

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 8 April 2021**

PRESENT

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

Also in attendance: Councillor Duncan Enright, Suzi Coul

Officers in Attendance: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive); Mandy Fathers (Business Manager, Operational Services); Chris Hargraves (Planning Policy Manager); Claire Bromley (Policy Planner), Democratic Services

38. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21 January 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

39. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Apologies from Cllr Neil Owen and Jake Acock.

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers.

41. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

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

42. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The work programme was discussed. The following points were made.

- Domestic Violence presentation to be given to Committee on 27 May 2021
- Discussion on the GLL Contract to be held at Committee on 27 May 2021
- RAF Brize Norton – an update was given by the Chief Executive. Members requested that a representative of the Defence Infrastructure Organisation, who was responsible for the Ministry of Defence Estates, be invited to address Committee to provide an update.
- Oxford-Cambridge expressway was no longer required and could be removed from the work programme.
- Health Care provision was ongoing to be kept on the work programme.
- Enforcement Powers in the Housing and Planning Act – Committee requested an update.

43. VULNERABLE PERSONS RESETTLEMENT SCHEME – VERBAL UPDATE

The Committee received a presentation from the Business Manager (Operational Services). It was explained that families were being supported through indefinite leave to remain applications and supported with additional English lessons, housing and finances. Children had settled well into their education. Support was also being given through booklets in order for families to become self-sufficient. The booklets were produced through an Oxfordshire wide project and best practice was shared in partnership with other authorities.

Thanks were given to the Committee for taking concerns raised previously and to the officers for doing remarkable work for the support given to these families.

The Cap Funding Scheme within the Strategy was for individuals and was provided up to £500 per individual, for help with education, getting into work and in one case financial support for medical issues.

Committee thanked officers for their work in supporting these families.

44. AFFORDABLE HOUSING REVISED DRAFT SPD CONSULTATION

The Committee considered the report of the Planning Policy Manager who gave a brief introduction to the supplementary planning document which was in need of updating. The draft document was currently the subject of consultation, which would close on 16 April 2021.

Comments and queries from Members related to issues such as:

The policy on working with travelling communities and whether this should be included in the document; making sure that local people with housing need were being provided with housing locally. Officers explained that the Council had a commitment to accommodate local people within their own boundaries and also an agreement, which was Oxfordshire wide, to take unmet need from Oxford City.

Concern was expressed over the size of houses being built, as larger houses such as four and five bedroomed houses were not mentioned in the document and neighbourhood plans were an important factor in what was required. Officers explained that developers were currently applying for smaller houses.

It was considered that the Council should be encouraging people to register for self-build or custom building housing and requested that Officer advertise that there was a register for people to use.

It was also considered important that information was being captured on independent providers who were providing housing and supported day time care, on a small scale for people who would otherwise be on the housing list.

The approach to energy and sustainable housing was ambitious, how could the local plan provide this type of housing.

Keyworkers were mentioned in the housing for essential workers, one category, of which was teachers. The Chair requested that keyworkers should include support staff.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and a consultation response be formulated.

45. LOCAL PLAN ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 2019/20

The Committee received and considered the report of the Planning Policy Manager, which was introduced by the Policy Planner. It was explained that the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) was structured around the six council priorities.

The key points of the report were: the gradual decline in CO2 across the district; increased number of charging points; increase in renewable energy; gradual decline of residual household waste; potential lower than usual use of the leisure centres due to Lockdown; there had been progress on the park and ride; there was an increasing trend in the number of people employed in West Oxfordshire, although some loss of employment space to change of use to residential had taken place; approximately £3m was collected in S106 planning obligations, of that £1.2m was for affordable housing; an increased number of planning applications were for smaller houses, 23% were on redeveloped land; 80% were determined within the timescales. Cabinet had considered the report and comments had been incorporated into the current report.

Comments and queries from Members related to issues such as:

The review of the Local Plan needed to be open and transparent and the public be made aware of the review and timetable of public engagement. Officers explained that there were various stages of consultation, which would start at the end of 2021. Bio-diversity and zero carbon issues would feature highly within the review.

Guidance on the mix of housing needed to be given, including the size of the houses, as concern was expressed that if developers were building a lower proportion of 3 and 4 bed houses, they would shrink the plot size of the smaller houses.

Building on the flood plain in relation to climate change would be an important factor within the review.

Meeting the housing need for a changing population, including travellers' sites and the size of the pitches or plots. Officers would look into the change in the number of pitches and report back to Members.

The timescale for the S106 planning obligations and how they had been met or delayed was queried. Officers explained that improvements were being made to the monitoring of the planning obligations currently.

Members reiterated that the process of debate through Cabinet and onto Full Council should be a better managed process with a more transparent and open debate.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

46. SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020-21 QUARTER THREE

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive, which provided details of service performance during Q3.

Covid-19 had an impact on performance, as there was a need to support vulnerable residents and work on delivering the business grants, which would not normally be part of the workload, together with other issues such as working hard with people who were rough sleeping and households in emergency accommodation, ensuring that everyone had accommodation during the lockdowns.

Issues with staff turnover, particularly in Planning, was explained, with recruitment taking place currently.

Two planning complaints which had been partially upheld although most complaints were Covid-19 related.

Comments and queries from Members related to issues such as:

‘Money allocated for food distribution and the projected need to support foodbanks. Whether there was a project as a whole district, as there was a collective need to supply people with good food, keeping a check on good food supplies, taking account of funding from Town and Parish Councils and building on community experience. Councillors expressed support for this project, although concern was also expressed on how the supply of food should be distributed, as foodbanks responded to a specific need. This would be discussed with Officers.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

47. 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 23 March 2021.

It was noted that:

Supplementary Planning Documents would be included on the agenda when necessary.

Car Parking in Woodstock was queried and when Cabinet would be considering this matter and the allocation of funds.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the Cabinet Work Programme be noted.

48. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

There were no questions from Members.

49. CONCLUSION

As this was the last meeting of the Civic year, Councillor Graham thanked the Chairman, Councillor Beaney, for conducting the meetings in a fair, honest and open way. This was supported by the Committee.

The meeting closed at 8.00 pm

Chairman