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Cherwell
DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Council Minute Book

19 April 2010

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Cherwell
DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Council Minute Book

Monday, 19th April, 2010

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Cherwell District Council

Executive

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, OX15 4AA, on 1 March 2010 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Barry Wood (Chairman)
Councillor G A Reynolds (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Ken Atack
Councillor Norman Bolster
Councillor Michael Gibbard
Councillor James Macnamara
Councillor Nigel Morris
Councillor D M Pickford
Councillor Nicholas Turner

Apologies for absence: Councillor Kieron Mallon

Officers: Mary Harpley, Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service
Ian Davies, Strategic Director - Environment and Community
John Hoad, Strategic Director - Planning, Housing and Economy
Mike Carroll, Head of Improvement
Phil O'Dell, Chief Finance Officer
AnneMarie Scott, Head of Human Resources
Ed Potter, Head of Environmental Services
Tim Mills, Private Sector Housing Manager
Jo Smith, Communications Manager
Richard Hawtin, Team Leader Property & Contracts
Gabi Kaiser, Cleaner Greener Development Manager
Alexa Coates, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

1 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **Petitions and Requests to Address the Meeting**

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

3 **Urgent Business**

The Chairman advised the Executive that he had agreed to admit an urgent item to the agenda relating to the progress of the pay and grading structure.

The item was considered urgent as any implications arising from the report needed to be dealt with before the next payroll deadline of 10 March 2010 and council not be delayed to the next meeting.

4 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2010 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5 **Private Sector Housing Strategy 2010 - 2014**

The Head of Housing Services submitted a report which sought the adoption of the Private Sector Housing Strategy and endorsement of the associated Action Plan.

Resolved

1) That the Private Sector Housing Strategy is adopted.

2) That the Private Sector Housing Strategy action plan is endorsed.

Reasons - This strategy is an essential part of the District's response to the needs of our residents for suitable accommodation. It will play an important role in delivering the council's corporate objectives.

Options

Option One	To adopt the Private Sector Housing Strategy and endorse the action plan
Option Two	To adopt the strategy and endorse the action plan with amendments.
Option Three	Not to adopt the strategy or endorse the delivery plan, in which case an alternative strategy will need to be considered.

6 **The Council's Response to Climate Change**

The Head of Environmental Services submitted a report which considered the progress of the Environmental Strategy for a Changing Climate and the overall progress of the Council in responding to climate change issues.

Resolved

1) That the current progress relating to the Environmental Strategy for a Changing Climate and the performance relating to the four climate change national indicators is noted.

2) That the revised Environmental Strategy for a Changing Climate Change delivery plan and the continuing priority attached to it is approved.

3) That the reducing carbon emissions by improving the energy efficiency of corporate buildings and also reducing other sources of Council emissions by gaining support from the Carbon Trust Local Authority Carbon Management programme is supported.

Reasons - The key issue is one of considering the revised delivery plan which takes into account local priorities as measured by national indicators. Account should be taken of the good work and improved performance already achieved but despite this, there will be continued pressure to maintain a positive direction of travel specifically with ongoing CO2 emission reductions.

Options

Option One	To approve the proposed revised delivery plan.
Option Two	To reject the proposed delivery plan
Option Three	To ask officers to modify the proposed delivery plan

7 **Progress on Developing and Delivering the Equalities Work Programme**

The Chief Executive and Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager submitted a report which provided an overview of the achievements relating to the Council's equalities work in 2009/10 and outlined the work programme for 2010/11.

Resolved

4) That the Corporate Equality Action Plan for 2009-2012 is agreed

5) That the proposals to seek equality accreditation from the Improvement and Department Agency (IDeA) in November 2010 are agreed

6) That the refreshed equalities scheme and the three year equality impact assessment programme is agreed

7) That the equality achievements made during 2009/2010 are noted.

Reason - This report provides and overview of our equalities performance and our work programme for the future. It considers the impact of the new Equality Framework for Local Government and, as requested by Executive in April 2009, it proposes a timeframe for the inspection. This report also provides and overview of new equalities duties that are coming into effect and how Cherwell District Council is responding to these duties and reflecting them in our long term objectives.

Option One Agree recommendations as outlined above

Option Two Executive to identify additional actions or changes to proposed timeframe and accreditation.

8 **2010/11 Corporate Improvement Plan**

The Chief Executive and Head of Improvement submitted a report which presented the proposed Corporate Improvement Plan for 2010/11.

Resolved

That the Corporate Improvement Pan for 2010/11 and associated Value for Money Review Programme for 2010/11 is agreed.

Reasons - The purpose of the report is to agree the 2010/11 Corporate Improvement Plan and the associated Value for Money Programme.

Options

Option One To agree the organisational priorities for improvement and the content of the 2010/11 Corporate Improvement Plan as set out in this report.

At the conclusion of the item the Leader thanked Mike Carroll, Jo Smith, Phil O'Dell and Alexa Coates who would all be leaving the Council, for their hard work and efforts.

All Officers other than members of Corporate Management Team left the meeting.

9 **Exclusion of the Public and Press**

Resolved

That, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business, on the grounds that it could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 and 4 of Schedule 12A of that Act.

10 **Pay and Grading Structure Update**

The Chief Executive updated the Executive on the timetable and progress to date in implementing the new pay and grading structure by 1 April 2010.
In light of the fast-approaching deadline the Executive considered the range of options available to the Council in case national sign off had not been achieved by 1 April 2010 and provided their views on these options.

Resolved

That the range of options as set out in the exempt report be noted and that the Chief Executive as Head of Paid Service be authorised to take action as required from the range of options in light of the view of the Executive and that any future action be formally delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

The meeting ended at 7.40 pm

Chairman:

Date:

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COUNCIL MEETING –

RECORD OF PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISIONS

SCHEDULE

February 2010 – April 2010

Portfolio	**Decision Subject Matter**
Community Safety, Street Scene and Rural	Civil Parking Enforcement Corporate Biodiversity Action Plan 2010-2011
Customer Service and ICT (with special responsibility for tourism)	A Destination Management Organisation for Oxford and Oxfordshire

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Cherwell District Council

Personnel Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Personnel Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, OX15 4AA, on 10 March 2010 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Victoria Irvine (Chairman)

Councillor Rick Atkinson
Councillor Ken Atack
Councillor Norman Bolster
Councillor Russell Hurle
Councillor G A Reynolds
Councillor Chris Smithson
Councillor Lynda Thirzie Smart
Councillor Barry Wood
Councillor Tony Ilott

Apologies for absence: Councillor Rose Stratford
Councillor Douglas Williamson

Officers: Mary Harpley, Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service
AnneMarie Scott, Head of Human Resources
Stephanie Rew, HR Manager
Michael Sands, Trainee Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

43 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

44 **Petitions and Requests to Address the Meeting**

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

45 **Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business.

46 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2009 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

47 **Employment Statistics**

The Head of Human Resources submitted a report which detailed employment statistics for October to December 2009, by Directorate, for information and monitoring purposes. The Committee were advised that there had been a rise in the number of leavers and that the increase was due to retirements following the expressions of interest process.

Resolved

That the contents of the report be noted.

48 **Job Evaluation and Pay Structure**

The Head of Human Resources submitted a report which provided information on the final changes, the process for implementation and the role of the Committee in pay and grading going forward. The Committee were advised that implementation of the new scheme was still on target for 1 April 2010 and that the Council were now in final negotiations with Trade Unions. The Head of Human Resources also advised that there had been varied reactions from staff to their indicative pay grades and that a key area of concern was the issue around progression on an incremental scale.

The Committee expressed their thanks to Officers for steering the authority through the job evaluation process and discussed the importance of ensuring that the new scheme was fair, affordable and capable of meeting the authorities needs.

The Committee requested that a table detailing the number of staff in each pay grade be included in the agenda of the next meeting. The Committee also requested that the Pay and Grading Structure Table be included in all future agenda's.

Resolved

That the new pay and grading structure be noted.

The meeting ended at 6:50 pm

Chairman:

Date:

Cherwell District Council

Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, OX15 4AA, on 22 March 2010 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor John Donaldson (Chairman)
Councillor Trevor Stevens (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Ken Atack
Councillor Devena Rae
Councillor Lawrie Stratford
Councillor Rose Stratford
Councillor Barry Wood

Also Present: Nicola Jackson, Audit Manager, Audit Commission
Katherine Bennett, Audit Team Leader, PricewaterhouseCoopers

Officers: Mary Harpley, Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service
Phil O'Dell, Chief Finance Officer
Karen Curtin, Head of Finance
Lauretta Vitalis, Head of Revenues and Benefits
Claire Taylor, Community Planning Manager
Rosemary Watts, Risk Management & Insurance Officer
Natasha Clark, Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

56 **Declarations of Interest**

Members declared interest with regard to the following agenda items:

10. Corporate Risk Register and Risk Strategy 2010/11.
Councillor Ken Atack, Personal, as the Executive Portfolio Holder with responsibility for risk.

57 **Petitions and Requests to Address the Meeting**

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

58 **Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business.

59 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 January were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

60 **Accountancy Progress Report - Closedown and IFRS**

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Finance which provided a progress report on the Financial Information Team in relation to the production of the 2009/10 Statement of Accounts and advised the Committee on how Officers were progressing in the adoption of International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS).

Closure of the 2009/10 Accounts and production of the Statement for Accounts
The Head of Finance circulated the latest year-end closedown 2009/10 timetable which detailed all of the activities to be undertaken. The target completion date for the draft Statement of Accounts was 21 May 2010, which was 5 days earlier than in 2008/09 and would ensure a longer period of final review and reconciliation to the working papers.

The Head of Finance advised the Committee that following last year's score of 3 on the Use of Resources assessment for Key Line of Enquiry 1.1 (KLOE1), the finance team had put measures in place to improve closedown procedures and were striving for a score of 4 on the Statement of Accounts. These included workshops for all Council departments to make staff aware of their Closedown responsibilities and holding regular meetings with the Audit Commission.

IFRS Preparation
The Head of Finance circulated the Audit Commission's "Countdown to IFRS – Checklist for members." The Committee was advised that the IFRS steering group (which included elected Members) had met and agreed its terms of reference. It would meet quarterly to monitor progress against the IFRS action plan and agree resources.

The Head of Finance reported that a number of officers had attended courses on IFRS. The Audit Commission would be holding a countywide training event on IFRS for Audit Committee members and senior officers.

Members of the Committee raised concerns about the impact of the IFRS on council tax payers. The Head of Finance assured the Committee that it was anticipated there would be minimal impact and agreed to include 'impact to council tax payers' to the IFRS steering group monitoring list.

Accounting Policies 2009/10 for inclusion in the Statement of Accounts
The Head of Finance advised the Committee that since last year there had been 4 minor changes to the Statement of Recommended Practice (SoRP) regarding accounting policies. These would have no financial impact for the Council, rather they related to presentation.

Resolved

(1) That the contents of this report and the Officers' proposed actions to deal with the closure of the 2009/10 Accounts and production of the Statement of Accounts be noted.

(2) That the contents of this report and the Officers' proposed actions to deal with the implementation of International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) be noted.

(3) That the accounting policies for inclusion in the Statement of Accounts 2009/10 be approved.

61 **Corporate Governance Panel 2010/11**

The Chief Financial Officer provided a verbal update on the Corporate Governance Panel. He reminded the Committee that the Corporate Governance Panel reviews the draft Annual Governance Statement which eventually forms part of the Statement of Accounts which the Committee would consider in June 2010. The draft Annual Governance Statement would be available in late April 2010.

The Committee was advised that it was also intended to convene additional meetings of the Corporate Governance Panel during 2010/11 to consider the Council's whole approach to Governance on an ongoing basis and in particular any issues or recommendations arising from the officer Corporate Governance Group.

Resolved

(1) That Councillors Atack and Lawrie Stratford be confirmed as the two Accounts, Audit and Risk representatives of the Corporate Governance Panel for 2010/11.

62 **Internal Audit Progress Report**

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Internal Auditor which summarised the progress made against the internal audit plan for 2009/2010 for the period from January 2010 to March 2010. The Committee was advised that 91% of the plan had been completed and that the remainder would be completed by the end of the financial year.

The Audit Team Leader reported that since the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee meeting of 20 January 2010, six final reports had been issued, four reports were in draft form and fieldwork had commenced in three areas.

The Audit Team Leader updated the Committee with a summary of the activity of the Benefits Investigation Team since 1 April 2009. The Team had received 261 referrals and had a sanctions success rate of 60.27% against a target of 50%.

Resolved

(1) That the Internal Audit progress report be approved.

63 **Internal Audit Final Plan 2010/11**

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Internal Auditor which presented the final version of the 2010/11 Internal Audit Plan. This was based on the Internal Audit Strategic Plan 2009-12 and had been updated following consultation with members and Officers.

Resolved

(1) That the Internal Audit Final Plan 2010/11 be approved.

64 **Corporate Risk Register and Risk Strategy 2010/11**

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive which presented the proposed Corporate Risk Register and the Risk Strategy for 2010/11 for consideration and comment by the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee in advance of their consideration by the Council's Executive.

The Risk Management and Insurance Officer updated the Committee on the Council's decision to combine performance management with risk management, with both areas being monitored through PerformancePlus. The Committee was advised that following extensive consultation, the risk register had been revised and principles developed for the management of risk.

The Committee was advised that "core risks" would comprise Corporate Risk Register. The reporting of the Corporate Risk Register would be integrated into to quarterly Performance Management Framework and reported to the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee quarterly. These would be strategic, corporate and some partnership risks. It had been determined that a number of existing corporate risks could be monitored at Head of Service level (operational risks) and escalated on an exception basis.

In response to Members' questions the Risk Management and Insurance reported that the proposed Corporate Risk Register and Risk Strategy was for 2010/11 and would be reviewed at the end of each year and updated, if necessary, to reflect changing priorities.

The Committee agreed that the proposals represented a more structured and focused approach to risk management. However, Members sought assurance that lower level operational risks would be monitored. The Corporate and Community Planning Manager assured the Committee that Operational risks will be review at Directorate Management Teams and issues escalated on an exception basis where appropriate. This mirrors the approach taken with service plans. In addition the quarterly governance statement completed by all service heads will identify any issues of concern.

In response to Members' comments, the Chief Executive agreed that it was important for member of the Committee to have access to the operational risk reports and provided assurance that these would be available at request.

Resolved

(1) That the principles of risk management set out in the report be agreed.

(2) That the Corporate Risk Register for 2010/11 be agreed.

(3) That the Risk Strategy 2010/11 be agreed.

(4) That the arrangements for reporting on risk management to the Executive and the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee be agreed.

(5) That the Executive be advised that the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee support and endorse the principles of risk management, the Corporate Risk Register 2010/11, the Risk Strategy 2010/11 and the arrangements for reporting on risk management.

(6) That it be agreed that members of the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee will be able to review operational risk reports.

65 **Certification of Claims and Returns 2008/09 - Audit Commission**

Nicola Jackson (Audit Manager, Audit Commission) presented the Certificate of Claims and Returns Report 2008/09 produced by the Audit Commission. The Audit Commission report reviewed the Council's arrangements for the preparation and administration of grant claims within the council.

The Audit Manager advised the Committee that this was the first year that the Audit Commission had required auditors to produce such a report. The report summarised the findings from the certification of 2008/09 claims.

The Committee was advised that the audit team had carried out a limited review of three claims, which had been certified with no amendment. The fourth claim (housing benefits) was subject to a full review and required a number of adjustments prior to the qualification of the claim. The Audit Manager reported that an action plan had been agreed and implemented to address the issues that had arisen.

The Committee noted that the report was based on 2008/09 figures, which was prior to the outsourcing of the revenues and benefits service to Capita. The Head of Finance assured the Committee that she had been working with the Head of Revenues and Benefits and Capita to ensure errors were minimized in the future.

Resolved

(1) That the contents of the Audit Commission Certificate of Claims and Returns Report 2008/09 be noted.

(2) That the agreed Action Plan presented as Appendix 2 to the Audit Commission Certificate of Claims and Returns Report 2008/09 be noted.

66 **Audit Protocol**

Nicola Jackson (Audit Manager, Audit Commission) presented a report of the Head of Finance which set out the basis for joint working arrangements between Cherwell District Council's Internal Audit Service (IA) and the Audit Commission (AC), as the Council's external auditors.

Resolved

(1) That the contents of the Audit Protocol report be noted.

67 **Chief Finance Officer**

The Chairman advised the Committee that this would be the Chief Finance Officers' last Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee as the Council had concluded an arrangement for sharing a Section 151 Officer and Chief Finance Officer with South Northamptonshire District Council. Martin Henry would be the Council's designated Section 151 Officer until 28 February 2011.

The Committee thanked the Chief Finance Officer for all his advice, support and guidance to the Committee in all areas of finance and wished him well.

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm

Chairman:

Date:

Cherwell District Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, OX15 4AA, on 9 February 2010 at 6.30 pm

Present:	Councillor Daniel Sames (Chairman) Councillor Lynda Thirzie Smart (Vice-Chairman) Councillor Ann Bonner Councillor John Donaldson Councillor Alastair Milne Home Councillor Tony Ilott Councillor Leslie F Sibley Councillor P A O'Sullivan Councillor Chris Smithson Councillor Trevor Stevens Councillor Lawrie Stratford
Substitute Members:	Councillor Devena Rae (In place of Councillor Nick Cotter)
Also Present:	Councillor Nigel Morris Councillor Carol Steward Francesca Heffernan, Decision Making and Young People Worker, Oxfordshire County Council Emily Little, Involvement Officer, Participation and Play, Oxfordshire County Council Participants of the Local Councillor Shadowing Programme from Banbury School and Frank Wise School
Apologies for absence:	Councillor Nick Cotter Councillor Colin Clarke
Officers:	Chris Rothwell, Head of Urban & Rural Services Grahame Helm, Head of Safer Communities & Community Development Philip Rolls, Recreation & Health Improvement Manager Craig Forsyth, Communications Officer Catherine Phythian, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer Natasha Clark, Trainee Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

44 **Declarations of Interest**

Members declared interest with regard to the following agenda items:

6. Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2009/10.
Councillor Alastair Milne Home, Personal, as a Member of the Board of the Banbury Community Transport Association.

Councillor P A O'Sullivan, Personal, as Cherwell District Council's elected Member representative on the Board of the Banbury Community Transport Association.

45 **Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business.

46 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25 January 2010 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

47 **Youth Engagement Scrutiny**

The Chairman explained that this was an opportunity for the Committee to question officers from Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council who were involved in the provision of youth services and specifically in activities which promote the democratic engagement of young people. He welcomed the following guests:

- Francesca Heffernan, Decision Making and Young People Worker, Oxfordshire County Council
- Emily Little, Involvement Officer, Participation and Play, Oxfordshire County Council
- Phil Rolls, Recreation and Health Improvement Manager, Cherwell District Council

The Chairman also welcomed the two pupils from Banbury School, a pupil and teacher from Frank Wise School and Councillor Carol Steward. The pupils were all members of their respective school youth councils and, together with Councillor Steward, were participating in the Local Councillor Shadowing programme.

The Chairman began by asking the representatives from Oxfordshire County Council to outline their roles.

Francesca Heffernan explained that her post involved engaging young people in north Oxfordshire in three distinct areas: Integrated Youth Support Services (IYSS); Connexions; and, the youth offending service. Ms. Heffernan advised the Committee that there were three funds available to support youth projects, youth groups, activities and facilities in Oxfordshire: the Chill Out Fund; Youth Opportunities; and, the Youth Capital Fund. Ms. Heffernan worked within the Participation Team which helped young people get involved in the decision-making process for the latter two funds. The Committee was advised that the Participation Workers also supported and helped build up the youth forums in the district.

Emily Little explained that her post included coordinating and facilitating the Oxfordshire Youth Parliament and coordinating and supporting the annual cycle of UK Youth Parliament elections across the county. In addition, she supported the Members and Deputy Members of the Youth Parliament during their term of office.

In the course of the discussion and questioning the following points emerged:

Youth Forums/Councils
Francesca Heffernan explained that at present in Cherwell there was an established youth council in Bicester, a youth forum in Banbury and a newly formed youth forum in Kidlington. Work was currently underway to establish a North Youth Forum which would be held three times a year and bring together the youth forums in the north and west of the county.

Members were interested to learn about how the outcomes and impact of the youth forums/parliament were measured and monitored. The Oxfordshire County Council representatives reported that there were many successful outcomes however acknowledged it was difficult to monitor the impact. They reported that from the perspective of the young people, success could be measured by their achievements and cited the examples of the Bicester Youth Council who had led the introduction of a recycling initiative in schools in the town; the manifesto of the UK Youth Parliament which had included promoting positive images of young people and had led to the production of a DVD entitled “the youth of today” which explored the reasons for the negative images of young people and highlighted the positive work of young people.

In response to questions, the Decision Making and Young People Worker explained that in the long term she hoped that more young people would be represented and given a voice in the issues that affected them. This would be achieved through greater partnership working between the county, district and town/parish councils together with schools and voluntary organisations.

School Councils
The Committee was interested to learn about how the school councils functioned. The Frank Wise pupil explained that he was the Chairman of his school council which included four senior and four junior pupils. A suggestion box was available in which any student could submit an item for discussion by the school council. The teacher from Frank Wise School explained that the school council had been running for a few years and that there were links to various groups to ensure that there were opportunities for young people with special needs and also access to mainstream activities.

The Banbury School pupils explained that there were three levels at their school: year group councils; a lower and an upper school council; and, a school parliament. The pupils explained that their School Parliament had limited decision making powers but gave the members an opportunity to have an understanding of democracy and how it works.

Activities and Communication
The Involvement Officer informed the Committee that there were currently two county-wide websites which hold information in regard to young people and

include information on what is available in the district. Youth Activator boards had recently been fitted in all secondary schools (Warriner / Kidlington / North Oxfordshire Academy and Banbury School) and would be fitted in all schools by Easter 2010. The boards hold information for young people on what's going on in their area. The boards were updated monthly, so hold up to date information in the areas of Physical Activities / Arts & Culture / Health & Info and Youth Clubs.

The Banbury School pupils advised the Committee that they were not aware of the boards in their school and had not heard of the county-wide websites. Furthermore, one of the pupils explained that not all young people have frequent access to the internet as access at school was limited and not all homes have an internet connection so it was important to use a variety of means of communication.

The pupils suggested a number of ways to improve communication with young people: school websites could host links to other websites; school newspapers/magazines could contain information on general activities, the activities of youth forums and events organised by the Council such as Local Democracy Week; information could be made available to parents at parents evening; the students themselves could disseminate information submitted to the school council through year representatives to class representatives; the Council could publicise events in the local media including newspapers and radio.

The teacher from Frank Wise School reported that the school had good and frequent contact with the Involvement Officer who provided support and information on activities in the district. However, he acknowledged that not all of the information was disseminated through the school and was an area he would be addressing.

The Committee agreed that it was important to ask young people about the activities they want and the mechanism for doing this should incorporate a wide range of young people, not only those who are involved in youth/school councils. In response to the Committee's question regarding what the Council could do to improve and promote the engagement of young people in local democracy, the pupils explained that they felt it was important to ask their views about activities and to make information and activities more widely available.

Conclusions

The Chairman thanked the representatives of Oxfordshire County Council, Banbury School, Frank Wise School and Cherwell District Council for attending the meeting and making a valuable contribution to the scrutiny review. He asked the Board to reflect on the evidence presented at the meeting, on the information obtained from the earlier briefing documents, discussions with officers at the Committee's previous four meetings and on the draft report that had been circulated to Members.

The Committee agreed that based on the evidence submitted they felt that a single all encompassing recommendation that the Council should introduce a formal policy for youth engagement would be sufficient.

48 **Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2009/10**

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services on the overview and scrutiny work programme 2009/10.

Existing Work Programme
The Committee noted the contents of the report and the existing work programme for 2009/10. Members noted that the Task and Finish Group on Anti-Social Behaviour would be meeting on 11 February 2010 to consider the Group's recommendations to Executive. Members requested that the report be brought to their March meeting for discussion prior to submission to the Executive as there appeared to be a number of areas that overlapped with the Committee's review on youth engagement.

Forward Plan
The Committee did not identify any further items from the Forward Plan for inclusion on their work programme.

Scheduling

Tackling Deprivation
The Committee observed that "tackling deprivation" was too broad an area to be included on the work programme as a potential scrutiny topic. However, they agreed that they would consider deprivation at their next meeting but only in relation to planning policy issues and Houses of Multiple Occupancy.

Built Environment Conservation Areas
The Committee noted that the Portfolio Holder Planning and Housing, the Strategic Director Planning and Housing and officers from Housing and Planning would attend the March meeting to brief Members on this issue. The briefing would cover the existing planning policies and regulations applicable to conservation areas; additional policies and controls that might be applied to conservation areas; and the relationship between Houses of Multiple Occupancy and deprivation.

Following the briefing the Committee would be in a position to determine whether to make recommendations to the Executive or to add the topic to their work programme for more detailed scrutiny in 2010/11.

The Chairman asked Councillor Bonner, who had raised the topic, to produce a short note outlining her concerns and issues with regard to this topic. The Scrutiny Officer would circulate the note to the Committee and officers in advance of the March meeting.

Phone Access and Telephony Review
The Scrutiny Officer advised the Committee that their request for the Executive to consider this item at their later March or April meeting to enable the Committee to consider the report had not yet been confirmed. The Scrutiny Officer agreed to progress this and advise Members once a decision had been reached.

Monitoring

Markets

The Portfolio Holder Community Safety, Street Scene and Rural and the Head of Urban and Rural Services updated Members on the progress with regard to the district's markets, in particular the appointment of a market operator for Banbury market, since the Committee's meeting on 10 November 2009.

In response to questions, the Head of Urban and Rural Services advised Members that the newly appointed market operator would assume formal responsibility for Banbury market on 1 April 2011. He confirmed that although the Council and the market operator would be working in partnership to deliver improvements to Banbury market, the relationship was underpinned by a formal contract that included appropriate break clauses and termination options. He reassured Members that the market traders had been given the opportunity to meet the new market operator at "drop in sessions" and make their views known.

The Committee asked whether the corporate risk register included an entry for the possible insolvency on the part of the market operator. The Head of Urban and Rural Services reminded Members that the Council had appointed the market operator following a rigorous tendering process but undertook to check and if necessary add an entry to the risk register.

Concessionary Travel

The Portfolio Holder Community Safety, Street Scene and Rural and the Head of Safer Communities and Community Development updated Members on progress with regard to the scrutiny recommendations on Concessionary Travel. The Committee noted that the responsibility for administering both the statutory minimum concession and discretionary concession for travel will transfer from district to county councils on 1 April 2011. Consequently no further action would be taken in relation to the recommendations on the introduction of a smart card reader scheme (Recommendation 1), the promotion of a concessionary travel consortium in Oxfordshire (Recommendation 6) or any changes to the start time of the discretionary scheme in 2010/11 (Recommendation 8).

The Head of Safer Communities and Community Development advised Members that the concessionary fare service providers were now providing monthly management information and that there was no evidence that mis-ticketing was either fraudulent or prolific.

Commenting on the research report on Community Transport provision in Cherwell District the Portfolio Holder Community Safety, Street Scene and Rural said that this had been an interesting piece of work that highlighted the differences between dial-a-ride and other voluntary schemes. He informed Members that he would be taking this work forward with officers in 2010/11.

The Committee expressed some concern that there was as yet no guidance on the financial implications or operational practicalities of the transfer of responsibility for concessionary travel from district to county councils. They encouraged the Portfolio Holder to initiate discussions with his counterparts at

the county council, as they felt a pro-active approach from Cherwell would do more to safeguard the interests of Cherwell residents.

Residents' Parking (Banbury)
Some Members of the Committee requested an update on this topic. The Portfolio Holder Community Safety, Street Scene and Rural reported that the Executive had considered this at their February meeting. Detailed plans were currently being developed for all of the consulted zones, however the timeframe had not yet been finalised. The Committee was advised that civil parking enforcement would pass from the County to Cherwell District Council in April 2011. The Portfolio Holder Community Safety, Street Scene and Rural advised the Committee that he would be in a position to bring further information to the Committee in the summer.

Resolved

1) That the current overview and scrutiny programme for 2009/10 be agreed.

2) That the contents of the Forward Plan be noted.

3) That the progress against the scrutiny recommendations on the future of markets in the district be noted.

4) That the progress against scrutiny recommendations on concessionary travel be noted.

5) That the Portfolio Holder Community Safety, Street Scene and Rural be asked to initiate discussions with the county council regarding the financial implications and operational practicalities arising from the transfer of responsibility for concessionary travel from district to county councils.

The meeting ended at 9.50 pm

Chairman:

Date:

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Cherwell District Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, OX15 4AA, on 9 March 2010 at 6.30 pm

Present:	Councillor Daniel Sames (Chairman) Councillor Lynda Thirzie Smart (Vice-Chairman) Councillor Ann Bonner Councillor Tony Ilott Councillor Leslie F Sibley Councillor Chris Smithson Councillor Trevor Stevens
Substitute Members:	Councillor Devena Rae (In place of Councillor Nick Cotter) Councillor Simon Holland (In place of Councillor Lawrie Stratford)
Also Present:	Councillor Colin Clarke Councillor Michael Gibbard Councillor Victoria Irvine Councillor Nicholas Turner
Apologies for absence:	Councillor Nick Cotter Councillor John Donaldson Councillor Alastair Milne Home Councillor P A O'Sullivan Councillor Lawrie Stratford
Officers:	Ian Davies, Strategic Director - Environment and Community John Hoad, Strategic Director - Planning, Housing and Economy Jameson Bridgwater, Head of Development Control & Major Developments Philip Clarke, Head of Planning & Affordable Housing Pat Simpson, Head of Customer Service & Information Systems Tim Mills, Private Sector Housing Manager Linda Rand, Design & Conservation Team Leader Craig Forsyth, Communications Officer James Doble, Democratic, Scrutiny and Elections Manager Catherine Phythian, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer Natasha Clark, Trainee Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

49 **Declarations of Interest**

Members declared interest with regard to the following agenda items:

7. Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme.
Councillor Trevor Stevens, Prejudicial, as the owner of a business in Kidlington High Street that might be affected by the proposed pedestrianisation scheme.

50 **Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business.

51 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9 February 2010 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

52 **Built Environment Conservation Areas**

The Chairman reminded the Committee that it had previously considered the possibility of conducting a full review of built environment conservation area policy and practice in the District. This review had not been pursued, but, at its last meeting the Committee had expressed further interest in the issues – with particular reference to Grimsbury Conservation Area and pressures to subdivide houses. The discussion had widened to cover general housing and deprivation issues in Grimsbury. As a result, the Committee had asked for an opportunity to meet with the Portfolio Holder Planning and Housing and relevant officers to explore all the issues that had been raised, before reconsidering whether to undertake the policy review.

The Chairman welcomed the following guests:

- Councillor Michael Gibbard, Portfolio Holder Planning and Housing
- John Hoad, Strategic Director Planning, Housing and Economy
- Jameson Bridgwater, Head of Development Control and Major Developments
- Philip Clarke, Head of Planning and Affordable Housing Policy
- Tim Mills, Private Sector Housing Manager
- Linda Rand, Design and Conservation Team Leader

The Strategic Director Planning, Housing and Economy gave a short presentation on 'Housing Change – Control and Management'. The presentation covered the existing planning policies and regulations; additional policies and controls that could be applied to conservation areas; the benefits and adverse impacts of the conversion of existing properties to flats and creation of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO).

The Strategic Director Planning, Housing and Economy noted that there had been increasing concern on the part of Grimsbury ward councillors that the level of property sub-division in the Grimsbury area was too high and could not be sustained. The Committee was advised that there were 228 known Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) in the District of which 45 were in Grimsbury. In percentage terms, the number of HMOs in the District was 0.39% and 4.5% in Grimsbury.

The Strategic Director Planning, Housing and Economy advised the Committee that there were currently a number of policies relevant to the issues identified including national planning and housing policy, the Local Development Plan, conservation area controls and private sector housing policies. The Committee was advised that from April 2010 a new power requiring planning permission for all new HMOs would come into effect. The Strategic Director Planning, Housing and Economy explained that as Local Planning Authority the Council would find itself dealing with a number of these newly required applications. It was anticipated that consideration of applications would include whether the application would result in adverse physical change, or if the level of HMOs in an area was causing social problems. Decisions to refuse would need to be well justified, with strong evidence of harm. It was noted that the main reason for the introduction of the new legislation was the need to manage the provision of student HMOs in University towns and cities where heavy concentrations of HMOs and severe problems of anti social behaviour were evident.

Members of the Committee acknowledged that development and change was inevitable and necessary. However they expressed concern that Cherwell District Council did not seem to be strong enough in protecting the heritage and conservation in Banbury. The Head of Development Control and Major Developments assured the Committee that the Planning department sought to ensure that planning applications for properties within conservation areas would protect, maintain or enhance the area. It was however important that there were sound planning reasons when planning applications were refused.

The Design and Conservation Team Leader briefed the Committee on the designation of conservation areas noting that the process attracted opposition as well as support. She reported that conservation area designation did not make a significant difference to residents, principally it gives the Local Authority extra controls over demolition, minor developments and the protection of trees, but that expectation of the level of influence on overall quality of the built environment from these controls could easily be disappointed. Article 4 Directions (which relate to restrictions of Permitted Development rights) can give greater control, but can be controversial.

In response to Members' questions, the Strategic Director Planning, Housing and Economy advised the Committee that while the Council has some very specific Article 4 Directions in place this tool was not used extensively in conservation area designation and management in Cherwell. This was for a number of reasons including the fact that Article 4 Directions restrict the right of an individual to modify their own home and their use would require considerable investment and resources on the part of the Council.

The Committee acknowledged that there were different types of flat conversion and HMOs and that although they were not prevalent throughout the district, rather there were certain areas where they were seen to cause problems. The Committee considered the need for criteria and a policy for HMOs reflecting the new legislation to be enshrined within the Local Development Framework. The Strategic Director Planning, Housing and Economy advised the Committee that work was currently underway on a Guidance document on flat conversions and HMOs that could become part of

the Local Development Framework. The Committee agreed that it was important to provide evidence of the issues faced in Grimsbury to support this work.

The Committee were advised of the arrangements for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to make suggestions, or raise concerns, over planning policy issues. These issues are referred to the informal Local Development Framework Advisory Panel which is convened by the Portfolio Holder Planning and Housing and is made up of non executive members, including the Chairman of the Planning Committee. The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is a standing Member of the Panel and is able to ask for the Panel to consider any issues raised by the Committee.

It was agreed that Councillors Bonner, Clarke and Smithson would meet informally with the Head of Planning and Affordable Housing Policy to consider the potential to use the new planning controls on HMOs and suggest decision criteria that could be included in the proposed guidance document. The councillor group would then ask the Chairman to put its suggestions to the Portfolio Holder through the Local Development Framework Advisory Panel.

The Committee also agreed that, based on the briefing, they would like to undertake further scrutiny work on the specific issue of built environment conservation areas as set out in the Scoping Report previously prepared and would add it to their 2010/11 work programme.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder and Officers for attending the meeting.

Resolved

1) That Councillors Bonner, Clarke and Smithson would meet informally with the Head of Planning and Affordable Housing Policy to consider the potential to use the new planning controls on HMOs and suggest decision criteria that the Chairman could recommend to the Planning and Housing Portfolio Holder through the Local Development Framework Advisory Panel.

2) That Built Environment Conservation Areas be included on the Overview and Scrutiny work programme 2010/11.

53 **Customer Access by Phone**

The Portfolio Holder for Customer Service and ICT presented the report which set out proposals for customer access by phone. He explained that this was to bring the Council in line with the latest customer service standards and because the existing switchboard system would be obsolete by 2015 and was already unable to manage the volume of calls at peak times.

The new approach to using the contact centre and switchboard telephone systems was intended to make it quicker for customers to get the information they need and improve the quality of information available to the Council

about how calls are handled. The new system would limit the number of menu choices for customers to just 4 based on the most popular enquiries and a "seasonal/topical" issue. All callers would have the option to hold for an "operator" rather than follow the automated menu options. Performance would be measured in terms of providing the right information rather than just the speed of response.

The Committee noted that the Council would also be introducing new guidance on the use of voicemail by officers. The underlying principle would be that voicemail should be used as a last resort and that calls should be diverted to colleagues rather than a machine.

In response to questions from Committee members the Head of Customer Service and Information Systems confirmed that Members would still be able to call officers on their direct dial numbers and that the details would be available in the Council Year Book and via blackberries. Members of the Committee emphasise the importance of careful planning and good management during the implementation phase to minimise the inconvenience to customers.

In conclusion the Committee welcomed the report and agreed that this was a valuable initiative to further good customer service.

Resolved

1) That the report setting out the proposed changes to the Council's telephony system be endorsed.

2) That Executive be recommended to accept the report.

54 **Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme**

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services on the overview and scrutiny work programme 2009/10 and the proposed work programme for 2010/11.

Existing Work Programme
The Committee agreed that Concessionary Fares, Affordable Housing and Rural Exception Sites, Markets in Cherwell to be removed from the work programme as monitoring was complete. If any issues relating to these topics needed to be scrutinised in the future then it would be a new piece of work.

The Committee agreed that the following topics should be considered for scrutiny in 2010/11 subject to the completion of a clearly defined scoping document: Conservation Area Policy, Youth Services and Preparations for an Ageing Population.

Forward Plan
The Committee did not identify any further items from the Forward Plan for inclusion on their work programme.

Kidlington Pedestrianisation
The Strategic Director, Planning Housing and Economy informed the Committee that on the Kidlington Pedestrianisation capital bid (value £25,000) had been referred to scrutiny for further consideration by Council.

The Strategic Director, Planning Housing and Economy reported that the project was intended to extend the pedestrianisation of the village centre through the use of traffic orders and that there was no physical work involved other than signage. The bid had been rejected as part of the 2010/11 budget process due to the overall financial constraints facing the Council. However, the Portfolio Holder for Resources had indicated that a supplementary estimate could be made if the scrutiny review considered that it was justified. The Committee noted that the scheme would bring Kidlington in to line with the other urban centres of the district.

The Committee agreed to look at the matter in more detail at their June or July meeting and that local Members, representatives from the Kidlington Pedestrianisation Project Board and Kidlington Parish Council and lead officers from Cherwell District Council should be present at the discussion.

Crime and Anti Social Behaviour Task & Finish Group Report
The Chairman of the Task & Finish Group was present at the meeting to respond to the concerns raised by the Committee at its February meeting regarding the content of the report and the length of time that it had taken to Task & Finish Group to conclude its review.

The Committee was advised that the delays had been in part due to constraints on officer and member time and also because the original remit of the Task & Finish Group had been too wide and it had proved difficult to stick to a narrower line of enquiry. Members of the Committee who had also served on the Task & Finish Group re-affirmed their belief that the scrutiny review had been a success, not least because it was the first such review to actively involve young people and other community groups.

The Democratic Scrutiny and Elections Manager tabled a schedule of changes to the draft report for the Committee to consider. He explained that the Committee could make observations and suggest changes to the draft report but that ultimately the decision rested with the Chairman and members of the Task & Finish Group.

The Committee noted these comments and then made some detailed observations on the text of the draft report. The Chairman agreed to take these into account in the final version of the report. It was agreed that this report should be presented to the Executive at the same time as the report on Democratic Youth Engagement as they raised complementary issues.

Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Protocol
The Committee considered the report on the draft protocol for the conduct of crime and disorder scrutiny and reflected on the potential blurring of responsibilities and duplication of effort between the Council's two scrutiny committees. The Committee recognised the importance of developing a strong knowledge base in this subject area and acknowledged that this would take a considerable length of time. They noted that the scrutiny of crime and

disorder was intended to be strategic and that the responsibility for the resolution of specific, operational issues lay with the organisations which belonged to the crime and disorder partnership.

In conclusion the Committee agreed to adopt the following approach to crime and disorder scrutiny (detailed as Option 2 in the report):

- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider crime and disorder matters on a theme or topic basis in terms of outcomes for the local community (e.g. youth offending, domestic violence)
- The Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board to review the performance of the Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership in terms of its effectiveness and delivery against targets.

Resolved

1) That the current overview and scrutiny programme for 2009/10 be agreed subject to the amendments detailed above and that they should be carried forward to the work programme for 2010/11.

2) That the contents of the Forward Plan be noted.

3) That a review of the Kidlington Pedestrianisation capital bid should be scheduled on the agenda of the June or July meeting.

4) That the draft report of the Anti Social Behaviour Task & Finish Group be noted and that it be referred to the Executive at the same time as the Committee's report on Democratic Youth Engagement.

5) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be responsible for the consideration of crime and disorder matters on a theme or topic basis in terms of outcomes for the local community (e.g. youth offending, domestic violence).

6) That the Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board be responsible for the consideration of crime and disorder matters in so far as they relate to the performance of the Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership in terms of its effectiveness and delivery against targets.

The meeting ended at 9.15 pm

Chairman:

Date:

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Cherwell District Council

Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board

Minutes of a meeting of the Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, OX15 4AA, on 16 February 2010 at 7.00 pm

Present:	Councillor Colin Clarke (Chairman)
	Councillor Alyas Ahmed Councillor Margaret Cullip Councillor Devena Rae Councillor Carol Steward Councillor Patricia Tompson Councillor Douglas Webb
Also Present:	Councillor Michael Gibbard Councillor Nigel Morris Sandie Dancer, Chair, Residents' Voice Harj Lota, Managing Director, Charter Community Housing Jacky Clacken, Housing Management Team Leader, Bromford Living Susan Dell, Bromford Living
Apologies for absence:	Councillor Nicholas Mawer Councillor Maurice Billington Councillor Victoria Irvine Councillor Keith Strangwood Councillor Martin Weir
Officers:	Gillian Greaves, Head of Housing Services Martyn Swann, Strategic Housing Manager Kate Winstanley, Strategic Housing Officer Craig Forsyth, Communications Officer Catherine Phythian, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer Natasha Clark, Trainee Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

44 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

45 **Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business.

46 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2010 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

47 **Registered Social Landlords' Management Group**

The Chairman welcomed the Portfolio Holder Planning and Housing, the Head of Housing Services, the Strategic Housing Manager, the Strategic Housing Officer and the representatives from Charter Community Housing, the Bromford Group and Charter Residents' Voice to the meeting.

The Chairman explained that this was an opportunity for the Board to learn more about the Registered Social Landlords' Management Group, including its links to the Council's corporate priorities, the national standards that apply and to explore strategic and operational issues relating to the management of housing stock across the district. Following the discussion the Board would reflect on the evidence presented and if there were any issues that they wished to explore further, these should be added to the 2010/11 Work Programme.

The Strategic Housing Officer began by setting the overall context for Cherwell's Housing Services work with the Registered Social Landlords (RSL). As part of its strategic housing function, the Council still has a role to play in how the former "council houses" are managed, as well as other social housing in the district. Most of the day to day operation is undertaken by the Registered Social Landlords and in doing so they are accountable to and monitored by the Tenant Services Authority (a government appointed national organisation).

There are 16 Registered Social Landlords operating in the district with stock holdings ranging from just four properties to over 5000 homes. The Council works closely with these Registered Social Landlords to ensure the effective management of social housing in the district. The Council chairs and facilitates the quarterly Cherwell RSL Housing Management Group meetings, and undertakes an annual appraisal with each Registered Social Landlord. The Council recognises that this approach does not suit the smaller Registered Social Landlords and so it is looking at other ways to engage them, possibly through a "buddy" system or attendance on a rota basis.

The Strategic Housing Officer explained that the main duties of the Registered Social Landlords can be described as:

- Rents, repairs and maintenance
- Allocation of homes
- Addressing worklessness
- Promoting neighbourhoods

The Board heard that over the last twenty years the focus of attention had moved from the traditional activities of allocations and rent, repairs and maintenance. The emphasis was now on addressing worklessness amongst social housing residents and introducing measures to promote neighbourhood

and community. The involvement of residents and tenants was a key aspect of this approach.

In response to questions from the Board the Strategic Housing Officer explained that although the management of social housing is undertaken by the Registered Social Landlords, the Council maintains a housing register and nominates (i.e. decides on) applicants to move into Registered Social Landlord homes. The Council normally secures full nomination rights on the majority of properties with the Registered Social Landlords typically retaining rights on about 10% for emergency cases. Properties are advertised through the Choice Based Lettings scheme and people can bid for up to 3 properties during each fortnightly advertising cycle and modify their bids according to the popularity of the properties.

The Board also heard from representatives from Charter Community Housing (the largest Registered Social Landlord in the district with over 5000 properties) and Bromford Living (responsible for 420 homes in the district). The Managing Director of Charter Community Housing described how its merger with Banbury Homes and the Sanctuary Group had resulted in positive benefits for the residents in Cherwell. Financial stability and economies of scale had enabled Charter Community Housing to retain an in-house maintenance team and to negotiate a new contract for the procurement of kitchens and bathrooms which did not attract an inflationary uplift because of the volumes of business. A potential downside could have been the loss of any local service and identity. This was something that the organisation had worked hard to avoid and they were confident that local residents and tenants still regarded it as a local service.

The Housing Management Team Leader of Bromford Living (Bromford Living manages Bromford Group's general rented housing in the West Midlands and surrounding counties) commented on the importance of partnership working with the Council to ensure the delivery of the Housing Strategy and cited the Development & Housing Management Standards Protocol as an example of effective joint working. Local service delivery is also important to Bromford Group and the Board learnt that there was a locally based housing manager who operates from the community office at Bure Park, Bicester. The Bromford Living Housing Management Team Leader told the Board about the joint work between the Council and Bromford Group in tackling the environmental issues at Bicester Cattle Market. There had been joint visits by Cherwell District Council and Bromford Group staff to issue information packs and brief residents on recycling and their responsibilities. As a result there has been a significant decrease in environmental issues at the Cattle Market.

The Chairman of the local Charter Residents' Voice group thanked the Board for the opportunity to present the views of the tenants and residents. She explained that Residents' Voice operated at both local and national level within the Charter/Sanctuary Housing group and that it was a well established and recognised means of consultation and dialogue with tenants and residents. Charter/Sanctuary Housing are positive supporters of the Residents' Voice groups and use them to develop and consult on new policies and responses to legislation, contribute to proposals for new build housing and inspect service departments as well as a means to mediate and resolve

practical and operational problems facing particular housing estates or individual tenants.

The Chairman of the local Charter Residents' Voice group told the Board that she had always found the Charter/Sanctuary staff and managers to be approachable and responsive. There were regular formal meetings and good informal communications. She was pleased to note that this was also apparent in the relationship with Cherwell's Housing Services where there had been a marked improvement in recent years. She cited a recent "skip day in Banbury" as an example of a successful joint project between the residents, Charter and Cherwell to tackle littering and flytipping and promote recycling.

The Chairman thanked the guests for their comments which had been informative and a valuable basis for the Board's consideration of the partnership between Cherwell's Housing Services and the Registered Social Landlords.

In conclusion the Board noted that there was a strong working relationship between the Council's Housing Services and the main Registered Social Landlords which was focused on common objectives which supported the Council's corporate priorities. This was underpinned by a formal structure to manage and measure the effectiveness of the partnership. As a result, the partnership was delivering practical benefits to those residents living in social housing. On the basis of the information presented the Board confirmed that there was no need to undertake any further scrutiny of this subject.

The Board determined that a brief report summarising the information presented should be submitted to the Executive commending the Portfolio Holder, Planning and Housing and the staff of Cherwell's Housing Services for their work, in partnership with the Registered Social Landlords, on the management of social housing in the district.

Resolved

1) That no further scrutiny of Registered Social Landlords and the management of social housing should be undertaken at this time.

2) That a report be submitted to the Executive commending the Portfolio Holder, Planning and Housing and the staff of Cherwell's Housing Services for their work, in partnership with the Registered Social Landlords, on the management of social housing in the district.

48 **Partnership Scrutiny: Oxfordshire Rural Community Council**

The Board reflected on the outcomes of its scrutiny review of the Council's partnership with Oxfordshire Rural Community Council and discussed the draft recommendations to the Executive. The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Street Scene and Rural was present at the meeting and participated in the discussion.

The Board confirmed that the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council was a valuable and important partnership for Cherwell District Council without which it would be difficult to deliver the Council's rural agenda.

The Board discussed the role of elected Members in the Council's partnership with Oxfordshire Rural Community Council and agreed that the current arrangement should continue but that it should be strengthened and the respective role and responsibilities of the Portfolio Holder and the elected ward member should be clarified. The Board felt that it was important to distinguish between the role of the Portfolio Holder in shaping the strategic direction of the partnership and determining funding and service level agreements and that of the elected member providing knowledge and experience of rural issues within the district. The Board agreed that the elected member should represent a rural ward.

Throughout the course of the Review the Board had raised some general issues about the role and responsibilities of elected Members who represent the Council on partnerships and outside bodies. The Board noted that in spring 2009 the Executive had requested further information setting out how the Council would effectively support member representatives on partnerships and outside bodies. The Chairman reported that a project group had been established to review representation on outside bodies. The Board agreed that that the review addressed the issues that they had raised and commented that it was important for there to be a defined role for elected Members representing the Council on outside bodies and partnerships and that the responsibilities for this role should be defined and strengthened.

Resolved

1) That the briefing on the review of representation on Outside Bodies be noted.

2) That the following recommendations to the Executive be included in the report on the Oxfordshire Rural Communities Council:

   a) That an annual programme of aims/objectives (aligned to the Rural Strategy Action Plan and the Council's corporate priorities) be agreed with Oxfordshire Rural Community Council and regularly reviewed and monitored by officers, the elected Member representative from a rural ward and reported to the Portfolio Holder.

   b) That the role and involvement of elected Members (the representative from a rural ward and the Portfolio Holder) in the Council's partnership with Oxfordshire Rural Community Council be clarified and strengthened.

   c) That the elected Member representative from a rural ward should work closely with rural community development officers and safer communities and community development officers to provide overall steer and direction for the partnership.

3) That the draft report Oxfordshire Rural Communities Council be circulated to Officers for comment.

4) That the Democratic, Scrutiny and Elections Manager in consultation with the Chairman of the Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board be delegated to agree any amendments to the draft report on the Oxfordshire Rural Communities Council prior to it's submission to the Executive.

49 **Work Programme**

The Board considered a report of Head of Legal and Democratic Services on the overview and scrutiny work programme for 2009/10.

The Board agreed that a report on the Contracts Review and a monitoring report on Past Year Budget Scrutiny Recommendations should be considered at the June meeting.

Partnerships: Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership
The Board was informed that the value for money review of the Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership had been delayed but that work was now starting on the scoping of the project. The Board confirmed that this was an important subject area and agreed that it should remain on their work programme for scrutiny in 2010/11.

Partnerships: Bicester Vision Partnership
The Chairman reported that he and the Vice-Chairman had yet to meet the Leader of the Council to discuss the arrangements and timing for the further scrutiny of the Bicester Vision Partnership. The topic would remain on the work programme for 2010/11.

The Board noted that this would be their last meeting until the new municipal year and expressed concern about the absence of a formal meeting date in March. They agreed to review the schedule of meetings for 2010/11 at their June meeting with a view to adding an extra meeting if necessary.

Resolved

1) That the Resources & Performance Scrutiny Board element of the work programme for 2009/10 as detailed above be noted and carried forward to the work programme for 2010/11.

2) That the update on the Bicester Vision Partnership be noted.

3) That the dates for the Board meetings in 2010/11 be reviewed at the Board meeting in June 2010.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm

Chairman:

Date:

Cherwell District Council

Standards Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, OX15 4AA, on 18 March 2010 at 6.30 pm

Present: Jim McBeth (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Timothy Hallchurch MBE
Councillor Eric Heath
Councillor George Parish
Councillor Bernard Lane
Kenneth Hawtin
Councillor Alan Greenslade-Hibbert

Substitute Members: Councillor David Carr
Councillor Russell Hurle (In place of Councillor Rose Stratford)

Apologies for absence: Dr Sadie Reynolds Councillor Fred Blackwell Councillor Ann Bonner Councillor James Macnamara Councillor Rose Stratford Councillor Douglas Williamson

Officers: Liz Howlett, Head of Legal & Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer
Alexa Coates, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

50 **Declarations of Interest**

Members declared interests with regard to the following agenda items:

10. Committee Membership
Councillor David Carr, Prejudicial, as the item was to consider his appointment to the committee as parish representative.

51 **Petitions and Requests to Address the Meeting**

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

52 **Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business.

53 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2010 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

54 **Minutes Standards Assessment Sub-Committee 25 February 2010**

The minutes of the meeting of the Assessment Sub Committee held on 25 February 2010 were noted.

55 **Update on Complaints**

The committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer which updated members on complaints relating to alleged code of conduct complaints received since the last meeting.

Resolved

That the content of the report is noted.

56 **Update from Standards for England**

The committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer which updated members on new information from Standards for England regarding the proposed revised code of conduct and local assessment framework.

The committee questioned the risk management framework proposed by Standards for England and expressed concerns relating to the impact of rating local authorities as amber of red due to circumstances out of their control. The committee felt that the categories or red, amber and green were not helpful to local authorities, as red or amber might imply to residents that an authority was performing badly, when in fact the categories related to risk as perceived by Standards for England.

The committee discussed the role of the committee and the operation of the code of conduct in light of the fact that the proposals for a revised code had been dropped. The committee discussed whether it would be appropriate to publicise complaints received as they were considered by the assessment subcommittee. It was generally thought that this would be inappropriate as some complaints were malicious and allegations could be unfounded. The committee felt it was correct to consider the publication of complaints on a case by case basis. The committee were advised that legislative requirements for the publication of decision notices were always met.

Resolved

That the content of the report is noted.

57 **Parish Council Visits**

The committee considered a report of the Chairman of the Standards Committee updating the committee on the proposed visits to parish councils

who had requested further guidance on the code of conduct and related issues.

The Vice Chairman advised the committee that the visits would mainly focus on providing guidance on declarations of interests. The Monitoring Officer distributed a guidance note to the committee for Weston on the Green parish council on the complaint assessment process and declaring interests at meetings. The committee requested that the note be distributed to all parish councils.

Resolved

1) That the content of the report is noted.

2) That the parish visits proposal is noted.

58 **Committee Membership**

The committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer which concerned committee membership.

The committee were informed that Douglas Frewer had resigned from the committee as independent member with immediate effect. Mr Frewer had recently moved out of the area and felt the journey to committee meetings was too great. Cllr Bernard Lane had also relinquished his position as parish representative as he would be standing down at the next parish council election.

The committee considered the recruitment of a new independent member and the appointment of a parish representative. Members of the committee requested that Officers prepare a press release to promote the role of the independent member to go alongside the advert.

Resolved

(1) That it is recommended to Council that Cllr David Carr is appointed as Parish Representative to take effect following the parish elections in 2010.

(2) That Officers make arrangements to recruit a further substitute parish representative following the parish elections in 2010 with the final appointment to be agreed by the committee.

(3) That the role description, person specification and advert for the new independent member is approved

(4) That the advert is published in the Banbury Guardian, Bicester Advertiser, Oxford Times and on the Council website and that Officers prepare a press release along with the advert.

(5) That the Committee thank Mr Frewer and Cllr Lane for all their hard work whilst on the committee.

Councillor David Carr left the meeting room whilst the committee considered the appointment of the Parish Representative.

At the end of the item the Vice-Chairman congratulated Councillor Carr on his appointment to the Committee, subject to the agreement of Council.

The Vice Chairman thanked Mr Frewer and Councillor Lane for their contribution to the committee and also Councillor Eric Heath who would be stepping down as a District Councillor at the election in May.

59 **Draft Annual Return 2010**

The committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer which sought approval of the draft responses to the Standards for England Annual Return 2010. The Monitoring Officer informed the committee of some additions suggested by Councillor Macnamara who was not able to attend the meeting.

The committee discussed question 36 which related to training for parish councillors and were advised that it was very difficult to give an accurate reflection of attendance by parish councillors at training events.

Resolved

That the draft Annual Return responses be approved subject to the following amendments:

1) Question 4 – Information on how to make a complaint against a member provided directly by elected Councillors

2) Question 13 – Leading by example e.g the number of declarations of interests made by Councillors at meetings.

3) Question 19 – Attendance at the Standards for England Conference, the inaugural meeting of the Independent Chairman and Vice Chairman Oxfordshire Forum.

The meeting ended at 7.30 pm

Chairman:

Date: