



Cherwell

DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2021/22

Foreword

This annual report for overview and scrutiny at Cherwell District Council outlines the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2021/22.

[To be completed]

Councillor Tom Wallis
Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Committee
2021/22

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Membership

Councillor Tom Wallis (Chairman)
Councillor Mike Bishop
Councillor Matt Hodgson
Councillor David Hughes
Councillor Perran Moon
Councillor Les Sibley

Councillor Douglas Webb (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Sandy Dallimore
Councillor Simon Holland
Councillor Ian Middleton
Councillor Adam Nell
Councillor Bryn Williams

Substitutes

Councillor Andrew Beere – July 2021
Councillor John Broad – September 2021
Councillor Shaida Hussain – February 2022
Councillor George Reynolds – October 2021

[to be updated if required after March 2022 meeting]

Guests in attendance

Councillor Barry Wood, Leader of the Council – July 2021, September 2021, October 2021, November 2021, February 2022
Councillor Colin Clarke, Lead Member for Planning – July 2021
Councillor Ian Corkin, Lead Member for Customers and Transformation
Councillor Tony Ilott, Lead Member for Financial Management and Governance
Councillor Lucinda Wing, Lead Member for Housing – September 2021
Councillor John Broad

[to be updated if required after March 2022 meeting]

External Guests

Craig Bower, Digital Programme Manager, Oxfordshire County Council – February 2022
Adrian Colwell, Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Central Team – July 2021 and February 2022
Andrew Thompson, Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Central Team – July 2021

[to be updated if required after March 2022 meeting]

Officers

Claire Taylor, Corporate Director Customers, Organisational Development and Resources. November 2021 for 2020-2022 Community Nature Plan Progress update and Safeguarding Self-Assessment Audit

Anita Bradley, Director Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer. July 2021, September 2021, October 2021 as Monitoring Officer support

Tim Spiers, Director of Digital and IT. February 2022 for Digital Infrastructure update.

Vicki Jessop, Interim Assistant Director Housing and Social Care Commissioning. September 2021 for Draft Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement 2021 and Changes to Cherwell District Council's Housing Allocation Scheme

David Peckford, Assistant Director – Planning and Development. July 2021 and February 2022 for Oxfordshire Plan 2050

Ed Potter, Assistant Director – Environmental Services. November 2021 for Climate Action Programme Update

Nicola Riley, Assistant Director – Wellbeing. November 2021 for 2020-2022 Community Nature Plan Progress update and Safeguarding Self-Assessment Audit

Louise Tustian, Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes. October 2021, November 2021 for Performance Monitoring.

Frances Evans, Housing Strategy and Development Team Leader – September 2021 for Draft Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement 2021

Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader. July 2021 for Performance Monitoring.

Sandra Fisher-Martins, Climate Action Mobilisation Manager – November 2021 for Climate Action Programme Update

Tom Gubbins, Sport and Physical Activity Manager – October 2021 for Teenage Mental Health Services within Cherwell

Andrew Maxted, Planning Policy, Conservation and Design Manager – February 2022 for Oxfordshire Plan 2050 update

Susan Asbury, Safeguarding Officer – November 2021 for Safeguarding Self-Assessment Audit

Paul France, Senior Housing Officer – September 2021 for Changes to Cherwell District Council's Housing Allocation Scheme

Sarah Gilbert, Team Leader Climate Action – November 2021 for Climate Action Programme Update

Sue Marchand, Community Nature Officer – Wellbeing – November 2021 for 2020-2022 Community Nature Plan Progress update

Sharon Whiting, Principal Planning Policy Officer – July 2021 for Oxfordshire Plan 2050 update

[to be updated if required after March 2022 meeting]

Scrutiny Topics 2021/22 and their links to Corporate Priorities

Performance, Risk and Finance Monitoring – *all priorities*

Oxfordshire Plan 2050 – *all priorities*

Constitution Review 2021 – *all priorities*

Changes to Cherwell District Council's Housing Allocation Scheme – *Housing that meets your needs*

Draft Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement 2021 – *Housing that meets your needs*

Teenage Mental Health Services within Cherwell – *Healthy, resilient and engaged communities*

Safeguarding Self-Assessment Audit – *Healthy, resilient and engaged communities*

Climate Action Programme Update – *Leading on environmental sustainability*

2020-2022 Community Nature Plan Progress update – *Leading on environmental sustainability*

Digital Infrastructure Update – *An enterprising economy with strong and vibrant local centres*

[to be updated if required after March 2022 meeting]

Training Session and Work Programme Planning

In May 2021 a scrutiny skills training session was delivered to the Committee by David McGrath of Link Support Services. The session covered the purpose and role of a Councillor in the scrutiny process, and provided tips and guidance on how the Committee could best prepare for the coming year.

Following on from the training, an informal work programme planning session was held in June 2021. Committee members were asked to propose subjects for potential consideration throughout the Municipal Year.

The subjects proposed by the Committee at the informal sessions and the actions proposed are included at annexe a.

Scrutiny Reviews

Two subjects were proposed for in-depth Scrutiny reviews; member education and training, and the relationship between the district council and parish councils.

Member education and training

A working group was established in September 2021, with all five Councillors who had been elected in May 2021 – Patrick Clarke, Sandy Dallimore, Matt Hodgson, Adam Nell and Dorothy Walker.

The working group considered the information, training and induction programme that had been in place following the May 2021 elections, and made recommendations relating to the induction programme and ongoing training for the May 2022 elections.

[Report of the working group to be considered at March 2022 Committee, update to be added post-meeting]

The relationship between Cherwell District Council and the parish councils

A working group was established in September 2021, consisting of Councillors Sandy Dallimore, Tim Hallchurch, David Hughes, Kieron Mallon and Bryn Williams. Councillor Andrew McHugh had a standing invitation to the meetings of the group, as the appropriate Executive Lead Member.

The review looked at the working relationship between CDC and parishes in the district. It mapped the various interactions, highlighting areas that work well and where there may be areas for improvement in the relationship and working practices.

[Report of the working group to be considered at March 2022 Committee, update to be added post-meeting]

Summary of the topics considered

Performance Monitoring

Quarterly monitoring of the Council's Performance Framework remains an important part of the ongoing work programme for the Committee.

The Committee has continued to concentrate on the performance element of the reports, as the risk and finance sections fall under the remit of the Accounts, Audit and Risk and Budget Planning Committees respectively.

[Further paragraph to be added post-March 2022 meeting]

Oxfordshire Plan 2050

The Committee considered the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 at two meetings, in July 2021 and February 2022.

The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 is being jointly produced by the five local planning authorities (Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, West Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and South Oxfordshire District Council) in Oxfordshire, working in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council and OxLEP. A central officer team is preparing the plan, and each of the five local planning authorities need to formally approve each stage of preparation. Prior to consideration by each council's Cabinet/Executive, the scrutiny committees in each authority reviewed and provided feedback.

In July 2021 the Committee considered the Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation document, and were asked to provide observations on it before it was considered by Executive. The report included the draft consultation document, and a number of supporting documents.

The Committee made a number of observations to Executive, including 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. A request was also made for later stages of the Plan process to focus on the Affordable Homes aspect, specifically social housing and social rented housing, acknowledging an explanation from the Assistant Director – Planning and Development that in planning terms ‘affordable’ does include social rented housing.

In February 2022, a consultation feedback report was provided to the Committee from the central plan team. The report gave an update on the preparation of the plan, and included a summary of comments receiving during the Regulation 18 consultation.

The Committee were asked to note the report, and recommend to Executive the adoption of a revised Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), which detailed how consultation would be undertaken. The SCI had been updated to reflect changes to Coronavirus regulations.

The Committee emphasised the need for more social rented housing rather than Government defined affordable house, and queried whether it would be possible for affordable rented houses to be linked to local wages rather than the national market formula. The Assistant Director – Planning and Development said that discussions on the possibility of such a link could be held at the relevant time.

[update to be added on the outcome of the 7 March Executive meeting]

Constitution Review

A resolution of the 2020 Constitution review was that an annual review of the Constitution be introduced whereby, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would consider and make recommendations to Full Council for agreement, with the potential for the Committee to convene a Constitution Review Working Group to offer advice if appropriate. The annual review would also include notice of any changes required by law.

Whilst the Committee agreed to establish a working group and agreed terms of reference for the group at its 30 November 2021 meeting, the Labour and Progressive Oxfordshire Groups did not wish to participate in the working group. Notwithstanding, the annual review was due to commence its work in early 2022 with a view to submitting proposals to the March Overview & Scrutiny Committee to make recommendations to Full Council. However, the decisions of Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) to formally serve notice to terminate the formal partnership working arrangements between the two councils has impacted the review.

[Further paragraph to be added post-March 2022 meeting]

Changes to Cherwell District Council's Housing Allocation Scheme

In September 2021 the Committee considered a report which detailed proposed changes to the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme. Committee was asked to consider the changes prior to approval being sought from Executive.

The proposed changes offered clarity to wording and definitions in a number of sections of the scheme, as well as adding a new section that dealt with the potential implications of Oxford's unmet housing need.

The Committee supported the proposed changes, and Executive subsequently approved the amendments at their meeting in November 2021.

Draft Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement 2021

Also in September 2021 the Committee considered a report which outlined changes to the Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement.

the proposed changes included reflecting changes to legislation that had occurred since the statement was initially adopted in 2017 and reflecting the council's ambition to deliver more social rented housing.

The Housing Strategy and Development Team Leader explained that the Localism Act 2011 required the Council to promote the consultation to all Registered Providers (RPs) in the district. Two consultation workshops had been held with RPs, in addition the Housing Team had promoted the consultation to stakeholders, voluntary and community groups.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Housing Strategy and Development Team Leader explained that current residents had not directly been encouraged to respond to the consultation, but the consultation was a full public consultation and advertised in line with the council's Consultation and Engagement Strategy.

The Committee were asked to contribute to the consultation via the Slido online polling app, which asked three questions:

- To what extent do you agree/disagree that more social rented homes should be provided?
- To what extent do you agree/disagree that the vision and aims of the new draft strategy are the right one for Cherwell District?
- What challenges might be we in delivering this new strategy for Cherwell District?

The Committee submitted two comments to Executive for their consideration:

- For all future consultations, a mechanism for ensuring residents directly affected by a consultation are contacted and encouraged to respond

- A continuous effort is required to improve quality and standard of housing in the district

Executive considered and approved the changes at their meeting in November 2021.

Teenage Mental Health Services within Cherwell

In October 2021 the Committee received a presentation that explained the work of the Wellbeing and Physical Activity Team in relation to mental health wellbeing.

The subject had been raised by Councillor Perran Moon at the informal work programming session held at the start of the Municipal Year.

The Sport and Physical Activity Manager explained that whilst the team was not directly responsible for delivering mental health provision, physical activity had been shown to have a positive impact on mental health.

Cherwell District Council had contributed to the mental health prevention framework, which was delivered through the mental health concordat.

Part of the work of the concordat included a mental wellbeing needs assessment, that looks at the current situation with adults and children across Cherwell.

During 2020 the assessment showed that 1 in 6 people had a probable mental health disorder, an increase from 1 in 9 people in 2019. The assessment also showed an increasing percentage of year 7 to year 13 students who reported they often struggled to sleep.

The FAST (Families Active Sporting Together) programme currently had 7000 individuals on the programme across 2500 families, and through information gathered it showed that 20% of young people on the programme had highlighted a mental health concern. The programme was being used to highlight activities and techniques to help young people and their families improve their mental health.

The main work of the team had involved developing a physical activity and mental health programme in partnership with Oxfordshire MIND, that had been delivered in primary schools.

The youth activators had delivered the programme in schools during the pandemic, to year 6 children. Year 6 had been highlighted as an important age group due to the imminent transition to secondary school, and an age group most impacted by the effects of the pandemic.

A 6-week programme had been developed that covered six different themes: Introduction to mental wellbeing; stress and anxiety; anger; goal setting; resilience; and self-esteem. Hour long sessions had covered physical activity and mental wellbeing.

The programme had been delivered by youth activators and Oxfordshire Mind initially, with youth activators being trained by MIND to deliver the mental health

aspect. Resource and guidance packs were also provided to the schools, to continue work once the initial 6-week programme had ended.

The programme had been delivered to 424 children across 16 schools, with 48% of those who had attended rating their wellbeing as 'much better'.

Climate Action Programme Update

In November 2021 the Committee received an update on progress delivering the Climate Action Programme. Came back following updates in September 20 and March 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 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.

Community Nature Plan 2020-2022

In November 2021 the Committee received a progress update regarding the Community Nature Plan.

The Committee had considered a draft plan in December 2020, prior to it being considered and approved by Executive in January 2021.

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 March.

[Member seminar on 9 March is for the CNP, update to be added post-session]

Safeguarding Self-Assessment Audit

In November 2021 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 self-assessment audit had to be completed annually, and the 2021 assessment was submitted to the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children and Adults Board on 3 December. It included 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.

Digital Connectivity in Cherwell

In February 2022 the Committee received an update on Digital Connectivity in the district, following an initial report that had been considered in July 2020.

The Programme Director of Digital Infrastructure Oxfordshire explained that 98.5% of the district had connected to superfast broadband services. This was an increase from 63% when the digital infrastructure programme started in 2014.

In October 2021 a new project had started called 'Gigahubs'. 24 public service buildings across the district had been identified as hub sites, which would have fibre connections installed that could then be used to extend fibre connectivity to local residents and businesses.

In relation to mobile digital signal, the Programme Director of Digital Infrastructure Oxfordshire explained that the team had a focus on 'small cell' improvements. This involved the installation of small units on street furniture such as lampposts, to increase the available mobile signal. Initially the project would be rolled out to a small number of lampposts in Oxford, but it was hoped that by the end of 2023 up to 70 lampposts across the county would have the technology, including some in Banbury and Bicester.

Subjects covered at the March 2022 meeting will be added post meeting if required.

Rolling Topic Sheet and previous items considered

The Committee continued to use the rolling topic sheet throughout the year, to keep track of subjects raised as possible areas of scrutiny.

A new document was introduced, to update Committee on items they had made recommendations/given feedback to Executive.

Both documents are attached, at annexe a and b.