

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Scrutiny Committee



Listening Learning Leading

HELD AT 6.00 PM ON TUESDAY 16 SEPTEMBER 2014

COUNCIL CHAMBER, SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
OFFICES

Present:

David Turner (Chairman)

Joan Bland, Celia Collett, MBE, Steve Connel, John Cotton, Kristina Crabbe, Pat Dawe, Paul Harrison, Elizabeth Hodgkin, Margaret Turner and Denise Macdonald (as substitute for Eleanor Hards)

Apologies:

Eleanor Hards tendered apologies.

Officers: John Backley (Technical and Facilities Manager), Steve Bishop (Strategic Director), David Buckle (Chief Executive), Susan Harbour (Democratic Services Team Leader), Paul Howden (Revenues and Benefits Client Manager, Bob Watson (, Chris Webb

32 Declaration of disclosable pecuniary interest

None.

33 Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 22 April 2014 as a correct record and to agree that the Chairman sign them as such.

34 Performance Review of GLL Leisure 2013/14

David Buckle, Chief Executive, Chris Webb, Facilities Development Manager (Leisure), Ben Whaymand GLL Partnership Manager, Steve Hercus, GLL Regional Manager and Ben Dickson, GLL Divisional Director, formed the panel who presented this report to the committee and who answered questions from members of the committee.

The committee raised the following points during the course of the discussion.

There had been a significant reduction in the usage of dry sites particularly at the Abbey and Parkside centres. The panel confirmed that this was largely due to the gymnastic clubs moving to better facilities elsewhere. The contractors are continuously reviewing the programme and products which it provides to increase turnover, diversification and usage.

There appeared to be a high turnover of management staff and the committee wished to know how this would be addressed. The contractor felt that turnover was not unusually high for the leisure industry and that most of the turnover was due to promotion within the group.

The committee sought clarification on the difference between KPT 7 & KPT 9 (subsidy per visit and cost per visit). A written answer would be provided and appended to the minutes.

The committee sought clarification on how the council had exceeded the minimum income which it should receive under the contract. A written answer would be provided and appended to the minutes.

The main deliverable of the contract was to increase participation in the council's leisure facilities, yet performance on this was down by 10 percent and rated as "poor", however the head of service has used his discretion to raise this to "good" and therefore the overall assessment is "good", despite empirical evidence to the contrary. The panel confirmed that this was due to the single issue of the gymnastics club at Abbey to a stand-alone facility at Berinsfield. If that one event is excluded then participation levels have increased. Further concern was raised that the participation numbers can be so significantly skewed by one event and that there is a lack of robustness.

New vending machines are being trialled within the group locally, which uses a local company and should ensure that this service is more reliable and use healthier food options. It is hoped that this will improve the reliability of the vending machines. This should improve the KPT rating which is currently very poor.

The council satisfaction section of the report raises issues that too many maintenance items are being missed. GLL will take these concerns on board and address them.

The report highlighted the lack of activity classes and taster courses over the summer. The contractor are employing staff directly to deliver increased participation and are working with the council's participation officers. Comments have declined drastically. GLL will work to improve this for the next report.

Cleaning was highlighted as a consistent issue by council staff. GLL undertook to take this on board and to address it.

The committee noted the improvement in GP referrals and complimented the contractor in achieving this.

Some members raised concerns about the content of the reports which reviewed the performance of the council's contractors. The format of these reports is under review and will be brought back to Scrutiny before being adopted.

The committee debated whether the contractor should be awarded a “fair” or a “good” for their performance over the last year. Concern was raised that issues which have a major effect on users were not adequately covered in the report and that the Cabinet member would have to make a decision based on incomplete information.

On balance, the committee agreed to recommend an award of “good” to the Cabinet member for leisure.

35 Performance Review of Capita

David Dodds, Cabinet member for finance; Paul Howden, Revenues and Benefits Client Manager; Bob Watson, Accountancy Manager; Marcia Slater, Business Support Manager and Darren Keen, Capita Contract Manager formed the panel who presented this report to the committee and who answered questions from members of the committee.

The committee thanked the officers for the high quality of the report.

Points noted by the committee:

- Some customers had reported to councillors that they had not been happy with staff contact.
- The report had a recommended outcome of “good” rather than “excellent” as last year. The officers explained that although there was only a small percentage difference, last year the score had put the contractor marginally into the “excellent” category, and this year marginally into the “good” category.
- The committee requested information on the levels of fines if benefit payment targets are not met. The officers would supply this information to members of the committee.

The committee recommended, to the Cabinet member, that an overall score of “good” be awarded on this contract for the last year: broken down as follows:

- Excellent for Revenues
- Excellent for Benefits
- Excellent for Exchequer
- Good for Financial Management System
- Good for Payroll
- Excellent for Customer Contact

36 Review of Flooding in South Oxfordshire

To present this item, and to assist the Scrutiny Committee in its discussions were:

John Backley, Technical and Facilities Manager

Gordon Hunt, Oxfordshire County Council Highways

Bethan Morgan, Oxfordshire County Council Emergency Planning

Sarah Underhay, Environment Agency

David Baldwin, Monson Engineering

Huw Thomas, Thames Water

Spencer Whitely Thames Water

John Backley gave a presentation which is appended to these minutes.

The committee then discussed the matters raised with members of the panel. The following are the key points from that discussion.

- The Environment Agency are continuing to investigate flood risk areas.
- Oxfordshire County Council has additional money for carrier drains which should help to ease flooding on highways.
- There continues to be an Oxfordshire wide multi agency approach with engagement from a range of agencies including voluntary organisations and blue light organisations.
- There is also an important emphasis in promoting community resilience; this is often done through flood groups which are self-organising groups in areas which are, or have been, subject to flooding. Both the district and the county council provide information and support to these groups
- The committee asked that district councillors and parishes should be informed as to what flood related work needed to be done and what work had been completed.
- How many flood groups are active in South Oxfordshire and are there areas which need them.
- The committee requested that a list of key contacts in agencies provided to the officers. These could then be used as contact points for flood groups.
- The committee wished to know how Environment Agency advice to SODC had changed given events last winter, especially on planning (development control) matters; concerns were raised that advice from the EA is not clear enough when determining whether it is sustainable to build on areas which may be prone to flooding. The Environment Agency confirmed that they use the flood map to identify flooding areas when providing advice and would be pleased for councillors, or others, to report issues to bring the maps up to date.
- The committee wished to know whether it was possible to pull forward anticipated government grants to spend immediately. John Backley to check with the Environment Agency whether this was permissible.
- Thames Water confirm that the use mobile applications and other similar devices to provide up to date information to their customers.

The chairman thanked the representatives of all the agencies present for their good joint working during the flooding.

37 Financial outturn to March 2014

David Dodds, Cabinet member for finance and Bob Watson, Accountancy Manager, formed the panel who presented this report to the committee and who answered questions from members of the committee.

The following issues were raised during the committee discussion:

- The current rate of underspend was about £40 per Band D council tax payer; however, underspends did not accumulate, but rolled forward into future years.

- The outturn was partially skewed by grant money received in quarter 4, which had been uncertain when officers had estimated the outturn at the end of quarter 3.
- There had been slippage in the capital programme with regards to Didcot leisure Centre Project.
- The budget for 2014/15 which was set in February this year had removed significant amounts of potential over budgeting in the services' base budgets - the effect of these budget changes would not have been reflected in the outturn report.

The accountancy team assured the committee that several measures had been put in place to improve next year's outturn, these included:

- Contingency monies had been centralised.
- Training had been improved for budget holders to assist them in more accurately setting their budgets and profiling them across the year.
- More emphasis had been placed on budget holders for providing accurate budgets.

38 Work Programme

The committee requested that the following items be added to the work programme:

Elections: individual elector registration and other administrative processes

Corporate Services Contract

Local plan: issues and options.

The meeting closed at 8.40 pm

Chairman

Date

Minute 34, Performance Review of GLL Leisure 2013/14 – Additional Information

a) the difference between KPTs 7 & 9

The main difference between KPTs 7 & 9 is that a comparison of income against expenditure is used for KPT 7 whereas expenditure only is used for KPT9. More relevant comparators will be developed for use under the new contract.

b) how the council had exceeded the minimum income which it should receive under the contract.

The contract commenced in 2009. Since then the following have taken place:

- Thame pool uplift - started in August 2010
- Castle uplift - started October 2010
- Park uplift - started April 2011
- Thame Gym uplift - January 2013
- Various carbon management initiatives between 2009 and 2014 adding to income