

Cherwell District Council

Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board

Minutes of a meeting of the Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, OX15 4AA, on 11 January 2011 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Nicholas Mawer (Chairman)

Councillor Alyas Ahmed
Councillor Rick Atkinson
Councillor Maurice Billington
Councillor Margaret Cullip
Councillor Tim Emptage
Councillor Carol Steward
Councillor Patricia Tompson
Councillor Douglas Webb

Also Present: Councillor Nigel Morris

Apologies for absence: Councillor David Hughes
Councillor Neil Prestidge
Councillor Martin Weir

Officers: Chris Rothwell, Head of Safer Communities, Urban & Rural Services
Karen Curtin, Head of Finance
Paul Almond, Street Scene & Landscape Manager
Natasha Clark, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

30 **Declarations of Interest**

Members declared interest in the following agenda items:

5. Contract Scrutiny ~ Landscape Maintenance.

Councillor Carol Steward, Personal, as Chairman of the Environment Committee at Bicester Town Council.

6. Update on Budget Scrutiny 2011/12.

Councillor Maurice Billington, Personal, as a member of Kidlington Village Centre Management Board.

31 **Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business.

32 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2010 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

33 **Contract Scrutiny ~ Landscape Maintenance**

The Chairman welcomed the Portfolio Holder Safer Communities, Urban and Rural, the Head of Safer Communities, Urban and Rural Services, the Head of Finance and the Street Scene and Landscape Services Manager to the meeting. He advised the Board that this was an opportunity for Members to receive an initial briefing on the council's landscape maintenance contract.

The Portfolio Holder Safer Communities, Urban and Rural and Head of Safer Communities, Urban and Rural Services began by giving an overview of the background to the council's landscape maintenance contract. They explained that following a tender exercise in 2005 the council had entered into a six year contract with Continental Landscapes with an option to extend the contract for a further three years. The Board was advised that the contract was worth £807,044 per annum which expenditure being split between scheduled ground maintenance (£641,774) and arboricultural and landscape variation work (£166,088).

The Street Scene and Landscape Services Manager advised Members that the council has five external clients (Oxfordshire County Council, Kidlington Parish Council, Bicester Town Council, Gosford & Water Eaton Parish Council and Parkwood) which brings in an annual income of around £500k. The council has service level agreements with Bicester Town Council, Kidlington Parish Council and Gosford & Water Eaton Parish Council, an agency agreement with Oxfordshire County Council and a contract with Parkwood.

In terms of performance monitoring, the Board was advised that whilst there had been some operation issues over the last five years, Continental Landscapes had performed to a consistently high standard. As a direct reflection of the contractor's performance, Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington Councils have had success in both the Regional and National Britain in Bloom competitions.

The Street Scene and Landscape Services Manager explained that performance was reported monthly and a mechanism on the contract allowed for financial deductions to be imposed where performance has not been up to the contract standard. The Board was advised of the staff responsible for managing the Landscape Maintenance contract and the methods used to monitor performance, which included site inspections, client feedback and formal monthly contract meetings.

The Head of Safer Communities, Urban and Rural Services explained that as part of a wider value for money exercise of Safer Communities, Urban and Rural Services, and in tandem with the Comprehensive Spending Review, the landscape service had been thoroughly reviewed. A benchmarking exercise was carried out to evaluate whether the contract as still delivering value for money. The review found that the cost of the contract and the service

provided was very competitive compared to neighbouring authorities and whilst rates were already relatively low, it identified opportunities for cost reduction. The Board was advised that £61k of savings had been identified for the 2011/12 budget. In addition, the value for money review had recommended that provision in the contract to extend for a further 3 years be pursued. The Executive considered the value for money review in December 2010 and endorsed the recommendation to pursue the option to extend the contract. The Board was advised of the approach that would be taken in light of the Executive's recommendation to explore the option to extend the contract.

In response to Members' questions, the Street Scene and Landscape Services Manager explained that the performance monitoring did not include specified timeframes for issues to be corrected, rather this was determined on a case-by-case basis.

The Board commended the improvement in the district that had been delivered by Continental Landscape and agreed that moving forward the key objectives were to ensure value for money and good service.

The Board agreed to nominate Cllrs Emptage and Steward to work with officers during the contract review process and requested officers to bring an update to the Board's July meeting on the contract review process and any impact of the service reduction.

Resolved

- (1) That Cllrs Emptage and Steward be nominated to work with Officers during the contract review process.
- (2) That Officers be requested to bring an update on the contract review process and performance in light of the reduction in service.

34

Update on Budget Scrutiny 2011/12

The Portfolio Holder Safer Communities, Urban and Rural, the Head of Finance and the Head of Safer Communities, Urban and Rural Services were present to update Members on the status of the 2011/2012 budget process. They paid particular regard to the outcome of the Executive's consideration of the recommendations (attached at appendix 1 to these minutes) submitted by the Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board in November 2010 following their budget scrutiny work in the autumn.

The Head of Finance reported that on 6 December 2010 the Executive had agreed the first draft of the 2011/2012 budget which included the Board's recommendations. The Board was advised that the following areas had subsequently been called in:

- Proposal to increase car parking fees
- Extension of car parking charging hours
- Introduction of parking fees for blue badge charges
- Begin negotiations with regards to Watts Way, Kidlington

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered the call-in on 5 January 2011 and resolved to refer the decisions back to the Executive to reconsider. The Committee had also made five further recommendations for the Executive to consider.

The Executive had considered the referral on 10 January 2011 and resolved to:

- 1. Reaffirm the decisions of the Executive on 6 December 2010 in connection with the implementation of car parking proposals, in order to get a balanced budget, and for these to be introduced on or as soon after 4 April 2011 as is practicable.*
- 2. Reaffirm the decision of the Executive on 6 December 2010 to begin negotiations with Eames with regard to the covenant for Watt's Way car park, Kidlington.*
- 3. Request the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to take forward in its work programme in 2011/12 further investigation of the following strategic parking issues:*
 - The balance and location of long stay/short stay parking in Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington*
 - The wider economic impact of Parking Policy on the Districts urban centres*
 - The cost benefit of alternative management arrangements for car parks, including 'Pay on Exit'.*
- 4. Report back to the Executive at the end of 2011 the outcome of its findings from 3 above and any recommendations for change.*

The Board agreed that they would monitor progress on the negotiations with regards to the Watts Way car park in Kidlington and should a business case be developed, it would be submitted to the Board for consideration.

The Head of Finance advised Members that the savings and income generated by the Board's recommendations equated to between £850 and £900k which would be built into the budget and help achieve a balanced budget.

The Board noted that the Executive had considered the second draft of the budget on 10 January 2011 and would consider the third draft in February 2011. The final version of the budget and the final Corporate Plan targets and promises would be presented to Council on 21 February 2011.

In response to Members' questions, the Head of Finance advised the Board that recent legislative proposals had indicated that local authorities would be able to set their own planning fees. The Board agreed that the Finance Scrutiny Working Group should consider planning application charges at its February meeting.

The Board was advised that the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) forecast would be included in the budget book being submitted to Council for consideration on 21 February 2011. The Head of Finance reported that it would be necessary to revisit the MTFS in light of the reduced grant the

council would be receiving from central government. She agreed that she would bring some recommendations on areas the Finance Scrutiny Working Group could choose to monitor in advance of the budget scrutiny 2012/13 process.

35

Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2010/11

The Board considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which updated Members on the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2010/11.

Partnership Scrutiny – Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership (CSCP)

The Chairman introduced the draft report on the Board's question and answer session with representatives of the Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership. In light of the session Members had commended the work of the partnership for its work on addressing crime and community safety matters in the district. The Board endorsed the report and agreed that it should be submitted to the Portfolio Holder Safer Communities, Urban and Rural. Members also confirmed that the representatives should be invited to a future Board meeting to update Members on the Partnership following the end of the Government's consultation on policing reform and once the budget positions of the partners were clearer.

Disabled Facilities Grants Policy

Councillors Billington, Cullip and Steward, who had worked with officers during the development of the Disabled Facilities Grants Policy, reported that the Policy had been approved by the Executive in December 2010 who had also endorsed the proposal that Registered Providers should be asked to sign-up to a protocol committing themselves to the principles in the Policy and to making a specified financial contribution towards the cost of adaptations for their tenants.

The Board agreed that they should retain the issue on the work programme to monitor the implementation of the policy and to consider any wider issues related to Disabled Facilities Grants that may emerge. Members agreed to invite officers to a summer meeting of the Board to provide this update.

Bodicote Old House Tender Process

Councillors Emptage and Steward reported on their involvement during the Bodicote Old House tender process. Whilst the initial stages of the process had been completed prior to their involvement, they explained that they joined three meetings during the process which included reviewing the shortlisted bids, a clarification meeting with bidders and award of the tender. Cllrs Emptage and Steward commended the officers for the work undertaken during the process that, in their opinion, followed a good purchasing process and consequently gave them confidence in the final decision regarding the award of tender.

Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

The Board considered the Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board elements of the work programme. Members noted that Cllr Atkinson had suggested the cost and use of external consultants by Cherwell District

Council as a potential topic for scrutiny and agreed that he be requested to bring a scoping document to the Board's June meeting.

Resolved

- (1) That the Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board element of the work programme for 2010/11 be agreed.
- (2) That the report on the partnership scrutiny of the Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership for submission to the Portfolio Holder Community Safety, Street Scene and Rural be agreed.
- (3) That the update on the Disabled Facilities Grants Policy be noted and that officers be requested to provide a further update to a summer meeting of the Board.
- (4) That the update on the Bodicote Old House tender process be noted.

The meeting ended at 9.10 pm

Chairman:

Date: