

Minutes



OF A MEETING OF THE

Scrutiny Committee

Listening Learning Leading

HELD AT 6.00PM ON 15 NOVEMBER 2011

AT COUNCIL OFFICES, CROWMARSH GIFFORD

Present:

Mr D Turner (Chairman)

Mrs A Badcock, Mrs C Collett, Mr S Connel, Mr J Cotton, Mrs P Dawe,
Mr L Docherty, Mr P Harrison, Mr S Harrod, Mrs E Hodgkin, Mr T Joslin

Apologies:

Ms J Bland and Ms K Crabbe submitted their apologies.

Officers:

Mr S Bishop, Ms K Doherty, Mr P Howden, Ms E Morris, Mrs M Reed,
Mrs J Thompson, Mrs S Truman,

Also present:

Mr D Keen, Capita
Supt R Povey, Area Commander, Thames Valley Police
Ms H Bell, Thames Valley Police Authority

Mrs D Brown, Cabinet member for health and housing
Mr D Dodds, Cabinet member for finance, waste and parks
Mrs E A Ducker, Leader of the Council and Cabinet member for corporate strategy

14. Minutes, 23 June, 21 July, and 23 August 2011

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 23 June, 21 July and 23 August 2011 with corrections:

- 23 June: add Mrs E Hodgkin to the attendance list and delete the words 'from the public gallery' after her declaration of interest under Minute 4.
- 23 August: add Mr S Harrod to the attendance and delete his name from the apologies.

and to agree that the Chairman sign these.

15. South Community Safety Partnership annual report 2010/11

Mrs D Brown declared a personal interest as a member of the community safety partnership.

The committee considered the report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the South Community Safety Partnership's summary of projects in 2010/11.

Mrs D Brown, Cabinet member, Supt R Povey, Thames Valley Police area commander, Ms H Bell, representing Thames Valley Police Authority, Mrs M Reed, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, and Ms K Doherty, Community Safety Team Leader, introduced the report and answered questions from the committee.

1. CSP funding in 2012/13 would be 48 percent of that in 2010/11. Some savings had been made by efficiencies in creating the joint partnership and shared team and there was some Local Area Agreement funding that would be carried forward for 2012/13 which would reduce the impact of the cuts.
2. In 2013 all funding would transfer from the district and county councils to the elected Police and Crime Commissioner to disburse.
3. In some cases budgets such as that for alcohol reduction could be carried forward into the next year.
4. The partnership was keen to encourage early reporting of domestic abuse before the situation escalated to a reportable crime.
5. The 'trap vehicle' was used in rural areas where thefts from vehicles were prevalent. Items stolen from the vehicle could be traced.
6. The council aimed to remove offensive graffiti from its own premises within 24 hours and non-offensive graffiti as rapidly as possible. Graffiti removal from private property had to be undertaken by the owner.
7. The SMART community drug and alcohol service was provided solely by the mobile unit as this enabled it to effectively provide services to rural communities.
8. The Designated Public Place Order (DPPO) in Henley had proved effective in reducing offences over the Regatta period. Written information on the reduction in incidents and offences could be supplied.
9. Complex issues such as on-going problems with dealers selling used cars from areas of the public highway could be dealt with on a multi-agency basis via Joint Agency Tasking And Co-ordination (JATAC) to make sure that the most effective solution was found.
10. Officers could provide written information on the reasons why no parenting orders were issued in 2010/11.
11. Officers could provide written information about the target for robbery personal property in 2010/11.
12. Crime was reducing in part due to good intelligence work, partnership working on crime prevention and pro-actively policing known potential re-offenders on release to encourage them not to re-offend. Some spikes were caused by individuals, and people travelling into the area to commit crime were harder to stop. Crime overall had reduced by another 15 percent since April 2011.
13. The police would appreciate more powers to deal with scrap metal dealers to reduce the prevalence of metal thefts, some of which caused serious damage and disruption.

Mrs Brown thanked the partnership's representatives for attending and took the opportunity to thank everyone on the partnership for their hard work.

The committee noted the report and seconded Mrs Brown's thanks.

16. Performance review of Capita for the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011

The committee considered the report of the Head of Finance setting out the performance review and proposed assessments of performance for the separate elements of the contract delivered by Capita for the financial year 2010/11.

Mr D Dodds, Cabinet Member, Mr P Howden, Revenues and Benefits Client Manager, and Mr D Keen, Capita contract manager answered questions about the report and performance as follows.

1. There was very little Capita could do to further simplify the benefits claim form but they did help claimants complete the form either in the office or by phone.
2. As customers increased their use of the automated payment line staff would be free to deal with other calls.
3. Some of the comments, especially on business rates, about lack of confidence in advice given seemed to stem from a dislike of the advice or council decisions rather than staff giving incorrect or uncertain advice. Quality checks on assessments and telephone calls would highlight any persistent problems.
4. There were complaints that people could not speak to the person who signed the letters issued but there were more complaints when these were not signed. Capita would review these again. The assessors did not generally take calls to avoid constant interruptions. There was an emphasis on avoiding generating unnecessary calls.
5. The accuracy of benefits assessments for September was 100 per cent and the two councils should receive unqualified audits of their housing and council tax benefit subsidy claims for 2010/11.
6. In some cases, such as council tax billing, Capita could plan for an increased volume of work and calls. However, it was not always possible to predict what would generate significant extra work. Capita were working on systems to better manage these peaks in workload.
7. Bailiffs are used as the very last resort when all other options have been exhausted.
8. The council deals with all complaints about all aspects of the service. Officers had received one official complaint about business rates and three about the bailiffs, two of which were justified, in the last year.
9. Capita and council officers discussed the issues with the service. Ideally all staff would be on one site but this was not possible with the model paid for in the contract. All parties were working well together to improve and innovate and issues raised at the start of this performance period had been resolved, but the service in some areas could not be improved much further given the constraints of the contract. In the assessments, 'neither' and 'N/A' had been used interchangeably.
10. The targets for 2011/12 would almost certainly be achieved given that performance in all areas was on or nearly on track.

The committee noted that performance over the last year had been generally very good and encouraged Capita and council staff to continue to improve on this.

RESOLVED: to recommend the Cabinet Member for Finance to assess the performance of Capita for the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011 as set out in the report:

Revenues	Excellent
Benefits	Good
Exchequer	Excellent
Financial Management System	Good
Payroll	Excellent
Customer Contact	Good
Concessionary Fares	Excellent

17. Corporate Plan 2012 to 2016

The committee considered the report of the Head of Corporate Strategy. Mrs EA Ducker, Leader of the Council, and Ms E Morris, introduced the report and answered questions on the priorities. They reported that the survey results were being analysed and then would be reported to councillors. The committee made a number of comments on the priorities.

Excellent delivery of key services

Comments:

The plan should focus on increasing the proportion of people 'very satisfied', not 'fairly satisfied', and measures and targets defining excellent service set.

Effective management of resources

In point 3, officers reported that figures would be calculated taking account of national and local targets and feasibility.

Comment: In point 1, annual council tax increases, the intent should be clarified to show the proposed increases in each year.

Meeting housing need

Provision of extra care homes would be covered under the fourth point 'ensure that new developments include a range of different types of affordable housing to meet local needs'.

Officers would work to bring exception sites for housing forward in villages even if these were not explicitly retained in the national planning framework.

Officers were satisfied that the local plan adequately dealt with known planned developments at Harwell.

Comment: The time taken to determine planning applications was a relatively minor part of the time taken to develop large sites. Mrs Ducker said that a narrative on additional ways the council would help deliver housing would be added.

Building the local economy

Oxfordshire County Council had committed to funding improvements in broadband for areas with speeds below 2Mb. They had received a tenth of their bid for funds for broadband improvements. It would be useful to find what speed residents required, as the requirements for business were well-known.

Comments:

- A quantifiable target for faster broadband (coverage and speed) should be set covering all areas not just towns. This is likely to be an on-going issue as expectations are raised.
- The council should be involved in the 4G trials to improve mobile phone coverage and take advice from the pilot authorities involved in the community infrastructure levy.
- The five percent increase in the visitor economy should be measured from a baseline and whether this was including or excluding the effect of inflation clarified.

Support for communities

Comment: It was difficult to quantify the effects of the council's work with communities but these could be measured more qualitatively,

The committee noted the report and agreed with the priorities and measures in the draft corporate plan, subject to the comments above,

18. Customer Service performance

The committee considered the report of the Head of Corporate Strategy. Mrs EA Ducker, Leader of the Council, and Mrs S Truman, introduced the report and answered questions.

- The telephone system could not easily record the number of out-of-hours calls; nor could it tell whether calls were abandoned because the caller could not get an answer or for a different reason. Very few calls took a very long time to answer.
- The reasons this council had a lower use of web and email contact than other councils were unknown.
- Improving the response times for email was a high priority. Contractors were expected to work to the same response times. The Vale of White Horse District Council aimed to answer emails within 7 working days rather than this council's target of 10 working days.
- Councillors should notify the relevant strategic directors, or Mr Bishop as the director responsible for customer services, with specific problems relating to response times from council officers.

The committee commented;

- The high number of abandoned calls should be investigated further
- The website re-design was not proving beneficial as the underlying databases and core functionality had not been improved.
- The 10-day response time for emails should be shortened.
- Better use of admin staff or smart technology for dealing with voicemail messages would reduce the number of unanswered messages because officers were off-site.

- A fuller analysis of the issues and reasons would be welcome in a forthcoming detailed report.
- Generally staff were to be congratulated on their responses to telephone calls.

The committee noted the report.

19. Work Programme

RESOLVED: to add to the work programme for the February meeting a report on the impact of charges for pre-application advice on planning services, customers, and councillors including considering whether charges are putting people off seeking advice and whether applications are submitted which are not in order; and surveying councillors about the numbers and types of queries they receive regarding planning consents.

The meeting closed at 8.00pm.

Chairman

Date