

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee

held at 7.00 pm on Thursday, 19 September 2013
at the Council Chamber, The Abbey House, Abingdon



Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillor Jim Halliday (Chairman), Charlotte Dickson (Vice-Chairman), Eric Batts, Tony de Vere, Debby Hallett, Sandy Lovatt, Julie Mayhew-Archer, Fiona Roper, Alison Thomson and Richard Webber

Officers: Kate Arnold, John Backley, Susan Harbour, Suzanne Malcolm, Anna Robinson and Chris Webb

Number of members of the public: 0

Sc.35 Notification of substitutes and apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Mohinder Kainth and Jason Fiddaman. Councillor Bill Jones attended as Councillor Kainth's substitute.

Councillor Elaine Ware had been due to attend the meeting as the Cabinet member for economy, leisure and property to answer questions on both of the substantive items on the agenda. However, she had had to tender her apologies for personal reasons, and it was agreed that officers would answer the questions from the Scrutiny Committee. Anything that required a Cabinet member's response would be put in writing to Matthew Barber, leader of the council.

Sc.36 Minutes

Minutes of the meeting held on 25 July 2013 and the exempt minutes of the meeting of 23 May 2013 were approved as an accurate record and it was agreed that the chairman would sign them.

Sc.37 Declarations of interest

None.

Sc.38 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

The chairman, Councillor Halliday and Councillor Kainth had not yet issued the survey of all councillors about their access to and use of the council's website and email for council business, but would do so in the week following the committee.

The s106 report would be deferred until the October meeting.

Sc.39 Statements, petitions and questions from the public relating to matters affecting the Scrutiny Committee

None.

Sc.40 Leisure Contract Monitoring (DC Leisure and Active Nation)

The Cabinet member for economy, leisure and property, Councillor Elaine Ware, was not able to attend the committee. Present were: Chris Webb, Facilities Development Officer; Kate Arnold, Leisure Manager, Dave Rolls Active Nation contract manager, David Johns, contract support manager, Active Nation and Ashley Mason from DC Leisure. DC Leisure/Active Nation are the contractors responsible for the management of the Vale of White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre.

There will be no report to Scrutiny next year, as it will be the last year of the contract, and no report to Scrutiny in 2015 which will be the first year of the new contract and key performance indicators will still be being set. However, the officers and Cabinet member will still have regular monitoring meetings with the contractors.

The discussion encompassed the following points:

- KPT10: "decrease operating costs per visits without compromising services" was affected by the additional £60,000 per year which the Vale Council now receives from the contractor as part of the contract extension;
- Active Nation are monitoring telephone calls to reduce abandoned calls and putting extra resources into place at the busiest times. The committee requested an update on the ease of getting through on the phones after the review is complete in December 2013;
- the customer satisfaction survey had a minimum of 333 completed surveys: up from 205 last year. These were a mixture of online and in person;
- Active Nation have changed their method of measuring customer satisfaction to: how strongly a customer would recommend the centre to a friend;
- Active Nation received a fair rating for customer satisfaction. However, customer complaints had reduced by one third. In addition, the total number of people using the centre has increased and the number of complainants is an extremely small percentage of the total number of centre users;
- KPT9: the council's Access to Leisure scheme is a participation scheme for residents in receipt of certain benefits and is not well promoted by either the council or the leisure centre. The scheme has a historically low take up. The weighting on KPT9 was considered by the committee to be too significant and to have a disproportionate affect on the overall assessment;
- the committee requested that the officer circulate information on the access to leisure scheme;
- the committee requested that officers consider the value of KPT 9 as a target, given that it is also partly the responsibility of the council, and report back to Scrutiny relating to this contract and for future leisure contracts;
- improvements to the car parking are slow in being delivered. Officers were asked to look at the budget for improving car parking and report back to committee;

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- the committee requested that the action plan be reissued with the final column completed.

RESOLVED

The committee resolved to recommend to the Cabinet member that DC Leisure and Active Nation should receive a rating of excellent.

Sc.41 Review of Two Hours Free Parking Scheme

The Cabinet member for economy, leisure and property, Councillor Elaine Ware, was not able to attend the committee. Present were: Suzanne Malcolm, economic development manager and John Backley, technical and facilities manager.

The Scrutiny Committee considered the question of whether the existing scheme of two hours free parking (with a sliding charging scale for subsequent hours) should be modified.

The committee had a detailed discussion and asked some questions of officers, key points are listed below:

- is there a difference in pricing across the Vale car parks for the third and subsequent hours?
- signs erected by the Abingdon Partnership at entry points to Abingdon state that there are “two hours free parking”, but it is not clear on the signposts which areas this relates to; officers were asked to contact town councils, county councils and other relevant car park operators to ensure that signage is clear;
- the committee asked the officers whether or not the free car parking had stimulated the local economy. This was a difficult thing to measure, but there had been positive feedback from local businesses and improvements in vacancy rates: footfall had fallen in shops, but not in cafés, pubs and restaurants;
- next time the business survey was undertaken, the committee asked that a question be added on what type of business each respondent was, eg, service, retail, eatery;
- officers were asked to review the cost of permits for staff working in local business such as retail.
- officers were asked to promote the benefits of free parking more actively among local residents;
- the committee asked that the officers assess the economics of three hours free parking;
- the committee requests that this item comes back to be considered in February 2014 when more up to date economic data is available.

The committee made the following recommendations/ suggestions to Cabinet

- to develop a strategy to translate increased use of car parks into economic vitality in market towns and district;
- to review a range of fees between car parks and towns;
- to consider whether level of ECNs (fines) is appropriate;
- to consider extending length of free parking period.

Sc.42 Action List

Noted.

Sc.43 Scrutiny work programme

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To add the following to the work plan:

- To receive a report on the 2013 season of the Abingdon open air swimming pool (November 2013).
- Air Quality Management Area plans.
- Wantage Civic Hall finances.
- Economic Partnerships, including SVUK: keeping informed (this to be discussed at a pre-agenda meeting to decide the best way to take it forward).

Sc.44 Dates of meetings

Noted.

The meeting closed at 9.20 pm