

Cherwell District Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 7 September 2021 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Tom Wallis (Chairman)
Councillor Douglas Webb (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Mike Bishop
Councillor Sandy Dallimore
Councillor Matt Hodgson
Councillor David Hughes
Councillor Perran Moon
Councillor Adam Nell

Substitute Members:

Councillor John Broad (In place of Councillor Ian Middleton)

Also Present:

Councillor Lucinda Wing, Lead Member for Housing (for Items 6 and 7)
Councillor Barry Wood, Leader of the Council

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Simon Holland
Councillor Ian Middleton
Councillor Les Sibley
Councillor Bryn Williams

Officers:

Anita Bradley, Director Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer
Vicki Jessop, Interim Assistant Director Housing and Social Care Commissioning (for Items 6 and 7)
Paul France, Senior Housing Officer (for Item 6)
Frances Evans, Housing Strategy and Development Team Leader (for Item 7)
Emma Faulkner, Democratic and Elections Officer
Lesley Farrell, Democratic and Elections Officer
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

13 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 July 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

14 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

15 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

16 **Changes to Cherwell District Council's Housing Allocation Scheme**

The Committee considered a report from the Interim Assistant Director, Housing and Social Care Commissioning relating to proposed changes to the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme prior to approval being sought from Executive at their 1 November 2021 meeting.

The Interim Assistant Director, Housing and Social Care Commissioning explained that the scheme set out how the Council processes and prioritises applications for social housing, including the criteria for determining priority based on housing need. The allocation of social rented housing is the responsibility of Cherwell District Council (CDC) as the housing authority, with alternative options such as shared ownership going through help to buy agents.

The CDC Housing Allocation Scheme had last been reviewed and amended in November 2018. The Interim Assistant Director, Housing and Social Care Commissioning explained that it was important to review the scheme regularly, to ensure it reflected housing needs in the district as well as taking account of updated statutory guidance and regulatory changes.

The proposed changes offered clarity to wording and definitions in a number of sections of the scheme, as well as adding a new section that dealt with the potential implications of Oxford's unmet housing need.

In response to questions from the Committee the Interim Assistant Director, Housing and Social Care Commissioning clarified that housing applicants with a disability were assessed in terms of how their specific housing needs were affected by their particular disability.

Resolved

- (1) That the proposed changes to the Housing Allocation Scheme be supported

Draft Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement 2021 (Cherwell District Council)

The Committee considered a report from the Interim Assistant Director, Housing and Social Care Commissioning which outlined changes to the Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement and sought comments from the Committee as part of the consultation process.

The Housing Strategy and Development Team Leader gave a presentation detailing the proposed changes, which included reflecting changes to legislation that had occurred since the statement was initially adopted in 2017 and reflecting the council's ambition to deliver more social rented housing.

The Housing Strategy and Development Team Leader explained that the Localism Act 2011 required the Council to promote the consultation to all Registered Providers (RPs) in the district. Two consultation workshops had been held with RPs, in addition the Housing Team had promoted the consultation to stakeholders, voluntary and community groups.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Housing Strategy and Development Team Leader explained that current residents had not directly been encouraged to respond to the consultation, but the consultation was a full public consultation and advertised in line with the council's Consultation and Engagement Strategy.

The Housing Strategy and Development Team Leader then asked the Committee to respond to three questions via the Slido online polling app. The questions were:

- To what extent do you agree/disagree that more social rented homes should be provided?
- To what extent do you agree/disagree that the vision and aims of the new draft strategy are the right one for Cherwell District?
- What challenges might be we in delivering this new strategy for Cherwell District?

Once the consultation period had finished the strategy would be amended to take into account consultation responses, including the comments from the Committee members who had answered the Slido poll questions. The updated strategy would be presented to Executive for approval at their 1 November 2021 meeting.

The Committee were invited to make comments which would be included in the consultation feedback to the Executive.

Further to the earlier question regarding current residents being invited to take part in the consultation, the Committee requested that for future consultations, consideration be given to a mechanism for ensuring residents directly affected by a consultation are contacted and encouraged to respond.

The Committee also requested that a continuous effort be made to improve the quality and standard of housing in the district.

In response to queries from the Committee regarding the type of housing available, the Housing Strategy and Development Team Leader encouraged the Committee to advise parish councils in their wards that a 'parish needs survey' could be undertaken to determine future housing requirements in each area.

Resolved

- (1) That the draft Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement be noted
- (2) That the following comments be submitted to the Executive:
 - a. For all future consultations, a mechanism for ensuring residents directly affected by a consultation are contacted and encouraged to respond
 - b. A continuous effort is required to improve quality and standard of housing in the district

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Constitution Review 2021

The Committee considered a report from the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer regarding the process for the 2021 annual review of the Constitution.

The Constitution was last reviewed in 2020, and one of the conclusions agreed by Full Council at its meeting on 14 December 2020 was that an annual review should be undertaken in autumn each year, with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee making recommendations to Council on any proposed changes.

The report as set out proposed an approach to the 2021 review, including the establishment of an informal cross-party working group, comprising 5 Conservative members, 2 Labour members, 1 Progressive Oxfordshire and 1 Independent Group member.

Councillor Perran Moon advised the Committee that following careful consideration and discussion within the Group, the Labour Group would not participate in the 2021 review if the working group was established as proposed. The reason for the Labour Group's decision was because the 2020 review process had resulted in some recommendations that had cross-party agreement at the working group stage, when considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee resulting in different recommendations going forward to Full Council.

Councillor John Broad echoed the comments of Councillor Moon with regards to the changes made by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to recommendations of the working group, and advised that the Progressive Oxfordshire Group would also not take part in the 2021 review if the working group was constituted in the same way.

Noting the comments put forward on behalf of the two Groups the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that there was a legal responsibility for the Constitution to be kept under review to ensure it remains fit for purpose. The preferred way of doing so would be via discussions with a cross party working group. If the Committee did not resolve to establish a working group as set out in the report, it would still be possible for the legal requirement to be met via an officer led process, but this was not the preferred approach. The Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer reminded the Committee that Full Council was the body responsible for adopting and changing the Council's Constitution and any changes would therefore need to be agreed by Full Council.

The Chairman of the Committee explained that he would like to move forward with a consensus view from Committee and establish the working group as set out.

The Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that as well as establishing the working group, she would be willing to liaise with Political Group Leaders to agree the practical steps and process for the review to allay their concerns arising from the 2020 review.

It was proposed by Councillor Tom Wallis and seconded by Councillor Sandy Dallimore that the recommendations as set out in the report be approved, with an additional recommendation reflecting the suggestion from the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer regarding liaising with Political Group Leaders about the 2021 review process.

In the course of debate it was proposed by Councillor Perran Moon and seconded by Councillor Matt Hodgson that a recorded vote be taken. Having been proposed and seconded, a recorded vote was duly taken and Members voted as follows:

Councillor John Broad	For
Councillor Matt Hodgson	Against
Councillor Perran Moon	Against
Councillor Douglas Webb	For
Councillor Mike Bishop	For
Councillor Sandy Dallimore	For
Councillor Adam Nell	For
Councillor David Hughes	For
Councillor Tom Wallis	For

Resolved

- (1) That the process for the 2021 annual review of the Constitution be endorsed.
- (2) That the establishment of a cross-party Constitution Review working group be agreed.
- (3) That the Director Law and Governance be requested to liaise with Political Group Leaders to agree the practical steps and process for the review.

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Work Programme 2021-22

The Committee considered its work programme for 2021-22, and received an update from officers on potential topics for review that had been raised at the informal work programme planning session held on 30 June.

With regard to the subject of teenage mental health raised by Councillor Perran Moon, the Wellbeing Team had provided information regarding the Oxfordshire mental health prevention concordat, and the Mental Health Prevention Framework which was in place for the period 2020 to 2023.

In addition to the concordat and framework, the Wellbeing Team had advised that the Youth Activators, in partnership with Oxfordshire Mind and Resilient Young Minds, had been delivering a mental health programme in schools. Work so far had been in primary schools but would be expanded to older age groups shortly.

In response to the information provided, Councillor Moon advised that he would still like more information to be provided, particularly in relation to the work of the Youth Activators and the mental health programme. His particular concern was the 13-19 age group due to the increased case load that had been reported nationally.

With regard to the subject of homelessness within the LGBT community raised by Councillor Sandy Dallimore, officers had gone back to the Housing Options and Allocations Manager and asked if it would be possible to record additional information when processing homelessness applications. The Housing Options and Allocations Manager had advised that it was not possible, as the questions asked related to information that had to be recorded annually for statistical returns to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

In response to the further information provided, Councillor Dallimore agreed that the subject should be removed from the topic list for the moment as no further work could be undertaken at this stage.

With regard to the subject of the relationship between the District Council and the parishes, Councillor Dallimore advised that he had now spoken to the Healthy Communities Manager and gathered some more information on what

was proving to be a complex subject. Councillor Dallimore therefore requested agreement of the Committee to set-up a working group of approximately five or six members, to investigate how the district council and parish councils interact and what might be possible in terms of improving the relationship, the flow of information and communication.

The Committee agreed that this was a good subject to investigate, and agreed that a working group should be established. Democratic and Elections Officers advised they would work with Councillor Dallimore and the working group to draft a scoping document for the review, which would be brought back to the October meeting of the Committee for consideration and approval.

Regarding potential new subjects for discussion, Councillor Dallimore proposed that a separate working group be established to look at the subject of member training and education.

Councillor Dallimore proposed that the working group should include the five new Members elected in May 2021, with one or two longer serving Members. The working group would gather views and feedback on the induction process and the ongoing process of member training, to identify any areas for development or improvement in the future.

The Committee supported the suggested topic and agreed to establish a working group. Democratic and Elections Officers advised they would work with Councillor Dallimore and the working group to draft a scoping document for the review, which would be brought back to the October meeting of the Committee for consideration and approval.

Resolved

- (1) That the verbal updates regarding suggested topics for scrutiny be noted.
- (2) That further information be sought and circulated to all Members regarding the Mental Health programme being delivered by CDC Youth Activators and an update and presentation be scheduled for a future Committee meeting.
- (3) That the homelessness in the LGBT Community subject be removed from the topic sheet.
- (4) That a working group be established to consider the subject of the relationship between Cherwell District Council and the Cherwell parishes.
- (5) That a working group be established to look at the subject of Member Training and Education.
- (6) That the update on items previously submitted to Overview and Scrutiny be noted.

- (7) That subject to the inclusion of scoping documents from the working groups being considered at the 19 October meeting, the indicative work programme for 2021-2022 be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.17 pm

Chairman:

Date: