

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 February 2010 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Daniel Sames (Chairman)
Councillor Lynda Thirzie Smart (Vice-Chairman)

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

Substitute Members: Councillor Devena Rae (In place of Councillor Nick Cotter)

Also Present: Councillor Nigel Morris
Councillor Carol Steward
Francesca Heffernan, Decision Making and Young People Worker, Oxfordshire County Council
Emily Little, Involvement Officer, Participation and Play, Oxfordshire County Council
Participants of the Local Councillor Shadowing Programme from Banbury School and Frank Wise School

Apologies for absence: Councillor Nick Cotter
Councillor Colin Clarke

Officers: Chris Rothwell, Head of Urban & Rural Services
Grahame Helm, Head of Safer Communities & Community Development
Philip Rolls, Recreation & Health Improvement Manager
Craig Forsyth, Communications Officer
Catherine Phythian, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer
Natasha Clark, Trainee Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

Declarations of Interest

Members declared interest with regard to the following agenda items:

6. Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2009/10.

Councillor Alastair Milne Home, Personal, as a Member of the Board of the Banbury Community Transport Association.

Councillor P A O'Sullivan, Personal, as Cherwell District Council's elected Member representative on the Board of the Banbury Community Transport Association.

45 **Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business.

46 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25 January 2010 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

47 **Youth Engagement Scrutiny**

The Chairman explained that this was an opportunity for the Committee to question officers from Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council who were involved in the provision of youth services and specifically in activities which promote the democratic engagement of young people. He welcomed the following guests:

- Francesca Heffernan, Decision Making and Young People Worker, Oxfordshire County Council
- Emily Little, Involvement Officer, Participation and Play, Oxfordshire County Council
- Phil Rolls, Recreation and Health Improvement Manager, Cherwell District Council

The Chairman also welcomed the two pupils from Banbury School, a pupil and teacher from Frank Wise School and Councillor Carol Steward. The pupils were all members of their respective school youth councils and, together with Councillor Steward, were participating in the Local Councillor Shadowing programme.

The Chairman began by asking the representatives from Oxfordshire County Council to outline their roles.

Francesca Heffernan explained that her post involved engaging young people in north Oxfordshire in three distinct areas: Integrated Youth Support Services (IYSS); Connexions; and, the youth offending service. Ms. Heffernan advised the Committee that there were three funds available to support youth projects, youth groups, activities and facilities in Oxfordshire: the Chill Out Fund; Youth Opportunities; and, the Youth Capital Fund. Ms. Heffernan worked within the Participation Team which helped young people get involved in the decision-making process for the latter two funds. The Committee was advised that the Participation Workers also supported and helped build up the youth forums in the district.

Emily Little explained that her post included coordinating and facilitating the Oxfordshire Youth Parliament and coordinating and supporting the annual cycle of UK Youth Parliament elections across the county. In addition, she supported the Members and Deputy Members of the Youth Parliament during their term of office.

In the course of the discussion and questioning the following points emerged:

Youth Forums/Councils

Francesca Heffernan explained that at present in Cherwell there was an established youth council in Bicester, a youth forum in Banbury and a newly formed youth forum in Kidlington. Work was currently underway to establish a North Youth Forum which would be held three times a year and bring together the youth forums in the north and west of the county.

Members were interested to learn about how the outcomes and impact of the youth forums/parliament were measured and monitored. The Oxfordshire County Council representatives reported that there were many successful outcomes however acknowledged it was difficult to monitor the impact. They reported that from the perspective of the young people, success could be measured by their achievements and cited the examples of the Bicester Youth Council who had led the introduction of a recycling initiative in schools in the town; the manifesto of the UK Youth Parliament which had included promoting positive images of young people and had led to the production of a DVD entitled "the youth of today" which explored the reasons for the negative images of young people and highlighted the positive work of young people.

In response to questions, the Decision Making and Young People Worker explained that in the long term she hoped that more young people would be represented and given a voice in the issues that affected them. This would be achieved through greater partnership working between the county, district and town/parish councils together with schools and voluntary organisations.

School Councils

The Committee was interested to learn about how the school councils functioned. The Frank Wise pupil explained that he was the Chairman of his school council which included four senior and four junior pupils. A suggestion box was available in which any student could submit an item for discussion by the school council. The teacher from Frank Wise School explained that the school council had been running for a few years and that there were links to various groups to ensure that there were opportunities for young people with special needs and also access to mainstream activities.

The Banbury School pupils explained that there were three levels at their school: year group councils; a lower and an upper school council; and, a school parliament. The pupils explained that their School Parliament had limited decision making powers but gave the members an opportunity to have an understanding of democracy and how it works.

Activities and Communication

The Involvement Officer informed the Committee that there were currently two county-wide websites which hold information in regard to young people and

include information on what is available in the district. Youth Activator boards had recently been fitted in all secondary schools (Warriner / Kidlington / North Oxfordshire Academy and Banbury School) and would be fitted in all schools by Easter 2010. The boards hold information for young people on what's going on in their area. The boards were updated monthly, so hold up to date information in the areas of Physical Activities / Arts & Culture / Health & Info and Youth Clubs.

The Banbury School pupils advised the Committee that they were not aware of the boards in their school and had not heard of the county-wide websites. Furthermore, one of the pupils explained that not all young people have frequent access to the internet as access at school was limited and not all homes have an internet connection so it was important to use a variety of means of communication.

The pupils suggested a number of ways to improve communication with young people: school websites could host links to other websites; school newspapers/magazines could contain information on general activities, the activities of youth forums and events organised by the Council such as Local Democracy Week; information could be made available to parents at parents evening; the students themselves could disseminate information submitted to the school council through year representatives to class representatives; the Council could publicise events in the local media including newspapers and radio.

The teacher from Frank Wise School reported that the school had good and frequent contact with the Involvement Officer who provided support and information on activities in the district. However, he acknowledged that not all of the information was disseminated through the school and was an area he would be addressing.

The Committee agreed that it was important to ask young people about the activities they want and the mechanism for doing this should incorporate a wide range of young people, not only those who are involved in youth/school councils. In response to the Committee's question regarding what the Council could do to improve and promote the engagement of young people in local democracy, the pupils explained that they felt it was important to ask their views about activities and to make information and activities more widely available.

Conclusions

The Chairman thanked the representatives of Oxfordshire County Council, Banbury School, Frank Wise School and Cherwell District Council for attending the meeting and making a valuable contribution to the scrutiny review. He asked the Board to reflect on the evidence presented at the meeting, on the information obtained from the earlier briefing documents, discussions with officers at the Committee's previous four meetings and on the draft report that had been circulated to Members.

The Committee agreed that based on the evidence submitted they felt that a single all encompassing recommendation that the Council should introduce a formal policy for youth engagement would be sufficient.

Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2009/10

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services on the overview and scrutiny work programme 2009/10.

Existing Work Programme

The Committee noted the contents of the report and the existing work programme for 2009/10. Members noted that the Task and Finish Group on Anti-Social Behaviour would be meeting on 11 February 2010 to consider the Group's recommendations to Executive. Members requested that the report be brought to their March meeting for discussion prior to submission to the Executive as there appeared to be a number of areas that overlapped with the Committee's review on youth engagement.

Forward Plan

The Committee did not identify any further items from the Forward Plan for inclusion on their work programme.

Scheduling

Tackling Deprivation

The Committee observed that "tackling deprivation" was too broad an area to be included on the work programme as a potential scrutiny topic. However, they agreed that they would consider deprivation at their next meeting but only in relation to planning policy issues and Houses of Multiple Occupancy.

Built Environment Conservation Areas

The Committee noted that the Portfolio Holder Planning and Housing, the Strategic Director Planning and Housing and officers from Housing and Planning would attend the March meeting to brief Members on this issue. The briefing would cover the existing planning policies and regulations applicable to conservation areas; additional policies and controls that might be applied to conservation areas; and the relationship between Houses of Multiple Occupancy and deprivation.

Following the briefing the Committee would be in a position to determine whether to make recommendations to the Executive or to add the topic to their work programme for more detailed scrutiny in 2010/11.

The Chairman asked Councillor Bonner, who had raised the topic, to produce a short note outlining her concerns and issues with regard to this topic. The Scrutiny Officer would circulate the note to the Committee and officers in advance of the March meeting.

Phone Access and Telephony Review

The Scrutiny Officer advised the Committee that their request for the Executive to consider this item at their later March or April meeting to enable the Committee to consider the report had not yet been confirmed. The Scrutiny Officer agreed to progress this and advise Members once a decision had been reached.

Monitoring

Markets

The Portfolio Holder Community Safety, Street Scene and Rural and the Head of Urban and Rural Services updated Members on the progress with regard to the district's markets, in particular the appointment of a market operator for Banbury market, since the Committee's meeting on 10 November 2009.

In response to questions, the Head of Urban and Rural Services advised Members that the newly appointed market operator would assume formal responsibility for Banbury market on 1 April 2011. He confirmed that although the Council and the market operator would be working in partnership to deliver improvements to Banbury market, the relationship was underpinned by a formal contract that included appropriate break clauses and termination options. He reassured Members that the market traders had been given the opportunity to meet the new market operator at "drop in sessions" and make their views known.

The Committee asked whether the corporate risk register included an entry for the possible insolvency on the part of the market operator. The Head of Urban and Rural Services reminded Members that the Council had appointed the market operator following a rigorous tendering process but undertook to check and if necessary add an entry to the risk register.

Concessionary Travel

The Portfolio Holder Community Safety, Street Scene and Rural and the Head of Safer Communities and Community Development updated Members on progress with regard to the scrutiny recommendations on Concessionary Travel. The Committee noted that the responsibility for administering both the statutory minimum concession and discretionary concession for travel will transfer from district to county councils on 1 April 2011. Consequently no further action would be taken in relation to the recommendations on the introduction of a smart card reader scheme (Recommendation 1), the promotion of a concessionary travel consortium in Oxfordshire (Recommendation 6) or any changes to the start time of the discretionary scheme in 2010/11 (Recommendation 8).

The Head of Safer Communities and Community Development advised Members that the concessionary fare service providers were now providing monthly management information and that there was no evidence that mis-ticketing was either fraudulent or prolific.

Commenting on the research report on Community Transport provision in Cherwell District the Portfolio Holder Community Safety, Street Scene and Rural said that this had been an interesting piece of work that highlighted the differences between dial-a-ride and other voluntary schemes. He informed Members that he would be taking this work forward with officers in 2010/11.

The Committee expressed some concern that there was as yet no guidance on the financial implications or operational practicalities of the transfer of responsibility for concessionary travel from district to county councils. They encouraged the Portfolio Holder to initiate discussions with his counterparts at

the county council, as they felt a pro-active approach from Cherwell would do more to safeguard the interests of Cherwell residents.

Residents' Parking (Banbury)

Some Members of the Committee requested an update on this topic. The Portfolio Holder Community Safety, Street Scene and Rural reported that the Executive had considered this at their February meeting. Detailed plans were currently being developed for all of the consulted zones, however the timeframe had not yet been finalised. The Committee was advised that civil parking enforcement would pass from the County to Cherwell District Council in April 2011. The Portfolio Holder Community Safety, Street Scene and Rural advised the Committee that he would be in a position to bring further information to the Committee in the summer.

Resolved

- 1) That the current overview and scrutiny programme for 2009/10 be agreed.
- 2) That the contents of the Forward Plan be noted.
- 3) That the progress against the scrutiny recommendations on the future of markets in the district be noted.
- 4) That the progress against scrutiny recommendations on concessionary travel be noted.
- 5) That the Portfolio Holder Community Safety, Street Scene and Rural be asked to initiate discussions with the county council regarding the financial implications and operational practicalities arising from the transfer of responsibility for concessionary travel from district to county councils.

The meeting ended at 9.50 pm

Chairman:

Date: