community safety and the officer group are assessing the impact of this.
 - Operation Reckless in Trading Standards has considerably reduced doorstep crime. There has also been an expansion of No Cold Calling Zones.

69/10 COMMUNITY PRIDE AND SELF HELP SELECT COMMITTEE (Agenda No. 6)

“How can Oxfordshire County Council facilitate members of the community to act to benefit the wider community and what are the current barriers that prevent them from doing this?”

The Council wishes to develop a strategy and framework by September 2010 which promotes and encourages community pride and self-help. The aim is to significantly reduce barriers so that individuals and communities are more able to help themselves.

This Scrutiny Committee was invited to contribute to the development of the strategy and framework by examining some of the barriers that people may be experiencing which act as a disincentive and by proposing some areas for improvement.

The Committee had before it:

- a briefing paper which set out the scope for the session
- a programme

- a summary of assistance already available to individuals and communities.

The following panellists attended before the Committee:

- Mr Alan Foulkes (Community Development Co-ordinator - Barton Community Centre) (Representative of a successful local Community Centre);
- Ms Patricia Chirgwin (Manager of Volunteer Linkup – Volunteer Centre West Oxfordshire) (Representative of a successful local Good Neighbour Scheme);
- Ms Jill Edge (Centre Manager - Sunshine Centre - Children’s Centre on the Brecht Hill Estate, Banbury) (Representative of a successful local Children’s Centre);
- Ms Celia Collett MBE (Chair of Steering Committee of Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Parish Plan and Trustee of Oxfordshire Rural Community Council) (Representative of a Parish that has a successful Parish Plan).

The Panellists were accompanied by Mr Paul James, Head of Partnership Working.

The following questions were put to each panellist in turn:

- *Give an example of successful delivery of community pride and the ingredients that led to it being a success.*
- *In your view what are the top 3 barriers that prevent individuals getting involved to deliver community solutions to local problems?*
- *What role would you like organisations such as the council to play? How should we be helping?*
- *If you were responsible for delivering community pride across Oxfordshire, what would be the first thing you would do?*

Following its select committee investigation, the Committee thanked all panellists for attending, **AGREED** to forward its recommendations to the Head of Partnership Working and requested sight of the Council’s strategy and framework to promote and encourage community pride and self help (including the review of existing county council activity) once available.

Following this meeting, this Committee’s recommendations were included in the paper to the County Council Management Team (Self Help Communities), a copy of which would be appended to the agenda for this Committee’s September meeting.

These recommendations included a number of points made by Ms Lisa Fisher (participant on the V Talent Programme), which gave a young person’s response to the select committee questions.

Councillor Pressel requested a report for herself on how many Community Development Workers are currently employed by the County Council - both in Social & Community Services and other Directorates - their roles and their geographical locations, together with any available information on the [estimated] numbers of

Community Development Workers employed by other organisations how they are funded (eg by a Housing Association), and where they are located.

70/10 CRIME AND DISORDER SCRUTINY DISCUSSION (Agenda No. 7)

A report on the Oxfordshire Safer Communities Partnership (OSCP) was before the Committee (SSC7) which included the following information:

- an outline of the role of the OSCP
- achieving positive outcomes through a partnership approach
- examples of the work of OSCP in the last year
- the latest performance information
- details of district council scrutiny arrangements.

The Committee was invited to:

- hold an in depth discussion in relation to this new duty and how to take it forward, to include confirmation of who to invite to future meetings (e.g. who from the partnership will come, does the Committee want to invite district councillors?);
- formulate a future work programme to detail the areas which the Committee wishes to scrutinise in respect to how the different partners are working together to deliver positive outcomes.

The Committee thanked Ms Whyte for her report and **AGREED** to:

- request reports to this Committee on a quarterly basis on how district council arrangements for scrutinising crime and disorder are working;
- monitor the outcomes of the Oxfordshire Safe & Confident Communities Project* that would be implemented during the next six months at its February or May 2011 meeting dependent on when the results become available.

(*communications campaign to increase public confidence in Oxfordshire in relation to NI21 – “The police and local council are dealing with the antisocial behaviour and crime issues that matter in this area”).

The reports on how the district council arrangements for scrutinising crime and disorder were working would be flagged up bi-monthly as a standing item on the officer group agenda and would then be fed through to the thematic partnerships.

Ms Whyte undertook to provide all members of the Committee with a copy of the current Oxfordshire Alcohol Strategy, together with information on the consultation events that would be taking place across the county (actioned).

71/10 FIRE SERVICE COMMAND AND CONTROL ROOM - THE FIRECONTROL AND FIRELINK PROJECTS
(Agenda No. 8)

The Committee noted the update (Refer SSC8).

72/10 DRAFT ACTION PLAN ARISING FROM THE HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE INSPECTION OF OXFORDSHIRE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE
(Agenda No. 9)

The Chief Fire Officer, together with Mr Colin Thomas (Temporary Deputy Chief Fire Officer), Mr David Heycock (Technical Services Manager) and the Cabinet Member for Safer & Stronger Communities attended before the Committee for this item.

The Committee received a report back on the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Inspection, together with the Service's draft action/implementation plan (SSC9(a)). A GANNT chart showing the likely timescales for implementing the actions was also before the Committee (SSC9(b)).

This further short report provided detail on the action plan on the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspection of Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and the subsequent report received in March 2010. The action plan had not yet been formally approved by the HSE but would be subject to further discussion over the next 2 - 3 months.

In relation to **R3 – Organisational arrangements need to be put in place to deliver operational training policy in a co-ordinated and consistent way** – the Committee noted that this recommendation's current status was amber and that it was currently proving challenging to move forward due to several changes in personnel. Additional activities had been planned which should allow adequate progress, but the current target time was under threat.

Councillor Goddard asked for additional information in relation to the above action point in terms of the range of costs it might involve, when the time issue would be resolved and if it would have been actioned before general budgetary decisions had to be made.

The Committee noted that OFRS had an overall estimate of a typical price range for this type of activity and that there had been a roll over of funds from last year's budget (Refer report). The cost would be constrained within £200k and half of that cost had already been met. It wasn't known at this stage whether the gap of approximately £50,000 would be a one off cost or a year on year cost.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer undertook to provide further financial details to Councillor Goddard and to the rest of the Committee.

The Committee thanked all concerned for the detailed and informative report.

Mr Thomas undertook to inform the Committee when the Health and Safety Executive had given Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service some indication of whether

or not they accepted the progress that was being made since the Inspection. It was expected that the response would be available in time for consideration at the Committee's 8 November meeting.

73/10 DEBT ADVICE SCRUTINY REVIEW PROGRESS UPDATE
(Agenda No. 10)

The Committee noted the update.

74/10 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME
(Agenda No. 11)

The Committee had before it:

- a list of key areas already investigated by this Committee
- Items logged for future meetings

The Committee noted that the implications of the current financial situation may highlight suitable issues for scrutiny consideration in due course and **AGREED**:

- to accept the invitation from the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee to participate in its proposed review of the county's youth centres and to request sight of the scoping template once available, to enable Members of the Committee to decide whether they would wish to put themselves forward;
- to request a report from the Head of Adult Learning on the latest position in relation to adult learning, in so far as it relates to the remit of this Committee (oversight of the adult learning service in provider mode);
- to request the Chief Fire Officer to provide a short paper in relation to progress made in order to increase the county's resilience to flooding in so far as it relates to the remit of this Committee (in relation to emergency planning and fire and rescue);
- to request to be updated on progress in relation to the Libraries Transformation Programme at the appropriate time;
- (in light of the current and anticipated further reduction in funding to the Thames Valley Road Safety Partnership) to consider the business plan for the integrated road safety approach within the Council once available and to monitor this area in 6 month's time from the date of this meeting.

Ms Coldwell undertook to:

- work with Councillor Stratford to timetable the above items to Scrutiny;
- send the outcomes of the most recent tracking session in relation to the Neighbourhood Action Groups select committee recommendations and a link to past scrutiny reviews to Councillor Pressel.

75/10 INFORMATION SHARE

(Agenda No. 12)

Report on the arrangements for meeting the requirements of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000

The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 ('the Act') regulates the use of covert activities by Local Authorities. It creates the statutory framework by which covert surveillance activities may be lawfully undertaken. Special authorisation arrangements need to be put in place whenever a Local Authority considers commencing covert surveillance or considers obtaining information by the use of informants or officers acting in an undercover capacity.

Codes of Practice issued under the Act provide guidance to authorities on the use of the Act. A revised Code of Practice came into force in April 2010. This new Code of Practice specifies that elected members should review the authority's use of the Act and set the policy at least once a year. They should also consider internal reports on the use of the Act on at least a quarterly basis.

An overview of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and associated Codes of Practice and the arrangements in place in Oxfordshire County Council was before the Committee (SSC12).

The Committee was invited to receive an overview of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and associated Codes of Practice and the arrangements in place in Oxfordshire County Council, in advance of future reports providing information on the use of this Act by Oxfordshire County Council.

Mr Richard Webb (Acting Head of Trading Standards) attended before the Committee to answer any questions which the Committee may have wished to ask.

A member of the Committee asked if the powers under the Act were under review in light of the new government.

Mr Webb stated that the Act had been reviewed a number of times over the years. The new government had proposed that local authorities should retain these powers and therefore the Act would still apply, but officers may need to obtain permission from magistrates prior to conducting any future activities.

Following a brief question and answer session the Committee thanked Mr Webb for his paper and **AGREED**:

- to request that the mandatory quarterly reports reviewing the Authority's use of the Act and the annual report to Scrutiny reviewing the Authority's policy (July 2011):
 - continue to include generalised information on the types of activities carried out and the purpose of the operations or investigations;
 - also include:
 - the number of requests for directed surveillance authorisations or covert use of a human intelligence source which had been refused;

- outcomes in relation to agreed requests; and
- categories of activities for both agreed and refused requests

(as the Committee wished to come to a view as to whether the requests had been justified); and

- include the outcomes of the Office of Surveillance Commissioners Inspections [which monitor the Council's arrangements for authorising RIPA including a review of all authorisations], how often cases had been reviewed [currently monthly], and whether a decision had been made to stop or continue the surveillance for each case.

76/10 TRACKING SCRUTINY ITEMS (Agenda No. 13)

Mr Nigel Wilson (Assistant Chief Fire Officer) reported on the Recruitment and Retention of Retained Firefighters Scrutiny Review. Key points were as follows:

- Currently OFRS has a retained complement of 388 personnel and officers anticipate that they need an additional 17 personnel (dependent on cover offered) across the county to fill both current and expected vacancies on stations (through retirement/personnel moving out of the area etc).
- Officers are making effective use of whole time (WT) personnel to support the availability of retained fire appliances and the new WT Watch Managers (WMs) supported by Oxfordshire County Council are already having an impact.
- The churn rate of retained firefighters continues to be an issue, particularly in the current economic climate, as:
 - employers are less likely to release personnel
 - individuals are travelling longer distances to find primary employment and as a result are not in the vicinity of their local station
 - some staff change jobs following redundancy, leading to them moving away or not being released for retained duties.

The full update was emailed to all members of the Committee after the meeting.

The Committee noted that this Scrutiny Review was now closed down as all of the recommendations that OFRS could action had been actioned.

The Chief Fire Officer then reported on the Road Safety Partnership as follows:

The Thames Valley Road Safety Partnership receives financial contributions from all of the Thames Valley district and county councils and Thames Valley Police. The in-year cuts to the Area Based Grant mean that the Partnership will receive a 27% reduction with immediate effect. The Road Safety Partnership Management Committee is looking at the implications of this whilst accepting that there may be further cuts following the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review in November. Internally, following my appointment as Chief Fire Officer, I am examining opportunities to create a single integrated approach to road safety as we currently

have several strands of activity within Environment & Economy, Trading Standards and Fire & Rescue.

77/10 FORWARD PLAN
(Agenda No. 14)

The Committee noted the following changes to the scheduling of reports to Cabinet:

- the report on Cogges Trust (to seek approval to complete the legal details, agreements and lease of the new Trust) would now be considered by the Cabinet on 21 September;
- the report on future use of legacy equipment from the OFRS Control Room would now be considered on 15 March.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing