

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 2 July 2013 at 6.30 pm

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

Councillor Alyas Ahmed
Councillor Alastair Milne Home
Councillor Jon O'Neill
Councillor Lynn Pratt
Councillor Nigel Randall
Councillor Lawrie Stratford
Councillor Douglas Williamson

Substitute Members: Councillor Gordon Ross (In place of Councillor Sean Woodcock)

Also Present: Councillor John Donaldson
Councillor D M Pickford

Apologies for absence: Councillor Timothy Hallchurch MBE
Councillor Melanie Magee
Councillor Sean Woodcock

Officers: Ian Davies, Director of Community and Environment
Natasha Clark, Team Leader, Democratic and Elections
Dave Parry, Democratic and Elections Officer

9 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

10 Urgent Business

There was no urgent business.

11 **Minutes**

That, subject to the amendment detailed below, the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 28 May, 2013 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Minute 6 – Air Quality across the District.

Penultimate paragraph – amend first sentence to read:

‘Committee Members raised extreme concern and disappointment that, even after detailed assessment, the declaration of an AQMA, and even the implementation of an Air Quality Action Plan, it appeared there was little the Council could do itself to ensure improvements were achieved.’

12 **Banbury Brighter Futures**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor John Donaldson, Lead Member for Banbury Brighter Futures, Councillor Debbie Pickford, Lead Member for Housing, and Ian Davies, Director of Community and Environment.

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Community and Environment detailing the performance of the Brighter Futures in Banbury Programme 2012/13 and advising priorities for 2013/14 and other associated Banbury matters.

In introducing the report, the Lead Member for Banbury Brighter Futures (BBF) and the Director of Community and Environment emphasised the positive progress made to date. The direction of travel on all themes was good, with all partners fully engaged.

The only area where progress had not been as great as it might have been in respect of education. This was mainly due to changes in personnel and efforts were underway to increase the pace of improvement and have educational achievement at or above the average for the County as a whole.

Regarding areas of concern previously identified by the Committee in respect of Air Quality and recycling rates, although the former was not directly linked with the BBF programme, the Lead Member for Banbury Brighter Futures undertook to investigate whether there were any areas where there were links and help might be given. Regarding recycling rates, a lot of work had been undertaken in the area with blitz teams and through education. With a high number of flats and Houses in Multiple Occupation, there were particular challenges, and although the area was kept tidy, more work was needed to increase recycling rates. As the Committee’s Work Programme included items in respect of all of the areas of concern, and the Director of Community and Environment undertook to feed into those items as information became available.

The Committee noted the good progress, but did raise some concerns regarding education and emphasised the importance of engaging with Head Teachers and School Governors regarding educational issues; the rolling-out of experience and good practice elsewhere across the District, and regarding the provision of housing accommodation.

In response to the Committee's comments, the Lead Member for Banbury Brighter Futures undertook to investigate engaging directly with School Heads and Governors. The Director of Community and Environment added that the Chairman of the Banbury Schools Partnership had previously been involved, and further involvement could now be investigated.

The Committee was advised that the areas of greatest need in the district remained the Wards covered by the BBF Programme, and resources should therefore remain focused on these. Nonetheless, rolling-out experience gained and good practice was happening, particularly through Connecting Communities Events (one was planned for Bicester later in the year). The Thriving Families Programme, Early Intervention hubs in Banbury, together with Job Clubs and work done with NEET's, had all produced lessons which could and were applied elsewhere. This was not a formal process and some Theme Leads were less able to progress matters than others.

The Lead Member for Banbury Brighter Futures advised that public perception of progress made in the Wards covered by the programme was very positive. The Connecting Communities events provided opportunities for public feedback, and a BBC Radio Oxford outside broadcast event in Bretch Hill had demonstrated a positive appreciation from residents.

The Lead Member for Housing advised that, through partners such as Sanctuary Housing, careful monitoring was taking place to ascertain the impact of changes to the Benefits rules, and whether the types of housing accommodation being provided was appropriate. It was, however, important that decisions were taken only when clear evidence was available to ensure the right type of accommodation was provided for local needs. Notwithstanding this, the target for the provision of affordable housing had been exceeded, and the transfer of land from Oxfordshire County Council would enable further provision. The Director of Community and Environment added that there were a higher number of development sites within the Banbury Brighter Futures programme area than anywhere else in the District.

The Director of Community and Environment confirmed that a Credit Union had now been established. Recruitment was underway, and the facility would become operational in 2014.

The Chairman thanked the Lead Members and the Director of Community and Environment for advising the Committee and taking on-board the issues raised. She concluded that excellent progress had been made during the first three years of the programme, but it was important that there be no loss of momentum. It was acknowledged that all partner organisations remained fully engaged, albeit efforts should be made to identify and engage with new partners (e.g. School Head Teachers and Governors). The knowledge and experience gained and good practice identified through the BBF programme should, wherever possible, be utilised elsewhere across the District, and a focus on housing was to be encouraged. Progress towards the establishment of a Credit Union was welcomed, as was the commitment to work with officers on the issue of Air Quality.

Resolved

- (1) That, subject to the points made in the conclusion detailed above, the progress and 2012/13 performance of the Brighter Futures in Banbury programme be noted.
- (2) That the forthcoming activities of the Programme be noted.

13 **Draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2012/13**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Law and Governance presenting the draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2012/13.

Resolved

- (1) That the draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2012/13 be noted.
- (2) That, subject to the further comments of Members of the Committee being considered and incorporated into the report, delegated authority be granted to the Head of Law and Governance, in consultation with the former Chairman of the two former scrutiny Committees, and current Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to complete the forward and make any minor amendments to the annual report before submission to Full Council.

14 **Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2013/14**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of law and Governance, which presented the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2013/14.

Executive Work Programme

The Committee agreed that there were no items in the Executive Work Programme for July to October, 2013 that they wished to include on their Work Programme in 2013/14.

Potential Work Programme Items

The Committee noted that scoping documents were being worked on with respect to a number of topics identified on the Work programme, and these would be submitted to the Committee for consideration at the August meeting.

The Chairman advised the Committee that plans were in-hand for a joint visit with South Northamptonshire Council's Scrutiny Committee to the Houses of Parliament during the autumn to observe the Select Committee process.

Resolved

- (1) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme be noted.

- (2) That no items in the current version of the Executive Work Programme (July to October 2013) be included on the Work Programme for 2013/14.

The meeting ended at 7.46 pm

Chairman:

Date: