

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, 6 November 2024**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chair), Thomas Ashby, Adam Clements, Julian Cooper, Genny Early, Liz Leffman, Nick Leverton, Dan Levy, Andrew Lyon, Paul Marsh, Stuart McCarroll, Michele Mead, Elizabeth Poskitt, Sandra Simpson, Ruth Smith, Alistair Wray, Liam Walker, Alex Wilson and David Jackson

Officers: Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Georgina Dyer (Chief Accountant), Phil Martin (Director of Place), Heather McCulloch (Community Wellbeing Manager), Janine Sparrowhawk (Community Funding Officer) and Kim Langford-Tejrar (Infrastructure Delivery Lead)

Cabinet Members in attendance: Councillors Duncan Enright, Hugo Ashton, Rachel Crouch and Alaric Smith

55 Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Joy Aitman, Carl Rylett, Steve Cosier and Mark Walker. Councillor David Jackson substituted for Councillor Carl Rylett.

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Natalie King.

Councillor Liam Walker left at 18:40.

Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt left at 18:57.

Councillor Liz Leffman left at 19:02.

Councillor Michele Mead left at 19:47.

56 Declarations of Interest

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

57 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt proposed that the minutes of the previous meeting, held on Wednesday 2 October 2024, be approved by the Committee as a true and accurate record.

This was seconded by Councillor Alex Wilson, was put to a vote and it was unanimously agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED: The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2024.

58 Chair's announcements

The Chair welcomed Members to the meeting and explained what to do in case of a fire and any further procedure rules.

59 Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

Infrastructure Funding Statement 2023/24

The Executive Member for Planning, Councillor Hugo Ashton, introduced the Head of Planning and the Infrastructure Delivery Lead. The report provided greater clarity on the receipt and use of developer contributions including Section 106 planning obligations to fund new and enhanced infrastructure in support of planned growth. As such, the Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) helped to support several aims and objectives of the Council Plan.

It was to be noted that the Section 106 annual report was not included as details could not be shared due to not being contractually determined.

S106 was to mitigate the impacts of development on a locality that were specifically earmarked in a legal agreement to meet a specific identified need. S106 applied once the impact of development could be seen. There was a very specific process for allocating S106 monies for projects which required a request to be made. There was evidence that sports play and leisure were very good at proving need and requesting money.

A scheme dating from 2006 had become unviable and needed further funding. There were no spend deadlines, however; S106 was used on long-term projects. Monies were being received from 2014-2021 and all instalments were needed before it could be spent. The Council was actively working on projects for 2025 to 2026 and nothing would be lost.

The following points and suggestions were noted by the Committee:

- S106 money was not always index linked and the Council did not sit on the money for long.
- S106 money was project specific and if it could not go to a specific project then it would go to a department and work would be done with the local community on how to allocate it and legal agreements would be looked at as part of that process.
- A Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Scheme would be introduced and submitted to an examiner before Christmas. CIL could be more flexible and capture smaller developments. The Council could define how it was spent and as part of the IFS which would be used to set out priorities and a list of schemes would be drawn out of it.
- Any contribution to a community needed to be evidence based and would need to be requested at the application stage. Once the money was received the relevant Town or Parish Council would be informed and the Council would work with them on delivering a specific project or type of infrastructure which could be flexible based on needs.
- There would be a review of whether CIL could be used for sustainable transport where a proper evidence base that was defensible at appeal could be set up. There would be an aim to ensure that no money was lost by working with internal teams, tracking and chasing and ensuring good accountancy procedures to actively manage it. However, it could not be guaranteed that schemes would not fail due to unviability.
- CIL and S106 were intended to coexist. However, this became unclear when there were larger schemes involved. For example, with Salt Cross there was £90m of S106 towards top end and then little room to charge CIL beyond that.
- A more proactive approach was required working with Town and Parish Councils in regard to S106/CIL. Information would be contained on the website and a spending plan would be shared to Members.

- Officers would look back to how much S106 was given back in the last five years.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the report and it was agreed that there were no recommendations to the Executive on 20 November 2024.

61 West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 Update

The Executive Member for Planning, Councillor Hugo Ashton introduced the Head of Planning. The report provided an update on the emerging draft West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041, with particular regard to proposed national planning policy changes, and a revised timetable for taking the plan through to adoption.

The District Council was in the process of producing a new Local Plan covering the period up to 2041. Good progress was being made with preferred policy options currently being drafted and supporting technical evidence being prepared. However, significant national planning policy changes had been announced in July and these would have a direct bearing on the new local plan and therefore a revised timetable for taking the new local plan forward needed to be agreed.

Work on the new West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 was now well underway. To date, there had been two main periods of public consultation which had been interspersed with focused engagement with key stakeholders. The anticipated structure of the plan was now agreed and was expected to comprise a series of cross-cutting district-wide strategic policies, a number of geographically specific 'place based' policies and a suite of development management policies. Preferred policy options were currently being drafted, the intention being to set out the Council's preferred approach and in doing so, to explain why other approaches have been ruled out. The purpose of the preferred options consultation was to firm up on the overall content of the plan ahead of it being formally published.

The Executive Member for Planning suggested that the final National Policy Planning Framework (NPPF) later this year was expected to include a new standard for the housing requirement meaning the district's requirement would be 65% higher than currently planned for. This would equate to 7,500 extra homes compared to the current plan. The delayed production of the NPPF meant that it would be brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Executive in March 2025 with a possible Member workshop beforehand and then a consultation after the Oxford County Council election in May/June. The Regulation 19 draft would give more protection and March 2026 was a realistic timeframe for the completed Local Plan.

There would also be a housing and employment land availability assessment with a long list of potentially suitable sites. Salt Cross was currently being assessed by the Inspector and their assessment would be completed by the end of this month.

The following points and suggestions were noted by the Committee:

- The Head of Planning confirmed that discussions were ongoing with neighbouring authorities in various forums and the Council was awaiting information from Oxford City Council as to how they would proceed after their local plan had failed at examination.
- It was explained that the Infrastructure Delivery Plan was not listed as not all the plans were listed in the update; only those that formed part of the evidence base.

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- The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) was out of date; an updated SCI would be considered in the Regulations 18 consultation with further policy and Development Management (DM) input provided.
- There was also a requirement to build on youth engagement and engagement with other hard to reach groups.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the report and it was agreed that there were no recommendations to the Executive on 20 November 2024.

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Westhive Criteria

The Community Funding Officer introduced the report that asked the Committee to consider the strengthening and clarification of established criteria for Westhive civic crowdfunding platform.

Westhive was a 'movement' on Spacehive, set up to support community projects in West Oxfordshire. Westhive was launched in October 2023. The Civic Crowdfunding platform provided a new and accessible way that West Oxfordshire residents could be at the heart of civic change and provided a springboard for locally led ideas to attract funding more easily. The report served to confirm the established criteria and strengthen elements which had been noted as requiring clarification.

The following points and suggestions were noted by the Committee:

- There were six funding rounds over three years.
- There was no change to the criteria it was just being organised into one place. There would be a review and analysis after round four toward the spring/summer 2025. The technical process and supporting residents remained. Officers were working through residents' experiences and would bring back the lessons learned at a later date.
- There was 1 application that had not been successful because it had not met the crowdfunding target out of 6 applications to date in phases 1 and 2. 9 applications in round 3 would be assessed.
- There were 2 pots of funding, of £125k and £175k. The UKSPF funding pot had a time limit but it could only be spent on capital projects so that funding was allocated where possible and there was less demand on Council's own allocation.
- A previous underspend had not been rolled over or lost. For 2025/26 the funding would be added in to the revenue account and whatever was left would be unspent capital.
- Members requested that there be more understanding provided in the next report as there were misgivings. It was proposed that a review is undertaken which compares the impacts of the Westhive approach with the previous grants system it replaced.
- It was explained that the Council used to give grants to the same groups every year. There was still £458k per year in total including the commissioned grants.
- The Cabinet Member for Finance explained that he was interested to hear feedback and this was about making Council's funding go further. If this approach was not working then other ways could be found to make it work. There was a review of scheme being conducted against its objectives. It was currently a three-year scheme but it could be changed in future.
- There were comments around the need to ensure that funding was fully utilised for the benefit of communities across the district.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the report and it was agreed that there would be the following recommendation to the Executive on 20 November 2024:

1. That the Council reviews how funding for Westhive is utilised with a view to ensuring that the budget allocated by the Council can be distributed effectively and fully for the benefit of communities.

63 Financial Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter Two

The Executive Member for Finance, Councillor Alaric Smith, introduced the report that detailed the Council's financial performance for Quarter Two 2024-2025.

The report considered the significant variances in revenue income and expenditure against the approved revenue budget set by Full Council on 28th February 2024. The report also included progress in delivering the approved Capital Programme. A year end revenue forecast was also included based on the data available in Q2. The forecast did not include any potential variances in funding i.e. interest on external borrowing, Minimum Revenue Provision, Retained Business Rates income and General Government Grants. These items made a significant impact on the 2023/24 outturn position, but at this stage in the year it was not possible to accurately predict their final position for the year.

At quarter 2 (Q2) there was an overall overspend of £96,821 against the profiled budget for the period. At quarter 1 there was an overall overspend of £257,013 against the profiled budget. The key factors driving the revenue position were income shortfalls in garden waste and development management, the delayed Elmfield office letting, the empty Carterton Industrial Estate units and increased expenditure on waste and recycling container replacement. Development management income had struggled in the first half of the year but may yet recover should a major application be received. The recycling contract with Suez expired at the end of September and the cost centre was showing a temporary underspend of £126,000 against the contract as officers and Suez were negotiating the final two months invoicing cost. The new contract, approved at the Executive meeting on 11 September 2024, was expected to deliver a budget saving of £300,000 from 2025/26 (£62,000 in 2024/25). The Elmfield offices had been empty since August 2023 and required capital investment before the new tenant occupies the building in January 2025. The tenant would undertake the work and had scheduled it to take 12 weeks. Rent would be paid from mid-January, irrespective of whether the construction works had been completed.

The following points and suggestions were noted by the Committee:

- There were many moving parts and it was unknown if there would be an underspend.
- In terms of planning projects, there were fortnight meetings to ensure all work streams were working efficiently.
- The Council was exploring opportunities for partnership working across Oxfordshire.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the report and it was agreed that there were no recommendations to the Executive on 20 November 2024.

64 Report back on recommendations

There were no recommendations to the Executive arising from the previous Committee meeting.

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65 Executive Work Programme

The Executive Work Programme was noted.

66 Committee Work Programme

It was noted that an item on the Waste Fleet Purchase Delegation would be added to the Committee Work Programme. This item had been referred to the Committee by the Executive on 9 October 2024.

The Meeting closed at 7.52 pm

CHAIRMAN