

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 30 May 2019

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chairman), Laetisia Carter (Vice-Chairman), Jake Acock, Joy Aitman, Luci Ashbourne, Jill Bull, Suzi Coul, Jane Doughty, Harry Eaglestone, Hilary Fenton, Andy Graham, Nick Leverton, Neil Owen And Carl Rylett

Also in Attendance

Councillors: Mike Cahill and Alex Postan

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meetings held on 28 March and 15 May 2019 be approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

5. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

There were no apologies for absence or temporary appointments.

6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

7. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

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

The Chairman advised that an email had been received from Ms Sue Haywood on behalf of Responsible Planning in Burford, expressing concern with regard to the definition of 'local housing need' in relation to the Council's Local Plan. A copy of that email is attached as Appendix A to the original copy of these minutes.

Mr Beaney advised that Officers were aware of the concerns expressed and were considering ways in which they could be addressed. He proposed that receipt of the email be noted. Councillor Graham questioned whether it would be appropriate to note the document given that it had not yet been circulated to all Members of the Committee. It was explained that the Committee was being invited to note the fact that the document had been received, not its content and the Chairman indicated that Members would have the opportunity to discuss the matter further at the next meeting in the light of advice from Officers should they wish to do so.

RESOLVED: That receipt of the email from Responsible Planning in Burford be noted.

8. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councillor Beaney welcomed those recently elected to the Council and those Members newly appointed to the Sub-Committee.

Overview and Scrutiny Training

Councillor Beaney reminded Members that arrangements had been made for overview and scrutiny training for all Members. There were to be two alternative sessions for this running at 3:00 and 6:00 pm on Tuesday 18 June and Councillor Beaney asked Members to advise Democratic Services which session they wished to attend.

9. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2019/2020

The Committee received the report of the Head of Democratic Services seeking consideration of a work programme for the committee for 2019/2020. Christine Gore, the Executive Director (Commissioning), introduced the report which set out the Committee's Work Programme for the remainder of the municipal year. She reminded Members that additional items could be added to the programme as necessary during the course of the year.

9.1 RAF Brize Norton

The Executive Director (Commissioning) advised that the redevelopment of the MOD housing sites in Carterton had been an ongoing issue. Over the past two and a half years the Council had been in discussion with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation to explore ways in which it could assist in facilitating the redevelopment. Most recently, Jenny Poole, the Chief Finance Officer, had met with representatives of the Defence Infrastructure Organisation who had confirmed that the MOD business case was currently going through the Government's scrutiny process.

It appeared that the project was moving forward, albeit slowly, and Dr Gore undertook to keep Members appraised of developments.

Councillor Graham questioned how meetings between the Liaison Group and the DIO were reported. Dr Gore advised that the Liaison Group was comprised of various stakeholders and held a wider remit. It met to discuss a range of issues relating to RAF Brize Norton and, whilst the redevelopment of the housing sites formed an element of its work, the Council had been in discussion with the DIO independently to seek to progress the project.

9.2 Oxfordshire Health Care Transformation Programme

Councillor Graham suggested that, as the Chief Executive of the Clinical Commissioning Group was to be invited to the next meeting, it would be useful to identify specific areas on which Members wished to receive further information. It was explained that, whilst the initial intention had been to seek an update on the progress of the Oxfordshire Healthcare Transformation Programme, should Members have any particular issues they would wish to see raised, these could be conveyed to the CCG through Democratic Services.

Councillor Doughty suggested that it would be useful to receive an update from the Council's representative to the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Councillor Owen agreed to provide the necessary information.

9.3 Leisure Management Contract Working Party

The Executive Director (Commissioning) reminded Members that the Working Party had been established in 2016 to give consideration to the procurement of the leisure management contract and delivery of the then current service. Since the conclusion of the procurement process, the Working Party had been held in abeyance with the caveat that further meetings could be arranged to address specific issues should the need arise.

As part of the new leisure management contract, the Committee now received a presentation on performance on an annual basis.

Councillor Acock suggested that the Committee should undertake a site visit to the new Carterton Leisure Centre. The Executive Director advised that a visit to an active construction site would be inappropriate.

Councillor Carter advised that the new contract had been the result of a lengthy procurement process and that, whilst there were still occasional issues, performance had improved significantly as a result. A reporting system had been established by which Members could raise any concerns expressed by their constituents (initially with the contractor then through the Council's Officers). Councillor Leverton indicated that he was satisfied that appropriate reporting arrangements were in place.

Councillor Beaney reminded Members that an information sheet had been devised at the instigation of the Working Party and it was **AGREED** that this be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

9.4 Oxfordshire Garden Village Area Action Plan

Councillor Rylett questioned when further reports on the Area Action Plan would be brought to the Committee. He noted that a great deal of work was currently underway in relation to the proposed garden village; design shows were taking place and the Area Action Plan was being developed. A planning workshop was to be held shortly and Councillor Rylett enquired as to its remit and whether an agenda would be produced. He suggested that it would be helpful for a Planning Officer to attend a future meeting as the masterplan was critical and he had found the infrastructure delivery plan somewhat disappointing, providing questionable added value. Councillor Rylett considered that it was essential that these projects were tied together and had anticipated that they would be considered concurrently.

The Executive Director advised that the Area Action Plan was to be considered by the Cabinet in July and that the Committee would have the opportunity to express its views as part of the subsequent consultation process. She would request that officers ensure that an agenda for the workshop on 12 June would be circulated in good time.

Councillor Leverton questioned whether this was more a question for the Development Control Committee but acknowledged that any final project was a long way from delivery.

Councillor Graham suggested that the Committee should be given the opportunity to consider the Area Action Plan prior to its submission to the Cabinet. The Executive Director advised that it was the agreed practice for the Cabinet to consider such draft plans and approve them for consultation purposes. The Committee would then have the opportunity to scrutinise the proposals and respond as part of the wider consultation process.

Councillor Acock indicated that the Committee was not bound by established practice and considered that Members should be consulted on the draft Area Action Plan prior to it being put before the Cabinet so as to give the Committee the opportunity to express its views on the proposed content.

Members were reminded that Cabinet reports were circulated to all Councillors and, whilst the Committee might not have the opportunity to express a collective view, all Members were able to attend Cabinet meetings and express any individual concerns they might hold.

Councillor Beaney proposed that the established arrangements should be maintained. Councillor Hilary Fenton noted that Members had already had the opportunity to go to the public events and others were to follow.

The Executive Director advised Councillor Rylett to raise any further questions with the Council's Planning Policy Manager, Chris Hargraves.

9.5 Community Infrastructure Levy

Councillor Graham noted that a report regarding the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy was to be considered by the Cabinet in June and questioned whether the Committee should have had the opportunity to consider the matter first. Councillor Beaney advised that the Cabinet report was only to seek a decision as to whether consultation on a revised charging schedule was necessary, or whether the previously approved schedule could be put forward for examination.

9.6 Affordable Housing

The Executive Director advised that, as there were a variety of options open to the Council, rather than submitting a further report exploring potentially more innovative ways in which affordable housing could be delivered to the Committee, arrangements were being made for a series of seminars, open to all Members, to take place.

Councillor Graham expressed his support for the suggestion and questioned how the outcome of such a seminar would be reported to Members. The Executive Director advised that a seminar would enable Members to establish which, if any, options they would wish to pursue. This was likely to give rise a requirement for a series of reports to the relevant Committees (including the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee given the likely financial implications).

9.7 Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

Councillor Ashbourne noted that the Council was now funding an external organisation to assist in delivery of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme and enquired whether their work would be included in the proposed report. The Executive Director confirmed that this would be incorporated in the report.

9.8 Homes for All

Councillor Acock questioned whether it was appropriate to invite representatives of 'Homes for All' to attend a future meeting as the organisation did not hold charitable status. He stated that the Council had refused to provide financial assistance to the pilot LGBTIQ+ support group the previous year as it was not a charity.

The Committee was reminded that the Council had felt unable to offer financial assistance in that instance not because of a lack of charitable status but because the group was not properly constituted at that time.

Councillor Beaney advised that he did not believe that the group was seeking financial assistance and suggested that, rather than invite representatives of 'Homes for All' to attend a Committee meeting, a small group of Members and Officers meet with their representatives on an informal basis to ascertain what was intended.

Councillor Doughty advised that the group was not seeking funds but wanted to give Members an indication of the issues and problems facing some residents of West Oxfordshire. She believed that the group should be invited to attend a meeting as this would be something of an 'eye opener'.

Councillor Coul indicated that the Committee could invite any group or individual to attend a meeting, regardless of their organisation's status.

It was **AGREED** that, in the first instance, representatives of 'Homes for All' be invited to meet with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee and Councillors Doughty and Graham, together with the appropriate Officers.

9.9 Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan

Councillor Graham enquired what action the Council was taking to secure further information on the AONB Board's proposals to seek National Park status. The Executive Director advised that the AONB Board had expressed its intention to seek National Park Status and was likely to submit that proposal to the Government at a time of its own choosing. The Council would then have the opportunity to express its views on the proposal during the formal consultation process.

Councillor Graham enquired whether the Board was aware of the Council's position and Councillor Beaney undertook to seek confirmation from Officers.

RESOLVED: That, subject to the amendments detailed above, the Committee's Work Programme for 2019/2020 be approved.

10. 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 May 2019.

Councillor Acock enquired as to what constituted a 'Key Decision' and it was explained that this was defined in the Council's constitution by financial parameters and geographic impact. Officers undertook to provide Members with full details.

Post Committee note:

The Council's Constitution defines Key decisions as follows:-

- (i) A "key decision" means an Executive decision which, is likely either:
- to result in the local authority incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the local authority's budget for the service or function to which the decision relates; or
 - to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards within the District.

(ii) A decision shall be regarded as financially significant if it is a decision which either commits the Council to more than £50,000 in expenditure or would result in savings greater than £50,000.

(ii) A decision shall be regarded as significant in terms of its effects on two or more wards if any of the Head of Paid Service, the Strategic Director (Resources) or the Monitoring Officer, consider that the decision will fall within the statutory definition.

II. NOTICE OF MOTION – EQUALITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Members considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services which sought consideration of the Notice of Motion regarding equality and the environment referred to the Economic and Social and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committees by the Council.

Councillor Leverton suggested that the inclusion of a statement at the end of each officer report, giving a statement or impact assessment of policies on equality and the environment implied a lack of faith in Officers. The Council already had robust arrangements in place to consider these issues and highlighting this in reports would add nothing other than to suggest that it had not done so before.

Accordingly, he proposed that the Council be advised that the Committee is of the opinion that no further action should be taken on the motion. The proposition was seconded by Councillor Owen.

Councillor Graham disagreed and suggested that, by highlighting these issues as suggested, the Council would show that they were taken seriously. He did not see that flagging up such matters could have negative connotations.

Councillor Bull agreed that flagging up these issues would not be perceived negatively but questioned whether it was necessary as consideration of such issues should be the norm.

The Executive Director advised that, in developing policies, the Council was required to undertake an equalities impact assessment and/or an environmental impact assessment where appropriate. Whilst these were not generally incorporated as it was considered that to do so would add unnecessarily to a report, Officers would highlight any adverse impact likely to arise from recommendations made in a report. Whilst it was not explicitly reported, this work was carried out as a matter of course.

Councillor Acock believed that this should be evidenced in writing as, in his opinion, consideration of equality and the environment was not the norm. These issues should underpin the work of the Authority.

Councillor Ashbourne stated that she did not believe that making specific reference to equality and the environment should raise concerns. Doing so would raise these issues in everyone's consciousness and would not be viewed in a negative manner.

Councillor Leverton suggested that introducing such changes at this stage would suggest that the Council had not been 'up to speed' on such issues in the past. He maintained that it could send out a negative message and stressed that he had confidence in the strong systems that were already in place.

Councillor Beaney expressed concern that the suggested changes would become a 'cut and paste' administrative exercise. Officers were good at pointing out any adverse implications and it was the role of Members to consider these when taking difficult decisions.

Councillor Carter stressed that, in proposing the Motion, Councillors Enright and Coles had no intention of implying a lack of faith in Officers.

RESOLVED: that the Council be advised that the Committee is of the opinion that no further action should be taken on the motion.

(Councillors Acock, Graham and Rylett requested that their votes against the foregoing resolution be so recorded)

12. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – YEAR END 2018/2019

The Committee received and considered the report of the Group Manager, Strategic Support, providing information on the Council's performance at the end of 2018/2019.

Councillor Graham expressed some concern over the performance of the Council's Building Control Service having been made aware of criticism from various quarters. He noted that the capacity issues experienced during the year had been addressed and a new surveyor had been recruited. However, he felt that it would be helpful to have information on the rate of staff turnover within the service in recent years to establish whether there were any trends. The Executive Director advised that staffing within the service was generally stable and undertook to provide more detailed information in due course.

Councillor Rylett enquired whether information regarding the number of leisure centre visits was available for individual centres. The Executive Director advised that much more detailed information was provided at regular meetings of the West Oxfordshire Advisory Board which was attended by Officers and the Cabinet Member with responsibility for leisure. This information could be made available to other Members on request. Councillor Beaney advised that more detailed performance information was provided as part of the contractor's annual report to the Committee.

Councillor Leverton asked whether there would be a presentation to inform Members of the outcome of the review of the vitality and viability of the market towns currently being carried out by the Council's Business Development Officer. The Executive Director confirmed that Members would be apprised of the results and undertook to seek an update on progress.

Councillor Doughty enquired whether there was any further information available regarding the future of the Debenhams store in Marriotts Walk as this was one of the anchor stores of the development.

Councillor Acock reiterated the importance of the store to the retail offer of the town and asked whether there was any information regarding the future of Boots store. Councillor Eaglestone indicated that concerns extended to the sub-branches located in other parts of the District. The Executive Director advised that initial suggestions were that the Company intended to look at initially closing stores where there was more than one in a town and undertook to make further enquiries.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

13. START TIME OF MEETINGS

The Committee gave consideration of the start time of meetings for the remainder of the 2019/2020 municipal year and:-

RESOLVED: That, meetings of the committee for 2018/2019 commence at 6:30pm.

14. MEMBERS QUESTIONS

Councillor Rylett enquired whether there would be an opportunity for Members to scrutinise the digital transformation process. The Executive Director advised that the digital transformation process was being conducted by Publica, not by the Council, but that it was anticipated that the Company would be making a presentation to members of the Council in the near future.

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

The meeting closed at 7:25pm

Chairman