

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Record of Decisions of the meeting of the
Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Held at 6.30 pm on **Thursday, 8 April 2021**

PRESENT

Councillors: Councillor Andrew Beaney (Chairman), Councillor Laetisia Carter (Vice-Chair), Councillor Joy Aitman, Councillor Luci Ashbourne, Councillor Jill Bull, Councillor Julian Cooper, Councillor Suzi Coul, Councillor Jane Doughty, Councillor Harry Eaglestone, Councillor Duncan Enright, Councillor Andy Graham, Councillor Nick Leverton and Councillor Carl Rylett

Officers: Claire Bromley (Planner (Policy)), Mandy Fathers (Business Manager - Operations Support and Enabling) and Chris Hargraves (Planning Policy Manager)

38 Minutes of Previous Meeting - 21 January 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2021 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

39 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Neil Owen and Jake Acock.

40 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers.

41 Participation of the Public

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

42 Chairman's Announcements

The work programme was discussed. The following points were made.

- Domestic Violence presentation to be given to Committee on 27 May 2021
- Discussion on the GLL Contract to be held at Committee on 27 May 2021
- RAF Brize Norton – an update was given by the Chief Executive. Members requested that a representative of the Defence Infrastructure Organisation, who was responsible for the Ministry of Defence Estates, be invited to address Committee to provide an update.
- Oxford-Cambridge expressway was no longer required and could be removed from the work programme.
- Health Care provision was ongoing to be kept on the work programme.
- Enforcement Powers in the Housing and Planning Act – Committee requested an update.

43 Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme - Verbal Update

The Committee received a presentation from the Business Manager (Operational Services). It was explained that families were being supported through indefinite leave to remain applications and supported with additional English lessons, housing and finances. Children had settled well into their education. Support was also being given through booklets in order for families to become self-sufficient. The booklets were produced through an Oxfordshire wide project and best practice was shared in partnership with other authorities.

Thanks were given to the Committee for taking concerns raised previously and to the officers for doing remarkable work for the support given to these families.

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The Cap Funding Scheme within the Strategy was for individuals and was provided up to £500 per individual, for help with education, getting into work and in one case financial support for medical issues.

Committee thanked officers for their work in supporting these families.

44 Affordable Housing Revised Draft SPD Consultation

The Committee considered the report of the Planning Policy Manager who gave a brief introduction to the supplementary planning document which was in need of updating with the previous version having been adopted in 2007. The draft document was currently the subject of consultation, which would close on 16 April 2021 after which point a final version would be prepared for adoption later in the year.

Comments and queries from Members related to issues such as:

The policy on working with travelling communities and whether this should be included in the document; making sure that local people with housing need were being provided with housing locally. Officers explained that the document would be of relevance to those members of the travelling community who are seeking affordable 'bricks and mortar' accommodation and that the issue of prioritising people for new affordable homes was determined through the Council's choice based lettings system. Officers also explained that the Local Plan includes a commitment to accommodate a proportion of unmet need from Oxford City.

Concern was expressed over the size of houses being built, with larger houses such as four and five bedroomed houses dominating and not meeting the identified need for smaller 2 and 3-bed accommodation.

Officers explained that there is a predominance of larger properties within West Oxfordshire's existing housing stock and that in permitting new developments, there is a need to encourage smaller units to help counter-balance this, with a number of recent instances where developers were revising schemes and applying for smaller houses.

The question was also raised as to whether affordable unit size requirements could be broken down by the different bands that are used for the Council's choice based lettings system. Officers agreed to try and obtain this information outside of the meeting.

It was also suggested that the Council should be encouraging people to register for self-build or custom building housing and requested that Officers should provide greater publicity of the Council's self-build register.

The issue of 'pepper-potting' affordable homes amongst other market homes was also raised and whether this was addressed in the SPD. In response, Officers clarified that this issue is addressed with reference to 'clusters' of new affordable homes.

The issue of Oxfordshire County Council's market position statement on supported living was raised and the question asked as to whether information was being captured on independent providers who were providing housing and supported day time care, on a small scale for people who would otherwise be on the housing list. Officers agreed to further consider this in discussion with Oxfordshire County Council.

The approach to energy and sustainable housing was raised, with a concern expressed that the revised draft SPD was now less ambitious and rather more vague than the previous iteration in respect of energy efficiency and sustainable design. In response, Officers explained that the revised text reflects concerns raised by a number of previous respondents that the SPD cannot go beyond the adopted Local Plan in terms of stipulating requirements of new development (e.g. zero carbon).

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Keyworkers were mentioned in the housing for essential local workers, one category, of which was teachers. The Chair requested that keyworkers should also include support staff who play a vital role alongside teaching staff.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and a consultation response be formulated.

45 Local Plan Annual Monitoring Report 2019/20

The Committee received and considered the report of the Planning Policy Manager, which was introduced by the Policy Planner. It was explained that the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) was structured around the six council priorities.

The key points of the report were: the gradual decline in CO2 across the district; increased number of charging points; increase in renewable energy; gradual decline of residual household waste; potential lower than usual use of the leisure centres due to Lockdown; there had been progress on the park and ride; there was an increasing trend in the number of people employed in West Oxfordshire, although some loss of employment space to change of use to residential had taken place; approximately £3m was collected in S106 planning obligations, of that £1.2m was for affordable housing; residential permissions showed a greater proportion of smaller (1 and 2 bedroom homes) against Local Plan guidelines on property size mix, 23% of residential permissions were on previously developed land; 80% of overall planning applications were determined within target timescales. Cabinet had considered the report and comments had been incorporated into the current report.

Comments and queries from Members related to issues such as:

The review of the Local Plan needed to be open and transparent and the public be made aware of the review and timetable of public engagement. Officers explained that there were various stages of consultation, which would start at the end of 2021. Bio-diversity and zero carbon issues would feature highly within the review.

Guidance on the mix of housing needed to be given, including the size of the houses, as concern was expressed that if developers were building a lower proportion of 3 and 4 bed houses, they would shrink the plot size of the smaller houses. Officers explained that the reference to 'smaller properties' was in relation only to number of bedrooms compared to Local Plan guidelines and not gross internal area.

Building on the flood plain in relation to climate change would be an important factor within the review. In relation to the climate change section of the report, it was suggested that we need a policy which sets out that we avoid building on the flood plain. The Planning Policy Manager advised that the Local Plan does include a policy which sets out a sequential approach in line with the National Planning Policy Framework and which directs new housing development to areas with lesser risk of flooding.

Meeting the housing need for a changing population, including travellers' sites and the size of the pitches or plots. Officers would look into the change in the number of pitches and report back to Members.

The timescale for the S106 planning obligations and how they had been met or delayed was queried. Officers explained that improvements were being made to the monitoring of the planning obligations currently.

Members reiterated that the process of debate on the Local Plan through Cabinet and onto Full Council should be a better managed process with a more transparent and open debate.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

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46 Service Performance Report 2020-21 Quarter Three

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive, which provided details of service performance during Q3.

Covid-19 had an impact on performance, as there was a need to support vulnerable residents and work on delivering the business grants, which would not normally be part of the workload, together with other issues such as working hard with people who were rough sleeping and households in emergency accommodation, ensuring that everyone had accommodation during the lockdowns.

Issues with staff turnover, particularly in Planning, was explained, with recruitment taking place currently.

Two planning complaints which had been partially upheld although most complaints were Covid-19 related.

Comments and queries from Members related to issues such as:

Money allocated for food distribution and the projected need to support foodbanks. Whether there was a project as a whole district, as there was a collective need to supply people with good food, keeping a check on good food supplies, taking account of funding from Town and Parish Councils and building on community experience. Councillors expressed support for this project, although concern was also expressed on how the supply of food should be distributed, as foodbanks responded to a specific need. This would be discussed with Officers.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

47 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 23 March 2021.

It was noted that:

Supplementary Planning Documents would be included on the agenda when necessary.

Car Parking in Woodstock was queried and when Cabinet would be considering this matter and the allocation of funds.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the Cabinet Work Programme be noted.

48 Members Questions

There were no questions from Members.

As this was the last meeting of the Civic year, Councillor Graham thanked the Chairman, Councillor Beaney, for conducting the meetings in a fair, honest and open way. This was supported by the Committee.

The Meeting closed at 8.00 pm

CHAIRMAN