

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the
Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Held in the Council Chamber at 6.30 pm on **Thursday, 10 February 2022**

PRESENT

Councillors: Councillor Andrew Beaney (Chairman), Councillor Andy Graham (Vice-Chair), Councillor Jill Bull, Councillor Maxine Crossland, Councillor Nick Leverton, Councillor Lysette Nicholls, Councillor Mathew Parkinson, Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt and Councillor Andrew Prosser.

Also present: Councillor Jane Doughty (Cabinet Member for Customer Delivery).

Officers: Jon Dearing (Group Manager - Resident Services), Giles Hughes (Chief Executive), Bill Oddy (Group Manager - Commercial Development), Phil Shaw (Business Manager - Development Management) and Scott Williams (Business Manager - Commissioning Strategy)

1 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2022 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Jake Acock, Owen Collins, Mark Johnson and Alex Wilson.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

4 Participation of the Public

Suzanne McIvor addressed the Committee on Agenda Item 6 - Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Consultation responses.

The Chair thanked Ms McIvor for her participation.

5 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman advised that as external participants were in attendance, the order of the agenda would be reconfigured as follows:

1. Online User Survey – West Oxfordshire Leisure Facilities
2. Phil Shaw and Jon Dearing – Update on staffing
3. Heather McCulloch – Dental Services
4. The Oxfordshire Plan

6 Oxfordshire Plan 2050 : Summary of Consultation

The Council's Chief Executive, Giles Hughes addressed the Committee to provide an update on the preparation of the Oxfordshire Plan. He advised that the Plan would be reviewed, revised and monitored as a living document, along with the Section 106 Policy which would also be reviewed.

The Economic & Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee was asked to note the summary results from the recent regulation 18 (part 2) consultation; note the revised scope of the Oxfordshire Plan, with clarification over its relationship to city and district Local Plans and

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supporting evidence base; note the next steps of the Oxfordshire Plan process; and recommend the adoption of the revised Statement of Community Involvement, subject to approval at the cabinets of the five Oxfordshire councils.

Mr Hughes also gave an overview of the members of the staff working on the document, including Andrew Thompson, a WODC planner, who had been seconded into the team. The decision making process was explained along with the long term strategic view of the document. Officers had been working closely with the County Council and were conscious of the importance of scrutiny, with this document being considered a month ahead of its final consideration at Cabinet.

Councillors were pleased with the open and transparent manner decisions about the Plan were being made and noted the number of emails they had received from CPRE and the organisation 'Need not Greed'.

A number of Councillors addressed the meeting with their support for the document, highlighting the aspirational tone. It was queried if the definition of infrastructure was strong enough and the potential to include Health and Wellbeing as an element.

Councillor Bull welcomed the Specialist Housing Need element, which was felt to be much more local along with the potential for lifetime homes to be adapted.

Councillor Prosser agreed with the comments made about Health and Wellbeing and housing need and received clarification on the process. Mr Hughes advised that the document had to refer to government policy as there were fundamental topics that needed to be addressed before housing.

Members also noted that homes did not have to mean houses, as there were different types including flats. There was a request to use the word 'homes' more and a desire to get the graphics right.

Finally, Members felt that an explanation on the housing numbers needed to be provided in a clear and transparent way.

Resolved that

- a) the summary results from the recent regulation 18 (part 2) consultation are noted;
- b) the revised scope of the Oxfordshire Plan, with clarification over its relationship to city and district Local Plans and supporting evidence base, is noted;
- c) the next steps of the Oxfordshire Plan process are noted; and
- d) the adoption of the revised Statement of Community Involvement, subject to approval at the Cabinets of the five Oxfordshire Councils, is recommended.

Committee Work Programme

Work Programme 2 - Leisure Services Questionnaire

Rachel Biles, Strategic Projects Lead, introduced herself and presented a slideshow summary of the on-line survey, which had been carried out during June to August 2021. Numbers of responses, statistics relating to the respondents and the quality of the responses was outlined.

Cleanliness had featured as an issue in the survey feedback, so as part of contract monitoring new monitoring officers were being appointed. These officers would act as 'mystery shoppers', and one of the key issues would be the cleanliness of the facilities. Officers explained that 'Quest' was a national scheme for facilities, with the monitors using this as a benchmark.

Scott Wilson addressed Members and provided an overview of the steps that GLL had taken to tackle the Covid pandemic and encourage users back to the centres.

Following a discussion relating to accessibility, Councillors were concerned as to how the surveys reached all age groups. It was noted that not many younger age groups had completed the survey and, as it was online only, many of the older generation, who did not have social media access, would have been unable to participate in the survey. Officers confirmed that focus groups were held regularly with Age UK and youth groups but it had not always been possible to hold the sessions in person due to Covid. In addition, the survey had been circulated to all parish clerks alongside using social media platforms.

The Chairman thanked the officers for attending and looked forward to seeing the outcome of the new monitoring officers and their 'mystery shopper' visits.

Work Programme 3 - Staffing Resources

Phil Shaw, Business Manager - Development Management, and Jon Dearing, Group Manager for Resident Services, addressed the Committee.

Members noted that the retention of planning officers was a national problem, and that in the past WODC had lost planners to other local authorities. The Council now had a career graded structure which meant they could nurture Planners into a graded structure and which in turn meant they could progress their career and have a salary to reflect this too.

Officers advised that with a larger administration support team and IT Dashboard with live data, it was easier to spot large caseloads. The future planned move to agile working and the recent successful recruitment of new planners should also help. In addition, the continuation of benchmarking with other Councils to ensure the Council kept up with the current trends of recruitment and staff retention.

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In summary, the pandemic had stretched resources to the limit with the increase in applications, however, there was a belief that the worst was over. However, it had left scars with some staff suffering with mental health issues over the stress of the amount of applications coming through. Mr Shaw confirmed that Publica had measures in place to support the staff.

Conservation and Ecologist officers were also under pressure, with two flooding reviews ongoing. However, skills mentoring and sharing over Ecology and Conservation areas was helping with the workload and broadening individual skillsets.

Councillors discussed the pressures of the last year and were pleased to hear that new measures had been put into place to address the challenges.

Councillors also praised the Planning Team and their efforts over the past year to maintain the service and requested that their thanks be noted.

Work Programme 1 – Dental Services

Heather McCulloch, Community Wellbeing Manager addressed the Committee.

Mrs McCulloch outlined the difficulties being experienced with dentistry and made reference to the Military Covenant which stated that military children and families should have access to dentistry, and to ensure that they were not disadvantaged.

Members noted that problems accessing dentistry was a much wider issue covering everyone and was a national issue too. A discussion followed with Councillors commenting on the issue of dentistry as a whole.

Councillor Leverton suggested that in order to move this issue forward, the Council could write to the local Member of Parliament, asking him to look into the problems being encountered.

Councillor Crossland suggested that the Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire should be made aware whilst Councillor Poskitt suggested writing a letter to the Armed Forces Minister.

Following advice from the Chief Executive, it was suggested that the relevant Cabinet Member be asked to write to the MP.

Mrs McCulloch highlighted a Youth Needs Assessment which would focus on Years 7 and 8 pupils of secondary schools. She suggested that Members may like to hear the outcome and see the data once it had been gathered.

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Committee Work Programme

Having considered the items above, it was agreed that the Youth Needs Assessment be added to a future workstream for the committee.

8 Cabinet Work Programme

Having considered the Cabinet Work Programme, the Committee

Resolved that the report be noted.

9 Members Questions

There were no member questions.

The Meeting closed at 8.45 pm

CHAIRMAN