

Cherwell District Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held as a Virtual meeting, on 14 July 2020 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Lucinda Wing (Chairman)
Councillor Tom Wallis (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Mike Bishop
Councillor Phil Chapman
Councillor Chris Heath
Councillor Shaida Hussain
Councillor Tony Mepham
Councillor Ian Middleton
Councillor Perran Moon
Councillor Les Sibley
Councillor Douglas Webb
Councillor Bryn Williams

Also Present: Councillor Ian Corkin - Lead Member for Customers and Transformation
Councillor Barry Wood – Leader of the Council

Officers: Gillian Douglas, Assistant Director: Social Care Commissioning and Housing
Louise Tustian, Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes
Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader
Steven Newman, Senior Economic Growth Officer
Emma Faulkner, Democratic and Elections Officer
Lesley Farrell, Democratic and Elections Officer
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

1 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 30 January 2020 were confirmed as a correct record, to be signed by the Chairman in due course.

3 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman welcomed Members and officers to the first virtual meeting of the Committee, and reminded all attendees of the virtual meeting etiquette.

4 Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

5 **Digital Connectivity in Cherwell**

The Chairman welcomed Steven Newman, Senior Economic Growth Officer at Cherwell District Council, and Craig Bower, Digital Programme Manager at Oxfordshire County Council, to the meeting to give an update on Digital Connectivity in Cherwell.

The Digital Programme Manager explained that superfast coverage, defined as speeds above 30 megabits per second, across Cherwell had increased from 66% in 2013 to 98% in 2020.

With regard to future plans, universal coverage of full fibre fixed broadband was targeted for 2033, with near full availability of 5G for mobile connectivity by 2033. Recent central Government announcements had suggested that the full fibre target could be brought forward to 2025.

The Digital Programme Manager clarified that the rollout of the 5G network was critically dependent on the fibre network, it was not a case of one being developed over the other.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Digital Programme Manager confirmed that it would be possible to reverse engineer the superfast coverage map to show the 2% of the district that was not yet connected.

The Committee commented that there was a clear link between the future rollout of fixed fibre and its importance to the Cherwell Industrial Strategy. They requested that a further update regarding digital connectivity and the Industrial Strategy be arranged for approximately 6 months.

Resolved

(1) That the presentation be noted

6 **Monthly Performance, Risk and Finance Monitoring Report - Quarter 4 / March 2020**

The Committee considered a report from the Director of Finance and the Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes that detailed the Council's Performance, Risk and Finance Monitoring as at the end of Quarter 4, March 2020.

The Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes explained that the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown had impacted on the end of year position for some indicators.

With regards to the risk register, the Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes advised the Committee that in light of the pandemic an additional risk had been added, relating to business continuity.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes advised that she would liaise with relevant officers and provide responses with regards to the long term plan for business rates; the implications in relation to rental income for Castle Quay; and whether or not the Council would be required to contribute towards costs for a Covid-19 vaccine.

The Committee congratulated the homelessness team for their work to date on housing homeless and rough sleepers during the pandemic.

Resolved

- (1) That the monthly Performance, Risk and Finance Monitoring report be noted

7 Housing Strategy Progress Report

The Committee considered a report from the Assistant Director – Housing and Social Care Commissioning that provided an update on the implementation of the Council’s Housing Strategy.

The Committee had considered the Housing Strategy at draft stage, and had requested an update be provided to them after 12 months.

With regard to the current situation concerning homeless residents, the Assistant Director – Housing and Social Care Commissioning advised the Committee that 66 people had been housed during the pandemic, and of those 30 still required assistance. A number of local hotels had been used as temporary accommodation, and Councillor John Donaldson as Lead Member for Housing had written to each establishment to thank them for their assistance.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Assistant Director – Housing and Social Care Commissioning advised that approximately £180,000 had been spent on emergency accommodation.

Resolved

- (1) That the report be noted

8 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2019/20

The Committee considered the draft Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report for 2019/20.

The report summarised the work that had been completed by the Committee over the year, as well as detailing the officers and external guests who had attended meetings.

Resolved

- (1) That the draft Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2019/20 be approved
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Monitoring Officer (Interim), in consultation with the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to finalise the areas highlighted in the report, prior to its consideration by Council

9

Work Programme 2020/2021

The Democratic and Elections Officers gave an update on the status of topics suggested for Scrutiny, and the indicative Committee work programme.

Following the presentation given earlier in the meeting relating to digital connectivity, the Committee requested that an update on the Cherwell Industrial Strategy be scheduled for October 2020.

The Committee also requested that an update be given regarding the council's response to the coronavirus pandemic, covering a review of Emergency Planning, what went well and what would be done differently and the economic impact on the district.

In response to a query raised relating to the possible sale of animal fur at council run markets, the Chairman of the Committee agreed to gather some additional information to enable a more detailed discussion at the September 2020 meeting.

Following a report in December 2019 to full Council regarding changes to the Constitution, it was suggested that a Constitutional Working Group be established to consider any proposed changes to the constitution prior to reports being submitted to full Council. In response to the request, the Governance and Elections Manager advised that she would advise the interim Monitoring Officer of the suggestion, and added that recruitment was currently underway for a permanent Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer who would be able to review the suggestion.

Resolved

- (1) That the work programme be noted

The meeting ended at 8.25 pm

Chairman:

Date: