

**Cherwell District Council**  
**Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board**

Minutes of a meeting of the Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, OX15 4AA, on 15 June 2010 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Nicholas Mawer (Chairman)  
Councillor David Hughes (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Alyas Ahmed  
Councillor Rick Atkinson  
Councillor Maurice Billington  
Councillor Tim Emptage  
Councillor Neil Prestidge  
Councillor Carol Steward  
Councillor Martin Weir

Apologies for absence: Councillor Margaret Cullip  
Councillor Douglas Webb

Officers: Gillian Greaves, Head of Housing Services  
Mark Taylor, Housing Grants Team Leader  
Natasha Clark, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

**2 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3 Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business.

**4 Minutes**

The Minutes of the meetings held on 16 February 2010 and 19 May 2010 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**5 Disabled Facilities Grants ~ Briefing**

The Chairman welcomed the Head of Housing Services and the Housing Grants Team Leader to the meeting.

The Chairman explained that this was an opportunity for the Board to learn more about Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) which had been considered by one of the budget scrutiny working groups as part of the 2010/11 budget scrutiny process. The topic has also been raised by Board Members as a potential topic for scrutiny in 2010/11. Following the discussion the Board would reflect on the evidence presented and if there were any issues that they wished to explore further, these should be added to the 2010/11 Work Programme.

The Head of Housing Services began by explaining that Disabled Facilities Grants are mandatory and as the as the housing authority Cherwell District Council has to meet its statutory duty to respond. The delivery of DFGs is also enshrined in the Councils priorities, including the Sustainable Communities Strategy, the Cherwell Housing Strategy 2005-11 and the Private Sector Housing Strategy which was adopted in March 2010. The Head of Housing Services highlighted that to address one of the Strategy's four priorities 'Support vulnerable people so that they can remain living in their own homes, and improve their health outcomes' a number of actions linked to DFGs had been developed. These included the need for a DFG policy to address prioritisation and allocation of resources and the development of practices and procedures to improve the efficiency and value for money for the DFG service.

The Housing Grants Team Leader advised the Board that applications were processed as they were received from the Oxfordshire County Council Occupational Therapists. The government's test of "fairness" applied to the assessment of need which is the responsibility of the Occupational Therapists and not a matter for the Housing team. Cherwell District Council cannot select or reject applications. All applications are capped at £30K and all are means tested except for disabled children under 19 years.

In terms of funding, the Board was advised that the DFG budget for 2010-11 was set at £950k. This was made up of a fixed £375k Government grant and £575k capital programme funding. It was not yet clear what, if any, impact the new Government's proposed cuts to public spending would have on DFGs.

The Housing Grants Team Leader explained that the Housing team were working with the Housing Association to explore ways for Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to fund adaptations. At present only Charter had an obligation (under the terms of the stock transfer) to fund DFG related work and the current spend was about £350K each year. Historically this has not been the case with Banbury Homes, however, now that Charter and Banbury Homes have merged there will need to be a more equitable approach to meet the needs of the ex Charter and ex Banbury Homes residents.

The Board was advised that a significant volume of very small scale adaption work was undertaken by the Small Repairs Handyman. This was a very successful scheme that Cherwell District Council had been operating for a couple of years. Funding came from other grants and the work was not included in the DFG figures. Other local authorities were now replicating this scheme.

In response to questions from the Board, the Housing Grants Team Leader explained that Cherwell District Council was entirely reliant on Oxfordshire County Council for referrals. Therefore any delays at the County would affect Cherwell's ability to allocate and carry out work. The Head of Housing Services advised the Board that Cherwell was working with partners to improve the service to disabled people. Work was underway on a new joint strategy, the County Physical Disabilities Strategy, which will provide an opportunity for Cherwell, the County and the other Districts to contribute to shared objectives. It is anticipated that a draft will be ready in September 2010 for consultation with all stakeholders.

The Board commented that the development of both the "County Physical Disabilities Strategy" and Cherwell District Council's "Disabled Facilities Grants Policy" would contribute to an improved service. The Board agreed that they would nominate Members to meet with Housing Services Officers to consider aspects of the Disabled Facilities Grants Policy and that the Head of Housing Services be invited to a future meeting to present a draft version of the policy.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Housing Services and the Housing Grants Team Leader for attending the meeting and the detailed information provided. The Board thanked and commended the Housing Services staff for their hard work for the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants which supported and assisted vulnerable members of the community.

**Resolved**

- (1) That Councillors Steward, Billington, Cullip and Ahmed be nominated to meet with Housing Services staff to consider aspects of Cherwell District Council's Disabled Facilities Grants Policy.
- (2) That the Head of Housing Services be invited to attend a future meeting of the Board to present a draft version of the Disabled Facilities Grants Policy.

**Draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2009/10**

The Board considered the Draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2009/10. The draft Annual Report contained information relating to the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board and various Task and Finish Group reviews.

The Board noted that the production of an annual report was a constitutional requirement and that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would consider the report at its meeting on 22 June 2010 and refer it to Council in July 2010.

**Resolved**

That the contents of the draft Overview and Scrutiny Board Annual Report 2009/10 be noted.

## **Appointment of Working Group Members**

The Chairman welcomed Councillors Atkinson, Emptage, Hughes and Prestidge as new members of the Board.

The Board considered a report which set out proposals for the membership of the Finance Scrutiny Working Group and the Performance Scrutiny Working Group for 2010/11.

The Chairman advised the Board that following changes to the membership of the Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board there were currently two vacancies on both the Finance Scrutiny Working Group and the Performance Scrutiny Working Group. Members of the Board confirmed that they were happy to remain on the same working group for the coming year and agreed that the three new Board Members would fill the vacancies on the Working Groups.

### **Resolved**

- 1) That the following Councillors be appointed to the Finance Scrutiny Working Group for 2010/11: Councillor Mawer (Chairman), Councillor Hughes (Vice-Chairman), Councillor Atkinson, Councillor Emptage, Councillor Tompson, Councillor Webb, Councillor Weir.
- 2) That the following Councillors be appointed to the Performance Scrutiny Working Group for 2010/2011: Councillor Hughes (Chairman), Councillor Mawer (Vice-Chairman), Councillor Ahmed, Councillor Billington, Councillor Cullip, Councillor Prestidge, Councillor Steward.

## **Draft Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2010/11**

The Board considered the report on the draft overview and scrutiny work programme 2010/11 and made a number of observations. The Board acknowledged the need to take account of potential resource constraints and the boundaries of the District Council's responsibilities when determining the work programme. They noted that it was important to ensure that any scrutiny review would deliver tangible results for the benefit of the residents of the district.

### **Update to Work Programme Items 2009/10**

The Board noted the update to the work programme items 2009/10 including the status of previous scrutiny reviews and proposed timescales for further updates and progress reports. The Board noted that Councillors Steward and Weir had previously been nominated to participate in the fees and charges review group. Members requested further information from Officers about the group to enable them to appoint a further participant at the July meeting.

### **Work Programme Items for 2010/11**

Members of the Board had suggested a number of topics for inclusion on the 2010/11 work programme.

**Disabled Facilities Grants**

This had been considered at agenda item 5.

**The Cost and Length of Planning Appeals**

The Board noted that the Performance Scrutiny Working Group had previously raised this item when considering the quarterly Performance Management Framework data. Members requested the Scrutiny Officer to liaise with planning officers and the performance team to provide an update to the Performance Scrutiny Working Group at their next meeting.

**The cost of Cherwell District Council employing external consultants**

The Board agreed that this was an interesting issue and would consider it in more detail later in the year.

**Resolved**

- (1) That the Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board element of the draft Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2010/11 be noted.
- (2) That the update on items carried forward from the 2009/10 overview and scrutiny work programme be noted.
- (3) That Councillors Steward and Weir be nominated to participate in the fees and charges policy review group and that a further Member be nominated at the Board's July 2010 meeting.
- (4) That the items suggested for inclusion on the 2010/11 Work Programme be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm

Chairman:

Date: