

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Scrutiny Committee

HELD AT 6.00 PM ON TUESDAY 23 APRIL 2013

COUNCIL CHAMBER, SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
OFFICES

Present:

Mrs Eleanor Hards (Chairman)

Ms Joan Bland, Mrs Celia Collett, MBE, Mr Steve Connel, Mrs Pat Dawe, Mr Paul Harrison, Ms Elizabeth Hodgkin, Ms Lynn Lloyd (as substitute for Mr Stephen Harrod), Mr David Turner and Mrs Margaret Turner (as substitute for Mr Will Hall)

Apologies:

Mr John Cotton, Mr Leo Docherty, Mr Will Hall and Mr Stephen Harrod tendered apologies.

Officers:

Mr John Backley, Ms Clare Kingston, Mr Ian Matten, Mr Matt Prosser and Mrs Jennifer Thompson

Also present:

Mrs Judith Nimmo-Smith, Cabinet member

Mr David Dodds, Cabinet member

Mr David Baldwin from Monson

Mr Chris Savage and Ms Sarah Underhay from the Environment Agency

Mr Gordon Hunt, Ms Bethan Morgan from Oxfordshire County Council

Ms Sarah Burchard, Mr Andrew Hagger, Mr Chris Shipley, and Mr Spencer Whiteley from Thames Water

Mr Ian Cooper and Ms Melanie Penfold from Biffa Municipal Limited

Mr Matthew Fowler from Sodexo Limited

30 Minutes

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2013 as a correct record and to agree that the Chairman sign them as such.

31 Update on flood prevention work in the district



Listening Learning Leading

The committee heard separate presentations on the work to prevent flooding in South Oxfordshire district and on the emergency planning process in Oxfordshire. The presentations are attached to these minutes.

Mr John Backley gave a presentation and answered questions from the committee. Representatives of the Environment Agency, Oxfordshire County Council, Monson, and Thames Water, as listed in the attendance, answered questions from the committee.

General

- New sandbags filled with a polymer which expanded in water were available to parish councils or flood groups in small quantities for quick deployment.
- The Environment Agency preferred to use soft river bank protection as this was better for wildlife and providing escape from the river, or where piling was necessary to set this back to have lower piling and a soft bank at the river edge. Hard piling provided no escape route from the river for people. However, all schemes had to be assessed on their merits.
- All flood structures in Oxfordshire are being mapped. These are any structure such as a bridge, ditch, or wall, which slows or diverts water whether intentionally or incidentally. There was a presumption that developments would not create new discharge into the drainage system and that water would be retained within the sub-soil, stored, and released slowly. Drainage schemes, on site storage ponds, and SUDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems) helped achieve this.
- The Environment Agency was responsible for authorising work on main rivers. There was a focus on education and collaborative work, as often riparian owners were not aware of the impact of work they undertook or the need to discuss proposed works, and could innocently create problems.
- Under the Flood Water Management Act and Land Drainage Act, responsible authorities could go onto properties and carry out work if the landowner would not do this. However, it was sometimes better to relocate the drainage system for ease of maintenance and access.
- Highways water could be legally discharged into any ditch or soakaway or land but any problems caused by run-off from the highway would be tackled.

Henley

- The Assendon Spring near Henley had started flowing again and the level of the underlying aquifer was high. South Oxfordshire District Council had written to all riparian owners along the route of the Assendon Spring to remind them to clear the watercourse. Oxfordshire County Council contractors were clearing ditches and culverts to make sure any water could flow freely and did not impact on properties.
- It was hoped that planned repairs to the New Street sewers could be made without completely closing the road.
- A request was made for early warning of the spring flowing into Henley as it had previously flooded cellars along its route.

Sydenham area

- Thames Water confirmed that they had relined the sewers around Sydenham and Kingston Blount to stop persistent problems with foul water flooding but this had not completely solved the problem. The pumping station at Henton was being upgraded and a pumping station upstream to reduce the water reaching Sydenham was in the final design stages. High water tables had caused serious problems with sewers across Thames Water's area. Tankers had been used to

move sewage around Henton, Sydenham, Emmington, and Cuxham to reduce the likelihood of foul water flooding.

- They noted comments that on occasion tankers had spilled sewage while trying to discharge at Henton station because the entrance gates had been locked.

Wheatley

- Flood alleviation works at Wheatley to improve culverts and divert water to flow away from the village to the Thames were at the design stage and would be progressed in 2013. An application had been submitted to the Environment Agency for funding but the works did not depend on this.

Didcot

- Despite the site of the Ladygrove estate having been a large flood plain, there had been minimal flooding in the 20 years since the site was developed because the drainage was meticulously planned and properly built. Great Western Park's drainage was also carefully planned and implemented. The Environment Agency had a role to evaluate soakaway and drainage proposals and to ensure that there was no increased risk of flooding either on new developments or further up or down stream.

Emergency Planning

- County-wide emergency planning covered responses to severe weather and flooding and major accidents. District councils and Oxfordshire County Council shared resources and information and carried out joint training. The agencies and emergency services all worked well together. Parish councils had an important role in providing shelters and respite in emergencies. There was a new challenge in the use of social media such as Twitter which could be very useful for gathering and disseminating information, but had to be carefully managed to avoid being overloaded with information and to quickly counter any false information circulating. New media had to be used alongside traditional media such as local radio.
- There was an agreement between the agencies setting out the lead media contacts and how information was agreed and sent out to make sure that when under pressure there was a consistent message and correct information from all sources to give residents the confidence to take action.
- Mr David Turner commented that parish emergency plans could prove invaluable, and should cover as wide a range of events as possible. Chalgrove's emergency plan had been used effectively to alert residents and set up communications and support after a cable theft cut off landline telephone and internet services.

Members of the committee commented positively on the work the agencies and council officers had carried out to prevent flooding such as that experienced in 2007 and 2008.

The committee thanked the representatives of the agencies for attending the meeting; for working well together; and for all the work carried out with local flood alleviation groups which was making a real difference.

32 Performance review of Biffa Municipal Limited

Mr Dodds reminded the committee that he had received hospitality at events sponsored by Biffa.

The committee considered the report of the Head of Corporate Strategy setting out the evaluation of Biffa Municipal Limited's (Biffa) performance in delivering the household waste collection, street cleansing and ancillary services contract for the period 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2012.

Mr Ian Matten, Shared Parks and Waste Manager, Ms Clare Kingston, Head of Corporate Strategy, and Mr D Dodds, Cabinet member, introduced the report and answered questions from the committee. Mr Ian Cooper and Ms Melanie Penfold, representing Biffa, answered questions from the committee and presented some photographs showing the results of the 'deep clean' across the district.

They reported that:

- Biffa and the council had won a number of awards for recycling and the district achieved the second highest recycling rate in the country.
- The recycling rate had dropped slightly, partly due to the need to landfill leaf sweepings in line with Environment Agency requirements. The Oxfordshire Waste Partnership was querying these requirements.
- Small electrical recycling collection points and the deep clean along streets to remove moss, weeds, and encroaching grass had been appreciated by residents.
- The target for missed collections was exceptionally hard to meet.
- There was an on-going discussion about additions to the service. Innovations under consideration were recycling disposable nappies (there was one plant in the country which could separate these into fibre and plastic for re-use) and in the longer term collecting small electrical items at the kerbside. Kerbside collections of batteries had been introduced, making a small contribution to the recycling rate. Biffa were considering the purchase of a chewing-gum removal machine.
- There was an increase in overall waste tonnages and a decrease in recycling country-wide, not just in this district, and the message to recycle and separate waste needed to be promoted to reverse this trend.
- The deep clean targeted towns and villages, not rural roads. Feedback from town and parish councils on where they would like the deep clean crew to focus would be welcomed.
- Litter clearing was done on a regular schedule but the specification is an out put one meaning the schedule was set to achieve maximum effect given the available resources. The team worked to a cleanliness standard so could miss the target if an area became littered between clearing and inspection, or had to miss out a lower-priority area if they were required for ad-hoc work elsewhere.
- Although the service delivery was exceptional, there was a need for a better exchange of information so that the council could meet their responsibilities to report to central government. Both parties were working to improve communications.
- The Binfo app had been well received and take up was as expected. The app had been sold to other councils. Apps for bulky waste collection and to report fly-tips were being considered, but adding more to the Binfo app may make it too cumbersome.
- There was a communications and education plan to remind residents about recycling and littering.
- The garden waste service could be considered to be operating near saturation point at 20,600 households, although new applications for the service were still being made. Some properties would have no need of the service as they either had no garden or composted everything themselves.

Councillors commented that the deep clean had made an enormous difference to the areas cleaned, and that as discarded chewing gum added to the on-going problems with litter, campaigns to stop both would be welcome

Councillors asked that

- the schedule of areas to be deep cleaned be put in the councillor's information sheet well in advance, along with a request for councillors to nominate areas to be cleaned;
- the street cleaning schedule be made available to all councillors.

RESOLVED: to recommend to the Cabinet member for finance, waste and parks that the performance of Biffa from 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2012 be assessed as:

- Key performance targets - good
 - Customer satisfaction - good
 - Council satisfaction - good
- and
- Overall performance - **good**.

33 Performance review of Sodexo Ltd (Horticultural Services)

The committee considered the report of the Head of Corporate Strategy setting out the evaluation of Sodexo Limited's performance in delivering the grounds maintenance services contract for the period 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2012.

Mr Ian Matten, Shared Parks and Waste Manager, Ms Clare Kingston, Head of Corporate Strategy, and Mr D Dodds, Cabinet member, introduced the report and answered questions from the committee. Mr Matthew Fowler, representing Sodexo Limited, answered questions from the committee.

They reported that:

- The review covered the first year of the contract and because of this, and the extremely challenging weather, it was hard to accurately assess the likely performance over the life of the contract. The weather and growing conditions had a major impact on the service.
- The larger contract across the two councils allowed for reductions in cost without compromising the service. The contract required multiple schedules for different aspects of the work and was output driven so work was only carried out when needed.
- Sodexo had taken on five full-time apprentices who would be trained externally. More experienced staff then took on supervisory roles. The additional staff and changes to work patterns increased productivity.
- The contractor maintained only two play areas, and two cemeteries inherited from the rural and borough councils in 1974. Other play areas and cemeteries were managed by parish and town councils.
- Better co-ordination of schedules between Sodexo, Biffa, and Oxfordshire County Council would help to improve outcomes and reduce the work for each contractor.

The committee noted the generally good performance and were assured that the areas for improvement would be addressed.

RESOLVED: to recommend to the Cabinet member for finance, waste and parks that the performance of Sodexo Limited from 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2012 be assessed as:

- Key performance targets - good
 - Council satisfaction - fair
- and
- Overall performance - **fair**.

The meeting closed at 8.10 pm

Chairman

Date