

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the
Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Held in the Council Chamber at 6.30 pm on **Thursday, 24 November 2022**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chair), Jill Bull, Owen Collins, Jane Doughty, Nathalie Chapple, Natalie King, Liz Leffman, Nick Leverton, Charlie Maynard, Lysette Nicholls, Rosie Pearson, Harry St John and Alex Wilson

Also present Councillor Aitman (Cabinet member for Stronger, Healthy Communities), Councillor Enright (Cabinet Member for Economic Development) and Councillor Levy (Cabinet Member for Finance).

Officers: Jon Dearing (Group Manager - Residents Services) Stuart Wilson (Leisure Contract Specialist) Astrid Harvey (Strategic Policy and Partnerships Officer), Andrew Brown (Business Manager - Democratic Services) Michelle Ouzman and Janet Eustace (Democratic Services).

Also present John Amatt (GLL Head of Service), Matt Simmons (GLL Partnership Manager).

34 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2022 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

35 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Poole (Deputy Chair).

36 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

37 Participation of the Public

There was no public participation.

38 Chairman's Announcements

The Chair amended the order of the agenda to allow presenters to speak earlier in the meeting.

39 WODC Refugee Update

Jon Dearing (Group Manager - Residents Services) updated the Committee on the WODC Refugee status. He reported that there were 171 Ukrainian households in the area and that there had been 166 home inspections. Additional resources were being deployed to help those families who wished to move on into the private rented sector. The Afghan and Syrian refugee families were reported as all doing well. It was noted that a hotel in Witney had been taken over by the Home Office to provide accommodation for other refugees. The Home Office was providing security and catering. The Council had no direct role but was in touch with the authorities to assist where possible. It was noted that it was a fast moving situation with local churches and charities providing support where possible.

40 Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) Update

John Amatt (GLL Head of Services) and Matt Simmons (Partnership Manager) presented the GLL Annual Report. They talked about the new initiatives to promote health and to respond to the cost of living crisis. They explained that although numbers attending Leisure Centres in Chipping Norton and Carterton were almost back to pre-pandemic levels, numbers at Windrush were down by 40%. They mentioned the increase in running costs which were up by more than 25% over the last three years. The problems with the roof at the Chipping Norton Leisure Centre were due to be resolved in the forthcoming year.

In answer to questions, Mr Amatt confirmed that the numbers returning to the Leisure Centre were in line with other rural areas. Windrush was suffering from competition with new gyms being set up. He confirmed that GLL was working with local GPs to progress outreach work and said that they were working hard to promote mental health particularly among younger people. Mr Amatt was asked about the cleanliness of the centres. He accepted that there had been serious staffing shortages across the organisation but that the situation had now improved. Councillor Bull said that many of her earlier queries had been addressed and thanked Mr Simmons for the greatly improved communications now in place.

It was confirmed that the legal dispute on the roof at Chipping Norton Leisure centre had come to an end and that the Council would need to fund the repairs.

Councillors asked how GLL proposed to address rising costs and falling attendance. Mr Amatt said that there was due to be an announcement about reducing opening hours the following day and that he could not discuss the matter in advance of that. Reducing water temperature was a difficult balancing act between lower costs and deterring users. The company was looking for ways to bring older people back by offering cross centre packages and also at the family market with new junior packages.

Mr Amatt confirmed that the autumn/winter programme for improving the pitches at Monahan Way was in progress. It was difficult to open the Astro Turf at Carterton Community College more widely but the pitch was always made available to those who had booked. He agreed to provide a schedule of those facilities across the district for which GLL is responsible.

The Chairman thanked Mr Amatt and Mr Simmons for their presentation and for answering questions.

41 West Oxfordshire Council Plan 2023 - 2027

Astrid Harvey (Strategic Policy and Partnerships Officer) introduced the draft Council Plan 2023 -2027. She explained that the plan set out the overall vision of the Council and would be used to inform a more detailed action plan. She invited comments.

In discussion the following points were raised:

- How this plan differed from the previous plan. It felt as though the pack had been shuffled with no new ideas being included
- 'excellent health and wellbeing' required more clarity
- There needed to be more about biodiversity and ecology
- References to 'coalition' should be changed to 'alliance'

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- Page 15. Are residents indeed being put first? Has there been a full consultation with the public?
- Page 16. Add 'farmed' to 'built and natural environment'.
- The extent to which Town and Parish Councils are consulted; buses and bins were quoted as examples
- Page 17. There was discussion around the need to add 'inclusive'.
- Last bullet point 'current and future residents'
- Will people understand the term 'blue infrastructure'?
- Remove the quote which refers to the 'donut' economy
- 'Teachers' should be expanded to include support workers
- 4th bullet point add in more about biodiversity
- What about access to local food and reducing food miles
- Page 21 Why specific reference to young people only? If this is an area for focus we must also consider mental health of our younger population.
- Does there need to be more about flooding?
- Bullet point 1 needs clarifying
- Infographic – the food bank figures should be for all of the area not just Witney.
- The domestic abuse figures need to be amended to include 'reported'.
- The footnotes are not legible.

The Chair thanked Ms Harvey for the report.

42 Service Performance Report 2022/23 - Quarter One

The Committee considered the report. It was noted that it no longer received details of the number of people on the housing waiting list and asked that these details be included in future reports. The Committee also asked for details of numbers of void properties.

43 Committee Work Programme

The Chair drew attention to the fact that a number of items had dropped off the work programme. If necessary an additional Committee meeting would be arranged to consider these when they come forward. The Committee noted that they had not received a report from Defence Infrastructure. Mr Dearing said he had invited Mr Wooden to attend the meeting but had not received a reply. He said he would continue to chase. It was noted that Annington had said they would not be refurbishing any more of their existing properties in Carterton.

The Chair said that he would follow up the establishment of a working party to consider issues of concern around the Leisure Centres. Councillor Aitman confirmed that she would not be a member of this group but would attend as Cabinet Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities. It was agreed that Mr Dearing would draw up a crib sheet on Housing Questions and circulate this to members of the Committee for comment.

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Several Councillors had attended the recent Scrutiny Committee training which had been very useful. The advice had been that agenda items should not be included 'for noting' but rather all items should be for active scrutiny.

It was agreed that a Housing Association should be invited to attend a future meeting to brief on their role and the problems they are facing. The Committee also asked for an opportunity to scrutinise developer contributions

44 Cabinet Work Programme

It was agreed that the work programme should be amend it to make it clearer whether or not an item would be considered by the public.

The Meeting closed at 8.30 pm

CHAIR