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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 11 March 2025 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Dr Isabel Creed (Chairman)
Councillor Nigel Simpson (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Gordon Blakeway
Councillor John Broad
Councillor Andrew Crichton
Councillor Frank Ideh
Councillor Simon Lytton
Councillor Lynne Parsons

Substitute Members:

Councillor David Rogers (In place of Councillor Barry Wood)

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Phil Chapman
Councillor Grace Conway-Murray
Councillor Harry Knight
Councillor Barry Wood

Also Present:

Councillor David Hingley, Leader of the Council
Councillor Lesley McLean, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property & Regeneration

Also Present Virtually:

Councillor Robert Parkinson, Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities

Officers:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive
Stephen Hinds, Corporate Director Resources and Transformation
Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities
Mona Walsh, Assistant Director - Property
Tim Hughes, Head of Regulatory Services & Community Safety
Nicola Riley, Assistant Director Housing and Wellbeing
Michael Carr, Interim Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead
Martyn Surfleet, Democratic and Elections Officer

55 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

56 **Petitions and Requests to Address the Meeting**

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

57 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28 January 2025 were agreed as correct record and signed by the Chairman.

58 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairmans announcements.

59 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

60 **Adjournment of the Meeting**

Due to technical difficulties with the audio visual system and webcast, the Chairman moved that the meeting stand adjourned for a 15 minutes to allow for technical issues to be resolved.

Resolved:

That the meeting be adjourned for 15 minutes.

61 **Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership**

The Committee considered a presentation from the Head of Regulatory Services and Community Safety on the Cherwell Community Safety Partnership (CCSP) detailing its inception as well as its duties and responsibilities. Members were informed of the make-up of the partnership and its seven statutory partners as well as other permanent members.

The Head of Regulatory Services and Community Safety updated the Committee on the CCSP Plan 2020 – 2023, detailing its notable successes in securing a Home Office Safer Streets 4 bid from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) to tackle youth related violence and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in Banbury, introducing a Public Spaces Protection Order

for Bicester town centre, securing funding to support a Young Women and Girls project, working with Takes Valley Police (TVP) colleagues to deliver objectives for an ASB focused operation named OP JANKLE, as well as the Safeguarding Children in Banbury (SCiB) initiative.

The Head of Regulatory Services and Community Safety updated the Committee on the proposed new CCSP 2025 – 2028 priorities:

- Anti-social behaviour (ASB)
- Modern slavery and exploitation
- Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)
- Domestic Abuse
- Serious Violence
- Retail Crime (including shop lifting)
- Rough Sleeping.

Members were also updated on the Safer Oxfordshire Partnership (SOP), a thematic group in Oxfordshire that aimed to bring together community safety partners to work together to deliver joint priorities and emerging themes, with a focus to make the county a safer place to live, work and visit by providing strategic oversight and direction for preventing crime and anti-social behavior across Oxfordshire.

In response to a question regarding the lack of a CCSP plan for 2024 as well as a full report on the previous 2020 – 2024 plan, the Head of Regulatory Services and Community Safety advised that the change in the plans term and lack of a report were caused by the loss of staff as a result of the decoupling from Oxfordshire County Council.

It was proposed by Councillor Lynne Parsons to recommend that the Executive, as a matter of urgency, ensure that the Cherwell Safer Community Partnership plan be reviewed and updated and presented to this committee early in the next municipal year. This was seconded by Councillor Andrew Crichton.

The Committee discussed the motion. On being put to the vote, there were 5 votes for, 0 votes against and 3 abstentions. It was agreed that recommendation should be submitted to Executive as soon as practicable.

The Chairman welcomed the Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley, Matthew Barber, Chief Constable Jason Hogg and Superintendent Benedict Clark, Thames Valley Police, to the meeting and invited them to update the Committee regarding policing in Thames Valley.

The Police and Crime Commissioner updated the Committee on officer numbers and plans for recruitment of additional officers. This included plans for increasing diversity and inclusion within the force, with measures being researched to encourage female applicants as well as applicants from diverse backgrounds.

The Police and Crime Commissioner gave an overview of the review and restructure of the Thames Valley force, highlighting that it was the largest review and restructure since 2010, with identified savings of £15.7m. £7m of these savings had been delivered to date. Members were advised that the restructure was necessitated by the uplift in demand on policing in the area and that dedicated command units for specific areas were being rolled out across the district.

The Police and Crime Commissioner explained the measures that had been undertaken to improve the response times on the nonemergency 101 police contact service. This included the introduction of new methods of contact such as social media channels, webchat functionality and an online victim portal as well as a new neighbourhood policing app.

The Chief Constable gave a presentation which provided more details on neighbourhood policing, focusing on the Thames Valley Alerts system which had seen a boost in users to the sum of 107,000, and a rise of 57.37% interactions, which better enabled the force to tackle local crime. Members were also advised on the focus on tackling E-Scooters and E-Bikes, with 31 E bikes/scooters seized in January 2025, 16 of which were seized in Oxford LCU.

Superintendent Clark provided the Committee with more details on some of the operations currently taking place to reduce knife crime, anti-social behaviour, retail theft and rural crime in the Cherwell district. The Committee was advised that the emphasis was on prevention of such activities and often involved a highly targeted approach working with other agencies and partners.

In response to Members' questions regarding if the Thames Valley "TV Alerts" could be simplified to make it more accessible and easier to use, the Police and Crime Commissioner advised that they were aware of issues accessing the system and would look to roll out training to tackle this issue.

Members of the Committee queried if all secondary schools had an individual school liaison officer or if they were shared and whether all schools in the district had access to this service. The Police and Crime Commissioner responded that there was dedicated coverage for both secondary and primary schools as part of the Safeguarding Children Partnership.

With regards the use of restorative justice for damage caused by antisocial behaviour, in response to a question if restorative justice was used on a regular basis to repair the harm caused by acts of ASB and what the impact was, the Police and Crime Commissioner explained that evidence to the effectiveness of restorative justice had been noted and that it was a potential avenue, but more research would be needed before implementation.

In response to a question regarding Oxfordshire County Council's proposals to switch off street lighting after 11pm in some areas, and whether TVP saw any potential risks or rise in crime due to the proposals, the Police and Crime Commissioner explained that TVP did express concerns about the proposals

and were in discussions with the County Council. It was not anticipated that crime levels would be greatly affected by the proposals, but residents' perception and concerns about crime would rise. TVP was working to increase the public's trust and perception of safety within the district.

It was agreed by the chairman that written responses to questions presented to the Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities would be provided after the meeting.

The Chairman thanked the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Chief Constable and Superintendent for their attendance.

Resolved

- (1) That having given due consideration, the Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership Presentation be noted.
- (2) That the Committee recommends that the Executive, as a matter of urgency, ensure that the Cherwell Safer Community Partnership Plan be reviewed and updated and presented to this committee early in the next municipal year.

62 **Scrutiny Working Groups Update**

The Committee received an update on the progress of the Scrutiny Working Groups established by the Committee since the last Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 28 January 2025.

Resolved

- (1) That the progress of the Scrutiny Working Groups be noted.

63 **Scrutiny Work Programme 2024-25**

The Chairman provided an update on Committee's Work Programme 2024-25, noting that the requested item on the Housing Development Action Plan had been included in the agenda for the next meeting on the 18 March 2024.

Resolved

- (1) That the Scrutiny Work Programme 2024-25 be agreed.

64 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the ground that, if the public and press were present, it would be likely that exempt information falling under the provisions of Schedule 12A, Part 1, Paragraph 3 would be disclosed to them, and that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

65 **New Council Offices at Castle Quay**

The Assistant Director Property submitted an exempt report detailing the process, progress and lessons learnt from the building of the new council offices within Castle Quay.

Officers responded to a range of questions regarding the content of the report.

Resolved

- (1) That having given due consideration, the Council's report on the New Council Offices at Castle Quay be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.57 pm

Chairman:

Date: