

Cherwell District Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 30 November 2021 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Tom Wallis (Chairman)
Councillor Douglas Webb (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Matt Hodgson
Councillor David Hughes
Councillor Ian Middleton
Councillor Perran Moon
Councillor Adam Nell
Councillor Les Sibley
Councillor Bryn Williams

Also Present:

Councillor John Broad
Councillor Barry Wood, Leader of the Council

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Mike Bishop
Councillor Sandy Dallimore
Councillor Simon Holland

Officers:

Claire Taylor, Corporate Director Customers and Organisational Development
Louise Tustian, Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes
Ed Potter, Assistant Director: Environmental Services
Sandra Fisher-Martins, Climate Action Mobilisation Manager
Sarah Gilbert, Team Leader Climate Action
Sue Marchand, Community Nature Officer: Wellbeing
Nicola Riley, Assistant Director: Wellbeing
Emma Faulkner, Democratic and Elections Officer
Lesley Farrell, Democratic and Elections Officer
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

28 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19 October 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

29 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

30 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

31 **Monthly Performance, Risk and Finance Monitoring**

The Committee considered a report from the Director of Finance and the Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes which detailed Performance, Risk and Finance monitoring at the end of September 2021.

In introducing the report, the Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes reported that 82% of the programme measures and key performance indicators had reported green for quarter 2, with 13% reporting amber and the remaining 5% reporting red.

With regard to the measures that had reported as red, the Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes explained that one major planning appeal had been overturned by the Planning Inspectorate during September 2021. In relation to number of visits or usages of leisure centres, three of the main centres had experienced an increase in visitors in August 2021, but one centre had shown a decrease following the seasonal programming change for the outdoor swimming pool.

The Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes agreed to gather responses to the questions submitted in advance of the meeting. Responses would be circulated to all committee members after the meeting:

- Indicator BP2.2.2 reduction of fuel consumption used by fleet – clarification on how an increase in fuel consumption can be reported as amber when the aim of the indicator is to reduce consumption.
- Indicator BP3.2.2 percentage of business rates collected, increased the NNDR base – details regarding the total arrears and clarification on how the indicator can report green if there are arrears.
- Indicator BP3.1.3 support business enterprise, retention, growth and promote inward investment – more details requested on the council's support to businesses.

- Indicator BP4.1.1 support community safety and reduce antisocial behaviours – more details on the more regular and routine presence in Kidlington referred to.
- Indicator BP3.1.5 proactively manage the Cherwell workstreams of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal – an explanation of the term ‘homes from infrastructure’ used in the commentary, and clarity on what ‘productivity’ refers to in the context of the indicator.
- Key action of ‘business engagement’ under ‘an enterprising economy with strong & vibrant local centres’ programme measure – an explanation regarding how engagement with property developers and commercial property benefits residents of Cherwell.

Resolved

- (1) That the monthly Performance, Risk and Finance Monitoring Report be noted.
- (2) That the Quarter 2 Climate Action Plan and Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Action plan progress updates be noted.

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Climate Action Programme Update

The Committee considered a report from the Director for Environment and Place, and a presentation from the Climate Action Mobilisation Manager which gave an update on progress in delivering the Climate Action Programme, and the reduction in the council’s greenhouse gas emissions in 2020/21.

The Climate Action Mobilisation Manager explained that 20 homes suffering from fuel poverty had been approved for ‘green homes’ grant funding, which would include provision of insulation and in some cases solar powered generation solutions.

The team was also working on a heat network feasibility study, which would give a district-wide map of opportunities available to take heat from a central source and deliver it to properties that may need it. A more detailed map of Banbury would be produced that would allow the team to approach potential partners to gauge interest in applying for funding for a pilot scheme. The mapping exercise was being completed with funding from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with match funding provided by Cherwell District Council.

The Climate Action Mobilisation Manager explained that the team had secured a £6m government grant from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme. The grant was being used to focus on heat decarbonisation of council buildings, through methods such as the replacement of boilers with heat pumps or solar thermal systems.

Once all replacements had been completed it was anticipated the changes would save 1000 tonnes of CO2 emissions.

The next steps for the programme included the continued rollout of park and charge points in Bicester, Banbury and Kidlington, and Carbon Literacy training during 2022 for senior officers and members.

With regards to the Greenhouse Gas emissions report for 2020/21, the Climate Action Mobilisation Manager explained that the 22.5% reduction in emissions compared to the 2019/20 figures was as a direct result of the COVID-19 lockdowns and the closure of council buildings. It was expected that the figures would increase for the 2021/22 year to reflect the buildings reopening, but the decarbonisation work being undertaken would offset some of the increase.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Climate Action Team Leader agreed to circulate more information after the meeting regarding a previous pilot scheme in Oxford that involved using gullies to assist EV charging.

The Climate Action Mobilisation Manager agreed to circulate more information after the meeting in response to a question regarding the potential for shared heat schemes such as ground source heat pumps as part of the local plan related developments in the south of the district.

Resolved

- (1) That the progress and next steps in the Climate Action Programme be noted.
- (2) That the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report for 2020/21 be noted.

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2020-2022 Community Nature Plan Progress Update

The Committee considered a report from the Assistant Director – Wellbeing which provided an update on the 2020 – 2022 Community Nature Plan and its approach to addressing the Council's statutory biodiversity duty.

Introducing the report the Assistant Director – Wellbeing explained that work on the Community Nature Plan involved a number of teams across the Council including planning, environmental services and the climate action team.

The wellbeing team had launched a 'Connect to nature initiative' during the COVID-19 lockdowns, which gave a monthly theme for residents across the district to engage with nature. The November theme was 'be kind', and focussed on looking after hibernating creatures such as ladybirds and hedgehogs.

Work would be starting during 2022 on the next iteration of the plan, and the Assistant Director – Wellbeing explained that Members would be involved in the drafting of the new plan via a workshop that would take place during Spring 2022.

The Community Nature Officer highlighted some of the partnership working with external organisations, including the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust, Wild Oxfordshire and Warriner School Farm.

In response to questions from the Committee the Community Nature Officer explained that the online activity hub gave details of all nature related activities taking place, and a flyer had also been produced to help publicise the sessions. The Community Nature Officer agreed to circulate details of the online hub and flyer after the meeting.

The Community Nature Officer also agreed to gather detailed information on hedgehog numbers in the district for circulation to the Committee after the meeting.

Resolved

- (1) That the 2020-2022 Community Nature Plan progress report and its approach to addressing the Council's statutory biodiversity be noted.
- (2) That the essential role of key partners in the delivery of the Community Nature Plan be recognised.
- (3) That it be noted that the development of the 2022-2024 Community Nature Plan (CNP) will include an all-member seminar in 2022 involving planners, as requested by Overview & Scrutiny in December 2020, and it be noted that the implications of the Environment Act will be taken into account in this next iteration of the CNP.

Safeguarding Self-Assessment Audit

The Committee received a presentation from the Safeguarding Officer that detailed the work of the Safeguarding Team during 2020/21, and gave an overview of the Safeguarding Self-Assessment audit.

The Safeguarding Officer explained that the self-assessment audit had to be completed annually. The 2021 assessment was due to be submitted to the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children and Adults Board on 3 December, and would include evidence of working with the Domestic Abuse Partnership and the Neglect Strategy Group to raise awareness.

The Safeguarding Officer reported that actions from the 2020 audit included improving the level of training and awareness of safeguarding responsibilities amongst staff and elected Members.

Mandatory Safeguarding training for staff had been moved to the online iHasco platform in December 2020, which meant that staff received email reminders to complete the required modules, and the Safeguarding Team could monitor completion levels. Elected Members had also been added to the online platform, with 44% having completed “Prevent” training and 10% “Safeguarding” training.

Safeguarding briefings were held twice a month for staff, covering themes such as neglect, domestic abuse, modern slavery and hate crime. Details of the ‘See It Report it’ system were also available to staff who wanted to report potential issues, and links to the system had been added to the Members’ Portal.

Council staff undertaking non-office based work in the district such as waste collection staff and youth activators had received specific briefings regarding neglect and safeguarding, as their roles meant they would be well placed to spot potential issues. The teams had been provided with cards and posters raising awareness of the signs of neglect and how to report them.

The Safeguarding Officer explained that this would be particularly helpful in Banbury, as the area had the highest percentage of domestic abuse cases in Cherwell.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Assistant Director – Wellbeing explained that it would be possible to provide more details on the figures around domestic abuse in the district, but it was unlikely it could be provided as a ward by ward breakdown as the information held by Police also covered West Oxfordshire. The Assistant Director – Wellbeing agreed to investigate and circulate further information after the meeting.

The Committee congratulated the team on the involvement of the waste collection staff and youth activators in highlighting potential issues, and asked if the details for reporting potential concerns were available to members of the public. The Corporate Director Customers Organisational Development and Resources advised that both Cherwell District and Oxfordshire County Council customer contact centre staff could take reports from members of the public with concerns, or contact details could be found via either council’s website.

Resolved

- (1) That the presentation be noted.

Work Programme 2021-2022

The Committee considered its work programme for 2021-22, received an update from officers on potential subjects for review and considered a scoping document in relation to the Parish review, as well as draft Terms of Reference for the Constitution Review Working Group.

With regard to the proposed review of the district council's relationship with parishes, the Democratic and Elections Officer advised that Councillors Hallchurch and Mallon had joined the working group. The aim of the review was to look at the working relationship between Cherwell District Council and the parishes, with a view to mapping the various interactions and highlighting areas for improvement.

Councillor Bryn Williams expressed an interest in joining the working group.

In relation to the Constitution Review Working Group, the Governance and Elections Manager explained that the Director of Law and Governance had spoken with all Group Leaders individually regarding the prospective Terms of Reference for the review.

Councillors Barry Wood and Les Sibley had indicated they were happy with the proposed approach to the review and the Conservative and Independent Groups would be participating.

Councillor Sean Woodcock had indicated that the Labour Group were not happy with the proposed approach, and would not be participating in the review.

The Governance and Elections Manager explained that the absence of the Labour Group from the working group did not prevent the review from taking place, and the proposed Terms of Reference had been drafted to reflect that.

The timetable for the review had been altered to take account of the time spent discussing the review with the Group Leaders, and it was now proposed to bring proposals from the working group to the March 2022 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with a view to recommendations being considered by full Council in May 2022.

In response to a comment from Councillor Perran Moon that if no opposition members took part in the review, the working group not be referred to as 'cross-party', Councillor Les Sibley confirmed that the Independent Group would be participating in the working group and multiple groups would therefore be represented.

Councillor Ian Middleton stated that the Progressive Oxfordshire stance remained the same as that of the Labour Group, but that the group were happy to continue discussions to try and resolve the issues and give the working group a full democratic oversight.

With regard to the indicative work programme, the Democratic and Elections Officer explained that the COVID-19 response update had been moved to the January 2022 meeting at the request of officers involved in preparing the update.

In relation to the update on topics previously suggested for scrutiny, the Democratic and Elections Officer advised the Committee that information available from a number of sources had been signposted to Members, as well

as a report that was considered by the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board at its meeting on 7 October 2021. It was proposed to close the subject and remove it from the topic list, if Councillor Perran Moon was satisfied that his initial queries had been answered sufficiently.

Councillor Moon indicated that he was happy with the information provided, and that the subject could be removed from the topic list.

With regards to potential new topics for Scrutiny, the Committee requested that a personal safety update be arranged for Members, in light of the recent death of Sir David Amess MP. The Democratic and Elections Officer explained that senior officers had requested a session be arranged for all Members, and discussions were underway with Thames Valley Police for a suitable session to be held in 2022.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding scheduling of updates on Planning Policy, the Recovery and Prosperity Strategy and Digital Infrastructure, the Democratic and Elections Officers advised that discussions were ongoing with relevant officers. A draft of the Recovery and Prosperity Strategy was due to be considered by Executive in January 2022, and would subsequently be scheduled for an Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting. The Corporate Director Customers Organisational Development and Resources undertook to liaise with relevant officers and Democratic and Elections Officers to schedule a briefing update on digital infrastructure at a future committee meeting.

Resolved

- (1) That, subject to the inclusion of Councillors Hallchurch, Mallon and Williams in the group membership, the Parish Working Group scoping document be approved.
- (2) That the Constitution Review Working Group Terms of Reference be approved.
- (3) That the work programme update be noted.
- (4) That the update on topics previously suggested for review be noted and it be agreed to remove Teenage Mental Health from the topic list.
- (5) That the update on items previously submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.22 pm

Chairman:

Date: