

SAFER & STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Monday, 3 September 2012 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.30 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Stewart Lilly (Deputy Chairman) – in the Chair

Councillor John Goddard
Councillor Anthony Gearing
Councillor Ray Jelf (In place of Councillor Patrick Greene)
Councillor Susanna Pressel
Councillor Bill Service
Councillor Alan Thompson
Councillor Carol Viney
Councillor Michael Gibbard (In place of Councillor Lawrie Stratford)

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Judith Heathcoat

Officers:

Whole of meeting Kathrin Luddecke

Part of meeting Caroline Parker

Agenda Item Officer Attending

5 Peter Clark

6 Peter Clark, Jacquie Bugeja, Karen Warren

7 David Etheridge

8 David Etheridge, Nathan Travis, Stewart Garner

9, 10 Richard Webb, Kate Davies, Gill Tishler (CAB)

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.

43/12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

The chairman, Cllr Lawrie Stratford, had given his apologies and the deputy chairman, Cllr Stewart Lilly, chaired the meeting. Councillor Michael Gibbard substituted for Councillor Stratford and Councillor Ray Jelf substituted for Councillor Patrick Greene. Councillor Chip Sherwood was absent.

The chairman introduced Caroline Parker, Projects and Programmes Manager, who will be taking on the role of Committee Officer from Kathrin Luddecke from the following week. Councillor Lilly, on behalf of all the committee, recorded its gratitude and wished Kathrin Luddecke well for her secondment.

44/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE

(Agenda No. 2)

None.

45/12 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes of the meetings held on 18 June (**SSC3**) were approved as a correct record, subject to amending the number of fire fighters mentioned under item 34/12 (p.3) from three to four, and signed by the chairman.

Matters arising from the meeting of 18 June:

- Item 39/12: Councillor Pressel requested updated figures on cycling accidents from Road Safety; in response to a query from Councillor Goddard it was **agreed** for a Road Safety update to be added to the committee's work programme.

46/12 SPEAKING TO OR PETITIONING THE COMMITTEE

(Agenda No. 4)

Dr Judith Wardle (Save Oxfordshire Libraries) had requested to address the committee. She expressed serious concerns about the section of the report on item 6 (**SSC6**) relating to expanding the use of volunteers in the library service. She referred to concerns about the outstanding appointment of the Community Library Co-ordinator, pilots for new staffing arrangements, compacts between the service and communities, parish councils making financial contributions, staff morale and extended temporary contracts during service re-organisation.

In response to a request for clarification by Councillor Pressel, Dr Wardle stated Save Oxfordshire Libraries was in contact with 19 library groups as well as core libraries.

47/12 DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

(Agenda No. 5)

The Head of Law and Governance, Peter Clark, gave a verbal update with a written note provided as requested previously. The update included, amongst other items:

- The appointment of Judge Peter Thornton as Chief Coroner and Peter Clark's thanks to the staff of the Coroner's Office for their work, in particular on the 43 military repatriations to date, 22 of which are being retained in the county
- A number of externally funded projects undertaken by the Museums, History and Archives services and support to local museums such as the Museum of Oxford and Abingdon Museum.

Councillor Pressel, who sits on the Museum Council, commended the role of the Museum Service that Carol Anderson and her team had played in establishing the wonderful new galleries of the Museum of Oxford at the Town Hall.

48/12 LIBRARIES STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION - UPDATE

(Agenda No. 6)

Karen Warren, Cultural Services Manager, gave a presentation updating the committee on the implementation of the Libraries Strategy on behalf of Jillian Southwell, Library Service Manager. Issues covered included:

- The successful Summer Reading Challenge in July, targeting adults as well as young people, delivered shortly after the senior management restructure which took effect in May – noting that over 50 volunteers had come forward, including young people between 14 and 19 years of age
- Opportunities to improve facilities to have a service fit for the 21st century, including self-service, payment by debit/credit cards and digital services which offered e-books as part of the core service
- Collaboration with other council services and leadership on projects, for example supporting council priorities such as skills and employment, educational attainment, health and wellbeing.

Karen Warren also responded to particular concerns raised by Dr Wardle in her address to the committee, including the following points:

- The development of Community and Community Plus libraries is a three year process which began in April this year and is therefore at an early stage but anticipated to progress apace
- Progress is being made with developing the role and training of volunteers and agreements with communities, with individual discussions to reflect local needs
- The post of Community Library Co-ordinator is being re-advertised externally following the decision of previous interview panels, involving representatives of Library Friends Groups, not to proceed to an appointment
- The professional behaviour of library staff throughout a period of change and the priority given by senior managers to continuing to support them, as well as the logistics of the restructure now starting with appointments to core library posts.

Councillor Heathcoat, the Cabinet Member for Cultural Services, highlighted sections of the report (**SSC6**) of particular interest to the committee. She referred to having kept elected members informed about progress, as she had undertaken to do, noting that she had not received any replies or comments from members. She thanked Karen and her staff for their hard work.

Karen Warren responded to a range of questions from members including noting a project management approach to the changes, being on track for milestones and financial savings, very positive meetings with Library Friends Groups over the last six months, learning from a visit to Hillingdon Council, publicity for the launch of the e-books facility and ability to access the internet from our libraries.

49/12 DIRECTOR'S UPDATE - FIRE & RESCUE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

(Agenda No. 7)

David Etheridge, Chief Fire Officer and Head of Community Safety, updated the committee about key issues, including:

- The Joint Fire Control project with Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue a project agreed by Cabinet progresses and both the Cabinet Member, Cllr Heathcoat, and the Chairman of this Scrutiny Cllr Stratford attend and sit on the Programmer Sponsoring Group to ensure they are actively involved and informed of progress
- Thanks to staff in relation to the Olympics, in particular those who volunteered their time, and Thames Valley Police noting Assistant Chief Constable John Campbell who had shown exemplary command skills
- The appointment of Simon Furlong as Assistant Chief Fire Officer, who brought valuable experience of 22 years' service in West Sussex, replacing Nathan Travis who is himself taking on the role of Deputy Chief Fire Officer

David Etheridge expressed his personal thanks to Colin Thomas, the retiring Deputy Chief Fire Officer, who was present at the meeting. He referred to his professional attitude, attention to detail, loyalty and outstanding and unstinting support given to the council and public of Oxfordshire over 21 years of service. This was echoed by the Chairman, Councillor Lilly, who had been asked by all councillors to thank Colin Thomas for his dedication and excellent service to the people of Oxfordshire over many years. Councillor Viney and the portfolio holder, Councillor Heathcoat, also paid tribute to his work and expressed their gratitude.

The Chief Fire Officer responded to questions from members of the committee, in particular relating to staff and union involvement in the Fire Control project. He acknowledged the importance of this area of work as well as the technical and operational side of the project, noting that implementation of the new arrangements was due in April 2014. In response to concerns expressed by Councillor Pressel, he invited her to meet directly with those concerned. He also confirmed that the Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue service, while working on a joint solution with Cambridgeshire, were aware of progress and would be welcome to re-join the Thames Valley project.

50/12 OXFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE - INTEGRATED CORPORATE RISK REDUCTION STRATEGY

(Agenda No. 8)

Nathan Travis, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, gave an overview of the strategy (**SSC8**), noting that at the half way point of the "365 Alive" campaign started in 2006 targets in all three areas of activity are being exceeded. He pointed out that the Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service is in an excellent position to focus on prevention and protection activities, as part of the county council and working closely with other emergency services.

In response to questions from members of the committee, he confirmed that the service is working closely with district councils and colleagues in public health. He

undertook to respond directly to Councillor Pressel on specific queries. David Etheridge also responded to a query by Councillor Goddard with regard to the location of fire stations and by Councillor Viney about the integrated approach to road safety.

51/12 REVIEW OF PAYDAY LENDING

(Agenda No. 9)

Kate Davies, Trading Standards Team Leader, and Richard Webb, Acting Head of Trading Standards and Community Safety, responded to questions by the committee on the report provided (**SSC9**). Discussion included clarification of what constitutes criminal behaviour with regard to money lending, confirmation of helplines and advice available and the importance of promoting financial literacy.

As a result of the discussions, it was **agreed** for:

- Councillor Bill Service to put a motion to Council concerning the role envisaged by national government for Citizens Advice as to who would fund that service, seconded by Councillors Goddard and Gearing
- Councillor Heathcoat to liaise with Councillors Tilley and Chapman, as Cabinet Members for Education and for Children and the Voluntary Sector respectively, about encouraging schools to promote financial literacy
- The service to circulate updated local information about debt advice in the county and the findings of the Office of Fair Trading's national review once published to the committee.

52/12 CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU CONSUMER EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

(Agenda No. 10)

Kate Davies, Trading Standards Team Leader, introduced Gill Tishler, representing Oxfordshire Citizens Advice Bureaus (CAB), who gave an overview of this pilot project run together with Oxfordshire Trading Standards (**SSC10**). The pilot is taking place as the CAB is preparing to become the publicly funded voice of the consumer under the government's proposals to changing the consumer landscape.

Gill Tishler outlined the three main areas of the project, around the partnership of advice agencies focusing on consumer issues, gathering and sharing information between agencies and awareness raising and campaigning. She also highlighted progress to date and work planned over the coming six months.

It was **agreed** for the project newsletter, current contact list of organisations with interest in the project and information sharing protocols to be shared with the committee. Members are welcome to pass on the newsletter and to suggest any other local organisations that could be involved.

53/12 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

(Agenda No. 11)

The committee's draft work plan had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting as requested. The chairman confirmed meetings with senior officers to

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identify items have taken place and asked members to suggest any additional items. The chairman confirmed that the update on Road Safety would be included within the committee's work programme.

54/12 CLOSE OF MEETING
(Agenda No. 12)

The meeting finished at 12.30pm.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing