

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Scrutiny Committee



Listening Learning Leading

HELD AT 6.00 PM ON TUESDAY 2 DECEMBER 2014

COUNCIL CHAMBER, SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
OFFICES

Present:

David Turner (Chairman)

Celia Collett, MBE, Steve Connel, Tony Harbour, Eleanor Hards, Paul Harrison and Elizabeth Hodgkin

Apologies:

Kristina Crabbe and Margaret Turner tendered apologies.

Officers:

Steve Bishop, David Buckle, Steven Corrigan, Kathy Fiander and Ron Schrieber

Also present:

Councillor John Cotton

45 Declaration of disclosable pecuniary interest

None.

46 Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the meetings held on 16 September and 21 October 2014 as a correct record and to agree that the Chairman sign them as such.

47 To review the action log

The previously circulated action log was noted.

The committee requested that, in future, paper copies of the action log be circulated prior to each meeting.

48 Preparation for the 2015 district, parish and parliamentary elections and progress on the elections action plan

David Buckle, Chief Executive, Steven Corrigan, Democratic Services Manager and Kathy Fiander, Electoral Services Team Manager, attended the committee to present the report and answer questions.

In response to questions, the officers reported that:

- Christopher Draper, Performance and Projects Officer, had been appointed as project manager for the 2015 elections.
- Didcot should have been included in the list of regional count venues in paragraph 15 of the report.
- Currently, approximately 8,500 electors had opted out of the open register, but this number was likely to increase.
- A meeting with the appointed printing firm would be held in January 2015 to resolve any issues such as the size of ballot papers.
- Although the final details had not been agreed, it was anticipated that the district counts would start on Friday afternoon with the parish council counts being held on Saturday. Parish councils were being consulted on their desire to hold their locally.
- Members could, on request, have access to the electoral registers published on 1 December but these were based on existing data and ward boundaries but would be republished at the end of January based on the new ward boundaries.
- Lessons had been learnt from the problems which had occurred in 2011. Since then the elections team had successfully delivered a number of elections. Arrangements were in hand to recruit sufficient numbers of counters and to ensure that all count supervisors were fully trained.
- A meeting had been held with election agents with further meetings to take place before the elections.
- The 2015 election webpage would include relevant information such as candidates' expenses together with links to the Electoral Commission website.
- Legislation required postal votes to be sent out as soon as possible after the close of nominations.
- The electoral services team were responding to any enquiries from parish councils in relation to the estimated cost of parish council elections. All parishes would be emailed in the near future with details of the estimated costs.

The committee thanked the officers for their report and welcomed the fact that all their previous recommendations had been implemented.

49 Corporate Services Contract

Councillor John Cotton and Steve Bishop, Strategic Director, attended the committee to present the report and answer questions.

An updated version of the report to be considered by South and the Vale Cabinets had been tabled and the strategic director outlined the changes made.

In response to questions, the following points were made:

- The services that were not being recommended for market testing in 2015 had been included as potential future contract additions to give the Council the maximum flexibility over the 7-10 year timeframe of the contract.
- The draft specifications of the services recommended for market testing would be further refined to separate out the elements which were repetitive and transactional and so suitable for outsourcing.
- There was no evidence to date that the proposals were having any significant effect on recruitment. All applicants for vacancies had been informed, when interviewed, of the possibility that services might be out sourced.
- If all the services recommended for market testing were outsourced, this would affect 99 out of 416 staff.
- The biggest danger to staff morale was uncertainty. The Communications Team Manager was working with the project team to ensure good communication to staff and monthly staff briefings were being held. The UNISON Branch Secretary was on the project team.
- At this stage it was not known how many staff would be required to relocate. If and when staff moved, the use of council office space would be reviewed.
- If bids for market-tested services were too expensive then the services would remain in-house.
- South and the Vale Councils would be in a position to award contracts for financial services and other corporate services on 1 August 2016 whether or not they were working in partnership with other local authorities. Partnership working with other councils reduced costs insofar as 3/5 of the costs could be recharged. The initiative had also attracted £125,000 of government funding which would not have been available otherwise.
- The government funding had been received and was not subject to any conditions.
- The councils' consultant was aware of the need to build mechanisms for responding to technological changes over the length of the contract.
- Irrespective of the number of separate contracts, there was nothing to stop a contractor bidding for more than one contract.

The committee considered the proposals for the future delivery of corporate services and, in particular, the division of services recommended for market testing into two packages. It was the committee's view that a balance needed to be struck between having too many distinct contracts, which would be difficult to manage; and too few, which would give too much power to the contractor.

A member expressed the view that the IT services should be packaged together but that not all other services needed to be outsourced in August 2016.

The committee expressed the view that, whichever services were outsourced, South Oxfordshire residents would still see the Council as the supplier of services. It was, therefore, imperative that any contracts were monitored closely.

The committee thanked the cabinet member and strategic director for their open and informative presentation and requested that the views expressed by the committee inform the cabinet decision.

50 To review the indicative work programme

The committee noted that the following items would now be topics of all-councillor briefings in January and February 2015:

- Local plan progress report
- Community Infrastructure Levy

The committee requested that a report on burial ground provision in the district be submitted to the next meeting.

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm

Chairman

Date