

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee

held on Thursday, 28 September 2017 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), Mike Badcock, Ed Blagrove, Chris Palmer, Judy Roberts, Sandy Lovatt, Robert Hall (In place of Vicky Jenkins) and Katie Finch (In place of Mohinder Kainth)

Officers: Andrew Down, Dylan Evans, Paul Howden, William Jacobs, Suzanne Malcolm, Ian Matten, Jo Paterson and Ron Schrieber

Also present: Councillors Matthew Barber, Charlotte Dickson and Robert Sharp. Simon Hewings, Chief Accountant (Capita)

Sc.16 Apologies for absence

Councillors Mohinder Kainth (substituted by Katie Finch) and Vicky Jenkins (substituted by Robert Hall) submitted apologies.

Sc.17 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 July 2017 were agreed as an accurate record and were signed by the Chairman.

Sc.18 Declarations of interest

Councillors Sandy Lovatt and Robert Hall declared that as chairman and a member of the Planning Committee respectively that would be considering a planning application for West Way, Botley in the near future, they would be stepping down from the committee and leaving the room for Agenda item 26.

Sc.19 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

None.

Sc.20 Public participation

None.

Sc.21 Performance review of The Beacon, Wantage

The committee considered the report of the interim head of waste, leisure, parks and environmental health which updated the committee on the actions taken in response to its recommendations from September 2016, set out progress towards The Beacon's 2017/18 targets and requested the committee to make further performance improvement suggestions to the Cabinet member for leisure.

Councillor Charlotte Dickson introduced this item. Also present to answer members' questions were Ian Matten, interim head of waste, leisure, parks and environmental health, Dylan Evans, leisure manager, and Jo Paterson, Partnership Development Officer.

The report set out the key performance indicators for 2016/17:

- increase in revenue and a reduction in the overall operating deficit
- increase in occupancy with more people using the venue more often
- attract new audiences and users
- improve the customer experience to ensure repeat business
- raise awareness of the facility and improve communication

Income had increased from £201,210 in 2015/16 to £214,864 in 2016/17. However, expenditure had also increased, primarily as a result of booking higher profile performers which in turn created the increase in income. Overall there was a slight increase in the operating deficit.

In response to members' questions, it was reported that:

- It was unlikely that The Beacon would ever be self-sufficient. The aim was to reduce the operational deficit year on year whilst attracting as many people as possible and ensuring that the venue was a community facility.
- The average cost per occupied hour had reduced significantly since 2012/13
- Occupancy figures were based on the number of hours that the venue was booked rather than the numbers attending.
- The largest cost was staffing followed by business rates.
- The Beacon was looking to increase secondary spend i.e. selling drinks and food to people attending events.
- A number of energy saving measures had been implemented in recent years.

The committee welcomed the report and the efforts made to reduce the operating deficit whilst ensuring that The Beacon continued to serve as an asset to the community. It was agreed that next year's report should include information on operating costs and income.

RESOLVED: to

1. Note The Beacon's performance against targets.
2. Request that next year's performance review include information on:
 - Income and expenditure budgets;
 - Environmentally friendly and energy saving measures; and
 - The Beacon's role as a community asset.

Sc.22 Financial outturn 2016/17

The committee considered the report of the head of finance/chief accountant (Capita) on the final year end position for revenue and capital expenditure against budget for the financial year 2016/17.

Simon Hewings, chief accountant (Capita), introduced this item. Also present to answer questions were Councillor Robert Sharp, Cabinet member for finance, and William Jacobs, head of finance.

With regard to revenue, Table 5 of the report showed a £1.5million variance in expenditure in 2016/17. Excluding housing benefit, the majority of the variance was due to over achievement of income. £510,000 of the income variance related to unbudgeted additional grant income for Didcot Garden Town. Other variances in income and expenditure were detailed in the report and appendices but, when Didcot Garden Town and carry forwards were excluded, the difference between the budgeted and actual revenue outturn was only £111,000.

Capital expenditure for 2016/17 was £5.0 million, a variance of £1.4 million against the approved programme for the year. There was, however, slippage of £8 million of capital schemes from 2016/17 to future years.

During further discussion, the committee noted the reasons given by the Cabinet member and officers for the slippage of specific capital projects. However, concern was expressed about the overall amount of slippage and, in particular, slippage in development and housing capital schemes.

The committee noted the accuracy of the budget forecast and welcomed the fact that there had been an under achievement of forecast income on temporary accommodation due to a reduction in demand.

RESOLVED: to

1. Note the overall financial outturn position of the council in 2016/17 as well as the outturn of individual service areas.
2. Request the interim head of development, regeneration and housing attend a future meeting to report on the reasons for the delay in implementing his service's capital schemes
3. Welcome the under achievement of income on temporary accommodation due to a reduction in demand.
4. Congratulate the officers on the accuracy of the budget forecast.

Sc.23 Council tax reduction scheme 2016/17

The committee considered the head of finance's report on the effect of the council tax reduction scheme (CTRS) on council taxpayers during 2016/17.

Paul Howden, Revenues and Benefits Client Manager, introduced this item. Also present to answer questions were Councillor Robert Sharp, Cabinet member for finance, and William Jacobs, head of finance.

In response to members' questions, the committee was informed that:

- Reducing claimants' entitlement had reduced the scheme costs. To date the current predicted savings were approximately £134,000 to be apportioned between the council, Oxfordshire County Council and the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). This figure was lower than originally anticipated, due to the CTRS caseload reducing significantly over the last two years which meant that more residents were paying council tax

(NB: The actual apportioned savings were subsequently confirmed as:

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Oxfordshire County Council | £104,638 |
| Thames Valley PCC | £ 13, 415 |
| Vale of White Horse (inc Parishes) | <u>£ 16,098</u> |
| | <u>£134,151</u> |

- Only two Discretionary Hardship Fund applications had been received in 2016/17 with one applicant awarded £83. The number of potential applicants was limited as applications could only be considered from council taxpayers who were resident at a property as at 31 March 2014 and had been affected by the changes to the CTRS.

RESOLVED: to

1. Note the report: and
2. Request that a further update be submitted to the committee in a year's time; the report to include details of the savings apportioned to the council, Oxfordshire County Council and the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner in 2017/18.

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

An updated work schedule had been tabled and was noted.

With regard to items coming to the committee in the next few months, the committee identified particular issues/information to be included in the reports and who should be invited to attend.

Sc.25 Exclusion of the public

RESOLVED: to exclude members of the press and public from the meeting for the following item of business under Part 1 of Schedule 12A Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 and as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 on the grounds that:

- i. it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, and
- ii. the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Sc.26 West Way, Botley

Councillors Sandy Lovatt and Robert Hall, chairman and a member of the Planning Committee respectively, stepped down from the committee and left the room for this item.

RESOLVED: to note the report of the head of corporate services.

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm