

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 10 December 2013 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Ann Bonner (Chairman)

Councillor Alyas Ahmed
Councillor Douglas Williamson
Councillor Sean Woodcock

Also Present: Councillor Michael Gibbard, Lead Member for Planning

Apologies for absence: Councillor Daniel Sames
Councillor Melanie Magee
Councillor Alastair Milne Home
Councillor Jon O'Neill
Councillor Lynn Pratt
Councillor Nigel Randall
Councillor Lawrie Stratford
Councillor Rose Stratford

Officers: Bob Duxbury, Development Control Team Leader
Marianne North, Housing Needs Manager
Natasha Clark, Team Leader, Democratic and Elections
Hedd Vaughan Evans, Research and Intelligence Officer
Dave Parry, Democratic and Elections Officer

36 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

37 Urgent Business

There was no urgent business.

38 Minutes

The Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7 November 2013 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

39

Chairman's Announcements

The Committee held a minutes silence as a mark of respect and to note the death of the former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela.

40

Commissioning of Services to Banbury CAB

The Chairman welcomed the Housing Needs Manager and Barbara Shaw, the Chief Executive of Banbury Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to the meeting.

The Chief Executive of Banbury CAB gave a presentation advising on the services provided by the organisation and the operation of the contract with the Council. Debt and money advice services included the mortgage rescue scheme. The scheme within Cherwell was recognised as the most successful in the region.

Debt management plans had been arranged for 1407 families and benefits advice given to clients had resulted in additional income of £3.8m being secured. Additionally, advice to people made redundant and people with disabilities had secured benefit payments which, in-turn, had prevented instances of homelessness.

Support from the Council had helped the CAB facilitate 201 people into volunteering, and the volunteer driver service had already delivered 1191 journeys and was likely to hit its annual target of 2000 journeys (it was already apparent that, with the reduction in ambulance services, demand for the volunteer driver service was increasing).

Monitoring by the Council of the various elements of the contract was undertaken by the Housing Needs Manager and the Countryside and Communities Manager and, rather than simply specifying footfall and client numbers, this related to outcomes, and this ensured the issue of service quality was monitored as well as service volume.

The CAB Chief Executive advised the Committee that pressure on the service was increasing and it was currently running a budget deficit. On average, approximately 19 clients a week were turned away; albeit if their circumstances changed it was possible that they would subsequently be able to be given advice or assistance.

The Committee questioned the Chief Executive on various aspects of the CAB's operations and services, following which the Chairman thanked both the Chief Executive and the Housing Needs Manager for their attendance.

Resolved

- (1) That the monitoring being undertaken regarding the provision of debt and money advice services by the Banbury CAB be acknowledged.
- (2) That the item be retained on the Work Programme, and that the Housing Needs Manager and the Countryside and Communities

Manager, together with the Chief Executive of Banbury CAB and the Transport Coordinator (OCC) be invited to attend a future meeting to advise further on the various elements of the contract.

41 **Update on Planning Enforcement Service**

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Councillor Michael Gibbard, Lead Member for Planning, and the Team Leader, Major Developments.

The Lead Member for Planning and the Team Leader, Major Developments presented the report of the Head of Development Management which gave an update on the impact on the Planning Enforcement service of the allocation of additional staff resources.

The Committee noted the fluctuating number of complaints, which could change from none on one day to several the next and welcomed the intention to adopt a more proactive, rather than reactive approach. Members acknowledged it was only the allocation of additional resources that had improved performance to the point where this could be considered.

The Committee also agreed that, whilst the service was discretionary, it was unquestionably essential to ensuring the credibility and effectiveness of the whole planning process. It was equally acknowledged that the discretionary element allowed the Council to decide against action where this was considered inappropriate, and this helped ensure the Council was seen to act in a fair and reasonable manner, and also make the best use of its resources.

The Chairman thanked the Lead Member for Planning and the Team Leader, Major Developments for their presentation and update.

Resolved

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That the positive impact of the allocation of additional resources to the Enforcement Service be acknowledged, and that this item be removed from the work programme.

42 **Customer Insight Report Quarter Two**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Transformation, reviewing the Quarter 2 Customer Insight Report, noting overall satisfaction rates, satisfaction regarding particular services, complaints, media enquiries, social media, and website interaction.

The Committee noted the issue regarding recording complaints within the Council's Lagan (complaint recording) system and welcomed the move to centralise responsibility for complaints management within the Performance and Insight team from 1 January 2014. The Committee also welcomed the intention to update and improve the on-line complaints form and the provision of additional information which would enable complainants to raise their

issues with the appropriate authority/organisation where this was not the Council.

Resolved

- (1) That the position and information provided regarding customer complaints be noted.
- (2) That the Corporate Performance Manager submit a further report at Q4, and report on the impact of the new process.

43

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 additional items in the Executive Work Programme for December 2013 to March, 2014 that they wished to include on their Work Programme in 2013/

Air Quality and Draft Cherwell District Council Five Year Business Strategy – It was noted that these items would be considered at the Committee's January meeting.

Housing Service Plan – The Team Leader, Democratic and Elections advised that arrangements were in-hand for a special meeting of the Committee to be held during February, 2014, to review the Housing Service Plan. All members would be invited to attend.

Resolved

- (1) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2013/14 be noted.
- (2) That no items in the current version of the Executive Work Programme (December 2013 to March 2014) be included on the Work Programme for 2013/14.

The meeting ended at 7.46 pm

Chairman:

Date: