

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee

held on Thursday, 29 September 2016 at 7.00 pm

at the Meeting Room 1, 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, Milton, OX14 4SB



Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Debby Hallett (Chairman), Alice Badcock (Vice-Chairman), Ed Blagrove, Vicky Jenkins, Monica Lovatt, Ben Mabbett, Chris Palmer and Judy Roberts

Officers: Clare Kingston, Suzanne Malcolm, Dave Morrell, Jo Paterson and Ron Schrieber

Also present: Councillors Charlotte Dickson and Mike Murray, and Simon Hewings (Capita)

Sc.16 Notification of substitutes and apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Katie Finch.

Sc.17 Minutes and actions arising and referral

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2016 were agreed as accurate and were signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment:

Minute 13: Capital and New Homes Bonus grant schemes

In Resolution 3, insert "they consider that," between "that" and "in order"

Sc.18 Declarations of interest

None.

Sc.19 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

The Chairman reported that:

- Her intention was for Scrutiny to make substantive recommendations to add value to draft policies and strategies;
- If members noticed any typographical or grammatical errors in any of the committee documents, they should notify democratic services outside of the meeting.

Sc.20 Statements, petitions and questions from the public relating to matters affecting the Scrutiny Committee

Joyce Hutchinson had submitted the following questions regarding the Beacon (see also Minute 21 below):

“As President of the Vale Twinning Association I am regularly involved with the Wantage and Grove Twinning Association. Recently a difference of opinion has developed between officers of the Vale and the Wantage and Grove Twinning Association regarding the location of the Twinning Association cabinet which presently is in the Beacon. In justifying their request for removal of this cabinet the Vale officers have advised me that the Beacon is now a business.

I and the Wantage community are not aware of any privatisation of the Beacon
I wish to ask the members for clarification of the nature of the Beacon as a business, for example:

Is it a limited company, if so

Who are the shareholders, who are the members of the board and who are the officers of the Board?

Is it intended to make a profit and where will the accounts be published?

If it is not a limited company in what sense is it a business?”

It was agreed to provide her with a written response.

Sc.21 The Beacon, Wantage

The committee considered the report of the head of corporate strategy setting out the performance of The Beacon in 2015/16 against targets and progress towards meeting its 2016/17 targets.

Charlotte Dickson, Cabinet member for leisure, introduced this item. Also present to answer questions were Jo Paterson, partnership development officer (leisure), Dave Morrell, team leader, The Beacon, and Clare Kingston, head of corporate strategy.

The report stated that, since 2012, it had been necessary to increase expenditure, predominantly on staffing costs, but that this had led to an increase in usage and income. In 2015/16, expenditure had reduced and income increased, resulting in a reduction of £22,699 in the operational deficit.

In response to questions and issues raised by the committee, it was reported that:

- A five year plan for The Beacon had been agreed in 2011/12 which anticipated that it would be breaking even by now. However, it soon became apparent that this was unrealistic and the current target is to reduce the operational deficit year on year.
- It was also intended to introduce more activities and better financial management and information.
- Energy efficiency measures already implemented should lead to further reduction in expenditure.
- Bookings of the Ridgeway had increased in 2016/17.
- Regular room hirers received a discount on their hire costs.

- The industry benchmark was 42% occupancy rates and this was what The Beacon was aiming for.
- New initiatives under consideration included conference packages and live streaming of National Theatre productions.
- Parking provision was unlikely to be increased in the foreseeable future.

The committee welcomed the positive report but took the view that more specific key performance indicators and financial targets were required in order to monitor progress more effectively.

RESOLVED: to

1. To note The Beacon's performance against targets.
2. To **RECOMMEND** the Cabinet member for leisure:
 - To implement a detailed performance plan for The Beacon and, if possible, include this, or reference to it, in the forthcoming leisure provision strategy.
 - That future key performance indicators should not be based solely on reducing the operational deficit but should also measure customer and staff satisfaction.
 - That next year's performance review should include not only positive comments received from new and returning customers but also negative comments, complaints and lessons learned.

Sc.22 Financial outturn 2015/16

The committee considered the head of finance's report on the financial outturn 2015/16 together with a brief report detailing the reasons for the delay in implementing leisure capital schemes.

Simon Hewings, the chief accountant from the Council's contractor, Capita, introduced this item. Also present to answer questions on the leisure capital programme was Clare Kingston, head of corporate strategy.

Details of the revenue underspends, which were largely due to over achievement of income, and overspends were set out in the report. With regard to overspends in the planning service, the committee requested further information on the reasons for the increased expenditure on legal advice on controversial applications.

With regard to the slippage of leisure capital scheme, the committee was advised that:

- There was capacity to manage these projects; a vacant post would be filled as works came on stream.
- The apparent discrepancy in some of the figures was due to the fact that the slippage related to 2015/16 capital budgets whereas the capital programme was delivered over a number of years.
- The cost of the White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre essential pool tank works was approximately £435,000.

RESOLVED: to note the overall outturn position of the council as well as the outturn of individual service areas and the reasons for the delay in implementing leisure capital schemes.

Sc.23 Abingdon moorings policy

The committee considered a draft policy to manage the moorings that the council owns on the River Thames at Abingdon.

Suzanne Malcolm, economic development manager, introduced this item. Also present to answer questions was, Mike Murray, Cabinet member for economic development and property.

In response to questions and issues raised by members, the committee was advised that:

- The draft policy was based on a South Oxfordshire policy for moorings at Wallingford.
- These were the only Vale Council-owned moorings in the Vale of White Horse.
- There was a need to regularise the current informal arrangements. At present a moorings inspector was employed on a casual basis to monitor the moorings.
- A bylaw would need to be established in order for the draft policy to be enforced. This was likely to take a matter of months.
- The cost of employing a moorings inspector on a more regular basis to enforce the cost had not yet been calculated but would be done as part of the work on the new bylaw.
- It was not intended to consult Abingdon Town Council or any other stakeholders further on the draft policy. Any interested parties could make representations to the Cabinet member or officers.

Following further discussion the committee

RESOLVED: to recommend the following alterations to the draft Abingdon moorings policy to the Cabinet member for economic development and property:

- That the definition of “vessels” in paragraph 9 be expanded.
- That the definition of “nuisance” in paragraph 19 be clarified by reference to other council policies.
- That with regard to commercial activities, as set out in paragraph 23, further work be carried out on the application process for such activities.
- That with regard to applications for moorings (paragraph 42), a standard application form be drafted and be available on line.
- Whilst the land on which the moorings are situated is within Vale Council ownership, some lies within South Oxfordshire district; therefore there is a need to check with the legal team about the need for a SODC bylaw to be in place to cover these sections.

Sc.24 Work schedule and dates for all South and Vale scrutiny meetings

The committee considered its current work schedule and noted that the leisure provision strategy had been deferred to the January 2017 meeting and that a proposed communications strategy would be considered by the joint scrutiny committee in November.

The committee agreed to consider the final draft budget at an additional meeting in February 2017, rather than include it in the business at the January meeting..

It was agreed to add the following items to the workplan:

- Neighbourhood planning grant funding
- Local Plan Part 2 – public consultation

The chairman agreed to consider whether the Vale scrutiny workplan item on consultation should go to joint scrutiny.

A member expressed the view that scrutiny should be actively involved in the budget setting process rather than simply reviewing the final draft budget. The chairman agreed to discuss scrutiny's role with the officers.

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm