

## **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 12 March 2013 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Ann Bonner (Chairman)

Councillor Daniel Sames  
Councillor Colin Clarke  
Councillor Tim Emptage  
Councillor Chris Heath  
Councillor Kieron Mallon  
Councillor Alastair Milne Home  
Councillor Nigel Randall  
Councillor Leslie F Sibley  
Councillor Lawrie Stratford

Substitute  
Members: Councillor Rose Stratford (In place of Councillor Melanie Magee)

Apologies  
for  
absence: Councillor Jon O'Neill

Officers: Claire Taylor, Corporate Performance Manager  
Marianne North, Housing Needs Manager  
Helen Town, Strategic Housing Officer  
Tim Mills, Private Sector Housing Manager  
Natasha Clark, Team Leader, Democratic and Elections  
Dave Parry, Interim Democratic and Elections Officer

#### **27 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **28 Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business.

#### **29 Minutes**

That, subject to Minute 25 being amended to record that the Committee strongly supported the proposals to enhance the Planning and Building Control Enforcement service, the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee

held on 9 October, 2012 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman

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### **Update on Empty Homes**

The Chairman welcomed the Lead Member for Housing, the Private Sector Housing Manager and the Delivery Team Manager.

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Regeneration and Housing providing an update on the situation regarding empty homes in the District, the steps being taken to bring empty homes and other empty property back into use, and the extent of progress made since 31 January 2012 when the Committee last considered the issue and agreed four principles as the basis for the Council's approach to empty homes.

The Private Sector Housing Manager and Delivery Team Manager advised that efforts had been concentrated on 50 properties that had been empty for at least 2 years in the areas of greatest need in the District - Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington, As a result of those efforts it was found that 24 were not empty (and the Council Tax Team had been advised accordingly), 3 homes had been returned to use, and the Council had used formal Notice of Entry to gain access to a further two properties. In total, was hoped that 10 properties from the original list would be returned to use. For the future, it was anticipated that improvements in data gather from the Council Tax System would speed-up the process on the next 50 properties identified for action.

The Committee noted the lack of take-up in respect of the Council's Empty Homes Loan, and Loan-to-Lease schemes and queried whether more effort might be put into highlighting their availability. In any event it was important to build momentum on the progress made to date.

In noting a summary of projects currently being undertaken, the Committee acknowledged that some properties, whether acquired through Compulsory Purchase Order or through partnership arrangements, were better being refurbished and then disposed of rather than subsequently retained. However, the proceeds should then be reinvested in the provision of other accommodation for let in areas of greatest housing need.

In the knowledge that, over the next 2-3 years, HCA Empty Homes grant funding might release some 250 properties for lease (53 being specifically Empty Homes), and produce a subsequent income from the New Homes Bonus scheme, the Committee welcomed the progress to-date.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the actions being taken to address the empty homes issue be noted.
- (2) That the matter be kept under review, with a further report on 12 months.

31 **Exclusion of Press and Public**

**Resolved**

That, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business, on the grounds that they could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of that Act.

32 **Update on Empty Homes - restricted appendix**

The Committee considered an exempt appendix to the Update on Empty Homes report which provided a summary of projects currently being undertaken.

The Committee acknowledged that some properties, whether acquired through Compulsory Purchase Order or through partnership arrangements, were better being refurbished and then disposed of rather than subsequently retained. However, the proceeds should then be reinvested in the provision of other accommodation for let in areas of greatest housing need.

**Resolved**

(1) That the restricted appendix be noted.

33 **Re-admittance of public and press**

**Resolved**

That the press and public be readmitted to the meeting.

34 **Housing Strategy**

The Strategic Housing Officer gave a presentation on the Housing Strategy Annual Delivery Plan, which was a 5 year programme identifying six priorities:

1. Increasing the supply and access to housing.
2. Developing financially and socially sustainable communities.
3. Housing for our most vulnerable residents.
4. Ensuring Homes are safe, warm and well managed.
5. Preventing homelessness.
6. Maximising resources – Investment Ready District.

The Committee was advised of the work underway to deliver the Plan; particularly in respect of research into equity loan products, a review of the Rural Housing Partnership, sustainable housing (Low Carbon Housing), housing for the most vulnerable, and the introduction across the district of the 'Green Deal'. It was noted that, with regard to preventing homelessness, there would be a major impact as a result of the changes to be introduced in the welfare system and, in this respect, the Council had already done a lot of work with the CAB and other partners which would be key to successful delivery.

Consideration was also being given to the possibility of using discretionary housing payments to assist with homelessness cases.

In considering Priority 3 (Housing for our most vulnerable residents), it was suggested that section 4 to the document might be re-worded to give more weight to putting pressure on developers to build properties once planning consent was given. At present, many developments for which consent had been granted had not subsequently been delivered. The Chairman acknowledged this point, and also emphasised that, particularly with regard to the welfare changes, it was important to ensure the public knew what the Council was doing and had put in place in order to help allay concerns.

The Committee thanked the Lead Member for Housing and officers for the presentation and agreed that the issue be retained on the Work Programme for a future report to include statistical information in order that the Committee might better measure progress.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That, subject to the below, the Housing Strategy Annual Delivery Plan be noted.
- (2) That section 4 to Priority three be amended to reflect the need to pressure developers to build properties once planning consent granted.
- (3) That, subject to the inclusion of statistical information to enable measuring of progress, the Committee to receive a further report in 6-12 months.

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### **Enforcement Service Plan - Feedback from Member Briefing**

The Corporate Performance Manager gave an overview of the Business Planning and Service Plan process.

The Committee was advised that the process comprised five key elements: The Sustainable Community Strategy; The Business Plan; the Medium Term Financial Strategy; service plans; and, Performance Appraisal.

The elements were variously delivered through the Executive, Scrutiny, Joint Management Team, and then Directorate Managements teams, Team Plans and Appraisals. The process was not repeated from scratch each year, but was rather evolved, and informed from several sources, including

- Previous commitments (e.g. big capital projects);
- Budget constraints;
- Customer feedback;
- New policy/legal requirement;
  
- Member Priorities;
- Performance improvement;
  
- Key Local strategies;

- Major projects and programmes.

The Corporate Performance Manager agreed to provide all Councillors with a copy of each of the Service Plans in April.

The Committee thanked the Corporate Performance Manager for the briefing and agreed that there should be greater Member involvement in the process in the future. Members requested the Corporate Performance Manager report back to the Committee in September, when further consideration could be given to each specific service plan, and one identified for detailed scrutiny. Members agreed that senior officers also be invited to attend this session.

In considering the notes of the Enforcement Service Plan Member Briefing held on 17 January, Members agreed that the Planning and Building Control enforcement service could be a viable area for review in order to gauge the impact of the recent increase in resources.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That an item 'Presentation on Service Plans' be included on the Work Programme for consideration at the September meeting.
- (2) That an item regarding the Planning and Building Control Enforcement service be included on the Work Programme for consideration in 6 months.

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## **Overview and Scrutiny 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.

### **Executive Work Programme**

The Committee agreed that there were no items on the Executive Work Programme for March to June 2013 that they wished to include on their Work Programme in 2012/13.

### **Potential Work Programme Items**

The Chairman advised that at its recent meeting the Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board had noted that the Banbury Brighter Futures project was showing amber. As the project was included on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme it was agreed that a report be submitted to the Committee in June and that members of the Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board be invited to attend.

The Chairman advised that the item regarding the twelve month review of the Community Transport and Dial-a-Ride scheme would now include a report from the Oxfordshire Rural Community Partnership.

### **Resolved**

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

- (2) That no items in the current version of the Forward Plan (March to June, 2013) be included on the Work programme for 2012/13.
- (3) That an update report regarding the Banbury Brighter Futures project be submitted to the June meeting of the Committee.
- (4) That the twelve month review of the Community Transport and Dial-a-Ride scheme currently included on the Work programme include a report from the Oxfordshire Rural Community Partnership.

The meeting ended at 8.42 pm

Chairman:

Date: