

## 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 18 September 2014

### PRESENT

Councillors: P J Handley (Chairman), Mrs E H N Fenton (Vice-Chairman), A C Beaney, R A Courts, Mrs L C Carter, Mrs M J Crossland, H B Eaglestone, J Haine, P D Kelland, D A Snow and B J Woodruff.

#### 20. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs J M Doughty, T N Owen and Mrs L E C Little.

#### 21. MINUTES

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 5 August 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### 22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

#### 23. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

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

The Committee resolved to hear the Annual Update from Thames Valley Police (TVP) as the first substantive agenda item (minute [27 below](#)); however items are recorded in the order in which they appear on the published agenda.

#### 24. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATE REPORT

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

#### 25. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2014/2015

The Committee received the report of the Strategic Director outlining progress on the Committee Work Programme for 2014/2015.

The following items were raised by the Committee:-

- (1) Quality of Care in Hospitals – concern was expressed at the operating times of buses between Carterton and the hospitals in Oxford. Whilst welcoming the introduction of these buses, the hours they ran were still limited and thus not always helpful for people needing to use them. Agreed that officers would follow this up and report back;
- (2) Meeting the needs of an ageing population – noted that this item would be placed on the agenda of a future meeting, possibly in connection with meeting the needs of residents with dementia;
- (3) Marriotts Walk Review Group – noted that an update report detailing the progress of this group to date would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee;

- (4) Leisure Contract – the Committee noted that the new contract was due to start in 2016. A report concerning the lead-in to the new contract would be presented at a future meeting. Mrs M J Crossland and Mrs E H M Fenton would visit the Carterton Leisure Centre shortly;
- (5) Provision of Youth Services and Welfare Reform Act – noted that both these topics were ongoing and that there were no issues to report at present;
- (6) Integration of Public Transport – the Committee expressed interest in having a speaker from Oxfordshire County Council at a future meeting in order to help understand how this would work.

**RESOLVED:-**

- (a) That the progress of items in the work programme be noted, as detailed above; and
- (b) That a speaker from Oxfordshire County Council be invited to a future meeting in order to address the Committee on the Integration of Public Transport, and answer questions about this subject.

26. CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The report of the Chief Executive giving an opportunity for the Committee to comment on the Work Programme published on 19 August 2014 was received.

**RESOLVED:** That the Cabinet Work Programme published on 19 August 2014 be noted.

27. THAMES VALLEY POLICE (TVP) – ANNUAL UPDATE

The Committee received an update presentation from Chief Inspector Helen Roberts and Supt. Kath Lowe in respect of priorities for policing in the area. A copy of the presentation is appended to the original copy of these minutes.

In addressing the Committee, Superintendent Lowe highlighted the following issues:-

Performance Dashboard

This showed how TVP was performing against its key performance indicators. There had been a pleasing reduction in crime in many areas, notably that of domestic burglary and violent crime. TVP was always seeking to increase the reporting of domestic abuse. The “outcome” rate was the rate of detection. It did not mean that a conviction was necessarily achieved for a particular crime however.

The outcome rate for violence with injury, for example, had dropped when compared with last year’s rate. TVP had teams working to improve this.

Key Crime Class

In West Oxfordshire, the “key crime class” rate was down by 20%. Rape offences had increased but this did not mean that there were necessarily more incidents – it indicated that more crimes of this nature were being reported. Following high profile abuse cases (such as those involving Jimmy Savile and Rolf Harris) there had been a greater awareness of these issues and greater confidence in the Police amongst people coming forwards.

Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) Community Trigger

This was something new. Victims of ASB, who encountered three cases of it within six months, could request a review of the response to their complaint. The review could be requested within 12 months of the first occasion of ASB. This required all agencies involved – Police, local Council etc – to meet, review what had happened, and consider other

methods of tackling the issue if necessary. The agencies involved should meet within six weeks of the review being triggered in order to prepare an action plan for combating the ASB issue.

The local council had an important part to play, since it acted as the gateway to requesting a review. "ASB" could be defined as *crimes and incidents that affect someone's quality of life*

#### Future issues for TVP

TVP still had many issues to tackle. These included:-

- Child sexual exploitation
- Modern slavery/human trafficking
- Domestic abuse

There were no ongoing investigations into child sexual abuse in West Oxfordshire. However, TVP urged everyone to be vigilant. The same vigilance should be applied to the matter of modern slavery and domestic abuse.

#### Other issues

People were now less likely to be burgled, perhaps because the cost of domestic products (such as DVD players) had dropped and they therefore had less resale value for a burglar. This did not mean that theft had gone away; rather that the nature of it had changed. There had been a move to cyber crime and fraud, identity theft, phishing emails and various online scams.

In addition, the national security level had been raised to "severe". This meant that terrorists were believed to be planning attacks, but the detail of where and when such attacks may take place was not yet known. The public was encouraged to report any suspicions to the Police, because communities would help to defeat terrorism.

There was some good news; rural crime had dropped in West Oxfordshire by almost 10%.

Overall, West Oxfordshire remained one of the safest places to live in the UK.

#### **Questions and Observations from the Committee**

In response to the presentation from TVP, members of the Committee focussed on the following key areas and made the following observations:-

#### Outcome rates

While it was interesting to see the statistics, it would be helpful if these could be put into context by providing some comparison with the previous year. It would also be helpful if the Committee could see what percentage of detections resulted in convictions. It was noted that in some areas (example, burglary from dwellings) other areas of Oxfordshire had a higher outcome rate.

How were "e-crimes" (such as hacking) shown? Were rural crimes recorded separately or included under one of the existing headings?

#### *Police Response:*

The outcome rate would include charges, convictions and cautions. Taking burglary as an example, it was unlikely that someone would receive a caution for burglary, so the outcome for that would mostly be charges. It should be kept in mind that other Police areas included offences taken into consideration in their outcome rates.

E-crimes would not be recorded by TVP but by Action Fraud. Any crime so recorded would be sent to the relevant force for the area in which the crime occurred – for example, where the hackers actually were at the time of hacking. Threats made by social media were investigated by the Police, but fraud was dealt with by Action Fraud. Each body recorded reported offences separately in order to avoid double counting.

Rural crime would include burglary from farmhouses or the theft of farm machinery. The actual number of individual crimes was still quite low.

#### Other demands on Police time.

It was noted that the Police had many other demands on their time – such as dealing with young people who had run away, or people who threatened to commit suicide. Consideration should be given to recording these events as well as it would be useful for the Committee to understand the time taken on non-criminal events.

#### *Police response*

Noted, however it was not possible to quantify and record such information at present.

#### Child Sexual exploitation and domestic violence

The Committee was encouraged to hear that TVP was greatly aware of this issue. However, in the light of events at Rochdale in recent weeks, there was some concern amongst the general population that anyone reporting suspicions of sexual abuse and exploitation might be labelled as racist. What reassurance could the Police offer?

There was concern expressed that this issue had links to the transport industry (for example, taxi drivers and people meeting young runaways at railway stations). More prevention was needed, not just detection.

#### *Police response:*

It was important to note that child sexual exploitation had been carried out by people from all ethnic groups and all professions; but it was a fact that the main groups so far were of a particular ethnicity. There was a greater duty upon people, and that was to protect the young. People should have confidence that the Police would move to tackle issues of this nature, regardless of the background of the perpetrators. The Committee should be reassured that there was a great deal of prevention work going on.

#### *Ron Spurs (Community Safety officer, WODC) added:*

Training had been arranged for staff from secondary schools in the district. A second session would be organised for charity workers. This was specialised training and was aimed at girls who were at risk of sexual exploitation. There was also a play, “*Chelsea’s Choice*” that had been shown (and well received) in many schools in Oxfordshire. Work was ongoing to educate people and show the young that help and assistance were available to them. The partnership between WODC and TVP was strong and successful as both worked hard to try to prevent crimes and solve problems.

As far as domestic abuse was concerned, the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service could offer valuable help and advice, but if someone was at immediate risk of harm, the Police should be involved.

### How Councillors can help

Councillors may receive reports from their constituents about, for example, traffic issues such as speeding and noisy motor cycles; or even people living rough and causing concern to a particular village. How best could they deal with such issues?

Could the Police also confirm where the call centres for TVP were located, as concern had been expressed about this?

*Police response:-*

For speeding, the concerns of your community should be reported to the Police, explaining that the issues had been raised with you.

For noisy motor cycles, that there was an offence of “being anti-social with a vehicle”. (The Police would consider this, and the issue of a rough sleeper, outside the meeting.)

Police call centres were situated in Kidlington and Windsor, so local calls would go to one of these places.

### **RESOLVED:**

- (a) That Superintendent Kath Lowe and Chief Inspector Helen Roberts be thanked for their attendance and informative update; and
- (b) That it be requested that, in future, the performance statistics were given in greater detail, with attention to the break-down of outcomes where possible, and the inclusion of relevant convictions for each subject heading (where known).

### 28. REVIEW OF DISTRICT HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Housing Development Support reviewing and updating the District Homelessness Strategy action plan.

Lesley Sherratt introduced the report and explained that the Council’s main aim was to try to prevent homelessness. Where help was required, the Council strived to provide the right accommodation in the areas where people wanted to live. The Council worked in partnership with others – for example the Citizen’s Advice Bureau – to try to prevent problems such as debts from leading to homelessness.

There were significant barriers to placing people in the private rented sector because many private landlords did not want tenants who were receiving benefits; even if the tenant was in employment.

Emergency accommodation included the local Travelodge, but with the recent upgrading of rooms there, this had started to become more difficult. Sometimes people from West Oxfordshire had to be placed in emergency accommodation as far afield as Swindon.

The Council also worked with housing associations to try to avert problems before they lead to tenants becoming homeless. The impact of the “social sector size criteria” had led to a reduction in housing benefit for some tenants. This was a particular issue for Cottsway Housing Association, which had over 200 affected households, half of which were also in rent arrears. Housing associations were putting resources into helping people manage their budgets. Some 24 households across the district were affected by the benefit cap. It should be noted that the so called “bedroom tax” applied only to people of working age.

During discussion, the Committee asked the following questions:-

What will be the impact of Universal Credit?

Response: In future, benefits would be rolled into one and would be paid direct to the tenant. There was a risk that the tenant would not use the money to pay their rent. Where a housing association was the landlord, the rent was currently paid direct, but this was not the case for private landlords and would not routinely be the case for housing association tenants when universal credit was introduced. Clearly this was a factor for private landlords when considering letting a property to a tenant. A tenant had to be in rent arrears before future rents could be paid direct to the landlord.

County Council consultation on commissioning services from 2015 – proposal to reduce single homeless units from 8 to 4 – how can this be covered?

Response: WODC had made representations on this matter and would be involved in the commissioning of services from 2015. The County Council had not yet made any decision on this.

What support is there for rough sleepers of those with issues of substance abuse?

Response: WODC relied upon specialist provision in Oxford. There were hostels that were equipped to deal with issues of substance abuse, so the aim was to secure a place there for them in order that they could receive the help that they needed.

Housing in some areas (for example, Eynsham) is at a premium yet people with rent arrears seem to obtain housing there. This does not seem fair, so how does this work?

Response: If someone was homeless because of rent arrears, the Council made enquiries to discover how this came about, and, crucially, if it could have been prevented. Sometimes people could show that this came about through no fault of their own, and therefore they could be housed. That did not apply if they were intentionally homeless. The Council would investigate any situation where it was suspected that homelessness was deliberately engineered, but it should be remembered that the Council had to give priority where it had a *duty* to provide housing.

What about hidden homelessness – people who are “sofa surfing”, or fleeing domestic abuse? This is a concern as there is no domestic abuse refuge in West Oxfordshire.

Response: WODC had a low number of people made homeless through domestic abuse. The Council put in a great deal of effort to keep people in their current home, wherever possible. If someone did flee to a refuge elsewhere, they could apply to return to West Oxfordshire. “Sofa surfing” was a particular issue for single people, but if they were not in priority need, the Council did not have a duty to house them.

It was acknowledged that there was a hidden picture behind both these issues.

Can the housing associations be called in to meet the Committee again? It would be useful to have their view on the homelessness and housing statistics.

Response: The Council received statistics and information from the housing associations with which it had dealings, but it had its own waiting list and gathered information itself in order to derive the fullest picture of the situation. The housing associations with which the Council dealt included Green Square, Sovereign, Sanctuary, SoHa, A2 Dominion and Cottsway; the last named being the largest. Housing associations worked with the Council to try to prevent homelessness.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That Cabinet be recommended to approve:-
  - (i) The updated action plan set out in Appendix A to the report; and
  - (ii) The updated eligibility criteria for the rent in advance and deposit bond schemes set out in Appendix B to the report;
- (b) That the contents of the report be noted, and officers be thanked for the production of such a good report; and
- (c) That a meeting be arranged with the housing providers within the district in order to discuss with the Committee issues of adequate housing, rent arrears and the effects of benefit changes upon tenants.

29. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – QUARTER I 2014/2015

The report of the Shared Head of Business Information and Change providing information on the Council's performance for the first quarter of year 2014/2015 was considered.

Andrew Tucker presented the report to the Committee. He noted that there were one or two "red" indicators, but the reasons for these were explained within the report. Planning in particular had gone through a period of transition with staffing changes and the impending introduction of a new computer system but things should now settle down and relevant indicators should improve later in the year,

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

30. MEMBERS QUESTIONS

There were no questions from members of the committee.

The meeting closed at 8.25pm

Chairman