

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **Economic and Social Overview & Scrutiny Committee**
held in Committee Room I, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney,
at 6.30pm on **Thursday 23 January 2020**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chairman); Laetisia Carter (Vice Chairman); Jake Acock, Jill Bull, Suzi Coul, Harry Eaglestone, Duncan Enright, Hilary Fenton, Ted Fenton, Andy Graham, Nick Leverton, Neil Owen and Carl Rylett

Officers in Attendance: Christine Gore (Executive Director, Commissioning), Jon Dearing (Group Manager for Resident Services), and Keith Butler (Head of Democratic Services).

51. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21 November 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

52. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Luci Ashbourne and the following resignations and temporary appointments were notified:-

Councillor Duncan Enright attended for Councillor Joy Aitman

Councillor Ted Fenton attended for Councillor Jane Doughty

53. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers in items to be considered at the meeting.

54. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

There were no submissions from members of the public in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure.

55. HOMES FOR ALL

Deborah Robson-Grey, the founder of Homes for All, thanked the Committee for the opportunity to attend and contribute to the meeting. Ms Robson-Grey then addressed the Committee, explaining that Homes for All had been formed in 2017 and that its primary focus was on homelessness and its causes.

She elaborated on the many, varied and complex aspects which could contribute to and cause homelessness, and asserted her view that the many different agencies and organisations with relevant responsibilities and interests needed to work together and be collective in their resolve to address the causes of homelessness as well as seeking to find homes for homeless people. In doing so, she also stated that Homes for All could offer free training in relation to domestic violence/abuse.

The Group Manager for Resident Services then outlined the Council's approach to homelessness, explaining that the range and complexity of factors and reasons were such that much of what was done was carried out on a county-wide basis, which was the most effective approach. He further explained that much of the Council's internal focus on homelessness was aimed at preventing it from occurring, and that finding suitable accommodation remained a constant problem; and emphasised the fact that the Council

would always give what assistance it could to those who presented themselves as homeless or potentially homeless. He also referenced the success of the “Our House” project.

Councillor Acock did not agree that the “Our House” project was successful, and felt that insufficient facilities and support were offered in the District, in the context of the loss of Base 33 and of many Youth Services. He referred to the problem of domestic violence and suggested training/a domestic abuse day, in response to which the Chairman reminded him that domestic violence issues/awareness featured in the Committee’s work programme.

In response to further comments about drug abuse and county lines, the Group Manager for Resident Services stressed that the Council’s role related to homelessness, and that he was aware of a small number of cases during the previous year where the coercion of young people in drug dealing was a factor, and also explained that this had on occasions been the reason for housing people outside the district.

The Executive Director, Commissioning reminded the Committee that the powers of the District Council in relation to many of the matters mentioned were limited, but were largely relevant to the Community Safety Partnership, and offered to raise the matters with the relevant Group Manager and Cabinet Member, with a view to taking a discussion into the Partnership.

Councillor Bull referred to the figures for homelessness and the housing waiting list, and was reminded that the vast majority of people on the waiting list were adequately housed, it also being confirmed that the Council was aware of the numbers of people in emergency accommodation, and of two current rough sleepers, both of whom had declined offers of help.

Councillor Enright concurred with previous comments about the loss of/reduction in Youth Services, and advised of relevant work being undertaken by Witney Town Council and stated that the Government had given an undertaking to seek to re-invigorate Youth Services provision.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Ms Robson-Grey be thanked for her attendance and input; and
- (b) That the Executive Director, Commissioning be requested to raise the matters via the Community Safety Partnership as suggested, and to report back to a future meeting of the Committee.

56. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2019/2020

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services which gave an update on progress in relation to its Work Programme for 2019/2020.

56.1 RAF Brize Norton

The Executive Director Commissioning reported on a short telephone briefing with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation which included confidential information. She had asked for an update which could be made available and would circulate it when it was supplied.

56.2 Vulnerable Persons’ Resettlement Scheme

Councillor Beaney advised that efforts were being made, in liaison with GARAS, to agree a date for a further meeting of the Working Party.

56.3 Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2018-2023

The Executive Director Commissioning reported that the meeting of lead members of local authorities within the area of the AONB was taking place the following day, having been rearranged as a consequence of the general election. Information on the meeting would be reported back to the Committee.

56.4 Equal Opportunities Policy

The Executive Director Commissioning stated that she did not think that any issues relating to the existing policy had been raised by councillors, and she would therefore ask the appropriate colleague to seek comments.

In response to a comment from Councillor Acock, Councillor Beaney advised that the current policy was for the period including 2020 and had not ceased during 2019.

56.5 Oxford to Cambridge Expressway

There was no further information available as to the previously anticipated consultation, and reference was also made to the motion opposing the expressway which had been unanimously passed by Council the previous day.

56.6 Domestic Violence

The Executive Director Commissioning suggested that an approach be made to the County Council with a view to attendance at the next meeting.

56.7 European Union Nationals – ‘Settled Status’

The Executive Director Commissioning reported that the latest statistics relating to applications for settled status were not yet available, but would be shared when they were to hand. She also advised that a meeting of the Working Group established by this Committee had taken place the previous week, and that a further meeting would be organised when updated Home Office guidance was available.

56.8 Staffing Levels in Housing and Planning Enforcement Services

Councillor Beaney confirmed that a date for the additional meeting of the Committee to consider these matters would be communicated as soon as possible.

56.9 Presentation by representatives of GLL Better (Greenwich Leisure Limited)

The Executive Director Commissioning advised that, whilst GLL were available to attend the meeting of the Committee on 2 April, she would liaise with the Chairman on that because of the amount of business currently anticipated for that date.

RESOLVED: That progress on the Committee’s Work Programme for 2019/2020 be noted.

57. CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services, which gave members the opportunity to comment on the Cabinet Work Programme published on 14 January 2020.

57.1 Supplementary Planning Documents

The Executive Director Commissioning advised that the SPDs relating to West Eynsham, East Chipping Norton and East Witney were all due to be considered by this Committee in due course.

57.2 Leisure Strategy Consultant

In response to a question from Councillor Graham, it was stated that this Cabinet item related only to the appointment of a consultant, and that there would be opportunities to feed into the strategy as it was subsequently being developed. It was also confirmed that questions or comments about the scope of the consultant could be raised at the Cabinet meeting on 12 February.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the Cabinet Work Programme published on 14 January 2020 be noted.

58. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Councillor Rylett asked about the current County Council consultation on the Minerals and Waste Local Plan, and was advised to contact the Planning Policy Manager for further information.

Arising from an issue concerning flyposting Councillor Acock was advised that flyposting matters could be raised with Environmental and Regulatory Services, and came within the remit of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting closed at 7:45pm

Chairman