

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 14 July 2021 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Tom Wallis (Chairman)
Councillor Douglas Webb (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Mike Bishop
Councillor Sandy Dallimore
Councillor Ian Middleton
Councillor Perran Moon
Councillor Adam Nell
Councillor Les Sibley
Councillor Bryn Williams

Substitute Members:

Councillor Andrew Beere (In place of Councillor Matt Hodgson)

Also Present:

Councillor Colin Clarke, Lead Member for Planning
Councillor Barry Wood, Leader of the Council
Adrian Colwell, Oxfordshire Plan Team
Andrew Thompson, Oxfordshire Plan Team

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Matt Hodgson

Officers:

Anita Bradley, Director Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer
David Peckford, Assistant Director: Planning and Development
Sharon Whiting, Principal Planning Policy Officer
Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader
Emma Faulkner, Democratic and Elections Officer
Lesley Farrell, Democratic and Elections Officer
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 **Appointment of Chairman for the remainder of the 2021-2022 Municipal Year**

Resolved

- (1) That Councillor Tom Wallis be appointed Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the 2021-2022 Municipal Year.

5 **Appointment of Vice-Chairman for the remainder of the 2021-2022 Municipal Year (if required)**

The Vice-Chairman having been appointed Chairman at the prior agenda item, it was necessary to appoint a new Vice-Chairman.

Resolved

- (1) That Councillor Doug Webb be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the 2021-2022 Municipal Year.

6 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 16 March and 19 May 2021 were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

7 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's Announcements.

8 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

9 **Monthly Performance, Risk and Finance Monitoring Report**

The Committee considered a report from the Director of Finance and Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes which summarised the Council's Performance, Risk and Finance monitoring position at the end of March 2021.

In presenting the report the Performance Team Leader focused on the performance elements of the report.

41 business plan measures were monitored during the year, and 28 were reporting as green at the year end in March. The indicators reporting red were mainly due to the impact of covid-19, including usage of district leisure centres and homes improved through enforcement action.

Regarding performance highlights, the Performance Team Leader explained that 1545 planning applications had been processed whilst officers worked at home, and 5.4 million bins had been emptied with an additional 7,067 tonnes of waste collected.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Performance Team Leader explained that the additional waste collected had been as a result of more houses in the district, and people spending more time at home due to the pandemic.

Resolved

- (1) That the performance aspects of the monthly Performance, Risk and Finance Monitoring report be noted.

10

The Oxfordshire Plan Regulation 18 Part 2 Consultation Document

The Committee considered a report from the Assistant Director – Planning and Development regarding the Oxfordshire Plan Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation document, which set out a range of planning policy options and a series of spatial strategy options for Oxfordshire. When complete the Oxfordshire Plan would provide a high-level spatial planning framework for Oxfordshire up to 2050 and would be a statutory Local Plan.

The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 was being jointly produced by the five local planning authorities in Oxfordshire, working in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council and OxLEP. A central officer team were preparing the plan, and each of the five councils (four districts and city) needed to formally approve each stage of preparation.

The Committee was requested to provide observations on the consultation document before it was considered by Executive at a special meeting on 19 July. If approved by all five councils, consultation would start on 30 July 2021.

In presenting the draft Executive report, the Assistant Director – Planning and Development explained that an additional recommendation had been added requesting adoption of the updated Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), which would also form part of the public consultation.

In addition to the SCI, changes would also need to be made to page 120 of the consultation document, specifically the housing figures quoted in the two tables.

The Assistant Director – Planning and Development explained that the consultation considered various options for growth, but specific locations and details would need to be developed after the consultation. Specific locations and numbers of houses were not known at this stage.

The Committee thanked the officers from the central unit for their work in putting together the documents, however it was agreed that due to the volume

of published information it had not been possible to read through everything in sufficient detail prior to the meeting.

The Director Law and Governance clarified that the papers had been published in line with statutory legal timescales but acknowledged the concerns of the Committee.

With regard to the timetable for the adoption of the plan, the Committee felt it was important for all Members to be kept informed of the outcome of the Regulation 18 consultation and subsequent work on the draft plan and Regulation 19 consultation, and requested a clear communications strategy to ensure ongoing involvement of members prior to anticipated adoption of the plan in 2023.

The Committee requested an understanding as to how the plan would address the estimated annual cost to the economy in relation to Mental Health, as detailed in the table in paragraph 248 of the consultation document.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Assistant Director – Planning and Development explained that the term ‘Affordable housing’ did also refer to social rented housing. Adrian Colwell from the Oxfordshire Plan Team added that as the plan would cover a 30 year timeframe, it was important to strike the right balance in wording and not be too specific at this stage. Definitions could change over time, and lead to the plan becoming out of date very quickly.

Mr Colwell advised the Committee that as further work would need to be completed once the Regulation 18 consultation had taken place, they could request that later stages of the plan focus on affordable homes.

With regard to how the consultation document had been laid out, the Committee commented that the preferred and alternative options could be confusing, and requested clarity over how the final document would be presented.

In relation to Policy Option 01: Sustainable Design and Construction, the Committee felt that caveats such as ‘this policy would be subject to viability and deliverability testing’ should be removed, as they could be used as ‘get outs’ by land owners/developers later in the plan process.

The Committee also expressed concern in relation to the Oxfordshire Growth Need Assessment and the accuracy of the figures, and commented that trajectory graphs throughout the documents all portrayed straight lines, with no apparent reference to natural growth and the possibility of growth decreasing.

Finally in relation to Green Belt references in Policy Option 10, the Committee felt that the messages were mixed. In some cases there seemed to be a suggestion of making it easier to build on Green Belt, and in others discussion was around enhancing Green Belt.

Resolved

- (1) That the draft Executive report and the Regulation 18 (Part 2) consultation document for public consultation be noted
- (2) That the following observations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be reported to the Executive:
 - a. A feeling of discontent amongst the Committee regarding the volume of information relating to the consultation, and the length of time Members had to go through it (acknowledging that it was within statutory legal timescales for agenda publication but not ideal). The Committee felt unable to sufficiently scrutinise the documentation in the available time.
 - b. A request for a clear communications strategy, and for progress updates and further involvement of both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee specifically, and more general briefings for all Members during the course of work on the plan following the Regulation 18 consultation
 - c. A request for an understanding as to how the plan will address the estimated annual cost to the economy in relation to Mental Health, as detailed in the table in paragraph 248 of the consultation document (Committee supplement part 1, page 87).
 - d. A request for the later stages of the Plan process to focus on the Affordable Homes aspect, specifically social housing and social rented housing, acknowledging the explanation from the Assistant Director – Planning and Development that in planning terms ‘affordable’ does include social rented housing.
 - e. A request for clarity regarding how the preferred and alternative options will be presented in the final consultation document, to avoid possible confusion for those reading it.
 - f. In relation to Policy Option 01: Sustainable Design and Construction, the removal of caveats such as ‘this policy would be subject to viability and deliverability testing’ (Committee supplement part 1, page 52) as they could be used as ‘get outs’ by land owners/developers later in the plan process
 - g. Concerns around the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment documents and the accuracy of the figures
 - h. Natural growth is not referred to through the document, trajectory graphs provided are all straight lines and do not seem to take account for natural growth to decrease as well as increase.

- i. Within Policy Option 10 – Green Belt (Paragraph 258, Committee supplement 1 page 89), National Planning Policy Framework guidelines are frequently referred to but the messages are mixed. In some cases there seems to be a suggestion of making it easier to build on Green Belt, and in others discussion is around enhancing Green Belt.

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Work Programme 2021-22

The Committee considered the indicative work programme for 2021-22, and received an update from officers on potential topics for review that had been raised at the informal work programme planning session held on 30 June.

With regard to the subject of teenage mental health raised by Councillor Perran Moon, the Democratic and Elections officer advised the Committee that information had been requested from the Wellbeing team, but not received yet. A further update would be given at the next meeting.

In response to the subject of homelessness within the LGBT community raised by Councillor Sandy Dallimore, the Housing Options and Allocations Manager had advised that one of the questions asked in a homeless case was regarding sexual orientation, and customers can choose their response.

There was no specific data collected on anyone who may be made homeless due to their sexual orientation. This would be picked up as part of casework, but there was no specific question asked for officers to draw down a report.

With regard to possible next steps for the subject, Councillor Dallimore requested that the Housing Options and Allocations Manager be asked why the information was not specifically requested, and if it could be in future.

Councillor Sandy Dallimore had raised the subject of the relationship between the District Council and parishes. The Healthy Communities Manager had provided Councillor Dallimore with a brief overview of the work of the team. Twice a year the council hosted a conference style parish liaison meeting to consult, inform and inspire parishes, and give them the opportunity to network with each other and senior council members and officers. Since July 2020 the meeting had been virtual, due to coronavirus restrictions.

The Healthy Communities Manager had also advised that as a result of the first coronavirus lockdown, a fortnightly parish bulletin had been started, which included items such as grant opportunities, consultations and changes to government guidance that would be useful for parishes.

Councillor Dallimore was due to meet the Healthy Communities Manager to discuss the issue further, and would feedback to the next meeting of the Committee.

With regard to the Management Companies subject that had been on the topic list since May 2019, the Committee agreed to remove it from the list as a possible subject for scrutiny.

The Governance and Elections Manager explained that a new appendix had been added to the work programme, which provided an update on items previously considered by the Committee. The new appendix would be updated and submitted to each meeting.

Resolved

- (1) That the verbal updates regarding suggested topics for scrutiny be noted.
- (2) That the Management Companies subject be removed from the topic sheet.
- (3) That the update on items previously submitted to Overview and Scrutiny be noted.
- (4) That the indicative work programme for 2021-2022 be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.40 pm

Chairman:

Date: