

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 24 September 2013 at 6.30 pm

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

Councillor Alyas Ahmed
Councillor Melanie Magee
Councillor Lynn Pratt
Councillor Nigel Randall
Councillor Lawrie Stratford
Councillor Rose Stratford
Councillor Douglas Williamson

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

Also Present: Councillor Ken Atack, Lead Member for Financial Management

Apologies for absence: Councillor Alastair Milne Home
Councillor Jon O'Neill
Councillor Sean Woodcock

Officers: Tim Madden, Interim Head of Finance and Procurement
Claire Taylor, Corporate Performance Manager
Ryszard Filipiak, Service Assurance Team Leader
Hedd Vaughan Evans, Research and Intelligence Officer
Dave Parry, Democratic and Elections Officer

24 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

25 **Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business.

26 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 6 August 2013 were agreed as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

27 **Welfare Reform Update**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Atack, Lead Member for Financial Management, the Interim Head of Finance and Procurement and the Service Assurance Team Leader to the meeting.

The Committee considered a report of the Interim Head of Finance and Procurement advising progress in respect of national changes in the welfare system.

At the request of the Committee, the Service Assurance Team Leader undertook to circulate information regarding the number of mutual exchanges that had taken place since the introduction of the Spare Bedroom Subsidy rule.

Regarding the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, it was noted that, to date, there had been no appeals against any decision. This compared to perhaps 2 or 3 appeals per month under the former Council Tax / Housing Benefit scheme and, whilst this might be because claimants were satisfied with the outcome of their application, it might also be because they were unaware of the way the new system operated.

The Committee expressed concern that, with regard to the localisation of the Social Fund, more elderly applicants might be reluctant to make an application. Concern was also expressed regarding the limited hours during which Auriga provided a service. In response, the Service Assurance Team Leader advised that, to date, the limited hours service did not appear to have been an issue, and the local Citizens Advice Bureau had also reported this to be the case. Regarding the introduction of the Benefit Cap, 36 households in the District had been affected. Some outreach work would take place during October, and if any households were found to be in need of assistance then this would be provided.

Responding to concern regarding the potential for an underspend on the Discretionary Housing Payments budget, the Lead Member for Financial Management advised that the system did seem to be operating well, and there was every intention to spend the budget by the end of the year. In this respect, consideration would be given to adjusting the application criteria later in the year to ensure budget spend. He added that it was important to be very clear and straight with applicants and, thus far, he was happy that the process was working well.

The Committee commended the work of the Local Government Resources Review Project team both in anticipation of the changes and currently as these were rolled out. It was agreed that information on the team and the work stream groups be included in the Members Bulletin.

Resolved

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted.
- (2) That, in future, monitoring of the Welfare Reforms be undertaken through the Performance Management process, with appropriate Officers being required to report to the Committee where an indicator showed red.

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Customer Insight Report

The Chairman welcomed the Corporate Performance Manager and the Research and Intelligence Officer to the meeting.

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Performance Manager reviewing the quarter 1 Customer Insight Report, noting overall satisfaction rates; satisfaction regarding particular services; complaints; media enquiries, social media, and website interaction.

The Committee noted that a new, two stage complaints process was now in place, and the Corporate Performance Manager undertook to circulate details, together with information regarding the 16 Ombudsman cases dealt with during 2012/13. She also acknowledged that there was a data quality issue with respect to recording complaints correctly and consistently and the recording of response dates. However, moving the complaints process into the Performance Team later in the year would help address these issues. She also undertook to investigate providing Members with a means of forwarding complaints that they had received direct to the complaints system. With regard to the three consultation exercises, the Research and Intelligence Officer undertook to circulate members with details of the number of participants.

Responding to Committee concerns regarding the Council's website and the relatively low customer satisfaction level, the Corporate Performance Manager advised that this area had already been identified for improvement as the website was particularly important if future plans to 'channel shift' customers to web transactions (from face-to-face or telephone contact) were to be successful.

Regarding webcasting, the Corporate Performance Manager undertook to supply Members with details of the Committees watched, the number of people accessing the system, and whether they had watched live or after the event.

Resolved

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That consideration of future reports be added to the Work Programme.
- (3) That information regarding the recording of responses to complaints; a means of enabling Members to refer complaints; Consultation

participant numbers; and Ombudsman and webcasting information as referred to above, be circulated to Members prior to the next meeting.

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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 September to December, 2013 that they wished to include on their Work Programme in 2013/14.

Potential Work Programme Items

The Committee noted that the Work Programme would be updated to reflect the decisions earlier in the meeting. In addition, the following updates were noted:

Air Quality – the report would now come to the December meeting.

Wind Turbines and their Locations – Review likely to commence in early November.

CDC Employment Initiatives – Councillor Magee would be preparing a scoping document.

Contract Scrutiny: Landscape Maintenance Contract – Councillor Lawrie Stratford would be contacting the Head of Environmental Services.

Concessions Policy – Councillor Randall had met with the Portfolio Holder and Service Manager and would seek to progress a report in due course.

The Committee was informed that arrangements were in-hand for a joint visit with South Northamptonshire Council's Scrutiny Committee to the Houses of Parliament. As the date for the visit clashed with the next scheduled meeting of the Committee, consideration would be given to rescheduling the meeting.

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 (September to December 2013) be included on the Work Programme for 2013/14.

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm

Chairman:

Date: