

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 25 January 2018

PRESENT

Councillors: P J Handley (Chairman), Mrs E H N Fenton (Vice-Chairman), A C Beaney,  
Mrs L C Carter, H B Eaglestone T N Owen, Dr E M E Poskitt and A H K Postan.

Also in Attendance: Mrs J C Baker

69. MINUTES

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

70. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs J M Doughty, P D Kelland, Mrs L E C Little, G Saul and C J A Virgin and the following resignations and temporary appointments were received and noted:-

Dr E M E Poskitt for J C Cooper,  
A H K Postan for M A Barrett

71. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

72. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

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

73. MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF GLL BETTER (GREENWICH LEISURE LIMITED), THE COUNCIL'S LEISURE SERVICES PROVIDER

The Committee received a presentation from Mr Paul Shearman (Partnership Manager, West Oxfordshire) and Mr John Amatt (Head of Service, GLL West Region) of GLL Better, the Council's Leisure Services provider, together with copies of the latest Quest Assessment Reports as requested by Members at the last meeting.

A copy of the presentation is attached as Appendix A to the original copy of these minutes.

In response to a question from Mr Owen, Mr Shearman advised that the Company had been able to reduce its utility costs in a variety of ways. LED lighting had been installed and lighting in activity areas was now on sensor control, the pool plant was now operated by a computerised system and more efficient pool plant installed to reduce water usage. Energy champions had been appointed throughout the organisation and energy awareness training provided to all staff. Mr Owen asked if service benchmarking was linked to financial targets and Mr Shearman advised that, whilst these were separate, they were effectively linked by default. As a social enterprise, GLL's objective was to provide good quality facilities at the right price.

Mr Eaglestone enquired as to the main source of complaints at the Windrush Leisure Centre in Witney. Mr Shearman advised that the greatest number of complaints related to the spin bikes as this equipment was hugely popular but, as it was reaching the end of its life, it was prone to breakdowns. The equipment was due to be replaced in a £60,000 investment programme. Mr Eaglestone expressed surprise that there were not more complaints about the cleanliness of the centre as family members had raised this with him as an issue. Mr Shearman advised that if such issues had been raised by customers they would have been recorded.

Mrs Baker advised that, in the first instance, customers should be advised to report complaints through GLL's internal system. If the issue was not resolved then they should contact the Council's Leisure Services Team.

Dr Poskitt suggested that standards of cleanliness fell below what was considered to be acceptable and questioned how difficult it was to address this. She also noted that Woodstock Pool had a larger number of accidents when compared with others in the District and advised that there had been instances of children being injured jumping from fencing. Mr Shearman advised that, as this was an outdoor pool, there tended to be a greater number of trips, slips and falls on the surrounding grassed area. He highlighted the importance of parental supervision to minimise such risks and indicated that the lifeguards were primarily focussed on safety in the water. Water based accidents were limited.

Dr Poskitt suggested that the situation should be monitored and compared to other outdoor pools. In response, Mr Amatt advised that a detailed breakdown of reported incidents could be provided for comparison with other similar facilities. He explained that, given the differing hazards encountered at outdoor pools, accident rates tended to be higher but those experienced at Woodstock were not beyond the norm.

Mrs Carter congratulated GLL in achieving good ratings in its Quest reports and expressed her appreciation of the lounge facilities planned. She requested that local residents be consulted on plans to invest in facilities in Chipping Norton and Mr Amatt confirmed that GLL would be happy to do so. Mrs Carter also suggested that the Company should be more proactive in publicising the action it had taken in response to complaints and Mr Shearman advised that, whilst a relatively new development, the Company was making increased use of social media to do so. Mrs Carter welcomed this move, indicating that good communication was vital in promoting customer satisfaction.

Mrs Carter went on to suggest that pay increases would help the Company to retain staff. In response, Mr Shearman advised that staff had received a 10% pay increase the previous year and the Company now intended to focus on rates for casual staff.

Mr Beaney advised that residents spoke highly of staff at the leisure centres and expressed his thanks for the service they provided. Given that the Windrush centre in Witney was the flagship facility in West Oxfordshire with the greatest footfall, he expressed some surprise that customer satisfaction levels were as low and questioned whether this was down to the age of the building. In response, Mr Shearman advised that, as a new tool, the feedback arrangements tended to attract complaints as they offered the first opportunity to raise issues of concern. He indicated that comments from customers were valuable and current levels of complaint were lower than could reasonably be expected. Whilst the current level of complaint did not give rise to any serious concern, Mr Shearman stressed that it would be necessary to drill down further into the data if no improvement was forthcoming. The new system provided the necessary information to enable GLL to do so.

Mr Beaney indicated that he would be interested in visiting the centres with representatives of GLL and Mr Postan wished to accompany him. Mr Postan suggested that, as Carterton Leisure Centre served the outlying villages, it could be helpful if this was acknowledged in the name of the facility. He also asked if GLL could assist in providing transport. In response, Mr Shearman acknowledged the difficulties faced by those in outlying areas in accessing facilities and advised that the Company was exploring ways in which these might be addressed.

Dr Poskitt asked whether there was a policy on the use of plastics and the type of food provided in cafes in the centres. Mr Shearman advised that the café in the Windrush centre was operated by the charity 'Yellow Submarine' but that GLL had a policy which supported Water Aid, ethical procurement and the use of Fair Trade products. 50% to 60% of products provided in vending machines were healthy options with these being placed to be more visible to customers. The use of paper cups and recycled materials was incorporated into the Company's Charter Policy.

Mr Handley suggested that efforts should be made to encourage those who may be less fit or self-conscious over their weight to use the facilities. Mr Amatt stressed that the facilities were open to all and activities were on offer to all abilities. Mr Shearman indicated that the centres were designed in such a way as to make provision for those who may be less self-assured and GLL offered subsidised use through the health referral scheme.

Mr Handley thanked Mr Amatt and Mr Shearman for their attendance and welcomed the open dialogue between the Company and the Council on both the good and bad. Developing an open culture would help identify and deliver improvements to the service provided.

**RESOLVED:** That the information provided be noted.

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

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

75. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2017/2018

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 2017/2018.

75.1 RAF Brize Norton

The Executive Director (Commissioning) advised Members that she had recently attended the first of a new series of liaison meetings. In addition to representatives from RAF Brize Norton, the meeting had also been attended by District and County Councillors, representatives of the LEP and companies associated with the base such as Air Tanker and Airbus. The meeting had been useful and there was a renewed commitment to work together to consider the future of Carterton and the impact of RAF Brize Norton on the town.

Meetings were to be held on a quarterly basis and it was anticipated that significant progress would be made.

An encouraging meeting had also been held with representatives of the Defence Infrastructure Organisation regarding the redevelopment of the REEMA North site. The Executive Director undertook to seek an update from the DIO.

Homes England had also been represented at the liaison meeting and the surrounding areas were represented by the County Division representative and the Leader of the Council. Local Members would be kept informed of progress.

Mr Postan indicated that, as part of the base lay within the parish of Brize Norton, the local council should also have representation at the liaison meeting. Mr Handley stressed that the local councils were represented through the County Division representative and gave an assurance that they would be kept informed.

75.2 Oxfordshire Health Care Transformation Programme/Deer Park Medical Centre

Mr Handley suggested that, whilst its efforts had been appreciated by local residents, the Council had done all in its power in relation to the Deer Park Medical Centre. He questioned whether this item should now be deleted from the Work Programme.

The Executive Director (Commissioning) drew attention to the letter from Mr Simon Angelides, the Oxfordshire Transformation Programme Director, appended to the report and expressed her concern that the Council had not been made aware of the proposals outlined in the local press that week. Whilst the Council could do no more on the Deer Park issue, it could still make comment on Phase II of the Transformation Programme.

Mrs Baker expressed her concern over the lack of communication on the part of the CCG. She advised that she had attended a subsequent meeting and responded personally on the question of Deer Park but was disappointed that she had heard nothing further on the matter. The Local Member of Parliament had also been heavily involved in campaigning for its retention.

Mrs Baker advised that the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee was to meet at the Council's Offices on 8 February and was scheduled to meet more regularly in future. Representatives of the CCG had a standing invitation to attend the Oxfordshire Growth Board but rarely did so.

Whilst acknowledging that there was no hope of seeing the practice re-opened, Mr Beaney noted that some 400 patients from the Deer Park practice had yet to register with an alternative provider.

Mrs Fenton felt that it was for individuals to register with another practice and Mrs Carter suggested that this was symbolic of the changes within the NHS and requested that services at the Horton hospital in Banbury also be considered by the Committee.

The Chairman made reference to reports suggesting that it had been decided at national level that, where changes had yet to be implemented, the Transformation Programme was to be put on hold. Officers undertook to investigate further.

Mrs Carter enquired whether there would be an opportunity for Members to address the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 8 February. Officers confirmed that there were arrangements for public participation and undertook to provide Members with more detail after the meeting.

### 75.3 Local Development Framework

The Head of Planning and Strategic Housing advised that a letter had been received from the Inspector regarding the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 Examination indicating that, other than in respect of the strategy/site allocations for the Burford – Charlbury sub-area, it was his conclusion that, subject to further modifications to address those specific issues, the plan as previously proposed to be modified was likely to be capable of being found legally-compliant and sound.

In response to a question from Mr Postan, he confirmed that the Inspector's decision would not have an impact upon overall housing numbers and, whilst it would not impact upon sites with extant permissions, it would enable the Council to put greater weight on the emerging Local Plan and resist development in inappropriate locations.

### 75.4 Welfare Reform Act – Meeting With Registered Social Landlords.

Mr Beaney reminded Members that there had been some concern that only representatives of Cottsway Housing had attended a previous meeting of the Committee and questioned whether other RSL's should be invited to attend. The Group Manager of Revenues and Housing Support advised that Cottsway managed the vast majority of social housing within the District.

Following the presentation on the introduction of Universal Credit at the previous meeting, Mrs Carter was pleased to note that arrangements had been put in place to assist claimants at the Guildhall in Chipping Norton. She expressed her disappointment that, whilst internet access was available at local libraries, the County Council's staff were unable to assist residents in making a claim. The Group Manager of Revenues and Housing Support advised that the District Council's contact details were included on leaflets available in libraries and assistance could be provided by our own staff. The Executive Director (Commissioning) undertook to raise the issue with County colleagues.

**RESOLVED:** That progress on the Committee's Work Programme for 2017/2018 be noted.

### 76. 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 16 January 2018.

**RESOLVED:** That the content of the Cabinet Work Programme published on 16 January 2017 be noted.

## 77. HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION ACT IMPLEMENTATION

The Committee received and considered the report of the Group Manager of Revenues and Housing Support which gave details of the Council's response to the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

The Group Manager explained that the Act placed a duty on local authorities to prevent homelessness even though an individual may not be in priority need. He advised that, in practice this new duty would not have any great impact as the Council's Officers already provided advice and assistance on an informal basis. The new legislation would simply formalise current arrangements.

In response to a question from Mr Handley, the Group Manager advised that a personal plan would be prepared for those seeking assistance. This would vary to suit individual needs. In some cases it might include assistance in securing employment whilst in others it could involve directing them towards those organisations able to address more complex needs through the homelessness pathway.

Dr Poskitt noted that the statutory duty only extended for a period of 56 days and enquired if assistance would be withdrawn after this time. In response, Officers advised that, whilst it was to be hoped that an individual's needs would have been addressed within that time, the Council would continue to offer such advice and assistance as appropriate and would keep in touch to ensure that a sustainable tenancy had been achieved.

In response to a question from Mr Beaney, the Group Manager advised that progress had been made towards securing emergency accommodation for the homeless within the District. He confirmed that both rough sleepers and those categorised as 'homeless at home' fell within the definition of homelessness. There were very few people sleeping rough in West Oxfordshire and, of the 61 persons identified as rough sleeping in Oxford City, only one had a local connection with West Oxfordshire and they had no wish to return to the District. Some rough sleepers did not wish to be re-housed and, if they declined offers of assistance, the Council could do little more.

Mrs Carter expressed concern that there had been three individuals sleeping rough in Chipping Norton and the Group Manager advised Members to contact the Council's Housing service to report any further instances as it funded an outreach service to provide direct assistance in such circumstances.

Mr Postan enquired whether homelessness was also a problem for those in work and the Group Manager confirmed this to be the case. Officers had been unable to secure private tenancies as cost and availability was such that private landlords had their choice of tenants.

The Group Manager also reminded Members that the Cabinet had recently agreed to support various initiatives through the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant.

**RESOLVED:** That the information provided be noted and the proposed approach be endorsed.

## 78. GREAT WESTERN RAIL FRANCHISE

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Planning and Strategic Housing which sought consideration of the Department for Transport's current consultation on the Great Western Rail Franchise.

Mr Handley indicated that the consultation document offered the opportunity to seek to improve frequency and facilities in West Oxfordshire.

Dr Poskitt suggested that the only way in which frequency could be improved was through the full dual tracking of the Cotswold Line. The Head of Planning and Strategic Housing concurred and advised that these were the issues that needed to be addressed during the new franchise which was to run from 2022 onwards. Whilst there was a wish to see a half hourly service to London, this could only be achieved if significant improvements were made.

Mr Beaney indicated that parking provision at stations needed to be increased to take account of the increase in passenger numbers. Mr Postan questioned whether developer contributions could be applied to improve such facilities and the Head of Planning and Strategic Housing confirmed that the Council could choose where to use funding secured through development.

Mr Handley suggested that, should the Eynsham Garden Village project go ahead, there would be merit in providing a new station at Yarnton. With regard to the Community Infrastructure Levy, Mr Postan indicated that a broad revenue base was essential. Communication links were vital to building a strong economy and meet funding requirements.

Dr Poskitt expressed some surprise at the proportion of First Class carriage space provided as it often appeared to be under-utilised. Members concurred and there was a general expectation that this would decrease over time.

**RESOLVED:** That the information provided be noted and the Cabinet be requested to take account of the issues outlined above in determining the Council's final response to the consultation.

## 79. MADLEY PARK PLAYING FIELDS PROJECT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Leisure and Communities which gave details of proposals for the refurbishment of an existing play area and the addition of new facilities at Madley Park Playing Fields, Witney.

Members thanked those involved for their efforts in developing this project and:-

**RESOLVED:** That the information provided be noted and the proposed design endorsed.

## 80. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

The Chairman of the Committee noted that it had been some considerable time since Members had been offered any training on the Overview and Scrutiny Function.

He made reference to a recent Government Briefing Paper entitled Overview and Scrutiny in local government

<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06520/SN06520.pdf> which was critical of current arrangements and recommended that Overview and Scrutiny Committees be provided with designated Officer and resource support.

He suggested that Officers be requested to identify a suitable external provider to offer Member training following the elections in May.

The meeting closed at 8:30pm

Chairman