

# Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

## Scrutiny Committee

HELD AT 6.00 PM ON TUESDAY 4 JUNE 2013

COUNCIL CHAMBER, SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL  
OFFICES

### Present:

Mrs Celia Collett, MBE (Chairman)

Mrs Eleanor Hards, Ms Joan Bland, Mr Steve Connel, Ms Kristina Crabbe,  
Mrs Pat Dawe, Mr Will Hall, Mr Paul Harrison, Mrs Margaret Turner, Mr Roger Bell  
(as substitute for Mr David Turner) and Mr David Dodds

### Apologies:

Ms Elizabeth Hodgkin, Mr Alan Rooke and Mr David Turner tendered apologies.

### Officers:

Mrs Kathy Fiander, Ms Paula Fox, Mr Ian Matten and Mr Matt Prosser

### Also present:

Mr David Dodds

## 1 Minutes

**RESOLVED:** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 23 April 2013 as a correct record and to agree that the Chairman sign them as such.

## 2 Board report - a graphical summary of the councils' performance to the end of March 2013

The committee considered the Board Report to the end of March 2013, on which committee members raised questions.

Ms P Fox, Planning Manager, Mr I Matten, Shared Waste and Parks Manager, Mr M Prosser, Strategic Director, responded to comments and questions as follows.

## **Planning: major applications**

Ms P Fox responded to a question on the continuing usefulness of time targets for major planning applications, given the use of Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs). Ms Fox advised that it was relevant to refer to the 13-week target for major applications as this measure continued to be used by Government. The main advantage of using PPAs was that they allowed the council and applicant to negotiate outside the constraints of the 13-week period. They could therefore help to achieve a positive result without the application being recorded as failing to meet the target. However PPAs were currently optional and the take-up rate was relatively low, only four of 15 current major applications were the subject of a PPA. The figures in the board report were therefore meaningful, particularly as Government had indicated that it intended to use the 13-week target as a key measure of performance. Hence it was still important to have this information.

Ms Fox agreed to review the wording supporting the information in the board report to include the number of major planning applications so the take-up rate could be seen in context. Owing to the timescales for production of the board report this would probably appear in the September board report.

## **Planning appeals**

Ms Fox advised that officers had not been able to identify a particular reason for the downturn in planning appeals performance in November and December 2012. Officers closely monitored the Inspectorate's decisions for trends and had noted that more appeals for housing schemes had been allowed recently. Councillors could expect to see comment about the emerging trend in the May board report.

## **Planning: new homes**

Mr Prosser explained that the criteria for arriving at the total target figure of 519 net additional homes had been taken from the April 2012 housing trajectory. This represented the projected number of homes being built in the district between April 2012 and March 2013. In acknowledgement of Mr Bell's comment that the council was behind target when taking into account historic targets since 2006 Mr Prosser emphasised that the council was not the builder of homes so the decisions of developers to build and the correct economic conditions were necessary to achieve the target.

Mr Prosser advised that he would confirm whether or not the target included rural exception sites.

## **Car parks**

Mr Prosser advised that he did not think that the offer of free parking on a Saturday had had an impact on the budget at South.

## **Fly tipping**

Mr Prosser responded to a question on publicity relating to fly-tipping, advising that historically, the Environmental Protection Team had issued a press release following each successful prosecution of a fly-tipper. This approach had resulted in a limited take up from the local press. As a result the Communications Team proposed

grouping successful prosecutions together and using them to emphasise a particular issue around fly tipping. In addition, the Oxfordshire Waste Partnership periodically issued press releases and developed promotional/educational material around fly tipping for the entire county.

Several articles were published in the council's news magazine Outlook with the last issue in spring 2013 including a feature about the day in the life of one of the fly-tipping enforcement officers. The work aimed to educate the public about using reputable companies to dispose of their waste.

In 2012/13 the council successfully prosecuted four fly tipping cases. There were approximately 10 potential prosecution cases in the pipeline at present.

Mr Prosser agreed to provide further information on the educational element of the council's work.

### **Staff sickness**

Responding to a question on the increase in staff sickness, Mr Prosser advised that sickness for South in 2012-13 was 6.75 days, compared to 6.93 for 2011-12. The data in the board report were aggregated, so the combined total was influenced by an unusually low Vale figure (4.36) in 2011-12, and a higher Vale figure (8.34) in 2012-13.

Long-term sickness had a significant impact. One person's absence for 12 months represented around 20 per cent of the Vale sickness days.

In terms of staffing levels and pressure, there was no firm evidence of a link to sickness absence. Over the last 12 months, 16 per cent of South sickness days were attributed to stress (April to September 23 per cent, October to March 9 per cent - again the figures were affected a great deal by individual cases). However, the councils' figures were a lot lower than nationally.

### **Waste**

Mr Matten provided an update on the independent street cleaning surveys. He stated that inspections were carried out quarterly, with 240 transects each quarter giving a total of 960 per annum. A transect was made up of 50 linear metres of roadway/footpath. The inspections were split between eight different land uses. Selection of which wards to be inspected was made by the council so that each ward received at least one inspection per year.

In response to a question on recycling rates and how the target would be achieved, Mr Prosser advised that the council's target was to be within the top ten councils in the country. To achieve this it was necessary to communicate with and remind residents to recycle, keep the recycling system easy and to increase the recycling stream. One hindrance to achieving the target was that packaging was now lighter. Most of the recycling successes across Oxfordshire were attributable to South, Vale and West Oxfordshire but changes in legislation were affecting performance. For example leaf deposits on roads could not be recycled because of contamination. However, Mr Dodds, as Chairman of the Oxfordshire Waste Partnership, had written to Government on the subject.

## **Garden waste service**

In response to the congratulations extended on the number of people making payment by direct debit, Mr Prosser advised that around 98 to 99 per cent of customers were using the service although it was recognised that not all customers could pay by direct debit.

Mr Prosser agreed to investigate whether the council and Capita could arrange for customers to sign-up to direct debits online rather than via a telephone call with Capita.

## **3 Work programme for 2013/14**

The committee considered the draft work programme set out in the agenda and asked to include the following items.

- An update on flooding in April 2014.
- The use of funding by organisations receiving revenue and capital grants: the Strategic Director would agree the scheduling of the report with the Chairman.

Mr Prosser agreed to arrange an update on flooding schemes in the Weekly Information Sheet so that councillors could see which projects had been undertaken.

## **4 Exclusion of the public**

**RESOLVED:** to exclude members of the press and public from the meeting for the following item of business under Part 1 of Schedule 12A Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 and as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 on the grounds that:

- (i) it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, and
- (ii) the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information

## **5 Extension of the waste contract**

The committee considered the report of the Head of Corporate Strategy that asked the committee to make recommendations to the Cabinet member for waste and street cleansing to enable him to make a final decision on the extension of the waste contract. This was a joint contract with Vale of White Horse District Council. When the contract was let a clause was included to allow extension of the contract for up to seven years by mutual agreement. The current waste contract was due to end in June 2017 and the report sought extension beyond that date.

The report had set out that the existing contract was delivering well at both councils with high levels of customer satisfaction and the councils were ranked first and second nationally according to DEFRA league tables. There were benefits in re-negotiating the contract now because some financial and value-added benefits would emerge.

In considering the report and responses to the questions posed the committee was reassured at the proposals to extend the contract.

The meeting closed at 7.05 pm

Chairman

Date