



**Overview and Scrutiny
Annual Report
2017/18**

Foreword

This annual report for overview and scrutiny at Cherwell District Council outlines the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2017/18.

Councillor Neil Prestidge
Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Committee
2017/18

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Membership

Councillor Neil Prestidge (Ch)
Councillor David Anderson
Councillor Mike Bishop
Councillor Chris Heath
Councillor Timothy Hallchurch MBE
Councillor Andrew McHugh

Councillor Jolanta Lis (V-Ch)
Councillor Claire Bell
Councillor Mark Cherry
Councillor Sean Gaul
Councillor David Hughes
Councillor Jason Slaymaker

Substitutes

Councillor Andy Beere
Councillor Barry Richards
Councillor Tom Wallis

Guests in attendance

Lead members:

Councillor Richard Mould – Lead Member for Performance Management
Councillor Lynn Pratt – Lead Member for Estates and the Economy
Councillor Debbie Pickford – Lead Member for Clean and Green
Councillor George Reynolds – Deputy Leader of the Council.
Councillor Barry Wood – Leader of the Council.

Other members:

Councillor Hugo Brown
Councillor Ian Corkin

External guests:

Inspector John Batty, Thames Valley Police
Alan Harris, Montagu Evans
Mitchell Ball, Freeths

Officers:

Scott Barnes, Director Strategy and Commissioning
Nicola Riley, Shared Community Services Manager (at the time of attendance; since been appointed Assistant Director – Communities)
Maria Wareham, Safeguarding Officer
Louise Tustian, Team Leader Strategic Intelligence and Insight Team
Ian Davies, Director of Operational Delivery
Mike Grant, Safer Communities Manager
Paul Sutton, Chief Finance Officer (at the time of attendance; since been appointed Executive Director Finance and Governance)

Richard Ellis, Interim Director (at the time of attendance; since been appointed Interim Executive Director – Wellbeing)

Joanne Barrett, Strategic Housing Manager

Alison Adkins, Housing Team Leader

Scrutiny Topics 2017/18 – Links to Corporate Priorities	
Performance Monitoring	Covers all priorities
Draft Budget and Business Plan	Covers all priorities
Lead Member Overview – Deputy Leader	Covers all priorities
Lead Member Overview – Lead Member for Performance Management	Covers all priorities
Lead Member Overview – Lead Member for Estates and the Economy	Covers all priorities
Lead Member Overview – Lead Member for Clean and Green	Covers all priorities
Lead Member Overview – Lead Member for Planning	Covers all priorities
The acquisition of Castle Quay Shopping Centre	Covers all priorities
Safeguarding Training Framework	Safe, Clean, Green
Safeguarding – update on internal review action plan and draft section 11 return submission	Safe, Green, Clean
Anti-Social Behaviour	Safe, Clean, Green
Oxfordshire CCG Phase 1 Consultation and Decisions Regarding the Horton General Hospital	A Thriving Community
Homelessness Reduction Act	A Thriving Community
A361 Working Group	A District of Opportunity
Mobile Phone Signal Working Group	A District of Opportunity
Youth Engagement Working Group	A District of Opportunity

Performance Monitoring

Each quarter the Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the Council's performance as measured through the Performance Management Framework.

The Council had maintained generally excellent performance as in previous years, but the Committee did request that Inspector John Batty from Thames Valley Police attend a meeting to discuss levels of anti-social behaviour in the District.

Anti-Social Behaviour

Following consideration of the performance information, Inspector John Batty was invited to attend a meeting of the Committee in October 2017 to discuss Anti-Social Behaviour.

The Committee were keen to find out if Inspector Batty thought enough was being done to reduce levels of ASB in the Cherwell District. Inspector Batty reassured the committee that levels of ASB in the district were low, and that the Council and the police had a very good working relationship.

Draft Budget and Business Plan

In January 2018 the Interim Director Richard Ellis and Executive Director Finance and Governance Paul Sutton attended the Committee to present the draft business plan and budget for 2018.

The directors explained that a refresh had been carried out on the existing business plan, which would be entering the last year of a five year cycle. In summer 2018 a more detailed review of priorities would be taking place.

The directors added that the total number of performance indicators being monitored would be reduced.

Lead Member Overviews

Following the success of the invitation to the Leader of the Council in February 2017 and some changes to the Executive in May 2017, Lead Members were invited to give an overview of their areas of responsibility to the Committee.

The Committee received an overview from five Executive Members; the Deputy Leader, Lead Member for Performance Management, Estates and the Economy, Clean & Green, and Planning.

All of the overviews were very well received, and the Committee found them extremely useful in furthering their understanding of the work of the Executive.

The Acquisition of Castle Quay Shopping Centre

In November 2017, the Committee considered the proposed acquisition of the Castle Quay Shopping Centre in Banbury.

The Chief Finance Officer attended the meeting with representatives from the Council's financial advisors, Montagu Evans and Freeths.

The Committee received an exempt presentation which gave details on the proposed purchase, and had the opportunity to ask detailed questions of the officers.

Safeguarding – Training Framework and Draft Section 11 Audit Return

The Committee have considered Safeguarding on two occasions during the year, once in July 2017 and again in November 2017.

In July the Committee were asked to consider a training framework. The Shared Community Services Manager and Safeguarding Officer attended to give details of the training plan, which was proposed for rollout later in 2017.

The proposals included a base level training for all officers and Members, with increased requirements for those officers with roles more likely to encounter potential safeguarding situations.

The Committee endorsed the training framework, which was subsequently adopted and launched throughout the Council.

In November 2017, the Committee were asked to consider the Section 11 audit return to the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board. Completion of the audit is an annual requirement, and following the internal review carried out in 2016, it had been agreed that the draft return would be submitted to the Committee for endorsement prior to its submission.

The Committee again endorsed the return, and were pleased with the progress made with the new training framework since its introduction.

Oxfordshire CCG Phase 1 Consultation and Decisions Regarding the Horton General Hospital

In August 2017 the Committee received a report that provided an update on proposed service changes at the Horton General Hospital.

The proposed changes had been subject of discussions at the Executive earlier in 2017. Following specialist advice, the Council decided to request a Judicial Review of the decision to downgrade maternity and critical care services at the hospital. Cherwell District Council was supported in the call for the review by South Northamptonshire Council, Stratford-on-Avon District Council and Banbury Town Council.

The Committee were fully supportive of the proposed course of action, and recommended to the Executive that it proceed with the review action 'with all vigour'.

Homelessness Reduction Act

In January 2018 the Strategic Housing Manager and Housing Team Leader attended Committee to give an overview of upcoming changes to the Homelessness Reduction Act.

The officers reported that as a result of the changes the workload for the Housing team at the Council was likely to change, but the exact impact of the changes were not yet known.

In response to questions the officers assured the Committee that a project plan was in place and the team had been preparing for the new legislation for the previous 12 months.

Following a request from the Committee, officers agreed to provide an update on the implications of the Act in approximately 12 months' time.

Task and Finish Working Groups

Three task and finish groups were in place at the end of the 2016/17 Municipal Year. At the start of the 2017/18 year, it was agreed that all three would continue.

A361

In November 2016 a scoping document was signed off by the Committee, which agreed to look at the A361 running through Cherwell district.

The working group carried out some initial research, and found that the Department for Transport had a funding stream available for County Councils to apply to for road improvements. The Safer Roads funding identified areas of the country eligible to apply, and councils in those areas had the opportunity to bid for a share of the money.

Part of the A361 was eligible for funding, and Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) submitted a bid early in 2017.

Announcements regarding awarding of the funding were due to be made in September 2017, which was then delayed to January 2018. Currently there still haven't been any announcements regarding which authorities have been successful with their bids.

In addition, OCC held a consultation during summer 2017 regarding a possible weight limit along part of the A361 through Burford. Although this isn't in the Cherwell District, the implications of any limit would mean that heavy goods vehicles would need to avoid the A361 through South Newington.

OCC decided that further information and consultation would be needed in relation to the Burford proposal. The working group are monitoring progress.

Mobile Phone Signal

Following the establishment of the Mobile Phone Signal Working group, initial research identified a similar project being undertaken by a group of MPs.

The British Infrastructure Group (BIG) intend to improve mobile phone signal across the UK by the end of 2017, off the back of a £5 billion commitment from Government.

The Committee agreed that the working group should carry out local research with a view to submitting it to the BIG review.

A survey was put together by Councillor Andrew McHugh, which was hosted on the Council's corporate Survey Monkey account.

Details of the survey were sent to every Parish Council and Parish meeting in the district, and a request made for those in poor or non-existent signal areas to complete it.

224 responses were received.

After considering recommendations from the Strategic Intelligence and Insight team, who had analysed the results of the survey, the Committee decided to carry out the survey again. The second running of the survey would hopefully give a greater response rate, and people in areas of positive signal would be encouraged to respond too.

Youth Engagement

In 2014, a review was carried out to improve Youth Engagement in the democratic process.

The review started well and had a lot of interest from local schools, but as time passed and students moved on, interest in the subject waned.

The Committee discussed the subject again, and felt that it was important for Youth Engagement to be encouraged wherever possible. A new scoping document was completed, with the aim of the review being to launch an event designed to engage young people in the democratic process. The scoping document was approved in February 2017.

Following changes to the Committee in May 2017, work on the review stalled. In August 2017 it was agreed that the review should be put on hold until the new Municipal Year.

Engagement with parishes

Following a training event in September 2017, the Committee agreed it would be a good idea to ask the residents of Cherwell for possible subjects to review in the new Municipal Year.

Correspondence was sent to all parish councils and meetings in January 2018, asking for topics to be suggested.

Five suggested topics were received from four parish councils.

After discussing the topics, the Committee decided to take the following approach for each one:

Adderbury

Suggested topic - To identify whether current planning policies and guidance are producing homes fit to live in with specific reference to the adequacy of storage space for personal possessions and of vehicular transport off of the road.

Approach – It was agreed that the subject should be broken down into two aspects; (i) whether new houses are ‘fit to live in’, and (ii) the air quality aspect of additional vehicles. Relevant officers to be invited to discuss with Committee, with a view to possibly including information in the Local Plan Part 2 process.

Kidlington

Suggested topic (1) – Decriminalised parking across the district, in particular for Cherwell District Council to consider a request to Oxfordshire County Council for a local warden.

Approach – A report to be requested from officers on the current situation with wardens and parking across Oxfordshire

Suggested topic (2) – Masterplans, specifically progress made in achieving requirements and improvements detailed in the plans.

Approach – Updates to be requested from relevant officers.

Piddington

Suggested topic - Social exclusion of rural communities, following publication of a community profile by Community First Oxfordshire.

Approach – Research to be carried out by officers to see if similar community profiles have been published for other rural communities in the district, with the possibility of carrying out a full review covering areas identified..

Shenington with Alkerton

Suggested topic - Inconsistencies in planning applications, following a number of recent applications with perceived inconsistencies in how officers have dealt with them.

Approach – More information required from planning officers, regarding the planning process and how consultation responses are dealt with.