

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 6 September 2022 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Sandy Dallimore (Chairman)
Councillor Douglas Webb (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Mike Bishop
Councillor John Broad
Councillor David Hingley
Councillor Matt Hodgson
Councillor Perran Moon
Councillor Dr Chukwudi Okeke
Councillor Bryn Williams

Substitute Members:

Councillor Dorothy Walker (In place of Councillor Ian Middleton)

Also Present:

Councillor Barry Wood, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Policy and Strategy (virtual)
Councillor Phil Chapman, Portfolio Holder for Healthier Communities
Councillor Dan Sames, Portfolio Holder for Cleaner and Greener Communities

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Maurice Billington
Councillor Ian Harwood
Councillor Ian Middleton

Officers:

Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities
Stephen Hinds, Corporate Director Resources
Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance & S151 Officer
Ed Potter, Assistant Director Environmental Services
Nicola Riley, Assistant Director Wellbeing & Housing
Jacey Scott, Revenues and Benefits Manager
Richard Webb, Assistant Director, Regulatory Services
Community Services (Virtual)
Jon Wild, Community Development Manager (Virtual)
Carolyn Arnold, Housing Technical Officer (Virtual)
Jim Guest, Environmental Protection Officer (Virtual)

Emma Faulkner, Democratic and Elections Officer
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

18 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest

19 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28 July 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

20 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman made one announcement

1. Democratic and Elections officer Lesley Farrell would be retiring from the council this month. On behalf of the committee the Chairman thanked Lesley for her tireless work and support and wished her a happy retirement. On a personal note the Chairman stated that Lesley had been a great help, particularly in his first year and that she would be greatly missed.

21 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

22 **Climate Change update and Carbon Management Action Plans**

The Chairman introduced Councillor Dan Sames, Portfolio Holder for Cleaner and Greener Communities, the Corporate Director of Communities and the Assistant Director Environmental Services to provide an update on the climate change work, carbon management plans and draft terms of reference for the climate action working group.

The Assistant Director Environmental Services had submitted a report which set out the Carbon Management Plans for the period 2022-2025 to guide the Council towards its net zero target. Draft terms of reference for the Climate Activity Scrutiny Working Group had been published as a supplement to the agenda.

In introducing the report, the Assistant Director Environmental Services explained that there were four main sources of carbon emissions across the council: corporate buildings, leisure centres, vehicle fleet and staff travel. Staff travel contributed less than 2% of the total emissions, with the largest

contributor being leisure centres. From 2008-09 financial year to 2020-21 financial year, Council emissions had reduced by 51%.

The council had received £6m funding from the public sector decarbonisation scheme, which had been used for the installation of air source heat pumps, a solar array at Woodgreen Leisure Centre that was used to heat the swimming pool and photovoltaic arrays had been installed at Bicester Leisure centre. Emissions at council owned leisure centres had subsequently reduced.

Smaller elements had also been implemented, such as LED lighting and a battery storage facility at Thorpe Lane depot that meant energy generated by solar panels could be stored for later use.

The project had been delivered on time at a cost of £5.2 million, therefore under budget.

In response to Members' questions, the Assistant Director of Environmental Services explained that a reduction of emissions across the vehicle fleet would be difficult to achieve rapidly. Whilst 10% of the fleet had already been converted to electric vehicles, the larger refuse vehicles were the biggest emission contributor at 35 to 40 tonnes per vehicle. However, the majority had Euro 6 engines which meant the existing fleet was clean by diesel standards. The cost for electric refuse vehicles was currently approximately £250,000, a significant increase on a diesel equivalent, and most were currently speed limited to 40mph and therefore not suitable to drive on the motorway which was necessary to reach the waste facilities at Ardley

In addition to cost, the charging infrastructure currently in place at Thorpe Lane Depot would mean that the larger batteries on the refuse vehicles would take two days to fully charge. The Assistant Director Environmental Services explained that the electricity supply at the depot would be improved in the coming months.

Regarding public use charging points, the Assistant Director Environmental Services advised the Committee that a number of charging points were being installed in council owned car parks, that would be available for the public to use to charge their vehicles. Car parks close to terraced houses and flats had been targeted for an initial installation, and further charging points would be installed over the coming months.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding estimated projections about when the council's net zero target would be achieved, the Assistant Director – Environmental Services explained that an initial emissions trajectory graph had been included in the report, covering the period to 2025. Once the recruitment process had been completed for the Climate Action Manager, additional projections could be compiled which would enable the committee to have a better gauge of the progress towards the net zero target.

In response to questions from the Committee and the involvement of Planning Officers in the Climate Change working group, the Corporate Director Communities advised that officer level working groups on both the local plan

and climate change reported to him, and he would ensure the two worked in conjunction with the Overview & Scrutiny working group as climate work interlinked with all areas of the Council.

With regards the draft Climate Change Working Group terms of reference, the Democratic and Elections Officer advised that Councillor Middleton had also expressed an interest in sitting on the Working Group. The Chairman advised that he would circulate the terms of reference to councillors seeking further Working Group members and ensuring all political parties were represented.

Resolved

- (1) That the establishment of a Climate Change Working Group be approved.
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Assistant Director Law, Governance and Democratic Services (Interim), in consultation with the Working Group Chairman and Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairman, to finalise the scoping document.
- (3) That the significant progress in the Council moving towards net zero by 2030 be noted.
- (4) That the proposed carbon management plans in making further steps to reach net zero by 2023 be noted.

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Air Quality Update

The Chairman welcomed the Assistant Director Regulatory Services and Environmental Protection and the Environmental Protection Officer to present an update on Air Quality across the district.

The Assistant Director Regulatory Services and Environmental Protection had submitted a report which provided an update on the air quality monitoring carried out across the district in 2021 and the air quality data obtained, the current district Air Quality Action Plan, and other air quality related matters. Air quality monitoring data showed significant air quality improvements over the last 5-year period in the air quality management areas of the district. The Council's Business Plan included a specific commitment to "Work with partners to improve air quality" within the Supporting Environmental Sustainability priority.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding Hennef Way in Banbury having a red status for Nitrogen Dioxide monitoring, the Environmental Protection Officer explained that the road was close to junction 9 of the M40 and was also a main route into Oxfordshire. A high number of HGVs used the road alongside private vehicles, and this contributed to the higher levels.

With regard to post-covid monitoring levels, the Environmental Protection Officer explained that figures hadn't increased much during 2021 when lockdowns ended, and people started travelling more.

The Committee emphasised the need for planning policy to be an essential factor in improving air quality moving forward. The Committee also highlighted that the accumulation of planning developments had had a significant impact on the level of emissions in the community. In response officers explained that there were requirements in planning policy documents regarding air quality, and these were reflected in the air quality management plans. When planning applications were submitted for areas close to or impacting on an existing air quality monitoring area, an air quality impact assessment was requested.

The Environmental Protection Officer added that consideration of the cumulative impact of new developments would be an area of discussion for the Climate Action Working Group.

Resolved

- (1) That the work undertaken by the Council, and its partners in relation to air quality in the district and the 2021/22 air quality monitoring area be noted.

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Cost of Living update

The Chairman welcomed the Chief Executive, Corporate Director Resources and Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing to the meeting to present a comprehensive update on work taking place across the council to support residents with the cost-of-living crisis.

The Corporate Director Resources explained that the presentation covered three key areas; finance, housing and food poverty, and each area would be introduced by relevant officers.

The Assistant Director Finance updated the Committee on various government backed financial schemes, including the Council Tax Energy Rebate, Housing Benefit and Council Tax support. In addition to national government schemes, the council also administered discretionary local schemes, such as the Household Support fund.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding the deadlines for the various schemes, the Chief Executive advised that the District Councils Network, of which Cherwell District Council was a member, was in discussion with central government regarding extensions, ring-fencing arrangements, and eligibility criteria.

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing introduced the Community Development Manager, who gave an overview of the Brighter Futures Partnership. The Programme had operated for 11 years and focussed on the

17 most deprived areas of Banbury, as identified via Office for National Statistic (ONS) figures.

The Community Development Manager advised the Committee that the Programme had secured funding from the “contained outbreak management fund” and was running additional programmes to support residents alongside the long-standing cookery skills programme and Growing Spaces project.

The Environmental Health Officer for Housing explained the variety of housing initiatives and warm spaces programme being developed as part of the cost-of-living support.

The Environmental Health Officer explained that the council worked with the organisation ‘Better Housing Better Health’, which was a programme aimed at improving housing conditions for residents with long term health conditions.

The council also administered CHEEP grants to assist with energy efficiency of housing, and tenancy support packages for residents at risk of homelessness.

Following the recent announcements regarding the increase in the energy cap, the council was working with local partners to create a warm spaces network. The network would involve publicising community venues that would be open and welcome local residents to spend some time in a warm place and take part in various activities.

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing explained that a raft of work was underway in relation to food poverty. Whilst the work had been referred to as food poverty to reflect the motion that had been approved at the 18 July 2022 Council meeting, but could also be described as food insecurity.

A map of community food provision had been established during the Covid pandemic, as more residents had needed to access food banks or community larders as a result of furlough or reduced working hours during the pandemic.

At their 6 June 2022 meeting, the Executive had endorsed and committed to the new Oxfordshire Food Strategy with this council joining with partners in its adoption and delivery. To support this work, it was proposed to establish a Food Poverty scrutiny Working Group to work with officers on the Cherwell specific strategy and action plan. Draft terms of reference for the working group had been published as a supplement to the main agenda pack.

The Chairman thanked officers for the comprehensive presentation and the Committee noted the work already underway. The Committee highlighted the need for better ways of communicating important helpful messages to the people in the community that were most in need of the support and initiatives detailed in the presentation. Officers assured the Committee that information was available digitally and on paper for those not digitally connected.

With regards Warm Space Networks, in response to comments from the Committee about the possibility of using council sites to provide warmth and

respice for residents during the coming winter months, the Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing explained that the council estate was being considered, and as with all venues being approached about the network, a balance was needed in terms of the distance residents would need to travel to access a warm space building. The Portfolio Holder for Healthier Communities added that consideration also needed to be given to the package of support at warm spaces and it was important to ensure individuals attending retained their dignity.

In response to Members' comments regarding including energy within the remit of the Working Group, the Corporate Director Resources explained that the biggest impact the council could make was in relation to food insecurity and for this reason the Working Group was recommended to focus on this aspect. In the course of discussion, the Committee agreed that the working group should be referred to as the Food Insecurity Working Group rather than Food Poverty Working Group.

Resolved

- (1) That the establishment of a Food Insecurity Working Group be approved.
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Assistant Director Law, Governance and Democratic Services (Interim), in consultation with the Working Group Chairman and Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairman, to finalise the scoping document.

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Work Programme 2022/2023

The Democratic and Elections officer provided a brief update to the committee on the indicative work programme for 2022/2023.

Resolved

- (1) That the update on the 2023/23 work programme be noted and the work programme agreed.
- (2) That, having given due consideration, the update on items previously considered be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.20 pm

Chairman:

Date: