

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 15 October 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 Frank Ideh
Councillor Simon Lytton
Councillor Lynne Parsons
Councillor Barry Wood

Also Present:

Councillor David Hingley, Leader of the Council

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Andrew Crichton
Councillor Harry Knight

Officers:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive
Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities
Richard Smith, Head of Housing
Michael Carr, Interim Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead
Matt Swinford, Democratic and Elections Officer

18 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

19 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 10 September 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

20 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

21 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

22 **New Cherwell District Council Housing Strategy 2025-2030**

The Committee considered a report from the Assistant Director – Wellbeing and Housing that presented the new Cherwell District Council Housing Strategy 2025-2030 for the Committee to review ahead of submission to Executive for adoption.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Housing explained that the Council had developed and delivered a Housing Strategy in accordance with its statutory duties from 2019 to 2024. A review of the current strategy and development of a new strategy was required to reflect changing national and local context over recent years and develop new priorities and objectives to be delivered. The Executive had agreed a public and stakeholder consultation commence on the draft revised Strategy at their 9 September 2024 meeting. Following the conclusion of the consultation and consideration of all comments, a final version would be submitted to Executive for approval.

Members posed several questions to the Head of Housing and the Corporate Director - Communities relating to the consultation process, National Policy Framework and local policy context as well as the scope of the policy, the existing housing stock, types of development and the social and physical infrastructure and resulting environmental impact. The Head of Housing and Corporate Director Communities explained the new Housing Strategy had been formulated in conjunction with the NPPF and the emerging Local Plan, but the full impact was unknown as consultation was ongoing.

With regards to the number of vacant properties, according to the latest council tax data, approximately 17,000 properties within Cherwell were vacant and that there were enforcement policies within the Housing Strategy to help tackle vacant properties. Stipulations on types of new developments were included in the emerging Cherwell Local Plan as well as the Oxfordshire Homelessness and Rough Sleeper policy and that schemes to aid in affordability were available for first time buyers.

Members also questioned what targets, metrics and measures of success were in place to monitor and deliver the Housing Strategy. The Head of Housing and Corporate Director Communities explained that the measures for tracking progress were outlined within the strategy, that an action plan would be used to monitor the strategy alongside regular update reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In the course of the discussion, the Committee agreed to request officers to substitute the current climate and environmental impact implications assessment of “not applicable” with a more appropriate description in the report to the Executive, and that the reference to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 be removed from the final version of the Housing Strategy.

Resolved

- (1) That having given due consideration, the following comments and recommendations be referred to the Executive in respect of the draft Housing Strategy:
 - i) That the development of the new Local Plan be aligned with the new Housing Strategy, once adopted.
 - ii) To include in the Housing Strategy Action Plan a section to provide further details and emphasis on single people in insecure accommodation (e.g. “sofa surfing”).
 - iii) That the reference text stating “not applicable” in the climate and environmental impact implications assessment be substituted with a more appropriate description in the officer report to the Executive.
 - iv) The reference to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 be removed from the final version of the Housing Strategy.

- (2) That officers be recommended to submit a summary of consultation responses received as part of the report to Executive and Executive be recommended to give those responses due consideration.

23

Working Groups Update

The chair provided an update on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Food Insecurity and Climate Action Scrutiny Working Groups since the last Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 September 2024.

The Vice-Chair of the Food Insecurity Working Group, Councillor Phil Chapman, gave a brief update on the first meeting of the working group, advising the appointment of Councillor Rebecca Biegel as Chair and providing an update on the focus and scope of the Working Group for 2024 – 2025, which was set out in the terms of reference submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for agreement.

Resolved

- (1) That the Scrutiny Working Groups update be noted and that the updated membership of each of the Scrutiny Working Groups be agreed, (Climate Change Scrutiny Working Group, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Scrutiny Working Group and Food Insecurity Scrutiny Working Group).

- (2) That the terms of reference for the Food Insecurity Scrutiny Working Group be agreed.

24 **Work Programme 2024-25**

The Chair gave an update on the work programme 2024 – 2025. Further to discussion with officers regarding the Committee's consideration of the emerging Local Plan prior to Executive consideration on 2 December, an extraordinary meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be scheduled for 12 November. Given the importance of the Local Plan, all Members would be invited to attend.

Resolved

- (1) That the updated Scrutiny Work Programme 2024/2025 be agreed.

The meeting ended at 7.57 pm

Chairman:

Date: