

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, 5 June 2024**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chair), Joy Aitman (Vice-Chair), Thomas Ashby, Adam Clements, Julian Cooper, Steve Cosier, Rachel Crouch, Genny Early, Natalie King, Dan Levy, Andrew Lyon, Paul Marsh, Stuart McCarroll, Michele Mead, Carl Rylett, Sandra Simpson, Ruth Smith, Alistair Wray, Liam Walker, Alex Wilson, Martin McBride and Hugo Ashton

Officers: Christine Elsasser, Andrew Brown (Democratic Services Business Manager), Bill Oddy (Assistant Director for Commercial Development), Andy Barge (Assistant Director for Communities), Alison Borrett (Senior Performance Analyst), Michelle Clifford (Business Manager - Customer Experience & Resources), Jon Dearing (Assistant Director for Resident Services) and Chris Hargraves (Planning Policy Manager)

Executive Members in attendance: Andy Graham, Geoff Saul and Duncan Enright

1 Election of Chair

Andrew Brown (Business Manager, Democratic Services) opened the meeting and asked for nominations for the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year of 2024 - 2025.

Councillor Michele Mead proposed that Councillor Andrew Beaney be elected as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2024-2025. This was seconded by Councillor Alex Wilson. With no other nominations made, the proposal was put to a vote and was unanimously agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED that the Committee **AGREED**

1. Elect Councillor Andrew Beaney as the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2024-2025.

2 Appointment of Vice Chair

Councillor Andrew Beaney, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, asked for nominations for the position of Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year of 2024 - 2025.

Councillor Ruth Smith proposed that Councillor Joy Aitman be appointed as the Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2024-2025.

This was seconded by Councillor Michele Mead. With no other nominations made, the proposal was put to a vote and was unanimously agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

3 Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Elizabeth Poskitt, Nick Leverton and Liz Leffman. Councillor David Jackson substituted for Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt and Councillor Martin McBride substituted for Councillor Nick Leverton.

Councillors Alistair Wray and Liam Walker gave apologies for lateness.

Councillor Mark Walker was absent.

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Apologies were received from Councillor Alaric Smith as the Executive Member for the Changes to Customer Telephone Access Times report.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received from Members of the Committee.

5 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Councillor Michele Mead proposed that the minutes of the previous meeting, held on Wednesday 10 April 2024, be approved by the Committee as a true and accurate record. This was seconded by Councillor Rachel Crouch, was put to a vote and was unanimously agreed by the Committee.

It was to be noted that in regards to any matters arising from the action points, there was one outstanding action point which related to the 5 year supply of travellers sites and an answer would be made available at the next meeting.

6 Announcements from the Chair

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

7 Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

8 Approval of Upgrade to WODC Public Space CCTV Provision and Monitoring Arrangements

The Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare introduced the report that recommended upgrading the public open space CCTV cameras covering areas of Carterton and Witney to high definition digital, together with the installation of five new cameras in Chipping Norton. The report further recommended that the Council joined the Thames Valley Police (TVP) CCTV partnership, with an associated transfer of CCTV assets and operational responsibility to TVP under a 'single owner' model; and moving monitoring arrangements to a shared Oxfordshire hub.

It was explained that £300,000 was approved by Council in 2019/20 for capital investment in CCTV, £255,635 remained, after upgrading the control room in 2022. The Executive would be asked to note the potential funding shortfall of up to £55,000. The steps that would need to be taken were listed in 4.7 of the Executive report.

Furthermore, under the current operating model, West Oxfordshire District Council retained direct responsibility for the public open space CCTV system and its ongoing maintenance. In early April 2022, Thames Valley Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner tabled a report to the Police and Crime Panel outlining a new vision for CCTV. This vision recognised that CCTV existed primarily for the benefit of policing and the wider interests of community safety. Therefore, it was right that policing would shoulder the lion share of the responsibility for providing the capability, under a 'single owner' model. The single owner model would help to consolidate technology, drive savings through economies of scale, improve integration with police systems and provide increased resilience.

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An Oxfordshire CCTV partnership board was established in 2022 and TVP had employed a CCTV Operations Manager to gain greater traction; the point had now been reached whereby an Oxfordshire monitoring control room, located in Abingdon, was proposed, which would form part of a Thames Valley Police CCTV Partnership which would see transfer of ownership of CCTV to Thames Valley Police.

The Assistant Director for Communities answered questions from Members and the following points were to be noted:

- The Partnership Board would run the CCTV arrangements and any decisions on camera locations, removals, and additions would need to be agreed by the CCTV partnership Board with the funding formula adjusted accordingly. There would also be a legal partnership agreement put in place to ensure that any movements of assets out of West Oxfordshire would be considered in the funding formula.
- All partners were seeking approval for the formal agreements from their perspective Executives. Thames Valley Police would do checks on requests for additional CCTV and would then fit that requirement into the funding formula as set out in the report.
- Shortfall and future costs would be applied for through the Safer Street Fund as found in section 4.7 of the report. The outcome of the bid was currently pending and continuous funding would be sought were possible.
- Reporting of faults and issues with CCTV would be done through the County Wide Maintenance Program and service reports could be provided if required.
- In terms of timescales, if the Executive approved this approach and the Thames Valley Police agreed to take the lead on the procurement, then the project would likely start in the Autumn and be completed by the end of the calendar year.
- In section 5.12 and section 6.5 of the report the total figures did not match. The figures in 5.12 were the correct figures.
- Carterton Town Council was paying more for cameras due to transferred images and there were large costs involved in that; however, steps were currently being implemented to reduce those costs.
- Any required upgrades to CCTV would be completed relatively quickly and the review time would be ongoing with the funding formula adjusted accordingly.
- The Partnership Model would bring additional resources and real time monitoring. However, Officers would ask Thames Valley Police if they believed this would improve response times.
- Security of the footage was believed to be secure due to the Thames Valley Police being compliant with the Commissioner Code and the quantifiable benefits of adopting the model were covered in section 2 of the report. If Members required more specific statistics Officers would need to request them from the Thames Valley Police.
- Capital Expenditure had not been broken down within the report; however, Officers were happy to circulate those figures.

RESOLVED that the Committee **AGREED** to submit the following recommendations to the Executive on 12 June 2024:

Recommendation: That the priority order of the steps that will be taken to address the funding shortfall of up to £55,000 (paragraph 4.7) are adjusted so that steps c) and d) were moved up to become the new a) and b).

9 Service Performance Report 2023-24 Quarter Four

The Leader introduced the report that provided details of the Council's operational performance for the end of 2023-24 Quarter Four (Q4).

Overall, the Council's performance had been positive, with commendable progress in a number of areas including visits to the leisure centres, Official Land Charge Search Times and Processing times for Council Tax Support and Housing Benefit. Sections 3.1 and 3.2 of the report highlighted where the service was in terms of targets.

The Senior Performance Analyst explained that the report in the pack was now correct as it had a few minor errors in some of the figures. Sections 3.1 and 3.2 of the report highlighted where the service was above and fell below targets respectively.

Questions were answered from Members and the following points were to be noted:

- Within the Action Tracker, Item 23, it was explained that an appointment for the Strategic Housing Development and Enabling Manager had been made. The Assistant Director of Commercial Development would give an update to Members after the meeting.
- Regarding Salt Cross, there was a separate Steering Group which had been updated; Andrea Kenton could provide that update to Members.
- The installation of Electric Vehicle Charge Points was delayed by 6-8 weeks due to the nature of the complex partnership with town councils and authorities; however, mitigation was put in place to manage the delay.
- Regarding Service Delivery Agreements within large developments, Members expressed a desire for the Council to take control of those green areas to ensure resident savings. Officers agreed to come back with a timeline and look into the issue further with the possibility of also looking into Community Land Trusts.
- Officers would come back on whether the Windrush lottery bid for May had been received.
- Improvement plans and grant schemes under the central government funding would continue to be tracked, published on the website and further information communicated to residents.
- In terms of leisure contracts benchmarking, this was only currently being done against other Councils and nearest neighbours but Officers would look into benchmarking within more sectors.
- A review of damaged bin replacements had been undertaken in conjunction with other councils and complaints had been monitored. The actual cause would be determined and assessed to see if any further preventative measures could be taken.

RESOLVED that the Committee **AGREED**:

- I. To Note the 2023/24 Q4 service performance report.

10 Salt Cross Garden Village Area Action Plan (AAP)

The Planning Policy Manager introduced the report that provided an update on the Salt Cross Garden Village Area Action Plan (AAP).

Salt Cross was a planned new garden village community to the north of the A40 near Eynsham. The area was identified in the adopted Local Plan as a strategic location for growth and it was expected to include around 2,200 homes, a 40-hectare science and technology park

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along with schools, open space and other community facilities. To guide the future delivery of Salt Cross, the District Council was preparing a new Area Action Plan (AAP). Once adopted, the AAP would form part of the statutory development plan alongside the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031. The purpose of the report was to provide an update Members on the current timetable for taking the AAP through to formal adoption following a third-party legal challenge last year.

Furthermore, the Planning Inspectorate confirmed that the examination had been reopened and that a new Inspector - Helen Hockenhull BA(Hons) B.PI MRTPI had been appointed. The Inspector wrote to the Council on the same day and a copy of her letter was attached at Annex B. The letter had also been published on the Garden Village Examination web page.

Questions were answered from Members and the following points were noted:

- There was a written ministerial statement published in December after the hearings in November; the two events were inter-related and provided authorities with instruction on what they could and could not do in regards to planning. However, the judge in the November hearing was not able to take the December statement into account. The Inspector would now be able to look into the issue and her letter attached to the report was clear on what needed to be done in reference to the ministerial statement. However, the current legal challenge would now need to be taken into account as well.
- The intention was to make Salt Cross as Net Zero as possible.
- There was a question of when the houses within the Salt Cross Garden village area would be built and it was explained that commencement would take place in 2026. However due to the challenge and issues that had occurred the timeframes would likely be pushed back to 2028.

RESOLVED that the Committee **AGREED**:

I. To note the contents of the report.

II Changes To Customer Telephone Access Times

The Leader of the Council introduced the report that proposed the trial of reduced telephone access hours from 9am-2pm become a permanent arrangement to the public, following the data gathered and in light of a continuous decline in customer demand for telephone contact.

The trial reduced telephone access hours from 9am – 2pm to the public and had proved the concept that customers were continuing to shift to digital channels. In the original report that proposed the trial period, and excluded the Managers and Officers required for the face-to-face visits at the Welch Way Office, each of the 30 Customer Service Officers across West Oxford District Council and Cotswold District Council (24.93 FTE) would have a reduction in hours of 0.32 FTE. The reduction across the 30 Officers equated to a total reduction of 7.98 FTE. This made a total efficiency saving of £238,100 shared equally between West Oxford District Council and Cotswold District Council, and was on track to achieve £250,000. Therefore, the total saving for each council would be £125,000 per annum.

The Business Manager, Customer Experience, shared that she had only received one complaint about the reduced service and reassured Members that customers could still access Officers face-to-face until 5pm and that other provisions were in place to ensure contact for emergencies etc.

Questions were answered from Members and the following points were to be noted:

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- Cotswolds District Council had agreed the trial of reduced telephone access hours from 9am-2pm as a permanent arrangement to the public verbally but were awaiting the end of pre-election period to ratify the decision through their Cabinet. It was believed that they would follow through with permanent arrangement as agreed.
- Some Members felt that they should have been consulted because they had received complaints about the reduced service; however, others suggested residents were happy with the savings.
- Members suggested other options, including a Hunt group, given that the numbers of calls were so small. This meant that a central line would be dialled in and calls would be answered by other staff who may be available and could forward on, etc. Officers explained that the reason the number of calls was low was due to the communications around the reduced times and if those were withdrawn, call numbers would rise again. As resources were now reduced they recommended against this approach. In terms of the hunt group approach, Officers felt this approach may frustrate residents as they would not get through to the department they required.

RESOLVED that the Committee **AGREED**:

- I. To note the contents of the report and that the Executive would be asked to agree to adopt the reduced telephone access arrangements on a permanent basis.

12 Report back on Recommendations

There were no Executive responses to any recommendations because no recommendations to the Executive had been agreed at the previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in April.

13 Committee Work Programme

No changes were agreed to the Committee's Work Programme:

Councillor Cooper raised a question about a the progress of report that had been requested by the Uplands Sub-Committee on world heritage buffer zone. The Business Manager for Democratic Services agreed to follow up after the meeting.

14 Executive Work Programme

The following was to be noted on the Executive Work Programme:

- The Executive meeting on 22 July would be held at 2pm.
- Various meeting had been moved back to avoid staff being briefed on the Publica Transition in the days leading up to the Parliamentary General Election, which many affected staff would be focused on delivering.
- Arrangements for Sustainable Development for this period were still on the work plan.

15 Leisure and Wellbeing Task and Finish Group Membership Change

The Committee agreed to appoint Councillor Joy Aitman to the Leisure and Wellbeing Task and Finish Group to replace Councillor Rizvana Poole who was now part of the Executive and therefore could not be involved in Overview and Scrutiny.

16 Date of Next Meeting

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The Committee was asked to move the date of the next meeting from 3 July 2024 to 17 July 2024 to avoid staff being briefed on the Publica Transition in the days leading up to the General Election.

RESOLVED that the Committee **AGREED**

- I. The date of the next meeting would be 17 July 2024 at 5.30pm.

The Meeting closed at 6.50 pm

CHAIRMAN