

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Economic and Social Overview & Scrutiny Committee
held in Committee Room I, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxon
at 6.30pm on Thursday 10 September 2015

PRESENT

Councillors: P J Handley (Chairman), Mrs E H N Fenton (Vice-Chairman), Mrs J C Baker, M A Barrett, Mrs L C Carter, J C Cooper, Mrs M J Crossland, Mrs J M Doughty, H B Eaglestone, E J Fenton, J Haine and P D Kelland

Also Present: D S T Enright and J F Mills

26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A C Beaney and T N Owen.

The Chief Executive reported the following temporary appointments:

Mrs J C Baker attended for Mr B J Woodruff

Mr E J Fenton attended for Mrs L E C Little

27. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers relating to matters to be considered at the meeting.

29. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

No submissions were received from the public in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure.

30. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATE REPORT

The Chairman advised that he would be taking Agenda Item Nos. 8 and 9 before Agenda Item No. 5.

The Committee then received and noted the Chairman's update report.

31. THAMES VALLEY POLICE (TVP) AREA POLICE COMMANDER – ANNUAL UPDATE

The Committee received an update from Superintendent Kath Lowe, copy attached to the original copy of these minutes, in respect of policing priorities for the area and addressing specific issues raised by councillors.

Supt Lowe outlined information contained in the statistics provided, highlighted the current TVP Delivery Plan and local policing priorities together with responses to specific matters of concern.

Mr Kelland referred to the outcome rate in respect of burglary and indicated that this continued to have a very low percentage. Supt. Lowe acknowledged the concern and further advised that crime in rural areas was more difficult to solve. Supt Lowe explained

that whilst rural crime was now more clearly defined it was still difficult to solve crimes as it was less likely there would be CCTV, forensic evidence or witnesses.

Mr Handley expressed concern at the low outcome rate for making off without payment and suggested that this would mainly be at petrol stations and many now had CCTV or number plate recognition facilities.

Mrs Crossland referred to figures relating to possession of weapons and sought clarification as to the types of weapon and age profile of offenders. Supt Lowe advised that it was generally knives and offenders were predominantly under the age of 25.

Mr Fenton questioned why the outcome rate was not 100% in respect of drugs crime as this was purely based on intelligence provided. Supt. Lowe advised that not all such information led to a conviction.

Mr Handley expressed concern that it was difficult to identify trends in the data as the criteria appeared to be changing regularly. Supt Lowe acknowledged the concern and clarified that indicators were set by government. Mr Handley asked about staff cuts and whether there had been any impact locally. Supt Lowe confirmed that there had been no cut in front line staff with savings being achieved through changes to other 'back office' services.

Mr Eaglestone referred to recent press coverage that the Metropolitan Police may look to replace PCSO's with volunteers. Supt Lowe indicated that it was a matter for individual forces. In response to Mr Enright it was confirmed that there had been no reduction in PCSO's in the area.

Mr Handley asked about the recording of cautions that had been issued. In response it was explained that these were included in the overall outcome figures.

Mr Kelland questioned why drug crime was not a priority. Supt Lowe acknowledged the concern and confirmed that such crime was dealt with through intelligence received by officers and street searches. Mrs Doughty indicated that a number of incidents had been reported about drug use in public but it did not appear that action had been taken. Supt Lowe undertook to refer the matter to the neighbourhood team.

Supt Lowe detailed the information in the 2015-2016 Delivery Plan and in particular highlighted child sexual exploitation and cyber-crime as major issues.

Mrs Doughty, in acknowledging the current funding issues and potential cuts, sought an assurance that funding for the Kingfisher project would continue. Supt Lowe indicated that child sexual exploitation was a priority when budgets were considered. In response to Mr Mills it was confirmed that training of officers in respect of such crimes was on-going and had been widened.

Mr Cooper thanked Supt Lowe for the work undertaken in Woodstock which had been very effective. Mr Kelland concurred that this was also the case in Eynsham.

Mr Kelland asked if the lack of holding cells in the district meant that decisions to caution could be taken in preference to charging somebody. Supt. Lowe acknowledged the concern and advised that officers needed to make a decision at the time. When prisoners were taken to Abingdon there was a prisoner handling team that would process the arrested person and allow officers to return to duty quickly.

Mr Handley thanked Supt Lowe for her attendance at the meeting and for answering the questions so openly. Mr Handley asked that the appreciation of the committee of the work of local policing teams be passed on.

RESOLVED: That, the update be noted.

32. OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL SUPPORTED TRANSPORT (SUBSIDISED BUSES AND DIAL-A-RIDE) CONSULTATION

The report of the Head of Leisure and Communities seeking consideration of a consultation document from Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), together with the views of Local Members, in respect of proposed changes to subsidised bus services and to the Dial-a-Ride service in Oxfordshire was received.

The Community Development Manager introduced the report and outlined the options contained in the report. Option 1 being the withdrawal of all bus subsidies; and option 2 being the reduction of bus subsidies. Within option 2, the committee was advised that OCC favoured support of the off peak option. The process for consideration of the consultation by this council and OCC was explained. It was noted that OCC and the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council had been invited to attend the meeting but no representatives had been available. Attention was drawn to the overarching comments contained in paragraphs 3.13 to 3.18 of the report.

In response to Mr Handley it was confirmed that the consultation related only to services receiving a subsidy and also the Dial-a-Ride service. Mr Handley referred to the subsidy figures and that these appeared to be very high for some services.

Mrs Fenton highlighted the 18/19 bus service that served a number of communities in her ward. Mrs Fenton suggested any reduction in provision would be detrimental as the services provided an important link for the elderly and those going to Oxford. Mrs Fenton indicated that a number of local councils in that area had responded to the consultation expressing concern at any changes.

Mr Barrett concurred and highlighted that Bampton had a large elderly population and the bus link was vital. Mr Barrett reminded members that permission had been granted for a large development in Bampton and this needed to be borne in mind by OCC as more people could potentially need the bus service. Mr Mills suggested that a number of large developments had been approved in the district and the situation in Bampton was being replicated elsewhere. Mr Mills suggested that the use of developer contributions could be beneficial in preserving services. The Strategic Director reminded the committee that whilst this was possible it could only provide help for a limited time and was not a permanent solution.

Mr Fenton expressed concern at the quality of the data provided with the consultation and that the patronage figures were limited, being for one month only, and the subsidy figures were difficult to reconcile easily.

Mr Mills referred to the X15 service between Witney and Abingdon and highlighted that this was an important link between the two towns and in particular the campuses of Abingdon and Witney College. Mr Mills suggested that the college could be engaged in discussions regarding funding of this service if reductions were implemented. The Community Development Manager advised that there had been engagement from the college when the service was introduced but could not confirm whether that was still the case.

Mr Kelland highlighted that tourism was important in the district and access to facilities and attractions, such as the Thames Path, by public transport should be retained. Mr Kelland suggested that options for delivering alternative provision may also need to be considered.

Mr Handley indicated that it would be beneficial, at an appropriate time, if representatives of OCC attended a meeting to explain the decisions reached and how services are to be structured in the future.

Mrs Carter referred to previous decisions relating to more stringent enforcement of access to non-emergency patient transport and the knock on effect this had to public transport, Mrs Carter questioned the capacity of voluntary services to cover any further reductions in service.

Mr Handley then summarised the debate and members agreed that Cabinet should be recommended to support the comments contained in paragraphs 3.13 to 3.18 of the report together with the service specific and other comments raised at the committee.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet be recommended:

- (a) To support the overarching consultation comments contained in paragraphs 3.13 to 3.18 in the response to Oxfordshire County Council;
- (b) That specific comments be included in respect of the potential impact of reductions to the 18/19 and X15 services;
- (c) That the response should make reference to the inadequacy of the consultation data provided, the importance of maintaining access to the main market towns, the role of smaller rural service centres that support the surrounding villages and hamlets, tourism in the district, the effect of future development and the potential impact on the voluntary sector; and
- (d) That representatives of OCC be invited to attend a future meeting to explain the decisions reached and how services are to be structured in the future.

33. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2015/2016

The Committee received the report of the Strategic Director providing an update on the work programme for the committee for 2015/2016.

RAF Brize Norton

Mr Handley advised that a further meeting of the Liaison Group had been arranged for October and outlined the parties involved in the group.

Quality of Care in Hospitals

The Strategic Director advised, in respect of Chipping Norton Hospital, that a report on the future of intermediate care in the town would be considered by OCC Cabinet on Tuesday 15 September. If the recommendation that a consultation be undertaken was supported it was anticipated that this committee would have input to the process and officers would ensure that members were kept up to date with progress.

The Strategic Director reported that an update had been received from Oxford Health in respect of Witney Hospital. The committee was advised that the temporary closure had been completed with 30 beds now open at Witney located currently on the first floor whilst the kitchen downstairs was refurbished. Bed numbers at other hospitals were being increased and it was planned to have that work completed by the end of the month.

It was noted that this was a new requirement which arose after discussions had started to ensure that standards were being complied with and this included removal of asbestos which is why the remaining ward had been located upstairs until completed. Once the kitchen refurbishment downstairs was completed the ward would be relocated downstairs so that work can begin upstairs (gym and dining room). The Council would be advised when this was to happen.

The Strategic Director clarified that with respect to staff all had been redeployed as previously discussed. Staff were either working in the remaining ward at Witney or had been redeployed to other community hospitals and services. It was clarified that five staff had left during the period of the consultation but these all predated the consultation and were not connected with the move. There was absolutely no truth that anyone had been 'forced' to resign and Oxford Health had been following their organisational change policy throughout. With regard to the five staff all were related to moving to other jobs due to marriage or house moves and two were staying with the trust and three were moving out of Oxfordshire. A member of staff had also retired during this time.

The Strategic Director advised that Oxford Health would be happy to arrange a date to come back to meet with Councillors and a site visit could also be arranged once all works were complete but this was likely to be towards the end of the year.

Mr Handley referred to the meeting with Oxford Health held in August and asked if a public statement had yet been made confirming that the ward would re-open. The Strategic Director confirmed that this was not yet forthcoming and acknowledged that it was important that clarification was received soon to end speculation. This had been raised with Oxford Health earlier in the day. Mr Mills, Cabinet Member for Health, advised that he would continue to press for a response and it was vital that trust was rebuilt between management and staff. Mr Enright concurred that clarification of the issues was needed at the earliest opportunity.

Mrs Doughty agreed that pressure needed to be maintained and it would be positive if the offer by Oxford Health to attend a meeting was taken up. The Strategic Director advised that a wider consultation on community hospital provision was expected in autumn and a further meeting would be beneficial.

Mr Fenton asked about the revised work programme as a result of finding asbestos and whether this would lead to a delay in re-opening. The Strategic Director indicated that this was not anticipated to be the case.

Mr Cooper emphasised that it was important to protect health provision and reminded members that a community hospital had already been lost at Burford in the past.

Members thanked Christine Gore and Mr Mills for their hard work and indicated that if any further support was needed then they would assist if they could.

Leisure Contract

Mrs Crossland expressed concern that Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) had only recently begun contacting members who were acting as liaison with GLL and also highlighted a specific issue in respect of disabled provision at Carterton Leisure Centre. Mrs Carter advised that she had received a lot of feedback regarding the facilities in the district and would be passing that on to GLL.

Mr Mills, Cabinet Member for Leisure, acknowledged that communication with GLL was a concern and had been raised with them through the advisory board.

Mr Kelland asked about the letting of the new contract and the process to be undertaken. Mr Mills confirmed that it would be a full competitive tender process with a view to achieving a good value contract whilst delivering the aspirations of the council in respect of leisure facilities. The Strategic Director indicated that choices would need to be made on what the council wanted to deliver through the contract and an initial report would be presented to Cabinet in October.

Mr Handley suggested that investment was needed to meet the needs of an increasing population in the district and options, including alternative funding, needed to be carefully considered. Mr Handley advised that information previously requested by the committee had been emailed to members and highlighted the audited accounts of GLL.

RESOLVED: That progress on the Committee Work Programme for 2015/2016 be noted subject to the issues raised at the meeting.

34. CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The report of the Chief Executive giving an opportunity for the Committee to comment on the Work Programme published on 18 August 2015 was received. The committee noted that some items had been deferred until later in the year.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Work Programme published on 18 August 2015 be noted.

35. OXFORDSHIRE GROWTH BOARD

Consideration was given to the report of Andrew Tucker, Strategic Director, summarising the work going on through the Oxfordshire Growth Board in general conformity with the statutory duty to co-operate looking in particular at how to address the issue of any unmet housing need arising from Oxford which cannot be accommodated within the city boundaries.

Mr Cooper thanked the Strategic Director for producing the report but highlighted paragraph 3.3 and suggested that it was not clear by how much Oxford City would be unable to meet its identified need and whether all options within the city had been explored. Mr Cooper indicated that there was a whole further debate around the designated green belt and what was included in that. The Strategic Director acknowledged the concern and that the predicted need and capacity within Oxford needed clarification.

Mr Kelland sought further information about the setting of the housing figures. The Strategic Director clarified that this was set through the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). The committee noted that the figures were quite high and Oxford was one of the least affordable places to live in the country.

In response to Mr Kelland it was advised that currently Oxford City Council were expressing a preference for development to the north and south of Oxford but this did not preclude options in West Oxfordshire. The Strategic Director reported that the city council had objected to the draft West Oxfordshire Local Plan on the basis that the issue should be considered now rather than in a local plan review at a later date.

The Committee thanked the Strategic Director his report.

RESOLVED: That, the report be noted

36. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – FIRST QUARTER 2015/2016

The report of the Shared Head of Business Information and Change providing information on the Council's performance at the end of the first quarter of year 2015/2016 was considered.

Mr Handley highlighted the red indicators relating to Building Control. The Strategic Director advised that there had been some staffing issues that had now been resolved. In respect of indicators PL1 to PL3 it was noted that performance had improved considerably and these were now green.

RESOLVED: That, the report be noted.

37. MEMBERS QUESTIONS

Developer Contributions

Mr Eaglestone sought clarification regarding the implementation and use of developer contributions. In response the Strategic Director advised that this would mainly be done through the Community Infrastructure Levy that would be progressed in conjunction with the emerging local plan.

Children's Centres

Mrs Carter expressed concern at recent reports that OCC was looking to change the delivery model for Children's Centres and emphasised the detrimental impact that closures or reductions in service could have on a large number of families. Mrs Carter highlighted the services, many of which were preventative, provided at centres. Mrs Carter stressed that the services were delivered by professionals and it was unlikely that the voluntary sector could cover any gaps in provision.

The Strategic Director advised that a report was to be considered at the OCC Cabinet on 15 September with regard to a consultation on the proposals and officers would obtain further details and ensure that the district council had input to that process.

Mr Handley acknowledged it was an important matter and that members needed input to the consultation. Mr Handley highlighted the financial pressures on OCC and options would need to be carefully considered. Mr Handley suggested that communication on the issue could have been better handled.

Syrian Refugee Crisis

Mr Kelland referred to the refugee crisis and sought clarification of the council's role in this matter. Mr Mills advised that an email had been sent to all members and a steering group of members and officers had been created to look at the issue and co-ordinate matters.

38. ANDREW TUCKER

Mr Handley reminded members that this would be the last meeting of the committee that Andrew Tucker, Strategic Director, would be attending before his retirement later in the month. Mr Handley expressed his thanks to Mr Tucker for his input and support to the committee and wished him all the best for his retirement. The committee associated themselves with the Chairman's comments.

The meeting closed at 8.40pm

Chairman