

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB
at 5.30 pm on **Wednesday, 10 April 2024**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chair), Thomas Ashby, Hugo Ashton, Julian Cooper, Rachel Crouch, Andy Goodwin, Nick Leverton, Andrew Lyon, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Sandra Simpson, Ruth Smith, Harry St John, Alistair Wray, Liam Walker, Mark Walker and Alex Wilson

Officers: Christine Elsasser, Andrew Brown (Democratic Services Business Manager) and Phil Martin (Assistant Director for Business Support)

Other Councillors in attendance: Leader, Councillor Andy Graham

Guests: Gareth Elliot, Director of Policy and Communications for Mobile

59 Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carl Rylett, Mathew Parkinson, Natalie King (Councillor David Jackson substituted for Councillor Natalie King), Phil Godfrey, Rizvana Poole, Duncan Enright and David Cooper.

60 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

61 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meetings held on 19 March 2024 were approved by the Committee.

It was to be noted that Councillors Andy Graham, Duncan Enright and David Melvin were required to be recorded as apologies rather than present at the 19 March meeting.

There was a point of clarification on why the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Draft Charging Schedule had been moved to the 10 June 2024 meeting. It was explained that this was due to the report not having sufficient time to go through all necessary internal processes.

62 Chairs Announcements

The Chair asked that Members not discuss political matters to avoid breaching pre-election period rules.

There was a requirement to change the order of the agenda due to the lateness of the presenter on Item 6. It was therefore suggested that Item 7, Report back on recommendations, Item 8, Committee Work Programme and Item 9, Executive Work Programme be discussed first.

The Chair thanked Members for their work with the Committee, recognising it was the last Committee meeting before the election, and wished everyone his very best wishes and best of luck for those up for re-election.

It was **AGREED** by the Committee to change the order of the agenda as stated above.

63 Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

64 Mobile Network Coverage

Gareth Elliot, Director of Policy and Communications for Mobile UK provided a presentation to the Committee and explained that Mobile UK was the body that represented the four major mobile network operators; which were listed as Three, Vodafone, EE. and Virgin/O2. Other networks were not included because they did not own the infrastructure.

It was explained that the material presented was for the purposes of raising awareness and providing information to challenge perceptions and myths. Mobile UK could not provide specifics on applications because that was in line with commercial decisions made by the operators.

The difference between 4G and 5G were explained and how it was essential to for 5G to be implemented. It was explained where 5G sat on the health spectrum of radiation, and the importance of 5G access and wireless connectivity for a multitude of services including healthcare, jobs digital inclusion.

The barriers to deployment were summarised and identified including leadership, planning delays, resources, localised objections. Hence why Mobile UK desired to help Councils with incentives and campaigning of digital champions etc. Examples of structures were presented and technical requirements were explained and the density of infrastructure required was displayed with mast options shown. More information could be provided with a library of resources and a podcast.

The following points were raised by the Committee and responses provided by Gareth and/or Officers:

- It was queried if West Oxfordshire was only covered by one network It was explained that planning restrictions in the UK make it difficult to build infrastructure and if you want coverage you need a mast.
- It was asked if there were any developers required to provide a mast infrastructure. It was explained that this was not the case and that the developments were often covered with existing infrastructure. It could be useful for Mobile UK to know when developments were coming to allow some proactivity.
- It was queried if there had been any mast applications in WODC and if those applications were welcomed or objected. It was explained that ? Norton was one example.
- It was suggested that if a map could be provided of all the masts requires, a provision could be made for in the Local Plan. It was explained that the network operators don't provide that or share that data and they compete for contracts with applications based on the need for capacity in that area. Another Member confirmed he had seen them in planning but most were not problematic unless they involved aesthetics of listed buildings etc.
- It was asked if there was a system of roaming and if that was an issue that needed to be addressed by the operator. It was explained that Mobile UK didn't think that roaming was a solution and you could not roam without the infrastructure.
- There was a query asked around central government budgets and what the process was for Councils to report a black spot or area with very bad coverage and how that could be actioned. It was explained that this was for the shared network to decide. There was a real struggle to engage with Councils at the planning levels.

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- There were various technical questions asked regarding signal coverage. It was explained that the closer you are the better your signal. The height of the masts were to enable more coverage and there were limitations therefore specific infrastructure was required.
- A question on what power sources and broadband linkages were required was asked. It was explained that it was dependent on the location whether microwave links or fibre was used.
- A query was raised about noise and whether sounds were omitted from the masts. It was explained that that was dependent on how big they were and what type cooling was required with generators.
- It was asked if BTPS10 switch off would affect anything. It was explained that that was a landline network switch off (land line network) and owned by open reach and not mobile. There was no control over that by Mobile UK. On the other hand, the turning off 2G/3G was raised that it may affect Council services in terms of parking metres, telecare transition etc. and they were encouraged to engage with suppliers and taking necessary actions. The AD for Business Services confirmed that WODC has looked into this and this would not affect any of the services.
- A Member noted that they found the session very informative and were ready to advocate for more mobile infrastructure in the area as required; however, they wanted to know why there was a lack of mobile coverage in certain areas. It was explained that the easiest answer was that Mobile UK was there to inform Councils on how to build better relationships and create an understanding on why an application has come in and to challenge perceptions. There was a coverage of 95% of areas and it was mostly privately funded. Other holistic solutions were required to be examined such as satellite, on demand masts on wheels for disaster relief areas and concerts etc.
- One Member requested of a map of WODC and what was the cost of repeater antennae. It was explained the cost of various technologies mentioned was unknown but there were changes in regulations to allow boosted coverage in your house and Wi-Fi calling etc. The map would need to be requested from the providers.
- Another Member asked if the mast used by Thames Valley Police could be used. It was explained that using existing infrastructure was not impossible and they work with other companies to use their infrastructure.
- Where churches could be used as a potential for masts to be installed was queried. It was explained that they could potentially be used and have been; however, there are often issues with, not only listed building status and rules around that, but also access, safety parameters, fragility and viable power linkages which renders them unsuitable.

The Leader thanked Gareth for his presentation and explained that the commercial considerations were now realised and this issue would be discussed further as to how it needs to be addressed in the area. The Executive would now take forward and address the issue further.

Report back on Recommendations

The Report Back on Recommendations from Executive was introduced by the Chair of the Committee and Members had the following queries:

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- In relation to the item on the review and repurposing of earmarked reserves, there was a query on how tracking could be done of the name changes of the earmarked reserves and that these changes should be tracked through the Audit and Governance Committee. **Action Point:** Officers to come back with an explanation for this.

In relation to the actions arising attached to the minutes, the same previous queries were raised and Officers were asked to continue to chase up as **Action Points** :

- My question was based around the appeal in Over Norton - Part of the reason for allowing it was that we had no site identify. If we don't, why not and if we do where are they - Without them, Do, we stand a much higher rate of losing appeals? On the point of 5 and 5 in H7 is that a rolling 5 or a first come first serve?
- Councillor Harry St John added a further query - On the same sort of subject I notice that seems to be an ever-expanding site and activities (even at night) at Cuckoowood Farm on Cuckoo Lane south of Freeland. Has any planning officer been on a visit to see that and what is going on because it should be as per any consents /conditions? There is a very substantial building and every time I pass the site at night it is lit up inside - after what one would expect be normal working hours... hence my question. There were engineering works going on at the entrance the other week with a JCB etc. doing work. I suspect the JCB may be resident on site. A quick analysis of enforcement cases across the District show a significant proportion of cases involve the travelling or related community by comparison to everyone else one case has been going on for ages with social services, and police, etc. involved.

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Committee Work Programme

The Committee Work Programme was introduced by the Chair of the Committee and he suggested that due amount of agenda items on the 5 June 2024 meeting there could be some movement of items to later meetings with consideration given to those that were post decision scrutiny items. It was to be noted that there was an updated Work Programme and Members should refer to that copy which they received at the meeting.

Members made the following suggestions and comments:

- Scrutiny could be moved to a week earlier. It was suggested that this would be needed to considered carefully as it would have a knock on effect with reports and would extend the Executive decision making process and was a wider corporate issue.
- For the old system to be implemented to ensure decisions could be pre-scrutinised and it was suggested that this new system was fundamentally flawed. It was explained that the new system was decided at Council but the point was taken.
- It was suggested that the July meeting also had many reports scheduled and that perhaps there could be separate meetings for specific things (i.e. CIL) or an additional meeting added.
- Further set up for prioritisation of items was requested and it was also suggested that this was moot point given that Executive items may move to other meetings and this would not necessary known therefore it was pointless discussing this. The options were explained and the options as above were summarised with prioritisation was reiterated.
- It was explained that every intention was to ensure that reports would go to Executive on 12 June given that Officers had the time and directive for those reports.

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- It was suggested to start the meeting earlier as there were no reports being deferred at Executive, otherwise there would be no decisions made on Scrutiny. It was further explained that from the discussion so far there would be 6 items on the June agenda which were all pre-scrutiny items.

It was therefore suggested and **AGREED** that all the reports listed on the plan would be scheduled with the addition of Salt Cross Garden Village Area Action Plan (AAP); preference would be given to pre-scrutiny with the discussions around post scrutiny items such as the performance reports to be moved to another meeting if necessary. The Draft Budget would be taken to the 8 January 2025 meeting,

67 Executive Work Programme

The Executive Work Programme was discussed in conjunction with Item 8.

There was a query from a Member on the Review of Public Conveniences which was as follows:

- Why were there two public conveniences within a mile of each other (Woodstock and Chipping Norton) and was this still justified? It was explained that these questions would be included on action plan for the 3 July 2024 agenda.

The Meeting closed at 7.15 pm

CHAIRMAN