

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 25 January 2010 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Daniel Sames (Chairman)
Councillor Lynda Thirzie Smart (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Ann Bonner
Councillor Nick Cotter
Councillor John Donaldson
Councillor P A O'Sullivan
Councillor Chris Smithson
Councillor Trevor Stevens
Councillor Lawrie Stratford

Also Present: Councillor Michael Gibbard

Apologies for absence: Councillor Alastair Milne Home
Councillor Tony Ilott
Councillor Leslie F Sibley

Officers: John Hoad, Strategic Director - Planning, Housing and Economy
Gillian Greaves, Head of Housing Services
Fiona Brown, Strategic Housing Officer
Tim Mills, Private Sector Housing Manager
Martyn Swann, Strategic Housing Manager
Catherine Phythian, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer
Natasha Clark, Trainee Democratic and Scrutiny Officer
Michael Sands, Trainee Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

37 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

38 Urgent Business

There was no urgent business.

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Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 10 November 2009 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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Private Sector Housing Strategy

The Private Sector Housing Manager gave a presentation on the Private Sector Housing Strategy, which was developed in order to recognise the importance of good quality private sector housing in the district and highlight the contribution the private sector housing team can make towards meeting the Council's corporate priorities. The strategy was before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for endorsement and approval given the strategic importance.

The Private Sector Housing Manager informed the Committee that the Strategy had four key areas of focus:

- Accessibility/ Affordability
- Stock Condition
- Supporting Vulnerable People
- Energy/Efficiency

The Private Sector Housing Manager explained that extensive consultation with stakeholders had taken place, as well as research on fuel poverty and stock conditions. The Private Sector Housing Manager informed the Committee that as part of the consultation process, the private sector housing team had organised and hosted a coffee morning which provided an opportunity for members of the community to learn more about the Council's services.

In discussion the Committee looked at:

- Risks presented by increased numbers of sub-divisional properties
- The valuable work of the small repairs service
- Plans/scope to expand the volume/capacity of privately rented accommodation in the District
- Licensing arrangements and enforcement procedures
- How to measure the performance and results of the strategy

Members noted the action plan which had been developed to accompany the strategy and felt that this should be reviewed again at a later date by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Officers agreed to give feedback on this in one year's time to provide Members with an update on progress. Members requested that the action plan be revised to include clearer, more measurable targets.

The Committee discussed ways in which to increase resident's awareness of the Council's service offerings for private sector housing. Finally Members were advised that the enforcement activities of the private sector housing team were undertaken by three full time employees who were also responsible for providing advice on housing standards and energy efficiency

as well as delivering landlord grants, and that plans to improve the service would need to be provided from the existing resource base.

Resolved

- 1) That the contents of the report be noted.
- 2) That the Private Sector Housing Strategy and Action Plan be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme for review in spring 2011.

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Older People's Housing Strategy

The Strategic Housing Officer gave a presentation on the Older Peoples Housing Strategy, which will ensure that the Council provides the right housing and support services to meet the needs of older residents over the next five years. The Strategic Housing Officer explained that the strategy had five key priorities:

- Provide and support preventative services that allow people to remain living independently in their own home
- Increase the provision of specialist older peoples housing
- Improve the provision of information and advice about housing options for older people
- Involve older people in the way we provide services
- Ensure new development meets the needs of older people now and in the future

The Committee were conscious of the projected increase in the number of older people living in Cherwell District, which would be significantly higher than other parts of the county. They also considered that it was important to balance the needs of both urban and rural residents.

The Committee recognised the importance of ensuring that suitable accommodation is provided for elderly residents to allow them to continue living in rural areas. Members suggested that the Council should promote mixed housing provision in all new housing developments, for example via the Local Development Framework and in North West Bicester.

Resolved

- 1) To note the contents of the report.
- 2) That the Older People's Housing Strategy be endorsed to Executive.

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Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2009/10

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services on the overview and scrutiny work programme 2009/10.

Existing work programme

The Committee noted the contents of the report and the existing work programme 2009/10. They confirmed that the February meeting would focus on the scrutiny review into Engaging Young People and that the March meeting would include a report on the proposed approach to crime and disorder scrutiny. The Committee noted that the revised Council calendar of meetings did not include an Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in April.

Forward Plan

The Committee did not identify any topics from the Forward Plan for inclusion on their work programme.

Scheduling

Built Environment Conservation Areas

The Committee considered the proposal to conduct a scrutiny review into the Council's approach to Built Environment Conservation Areas. The Committee recognised that this had some links to the developing strategy to break the cycle of deprivation and address inequalities across the district.

The Committee agreed that these important issues should be discussed in more detail at their March meeting.

Phone Access and Telephony Review

The Committee confirmed that they would wish to consider this report before it was referred to the Executive. They suggested that the report could be allocated to the second Executive meeting at the end of March which would allow them to consider it at their meeting on 9 March. The Scrutiny Officer undertook to refer the Committee's request to the Portfolio Holder and the Strategic Director.

2012 Olympics Update

The Committee noted that the Executive had considered this report at their meeting on 11 January and all of the recommendations had been agreed. Councillor Donaldson indicated that he would be interested in serving on the Member/Officer working group. The Committee agreed that this topic should remain on the work for a further review on progress in 2010/11.

Affordable Housing and Rural Exception Sites

The Committee were informed that there had been good progress in a number of areas since the scrutiny review in the spring of 2008:

- Quarterly reports are sent to Parish Councils and ward Councillors to update on progress in their Parish. These have been generally well received, for example Wiggington Parish Council commented that the report was 'excellent and a great help'.
- A service level agreement has been signed with the Oxfordshire Rural Communities Council (ORCC) in respect of the delivery of the rural housing enabler (RHE) service. This includes a joint work plan for the RHE with clear targets for the work of the enabler.
- Greater resources have been given over to site appraisal work within the Planning Development Control service leading to faster turnaround on appraising suitable sites.

- We have built on positive relationships with the Duchy of Cornwall and some of the Oxford Colleges resulting in negotiation over land acquisition.
- We are in the planning stages for moving to a rolling housing needs programme from April 2010. This will enable us to better understand where we should be targeting our activity.

Resolved

- 1) That the current overview and scrutiny work programme for 2009/10 be agreed.
- 2) That the contents of the Forward Plan be noted.
- 3) Include a briefing session on Built Area Conservation and Tackling Deprivation on the agenda of the 9 March meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 4) That the Portfolio Holder for Customer Service and ICT be asked to delay the Executive's consideration of the 'Phone Access and Telephony Review' until the end of March and to refer the report to the 9 March meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 5) Note that the Executive had agreed the recommendations set out in the report on "Preparation for the 2012 Olympics Tourism Potential" and agree to add the topic to the work programme for a further review of progress 2010/11.

Youth Engagement Scrutiny

The Chairman introduced the three pupils from Banbury School who were observing the meeting as part of their involvement in the Councillor Shadowing programme.

Prior to the meeting the Scrutiny Officer had circulated a first draft of the Committee report on Youth Engagement. The Committee made some comments on the text of the draft report and asked that a revised draft be circulated in advance of their next meeting; copies should also be sent to the councillors and Banbury school pupils involved in the Councillor Shadowing programme.

The Banbury School pupils informed the Committee that they were confident that fellow pupils would be interested in participating in topical debates (which could be held at the school or hosted by the Council at Bodicote House). The Banbury School pupils said that they believed that take up would be greater if the Local Democracy Week activities were extended throughout the year and given greater advance publicity.

The Committee invited the Banbury School pupils to attend their February meeting to participate in further discussions on youth engagement in local democracy. The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that a member of the UK Youth Parliament and youth workers from the County Council would be at the next meeting. The Committee asked the Scrutiny Officer to invite some additional

guests, senior County Council officers working in youth services, to the next meeting, recognising that this might prove difficult given the short notice.

Finally the Chairman explained that there would be a private briefing session in advance of the next meeting and asked Members to forward any questions or topics for discussion to the Scrutiny Officer.

Resolved

- 1) That the Banbury School pupils involved in the Councillor Shadowing programme be invited to the February meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 2) That senior County Council officers working in youth services be invited to the February meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 3) That Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be asked to forward any questions or topics for discussion on youth engagement to the Scrutiny Officer.

The meeting ended at 9.15 pm

Chairman:

Date: