

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 June 2009 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Daniel Sames (Chairman)

Councillor Ann Bonner
Councillor John Donaldson
Councillor Tony Ilott
Councillor Alastair Milne Home
Councillor P A O'Sullivan
Councillor Chris Smithson
Councillor Trevor Stevens
Councillor Lawrie Stratford

Substitute Members: Councillor Rose Stratford
Councillor Devena Rae

Also Present: Councillor Colin Clarke
Councillor Nigel Morris
Councillor Barry Wood

Apologies for absence: Councillor Lynda Thirzie Smart
Councillor Nick Cotter
Councillor Neil Prestidge

Officers: Mary Harpley, Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service
Ian Davies, Strategic Director - Environment and Community
Jameson Bridgwater, Head of Development Control & Major Developments
Grahame Helm, Head of Safer Communities & Community Development
Chris Rothwell, Head of Urban & Rural Services
Catherine Phythian, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Urgent Business

There was no urgent business.

5 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 7 April 2009 and 20 May 2009 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Appointment of Overview and Scrutiny Link Members

The Committee considered a report from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services regarding the appointment of individual members to take the lead in specific areas of the Committee's work.

Resources & Performance Scrutiny Board

The Committee noted that no one overview and scrutiny councillor was a member of both overview and scrutiny committees. They agreed to issue a standing invitation to the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Resources & Performance Scrutiny Board to attend meetings of this committee as necessary.

Pre-decision Scrutiny Link Member

The Committee felt that it was important that all overview and scrutiny members should be familiar with the contents of the Forward Plan and use that document to brief themselves on issues of potential interest to scrutiny.

The Committee agreed to appoint the Chairman or Vice-Chairman as the formal pre-decision scrutiny link member.

Task & Finish Group Link Members

The Committee agreed to appoint Councillor Smithson as the link member to the Crime Perception and Anti-Social Behaviour Task & Finish Group and the Private Sector Housing Strategy Task & Finish Group. The Committee decided that there was no need to appoint a link member to the Concessionary Fares Task & Finish Group as the review was close to completion.

County Council Health Overview and Scrutiny

The Committee agreed to issue a standing invitation to Councillor Mrs Rose Stratford, as the Council's representative on the County Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to attend meetings of this Committee as necessary to give updates on key issues relating to health.

Review of Executive Liaison arrangements

Councillor Wood briefed the Committee on the findings of the recent review of the Executive Liaison arrangements. He said that it was apparent that, for a variety of different reasons, the system of formal pairings of Executive and Overview & Scrutiny members had not worked and had not lead to a specific scrutiny review or recommendations.

The Committee agreed that positive, open communication between all members of the Executive and overview and scrutiny was essential. However, they felt that it was important to maintain the independence and integrity of the scrutiny function and that therefore it would be better to pursue informal dialogue rather than any formal feedback mechanism.

The Committee discussed whether there would be merit in inviting Portfolio Holders to attend overview and scrutiny meetings on a planned basis to hold a general briefing or "question and answer" session. On balance they agreed that this idea was worth pursuing and asked officers to work up proposals for discussion at the next meeting.

Resolved

- 1) That the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Resources & Performance Scrutiny Board be invited to attend meetings of this Committee as necessary to give updates on key issues relating to the work of the Board;

- 2) That the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee be appointed as the pre-decision scrutiny link member;
- 3) That Councillor Smithson be appointed as link member for the Crime Perception and Anti-Social Behaviour Task & Finish Group and the Private Sector Housing Strategy Task & Finish Group;
- 4) That Councillor Mrs Rose Stratford, as the Council's representative on the County Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, be invited to attend meetings of this Committee as necessary to give updates on key issues relating to health.
- 5) That the current formal Executive Liaison Member arrangements should be abandoned and that all members of overview and scrutiny should be encouraged to develop informal dialogue with the Executive on matters of interest to scrutiny.

7 Residents Parking

At the Committee's request Councillor Morris, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Street Scene and Rural and the Head of Urban and Rural Services were present at the meeting to brief members on the latest developments concerning the proposed residents parking schemes in Banbury.

The Portfolio Holder explained that the public consultation exercise had closed on 11 May and that the responses were with the consultants for detailed analysis. The overall response rate was 30% which was in line with the consultant's expectations. The consultation exercise had been directed only to those households and properties in the proposed residential parking zones. The Executive had previously agreed to proceed with some or all of the proposed schemes if more than 50% of the respondents to the consultation voted in favour of a scheme

The next phase of work would involve further analysis of the responses and detailed working up of the various options available for the provision of residents parking schemes in parts of Banbury.

In discussion the Committee raised a number of points and where appropriate the Portfolio Holder agreed to provide additional information outside the meeting.

The Committee asked for further details on when and where the parking problems occurred. They wondered whether the introduction of a residents parking scheme would result in empty streets by day. They were also concerned about the extent of any displacement parking and the knock on implications for streets outside the residents parking zones. They suggested that other initiatives such as short-term pay and display on street parking should be considered in parallel with the residents parking schemes.

The Committee suggested that the problems associated with commuter parking in the vicinity of the rail station should be addressed in other ways. They cited the positive experience at Bicester and the constructive dialogue with Chiltern Rail which had resulted in an extension to the station car park and the introduction of a commuter shuttle bus.

There were also concerns about the possible detrimental impact on the town's retail trade as a result of the recent increase in parking fees and the introduction of

residents parking schemes. They asked for further information on the level of take up in Council car parks since the increase in charges.

The Committee also pointed out that it was important that any income from residents parking schemes should be kept separate and was not used to subsidise the Civil Parking Enforcement arrangements; although they recognised that there would inevitably be some commonality of resources and activity.

Finally the Committee expressed concern that many residents would inherit by default a scheme that they could not afford and did not want, especially in areas with low incomes and a transient population.

In conclusion the Committee expressed serious reservations about the criteria set by the Executive on which to take the decision to proceed with residents parking. They did not think that it was truly representative to go ahead on the basis of a majority of the responses being in favour of residents parking. They felt that this would result in a significant number of residents inheriting the scheme by default and being unable to afford to park near their home.

The Committee was not convinced that a residents parking scheme would solve the fundamental parking problems in Banbury. They felt that further work should be undertaken to explore alternative options and to look at the extent to which any residents parking scheme could be tailored to meet the needs of specific communities.

The Committee were in agreement that until the Civil Parking Enforcement arrangements were in place it would be inappropriate to introduce any residents parking scheme in Banbury.

Resolved

- 1) That the Executive should be informed of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's reservations regarding the approval criteria set for the residents parking scheme consultation ;and
- 2) That the Executive should be asked to defer any decision on the implementation of residents parking schemes in Banbury to coincide with the introduction of Criminal Parking Enforcement (CPE) arrangements and to allow officers time to explore alternative options and proposals to address the parking problems in parts of the town.

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Concessionary Travel

Councillor Clarke, as Chairman of the Task & Finish Group, presented the draft report and recommendations on Concessionary Travel. He explained that the Task & Finish Group had held a number of meetings in the first half of 2009 and had consulted widely with other local authorities, the bus companies and local residents to gather the evidence and gauge views and opinions. The relevant Portfolio Holder and the Older People's Champion had also been closely involved in the work of the Task & Finish Group.

Councillor Clarke explained that in the course of the review the Task & Finish Group had looked at a range of issues as reflected in the eight recommendations. He briefed the Committee on the background to each of the recommendations. In particular he highlighted the Task & Finish Group's conclusion that it would not be appropriate for the Council to invest in smart card reader technology at this time due to reservations about the level of financial commitment and the technical capacity of

the systems to meet the Council's needs. Councillor Clarke assured the Committee that on the question of mis-ticketing there was absolutely no suggestion of any misconduct on the part of the bus operators and their drivers but it was important to recognise that human error at the point of ticket issue could result in a cost to the Council.

The Committee noted the report and the recommendations. In particular they felt that it was important that the Council should continue to support the Dial-A-Ride service and to explore options for additional alternative community transport schemes. They also confirmed their support for the promotion of a county-wide approach to concessionary travel and community transport.

Councillor Morris, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Street Scene and Rural told the Committee that he welcomed the work of the Task & Finish Group and that he would advise the Executive to accept the recommendations. He said that he had scheduled a meeting the following week to discuss the response to the Government consultation and he would welcome the involvement and contribution of members of the Task & Finish Group and the Committee to that meeting.

Resolved

- 1) To note the draft report from the Task & Finish Group on Concessionary Travel;
- 2) That the Democratic, Scrutiny and Elections Manager be delegated, in consultation with the Chairman of Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Councillor Clarke, as Chairman of the Task & Finish Group on Concessionary Travel, to approve a final version of the report subject to any comments or amendments received from members of the Task & Finish Group or the Overview & Scrutiny Committee;
- 3) To agree the recommendations set out in the report of the Task & Finish Group on Concessionary Travel and to refer the report and those recommendations (detailed below) to the Executive:

Recommendation 1: Smart Card Reader Scheme

That Cherwell District Council should not pursue the introduction of a Smart Card Reader scheme at this time due to the significant financial investment required and reservations about the current technical capacity of such schemes to meet the Council's needs. The government consultation on the future administration of concessionary travel schemes compounds the uncertainty.

Recommendation 2: Mis-ticketing

That the Portfolio Holder should publicise the importance of checking bus tickets and encourage bus pass holders to submit examples of mis-ticketing. The Portfolio Holder should follow-up examples of mis-ticketing with the bus companies; monitor the scale and value of the problem for the remainder of the financial year; and report on the results and proposed actions to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the spring of 2010.

Recommendation 3: Management Information

That the Portfolio Holder should encourage the concessionary fare service providers to move to a monthly rather than quarterly claim and settlement cycle.

Recommendation 4: National Travel Tokens

That the current arrangements for the issue of national travel tokens should continue for 2009/10 and that the Portfolio Holder should monitor the take up and use of the national travel token scheme. The Council's continued participation in the national travel token scheme should be reviewed against the findings of the independent research into the provision of community transport schemes in the district (see recommendation 5).

Recommendation 5: Community Transport

That Cherwell District Council should continue to support and promote the provision of community transport schemes across the District. In support of this corporate priority the Portfolio Holder should commission research into the feasibility of introducing alternative community transport schemes in those parts of the district where residents do not benefit from the concessionary bus pass, national travel tokens or the Dial-A-Ride service.

Recommendation 6: Consortium approach

That the Portfolio Holder should open discussions with colleagues at the County Council and the District/City councils with a view to promoting a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of the national concessionary travel scheme, subject to the outcome of the government's consultation on the administration of concessionary fares schemes.

Recommendation 7: Government Consultation

That the Portfolio Holder should be invited to use the work of this Task & Finish Group and the conclusions and recommendations in this report to inform the Council's response to the government's consultation on the administration of concessionary fares schemes.

Recommendation 8: Concessionary Travel Scheme

That the start time for the concessionary travel scheme in Cherwell should not be reviewed again and should remain at 09.30 am, in line with the statutory scheme, until April 2011 when the new arrangements for the administration of the concessionary travel scheme will come into force.

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Overview and scrutiny draft work programme 2009/10

The Committee considered the report on the draft overview and scrutiny work programme 2009/10 and made a number of observations. The Committee acknowledged the need to take account of potential resource constraints and the guidance on excluded matters when determining the work programme. They agreed that it was important to ensure that any scrutiny review would deliver tangible results for the benefit of the residents of the district.

Annual Work Programme Canvas

The Committee were pleased to see that there had been an increase in the number of responses from Parish Councils, although many of the topics suggested related to specific service issues or were the responsibility of other authorities, and were therefore not suitable for scrutiny. They noted that officers would respond to all of the Parish Council enquiries explaining the outcome of the Committee's discussion on work programme scheduling.

The Committee also noted the detailed suggestions put forward by the local MP.

Potential scrutiny topics

After due consideration of all of the proposals the Committee agreed to take forward three possible topics for scrutiny:

- Preparations for an ageing population

- Youth Facility Provision
- Preparations for the 2012 Olympics tourism potential for the district.

They recognised that each of these topics were complex and wide-ranging and asked officers to prepare more detailed briefing and scoping documents for consideration at the next meeting.

They also suggested that the Resources & Performance Scrutiny Board should consider adding a scrutiny review of the Registered Social Landlords' Management Partnership and related standards to their work programme.

Monitoring of past scrutiny reviews

The Committee said that they wished to adopt a stronger role in monitoring the outcomes of past scrutiny reviews and agreed that RAF Bicester Conservation Area should be included in the monitoring section of the work programme. The Chief Executive suggested that it would be appropriate to take an initial update on this at the next meeting of the Committee.

Resolved

- 1) That the draft overview and scrutiny work programme for 2009/10 be agreed subject to the amendments detailed above, and as set out at Appendix 1 to these minutes;
- 2) To note the responses to the annual work programme canvas;
- 3) That the following topics should be added to the work programme for further research and scoping assessment and brought to the next meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for consideration:
 - Preparations for an ageing population
 - Youth Facility Provision
 - Preparations for the 2012 Olympics tourism potential for the district.

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm

Chairman:

Date: