

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, Oxon
at 6.30pm on Thursday 23 January 2014

PRESENT

Councillors: P J Handley (Chairman); Mrs E H N Fenton (Vice-Chairman); Mrs J C Baker;
A C Beaney; Mrs L J Chapman; A S Coles; Mrs M J Crossland; Mrs J M Doughty; J Haine;
P D Kelland; Ms E P R Leffman and D A Snow

Also Present: R A Langridge

58. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Apologies for absence was received from Mrs H R Hibbert Biles and Mr T N Owen

The Chief Executive reported the following temporary appointment:

Mrs J C Baker attended for Mr H B Eaglestone

59. MINUTES

Mr Coles advised that his comments regarding the spare room subsidy, Minute No.53 refers, related to the government policy rather than his personal view on the impact of the legislation.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes, as amended, of the meeting held on 21 November 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

60. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

61. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

No submissions were received from the public in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure.

62. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATE REPORT

The Committee received and noted the Chairman's update report.

63. LEISURE CONTRACT REVIEW – UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Leisure and Tourism updating on progress against recommendations agreed by the Committee in January 2013 relating to the leisure management contract. Representatives of GLL Better, the Council's leisure contractor, were also present to provide a verbal update and answer member questions.

The Head of Leisure and Tourism introduced the report and explained the monitoring systems and governance arrangements that were in place with GLL Better to ensure that any issues were identified.

Robert Wood (Partnership Manager), Steve Hurcus (Regional Manager) and Ben Dixon (Divisional Director) introduced themselves to the committee and outlined their specific roles in GLL Better.

Mr Wood gave an overview of the action taken by GLL Better in respect of the recommendations made by the review group in January 2013. It was explained that there had been significant management changes at the centres in West Oxfordshire, new procedures for cleaning had been implemented, customer feedback was being obtained and the complaints procedure had been reviewed.

Mr Wood advised that new programmes particularly for young people and hard to reach groups were being introduced and there would be increased marketing of the centres. It was emphasised that centre managers were being encouraged to take a more collaborative approach to ensure a wider range of activities were available across the centres. Mr Wood acknowledged that there had previously been staffing problems but this had been addressed and there was now just one vacancy in the fitness suites.

In conclusion Mr Wood indicated that significant improvements had been made in respect of the issues identified in the review and this was reflected in customer satisfaction surveys, up from 69% to 87%, and in the discussions with council officers.

Mrs Crossland sought clarification as to how feedback was obtained from customers. Mr Wood advised that it was a mixture of independent surveys, website feedback and direct from centre users. It was explained that the centres had an information board that provided details of how to feedback views and there was an annual survey within the centres. Mrs Crossland suggested that this could be made more obvious in the facilities as she had never seen the information board on her visits to a local centre.

Mrs Crossland expressed the hope that changes to the cleaning regime, including more daytime cover, would help improve the centres. Mr Wood advised that works to the wet side changing rooms at Carterton would also be beneficial. In respect of staffing Mrs Crossland advised that she had problems making bookings over the telephone as staff were not available. Mr Wood acknowledged the concern and advised that a new telephone system was in place that allowed people to divert to specific extensions or leave a message.

Mrs Crossland, whilst supporting the ambition to access hard to reach groups, expressed concern that opportunities were being missed. An example was given whereby GLL Better had failed to attend a meeting of U3A which would have been an opportunity to access a large number of potential centre users. Mr Wood advised that this was now a role for the new community engagement team and targeting groups such as U3A was a key aim.

Ms Leffman indicated her support for an improved marketing strategy and emphasised the need to target young people particularly teenagers. Ms Leffman suggested that comparison with other neighbouring providers would be useful as it appeared that better activities were offered elsewhere. Mr Wood acknowledged that it was an issue and explained that the marketing would be district wide so would cover all the centres but also activities offered by independent providers would be included so that a wide range was available.

Mr Coles in acknowledging that complaint procedures were in place suggested that it would be positive if matters could be dealt with directly by staff. Mr Hurcus concurred and advised that training was being provided so that managers at centres could take ownership and deal directly with issues. It was emphasised that direct communication was a priority

when dealing with customers. Mr Coles suggested that having staff who could 'meet and greet' customers and help them would be useful. Mr Hurcus indicated that this approach had been used at busy times in some centres and was an initiative that could be developed further.

Mr Snow sought further information regarding better co-ordination of timetables between the centres. Mr Wood agreed that this had caused some problems particularly in respect of Witney and Carterton. The committee was advised that a new post had been created that would take on this role and look to provide activities across all facilities at times convenient to users. Mr Wood indicated that this was a significant change as centres had previously tended to work in isolation.

Mr Beaney indicated that in some parts of the district, such as the north of the area, residents were being targeted by facilities in neighbouring areas which appeared to offer better value and so they were going to those instead. Mr Beaney also highlighted the need to proactively engage with schools. Mr Wood advised that a number of school newsletters were used to provide information. In respect of other facilities Mr Hurcus reported that regular price checks were made against other facilities. Mr Hurcus suggested that sometimes the facilities on offer were not comparable but acknowledged that targeted marketing in some areas could be needed. It was further reported that membership and usage of the centres, including Chipping Norton, had increased in the past year.

Mr Kelland suggested that improved booking systems and customer service at the facilities should be a priority. Mr Kelland further suggested that GLL Better should look at providing a wider range of activities and target niche markets to further increase usage.

Mr Kelland sought an update regarding roof repairs at Chipping Norton. The Strategic Director advised that contractors were currently on site carrying out the remedial works that were required. Finally Mr Kelland asked about the letting of the leisure contract in the future. The Head of Leisure and Tourism clarified that advice had been obtained which indicated that any contract extension could put the council at risk of a legal challenge. The tender process for the contract would therefore commence in 2016.

Mrs Baker concurred with other members that it could sometimes be difficult to make bookings at the centres. Mrs Baker indicated that, in her experience, staff had always been helpful and tried to resolve issues quickly. Mr Wood advised that changes were being made to the times from which bookings could be made which should help customers.

Mrs Chapman reminded members of the history of the leisure contract and suggested that the situation had improved considerably in recent years. Mrs Chapman highlighted the improved facilities, particularly in respect of dry side and fitness suites, at the centres. Mrs Chapman emphasised the need for continued marketing of facilities. In respect of the new contract Mrs Chapman expressed the hope that any contractor would have a connection with the district and local knowledge of what was required.

Mrs Chapman thanked GLL Better for their update and suggested it would be beneficial if a summary of their verbal presentation could be circulated to members together with contact details so that councillors had a point of contact if needed. Officers undertook to circulate the information.

Mr Langridge, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Leisure, highlighted the good working relationship he had with GLL Better through the West Oxfordshire Advisory

Board meetings. Mr Langridge advised that issues were being addressed promptly and GLL Better had been proactive in supporting initiatives such as the West Oxfordshire Sports Awards.

Mr Handley thanked the representatives of GLL Better for attending the meeting and outlining the improvements that had been achieved in the district.

RESOLVED: That, the update report be noted.

(Mr Langridge left the meeting at this juncture)

Mr Handley advised, that with the agreement of the committee, he intended to take Agenda Item No. 9 – Local Plan Monitoring Report before Agenda Item No. 7.

64. LOCAL PLAN MONITORING REPORT 2012/2013

The report of Andrew Tucker, Strategic Director, seeking consideration of the Council's Local Plan monitoring report for 2012/13 prepared in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 was received.

The Strategic Director introduced the report and explained that the report monitored performance and did not recommend any policy changes. It was indicated that there were no major concerns arising from the report but it was acknowledged that there were challenges ahead as the Local Development Framework progressed.

Mr Handley thanked officers for producing such a comprehensive report and highlighted that some of the projected figures, particularly with regard to housing, would change significantly once the outcome of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) was known.

Mrs Crossland sought clarification regarding the number of houses to be built in Burford Road, Carterton. Officers undertook to advise Mrs Crossland of the approved figure.

Mr Coles referred to the State of Nature report that had been produced in 2013 by a wide range of the UK's wildlife organisations and provided a health check of nature in the UK and its Overseas Territories. Mr Coles asked if the report had been used as part of the Biodiversity section of the monitoring report. The Policy Planner advised that data had been obtained from the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre who provided specific information for West Oxfordshire but the State of Nature document could be used as part of future reports.

In response to Ms Leffman clarification was given in respect of the relationship between the graph and table on page 14 of the appendix.

Mrs Chapman in supporting the report suggested that, in future years, it would be useful to provide some comparative data from surrounding districts. Mrs Chapman proposed the officer recommendation and this was seconded by Mrs Doughty.

Mr Beaney referred to page 17 of the appendix and the requirement for a five year land supply and asked if the outcome of the SHMA could impact on this. The Strategic Director acknowledged that revised housing requirements could put pressure on the land supply. As a consequence there was potential for developers to make planning applications on the basis that they considered that there was not a five year supply.

RESOLVED: That, the content of the 2012 / 2013 Local Plan monitoring report is noted for information.

65. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2013/2014

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director providing an update on the work programme for 2013/2014.

RAF Brize Norton

Mr Handley reported that a date for the next liaison meeting was awaited.

Mrs Crossland asked if the latest aircraft noise report had been made available to the council as it appeared that the problem had got worse. The Strategic Director agreed that he would check with the relevant Environmental Health Officer and advise Mrs Crossland accordingly.

Marriotts Walk Review Group

Mr Kelland referred to the recent Cabinet decision to support small town centre retailers with a package of business advice and asked if this impacted on the work of the review group. The Strategic Director clarified that the review group was doing work on an ongoing basis and the Cabinet decision related to a specific initiative.

Ms Leffman indicated that the small business support scheme was district wide whilst the review group was concentrated on Witney. Ms Leffman suggested the two strands of work would complement each other rather than duplicate work.

Mrs Chapman highlighted the success of Marriotts Walk despite the development being controversial at the planning stage.

Rural Broadband

Mr Handley referred to the present situation regarding the introduction of rural broadband and funding from the district council to cover gaps in the initial contract. Discussion ensued in respect of potential solutions in some rural areas, the likely cost and timescale for delivering services.

The Committee agreed that there were still a number of issues to be resolved but it would be beneficial to receive a report at the next meeting on what the current position so that members were better informed for future discussions.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That progress with regard to the Committee Work Programme be noted; and
- (b) That an item relating to Rural Broadband be added to the programme.

66. CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The report of the Chief Executive giving an opportunity for the Committee to comment on the Work Programme published on 14 January 2014 was received.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Work Programme published on 14 January 2014 be noted.

67. MEMBERS QUESTIONS

There were no member questions.

The meeting closed at 8.00pm

Chairman