

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Economic and Social Overview & Scrutiny Committee
held in Committee Room 1, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxon
at 6.30pm on Thursday 17 March 2016

PRESENT

Councillors: P J Handley (Chairman), Mrs E H N Fenton (Vice-Chairman), M A Barrett,
A C Beaney, Mrs L C Carter, J C Cooper, Mrs J M Doughty, H B Eaglestone, E J Fenton,
A H K Postan and B J Woodruff

59. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs M J Crossland, Mrs L E C Little and Mr P D Kelland

The Chief Executive reported the following temporary appointments:

Mr E J Fenton attended for Mr J Haine

Mr A H K Postan attended for Mr T N Owen

60. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 January 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

61. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

62. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

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

63. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATE REPORT

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

64. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2015/2016

The Committee received the report of the Strategic Director providing an update on the work programme for the committee for 2015/2016.

RAF Brize Norton

Mr Handley reported that a meeting of the liaison group had recently been held and updated members on issues discussed.

Mr Handley advised that there was a further delay in the construction of replacement RAF housing whilst funding was reviewed. Mr Handley expressed disappointment at the delay and indicated that this increased pressure on the rental market in the district. The committee expressed disappointment at the possible impact on the Local Plan.

Mr Cooper concurred that it was disappointing the scheme was not being progressed and that representations should be made particularly in light of the defence budget being largely protected. Mr Handley advised that the local MP was being lobbied on the matter.

Mr Handley reported that an extra gate was being opened at the camp in the evening to expedite the flow of traffic from the base. Finally Mr Handley advised that plans for a community centre on the site had also been frozen.

Quality of Care in Hospitals

Mrs Doughty welcomed the scheduled reopening of the ward at Witney Hospital at the end of March. Mrs Doughty indicated that she understood there may be closures of wards elsewhere and asked if any were in West Oxfordshire. It was agreed that officers would establish the current position and advise members accordingly.

(Mr Woodruff joined the meeting at this juncture)

Mrs Doughty suggested it may be beneficial to invite Oxford Health to attend a meeting particularly as a new Chief Executive had recently been appointed.

Mr Barrett, council representative on the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee, gave an update regarding the South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS). Mr Barrett advised that whilst SCAS was hitting targets across the region the joint committee had asked for figures at a district level as targets were clearly not being met in some areas.

Mr Barrett reported that SCAS had been investigated and found not to be falsifying performance information but were likely to be fined for poor performance. Discussion ensued regarding the role and use of first responders and recording of their attendance at incidents. Mr Barrett clarified that the cost of training for paramedics was paid for by SCAS.

After further debate it was agreed that representatives of SCAS and the Clinical Commissioning Group should be invited to a future meeting.

Police, Community Safety and CDRP

Mr Handley reported that discussions were on-going regarding the establishment of a safety centre in Carterton where a number of emergency services would be based. Mr Handley also advised that fire service cover would be established within 12 months.

Mr Fenton asked if this was additional provision or a restructure of existing resources. Mr Handley clarified that an engine would be transferred from Chipping Norton as they did not have enough volunteers to crew two vehicles. Mrs Carter confirmed that this was the case and the transfer was a sensible way forward. Mrs Carter also drew attention to an initiative where free fire safety assessments of properties were available to the over 60's and those with children under the age of five.

Local Development Framework (LDF)

Mr Handley advised that Cabinet had approved a new timetable for the Local Plan. Work was on-going to look at issues raised by the inspector and there would be member workshops to keep councillors up to date with progress. Mr Handley suggested the main issue was identifying the allocation of unmet need from Oxford City to the surrounding districts.

Mr Cooper referred to issues he had raised at the recent Council meeting and suggested it was important that members were briefed at the earliest opportunity. Mr Cooper highlighted the budget set aside for the local plan and that a large proportion was still available. Mr Cooper suggested that the agreed timetable was too lengthy and the process needed to be undertaken quicker particularly in light of the large number of speculative applications coming forward.

The Strategic Director acknowledged the concern but reiterated the need for housing figures to be reviewed and in particular that decisions on unmet need for Oxford would not be made until August. It was emphasised that questions raised by the inspector would need to be responded to and the final decisions were for Council to make. Mr Cooper sought clarification of issues raised by the inspector and suggested that councillors were not being kept informed. The Strategic Director emphasised the importance of reviewing data and undertook to clarify when briefings would be held.

Mr Postan highlighted that a proactive response was needed and the issue of the Oxford Green Belt fully considered to ensure that any additional housing that may be required in the district was fully justified.

Mr Handley referred to the wider issue of devolution bids as a potential issue. In response to Mr Woodruff it was clarified that the decision on proposed housing numbers in the district, whilst informed partly by countywide decisions, was a matter for this council to determine.

Meeting the Needs of an Ageing Population

Mr Handley advised that Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) had agreed to protect funding for day centres until March 2017. It was however anticipated that there would be a review of provision which would be consulted on and members would be kept advised as and when matters came forward.

Mrs Carter asked about matters relating to Children's Centres following discussions at OCC on options for future service delivery. Mr Handley advised that the additional £2million in savings that had been identified would now not take place but decisions on how the money will be spent were yet to be made.

Mrs Carter advised that the Oxpip initiative was no longer running in Carterton and so services were being provided through the Children's Centres.

Leisure Contract

Mr Handley reported that the specification for the new contract was being developed and reports would be brought forward accordingly.

Mrs Carter highlighted the current contract and suggested that communication by the contractor could be improved. Mrs Carter referred to issues at Chipping Norton Leisure Centre and acknowledged that GLL had been willing to discuss concerns but there were matters that needed to be included in the new contract. The Strategic Director agreed that there were issues with the boilers at the centre and a solution was being sought.

The Strategic Director advised that the new contract specification would include agreed standards that contractors would have to meet. In respect of the current contract it was indicated that GLL would be advised of any concerns. The Strategic Director highlighted the Windrush Leisure Centre and acknowledged concerns about the centre's ability to meet future need but it was unlikely that a complete redevelopment could be achieved in the new contract.

Mrs Carter highlighted the positive work of GLL but suggested they needed to promote themselves better.

Mr Woodruff advised that he and Mrs Fenton had visited the Windrush Leisure Centre and the centre had made good progress considering the limitations of the building. Mr Woodruff suggested that rebuild costs could be anything up to £25million. Mr Beaney

questioned whether that much finance would be required. The Strategic Director clarified that no definitive figures were available and any proposals would be a decision for members and be dependent on an agreed specification.

Mrs Doughty advised that she had also visited the centre recently and concurred that GLL were working hard to make improvements. Mrs Doughty raised concern regarding shift patterns and the turnover of staff. Mrs Carter asked if GLL were now paying the living wage.

(Mr Eaglestone left the meeting at this juncture)

Mrs Carter referred to recent coverage regarding obesity and the important role that leisure provision had in addressing the problem.

Mrs Fenton concurred and suggested that initiatives such as new or improved cycleways and footpaths would be beneficial and asked if this could be delivered through the new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) 123 list. Mrs Carter advised that improved links had been secured in Chipping Norton as a result of a new development. Mr Postan suggested that members could identify potential sites in their own wards.

The Strategic Director reminded members that the 123 List would need to be agreed in the future and a decision made on the competing projects. Mr Cooper emphasised the importance of working with parishes on such matters.

Officers undertook to establish the process for the 123 List and how the council could facilitate the delivery of improved cycle and footpath links.

Welfare Reform Act

The committee noted that an update on welfare reform issues would be presented as part of a special meeting with registered social landlords. A date for the meeting was to be agreed and members would be advised when details were finalised.

Integration of Public Transport

The committee was advised that OCC had considered a report at a recent Cabinet meeting and further usage data on subsidised bus routes had been made available. Discussions were also on-going to see if alternative funding could be identified for some routes or whether they could be run commercially.

Officers undertook to obtain further information regarding the consultation on data and advise members.

Mr Handley also reported that additional funding was in place to undertake work on potholes in the county.

RESOLVED: That progress on the Committee Work Programme for 2015/2016 be noted subject to the issues raised at the meeting.

65. CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The report of the Chief Executive giving an opportunity for the Committee to comment on the Work Programme published on 11 March 2016 was received and noted.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Work Programme published on 11 March 2016 be noted.

66. MARRIOTT'S WALK UPDATE

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Democratic Services providing an update on the Marriott's Walk Shopping Centre.

Mr Handley, in acknowledging the content of the report, suggested that a more detailed briefing for members would be useful. Mr Handley advised that a number of shops, in secondary trading areas, had shut and it would also be useful to obtain more information regarding support for small businesses. Mr Handley emphasised the importance of free parking in encouraging shoppers in to the town.

(Mrs Doughty left the meeting at this juncture)

The Strategic Director updated members in respect of the alterations to Business Rate Relief and that the impact of the changes would need to be fully assessed. The Strategic Director agreed to provide details of the likely impact of changes. It was noted that there was other support for businesses and it would be useful if members were cognisant of help available to traders.

Mrs Carter suggested that a number of issues such as rents and pressure on traders were not unique to Witney so a wider context was needed.

After further discussion it was agreed that the committee would receive an update report on the wider economic development issues at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That the committee receive a briefing report on support for small businesses and the impact of changes to Business Rates Relief at a future meeting.

67. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – THIRD QUARTER 2015/2016

The report of the Shared Head of Business Information and Change providing information on the Council's performance at the end of the third quarter of year 2015/2016 was considered.

Mr Beaney referred to indicator PL4 and expressed the hope that the improvement would be reflected in future reports and the indicator would move from red status.

Mr Handley asked if there were any issues in respect of recruitment in the planning department. The Strategic Director advised that staffing levels had improved and it was clarified that if the council paid training costs these could be recovered if an officer left the council within a certain time.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

68. MEMBERS QUESTIONS

Mrs Carter referred to funding for domestic violence support and asked if this had been protected by OCC.

The Strategic Director advised that this had been discussed in a previous budget year when the funding had been protected. It was understood that this protection was still in place but officers would check and clarify.

The meeting closed at 8.10pm

Chairman