

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,
at 6.30pm on **Thursday 20 September 2018**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chairman), Hilary Fenton (Vice-Chairman); Rosa Bolger, Laetisia Carter, Harry Eaglestone, Ted Fenton, Andy Graham, Peter Kelland, Nick Leverton, Michele Mead, Neil Owen, Alex Postan and Carl Rylett.

Also in attendance: Councillor Norman MacRae MBE

25. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28 June 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

The following resignations and temporary appointments were reported:-

Councillor Carl Rylett for Councillor Jake Acock
Councillor Alex Postan for Councillor Jane Doughty.

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

28. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

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

29. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were none.

30. SUPERINTENDENT MARK JOHNS, LOCAL POLICE AREA COMMANDER FOR CHERWELL AND WEST OXFORDSHIRE

Superintendent Johns gave a presentation to the Committee during which he:

- Fully explained the current defined policing priorities relating to home burglaries; child sexual exploitation; domestic abuse; drug lines and child exploitation related to drugs; neighbourhood policing; and rural crime
- Explained data relating to those priorities in the current year; and commented on variances in that data in comparison with the previous year, including the fact that increases in arrests for drugs offences arose largely from the fact that officers had been able to be at the locations concerned in order to make the arrests
- Advised that for those under 16 years child protection issues would be a consideration, and that the definition of high risk in relation to domestic abuse was being "at immediate risk of significant harm"
- Expanded on issues around the use of supply of drugs, including the problems associated with "drugs lines"
- Stated that the way that offences were recorded, and the categories allocated, were governed by the Home Office

- Referred to other key challenges around an increase in offences involving violence, with and without injury, and public order

Inspector Hookham informed the Committee of the six-week engagement programme relating to rural crime, and explained the key issues and considerations. An improvement in communications and engagement was critical, given the vulnerability of rural areas to certain types of crime. In response to questions from Councillor Carter, he stated that the programme was at no additional cost because it was contained within day to day control plans, and that the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner had included rural crime as a priority.

Lengthy discussion took place, and Superintendent Johns and Inspector Hookham responded to comments and questions, including the following:

- Councillors Kelland and Rylett raised concerns about various issues in Eynsham and Cassington, and referred to a perception that those issues were not being addressed and that the Police were not as responsive as they could be. Superintendent Johns commented on the need to continually assess the questions of threat, risk and demand, and undertook to consider the matters raised following this meeting
- Councillor Ted Fenton asked whether the approach to speeding in rural areas could be varied, such that enforcement took place in different places, and was advised that Community Speedwatch was a possibility, that much of the work on speeding was data-lead, and that the assistance of the community was needed, but equipment and training could be provided
- Councillor Graham asked about educational programmes, and about crimes related to the LGBTIQ+ community, and it was stated that engagement was key, but was not solely a matter for the Police, and that it was intended to replicate an engagement scheme which had taken place in Banbury in West Oxfordshire. This was “work in progress”. PCSOs were also relevant to schools and the education element. As far as the LGBTIQ+ community was concerned, Superintendent Johns confirmed that any hate crime was reviewed by an Inspector, but noted that a criminal justice outcome was not always the best option for the victim. He also observed that the figures he had presented earlier in the meeting did not reflect the asserted increase, and said that he would be pleased to be invited to one of the community meetings mentioned by Councillor Graham
- Reference to neighbourhood policing coverage being greater than previously, because the officers were not diverted to other duties
- Councillor Bolger queried the impact of budget reductions and asked whether Superintendent Johns considered that he had sufficient staff. The Superintendent indicated the staffing levels in 2014 and 2018, which showed a small reduction, and commented on how that had been accommodated, and on recruitment difficulties. He observed that it would always be the case that greater resources could be used
- Councillor MacRae referred to a recent exchange he had with a resident about apparent drugs transactions in Witney, the text of which he would circulate to all members of the Committee. He considered that drugs appeared to be socially acceptable in many instances, and that there was a perception that the Police were not concerned. Superintendent Johns referred to what he had said earlier but the increase in arrests for drugs related offences, and felt that there was no obvious short-term fix

In conclusion, Councillor Beaney commented that it would be appropriate for the Area Commander to attend in less than another year, and Superintendent Johns emphasised that

if Councillors had specific issues or concerns, they were welcome to raise them and did not have to await a meeting such as this one.

31. PRELIMINARY CONSULTATION ON THE WEST EYNSHAM DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT (SPD)

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Planning and Strategic Housing, which asked it to consider making a response to the preliminary consultation on the West Eynsham Development Framework Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

In briefly introducing the report, the Planning Policy Manager explained that the site was included in the Local Plan for a development of 1000 houses forming a strategic urban extension to Eynsham, and in doing so would partially address the unmet housing need for Oxford. The adoption of the Local Plan was due to be considered by Council the following week, and the report of the Inspector had deemed it to be sound and legally compliant, subject to the approval of main modifications, of which this site was one. The current consultation was the first stage in taking the site forward, and he drew particular attention to section five of the consultation document, entitled “Key Issues and Priorities for the West Eynsham SDA”. A good level of responses had already been received, and the consultation was due to end the following day, 21 September.

The Committee then went through the consultation document, and members were given the opportunity to comment generally, but specifically in relation to the explicit consultation questions:

Questions 1a) to 1d) (Comprehensive and co-ordinated response to development)

The Committee was in agreement with 1a) and 1b) and had no additional observations to make on 1c) or 1d).

Questions 2a) to 2d) (Character and Form of Development)

The Committee made no comments.

Questions 3a) to 3d) (Effective Integration with Eynsham)

Councillor Rylett queried whether the West Eynsham site should be included as part of a wider Area Action Plan (AAP) for the site and the proposed Garden Village to the north of Eynsham, and was advised that (i) this was a matter which had been raised in consultation responses received to date; and (ii) the Local Plan Inspector had been satisfied with the approach of having an Area Action Plan for the Garden Village land and a separate SPD for West Eynsham. Clearly, there were links between the two development sites, and some aspects would be looked at for both, such as transport and infrastructure provision. The Planning Policy Manager advised that whilst an approved West Eynsham SPD would not form part of the statutory development plan it would still be a significant, material consideration in the determination of any planning application(s) for the West Eynsham site.

In relation to question 3b) the Committee underscored the need to include connections for motor vehicles.

The Committee made no comments on 3c) or 3d).

Questions 4a) to 4d) (Linear Park)

The Committee was supportive of the concept of providing a linear park as part of the proposed development, and in response to concerns about flooding, the Planning Policy

Manager stated that the land was not constantly flooded, and that the proposed use was preferable to housing, which as a more sensitive land use would need to be kept out of the defined floodplain. It was important for the Council to know what support there was for a linear park, and what wishes residents had for that provision in terms of the type of uses and facilities provided. Access to the countryside was important, and it was acknowledged that the development provided an opportunity to address the current relative lack of public rights of way to the west of Eynsham.

Questions 5a) to 5c) (Retention of key views)

The Committee made no specific comments, but was in agreement that the views referenced in question 5a) should be retained and enhanced.

Questions 6a) to 6e) (School Provision)

The Committee agreed with the comment by Councillor Ted Fenton that pedestrian access to schools was important, and the Planning Policy Manager stressed that safe routes to schools were a key aim in the Local Plan. In response to a question from Councillor Beaney, he also confirmed that academies would be included in stakeholder engagement moving forward.

Councillor Bolger reported that Springfield school in Witney was at capacity, and hoped that provision could be made via section 106 funding. The Planning Policy Manager advised that the question of section 106 requirements would be for a later stage, and that there were likely to be many demands on that funding, not all of which would be capable of being accommodated.

Councillor Owen queried the provision of Doctors' surgeries, and the Planning Policy Manager confirmed that question had been raised in relation to the Garden Village site. There were understood to be capacity issues around the existing practice in Eynsham, but there had also been a lot of concern that the provision of new facilities would impact on the continuation of the existing. There had not been a consensus, and the Committee agreed with his view that more exploration of the issues and concerns was needed.

Questions 7a) to 7d) (Potential Provision of a "Local Centre")

The Committee was supportive of the provision of a small "local centre" as part of the West Eynsham development, whilst also acknowledging the importance of considering what impact that might have on the existing village centre. It was agreed that provision of any retail facilities should be small in scale providing a convenience shopping function only.

Questions 8a) to 8e) (Western Spine Road)

Members were generally in agreement with the proposal, although there were concerns raised about the risk of flooding, in response to which the Planning Policy Manager advised that further detailed work on the question of flood risk had already been commissioned.

Questions 9a) to 9c) (Supporting Infrastructure)

The Committee agreed with the potential infrastructure provision cited in question 9a) and made no other specific comments.

Questions 10a) to 10i) (Meeting identified housing needs)

Arising from 10j concerning the possible emphasis on meeting the needs of essential local workers, Councillor Beaney raised the question of the many people who found themselves in the "in-between" position of not qualifying for affordable housing and not being able to

afford the open market. This was considered to be a good opportunity to explore a number of types of provision.

Councillor Rylett considered that the development represented a good opportunity for self-build housing, via a community land trust.

Councillor Bolger made further reference to healthcare provision, and the possible loss of the Cogges GP surgery in Witney, which would in turn be likely to impact on residents of Eynsham and its environs. This needed to be an important consideration for the development of new housing in Eynsham. Councillor Kelland agreed, and also referred to his understanding that the existing practice in Eynsham could not increase its capacity, and that the proposed provision in Hanborough was also a factor.

Councillor Bolger also queried the provision of public transport, the need for which should be asserted, and was informed that discussions with Stagecoach on that aspect were on-going.

Mention was also made of the Eynsham Neighbourhood Plan, which had been submitted to a consultant for an assessment of whether it would satisfy an examiner when presented, and it was emphasised that if a Neighbourhood Plan was approved following a local referendum, it would become part of the statutory development plan alongside the Local Plan.

Finally, the Planning Policy Manager advised the Committee that responses to the consultation on the Garden Village Area Action Plan were available online, which would also be the case in relation to the West Eynsham SPD, as soon as possible.

RESOLVED: That the comments set out above be conveyed as the Committee's response to the consultation.

32. UPDATE ON PLANNING ENFORCEMENT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Planning and Strategic Housing which, further to a report considered in September 2017, updated it on the operation of the planning enforcement function. The report addressed issues around the volume of cases, staffing, legal considerations and councillor involvement, and advised that the backlog of cases had been significantly reduced, albeit that it remained necessary to prioritise the work. It was also important to appreciate that many cases did not reveal a breach of planning control, related to non-planning issues, or did not require enforcement action, and that the proportion which would result in formal action was extremely small.

The Solicitor then expanded on legal considerations, and the processes which had to be followed, including the need to consider the expediency of taking enforcement action. Where an enforcement notice was issued and not complied with, prosecution was a course of action but regard had to be had to the tests in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, namely whether there was sufficient evidence such that there was a realistic prospect of conviction and, if so, if it was then in the public interest to prosecute. Taking legal action in itself would cause a delay, and typically it would be around four months before a case was heard in court in Oxford. Likewise, an appeal against an enforcement notice would lead to a delay, whilst the matter was in the hands of the planning inspectorate. She also explained that enforcement notices were a charge on the land in question, and ran with the land, being in the public domain at that stage.

Councillor Ted Fenton referred to breaches of routeing agreements, and enquired whether there were options available with some "teeth" but which were short of formal

enforcement action. In response, the Solicitor referred to the possibility of serving breach of condition notices, as an alternative to an enforcement notice.

In response to a question from Councillor Postan, she confirmed that injunctions could be sought, but were for extremely significant cases only, and were rarely used. Similarly, stop notices were possible, but could be used only where it was certain that there were sufficient grounds for subsequent enforcement action, and that course carried associated financial risk.

Councillor Carter enquired as to any intentions to increase the resources available for enforcement, in the context of the large amount of known future development, and was advised that the transformation process would consider this, and that strong and useful performance indicators would be a necessary part of the process. If or when it was deemed appropriate, the Council could seek additional resources, and it was commented that the development of appropriate performance standards could be of interest to the Committee in due course.

Finally, Councillor Beaney referred to the long-running problem with the Unicorn in Great Rollright, and reiterated his frustration that it appeared to be so difficult to bring the case to a conclusion. It was understood that a further report on the Unicorn would be submitted to Cabinet in October or November.

RESOLVED: That the report and additional information given at the meeting be noted.

33. REVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

This matter was introduced by the Group Manager, Customer Services, and the Committee then received a short presentation from Mandy Fathers, Business Service Manager, on key considerations in relation to the preparation of a revised Homelessness Strategy. She explained various factors, including the impacts on homelessness of the housing market in terms of affordability and the cost of renting privately, the shortfall in provision for single people, and how these also impacted on the demand for social housing. The duty, under the Homelessness Reduction Act, to focus on prevention, was also highly relevant.

During discussion, the lack of any refuge in the district for victims of domestic violence was mentioned, and Councillors Carter and Graham both emphasised their view of the need for Councillors to receive training. Councillor Graham also felt that short term actions were needed as part of the strategy as well as those for the medium and long-term, and hoped that there would be consideration as to how councillors could support the officer functions in relation to homelessness.

The Committee noted that it was intended that it would consider the draft Homelessness Strategy prior to a report to Cabinet later in the year, and was appreciative of the officer input on this matter.

RESOLVED: That the presentation and matters raised be noted.

34. HOMESEAKER PLUS

Councillor Graham had asked for this to be included on the agenda. He referred to the fact that the scheme had been reviewed a year previously, but considered that a further review was necessary because the allocations policy considered need on a District-wide basis as opposed to more local connections, for example with a particular village. This meant that people with a lower degree of housing need would never be allocated housing

in their area. He proposed that the policy be reviewed, and that proposal was seconded by Councillor Carter.

The Group Manager, Customer Services, explained that around 90% of people on the waiting list were classified as “bronze” in terms of their housing need, and were unlikely to be allocated housing. The Council had a legal duty to allocate housing based on need, and such need could not be restricted to a local area, as opposed to the District, without compromising that duty and consequently reducing or removing the flexibility which was needed in order to be able to support vulnerable people and those with the greatest housing need.

During discussion, Councillor Carter referred to the inadequate amount of one and two-bedroomed properties; and Councillor Bolger asserted the need for Council-owned homes. Several speakers also stated that they had some sympathy with the points being made, but could not agree with the possibility of a change in policy, in light of the Council’s overall obligations to the District as a whole as opposed to particular parts of it.

The proposal for a review of Homeseeker Plus was put to the vote. There were four votes in favour and six against, and the proposition was **LOST**.

35. VULNERABLE PERSONS’ RESETTLEMENT SCHEME

Councillor Bolger had requested that this item was included on the agenda. She outlined the background to the resettlement scheme, under which the Government had wished to accommodate 20,000 Syrian families via a well-funded initiative with great potential for successful resettlement and integration. Six families had been accommodated in West Oxfordshire, and Councillor Bolger considered that the programme had declined after its first year, with insufficient support being provided for at least some of the families, and gave examples of her understanding of some of the issues. Councillor Bolger felt that her enquiries had not met with sufficient responses, and accordingly wished to initiate a full review of the programme and support for the families in West Oxfordshire, to include analysis of funding and expenditure.

The Group Manager, Customer Services responded with detailed comments about some of the problems reported by Councillor Bolger which in his opinion cast a different light on matters. He acknowledged that there had been some issues, but was confident that they had been addressed and that appropriate support was in place.

The Committee –

RESOLVED: That a Working Party comprising Councillors Beaney, Bolger, Graham, Leverton and Mead be established to consider the matters raised.

36. QUARTER ONE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2018/19

The Committee received and considered the report of the Group Manager, Council and Company Support, which provided information on the Council’s performance at the end of Quarter 1 2018/2019, which included commentary on red and amber indicators.

In relation to RHS11 (number of households in emergency accommodation over 28 days), the Committee was advised that further to a question asked by Councillor Graham at the Cabinet meeting the previous day, the portfolio holder would be providing additional information and comment which would be circulated to all members of the Council.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

37. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2018/2019

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 2018/2019.

37.1 Oxfordshire Health Care Transformation Programme

The Executive Director – Commissioning (i) advised the Committee that changes in the Clinical Commissioning Group were encouraging in terms of an apparent desire better to engage with stakeholders; and (ii) highlighted the recent change in Cabinet portfolio holder at the County Council, and anticipated that the new portfolio holder would accordingly be invited to attend a meeting of the Committee in the new year.

37.2 Presentation of the Programme at Meetings of the Committee

The Committee agreed with suggestions made by the Executive Director – Commissioning to the effect that (i) it would be useful in future for the programme report to seek to include more definitive dates for reports/consideration of matters in the programme; and (ii) items should be removed on completion.

RESOLVED: That (i) progress on the Committee’s Work Programme for 2018/2019 be noted; and (ii) the suggestions made by the Executive Director – Commissioning be agreed.

38. 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 21 August 2018. Members noted that (i) an updated programme had been published and circulated to all members of the Council earlier in the week; (ii) item no. 9 in the Appendix to the report (relating to the new enforcement powers for private sector housing and other regulatory functions was now expected to be considered by this Committee in November, and Cabinet in December 2018; and (iii) the items relating to the East Chipping Norton and East Witney Supplementary Planning Documents were similar to that for West Eynsham considered earlier in the meeting, in the sense that Cabinet would be recommended to approve a consultation, and that consultation would be referred to this Committee for a response.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

39. MEMBERS’ QUESTIONS

There were no questions from Members relating to the work of the Committee.

The meeting closed at 9:50 pm

Chairman