

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 24 October 2023 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor John Broad (Chairman)
Councillor Dr Isabel Creed (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Patrick Clarke
Councillor Ian Middleton
Councillor Dr Chukwudi Okeke
Councillor Lynne Parsons
Councillor Rob Pattenden
Councillor Dorothy Walker
Councillor Douglas Webb
Councillor Bryn Williams

Substitute Members:

Councillor George Reynolds (In place of Councillor Ian Harwood)

Also Present:

Councillor Sandy Dallimore, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services
Councillor Andrew McHugh, Portfolio Holder for Cleaner and Greener Communities

Also Present Virtually:

Councillor Barry Wood, Leader of the Council

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Ian Harwood
Councillor Simon Holland

Officers:

Stephen Hinds, Corporate Director Resources
Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
David Peckford, Assistant Director Planning & Development
Ed Potter, Assistant Director Environmental Services
Nicola Riley, Assistant Director Wellbeing & Housing
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager
Patrick Davis, Democratic and Elections Officer

Officers Attending Virtually:

Yvonne Rees, Chief Executive
Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities
Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance & S151 Officer
Mona Walsh, Assistant Director - Property
Shona Ware, Assistant Director Customer Focus
Tony Brummell, Building Control and Flood Risk Manager
Tim Hughes, Head of Regulatory Services & Community Safety
Paul Seckington, Head of Development Management
Richard Smith, Head of Housing
Emma Faulkner, Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead

33 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

34 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings held on 19 September 2023 were agreed as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

35 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

36 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

37 **Sanctuary Housing**

The Chairman welcomed the following officers from Sanctuary Housing: Regional Director, Katie Poole; Head of Neighbourhood Operations, Yvonne Crinean; Head of Development, Sophie Bell; Head of Property Services, Joanne Stringer; Neighbourhood Partnerships Manager, Charlie Heritage; and, Regional Customer Service Manager, Ranjit Sall, who would be giving a presentation regarding the association's work in the Cherwell area.

The Head of Neighbourhood Operations gave an overview of the range of services offered by Sanctuary Housing within the Cherwell district and a summary of the work currently being undertaken by the association. The Head of Neighbourhood Operations explained the various communication methods available for tenants to contact the association and the metrics that were used to measure performance in communication..

In response to Members' comments regarding direct communication between elected members on behalf of residents and Sanctuary Housing, the Regional

Director explained that a Regional Customer Service Manager role had been established in recognition of the need to improve contact. The Regional Director confirmed that Sanctuary Housing officer roles and contact details would be circulated.

The Head of Development provided the Committee with an update on the approach taken by Sanctuary Housing in relation to new housing schemes, with a particular focus on sites that were currently under development within the Cherwell area.

In response to Members' questions, the Head of Development explained that more information on the specification of houses would be circulated. Builders and contractors were required to sign up to Sanctuary standards.

The Head of Property Services provided an overview of Sanctuary Housing's strategy regarding investments to the existing housing stock and explained the approach taken to prioritising improvements to properties. Information was also shared on the management of empty homes and Sanctuary Housing's approach to dealing with reported damp and mould in its properties.

The Regional Director reported on Sanctuary Housing's approach to sustainability. A Sustainability Report has been published in the summer and would be circulated to Committee members. The Regional Director advised that currently just over 50% of the Sanctuary social homes within the Cherwell District Council area required some form of retrofit works to ensure that they met the target Sanctuary Housing had set itself to achieve an EPC rating of A-C in all Sanctuary social homes by 2030.

The Neighbourhood Partnerships Manager gave an overview regarding Community Investment in Cherwell. The Committee was advised that Sanctuary's strategic focus was on building connection and resilience for its customers and communities. This generally involved working alongside organisations including Cherwell District Council and other local charities and partners.

The Chairman thanked the representatives from Sanctuary Housing for their attendance.

Resolved

- (1) That the presentation from Sanctuary Housing be noted.

Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 2 2023-24

The Committee considered a report from the Assistant Director, Customer Focus, that detailed the quarter two performance for 2023/2024.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and Assistant Director Customer Focus gave an overview of the processes for setting and changing the key performance indicators during the financial year.

The Committee was advised that all 26 performance indicators had been achieved or were within tolerance and most of the milestones had been met. It was anticipated that the milestones that had not been achieved by quarter two should be met by the end of the financial year.

Members of the Committee had submitted questions in advance of the meeting which duly responded to.

In response to a question on indicator BP1.2.01, an increase in the number of homeless households, the Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing Wellbeing advised that unfortunately this was not just a local issue but part of a wider national trend. The Committee was advised that the aim was to relocate families that were housed in temporary accommodation in to self-contained housing options as soon as possible. The intention was to then move these households in to a permanent home within the prescribed three month target. However, the shortage of affordable housing with the Cherwell area presented a significant challenge to achieving this objective. The Head of Housing outlined the actions being taken to alleviate the lack of supply of affordable housing in relation to demand for such properties. An update on the number of properties becoming available was also provided to the Committee.

The Assistant Director of Finance, responded to the question regarding indicator BP1.2.07, as to whether the targets for housing benefit and council tax event changes should be more challenging, explaining that the goals set by the Council were already much higher than those set nationally by the Department for Work and Pensions. The Committee was also advised that forthcoming changes regarding Universal Credits may potentially impact on the current claim processing timescales and, as such, the existing performance indicators would be sufficiently challenging.

In response to the question regarding six-week mental health activity programmes for 14 to 16 years olds with behavioural difficulties, the Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing, advised that the course was not designed to be a clinical intervention and that the students were able to refer themselves with the aim of improving their mental health. The current measurement of success was comparing the outcome of surveys undertaken at both the beginning and end of the six-week period. The Committee was advised that additional performance measures were being considered.

The Chairman raised a question regarding the process of deciding the performance indicators and associated target measures that the Council had implemented for the current year. The Assistant Director, Customer Focus explained that the Executive agreed the measures at the start of the fiscal year and as had been outlined, there were mechanisms in place for revising the measures if necessary.

In response to a question regarding indicator BP1.2.08, the percentage of Major Planning Applications determined within the National Indicator, the Head of Development Management advised that metric was set at national level and that the Council had repeatedly exceeded the target in recent years.

In response to a question on indicator BP1.2.13, Net Additional Housing Completions, the Assistant Director of Planning and Development explained that the targets had a 20% margin built in to allow for market fluctuations. The Committee was advised that the quarter two target was within the margin but the year-to-date figure was a red indicator.

Councillor Okeke In response to a request for clarification on the format of the EDI Quarter 2 update, particularly regarding how the in-progress status was shown on the report, the Assistant Director, Customer Focus explained that these were milestone actions and as such were under constant review. They were due to be discussed at the next EDI working group meeting.

Resolved

- (1) That having given due consideration, the Council's Quarter 2 2023-24 performance be noted and no recommendations be submitted for Executive consideration.

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12-Month Climate Action Plan 2023 - 2024

The Climate Action Manager and Corporate Director Communities submitted a report which set out the background and content of the newly produced 12-month Action Plan for climate change, which was based on the council's 2020 Climate Change Framework.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Cleaner and Greener Communities commended the Climate Action Manager for his hard work progressing the Action Plan and thanked the Climate Action Working Group for their ongoing valuable contribution. The Portfolio Holder for Cleaner and Greener Communities reminded the Committee that the Action Plan was a baseline and would be an iterative process. It therefore distinguished between actions which were already planned and those which were aspirational.

The Assistant Director for Environmental Services explained that the specialist external consultants BioRegional, had carried out a detailed review, including a gap analysis and an assessment of the actions in terms of those which were most impactful and those over which the council had the most influence.

In response to a question regarding an increase in emissions in 2021/2022 the Assistant Director Environmental Services, explained that figures for 2020/2021 had been lower than usual due to Covid related closures of leisure centres and reduced vehicle usage. The increase coincided with the re-opening of leisure centres and people returning to work. Councillor Middleton referred to a list of questions he had submitted in advance of the meeting and confirmed he was happy to receive responses after the meeting.

The Committee echoed the comments of the Portfolio Holder for Cleaner and Greener Communities and thanked the Climate Action Manager for his work in producing the Action Plan.

Resolved

- (1) That having given due consideration, the Council's 12-month Climate Action Plan 2023-24 be noted and no recommendations be submitted for Executive consideration.
- (2) That having given due consideration, the potential resource implications relating to the implementation of the Council's 12-month Climate Action Plan be noted and no recommendations be submitted to Executive for consideration.

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Working Group Updates

The Principal Officer – Scrutiny and Democratic Lead gave an update on the work of the Climate Action, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Food Insecurity working groups.

The Committee was advised that following the adoption of the Motion regarding Retrofitting of properties at the meeting of full Council on the 16 November 2023, there may be a requirement for the Committee to review the terms of reference of the Climate Action working group. Officers would have detailed discussions with the Climate Action working group and report back to the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

Resolved

- (1) That the working group updates be noted.

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Work Programme 2023-24

The Committee considered the indicative work programme for 2023/24.

Resolved

- (1) That the indicative work programme be approved.

The meeting ended at 9.15 pm

Chairman:

Date: