

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Held in the Committee Rooms 1 & 2, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire
OX28 1NB at 5.30 pm on **Wednesday, 6 December 2023**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chair), Rizvana Poole (Vice-Chair), Julian Cooper, Rachel Crouch, Jane Doughty, Phil Godfrey, Nick Leverton, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Ruth Smith, Harry St John, Alistair Wray, Liam Walker, Alex Wilson, Dan Levy and Rosie Pearson

Officers: Andrew Brown (Democratic Services Business Manager), Phil Martin (Assistant Director for Business Support), Bill Oddy (Assistant Director for Commercial Development), Max Thompson (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Jon Dearing (Assistant Director for Resident Services), Mandy Fathers (Business Manager - Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service), Philip Measures (Service Leader), Stuart Rawlinson (Business Manager - Resources, Data and Growth), Jack Graham (Environment Support Officer), Alison Borrett (Senior Performance Analyst) and Will Barton (Business Development Officer)

Executive Members in attendance: Andy Graham, Leader of the Council.

11 Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments

Apologies were noted from Councillors Ashby, Ashton, David Cooper, King, Parkinson, Lyon, Simpson, and Mark Walker.

Councillor Levy substituted for Councillor Ashton and Councillor Pearson substituted for Councillor Simpson.

12 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

13 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2023 were approved by the Committee and signed by the Chair as an accurate record.

14 Chair's announcements

The Chair reminded the Committee that an additional "Spotlight" meeting was being held on 18 December 2023 at 5.30pm to scrutinise the Publica Review.

15 Participation of the Public

There was no public participation.

16 Outdoor Market Review

The Business Development Officer introduced the report to the Executive on 13 December 2023 which presented the outcome of a review of outdoor markets conducted by a consultant. The report considered three options for the future running of the markets in Chipping Norton and Witney (retain Council control, contract out to a commercial operator, transfer responsibility to town councils). The preferred option was to seek a commercial market operator but the Council was also keen to work with town councils. Cirencester

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market (operated by the town council) had been visited and was considered to be an example of good practice, with a busy calendar of events and an attractive offer generating high footfall.

The Committee asked a number of questions and noted that:

- Witney Town Council was likely to be open to running the market in Witney and Members considered that the Council should be pursuing that option where town councils were willing to take on responsibility.
- Chipping Norton Town Council was unlikely to be willing to take on responsibility for the market at the current time but would be willing to work in partnership with the district council. Members suggested that it may be possible to work in partnership with the town council and to reach a position where they would be willing to take on responsibility in future.
- While the preferred option was considered to be the most financially advantageous to the Council, the Council's primary consideration should be to support thriving and attractive market towns, not to generate a modest saving of £8,000-15,000 per annum.
- A possible fourth option was for a shared partnership approach.
- The reference to "High Street closure" in a bullet point at paragraph 2.7 was really about traffic restrictions rather than the high street being closed for business and this was an important distinction.

The Business Development Manager committed to getting back to the Committee on the cost of the consultants' report and the fees that are charged to stall holders.

The Committee commended the review as being a good piece of work and resolved to make one recommendation to the Executive on 13 December 2023:

- I. That the local ward members are added as consultees to the first recommendation (in the report) and the initial period in recommendation 2 is set at one year rather than two years.

17 Fly Tipping Enforcement Update

The Business Manager for the Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service introduced the report which provided an update on fly-tipping enforcement activities. The Business Manager highlighted the impact of staff sickness and stated that there had been an improvement in this area.

The Committee asked a number of questions and noted that:

- There was essentially a team of one undertaking fly tipping enforcement work and it wasn't possible to cover absences without diverting resources away from other important activities within Environmental Services.
- There was a correlation between a tougher approach to charging at the household waste recycling centres and increased incidents of fly-tipping. Charging levels were a matter for Oxfordshire County Council and evidence was cited that abolishing charges did not necessarily lead to a reduction in fly tipping.
- Cameras were being deployed to known hotspots, in accordance with the requirements of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.
- There was a known issue with the online reporting system whereby historic incidents that may have been resolved were still showing. Ward members would appreciate access to better information about the status of fly tipping incidents.

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- The Environment Support Officer prioritised cases based on their own professional judgment. Priority would be given where, for example, accesses or highways were being impeded.
- The landowner had responsibility for removing fly-tipped material but the Council could still investigate these cases and could potentially clear the waste at its own cost if it was unable to establish land ownership.
- A policy on Fixed Penalty Notices would be coming forwards in the coming months as the Council wanted to tighten up on that and ensure that fines were being recovered.

The ERS Service Leader undertook to ensure that the Environment Agency's register of waste disposal professionals would be made available to the public by the Council.

The Committee thanked the officers and agreed to receive a further update in a year's time.

18 Quarter Two Performance Monitoring Reports 2023/24

The Leader of the Council introduced the service performance report covering the period from July to September 2023. The Leader highlighted progress in the following areas: the imminent appointment of a strategic housing manager, the planned net-zero development at Walterbush Road, improvements to bridges in Deer Park, the Local Plan workshops, the decarbonisation of Carterton Leisure Centre, the Westhive crowdfunding initiative which would provide funding for community owned projects, Council Tax collections, customer satisfaction, and the processing of planning applications.

The Committee welcomed the positives, asked a number of questions and noted that:

- The 24 hour limit for reporting missed bins was a policy issue and there was a case for looking at this now that telephone opening hours had been reduced.
- Data on missed bin collections came from two sources; reporting by householders and an incab technology platform.
- Recurring missed collections tended to be legacy issues from how the service was previously operated and Members were encouraged to report any such issues.
- The Council's accuracy record for bin collections was over 99%; it was a high performing service and recycling rates were high but the Council was not complacent and was making further data-lead improvements.
- The majority of the aged debt related to direct debits that were paid later in the month or a small number large accounts that paid every 90 days. The amount of aged debt under management was under £25,000.
- There had been 9 applications to the Westhive scheme to date, which was considered to represent a good start.

The Business Manager for Resources, Data and Growth committed to responding in writing to a question as to why residual household waste per household was high in quarter 1.

The Committee thanked the Leader and the officers and noted the report.

19 Executive response to a recommendation from Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Financial Performance Report 2023/24 Quarter 2

The Executive response was noted.

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The Committee agreed to establish a task and finish group to consider the Strategic Outcomes Planning Model and for the membership of the group to include Councillors Beaney, Poole and Wilson, with other seats on the group opened up to all non-executive members. The Chair would be appointed at a future Committee meeting.

20 Committee Work Programme

The Chair introduced the work plan.

In response to a question, the Business Manager for Democratic Services advised that the lead Human Engine consultant would be attending the meeting on 18 December 2023 by video link. The Leader of the Council and Chief Executive would also be in attendance.

In relation to the Public Space CCTV item, the Committee noted regret that town councils had not been sufficiently involved and consulted to date.

The Committee resolved to note the work plan and agree that:

1. The Annual Monitoring Report would be added to the business for the meeting on 29 February 2024 (after consideration by the Executive).
2. The items suggested by members would be added to the work plan and dealt with in priority order.

21 Executive Work Programme

The Committee agreed to note the Executive work plan and to add the following Executive reports to the Committee's work plan for pre-decision scrutiny:

- Climate Change Strategy
- Business Case for Acquiring Emergency Accommodation
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Draft Charging Schedule.

The Meeting closed at 6.50 pm

CHAIRMAN