

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Scrutiny Committee

HELD AT 6.00 PM ON TUESDAY 17 DECEMBER 2013

COUNCIL CHAMBER, SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
OFFICES

Present:

Mrs Celia Collett, MBE (Chairman)

Ms Joan Bland, Mr John Cotton, Mrs Pat Dawe, Mrs Eleanor Hards,
Mr Paul Harrison, Ms Elizabeth Hodgkin, Mr Alan Rooke, Mr David Turner and
Mrs Margaret Turner.

Apologies:

No apologies were tendered.

Officers:

Ms Suzanne Malcolm, Mr Matt Prosser, Ms Kate Rayner and Mrs Jennifer
Thompson,

Also present:

Mrs Judith Nimmo-Smith, Cabinet member for economic development, property and
technical services

Mr Peter Woodman, 21st Century Thame

Ms Helen Stewart, Thame Town Clerk

Mr Mike Kennedy, Henley on Thames Town Clerk

Mr Derrick Hoare, Chairman of Wallingford Partnership

Mr Jamie Baskeyfield, Wallingford Town Clerk

20 Declaration of disclosable pecuniary interest

None.

21 Minutes of the previous meeting

Consideration of the minutes was deferred to the next meeting.



Listening Learning Leading

22 Market towns

The committee considered the report of the Head of Economy, Leisure and Property setting out the current and proposed support for the three market towns of Henley on Thames, Thame, and Wallingford.

Ms Suzanne Malcolm, Economic Development Manager, and Mrs Judith Nimmo-Smith, Cabinet member, introduced the report. Representatives from the three market towns spoke to the committee and answered questions as summarised below.

Thame and Chinnor

Mr Peter Woodman, representing 21st Century Thame, explained how the council funding supported a number of initiatives to help businesses. These included a loyalty card scheme supported by about forty per cent of shops; equipment and furniture for hire by charities and organisations; and leaflets to promote the town's leisure attractions. Expanding the loyalty scheme, keeping the leaflets current, and funding new projects required funds and would not happen as easily or at all without the district council's contribution. Shops in Chinnor had approached the town and work to integrate the two community's businesses and help Chinnor's shops was underway.

Ms Helen Stewart, Thame Town Clerk, said that Thame's business community did not have strong common issues to unite it and there was a low vacancy rate. The current support worked well as all the funding went towards specific projects focussed on maintaining Thame's viability as a market town; the business community supported the model and was involved; and matching funding was provided by a wide variety of groups. Projects were successful, sustainable, and cost-effective. A small group from the town council, the district council and 21st Century Thame agreed and oversaw the projects.

Businesses were generally positive and there was little support for major initiatives, but there were new challenges posed by proposals for a large supermarket. Business buy-in was not measured by attendance at meetings; the work was strongly supported by independent shops. The number of events attracting people into the town (such as the arts, food, and Christmas events) was increasing. It was hard to quantify the increase in trade as a result of schemes but traders and customers were positive about them.

The Neighbourhood Plan's economic section emphasised walking and cycling links to the town. The increased population and a new supermarket gave an opportunity to encourage new residents from the town and outlying villages to use Thame's specialist shops rather than shop elsewhere.

Henley on Thames

Mr Mike Kennedy, Henley on Thames Town Clerk, said that the part-time town centre manager provided an accessible contact between local businesses; with the Henley Partnership; and with the local authorities. The manager co-ordinated schemes funded by the district and town councils (for example training and the shop-front improvement scheme), and was involved in larger events. Sponsorship for Henley in

Bloom, the Christmas lights and shop front improvements all helped improve the town's profile.

The town council understood the constraints on the district council and was grateful for the continuing support. The town could make use of a full-time manager if funds were available. The business action plan for Henley to 2016 sought to promote the town as a world-class all-round destination for business, leisure and commerce and included a budget to promote tourism.

Wallingford

Ms Kate Rayner, Wallingford Market Town Co-ordinator, said that the benefits to the town included successful projects, new partnerships, a resource to cover everything from strategic planning to helping with events, and a closer working relationship between the town and the district council. A shop front improvement scheme was underway; a locker bank for internet deliveries was installed recently; newsletters and a proposed business breakfast helped the business community; and improvements to the town and on-line promotion encouraged visitors. Businesses were enthusiastic about starting projects and the vacancy rate was reducing.

Mr Derrick Hoare, Chairman of the Wallingford Partnership, said the co-ordinator's remit, enthusiasm and expertise were essential to the town's success. The economic development plan for Wallingford could not be delivered without the co-ordinator to build relationships and deliver projects as no-one else had the time or resources to do the work.

Mr Jamie Baskeyfield, Wallingford Town Clerk, said that the co-ordinator's role provided very good value for Wallingford and should continue. Businesses were very enthusiastic. It would cost far more to deliver the projects in the town's action plan without the co-ordinator working with the business partnership and the town council. There was enough profitable work for a full-time post. It may be possible to bring in matched funding, and specific measures as well as specific objectives may be needed.

The town council hoped that the southern end of St Martin's Street could be revitalised soon. A pro-active approach to encourage agents to let commercial properties to business people was required. Discussions with Morrison's to have the town centre and proposed supermarket working in cooperation were on-going and a plan to signpost and link the two sites was in development.

There were regular discussions on how to encourage boaters to come into the town. The district council's extension of their moorings had increased footfall. The town council had extended their moorings, improved the surrounding area and added signs, but even if land could be found additional moorings were expensive to provide.

The formal partnership had successfully applied for South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) funding and matched funding to provide the website, flags, Christmas decorations, wifi and leaflets and an audio trail, all of which had encouraged people to visit.

Mrs Nimmo-Smith and Ms Malcolm said that the support for market towns had developed into three distinct models to support the different needs of each town. The recommendation was to support a growth bid for an additional two years' funding to

maintain the service. They were aware of Henley's and Wallingford's view that the work could be expanded, and Thame Neighbourhood Plan's economic strategy. The district council would continue to provide a district-wide strategic overview, support for businesses, and forums. Economic Development's infrastructure fund encompassed the larger villages and officers were developing schemes in Chinnor and Sonning Common.

Members of the committee commented:

- It was encouraging that Thame was working with Chinnor. The Cabinet member was asked to continue and extend support for the larger villages; Chinnor in particular.
- Advertising in local village/parish magazines would help promote businesses in the extended zones around the towns.
- The town should develop detailed plans to benefit from the proposed Morrison's supermarket in Wallingford in preparation.
- Was the focus on economic development strong enough as many of the initiatives provided social or cultural benefits but there was not enough emphasis on economic growth and increased revenue?
- The three business communities, officers, and the Cabinet member were to be congratulated on developing individual successful solutions, delivering projects and providing strategic support.
- The report's proposed recommendations and revenue provided value for money for businesses and residents and were supported by the committee.

The committee agreed to recommend that Cabinet endorse the proposals in the report:

- a) to extend the contract for the Wallingford market town co-ordinator for a period of two years to 31 March 2016, subject to confirmation of £5,000 funding from Wallingford Town Council
- b) to agree that the Wallingford market town co-ordinator spends one day a week based at Wallingford Town Council offices
- c) to support the provision of maternity cover whilst the current Wallingford market town co-ordinator is on maternity leave
- d) to provide Henley Town Council with a contribution of £10,000 a year for 2014/15 and 2015/16 towards the Henley town centre manager role, subject to confirmation of £5,000 funding from Henley Town Council (and £1,000 from Henley Partnership)
- e) to provide £10,000 a year for 2014/15 and 2015/16 as a funding pot for Thame to support projects and project delivery in the town.

23 Board report - a graphical summary of the councils' performance to the end of October 2013

The committee considered the board report showing the council's performance in key areas from April 2013 to October 2013 and a five-year summary of performance in selected areas from April 2008 to March 2013.

Mr M Prosser, Strategic Director, answered questions from the committee.

The committee noted that:

- The numbers of homeless households in temporary accommodation rose from 20 in September to 25 in October which is over the target of 23. At the end of November numbers were back at 23 and down to 18 in mid-December. There appeared to be no specific reason for this increase in terms of type of applicant aside from a general increase in homelessness, a trend reflected nationally. However officers were awaiting a number of tenancy start dates for applicants which appeared to have temporarily inflated the figures
- In October two out of three major planning applications were determined within their target time. The one application that went over the 13 week target was a housing scheme submitted by SOHA which was improved on advice from officers, referred to the Planning Committee and planning permission granted. The impact of failing to process one application within target has a comparatively big impact on the monthly percentage due to the relatively small numbers of major applications. The overall performance on major applications to date is still strong at just over 90 per cent and significantly above the government's national target of 60 per cent.
- There were no plans at the moment to change the way the council used the New Homes Bonus to support local projects.
- All local authorities provided the same data for waste and recycling but there were different ways of accounting for the rejection rates from recyclables which affected the comparative figures. Figures would be finalised once the tonnages of street sweepings recycled and landfilled were known.

Members of the committee asked for written information about:

- The reasons for the reduction in council tax collection rate since July;
- Lessons learned from recent planning appeal decisions.

The committee thanked the teams responsible for producing the interesting and informative reports.

The meeting closed at 7.35 pm

Chairman

Date