

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 11 September 2012 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Ann Bonner (Chairman)
Councillor Daniel Sames (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Tim Emptage
Councillor Chris Heath
Councillor Melanie Magee
Councillor Alastair Milne Home
Councillor Jon O'Neill
Councillor Nigel Randall

Substitute Members: Councillor Lynn Pratt, as substitute for Councillor Colin Clarke

Also Present: Councillor G A Reynolds - Deputy Leader
Councillor John Donaldson - Lead member for Banbury Brighter Futures
Councillor D M Pickford - Lead Member for Housing
Councillor Nicholas Mawer
Councillor Sean Woodcock

Apologies for absence: Councillor Colin Clarke
Councillor Leslie F Sibley
Councillor Lawrie Stratford

Officers: Calvin Bell, Director of Development
Ian Davies, Director of Community and Environment
Karen Curtin, Head of Finance and Procurement
Natasha Clark, Team Leader, Democratic and Elections
Dave Parry, Interim Democratic and Elections Officer

13 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

14 **Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business.

15 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24 July 2012 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

16 **RAF Bicester**

The Committee received a presentation from the Director of Development, and Head of Finance and Procurement, advising on the background to the recent Executive decision to investigate the potential for securing the RAF Bicester site for heritage purposes through a strategic partnership with Bomber Command Heritage (BCH). The site was being marketed by the Defence Infrastructure Office, and the Council would support any bid by BCH through the provision of professional and strategic advice. The Council would not be acquiring the site itself, and any financial support would be within current budgets. If BCH were successful in their initial bid, any requirement for additional revenue support would have to be considered by the Executive.

In the course of discussion the Committee noted:

- There were understood to be up to six potential bidders interested in acquiring the site, and all were likely, at least initially, to meet the criteria set by the Defence Infrastructure Office.
- Separate to its involvement in the partnership, the Council could exercise considerable control and influence over any future development through the Bicester Master Plan and Planning Policy Guidelines.
- Although the Council could support the partnership bid through direct grant funding, support could also be given through assisting BCH in securing additional sources of funding from other grant providers.
- The Council's Senior Conservation Officer had visited the site to make an initial assessment.
- There were no circumstances where the Council, through its Planning obligations, would have to take responsibility for the site and its liabilities.

The Chairman thanked Officers for their informative presentation on what was a very worthy project, however, cautioned, that the main priority must be to protect the residents of the District from any financial liability.

The Committee agreed to monitor the progress of the project, and invited Officers to report back to a future meeting.

Resolved

- (1) That RAF Bicester be retained on the Committee's work programme and officers be invited to a future meeting to provide a further update.

17 **Banbury Brighter Futures**

The Chairman welcomed the Lead Member for the Banbury Brighter Futures Programme, and the Director of Community and Environment.

The Lead Member for the Banbury Brighter Futures Programme presented the report of the Director of Community and Environment which sought consideration of the progress and priorities of the Brighter Futures in Banbury programme. It was emphasised that, despite the challenges posed by multi-partner working, positive achievements were being made. The Lead Member was confident this good work would continue, even though each of the partner organisations faced budget and resource pressures.

The Director of Community and Environment circulated an extract from the Banbury Brighter Futures website (www.brighter-futures.org.uk) and explained that, whilst originally introduced in 2009, the programme had now been running for a sufficient period to allow the report to detail the progress made in each of the six theme areas over a 12 month period. Emphasising the breadth and complexity of the Programme, he advised that some thirty organisations were involved. To help ensure no loss of momentum, Theme Leaders met every other month and, in addition, action was frequently taken in between these meetings to address rapidly changing situations and circumstances.

In response to Members' queries regarding whether the Programme was adequately resourced to meet the identified priorities for 2012/13, the Director of Community and Environment advised that, whilst the Councils resourcing was sufficient to deliver current priorities, the key issue remained the ability of other partners to meet their resourcing obligations.

Referring to the figures contained in the report relating to those young people not in education, employment, or undertaking training ('NEET's'), the Director of Community and Environment advised that data relating to the District as a whole had been included, as work was being done across the District to address this issue. However, it was nevertheless the case that efforts to reduce the number of NEET's were concentrated in areas of greatest need. Regarding the overall unemployment situation; although the three Wards in the Programme showed the highest rate in the District, the figures were still comparable with the national average. Noting this, the Committee requested that future reports contain more comparative information in order to assist in identifying areas where efforts and resources might be concentrated.

In conclusion, the Lead Member for the Banbury Brighter Futures Programme emphasised the importance of feedback, and urged members to contact either the Director of Community and Environment or himself with any information or proposals they might have, as communication was the key to the continued success of the programme.

Resolved

- (1) That the good progress made in the second year of the Brighter Futures Programme be noted.

- (2) That the areas of emphasis and proposed activity in 2012/13 be noted.

18 **Health Sector Reforms and Emerging New Local Arrangements**

The Chairman welcomed the Deputy Leader and the Director of Community and Environment, who proceeded to present the report of the Director of Community and Environment which sought consideration of the changes to the local health sector, and the resultant new structures and functions arising as a consequence of the health sector reforms.

Noting the wide ranging nature and complexity of the new arrangements, the Committee expressed concern that with District level Members only having a limited involvement (one appointee on each of the proposed four new Boards representing all Oxfordshire Districts), the opportunity to influence would be limited. Communicating the changes to the public and helping them identify who would be delivering services would also be a major challenge, particularly as the proposed changes were required to deliver some of the savings required in the Health sector as a whole. In this respect the Committee welcomed the undertaking of the Director of Community and Environment to re-draw the diagram providing an overview of the NHS Reforms to enable the public to better understand the changes and identify service providers.

Resolved

- (1) That the new Oxfordshire and local arrangements for the Health and Wellbeing Functions, Healthwatch and Clinical Commissioning be noted.
- (2) That the District Council's involvement in the appropriate parts of the Health & Wellbeing partnerships structure be supported.

19 **National Benefit Changes**

The Committee received a presentation from the Lead Member for Housing and the Head of Finance and Procurement advising on the introduction, from April 2013, of wide-ranging National Benefit reforms including:

- A Benefit Cap
- Size Criteria for Social Housing
- Disability Living Allowance
- Introduction of Universal Credit
- Local administration of Social Fund by County Council

Collectively, these changes would have significant implications for the Council and its customers. With respect to the new arrangements for those customers in receipt of Housing Benefit (currently paid directly to the landlord by the Council), not only would they find the level of benefit capped, but the monies were to be received direct, and they would be personally responsible for paying their rent. This would probably prove unpopular with landlords, and was likely to result in a decrease in property available for rent and a corresponding increase in homelessness and Discretionary Housing

Payments. There was also likely to be an increase in customer contact as the introduction of Universal Credit impacted on customers. A report had been submitted to the Executive in July and the Council was looking to work closely with partners, adopt a proactive communications strategy for both claimants and landlords, and review the implications for the budgets in respect of Discretionary Housing Payments, temporary accommodation, Housing and Customers services, service assurance and the Capita contract.,

Noting the impact on the Councils services and resources, the Committee also identified that there were likely to be significant implications for other service providers, particularly the Citizens Advice Bureau. In addition, it was agreed that Councillors should be advised of the number of properties in their Wards where there were residents who would be affected. However, it was also acknowledged that the changes were being introduced not only with a view to reducing the overall welfare budget, but also to move people away from a dependency on benefits and encourage them into work. In this respect the Council must continue in its efforts to create a business friendly District of opportunity.

In conclusion, the Lead Member for Housing reminded the Committee that the draft for the new Allocations Policy would be discussed at meetings to be held on the 3 and 4 October at 6.00pm. The proposed changes would also have a significant impact, and she encouraged Members to attend and participate.

The Chairman thanked the Lead Member for Housing and the Head of Finance and Procurement for their comprehensive presentation on this challenging area.

Resolved

- (1) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive a further report on this subject at it meeting on 12 March 2013

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2012/13

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Law and Governance which presented the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2012/13.

Forward Plan

The Committee agreed that there were no items on the Forward Plan for September to December 2012 that they wished to include on their Work Programme in 2012/13.

Agenda for 9 October 2012

It was noted that the meeting in October would receive briefings regarding Air Quality and the Council's Planning and Building Control Enforcement function.

Resolved

- (1) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme 2012/13 be noted.

- (2) To no items in the current version of the Forward Plan (September to December, 2012) be included on the Work programme for 2012/13.

The meeting ended at 9.10 pm

Chairman:

Date: