

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 1 August 2023 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor John Broad (Chairman)
Councillor Patrick Clarke
Councillor Simon Holland
Councillor Ian Middleton
Councillor Dr Chukwudi Okeke
Councillor Lynne Parsons
Councillor Dorothy Walker
Councillor Bryn Williams

Substitute Members:

Councillor George Reynolds (In place of Councillor Douglas Webb)
Councillor Sean Woodcock (In place of Councillor Isabel Creed)

Also Present Virtually:

Councillor Barry Wood, Leader of the Council
Councillor Nicholas Mawer, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Isabel Creed
Councillor Ian Harwood
Councillor Rob Pattenden
Councillor Douglas Webb

Officers:

Nicola Riley, Assistant Director Wellbeing & Housing
Richard Smith, Head of Housing
Emma Faulkner, Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead

Officers Attending Virtually:

Yvonne Rees, Chief Executive
Robert Jolley, Assistant Director Growth & Economy
Shona Ware, Assistant Director Customer Focus

14 **Declarations of Interest**

7. Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 1 2023/24.
Councillor Lynne Parsons, Other Registerable Interest, as a volunteer for Citizens Advice Bureau, which was mentioned in the performance measures.

15 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 27 June 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

16 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Patrick Clarke, following the announcement at Full Council that he would be replacing Councillor Maurice Billington on the Committee.

17 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

18 **Tenants Charter**

The Committee considered a report from the Assistant Director – Wellbeing and Housing that gave an overview of the proposed Tenants Charter.

Councillor Nick Mawer, Portfolio Holder for Housing, introduced the report, explaining that the Charter had been produced following a Motion to Full Council and a commitment being given to implement a Charter for residents that rent via the Council.

Councillor Mawer explained that the Charter outlined the expected relationship between the Council as a landlord and its tenants, and complimented wider legislation changes as a result of the ongoing Renters Reform Bill that was currently progressing through Parliament, and the Social Housing Regulation Act that had received Royal Assent.

Council has a wider strategic and statutory role within housing standards across the district. Encouraging good landlord and tenant relations. Survey of tenants, high response rate and overwhelmingly positive.

Councillor Mawer added that commitments were made during debate on the motion at Full Council, to raise awareness of the Charter across the district. The Council was unable to make private landlords or Registered Social Providers adopt the Charter for their own tenants, however it was hoped that it could be used as a starting point for private residents to refer to in the event they needed to seek advice for their own tenancies.

The draft Charter had been subject to consultation with residents, and had achieved a high response rate that was overwhelmingly positive.

The Head of Housing added that a detailed public awareness campaign would be drafted ready for presenting to Executive alongside the draft Charter, with the proposed publicity following the three commitments detailed in the Charter.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding the language used in the Charter and it needing to be accessible to all Council tenants, the Assistant Director – Wellbeing and Housing advised that the team would work with colleagues from Communications to ensure the final document was accessible to everyone.

With regard to comments from the Committee requesting additional information as to how tenants could raise grievances or issues with the Council as their landlord, the Head of Housing highlighted references to the Council complaint process and the Local Government Ombudsman should complaints not be resolved satisfactorily. It was agreed that further consideration could be given to making the section clearer.

In response to comments regarding the Charter being made available in relevant languages, the Assistant Director – Wellbeing and Housing assured the Committee that the team would work with Communications colleagues to ensure information was provided in all required languages.

It was proposed by Councillor Sean Woodcock and seconded by Councillor Patrick Clarke that the draft Tenants Charter be recommended for adoption by Executive, subject to comments on consideration of the language used in the Charter, ensuring the final draft was accessible to all tenants, and additional clarity on how residents could raise issues with the Council as their landlord.

Resolved

- (1) That having given due consideration, the draft Tenants Charter be recommended for adoption by Executive subject to the following comments
 - a. Consideration of the language used in the Charter, ensuring the final draft is accessible to all tenants
 - b. Additional clarity on how residents can raise issues with the Council as their landlord
- (2) That the comments regarding the comprehensive communications plan to be presented to Executive alongside the draft Charter be noted.

Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 1 2023/24

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

Councillor Barry Wood, Leader of the Council, introduced the report, and explained that the Council had in place a comprehensive and robust performance management framework. For Quarter one, 82% of measures had achieved their target.

With regards to Peer Reviews actions, the Assistant Director – Customer Focus clarified that 15 of the actions had been achieved during quarter one, rather than 14 as stated in the report.

In response to questions asked by the Committee in relation to indicator BP1.2.04 Number of affordable homes delivered, the Assistant Director – Growth and Economy confirmed he would seek a detailed response for circulation after the meeting.

Regarding indicator BP1.2.13 Net additional housing completions to meet Cherwell needs, the Assistant Director – Growth and Economy advised the Committee that the Council had an annual obligation to report details of the number of houses completed. The annual target was 1142, which meant a quarterly target of 286. Quarter one had come in slightly under target with 173 completions, however the Assistant Director – Growth and Economy explained that historically quarterly figures fluctuated dependent on outside influences such as market conditions and developer activity. For 2022/23 the Council had achieved 1318 completions across the year, exceeding target.

A number of detailed questions were asked in relation to indicators BP1.2.10 and BP1.2.11, % of major and non-major applications overturned at appeal; BP2.2.01 % waste recycled and composted; BP3.2.01 and BP3.2.02 % of Council tax collected, increase council tax base and % of Business rates collected, increase NNDR base; and the measure relating to illegal flytips. Officers agreed to circulate written responses on the questions after the meeting.

Resolved

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

Working Groups Update

The Committee received verbal updates on the work of the Climate Action and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion working groups.

Speaking on behalf of the Climate Action working group, Councillor Broad explained that the group had a good debate at its last meeting, and would be

meeting later in August to determine what actions the Council could focus on in relation to the climate emergency.

Regarding the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion working group, Councillor Parsons reported that Councillor Gemma Coton had been elected Chair of the group, and it had been agreed that robust targets and milestones were needed for the high level actions agreed previously as part of the EDI action plans.

The Food Insecurity working group were due to meet later in August, and an update would be provided at the September meeting of the Committee.

Resolved

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

21

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 8.05 pm

Chairman:

Date: