

Minutes



Listening Learning Leading

OF A MEETING OF THE

Scrutiny Committee

HELD AT 6.00PM ON 17 APRIL 2012

AT COUNCIL OFFICES, CROWMARSH GIFFORD

Present:

Mr D Turner (Chairman)

Mrs A Badcock, Ms J Bland, Mrs C Collett, Mr J Cotton, Ms K Crabbe, Mrs P Dawe, Mr P Harrison, Mr S Harrod, Mr T Joslin, Mrs M Turner (as substitute for Mr L Docherty)

Apologies:

Mr L Docherty and Mrs E Hodgkin submitted their apologies.

Officers:

Mrs M Beviere, Mr D Buckle, Ms L Cloke, Mr S Corrigan, Ms E Dolman, Ms C Kingston, Mr I Matten, Mr M Prosser, Mrs M Reed, Mrs J Thompson

Also present:

Mrs A Ducker, Leader of the Council
Mr D Dodds, Cabinet member for finance, waste and parks
Mr B Service, Cabinet member for leisure and grants
Mr S Chown, business manager for Biffa

31. Minutes, 14 February 2012

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 14 February 2012 as a correct record and agree that the Chairman sign these as such.

32. Review of the arts development strategy action plan

The committee considered the report of the head of economy, leisure and property setting out the arts development strategy action plan for 2012/13.

Ms L Cloke, the Arts Development Officer, Ms E Dolman, Shared Arts Development Manager, and Mr B Service, Cabinet member, introduced the report and gave a presentation about the actions completed in 2010 to 2012. Prior to the meeting she

circulated a list of the proposed actions for 2012/13 for the strategy suggesting priorities.

Ms V Jonas, from Thame Youth Theatre, spoke to the committee. She outlined the current status of the youth theatre which now ran six groups on three evenings a week at Lord William's Lower School site, ran a summer school, and produced 16 performances a year. However, sharing facilities with the school was not ideal and in the longer term the transfer of the school onto a single site could leave the theatre with no facilities. The youth theatre would like to work more closely with the arts development officer and be included in the arts development strategy for future years to ensure the long-term viability of the youth theatre organisation.

In response to questions from committee members, officers reported that:

- The majority of projects took place in and around the market towns although a youth music project, rural touring productions, and the tree of light project involved rural communities.
- There was no budget to support organisations not already supported by the council but the arts development officer could advise about other sources of funding.
- The lack of county council funding for youth work was adversely impacting on the strategy's delivery.
- The numbers participating could be increased but that was not the only measure of success. An event may be designed to have a high impact on few people or may specifically target a numerically small community. Different number of people may also be involved at different stages. For example, the number of people involved in developing the draft Great Western Park public art strategy was considerably higher in total than just the number who commented during the consultation survey.

The committee commented that:

- good and widespread publicity was needed to generate awareness and get as many people as possible involved. Parish and school newsletters, leaflets to houses, and social media could all be used to promote events;
- the strategy should give higher priority to the rural areas and the Thame to Henley area;
- a shorter plan with well defined outcomes would be easier to achieve especially given that this was an ambitious strategy and resources were very limited.

The committee concluded that the prioritisation of the actions in the strategy set out by the arts development officer circulated prior to the meeting (attached to the signed copy of the minutes) was sound.

33. Conduct of the 2011 local elections: update on progress

The committee considered the report of the head of legal and democratic services setting out the progress on the action plan agreed after the July 2011 review of the last local elections.

Mr Buckle, the returning officer, Mrs M Reed, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Mr S Corrigan, Democratic Services Manager, and Mrs M Beviere, Elections Team Leader, introduced the report and answered questions from the committee.

Mr K Arlett, a resident of Henley, spoke to the committee. He asked why the report had been delayed for three months and how the parishes' discount on their election expenses was funded as the compensation figures released and costs incurred did not show a saving. He also asked the committee to consider whether the returning officer's job should be full-time and whether he should meet more often with his team; how the new print firm had been appointed; and for detailed updates on progress on the action plan.

Officers replied to Mr Arlett. The progress report had been due in January or February but the February meeting of this committee clashed with another meeting the returning officer and elections manager had to attend. This was the next scheduled meeting of the committee. Other questions were answered in discussion with the committee.

In answer to questions from the committee, officers reported that:

1. The processes set out in the action plan were in place for the current by-elections (in Chinnor and Watlington and at Vale) and would be in place as required for forthcoming elections.
2. The joint electoral database was in place and working well.
3. Postal vote despatch was tracked from the printer to Royal Mail, and a sample of voters had agreed to notify the elections team when they received their packs. Information was sent through on the day of despatch and there had been no apparent problems.
4. The print firm had been selected on the basis of references, previous experience, and their satisfactory delivery of the annual canvass. The future selection of the printer for the major elections would place a strong emphasis on experience in elections work, reliability, and previous successful delivery of postal votes and ballot papers.
5. The time spent on each of the roles of returning officer and chief executive varied from nothing when there were no elections to nearer full-time close to a major election. Overall the returning officer role took about 5% of the chief executive's time. Normally at least three and possibly eight to ten deputy returning officers were appointed to oversee specific tasks during an election. Prior to 2007 the electoral services manager had acted as the council's returning officer.
6. The information sent out with postal vote packs was set out in statute and could not be simplified.
7. As preparations for an election progressed, detailed plans were developed and submitted in accordance with the Electoral Commission's timetable, and team

meetings became more frequent. Planning for the police and crime commissioner elections in November was already underway.

8. Details of the full compensation payment were confidential and the figures released did not reflect the full sum. Parish councils' bills had been reduced to take account of the problems with postal votes.
9. Not all actions could be fully completed until much closer to the 2015 district council elections although work on these was on-going.

Members of the committee commented:

- Could the returning officer provide information about the actual time spent on the role as an election progressed and the role and time commitment of the deputy returning officers to allow the committee to determine if this was sufficient?
- The delay in reporting back to the committee was not acceptable.
- Samples of the detailed plans for a major election should be submitted to interested committee members well before November 2014 to allow an evaluation of their completeness and effectiveness.
- If the Electoral Commission could not review the council's systems and planning for a major election, then another independent person should be sought to carry out the review.
- A summary report on the Watlington and Chinnor elections should be sent to members of the committee.

The committee agreed to note the progress on the election plan and to consider a further update report after the 15 November Police and Crime Commissioner elections at its meeting on 18 December.

34. Performance review of Biffa Municipal Limited from 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011¹

Mr D Dodds declared a personal interest in this item as he had received hospitality from Biffa at the Local Government Association Best Council Awards. In accordance with the councillors' code of conduct, he remained in the room and took part in the debate on this item.

The committee considered the report of the head of corporate strategy setting out Biffa Municipal Limited's (Biffa) performance in delivering the household waste collection, street cleansing, and ancillary services contract for the period 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011.

Mr D Dodds, Cabinet member, Ms C Kingston, Head of Corporate Strategy, Mr I Matten, Shared Parks and Waste Manager, and Mr S Chown, business manager for Biffa, introduced the report and answered questions from the committee as follows:

- The majority of streets were cleaned on approximately an eight week cycle, with higher priority given to areas of heavier use.

¹ Mrs C Collett left the meeting shortly after the start of this item.

- Biffa do not agree fully with the scoring achieved for street cleansing in the report and have arranged for an independent evaluation as a comparison. The overall cleanliness has improved with regular cleaning and the targets should be more achievable.
- The contractors removed all graffiti from South Oxfordshire District Council's property but only offensive or racist graffiti from other property.
- The service had focussed on delivering a first class waste collection service and now needed to concentrate on improving performance in street cleaning. After the deep clean the target should be easier to achieve.
- When a missed collection is reported, the call centre checks the list of bins actually collected from the rounds. The crews have to log a bin as 'not out' on the on-board computer, which takes more time than emptying the bin (which is automatically logged). The call centre staff check the computer records with the caller, as staff have to check if the bin was genuinely missed by the crews or simply not presented for collection in time. Correctly presented bins reported as missed within 24 hours would be collected. Bins not put out in time or those reported after 24 hours would not be collected.
- Management continually educate and train the crews and withdrew bonuses or disciplined staff where there were persistent problems.

Members of the committee commented:

- Performance was very good across all areas except street cleaning.
- The assessment for street cleaning was too harsh. It was hard to keep streets clean for any length of time.
- The district hosted a leading science and technology area. However visitors coming via Didcot were greeted by a fairly uninspiring street scene.
- There had been positive reports from parish councils about the litter picking and street cleaning.
- The removal chewing gum from pavements was a huge improvement for the environment in the towns.
- The weekly food waste collection made a significant contribution to the recycling rate.
- Spillages during the waste collection should be cleared by the crews as these could have a very detrimental effect on the streets.

The committee recommended that cabinet member make the final assessment of Biffa's performance taking into account the officer's report and the comments made by the committee.

The meeting closed at 8.45pm

Chairman

Date