

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 **Thursday, 29 February 2024**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chair), Rizvana Poole (Vice-Chair), Thomas Ashby, Julian Cooper, Rachel Crouch, Jane Doughty, Natalie King, Nick Leverton, Michele Mead, Sandra Simpson, Ruth Smith, Harry St John, Liam Walker, Mark Walker, Alex Wilson, David Jackson and Elizabeth Poskitt

Officers: Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrew Brown (Democratic Services Business Manager), Georgina Dyer (Chief Accountant), Giles Hughes (Chief Executive), Bill Oddy (Assistant Director for Commercial Development), Max Thompson (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Andy Barge (Assistant Director for Communities), Alison Borrett (Senior Performance Analyst), Hannah Kenyon (Climate Change Manager) and Stuart Rawlinson (Business Manager - Resources, Data and Growth)

Other Councillors in attendance: Andy Graham, Alaric Smith, Tim Sumner, Andrew Prosser and Deputy Leader - Economic Development - Cllr Duncan Enright

46 Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hugo Ashton, Andy Goodwin, Phil Godfrey and Alistair Wray (Councillor Dave Jackson substituted for Councillor Alistair Wray and Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt substituted for Councillor Hugo Ashton).

Apologies were also noted from Councillor Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council.

47 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

48 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 7 February 2024 were approved by the Committee.

49 Chair's announcements

The Chair updated Members that the first meeting of the Leisure and Wellbeing Task and Finish Review would be held the following day at 3.00pm over Teams.

Members were asked to consider what issues the Committee wished to include in its work plan for 2024/25 and to provide any suggestions to the Chair, Councillor Poole and Democratic Services.

50 Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

51 Carbon Action Plan

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The Climate Change Manager provided a copy of the Carbon Action Plan attached to the agenda. Lily Paulson, the Climate Change Officer was introduced and thanked for all her hard work on the project.

The report explained that West Oxfordshire District Council (the Council) declared a climate and ecological emergency in 2019, making its pledge to become a carbon neutral Council by 2030. A pledge to be carbon neutral meant that the Council needed to balance the carbon dioxide emissions produced as a result of its everyday activities with the amount of carbon dioxide emissions that was removed from the atmosphere. Therefore, the first objective was to minimise the amount of carbon dioxide emissions being released because of Council activities bringing these as close to zero as possible. Any remaining 'residual' emissions would then need to be offset through verified means.

While the Carbon Action Plan focused on reducing emissions from Council activities, buildings and services, the Council was also committed to facilitating the reduction of wider district emissions through the delivery of its Climate Change Strategy 2021-25.

The document provided an updated version of the Climate Action Plan, covering actions to be undertaken between 2024 and 2030 to reach the carbon neutral target.

The plan only focused on the Council's internal emissions and set out the pathway and actions required to meet the 2030 targets.

A range of actions were required to meet these targets and currently the Council was not on course to reach the 2030 targets. The actions that were required in certain areas, the co-benefits, the financial implications, importance for external funding and how monitoring and reporting would be undertaken was explained.

Various questions and points of clarification were raised with Officers providing answers and points of clarification as follows:

- It would be difficult to achieve Carbon neutrality without funding or opportunities to secure funding.
- Grey Fleet meant vehicles that employees own and use for business purposes (which could include petrol, diesel, electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles).
- The waste fleet fell under "scope one" emissions within the Carbon Action Plan.
- Leased assets were commercially let and not delivering services for the Council.
- The Old Port House had been reviewed and was the first project; which proved important for social impact and the Asset Management Team would look at retrofitting the Council held buildings within a timeframe of the next eighteen months.
- The cycle to work scheme was being reviewed in the Active Travel Plan and what could be done to facilitate the switch to staff not using their vehicles was being examined. Information on how many staff use this scheme would be provided in due course.
- Leisure centres were key projects for decarbonisation and the prices were highly inflated in the market due to not many suppliers quoting which had caused viability issues. Grant funding was being looked at.
- There had been a switch to Green energy suppliers and there was a requirement for an Energy Manager to oversee this.
- The Climate Team were ensuring continued maintenance of all leisure facilities and not just awaiting funding. In particular, any roof issues were being looked at.

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- Hybrid meeting options and condensing the need to travel were part of the Plan's objective and Members' travel was important and the team were happy to look at that and discuss with the Executive.
- Air source and ground source heat pumps could be suitable for some projects.
- A variety of mixed habitats were acknowledged and the nature recovery work was being reviewed.
- Electric Vehicle (EV) charge points and their infrastructure were progressing; other alternatives were being viewed with an open mind.
- There was approval for two nature recover specialists to join the Climate Team.
- EV trials would be considered in the fleet of vehicles.

There was an additional question around funding and what the costs of reaching climate neutrality would be if no external funding was obtained. Officers explained that it would be very difficult to achieve that objective without any funding streams and exact deficit figures could be provided outside of the meeting. **Action Point:** Officers would provide deficit figures to Members.

RESOLVED that the Committee **AGREED** to submit the following recommendation to the Executive on 6 March 2024:

- I. That consideration is given to how the carbon footprint of Councillors may be reduced.

52 Financial Performance Report – 2023/24 Quarter Three

The Executive Member for Finance introduced the report that detailed the Council's financial performance for Quarter Three 2023-2024. It was explained that the position at year end was forecasted to be an overspend of £326,268. The equivalent figure at Q2 was £783,170. The outturn position had significantly improved due to the contribution of £554,000 in additional Treasury Management investment income and an expected £250,000 reimbursement from Publica relating to early delivery against savings targets and slightly higher employee turnover.

The Finance Director asked the Committee to note the recommendation of delegated authority on page 62 of the report and that it was to ensure reserves could be used to address various risks if required.

Various questions and points of clarification were raised with Officers providing answers and points of clarification as follows:

- Earmarked reserves that were no longer required for specific projects could be used to help with the general fund.
- The budget was set on a general fund and the earmarked reserves were separate.
- On page 63 the funds were earmarked but not ring-fenced. Therefore there was a request for delegated authority to revisit and move some monies into areas that were more of a risk if required.
- All four risks that were referenced in the budget and medium term financial strategy (MTFS) were in the public domain.
- This was an annual review and a risk assessment exercise that identified and assessed the highest risks.
- Section 106 monies were not held in earmarked reserves.
- The amount to be spent on mitigating the risks was not known yet.

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RESOLVED that **AGREED** to submit the following recommendation to the Executive on 6 March 2024:

- I. That the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is included as a consultee in the delegation to the Director of Finance to review and repurpose earmarked reserves, in addition to the Executive Member for Finance.

53 Sport England Swimming Pool Support Fund Phase 2

Members were made aware that there was an exempt report and if it was discussed there would be a requirement to go into exempt session.

The Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects introduced the report that sought approval for the Council to enter into an agreement with Sport England for the acceptance of a grant from the Swimming Pool Support Fund (SPSF) Phase 2; and for the Council to draw down funding awarded to Chipping Norton Lido, acting in its capacity as lead authority for the delivery of the SPSF.

It was explained that the SPSF had been allocated to local authorities in England by the government as a support package for public leisure facilities with swimming pools and was split into two phases. Following the announcement of the second phase of the grant scheme in September 2023, a series of interventions were considered for each of the sites in the District. Funding bids totalling almost £754,000 were developed and for Carterton Leisure Centre, Chipping Norton Leisure Centre, Chipping Norton Lido (bid submitted by Lido management team), Windrush Leisure Centre, Witney, and Woodstock Outdoor Pool. Only 2 bids were accepted due to an overwhelming demand; funding for both Windrush Leisure Centre in Witney and Chipping Norton Lido were accepted.

Various questions and points of clarification were raised with Officers providing answers and points of clarification as follows:

- Bids were put in for a number of buildings. Funding would come directly from Sports England and this was not money the Council allocated; the Council only facilitated the grants and it could not be used for any other purposes.
- Clarification on the solar panels on Windrush Leisure Centre and any payments or additional costs around those would need clarification from the leisure operator, GLL.
- Criteria for the funding was weighted on community facilities and the menu of interventions. There was no further explanation as to why the other bids were not accepted.
- Complementary heating activity for swimming pools was being examined to reduce energy demands.
- Funding could be partially lost if there were to be a new leisure centre built but these issues would be addressed if that scenario occurred and it was unlikely Sports England would claw back any money paid from the grant if the Council was extending leisure provision within the District.

RESOLVED that the Committee **NOTED** the report.

54 Service Performance Report 2023-24 Quarter Three

The Senior Performance Analyst introduced the report that provided details of the Council's operational performance at the end of 2023-24 Quarter Three (Q3).

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Highlights of the report were shared and it was explained that the Climate Team, in collaboration with other Oxfordshire authorities, secured £298k of Innovate UK funding to enable nature-based carbon offsetting in Oxfordshire.

Witney Christmas Market witnessed approximately 15,000 shoppers at the Marriotts Walk shopping centre, marking a 59% increase compared to the same period in 2022 and a significant 70% surge from the previous week's visitor count.

In November, the Executive approved a new delivery model, jointly developed by Green Axis and Homes England, for the zero-carbon housing development at Waterbush Road, Chipping Norton, with legal agreements currently in progress.

Planning permission had been granted in November for the decarbonisation of Carterton Leisure Centre.

An overview of progress against all actions in the Corporate Plan was attached at Annex A and the Council Priority highlight report was attached at Annex B. Service performance indicators both above and below targets were listed in the report and some explanation was provided where required.

Various questions and points of clarification were raised with Officers providing answers and points of clarification as follows:

- A comparison had been made and benchmarks were created for the process of collection and writing off of Council Tax debt. The set target of 99% remained and was viewed as achievable.
- A breakdown of appeals for both the Uplands and Lowlands planning sub-committee areas would be added to the next report brought to Committee.
- In regard to uncollected bins, that data would be broken down into parishes and added to the next report brought to Committee.
- A review of the service level agreement would occur when the waste service was under review and the Committee would be updated accordingly.

RESOLVED that the Committee **NOTED** the report.

55

Publica Transition Plan

The Chief Executive Officer introduced the report that considered the Local Partnerships report and other findings and recommendations therein of the Publica review.

Frank Wilson had been recruited as the new Interim Managing Director of Publica. Christine Gore had been appointed as the new Chair of the Board and Andrew Pollard had been appointed as the Interim Programme Director.

The report explained that most Council services were delivered through Publica, a joint vehicle owned by the Council together with Cotswold District Council, Cheltenham Borough Council and Forest of Dean District Council. An options appraisal review of Council services and the way in which they were delivered had been undertaken by a company called Human Engine in 2023. The final report recommended that a significant number of services should move from Publica and return to being under direct control of the Councils. This would leave Publica delivering a range of support and customer services for the Councils.

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The Human Engine report would inform the preparation and implementation of a detailed transition plan that would be presented by the Interim Programme Director and Chief Executive later in the year.

Local Partnerships come with a wealth of experience and were well placed to be able to refer to the wider public sector's experience of insourcing to provide illustrations of governance, organisational design and service transformation, having been involved in undertaking service reviews for a number of councils in the past. This knowledge and approach facilitated bringing services back in-house following best practice, rather than simply 'lift and shift'. The brief agreed with Local Partnerships was for the provision of a high-level set of recommendations, following those set out in the Human Engine report, to enable the councils to take the project forward. The Local Partnerships report did not intend to seek to identify all service areas to be transferred, but to give a high-level overview of and suggest key phases of services as part of the transition. It would be for the Interim Programme Director to develop this further with more specific detail in due course. It was envisaged that the detailed transition plan would be completed by the end of April, with subsequent reporting back through the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Executive.

The Interim Programme Director introduced himself and outlined his experience whilst explaining how he could go about developing a detailed, fully analysed and costed Transition Plan.

Various questions and points of clarification were raised with Officers providing answers and points of clarification as follows:

- Member consultation would be organised in due course; however, all service options would be considered for a reasonable and sensible approach to ensure economies of scale and resilience. There would need to be robust frameworks and agreements in place to protect all Councils.
- There were two aspects and the Interim Programme Director explained the hub and spoke approach that used the many hands principles and that there were gatekeepers to keep track of the costs. It was also explained that all options would be examined and considered.
- It was explained that it was important for an organisation to recognise its ethos and values and then to recognise what was wanted, needed and what was affordable. Those were the three key elements that needed capturing and then what the purpose was and how that fit with the Corporate Plan. The design and structure and needed to be balanced with TUPE, the law and the Council's the obligations and responsibilities to its employees. It was extremely important that all this was considered. The communication work stream was also very important to mitigate risks.
- There were no costs available for this plan as of yet and it was emphasised that it was very important to consider and explore joint service arrangements, other partnerships and sovereign services. There would be options and choices within each service.
- There were often various reasons for shared services to split and each authority would have a different reason for doing this.
- No redlines had been expressed and those would be revealed after analysis and consideration of the options; therefore, none had been identified at this time.

RESOLVED that the Committee **NOTED** the report.

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Councillor Cooper and Leverton wished it to be recorded that they were not in favour of the report.

56 Report back on recommendations

The Democratic Services Business Manager provided a list of the recommendations arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on Wednesday 7 February 2024. Comments were then provided by the Executive and this would be a standing item going forward as it demonstrated good practice.

Councillor Alex Wilson requested that it be recorded that he was disappointed his recommendation was rejected.

RESOLVED that the Committee **NOTED** the Executive's response to the recommendations arising from the 7 February 2024 Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

57 Committee Work Programme

The following was requested for the Committee Work Programme:

- The Committee agreed to bring the waste service contract update; once it was ready to scrutinise.
- Information on the CCTV upgrade in April and the requested statistics would be chased and shared with Members.
- Community Infrastructure Levy report requested to come to the April meeting.
- Knight's Court would be added back on to the work programme.

58 Executive Forward Plan

The following was requested for the Executive Forward Plan:

In regards to a query on the CIL Draft Charging Schedule and whether it was a key decision; it was confirmed that it was not a key decision because the report was only seeking authority to consult on a draft and Council would be the final decision maker when the charging schedule was adopted.

The Meeting closed at 7.48 pm

CHAIRMAN