

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee

held on Thursday, 15 January 2015 at 7.00 pm

at the Lockinge, The Beacon, Portway, Wantage, OX12 9BY



Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Jim Halliday (Chairman), Charlotte Dickson (Vice-Chairman), Eric Batts, Tony de Vere, Debby Hallett, Mohinder Kainth, Sandy Lovatt, Julie Mayhew-Archer, Fiona Roper, Richard Webber and Bill Jones (In place of Jason Fiddaman)

Officers: Katharine Doherty, Steve Culliford, Trudy Godfrey, Liz Hayden, Anna Robinson, Sally Truman, Chris Tyson and Yvonne Cutler-Greaves

Also present: Councillor Elaine Ware (Cabinet member for Economy, Leisure and Property) and Councillor Reg Waite (Cabinet member for Commercial Services)

Number of members of the public:

Sc.192 Notification of substitutes and apologies for absence

Councillors Jason Fiddaman and Alison Thomson had sent their apologies for absence; the former being substituted by Councillor Bill Jones.

Sc.193 Declarations of interest

Councillor Charlotte Dickson declared an interest in the item on the Community Safety Partnership: review and future, as her father, Councillor Bill Jones, was the Cabinet adviser on the partnership and as such was under scrutiny.

Sc.194 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

The strategic director updated the committee on the fire incident at the council's shared offices at Crowmarsh Gifford. This had resulted in some disruption to services. The committee noted the details of an initial assessment of the damage and the plans to re-install council services.

The chairman announced that consideration of the community infrastructure levy had been postponed until the committee's February meeting due to recent changes in the rules proposed by government.

Sc.195 Statements, petitions and questions from the public relating to matters affecting the Scrutiny Committee

None

Sc.196 Action List

Due to a fire at the council's offices in Crowmarsh Gifford in the morning, no action list was available for this meeting.

Sc.197 Community Safety Partnership: Review and Future

Councillor Charlotte Dickson declared an interest in this item and left the room during its consideration as her father, Councillor Bill Jones, was under scrutiny as holding the position of Cabinet adviser on community safety.

The committee considered the annual report on the South and Vale Community Safety Partnership. Attending the meeting were community safety officers and the Cabinet adviser, Councillor Bill Jones. Thames Valley Police inspector Andy Boyd had submitted his apologies.

The community safety partnership was a multi-agency partnership involving South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils, Oxfordshire County Council, Thames Valley Police, the Oxfordshire Probation Service, the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, Oxfordshire Public Health and NHS Oxfordshire, and local housing associations. Together they worked to reduce crime and the fear of crime, focusing on the benefits to residents, businesses, and partner agencies. The partnership's report looked back at performance over the past year and looked ahead to a plan for the forthcoming year. The report also assessed the financial support available.

The committee questioned the officers on the report and noted:

- the funding situation had required the team to re-think its approach and become more intelligence-led
- the plan for the forthcoming year was to shift focus more towards support for vulnerable people--the committee supported this
- the team was constantly reviewing how best to communicate with the public and advertise the help that it could offer
- the reasons behind the 21 per cent increase in anti-social behaviour statistics would be sought from Thames Valley Police and communicated to the committee
- the council's partners remained serious about the work of the partnership despite continuing pressures on their funds
- improvements would be made to the presentation of the statistics in future reports
- there was a useful service called Thames Valley Alert that notified subscribers to crimes and cases that had been solved

RESOLVED: to

- (a) note the progress that the South and Vale Community Partnership has made so far in 2014/15 in delivering its priorities and statutory functions;
- (b) thank staff for their report and congratulate them on their performance over the past year, particularly in relation to tackling domestic violence;

- (c) suggest that staff concentrate on the work carried out by the council and communicate the partnership's existence and the services it provides;
- (d) ask officers to explore with Sovereign Housing Association to participate in the Smartwater project;
- (e) ask officers to explore whether the Needle Exchange scheme can be extended to pharmacies in Wantage and other areas where there is less involvement currently, or explore publicising the schemes currently available;
- (f) request that the partnership concentrates on reporting actual crime;
- (g) encourage the community safety team and other partners to pursue and take up any grants available, including grants available from the Vale, and town and parish councils;
- (h) support the direction of travel towards helping vulnerable people; and
- (l) express support for the growth bid to allow the community safety team to continue its good work.

Sc.198 Abbey Meadow and Gardens

The committee considered the report from the head of economy, leisure and property on a project to improve the Abbey Meadows in Abingdon. Attending the meeting to answer questions were the corporate strategy officers and the Cabinet member for leisure.

The committee noted that Cabinet had asked officers to consult on proposals to improve the area. The feedback from workshops with key community groups, young people, and the Abingdon Area Committee had led to the officers proposing three scenarios, each having a theme, a main focus item, and a choice of other improvements within a budget. These scenarios were:

1. develop the site as a sporting/leisure destination, with improvements to the swimming pool being the main focus
2. a tourism/recreational destination with a café at the swimming pool site
3. a green open space with emphasis on low-key natural, including an amphitheatre

The three scenarios would be subject to a public consultation in February and March, if the £500,000 growth bid for the first phase of this project was approved by Council in February.

The committee made some suggestions on how the consultation was conducted. Some councillors believed that offering three scenarios was not the best form of consultation on this project. Instead they suggested a matrix-style consultation where consultees could choose options from a list up to a budget, with each option having a monetary or points value. The committee urged officers to advertise the consultation well, and use the Town Council's magazine, the Town Cryer, as well as local newspapers and a Facebook page.

The committee thanked the officers for the progress made with the project.

RESOLVED: to suggest that prior to the consultation on the scenarios to improve the Abbey Meadows in Abingdon, the Cabinet member for leisure gives consideration to:

1. undertaking a pilot consultation to identify whether the consultation scenarios offered form an acceptable consultation method
2. using clear wording to describe the consultation options
3. asking the Scrutiny Committee members to comment on the draft consultation wording
4. advertising the consultation locally
5. offering consultees a range of schemes in a matrix system using points or costs for each item
6. asking Abingdon Town Council to include an article on the project consultation in its next edition of the Town Cryer
7. using councillors to assist with the public consultation at the community shop
8. setting up a Facebook page as part of the consultation
9. consulting the Police, in particular the Police Community Support Officers who patrol the Abbey Meadows

Sc.199 Councillor Development Programme

The committee considered the head of corporate strategy's report that outlined the pilot councillor development programme content, methodology and timetable. An officer and councillor task group had worked on a programme to help councillors develop into their roles after the May 2015 elections. Implementation of the programme was dependent on the budget growth bid being accepted by Council at its meeting in February.

The committee considered that a councillor development programme was necessary but that the pilot programme should be condensed. Councillors suggested that some training sessions did not need a whole evening and could be combined with other sessions. While some training was essential (e.g. the statutory duties of the planning and licensing committees), other training should be optional. The programme should make this distinction and the sessions clearly advertised as such. The committee also considered that the welcome session and the welcome guide were important, and councillors should be advised who they should contact about frequently asked questions from the public. Councillors need to know what they must *not* do. Finally, the committee suggested that newly elected councillors should be offered a mentor to help them in the first few months as a councillor. This could be an experienced councillor and/or an officer.

RESOLVED: to request officers to revise the councillor development programme and send a revised draft to councillors for further comment.

Sc.200 Indicative Scrutiny work programme

The committee reviewed its work programme and agreed to add an item to review the council's business continuity plan in the light of its experience following the fire at the Crowmarsh Gifford offices. The committee agreed that a reasonable period should be allowed before this review to assess the effectiveness of the continuity arrangements. The committee scheduled this matter for June or later.

The meeting closed at 9.25 pm