

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 28 November 2023 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor John Broad (Chairman)
Councillor Dr Isabel Creed (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Patrick Clarke
Councillor Ian Harwood
Councillor Dr Chukwudi Okeke
Councillor Lynne Parsons
Councillor Rob Pattenden
Councillor Dorothy Walker
Councillor Douglas Webb
Councillor Bryn Williams

Substitute Members:

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Simon Holland
Councillor Ian Middleton

Also Present:

Councillor Phil Chapman, Portfolio Holder for Healthy and Safe Communities
Councillor Sandy Dallimore, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services
Councillor Sean Woodcock

Also Present Virtually:

Councillor Barry Wood, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Policy and Strategy
Councillor Nicholas Mawer, Portfolio Holder for Housing
Councillor Lynn Pratt

Officers:

Shahin Ismail, Interim Head of Legal Services & Deputy Monitoring Officer
Nicola Riley, Assistant Director Wellbeing & Housing
Edward Frape, Senior Healthy Place Shaping Officer
Richard Smith, Head of Housing
Aaron Hetherington, Principal Officer - Electoral Services Lead
Patrick Davis, Democratic and Elections Officer

Officers Attending Virtually:

Yvonne Rees, Chief Executive
Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities
Shona Ware, Assistant Director Customer Focus
Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance & S151 Officer
Susan Asbury, Safeguarding Officer
Tim Hughes, Head of Regulatory Services & Community Safety
Emma Faulkner, Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead

42 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

43 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24 October 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

44 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

45 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

46 **Future Oxfordshire Partnerships Update**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Barry Wood, Leader of the Council, Councillor Sean Woodcock, and Councillor Lynne Pratt, to the meeting to provide an update on the work of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) and its Scrutiny Panel. The Chairman advised that he, Councillor Woodcock and Councillor Pratt were CDC's representatives on the FOP Scrutiny Panel.

The Leader explained that FOP was a joint committee of the six Oxfordshire councils that worked with key strategic partners to deliver a better future for the county. FOP's purpose was to deliver the aims of the Strategic Vision which all six councils had adopted. The Committee was advised that FOP did this by overseeing the delivery of projects that the Oxfordshire councils were seeking to deliver collaboratively in the fields of economic development and strategic planning.

The cooperation had helped Oxfordshire secure over £500m of additional investment. FOP also had an important role in representing Oxfordshire on matters of regional interest.

FOP was supported by four Advisory Sub-Groups which were attended by the relevant CDC Portfolio Holder and a Scrutiny Panel which Councillors Broad, Pratt and Woodcock were the CDC appointed representatives.

The FOP Scrutiny Panel members updated the Committee on various aspects of the Panel including the membership composition and future work programme. The Committee was also advised how the work of the FOP Scrutiny Panel had potential to impact on resourcing of housing and infrastructure projects within the Cherwell district.

Resolved

- (1) That the update regarding the Future Oxfordshire Partnerships Scrutiny Panel be noted.

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October 2023 Performance Monitoring Report

The Committee considered a report from the Assistant Director – Customer Focus that detailed the Council's performance against its indicators for October 2023.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services explained that all indicators were on target.

In response to a question on indicator BP1.2.01, number of homeless households living in Temporary Accommodation (TA), and how many of the families were the same as had been reported homeless at the previous meeting of the Committee in October, the Portfolio Holder for Housing responded that there were 20 families in that category. The Committee was advised that nine of those households were under offer and awaiting accommodation, with the remaining 11 families waiting for an offer or under assessment.

The Committee was also advised that around 20% of households in temporary accommodation at any one time, were waiting to have their situation assessed. Part of the role of the Housing Options Team was to assess the circumstances of people that approached the Council to understand their reasons for homelessness and whether the Council could offer them an ongoing housing duty.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing advised the Committee that none of the households still in temporary accommodation, were as a result of waiting for Sanctuary Housing to carry out and complete repairs.

Further questions were raised regarding the process for Registered Providers to nominate properties for registration on the Homechoice housing register. The Head of Housing advised that as part of the Nominations Agreement with Registered Providers, they were only able to register properties that would be ready and available within six weeks.

Following further discussion, and in response to a request for clarification regarding the target for the number of homeless households in the Cherwell District, the Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing advised that the target number was reviewed regularly. The Committee was also advised that in the event of a large increase in the number of homeless households the Council faced capacity challenges but was able to mitigate these to a certain extent using alternative accommodation options such as hotels.

In response to a question regarding the historic data for the indicator, the Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing confirmed that she would investigate how much historical data was available and respond accordingly.

In response to a question on indicator BP4 1.02, support community safety and anti-social behaviour prevention activities and the outcomes of the Active Leaders Course, the Portfolio Holder for Healthy and Safe Communities advised that as the first course had only recently finished, none of the participants had yet entered paid employment. The Head of Regulatory Services and Community Safety gave an overview of the course objectives and planned outcomes.

Resolved

- (1) That having given due consideration, the Council's October 2023-24 performance be noted and no recommendations be submitted for Executive consideration.

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Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing submitted a report which presented a draft new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing introduced the draft Strategy. The Head of Housing explained that as part of the Council's statutory duties regarding homelessness, the Council must review homelessness in the district area and produce a strategy to tackle the issue and support those affected every five years. The review highlighted the homeless pressures and trends within Cherwell and the findings informed the subsequent strategy and action plan objectives.

In response to a question regarding the funding of resettlement schemes the Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing confirmed that the Council did receive funding from the Home Office for each family that came to live in Cherwell under a recognised migration scheme and that there was also a contribution to each bed space for an asylum seeker. It was clarified that this was per bed space rather than per asylum seeker.

In response to questions regarding the level of liaison between the different agencies assisting homeless people who were facing significant challenges,

the Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing advised that the Council worked with a number of providers across the County as part of the Oxfordshire Alliance. She explained that the aim was to provide bed spaces in appropriate accommodation to people who needed rehabilitation at the same time and that information was shared, where allowed, between the various agencies to avoid wherever possible, the requirement for the individual having to continuously explain their circumstances.

In response to a question regarding the national increase in the number of Section 21 notices that had been issued, and a request for the council to again write to Central Government regarding the banning of such notices, the Portfolio Holder for Housing confirmed he would discuss with the Member who raised the question outside of the meeting.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Housing and the Housing team for their hard work developing the Strategy.

It was proposed by Councillor Webb and seconded by Councillor Okeke that having given due consideration, the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029 be recommended for adoption by Executive

Resolved

- (1) That having given due consideration, the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029 be recommended for adoption by Executive.

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Cost of Living Crisis - Action Plan update

The Portfolio Holder for Healthy and Safe Communities introduced the Cost of Living Action Plan for Winter 2023/2024 and advised the Committee that the plan provided a framework for all the activities that the Council was pursuing.

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing and the Senior Healthy Place Shaping Officer gave a presentation which provided an update on the progress made against the action plan that had been submitted to Executive in October

The Senior Healthy Place Shaping Officer provided an update on the Cherwell Warm Welcome Network and explained that there had been increase of 18 new community partners this year, with the team having successfully targeted new spaces in village locations.

The Committee was updated on work that was being done to address food insecurity within the district. This included the delivery of additional food grant schemes and the provision of food during school half term through the Activate and Eat Clubs.

The Senior Healthy Place Shaping Officer advised the Committee that the Council had been successful in negotiating reduced membership fees for local

residents to join the Oil Co-operative, a scheme for rural residents that enabled members to purchase heating oil at a discounted rate with the price determined in advance.

In response to a question regarding the level of discount received, the Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing confirmed she would provide a response for circulation after the meeting.

The Committee thanked the officers for all their hard work on the Cost of Living Action Plan.

Resolved

- (1) That the Cost of Living Crisis Action Plan update be noted.

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Cherwell District Council Safeguarding Self-Assessment 2023

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing submitted a report to update the Committee on how well the Council was performing in delivering its safeguarding duties.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Healthy and Safe Communities highlighted the importance of all Members completing safeguarding training.

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing and the Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead gave a presentation detailing the annual Safeguarding Audit and work of the Safeguarding team.

The Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead explained that the self-assessment audit had to be completed annually and that it was a joint piece of work with the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children and Adults Board. The 2023 return was due to be submitted to the Boards in December 2023.

The Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead reported that in 2022 the main focus for improvement was to increase awareness amongst Parish Councils of safeguarding measures and to increase the use of safeguarding communications in different languages. The Committee was advised that the focus for 2023 had been leadership, strategy and working together, commissioning arrangements and people's experience of safeguarding all of which had been achieved.

The Committee was advised that there had again been a rise in reports made on the internal reporting mechanism 'See It Report It' particularly under themes such as neglect, domestic violence and physical abuse. Training for relevant staff would be updated to reflect this trend.

Mandatory training for CDC staff was provided online via the iHasco platform which was supplemented by internal briefings that the Deputy Designated

Safeguarding Lead had been running. There had been an 87% increase in the number of staff attending these briefings over the last three years.

The Committee reiterated the importance of elected Members completing the Safeguarding Training or providing evidence of training having been completed via another route.

In response to a question regarding a more interactive approach to training for Members, the Assistant Director of Wellbeing and Housing advised that different approaches could be considered based on individual need. Alternative ways of delivering training would be discussed with the Democratic and Elections team.

In response to a request from the Committee that Political Group Leaders be kept informed regarding training levels within their groups, it was agreed the Chief Executive would raise this at the next Political Group Leaders' meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Okeke and seconded by Councillor Creed that political group leaders be kept informed regarding the number of members from their groups that have completed safeguarding training.

Resolved

- (1) That having given due consideration, the Safeguarding Self-Assessment 2023 report be endorsed.
- (2) That Political Group Leaders be kept informed regarding the number of Members of their respective groups that had completed safeguarding training.

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Working Group Updates

The Principal Officer, Scrutiny and Democratic Lead, presented the working group updates.

The Committee was informed that since the publication of the agenda, the Monitoring Officer had recommended that the revised Terms of Reference for the Climate Action Working Group be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee in January, to enable the group time to finalise the revisions. There was therefore no requirement for the Committee to consider recommendation 1.2 detailed on the agenda.

Resolved

- (1) That the working group updates be noted.

Work Programme 2023-24

The Committee considered the indicative work programme for 2023/24.

The Principal Officer Scrutiny and Democratic Lead advised that there were a large number of items scheduled for the January meeting, and the Committee might wish to consider how to effectively and efficiently manage the agenda. It was agreed that the Chairman, Vice-Chair, Chief Executive and Principal Officer Scrutiny and Democratic Lead should meet to discuss.

In response to a question regarding the future scrutiny of Sanctuary Housing following the decision to disband the Charter Committee, the Portfolio Holder for Housing agreed that an alternative approach would be needed, but added that although Sanctuary Housing was the largest, they were not the only Registered Provider the council worked with.

It was agreed that the Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Parsons and the Principal Officer Scrutiny and Democratic Lead would meet to discuss options for the future format of updates from Sanctuary Housing.

Resolved

- (1) That the indicative work programme be noted.
- (2) That the Portfolio Holder for Housing, the Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing, Councillor Parsons and the Principal Officer Scrutiny and Democratic Lead meet to discuss the format of future updates from Sanctuary Housing.
- (3) That the Chairman, Vice-Chair, Chief Executive and Principal Officer Scrutiny and Democratic Lead meet to discuss the work programme for January 2024.

The meeting ended at 8.25 pm

Chairman:

Date: