

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 4 July 2019

PRESENT

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

Officers in Attendance

Giles Hughes, Chris Hargraves and Paul Cracknell

15. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 May 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

16. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Councillor Mike Cahill attended for Councillor Luci Ashbourne.

Apologies for absence were received from Val Messenger, the Director of Public Health, who was to have been present for agenda item No. 6 (Oxfordshire Health Care Transformation Programme) but who had been unable to get to the meeting.

There were no other apologies for absence or temporary appointments.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

18. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

18.1 Assessment of Housing Need and Growth Board Communication Processes

In accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure, Ms Sue Haywood addressed the meeting regarding the above issues. Summaries of her submissions are attached as Appendix A to the original copy of these minutes.

In relation to the concerns expressed by Ms Haywood regarding the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy, Mr Hughes advised that this document was co-produced by the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and Central Government, not by the Growth Board. As such, it had not been endorsed on behalf of the district councils. The strategy did not set growth targets and, therefore, did not tie the local planning authorities' hands in the planning arena. The scope of the strategy would become clearer once the document was published.

Mr Hughes also advised that the Growth Board was taking the opportunity to reflect on its previous operation to assess how well it was working and how it could be improved moving forward.

With regard to request that the Council conducts a review of recent appeal decisions in terms of assessing and defining local and district housing need, it was **AGREED** on the suggestion of the Chairman that the matter be referred to the Development Control Committee for further consideration. Councillor Graham asked whether the outcome of that Committee's deliberations would come before this Committee and the Chairman advised that Members could request so should they wish.

Councillor Leverton asked whether the Council had seen the draft Local Industrial strategy and Mr Hughes advised that, whilst there had been some engagement on certain aspects of its content, the draft had not been formally considered by the Council. He reminded Members that the Leader of the Council was a member of the OxLep Board.

18.2 Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

In accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure, Ms Salima McKnight addressed the meeting and expressed her concern over the operation of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. Amongst her concerns were delays on the part of the Council in securing Central Government funding under the scheme and suggestions that the families were uncertain as to who to contact to seek assistance. In order to address this second issue Ms McKnight suggested that a single point of contact should be identified.

Ms McKnight also expressed concern at the delay in submitting an update report on the operation of the scheme to the Committee, suggesting that this implied that the Council was not taking the issue seriously and was failing to give sufficient priority to this group of vulnerable people. She suggested that the working Group should be reinstated and take independent advice on good practice from experienced key workers in the field.

Councillor Doughty expressed her support for the reinstatement of the Working Group and acknowledged the importance of a single point of contact. She noted that, initially, there had been a significant degree of Member involvement in the project.

Councillor Leverton questioned whether the delay in claiming Central Government funding could have resulted in that funding having been lost. Ms McKnight indicated that she believed that this could have been the case as funding was allocated on an annual basis. She stated that the available funding had not been fully utilised and suggested that the Council should have funded an external support programme.

Councillor Leverton asked whether the information provided to Members had been made available to the Council's Officers and Ms McKnight advised that she had not done so as yet.

Councillor Beaney agreed that the Working group should be reinstated. Councillor Carter concurred and questioned whether interested parties such as Ms McKnight could be invited to attend. Councillor Beaney confirmed that the Working Group could invite contributions from interested parties.

Councillor Graham agreed that the Working Group should be reconstituted and Councillor Coul emphasised the importance of identifying a key point of contact for the families.

Ms McKnight thanked Members for their consideration and noted that the operation of the scheme had been improved by the involvement of the two organisations, Garas and Aspire.

Councillor Beaney undertook to ensure that the families were provided with appropriate information and contact details. Councillor Carter requested that the terms of reference with Garas be provided to the Working Group.

Councillor Bull advised that she had worked with Aspire at the ICE Centre in Carterton and Councillor Aitman stressed the importance of engaging with the schools attended by family members. Councillor Graham requested that arrangements be made for the Working Group to meet without delay.

Councillor Leverton questioned whether any requests made to the Council by the families had been ignored and Ms McKnight indicated that she did not believe this to be the case.

RESOLVED: That a Working Party comprising Councillors Beaney, Ashbourne, Doughty, Graham and Leverton be re-established to consider the matters raised.

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

19. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councillor Beaney confirmed that, following the last meeting, he had spoken to the Council's representative to the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Board regarding the Council's position on the Board's Management Plan and, in particular, the promotion of the Cotswolds as England's next National Park. He also advised that it was possible that the Management Plan would be revised following changes in the composition of the Board.

20. OXFORDSHIRE HEALTH CARE TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

The Committee received a presentation from Louise Patten, the Chief Executive Officer of the Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Groups, regarding Healthcare Transformation and the NHS Long Term Plan. A copy of her presentation is attached as Appendix B to the original copy of these minutes.

In response to a question from Councillor Graham, Ms Patten advised that the proposals to support adults and older adults with severe mental illnesses through new models of integrated primary and community mental health care were based upon 'vanguard' services operating tried and tested methods. Councillor Coul enquired what was to be done to address the needs of those children and young adults experiencing mental illness. Ms Patten advised that, nationally, there was a significant problem for children and young adults in accessing mental health services. The rapid increase in the number of those seeking assistance had not been anticipated and it was thought that this had been exacerbated by a variety of external factors such as the rise of social media. Whilst these services had seen a significant increase in funding it was clear that more needed to be done.

Councillor Acock suggested that this was simply a matter of inadequate funding and questioned why no mention had been made of seeking an overall increase in funds. Ms Patten explained that the Clinical Commissioning Group was allocated a fixed level of funding and had no option but to operate within that budget. Funding levels were based upon a national formula and baseline funding per head of population in Oxfordshire was low. It was difficult to assess how funding was allocated as a variety of services in the county were funded through the research institutions in Oxford. However, Ms Patten acknowledged that the CCG was under-funded by some £9million in the current year and would look to re-balance budgets to better address local needs as it did every year.

Councillor Doughty expressed some concern that, in a rural district such as West Oxfordshire, mental health issues were not readily identified. Ms Patten agreed, indicating that it was difficult to identify needs as many were reluctant to come forward to seek assistance. The CCG had moved to an outcome based contract and recognised the need for various authorities to work together to deliver the best possible outcomes. By engaging with the voluntary and charitable sectors it was possible to address issues before they deteriorated.

In response to a question from Councillor Leverton, Ms Patten confirmed that funding varied across the country and was determined on a formulaic basis based upon general levels of health and income. In Oxfordshire, 14% of the allocation was top-sliced. With regard to the information provided in relation to GP practices, it was noted that NHS and Council boundaries were not co-terminus. Ms Patten advised that the possibility of these becoming more closely aligned was being explored.

Councillor Eaglestone expressed concern over the potential closure of chemists across the District. Ms Patten explained that the loss of commercial chemists was primarily due to the fact that they could only remain viable through ancillary sales and could not survive by dispensing prescriptions alone. The CCG was looking at ways in which to retain and encourage their use but this would rely on support from within the local communities.

Ms Patten explained that Primary Care Networks were seen as the key to future service provision, working in collaboration with all other providers in the local health and social care system. There was also a need to work more closely with district and county councils, taking advantage of opportunities such as the healthy towns' initiative. Work to identify ways in which stakeholders could work together was ongoing and the importance of planning services to meet future needs had been recognised. It was important for health service providers to influence Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 developer contributions as health services needed to be closer to other community uses.

Councillor Doughty questioned how the recruitment of GP's and nursing staff could be encouraged. Ms Patten advised that this was difficult and considered that the local cost of living and the absence of local weighting was a significant disincentive to recruitment and retention. Councillor Doughty suggested that the loss of nurses' accommodation had been a contributory factor.

Councillor Bull questioned how social care services would be engaged in a wider partnership. Ms Patten advised that the Director of Adult Social Care had regular meetings with the Hospital Chief Executives but that there would be greater clarity once the Green Paper was published.

Councillor Acock suggested that Oxfordshire was behind in implementing digital solutions and indicated that the facetime service operated in London had not been successful as many patients had been pushed towards A&E departments following misdiagnoses. Ms Patten advised that the GP at hand service in London had been developed by a digital company. This service was directed to those between 18 and 35 and had effectively been overwhelmed by demand. Far more people than expected had registered, including many from outside the intended operating area. The number of users had increased from 4,000 to 40,000 and the service had toppled over. Work was underway to analyse and learn from this project but the concept of digitisation was supported by the Secretary of State. Success would rely on effective communication and services would be managed and monitored carefully as they developed.

Members questioned whether the change to the all degree qualification had discouraged people from pursuing a career in nursing. Ms Patten indicated that, since the introduction of the all degree qualification path in 1980, nursing had become far more technical. The needs of patients in hospital were far greater than they had been in the past as those with less complex needs now recovered at home. Further, there were other training schemes for other levels and those who would have qualified by experience were now employed as health care assistants.

In response to a question from Councillor Coul, Ms Patten confirmed that the information regarding GP staffing levels was based upon full time equivalent hours.

Councillor Graham expressed some concern that the proposals were simply a PR exercise and questioned how feedback would be dealt with. He maintained that the level of funding provided by Central Government was fundamental to any change in service provision and expressed concern that the requisite social care provision was not in place. Whilst the quality of care offered by the National Health Service was outstanding, this was due to the commitment of staff at the grass roots. Councillor Graham also questioned whether the allocation of developer contributions to health service provision would be at the expense of other areas.

Ms Patten advised that her presentation outlined the overall strategic direction that health service provision was to take. This model would then be employed to respond to local needs. Health services already benefited from planning gain but most GP surgeries were old and there was a need to plan future facilities together, integrating health care provision with other community facilities. Councillor Bull expressed her support for this approach.

Councillor Carter acknowledged the merits of providing services close to home but stressed that the concept had to be played out in reality. She made reference to the relocation of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services from Witney to Cowley, the difficulty in obtaining GP appointments and the closure of the obstetrics department at the Horton Hospital, indicating that those in the north of the District found it more difficult to travel to Oxford. Councillor Carter also questioned how active the Patient Participation Groups were.

Ms Patten advised that she had now been in post for some 15 months and, when she had taken up her position, the CCG had been in the process of launching Phase II of the Transformation Programme which had proposed the closure of A&E and paediatric facilities at the Horton Hospital.

Whilst the historic pattern of service delivery might not necessarily be correct, recognising the need to understand the likely levels of population growth, Ms Patten had placed a moratorium on these proposals. The 2016 decision regarding obstetric services had been referred to the Secretary of State and a review panel was working through the resulting recommendations. With regard to Accident and emergency services, Ms Patten advised that there was no intention to withdraw these facilities as their retention had many advantages and offered the opportunity to work with local GP practices.

Councillor Carter suggested that limitations in the obstetrics services currently provided at the Horton Hospital meant that some expectant mothers had to be transferred to the John Radcliffe hospital in Oxford. She considered that journey times, particularly during the winter months, could place them in danger. Ms Patten confirmed that no decisions on the future of the service had been made. A final decision would take account of issues such as clinical safety, staffing mix and recruitment and it was possible that the solution would be a new build facility. Whatever the conclusion, it was essential that any future service was sustainable.

Councillor Rylett questioned arrangements for the digitalisation of primary care and Ms Patten advised that this would incorporate facilities for self-assessment, data collection and the intelligent use of records. Whilst initial moves in this direction some 18 years previously had been unsuccessful, the current platform was performing well and significant levels of funding had been made available to the project. As the system improved, the more complex data collected would help to predict health needs in the future. Monitoring carried out to date was providing important insights and emphasised the need to embrace the initiative.

Councillor Leverton indicated that needless pressure was placed upon services by individuals making unnecessary appointments. Ms Patten agreed that this was an issue that needed to be addressed through education in early years and empowerment.

Councillor Beaney noted that there were different levels of service between GP practices and Ms Patten advised that this was because each practice was an independent business. By funding practices in networks, the CCG could set baseline requirements. Councillor Doughty noted that the Nuffield and Windrush practices in Witney already worked well together.

Councillor Beaney thanked Ms Patten for attending the meeting on behalf of the Committee and for her frank and open approach which was welcomed by Members.

21. EAST WITNEY DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT – PRELIMINARY CONSULTATION

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services which invited a response to the preliminary consultation on the East Witney Development Framework Supplementary Planning Document.

The Council's Planning Policy Manager, Chris Hargraves, introduced the report and the Chairman invited comments on the issues set out in the Issues Paper. The Committee then considered the consultation document and Members were given the opportunity to comment both generally and specifically in relation to the explicit consultation questions:-

Question 1: Key Considerations

The Committee had no additional observations to make on questions 1a) or 1b).

Question 2: A Community Hub

Councillor Beaney suggested that the inclusion of a butchery within the proposed community hub could conflict with use as a place of worship. Councillor Aitman noted that a community hall on a previous development had been sold off to a single faith group and indicated that any new community facility should remain available to all.

Question 3: Type and Size of New Homes Needed

Councillor Leverton considered that a sizeable proportion of properties should be bungalows as there was a lack of such accommodation in the District. This would help address the needs of an ageing population and free up family homes occupied by those wishing to downsize. He suggested that these could be concentrated on a section of the site. Councillor Acock agreed with the need for more bungalows but considered that these should be distributed throughout the site. He also suggested that a 50% Affordable Housing requirement should be applied. Councillor Beaney advised that the Local Plan specified a 40% requirement.

Question 4: Affordable Housing

Councillor Beaney questioned how the needs of key workers would be addressed. Mr Hargraves advised that the intention with large strategic sites such as East Witney was to encourage a broad range of affordable housing including potentially housing for key workers. Councillor Graham suggested that the definition of affordable housing was unclear and Mr Hargraves advised that this was defined in the National Planning Policy Framework. Giles Hughes, the Council's Head of Paid Service, advised that development would have to accord with the supplementary planning document and that, once a scheme came forward, Officers would be able to give a clearer steer to the developers as to the types of affordable housing required.

Councillor Bull suggested that priority should be given to health service workers but Councillor Aitman questioned whether their wages would be sufficient to meet the required contributions. Councillor Acock questioned whether staff working in Oxford would want accommodation in Witney, indicating that evidence would be required.

Question 5: Meeting Specific Housing Need

In response to a question from Councillor Beaney, Mr Hargraves advised that any plots designated for self-build that remained unutilised after a designated time period of 12 months would revert to the developers for market housing. Councillor Coul suggested that self-build plots should be located together so that owners could provide mutual support.

Councillor Beaney also suggested that provision be made for emergency accommodation such as that recently provided in at Horsefair in Chipping Norton. Councillor Bull agreed that there was not enough of this type of accommodation at present.

Councillor Graham indicated that insufficient provision existed within the District to meet the needs of gypsies and travellers. He considered that the question in the consultation document was badly phrased and encouraged the use of open rather than closed questions which were likely to elicit a negative response.

Mr Hargraves advised that the Local Plan required the provision of gypsy sites to be explored when considering all allocated strategic sites.

Councillor Coul indicated that the travelling community had been stigmatized and questioned whether representatives had been invited to contribute to the consultation. Mr Hargraves advised that, whilst representatives had been invited to respond to the Local Plan, there had been no specific invitation to respond to this particular consultation. He acknowledged that there was an under-provision within the District but stressed that permanent sites were difficult to find.

Question 6: Character and Form of Development

Councillor Leverton indicated that properties should be constructed to the highest environmental standard with facilities such as electric vehicle charging points to be included as a matter of course. There was an opportunity to change the way in which properties were built by requiring high levels of quality and sustainability.

Councillor Coul expressed her distaste for fake chimneys and windows etc. suggesting that new properties should be designed to reflect current technologies, not as a pastiche of the local vernacular. Councillor Beaney noted that such features reflected the character of development in Witney.

(Councillor Carter left the meeting at this juncture)

Question 7: Vehicular Access and Highway Infrastructure Improvements

Councillor Leverton indicated that air quality and noise should be a consideration as the site was close to the A40. Councillor Rylett stressed the importance of providing access to the A40 from South Leigh.

Question 8: Public Transport and Active Travel

Councillor Acock suggested that the Council should explore alternative solutions to the use of personal motor vehicles for travel between Witney and Oxford, citing the Alton to Manchester route as an exemplar.

Councillor Coul suggested that active travel should be encouraged by creating a continuous cycle link to the A40 and back into Witney. Councillor Bull emphasised the importance of level access for the disabled.

Councillor Rylett indicated that this was an opportunity to encourage active travel as the site was close to the town and the existing cycle route to Eynsham. Provision of a car park would encourage people to walk to the town and a bus link to South Leigh could be created. Councillor Aitman suggested that a cycle link could be provided to the local school.

Question 9: Landscape and Heritage

The Committee had no additional observations to make on questions 9a) to 9c).

Question 10: Green Infrastructure

Councillor Beaney was pleased to see that provision was to be made for allotments. He had no preference as to location, suggesting that this would be governed by soil conditions.

Councillor Acock wished to see tree planting adjacent to the highways.

Question 11: Biodiversity

Councillor Rylett stressed that there had to be a net gain in biodiversity. Mr Hargraves advised that the Local Plan specified the need for a net gain where possible with developers now expected to face such a requirement. Councillor Acock wished to see an increase in natural habitat in response to the loss of bees and other wildlife.

Question 12: Reducing Flood Risk

Councillor Leverton noted that the site was on a hill and emphasised the importance of Thames Water ensuring that the drainage and sewerage infrastructure was both fit for purpose and 'future proof'. Councillor Coul concurred. Councillor Leverton questioned whether the Council should seek an independent audit of Thames Water's report. Councillor Graham stressed that the current infrastructure was at breaking point.

Question 13: Sustainable Design and Construction

Councillor Acock suggested that the use of solar panels should be specified. Councillor Coul agreed, indicating that it was far easier and more cost effective to incorporate sustainable design features such as those identified at paragraph 5.142 of the consultation during construction.

Councillor Beaney indicated that the use of biomass energy was far less sustainable than originally thought as fuel was often transported great distances.

Councillor Coul reiterated that electric vehicle charging points should be required as standard.

Question 14: Supporting Infrastructure Councillor Beaney questioned the initial view expressed by the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group that there was adequate primary health care capacity available in Witney to accommodate the scale of housing growth set out in the Local Plan. Councillor Acock questioned whether there were any further GP surgeries planned and Councillor Doughty suggested that the Deer Park Surgery should be re-opened.

Councillor Coul indicated that it was imperative that infrastructure was provided prior to residential development.

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

Councillor Rylett questioned whether attendance at the recent exhibitions had been sufficient and Councillor Aitman indicated that many local residents were unaware of the proposals. Mr Hargraves advised that the Council had sought to publicise the consultation in as wide a way as possible and agreed to give further notification.

22. **COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2019/2020**

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 2019/2020.

22.1 RAF Brize Norton

In response to a question from Councillor Leverton, Mr Hughes advised that discussions with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation were ongoing and that the detailed business case was under active consideration and moving forward.

22.2 Oxfordshire Garden Village Area Action Plan

Councillor Coul asked when the next stage of the Area Action Plan would be brought before the Committee for Consideration. The Chairman undertook to investigate further and respond.

22.3 Community Infrastructure Levy

In response to questions from Members, Mr Hughes explained that the Council was currently in the process of updating the viability evidence supporting the proposed Charging Schedule. Depending on the outcome of this work the Council could either be in a position to move forward or, if changes were required, the Schedule would have to be reviewed. It was confirmed that any proposals would be brought before the Committee prior to their consideration by the Cabinet.

22.4 Homes for All

Members were advised that arrangements had been made for a meeting with representatives of 'Homes for All' to be held on 21 August 2019.

22.5 Oxford to Cambridge Expressway

Councillor Graham requested that this item be included within the Committee's Work Programme. Mr Hughes advised that Homes England was to conduct a public consultation on potential options in the autumn and suggested that the matter be considered at that juncture as part of the consultation process. Members concurred.

22.6 Care Quality Commission Report on Oxford and Banbury Hospitals

In response to a request from Councillor Graham, the Committee **AGREED** to include this item within the Committee's Work Programme.

RESOLVED: That (i) progress on the Committee's Work Programme for 2019/2020 be noted and (ii) that the additional items referred to above be included within the Committee's Work Programme.

23. 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 25 June 2019.

The Chairman noted that consideration of the Oxfordshire Cotswolds Garden Village Area Action Plan - preferred options for consultation and the approval of Oxfordshire Plan 2050 for consultation purposes were significant items of business and suggested that a special meeting of the Committee could well be required.

24. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Councillor Acock questioned why the Equal Opportunities Working Party had not been reconstituted and suggested that it should be revived.

It was explained that the Working Party had been fundamental in devising the Council's Equalities Policies and it was **AGREED** that Members would review the work carried out to date and consider whether further meetings were required.

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

The meeting closed at 9:20pm

Chairman