

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Economic and Social Overview & Scrutiny Committee
held via video conferencing at 6.30pm on Thursday 19 November 2020

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chairman), Laetisia Carter (Vice-Chairman), Joy Aitman, Jill Bull, Julian Cooper, Jane Doughty, Harry Eaglestone, Hilary Fenton, Andy Graham, Nick Leverton, Neil Owen and Carl Rylett.

Also in attendance: Councillors Marilyn Davies, Duncan Enright, Toby Morris and Geoff Saul.

Officers and others in Attendance: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive); Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer); Andy Barge (Group Manager for Strategic Support); Mandy Fathers (Business Manager Operational Support); Keith Butler (Head of Democratic Services); and Amy Bridgewater-Carnall (Senior Strategic Support Officer); Superintendent Emma Garside, Cherwell and West Oxfordshire Local Area Commander; and Inspector Stephen Hookham (Thames Valley Police).

13. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17 September 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jake Acock and Luci Ashbourne.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers in items to be considered at the meeting.

16. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

There were no submissions from members of the public in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure.

17. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman, Councillor Beaney thanked all those Members who had managed to attend the Domestic Violence Awareness Raising session on 12 November 2020 and advised that the recording of the briefing would be uploaded to the Councillor Portal in due course. He encouraged any Members who had been unable to attend on the evening, to watch the recording.

18. PRIVATE TENANTS FORUM

The Committee received and considered the report of the Group Manager, Resident Services, which asked Members to consider the purpose, benefits and outcomes of forming a Private Rented Sector Tenant's Forum, further to the consideration of the matter at the meeting of the Committee held 17 September relating to the motion proposed at the Council meeting on 26 February 2020.

The report outlined the current level of properties privately rented in West Oxfordshire and clarified the statutory duties for which the Council was responsible. A table at section 2.4 of the report highlighted the number and type of complaints that the Council had administered during 2019 and 2020. The report recognised that there were already formal routes for Private Rented Sector tenants to receive advice and make complaints regarding their landlords; through the Council's existing regulatory services and (Council commissioned) CAWO service.

Officers also felt that a Private Tenant Forum would not be an appropriate place to raise/discuss individual complaints, however two options were proposed for Councillors to consider:

- 1) Create a webpage specifically for the private rent sector. This would be an informative area for customers giving advice, guidance and signposting to other organisations, such as CAWO and Shelter. Through our Customer Satisfaction Web Survey, we could then establish what other needs these tenants have.
- 2) Conduct a Needs Survey with Private Rented Sector tenants; directly where we have the contact details (e.g. Housing Benefit recipients) or on the Council's Website front page. This survey could be conducted in parallel with the above data collection process.

The proposer of the motion, Councillor Saul addressed Members and he thanked officers for the report. He felt that it was important to make it clear that the forum would not be the place to put forward individual complaints but that it should be used to ensure that residents were aware of their rights.

He felt that the two options in the report were viable and it was worth considering a dedicated web page similar to Redbridge London Borough Council.

Councillor Leverton agreed with the comments made and hoped a forum would help to maintain a good relationship between renter, tenants and letting agents. He suggested that the Council could provide information for individuals and link with the Citizens Advice Bureau to offer further assistance if needed.

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing, Councillor Davies assured the meeting that this was something that Cabinet felt passionate about and wanted to protect private renters. It was noted that engaging with landlords was key but Members needed to be mindful of how much influence the Council had in private matters.

Members were supportive of both options in general and requested that these be put back to Council for consideration as a good starting point.

RESOLVED: That Council agree to:

- 1) Create a webpage specifically for the private rent sector. This would be an informative area for customers giving advice, guidance and signposting to other organisations, such as CAWO and Shelter. Through our Customer Satisfaction Web Survey, we could then establish what other needs these tenants have.
- 2) Conduct a Needs Survey with Private Rented Sector tenants; directly where we have the contact details (e.g. Housing Benefit recipients) or on the Council's Website front page. This survey could be conducted in parallel with the above data collection process.

19. POLICE, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION

The Committee received a presentation from Superintendent Emma Garside, the Thames Valley Police Cherwell and West Oxfordshire Local Area Commander.

Superintendent Garside introduced herself and her colleague Inspector Hookham. She advised that she had taken over the role in June 2020 and outlined the priorities for Thames Valley Police which were consistent across twelve areas. She gave a detailed update on the reduction of crime, burglaries and robberies, knife crime and bringing offenders to justice with an increase in weapons offensive.

Superintendent Garside and Inspector Hookham answered questions and queries from Members of the Committee including the impact of Covid-19, breaches of legislation and the use of mobile technology.

Levels of Anti-Social Behaviour were discussed and it was recognised that PCSO's were engaging well with their communities.

Councillor Graham raised the issue of Hate Crimes and queried the level of Police involvement with the LGBT communities. In response, Superintendent Garside encouraged Councillors not to wait for formal meetings but to contact her if the need arose. Councillor Graham agreed to send her his contact details as a point of contact.

Members were advised that police officers received initial training in Hate Crimes but this was not necessarily repeated throughout the year. Officers were actively involved in national campaigns to raise awareness of the issue and help to raise the profile of the impact of hate crimes on victims and their communities.

In concluding, Superintendent Garside thanked Members for their input and assured them that they could contact her directly if they needed to.

The Chairman thanked her and Inspector Hookham for attending and answering questions from the Committee and asked them to pass the Council's thanks to all officers working across West Oxfordshire and Cherwell.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

20. BUDGET 2021/2022

The Committee received and considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer, which provided details of the budget for the following year. Funding would not

be determined until the new year and therefore Members were reminded that this draft was an early indication and would be subject to change.

The Chief Finance Officer introduced the report and highlighted the key points. The estimated budget gap in 2021/22 was approximately £3m pre Covid and it was noted that the pandemic had resulted in a large impact on the Council's income and investments.

The Chief Finance Officer explained that the Budget could be considered as expected and that there would be a funding shortfall of £2 million over 2021/22 and a total of £9 million over the next five years. The Chief Finance Officer also drew attention to the difficulties the Council's Leisure Operator GLL had faced over recent months and the difficulties also faced by the Council's commercial tenants. She continued that the Budget for 2021/22 was based on a £5 uplift in Council Tax for a Band D property, but highlighted that savings in office supplies and working arrangements, owing to the move to working from home, had saved an approximate £300,000.

Councillor Morris thanked officers for the report and reminded the Committee that there was a great deal of uncertainty at the present time.

In response to a question from Councillor Graham, Mrs Griffiths advised that she did not know the figure of extra Council Tax revenue to be generated from new properties but would send a breakdown after the meeting.

Councillor Cooper asked for assurance that the figures relating to GLL would not increase. In response, Mrs Griffiths explained that the figure quoted was the maximum fee the Council could lose but did not know if requests for further financial assistance would be forthcoming. There was no indication that GLL were looking to pull out of West Oxfordshire and Members were assured that robust discussions were being had.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

21. PUBLIC OPEN SPACE CCTV PROVISION AND MONITORING ARRANGEMENTS

The Committee received and considered the report of the Group Manager, Strategic Support, which provided a progress update on upgrading the public open space CCTV cameras covering areas of Carterton and Witney and associated monitoring control room arrangements.

The report advised that West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) owned and operated a public open space Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) system in the district, consisting of 61 cameras - 57 in Witney and four in Carterton. The town centre public space CCTV scheme was introduced in the town in 2002 and expanded to cover Carterton town centre in 2008; and the scheme was upgraded (digitised) and expanded to include Marriotts Walk in 2009.

Monitoring of West Oxfordshire's cameras took place at Witney Police station, with the staff employed by Thames Valley Police (TVP) and a service level agreement in place with the Council. Within Oxfordshire, monitoring control rooms were also located in Oxford City, Banbury and Abingdon.

In late autumn 2018, WODC commissioned CDC Technical Services to undertake an independent review of the public space CCTV systems in Witney and Carterton town centres.

In addition to this work, a motion was put to Council in February 2020 by Councillors Duncan Enright and Laetisia Carter and was referred to this Committee for comment and advice, asking that "*The Council therefore resolves to call a meeting with stakeholders at the earliest opportunity, and to seek to expedite the replacement of the system with a target date for completion by the end of Summer 2020.*".

The report explained the restrictions and difficulties that had resulted in slow progress being made, however, further steps had been made following a meeting in January 2020 and a number of decisions were in place by March 2020. Unfortunately, Covid-19 had regrettably slowed progress once more.

Mr Barge outlined the report and summarised the key points, including the proposal for the Districts to enter into a memorandum of understanding as detailed at section 4.1 of the report.

In response to a query from Councillor Beaney, Mr Barge explained that there would be less capacity and a higher cost involved if West Oxfordshire chose to work independently.

As the proposer of the motion, Councillor Enright thanked officers for the report and hoped that this would have given Cabinet the impetus to move work forwards

more swiftly. He welcomed the report and requested that Members be kept up to date as more news was available.

Mr Barge then answered various queries from Members including the potential to use wireless re-deployable cameras, the benefits of primary monitoring at a central location and future technologies involving mobile phones.

The issue of funding was discussed and it was felt that part of the funding model should be based on the number of cameras an area had as well as the level of crime in that area. It was noted that some town councils paid a contribution for the equipment and it was hoped a decision making paper would be forthcoming in the new year.

RESOLVED: The update and reasons for the delays are noted and Members welcome the proposed next steps towards upgrading the public open space CCTV provision.

22. MOTION: POLICING IN WEST OXFORDSHIRE

The Committee gave consideration to the following motion proposed by Councillor Laetisia Carter and seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright at the meeting of the Council held 26 February 2020 and referred to this Committee for consideration and comment:-

"Despite remaining a low crime area residents of West Oxfordshire are rightly concerned about the increase in crime, particularly involving vulnerable people/young people and antisocial behaviour across the district. Our Community Safety Plan is reaching its end in 2021. Policing is under increasing financial pressure. West Oxfordshire District Council would like to work in closer partnership with Thames Valley Police to increase capacity to police our towns and villages. As a response to growing complex crime the Council resolves to negotiate with Thames Valley Police to put more police officers on patrol in West Oxfordshire, including the possibility of jointly funded posts."

Councillor Carter addressed Members and outlined her reasons for believing the motion should go forwards. She explained some of the problems being faced by residents and felt that the Council should mirror the example put forward by Carterton Town Council, which had helped to fund a PCSO post. Councillor

Carter did not feel that it was fair that some towns could afford to bolster their policing and wanted the District Council to do so.

This was seconded by Councillor Enright who reiterated the importance of the Community Safety Plan.

The Committee agreed that this was an important issue and recognised the difficulties that communities experiencing anti-social behaviour had to deal with.

The Chairman reminded Members of the previously discussed Budget item and asked the proposer if she wished to include a sum of money in the motion, to help guide officers. Councillor Carter felt that should be left blank so as not to restrict the work in priority areas. The Cabinet Member for Finance also felt it would be helpful to have an idea of the amount of funding and where Councillors would like this to come from.

The Cabinet Member for Communities addressed the Committee and reiterated the level of work that the Council was already involved in with the Police, including weekly updates from the Community Officers, the focus on recognising and reducing instances of Domestic Violence and the previously discussed funding for improved CCTV systems.

Councillor Bull advised that Carterton Town Council had part funded the PCSO post independently of the District Council and suggested that Town and Parish Councils be approached to consider similar actions. She therefore proposed that the response to the motion be that Council should encourage Town and Parish Councils to support or part fund PCSOs in their own towns.

This was seconded by Councillor Leverton. On being put to the vote the result was tied and the Chairman chose not to exercise his casting vote.

Councillor Enright suggested a compromise whereby the Council would look at proceeding with the Community Safety Plan with a view to employing more police officers and encourage Town and Parish Councils to look at the Carterton model.

Councillor Carter did not want to dictate to town and parish councils, without the District Council looking at the principle of bolstering TVP funding first and this was seconded by Councillor Cooper.

On being put to the vote, the result was again tied and the Chairman felt that the committee was not able to make a decision based on the information available.

In conclusion, the Committee was generally supportive of community initiatives but was concerned that the responsibility for funding should not fall to the District Council alone, especially in the current financial climate. It was recognised that discussions with town and parish councils should be supported with a view to advising how they could jointly fund PCSO posts if they wished.

The Chairman proposed that Council be advised that the Committee was unable to reach a decision and requested that the minutes from this meeting be presented as an overview of Members' opinions.

23. DRAFT STRATEGIC VISION FOR OXFORDSHIRE

The Committee received and considered the report of the Chief Executive, which presented the draft Strategic Vision produced by the Oxfordshire Growth Board, and invited it to make comments to Cabinet, which would be considering its response at its meeting on 16 December 2020.

The Chief Executive outlined the report and explained that this would come into effect when the new documents were produced.

The Committee was generally supportive of the document but a number of issues were raised relating to some of the wording and areas of work that could be strengthened. These included:

- The consultation period was noted and it was hoped that this would encourage transparency;
- The reference to Health and Wellbeing was welcomed but it was noted that the document did not touch on Social Care;
- Overall the ambitions in the document were supported but some of the wording was felt to compromise a little and could perhaps be made stronger – whilst it was saying the right things, it was not always strong enough;
- More reference could be made to the world class universities and schools in the County and the drive to support learning, including lifelong learning, without leaving any sectors of the community behind.
- More content could also be added on inclusion and diversity

The Chief Executive thanked Members for their input and agreed that whilst the intent was there, the documentation could be made more robust in some areas.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted, and the above comments be presented to Cabinet for consideration.

24. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services, which updated it on progress on the 2020/21 work programme.

The Chairman drew Members attention to the items on the agenda for the January 2021 meeting and requested that questions relating to the Domestic Violence officers and the GLL presentation be put forward in advance.

Councillor Cooper requested that 'Rail Strategy Document' be added to the Committee's work programme for January. This was following the inclusion of an item on the Growth Board agenda entitled "Investment in Rail Connectivity Report".

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the Work Programme updated as requested.

25. CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services, which gave members the opportunity to comment on the Cabinet Work Programme published on 20 October 2020.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the Cabinet Work Programme published on 20 October 2020 be noted.

26. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

There were no questions from Members.

The meeting closed at 9:15 pm

Chairman