

## **SAFER & STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES** of the meeting held on Monday, 26 October 2009 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 1.22 pm

**Present:**

**Voting Members:** Councillor Lawrie Stratford – in the Chair  
Councillor Alyas Ahmed  
Councillor Steve Hayward  
Councillor Peter Jones  
Councillor Stewart Lilly  
Councillor Carol Viney (Deputy Chairman)  
Councillor John Goddard

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

**Officers:**

Whole of meeting I. Alvi & K. Coldwell (Corporate Core); D. Etheridge and C. Thomas (Community Safety); R. Munro (Social & Community Services).

Part of meeting

**Agenda Item**                      **Officer Attending**  
6.                                      M. Crapper and M. Clarke (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.*

### **20/09 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS** (Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Councillors Sajjad Hussain Malik, Susanna Pressel and Bill Service.

### **21/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE** (Agenda No. 2)

Councillor Peter Jones declared a personal interest at Agenda Item 5 on the grounds that he works for the Bodleian Library.

**22/09 MINUTES**

(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2009 were approved and signed subject to recording that Councillor Sajjad Hussain Malik had not been present.

**23/09 SPEAKING TO OR PETITIONING THE COMMITTEE**

(Agenda No. 4)

No requests had been received.

**24/09 PRESENTATION FROM THE SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES FIELD**

(Agenda No. 5)

The Committee received a presentation on Community Services from Mr Richard Munro, Head of Community Services, on (a) this service area and how it fits into the bigger picture and (b) the challenges and priorities facing this area for the period 2009/10 and in the longer term, in terms of strategic underlying issues. A copy of the presentation is attached to the signed Minutes and further information given during the presentation is detailed below:

- Community Services comprises 7 1/2 % of the overall budget for Social & Community Services;
- Social & Community Service's mission statement is that it "will support and promote strong communities so that people live their lives as successfully and independently as possible". It will also "provide effective and efficient support to the most vulnerable". This vision reflects the prevention agenda, given the increasing numbers of older people;
- Community Services' focus is universal support for communities and covers:
  - **The Library Service** (statutory) – books are still at its heart, although the service has changed in light of new communication technologies;
  - **Heritage and Arts** – this includes the Museums Service (eg. Cogges Manor Farm Museum until April 2010 and the Museums Resource Centre at Standlake) and the Archive Service. The Council has a statutory duty to look after records, although the service also provides other facilities, such as Oxfordshire Studies (local history) including the Victoria County History Project. The arts side of the service is fairly small but high profile and there are strong partnerships in Heritage and Arts;
  - **Adult Learning** – this is now completely externally funded. Its main source of income is from the Learning & Skills Council, which is about to be abolished. Adult Learning covers a number of areas, including learning for leisure and learning for skills. This committee's remit is oversight of the adult learning service in provider mode, not skills commissioning, which sits under Councillor Robertson's portfolio and the Growth and Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee;

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- **The Registration Service** – which has the statutory responsibility to register births, deaths and marriages and also carries out other activities, for example, citizenship ceremonies;
- **Cultural & Community Development** – much activity in this area is now at arms length through 'Oxford Inspires'. Karen Warren oversees the Community Development Team which comprises eight staff and works within the community, including with the Chinese, Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities. Projects with these communities help them to become more self determining.
- Community Services links to many of the County Council's objectives, especially in terms of 'healthy and thriving communities', but also in relation to a 'world class economy' (in terms of contributing to economic development and tourism), and 'reducing inequalities and breaking the cycle of deprivation'.
- Its contribution to economic development includes the Adult Learning Service (skills development), the Registration Service (many people choose Oxfordshire as the place to marry, which has a knock on effect for tourism) and heritage services.
- Community Services contributes to building safer and stronger communities through enabling participation, community development and community cohesion, access to information (eg local and family history), intergenerational activities, citizenship and community pride.
- Priorities and challenges include:
  - **The Library Service Change Programme** (43 libraries in Oxfordshire) – this is underway and covers library property improvements, self-service, community involvement and mobile services. The programme arose from the Fundamental Service Review of Cultural Services which took place a few years ago. The proposed introduction of self service in libraries would provide the Council with the opportunity to make cost savings and would also aim to satisfy public demand. Some of the county's libraries offer more value for money than others. Dialogues with the community are underway regarding how services might be provided more efficiently and officers are in the process of reviewing the mobile library service to see if it is delivering the best value for money;
  - **Heritage and Arts** – including the transfer of Cogges Manor Farm Museum to the Trust, pursuing a partnership with the Soldiers of Oxfordshire in relation to the Oxfordshire Museum (the Soldiers of Oxfordshire are willing to make a financial investment to ensure that military artefacts are looked after and displayed), work in relation to the History Centre involving other partners to ensure that there is one point of contact for information provision, and the Music Service change programme, which is reorganising how it raises funds in order to reduce the County Council's subsidy (although the Music Service sits within the remit of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee);

- **Adult Learning** – in terms of financial recovery (the service is currently running at a deficit and will need to pay back money over the next five years. A plan is in place to enable it to do so), the uncertainty of external funding, management restructuring and its role as a service provider to Oxfordshire County Council (there is a need to determine what the County Council wishes it to provide);
- **The Registration Service** – in terms of the future on-line registration of marriages (the service is at the cutting edge in terms of bringing services on-line), future legislation which will impact on the service (it is possible that the government will ask the Registration Service to do more in future without additional funding), and the achievement of its income targets (it currently earns twice its subsidy in earned income although there is no discretion in setting the rate for its statutory services);
- **Cultural and Community Development** – in terms of an increasing emphasis on prevention, expectations of greater involvement, redressing inequalities, and the cultural Olympiad (2012). Work must focus on where this programme area can make the most difference, although outcomes in terms of prevention are hard to evidence. In terms of community involvement, the new 'duty to involve' affects all of the Council's services and the potential for using this team to work towards reducing inequality and breaking the cycle of deprivation has not yet been recognised. A programme of events for the cultural Olympiad will be starting next year.

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

- **Is much partnership work underway, including with businesses and the district councils?**

There are well developed partnerships with Heritage and Arts. The Council still runs two museums, although many of the county's museums are now run by the district or town councils or by charitable trusts. Community Services still supports them in terms of education and outreach work and collection management. Officers work with the district councils on arts management. The Registration Service does not have to pay for any publicity due to its relationship with businesses that support weddings.

- **Can public buildings be used for multiple purposes in lieu of mobile libraries?**

This is being explored. This sometimes works in terms of asset management but can be a trap. Community buy in is also necessary in order for it to work.

- **How many joint-use libraries are there in schools?**

Three.

- **Only three different ethnic minority communities were mentioned. Is there a list of all of the different communities and how can we communicate with them?**

It is hard to be definitive. For example, the community development worker in Banbury has knowledge of the different Asian communities. We do have contacts within communities but are always learning more about different communities, their concerns and how we can help them.

The Committee then thanked Mr Munro for his excellent presentation and **AGREED** that it wished to receive presentations on specific topics in relation to community services at future meetings and also wished to receive a presentation on the work of Oxford Inspires.

**25/09 DRAFT FIRE AUTHORITY INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN 2010/11**  
(Agenda No. 6)

The report before the Committee proposed a number of projects to be included within the Fire Authority's Integrated Risk Management Action Plan (IRMP) for the fiscal year 2010/11. The proposals summarised those areas where the Service's Senior Management Team believe that service improvements might be achieved. The report also included an overview of progress on projects for the fiscal year 2008/9 (Annex 1).

The Committee was invited to review project implementation for the previous year, ask any questions relating to future service improvements and offer any advice/comment on the proposed projects to the Cabinet Member for Safer and Stronger Communities.

Mr Dave Etheridge (Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Head of Service Delivery), together with Mr Martin Crapper (Service Delivery Manager) and Mr Mick Clarke (Station Manager IRMP, Kidlington) attended before the Committee for this item.

Mr Etheridge summarised the background to the IRMP and stated that the proposals, once approved by the Cabinet Member, would be subject to 'risk analysis' and public consultation. A final decision would be made in March 2010, with a view to formal adoption of the Action Plan for implementation from April 2010.

The following information was reported to the meeting:

In relation to proposal (a) Day Crewing Review at Abingdon and Didcot Fire Stations, the proposed revised duty system would amend the current shift pattern to predominantly Monday to Friday day time hours. It was proposed that two shifts of seven would change to one shift of twelve. This would free up four establishment positions on a permanent basis across the two stations. These four positions (which would become Watch Managers) would be utilised on retained stations where availability is a problem due to a shortage of retained fire fighters. This redeployment would maximise the Service's use of resources and improve resilience across the county by reducing the levels of time where retained fire engines are not available

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(17500 hours of retained fire engine non-availability from April 08 to March 09). Additionally, from the remaining operational personnel left at Abingdon and Didcot, potentially on a Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday a minimum of six fire fighters would also be deployed to other stations. This would provide even greater resilience and fire engine availability on OFRS's retained stations and ensure that community fire safety education could also take place in some of the smaller towns and villages where there was currently very little activity. The outcome of this project would mean that there would still be the same amount of fire engines, and fire fighters riding those engines, at both Abingdon and Didcot as there are now. There would be no loss of jobs as the reduction in two positions at each station could be managed via retirements and vacancies. Mr Etheridge added that no individual would be forced to go to another fire station or to move out of their provided day crewing house.

Given the full agenda at this meeting, the Committee **AGREED** that a presentation should be given to its November meeting on the above proposal, in order to resolve any questions that the Committee might have.

Councillor Goddard then put forward the following questions to be answered at the November meeting:

- In relation to proposal (a) Day Crewing Review at Abingdon and Didcot Fire Stations:
  - what would be the impact of any changes to day crewing at Abingdon and Didcot Fire Stations in relation to response times, ie. which areas would be affected by longer response times, when and by how much?
  - although statistically there were fewer incidents at weekends, evenings and night times, surely these were when serious injuries and fatalities were most likely to occur?
- Wouldn't the removal of a fire engine out of Rewley Rd at the weekend to provide standby cover in the two towns be disadvantaging other areas by moving it out of the City?

All members of the Committee were then invited to feed any further questions to Mr Etheridge and Mr Crapper via Ms Coldwell as soon as possible in relation to the areas they wished to be covered at the November meeting.

In relation to proposal (d) Review of Co-Responder Arrangements with South Central Ambulance Service, the Committee **AGREED** to request Mr Etheridge to provide information to a subsequent meeting on the number and frequency of co-responder incidents over the past year (whereby Oxfordshire fire crews at specific sites had responded to life threatening emergencies such as heart attacks), together with data on attendance times by fire crews to these incidents\*. (\*The Committee noted that South Central Ambulance Service is automatically mobilised when fire crews are called out).

It was **AGREED** that Mr Etheridge would email the Committee with the list of stakeholders who would be consulted on the 2010/11 IRMP, to enable members of the Committee to put forward any suggestions for additional stakeholders who should be consulted in future.

The Cabinet Member for Safer and Stronger Communities requested that her thanks to all relevant officers be recorded, for their work on the projects in the IRMP Action Plan 2008-09, which had been completed on time and within the allocated budget, whilst noting that Project 7 was ongoing (The Implementation of Roles at Kidlington Fire Station).

## **26/09 OXFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE RESPONSE STANDARDS PERFORMANCE 2008/09**

(Agenda No. 7)

The report before the Committee provided details of Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service's (OFRS) performance statistics for fire appliance response times to emergency incidents during 2008/09 (April 2008 – March 2009). The report provided details of that performance and the actions being undertaken to mitigate risk.

The report showed that OFRS response times for 2008/09 had been slightly slower in comparison with the previous year (79.11% 08/9, 80.53% 07/8). The report set out the factors that had affected performance, which were the weather, traffic management and the motorway and to a lesser extent the A34.

The Service wished to improve on its response times and was doing everything possible to achieve this. Every 'failure' against the Standards is analysed by the relevant Station Manager who then reports this to their Fire Risk Manager and where possible, appropriate action is taken. The Senior Leadership Team receives a quarterly performance review against the response standards and where there are discrepancies, further detail is sought of the action taken or justification for delays in attendance.

The Committee noted that the Audit Commission did not wish OFRS to make its response times any less challenging.

Mr Etheridge stated that in relation to proposal (a) of the IRMP, just having one extra wholetime fire fighter or Watch Manager on a retained fire station would help the service to respond more quickly.

In response to a Member's concern, the Cabinet Member for Safer & Stronger Communities stated that she was mindful of those stations with low percentages of responses meeting the response standards, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

In response to a Member's question, Mr Etheridge stated that it was difficult to compare OFRS response times with those of other Brigades, as since 2005 OFRS has had local response standards for attending emergency incidents in the county, based on the historical location and status of the county's current fire stations. The previous government model had been 20 minutes for rural areas, whereas Oxfordshire's targets were more stringent (80% of all emergency response times will be responded to within 11 minutes and 95% of all emergency incidents will be responded to within 14 minutes). Different Brigades had taken different approaches to their response targets. In Oxfordshire the service had set a county wide target rather than a different target for each part of the county dependent on local factors.

The Committee then thanked Mr Etheridge and Mr Wilson for their informative report and agreed with the view of the Audit Commission that Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service response times should be both challenging and achievable.

## **27/09 ANNUAL SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME SEPTEMBER 2009 - JULY 2010**

(Agenda No. 8)

Mr Imran Alvi (Assistant Corporate Performance and Review Manager) attended for this item in order to answer the Committee's questions.

Following a lengthy debate, the Committee **AGREED** that the following items should comprise its future work programme:

### a) Select Committees:

- **Community Pride** – (the scope of this piece of work would have to be narrowed down as the subject encompasses a very broad remit);
- **Crime & Disorder Scrutiny** – the following areas were suggested: the effectiveness of the Oxfordshire Safer Communities Partnership (is it improving community safety across Oxfordshire?) – are the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) working consistently? – key players to be invited to a select committee – then look at key topics later.

(It was emphasised that relationship building with partners would be needed as a first step in order to facilitate a critical friend approach).

- b) Fear of Crime – (smallest piece of work in terms of time and resources). The Policy Unit would be conducting face to face research with the community through 'Oxfordshire Voice' on their perception of crime in December.
1. An officer from the Policy Unit would be invited to present the outcomes of this research to the Committee;
  2. The Committee would look at how the police's crime statistics are produced and what they mean.

It was **AGREED** that Dr Alvi would liaise with Councillor Stratford regarding attendees and scope for the select committees and Ms Coldwell in terms of scheduling the above three items to future meetings.

### c) Question and answer sessions (as time allows):

- **Debt** – new scoping template to be produced to refine its focus;
- **Road safety** – consider at a future meeting. Possibly in a year's time;
- **Transformation of libraries** – February 2010;
- **Plans for Banbury Library/Mill Arts Centre Development** – May 2010;
- **Cogges Museum: Review of progress towards trust status** – February 2010;
- **Provision of Adult Learning** (in light of the abolition of the LSC) – May 2010. To take into account the work of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee and the Growth and Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee;



- **Grant Co-ordination** – would need to focus on those grants which fall within this Committee’s remit (eg. small arts grants and community grants) and if this funding is being used effectively to build community pride. Could look at whether co-ordination between grant awarders can be improved (eg. between county and district);
- **Final IRMP report** – May 2010;
- **TVPA 3 year strategic plan 0811** – July 2010.

d) Fire Service Command and Control Room – the FiReControl and FireLink Projects  
– progress update to be given at each meeting.

The Timeline of scrutiny activities (Annex 1) would be updated at each meeting as scrutiny activities are arranged.

All members of the Committee were reminded of the budget scrutiny preparatory sessions which had been arranged to assist them with budget scrutiny:

- a) Committee specific session - 19 November (4.30 – 6 pm, meeting room 2)
- b) Two generic budget scrutiny sessions which would look at the layout of the budget information either 23 November (10 – 11.30 am, mtg room 2) or 27 November (10 – 11.30 am, mtg room 3)

## **28/09 FIRE SERVICE COMMAND AND CONTROL ROOM - THE FIRECONTROL AND FIRELINK PROJECTS**

(Agenda No. 9)

Mr Colin Thomas (Assistant Chief Fire Officer and Head of Service Support) gave a presentation to the Committee on current and future benefits and the risk management process, a copy of which is attached to the signed Minutes.

The Committee also had before it a written progress update on both projects.

Following a brief question and answer session the Committee thanked Mr Thomas for his informative presentation and paper and for his sterling work on both projects.

Mr Thomas responded by thanking his Senior Management Team for enabling him to participate at an appropriate level, stated that he was supported by an excellent team, and thanked Members for their support, with particular reference to the Cabinet Member for Safer & Stronger Communities and Councillor Rodney Rose.

## **29/09 FORWARD PLAN**

(Agenda No. 10)

The Committee noted the items listed on the current version of the Forward Plan (October 2009 – January 2010).

**30/09 TRACKING SCRUTINY ITEMS**

(Agenda No. 11)

The Committee noted that no items had been identified for tracking at this meeting.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing ..... 200