

## **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 10 September 2024 at 6.30 pm

#### Present:

Councillor Dr Isabel Creed (Chairman)  
Councillor Nigel Simpson (Vice-Chairman)  
Councillor Gordon Blakeway  
Councillor John Broad  
Councillor Phil Chapman  
Councillor Grace Conway-Murray  
Councillor Andrew Crichton  
Councillor Frank Ideh  
Councillor Lynne Parsons  
Councillor Barry Wood

#### Substitute Members:

#### Apologies for absence:

Councillor Harry Knight  
Councillor Simon Lytton

#### Also Present:

Councillor David Hingley, Leader of The Council  
Councillor Rob Pattenden, Portfolio Holder - Healthy Communities  
Councillor Chris Brant, Portfolio Holder - Corporate Services

#### Also Present Virtually:

Councillor Jean Conway, Portfolio Holder - Planning and Development Management

#### Officers:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive  
Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities  
Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer  
David Peckford, Assistant Director Planning & Development  
Nicola Riley, Assistant Director Wellbeing & Housing  
Shona Ware, Assistant Director Customer Focus  
Martyn Surfleet, Democratic and Elections Officer  
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

#### Officers Attending Virtually:

Paul France, Strategic Housing Team Leader

10 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

11 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 18 July 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

12 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

13 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

14 **Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 1 2024 - 2025**

The Committee considered a report from the Assistant Director – Customer Focus that detailed the council's performance position at the end of quarter 1 2024-2025.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services advised that 50 of the 57 Business Plan measures had been achieved, 6 were operating slightly behind target and 1 being behind target. The one measure that was operating behind target related to temporary accommodation where 68 households were reported in temporary accommodation against the maximum target of 45. It was reported that the number of new placements was now comparable to the number of moving out into other housing options, therefore the reported increase had shown a slight slowing down.

In response to a question regarding how the council defined the term "vulnerable" the Assistant Director – Housing and Wellbeing alongside the Strategic Housing Team Leader advised that it was considered in the broadest possible sense, but Housing legislation included specific set of criteria that helped determine if a person or household was "Vulnerable" which ensured a consistent approach.

In response to a question regarding the relationship between the green rating for delivered affordable housing and the red rating of homeless households in temporary accommodation, and what the council was doing to reconcile the difference, the Assistant Director – Housing and Wellbeing alongside the

Strategic Housing Team Leader advised that the ratings related to annually set measurable targets and indicated the council's position on achieving said targets. With regards affordable housing, the Assistant Director Planning and Development that the overall housing target and qualifying target for affordable housing would be reviewed as part of the Local Plan process and would have regard to the Council motion to target 50%. It was important to balance the target with what was viable to ensure housing delivery occurred.

In response to a question regarding BP1.2.10, % of Major Applications overturned at appeal and the cost to the council, the Assistant Director Planning and Development advised that the national target of 10% was the indicator whilst the actual for quarter 1 was 18.8%. The council was also measured nationally over a two-year period and this figure was 11.2% as reported to Planning Committee. The Assistant Director Planning and Development explained that the number of appeals this year had been higher than previous years resulting in more appeals being allowed. This was being reviewed and Planning Officers would work with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management and Planning Committee to ensure recommendations were sound, grounds for refusal were as defensible as possible, and that the council's decision making process was robust. The cost of appeals varied greatly and were subject to many factors The Chairman reminded the Committee that Planning Application Appeals would be a substantive agenda item at a future meeting.

In response to a request that the red and amber indicators on the EDI Action Plan action plan be considered at the first meeting of the EDI working group, Committee endorsed the request.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That having given due consideration, the Council's Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 1 2024 - 2025 performance be noted, and no recommendations be submitted for Executive consideration.
- (2) That it be delegated to officers to arrange the EDI performance indicators be added to the agenda of the first meeting of the EDI Working Group.

### **New Cherwell District Council Allocations Scheme**

The Committee considered a report from the Assistant Director – Housing and Wellbeing which sought consideration of draft Cherwell District Council Allocations Scheme prior to the Scheme being submitted to Executive in December.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities explained that the Allocations Scheme was the Policy that ensured the fair allocation of social housing properties within district and was used for the administration of the waiting list for social housing, which was part of our statutory duties. It was good practice to regularly review the Scheme to

ensure it remained compliant and continued to meet the needs of applicants in the best way. At their July meeting, Executive had agreed the draft new Allocations Scheme for consultation. A public and stakeholder consultation on the new Scheme was currently under way.

The Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities explained that the policy is heavily informed by legislation, Council's had flexibility to be able to manage and administer their own schemes and prioritise certain applicant circumstances. The main changes proposed in the new Scheme were:

- An increase in the banding for statutory homeless households
- The creation of a domestic abuse category within Band 2 to comply with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Income threshold being capped at £80,000 for applications on larger properties
- Changes to how overcrowded households are managed through the waiting lists
- Additional preference for people leaving the armed forces and their families – consistent with the armed forces covenant within legislation

In response to a question relating to applicants with rent arrears the Assistant Director – Housing & Wellbeing advised that. Officers worked with applicants on a case by case basis. An applicant's rent record would be looked at the time of bidding and should have a cleared outstanding housing debt in full or evidence they have made a concerted effort to address their housing related debt.

In response to questions relating to the waiting list, available stock, how many providers the council worked with, the Assistant Director – Housing & Wellbeing advised that there were currently just over 2050 applicants on the waiting list and that stock availability varied from week to week. The council operated a choice based letting scheme with a weekly newsletter to those on the waiting list. With regards to current providers, the council worked with over 30 providers with Sanctuary being the largest. All registered providers signed up to the council's nominations agreement.

In the course of discussion, officers were requested to consider including in the report to Executive the relationship between the number of prospective applicants on the waiting list and those who don't meet the criteria but are supported by renting in the private sector with housing benefit support.

In response to questions regarding the changes and they would impact on supply and availability of properties, the Assistant Director – Housing & Wellbeing advised that the increase in supply was linked to the development. The Allocations Policy focused on the allocation of the limited stock available in line with the criteria and priority bands in the Policy rather than creating supply.

In response to a question regarding the Band 2 Categories: Domestic Abuse, and introduction for survivors of domestic abuse who wished to remain in their home, the Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing Services explained that

this was intended to ensure each person's circumstance was best met. Individuals applying in this category who were high risk could make be eligible for Band 1 or may wish/need to make a homeless application for temporary accommodation away from their current home. There was a Duty Team during office hours and an Emergency Out of Hours services to assist individuals at risk of homelessness.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That having given due consideration, the New Cherwell District Council Allocations Scheme be recommended for adoption by Executive,
- (2) That it be recommended to Executive that they receive a summary of the consultation for consideration alongside the Scheme being recommended for adoption.

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### **Cost of Living 2023/2024 Review and 2024/2025 Activities**

The Committee considered a report from the Assistant Director – Housing and Wellbeing, that provided an update on additional activity described in the 2023/24 Cost of Living action and proposed approaches and activity for 2024/2025.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities, advised of the positive impact the councils' interventions has had on residents of the district, and that confirmation had been received of continued funding through HSF6 agreements with Oxfordshire County Council.

In response to clarification as to the report stating "Not Applicable" against "Climate and Environmental Impact" in the Implications section despite the report detailing activity relating to reduction in energy use and reduction of thermal loss, the Assistant Director – Housing and Wellbeing undertook to provide clarification to Members.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That having given due consideration, the Cost of Living 2023/2024 review and proposed range of activities for 2024/2025 be noted and recommended to Executive to endorse.

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### **Work Programme 2024 - 2025**

The Chair provided an update on Committee's Work Programme 2024-25 advising that anticipated meeting dates for the majority of the suggested topics had been agreed and were as set out in the agenda. Planning Application Appeals and Infrastructure Funding and Delivery and S106 Contributions had subsequently been scheduled for the January meeting.

With regards the Local Plan, the Chair advised following discussion with officers, that due to the importance and complexity of the Local Plan, an extraordinary Overview and Scrutiny Committee be held to focus on the Local Plan. The extraordinary Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting would take place on Tuesday 12 November ahead of Executive consideration of the Local Plan on 2 December. Given the importance of this item, all Members would be invited to attend and a briefing ahead of the meeting would be scheduled.

The Chair advised that the Chief Constable and Police and Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley will join our March meeting to give their annual updates. As usual, all Members will be invited to attend this meeting. The Chair agreed to liaise with officers regarding a Committee suggestion that the Chair of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (BOB), Integrated Care System (BOBICB) also be invited to attend the March meeting as the Committee could get value in a feedback loop.

The Governance and Elections Manager provided an update on the nominations received for the Food Insecurity, Climate Action and EDI working groups and encouraged members to come forward should they wish to participate. The first working group meetings would be scheduled in due course. It was also advised that the Personnel Committee will be asked to agree the continuation of the EDI working group at its next meeting and to nominate members. Arrangements would then be made for the first EDI working group meeting.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That having given due consideration, that the indicative Work Programme 2024 – 2025 be noted and endorsed.
- (2) That the update on the scrutiny working groups (Climate Action; Food Insecurity; and Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion) be noted.

The meeting ended at 7.50 pm

Chairman:

Date: