

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the
Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Held in the Committee Room 1 at 6.30 pm on **Wednesday, 5 July 2023**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chair), Rizvana Poole (Vice-Chair), Natalie King, Charlie Maynard, Nick Leverton, Harry St John, Alex Wilson, Julian Cooper, Thomas Ashby, Rachel Crouch, Andrew Lyon, Phil Godfrey, Sandra Simpson and Alistair Wray

Officers: Jon Dearing (Assistant Director for Resident Services), Andy Barge (Assistant Director for Communities) and Chris Hargraves (Planning Policy Manager), Michelle Ouzman (Strategic Support Officer) and Anne Learmonth (Strategic Support Officer).

Other Councillors in attendance: Joy Aitman and Geoff Saul

1 Election of Chair

Jon Dearing, the Assistant Director for Resident Services, opened the meeting, welcoming Members and Offices to the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

The Assistant Director referred Members to the first item on the Agenda, Election of the Chair, and asked the Committee for nominations to the positions of Chair of the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2023/24.

Councillor Rizvana Poole proposed that Councillor Andrew Beaney be appointed to the position of Chair of Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2023/2024. This was seconded by Councillor Alex Wilson, was put to a vote. The vote was carried.

The Committee **Resolved** to:

1. Appoint Councillor Andrew Beaney to the position of Chair of the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee, for the municipal year 2023/2024.

2 Election of Vice-Chair

Councillor Alex Wilson proposed that Councillor Rizvana Poole be appointed to the position of Vice-Chair of Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2023/2024. This was seconded by Councillor Julian Cooper, was put to a vote. The vote was carried.

The Committee **Resolved** to:

1. Appoint Councillor Rizvana Poole to the position of Chair of the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee, for the municipal year 2023/2024.

3 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Liam Walker.

4 Declarations of Interest

Declarations of Interest were received as follows:

- Councillor Maynard declared that he was a trustee for Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB);
- Councillor St John declared that he was a trustee for Wychwood Forest Trust;

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- Councillor Andrew Beaney declared that the Agenda included Councillor Liz Leffman as a member of the Committee, and that Councillor Liz Leffman is not a member of the Committee.

5 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2023 were approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

The Chair informed the Committee that attached to the minutes was the Asylum report which was excluded from the public originally when the Agenda was published. The report was reviewed at the meeting by the Committee, it was then agreed that the report should not have been excluded, should have been published to be transparent, and therefore would be published with the minutes.

6 Participation of the Public

There were no participation of the public.

7 Response Outcome from Recommendations to Executive

The Chair brought Members' attention to the Executive responses to the two recommendations that the Committee referred to the Executive, from 16 March 2023 meeting.

The Chair explained to the Committee the background to the recommendations, which arose from Council motions, and the responses as there were newly appointed Councillors in attendance.

The Committee **Resolved** to:

- I. Note the Executive responses.

8 Asylum Update

The Chair introduced the Asylum Update Report but noted a difference in the figures reported on Page 15, to the figures reported on Page 26 on the Service Performance Report. The Assistant Director for Resident Services, Jon Dearing, confirmed that the figures reported on page 15 were the most up to date figures.

The actual total figures for Ukraine are 361 visitors in the District that we are aware of, 243 are in the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, with 142 sponsors.

Councillors enquired if we included within the figures, guests from Hong Kong, The Assistant Director for Resident Services confirmed that West Oxfordshire District Council (the Council), did not record any figures from Hong Kong.

Councillors then asked a series of questions regarding the asylum process.

The Assistant Director for Resident Services confirmed that there were 201 people staying in the hotel, awaiting asylum status, but not everyone stays in the District and some move on. The Council has requested further funding to assist in finding permanent housing. The Council had taken on a new member of staff, and were hoping to take on a further three new members of staff in the future. Finding new homes was challenging for the Council. At present there was no timeline of when the Hotel option would cease. The Council had applied for the

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Local Housing Fund which was approved and that £3 million pounds of funding would be passed over to Cottsway Housing Association to fund homes for Ukraine families in the district. The Council had taken advice from the SE Migration Partnership and as long as families were not being split up over the District the homes would not necessary be concentrated in Witney, it depended on where the housing stock was available. It was a balance, not housing them all in the same street, but also not isolating them from each other.

The Committee **Resolved** to:

1. Note the Asylum update.

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Grant Scheme Overview

Andy Barge, the Assistant Director for Communities, introduced the new Grant Scheme, presenting the new approach to grant funding, which was better aligned to the outcomes intended from the Council Plan and aimed to foster greater community engagement and involvement.

The new grant scheme introduces a new approach to revenue grant funding from 2024/25 aligned to four lots and supported by three year service level agreements.

Four lots being:

1. Improving our natural environment and the access to it, so that we enable physical and mental wellbeing and cohesive, connected communities;
2. Taking action towards the climate and ecological emergencies, so that we reduce carbon footprints and encourage nature recovery;
3. Increasing community resilience and amplifying the voice of the seldom heard, so that we take action on issues most important to our residents and their needs, such as access to food, supporting young people and cultural provision;
4. Providing residents with high quality, independent housing advice, welfare and debt advice services, so that they are empowered to tackle their problems and we support those who are unable to deal with difficult circumstances on their own.

The community revenue grant funding awarded in 2022-23 would be awarded again in 2023-24 to the same recipients and at the same level to allow a managed transition.

Civic crowdfunding will be introduced as an alternative to community facilities grants and the Council will make up to £120,000 per annum available to pledge against proposed projects.

The Council has appointed Spacehive as its civic crowdfunding platform provider on a three year contract.

Delegated authority will be given to the Chief Executive, in conjunction with the Leader and Executive Members for Stronger Healthy Communities, Planning and Sustainable Development, Environment, and Climate Change, to agree the type of projects to be supported and the pledge criteria for crowdfunding.

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The final change noted as an outcome of the review was the creation of a part-time Community Funding Officer post, to ensure the success of the new schemes and to secure external funding to support service delivery, where possible. Members were also assured the total budget directed at the various grant funding schemes had been maintained at the same level.

Members discussed with the Assistant Director the following topics:

- Verification checks on behalf of the Council;
- SpaceHive commission;
- Voluntary groups / charities;
- Guidance on applications;
- Crowd funding;
- Grant Panel;
- Council pledges;
- CDC SpaceHive Data;
- Pre-launch online and events

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director for the overview.

The Committee **Resolved** to:

1. Note the new Grant Scheme.

10 CCTV Update

The Assistant Director for Communities introduced the CCTV Update, focusing on upgrading the public open space CCTV cameras, covering areas of Carterton and Witney (with Chipping Norton under consideration) and associated monitoring control room arrangements.

Councillors entered into discussion on the following:

- Number of CCTV Cameras paid for in locals towns;
- Proportions costs levied to local towns;
- Relocation of camera's in local towns;
- Extending the scheme to include Chipping Norton;
- View on the options for mitigating tree growth;
- Preferred location Two Hub design – one in Witney.

The Committee **Resolved** to:

1. Endorse the continued need for public open space CCTV;
2. Note the progress towards a shared monitoring control room;
3. Note the camera optimisation review and provide a view on extending public open space CCTV to cover Chipping Norton;

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4. Provide a view on the options for mitigating tree growth;
5. Note the proposed future operating model;
6. Note the CCTV update from the Assistant Director for Communities.

II Update on Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Local Plan

Chris Hargraves, the Planning Policy Manager, introduced the review of the Local Plan, and explained to the Committee that they were currently at the initial plan preparation stage. The Local Plan would follow four stages:

- **Plan preparation** – informal engagement on the scope of the plan, different options and alternatives explored to identify a preferred approach.
- **Publication** – the formal stage when the Council produces what it considers to be a ‘sound’ plan.
- **Submission** – when the Council submits its plan for examination.
- **Adoption** – subject to the outcome of the examination, the Council formally adopts the plan.

The Planning Policy Manager summarised the consultation undertaken to date and explained that a range of supporting technical evidence was in the process of being commissioned. He explained that a further focused consultation was planned for the summer, feedback from which would then be used to inform a set of preferred policy approaches later in the year.

The Committee then discussed the following items:

- Public Transport – reintroduction of railways;
- National Policy Framework;
- Historic England input;
- Buffer zone for Blenheim;
- Consultation timescales;
- Digital and face to face events;
- Broader plan v detailed plan;
- Larger sites non delivering;
- WODC and OCC Housing proportions;
- SI06 and CIL (community infrastructure levy).

The Planning Policy Manager summarised the current timeline for taking the Local Plan forward:

- Consultation on preferred policy options/approaches winter 2023
- Publication of draft Local Plan summer 2024

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- Submission for examination autumn 2024
- Adoption mid 2025

The Chair thanked the Planning Policy Manager for the overview.

The Committee **Resolved** to:

1. Note the overview of the Local Plan from the Planning Policy Manager.

The Planning Policy Manager then introduced the update on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), explaining to the Committee that CIL is an optional charge which can be placed on development based on square meter size. Unlike Section 106 agreements, monies received through CIL are not site-specific and can be spent on infrastructure improvements across the District. There have been several previous attempts to introduce CIL in West Oxfordshire and earlier in the year, it was agreed that the process would be re-instigated. Officers have therefore just completed a tendering process for viability advice to inform a draft charging schedule and also to provide whole plan viability advice for the Local Plan in due course.

The viability evidence will explore whether larger strategic sites should be CIL exempt which is often the case in most local authorities in light of the heavy Section 106 burden such sites tend to incur. It was further explained that a proportion of CIL monies are passed to Town and Parish Councils which ranges from 15% where no neighbourhood plan is in place, up to 25% where an adopted Neighbourhood Plan is in place.

The Committee **Resolved** to:

1. Note the verbal update on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) from the Planning Policy Manager.

12 Service Performance Report Q4 and Review of Full Service Performance Data

The Chair introduced the Service Performance Report Q4 and explained to the Committee that at the last meeting the Committee had requested a full set of Service Performance indicators. These had been produced and the Chair thanked the Officers for publishing them, however the Committee was expecting a fuller set of statistics for the Economic Service Performance Reports. Historically the Committee used to receive reports of Leisure Services, Parking, Enforcement, Planning Percentages, and Housing Statistics. The Chair requested that report suggestions to be emailed to himself by the end of July, ahead of the October 4 Committee meeting.

The Committee reflected on the performance report and discussed the following items:

- Uncollected Council Tax;
- Business Rate collections;
- Only one rough sleeper recorded, Councillors complemented Officers in keeping on top of the numbers;

The Assistant Director for Resident Services to come back to the Committee with the 1.64 %, short of the target of uncollected Council Tax as a monetary value, and Business Rate collection improvement by 4% as a monetary value.

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The Committee **Resolved** to:

1. Request officers to bring a fuller set of reports on Economic and Social Performance Reports to the next Committee meeting set for 4 October 2023;
2. Suggest to Officers to remove the grey smiley face on the Customer Satisfaction Dashboard;
3. Note the Quarter 4 Service Performance Report.

13 Committee Work Programme

The Committee reviewed the Committee Work Programme with the Assistant Director for Resident Services.

The Committee **Resolved** to:

1. Schedule an additional Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee focused on Housing;
2. Schedule an additional Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee focused on Health;
3. Invite the Local Police to the next Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting set for 4 October 2023;
4. Remove the item 3 - Marriott's Walk, from the Committee Work Programme;
5. Remove the item 6 – Parking Strategy, from the Committee Work Programme;
6. Remove the item 12 and 15 – Enforcement Improvement Programme, from the Committee Work Programme;
7. Note the Committee Work Programme Report.

14 Executive Work Programme

The Committee reviewed the Executive Work Programme with the Assistant Director for Resident Services.

Councillor King left the meeting at 20:34.

The Committee **Resolved** to:

1. Note the Executive Work Programme Report.

The Meeting closed at 8.39 pm

CHAIR