

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Scrutiny Committee

HELD AT 6.30 PM ON TUESDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2015

MEETING ROOM 1, 135 MILTON PARK

Present:

Richard Pullen (Chair)

Steve Connel, Paul Harrison, Jeannette Matelot, David Turner and Ian White

Apologies:

Pat Dawe tendered apologies.

Officers:

David Buckle, Susan Harbour, Clare Kingston, William Jacobs, Ian Matten, Bob Watson

Also present:

Tony Harbour
Jane Murphy

1 Minutes and actions arising and referral

The committee agreed that the minutes of the meeting on 17 February 2015 were an accurate record of the meeting and the Chair signed them. There were no outstanding matters arising or referrals.

2 Declarations of interest

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests
None

Other interests

Councillor David Turner declared that he was also a parish councillor in Chalgrove, one of the parishes affected by the proposed withdrawal of the street cleansing grants.



Listening Learning Leading

3 Urgent business and chair's announcements

Simon Hewings, the report author had been unable to attend the meeting due to family circumstances. William Jacobs, head of finance, attended in his place.

4 Statements, petitions and questions from the public relating to matters affecting the Scrutiny Committee

Three members of the public had registered to speak at the meeting on the proposed withdrawal of the street cleansing grants, these were:

- Pat Haywood from Chinnor Parish Council
- David Brooker from Goring Parish Council
- Ian Hill from Watlington Parish Council

They would be invited to speak at the beginning of the relevant item.

5 Work schedule and dates for all South and Vale scrutiny meetings

The committee noted that the homelessness strategy was no longer on the work programme as it had not changed substantively since consultation and that the burial grounds item was no longer on the work programme.

6 Street Cleansing Payments

Tony Harbour, the Cabinet member for waste, introduced this item. Also present to answer questions were Clare Kingston, head of corporate strategy and Ian Matten, waste and parks service manager.

The representatives from the parish councils raised concerns about the potential loss of the street cleansing grants. The council's contractor, Biffa, cleansed to national standards, but the parishes represented felt that the grant enabled them to provide a more local and responsive solution and to a higher standard. Without the current grants, they would need to increase their parish precepts to maintain current high standards.

The committee then debated the issue, asking questions of the cabinet member and officers and the following points were raised:

- Biffa had to meet national standards on cleanliness, but not everyone felt that these were high enough;
- The grants offered good value for money and provided a local standard of cleanliness;
- In 2009 all parishes were given the option to take the grant funding, only some chose to, therefore the double funding was not inequitable;
- The rapid removal of the grant would not give the parishes a chance to consider alternative forms of funding and would, in some cases, impact on people's jobs;
- The saving to South Oxfordshire District Council would be minimal;
- Concern was raised about whether high enough standards of cleanliness could be maintained.

Recommendations and Referral.

The Cabinet member was due to take the decision in the next 8 to 10 days. The committee referred the matter back to him and made the following recommendations:

- That he reconsider the entire decision with a view to not removing the grants.
- That, if he did choose to remove the grants, he do so in a staggered way to allow the parishes to manage the change and to reduce the potential impact on people's jobs.

7 Financial Outturn 2014/15

Jane Murphy, the Cabinet member for finance, introduced this item. Also present to answer questions were William Jacobs, head of finance, and Bob Watson, accountancy manager.

The committee discussed the financial outturn asking questions of the cabinet member and officers, and the following points were raised.

- The impact of the fire had affected the forecasts and created both variance in the revenue budget and slippage in the capital programme.
- There had been an overachievement, against budget, in planning income. However this would result in future additional expenditure on staff costs to meet demand.
- Budget holders had been working hard to improve the accuracy of their forecasting and contingency had been removed from service areas and put into a central pot. These two measures were improving forecasting and outturn accuracy.
- A significant proportion of the underspend was in areas of one off expenditure in capital rather than revenue and, therefore, could not be used to support a reduction in council tax to residents. Furthermore, council tax capping would mean that reducing the tax would result in an inability to re-inflate it in following years once the current one off underspend had been reversed.

Recommendations and referrals.

This item was "to note" and so there were no recommendations or referrals arising.

The meeting closed at 8.00 pm

Chairman

Date