

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 standing 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 and therefore used the aforementioned companies' 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 mast applications because that was in line with commercial decisions made by the operators.

The difference between 4G and 5G was 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 and digital inclusion.

The barriers to deployment were summarised and identified including leadership, planning delays, resources, and localised objections. Mobile UK wanted to help councils with incentives and the campaigning of digital champions. 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 Elliot and/or Officers:

- It was queried whether West Oxfordshire was only covered by one network. It was explained that planning restrictions in the UK made it difficult to build infrastructure and if you wanted coverage you needed a mast.
- Developers were not required to provide mast infrastructure and new 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 Over Norton was one example of the problematic nature of mast's being welcomed in an area.
- It was suggested that if a map could be provided of all the masts required, 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 queried 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 were to a mast the better your signal would be. 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 for the generators.
- It was asked if BTPS10 switch off would affect anything. It was explained that that was a landline network switch off owned by Openreach and not mobile. There was no control over that by Mobile UK. On the other hand, turning off 2G/3G was raised that it may affect Council services in terms of parking metres, telecare transition, etc. The Assistant Director for Business Services confirmed that the Council had 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 a map of the district area and 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 homes 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 site for masts to be installed was queried. It was explained that they could potentially be used and have been; however, there were 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 Elliot 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 this forward and address the issue further.

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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:

- 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

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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:**

- Councillor Andrew Beaney clarified that his question was based around the appeal in Over Norton - Part of the reason for allowing it was that the Council had no sites identified. If not, why not and if sites were identified where were they - without them, did the Council stand a much higher risk of losing appeals? On the point of 5 and 5 in H7 was that a rolling on from 5 or on a first come first serve?
- Councillor Harry St John added a further query - There seemed to be an ever-expanding site and activities (even at night) at Cuckoowood Farm on Cuckoo Lane south of Freeland. Had any planning officer been on a visit to see that and what was going on because it should be as per any consents/conditions? There is a very substantial building which was lit up inside - after what one would expect to be normal working hours. There were engineering works going on at the entrance the other week with a JCB, etc. doing work, which may be resident on site. A quick analysis of enforcement cases across the District showed a significant proportion of cases involved the travelling or related community by comparison to everyone else. One case had 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. 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:

- Overview and Scrutiny Committee could be moved to a week earlier (to be held two weeks prior to meetings of the Executive). It was suggested that this would need to be considered carefully as it would have a knock on effect with reports and would extend the Executive decision making process, which would be a wider corporate issue.
- A Member suggested that the old system of three overview and scrutiny committee be implemented to ensure decisions could be pre-scrutinised and it was suggested that this new system of having a single committee was fundamentally flawed. It was explained that the new system was decided at Council and part of the rationale for doing so was to properly embed pre-decision scrutiny as part of the Council's decision making process, which had been very challenging under the previous model, but the point was taken.
- Consideration was given to the option of holding an additional meeting in June but this option was not preferred. The Leader clarified that his expectation was that Executive reports would be coming forwards on the timescales set out in the Forward Plan.
- It was suggested to start the next 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

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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 Council-operated public conveniences facilities within a mile of each other in two settlements (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