

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Scrutiny Committee

HELD AT 6.00 PM ON TUESDAY 22 APRIL 2014

COUNCIL CHAMBER, SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
OFFICES

Present:

Mrs Celia Collett, MBE (Chairman)

Ms Joan Bland, Mr Steve Connel, Mr John Cotton, Ms Kristina Crabbe, Mrs Pat Dawe, Mr Paul Harrison, Ms Elizabeth Hodgkin, Mrs Denise Macdonald (as substitute for Mrs Eleanor Hards) and Mr David Turner.

Apologies:

Mrs Eleanor Hards and Mrs Margaret Turner tendered apologies.

Officers:

Mr Ian Matten, Mr Phil Moule, Mr Matt Prosser, Mrs Anna Robinson and Mrs Jennifer Thompson.

Also present:

Mr David Dodds, Cabinet member for finance, waste, parks
Mrs Ann Ducker, MBE, Leader of the council

27 Declaration of disclosable pecuniary interest

None.

28 Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 18 February 2014, as a correct record and to agree that the Chairman sign them as such.



Listening Learning Leading

29 Performance review of Biffa to 31 December 2013

The committee considered the report of the head of corporate strategy setting out the performance of Biffa Municipal Limited in providing the household waste collection, street cleansing, and ancillary services in South Oxfordshire from 1 January to 31 December 2013.

Mr Ian Matten, Waste and Parks Service Manager, and Mr David Dodds, Cabinet member, introduced the report and answered questions from the committee. Mr Simon Chown, contract manager for Biffa, answered questions and showed photographs of the 'deep clean' of streets across the district.

In answer to questions, they explained:

- the process for registering and rectifying a missed collection;
- free garden waste collections were offered to all properties on military bases as this was more cost-effective for both the occupants and the council given the high turnover in occupants;
- staff turnover was relatively high as people moved on in their careers and Biffa was taking steps to improve retention rates;
- Installation of 360° cameras on vehicles would give evidence in cases of allegations of damage from reversing vehicles. There should be no incidents if procedures were followed;
- information about recycling and waste collection was sent to every newly built home.

Councillors discussed the reasons for the fall in the recycling rate. Street sweepings had to be landfilled in accordance an Environment Agency directive, which reduced the recycling rate by approximately three per cent. Alternative treatments were being evaluated. The campaigns to reduce packaging had the effect of reducing this by 20-30 per cent; and the campaign to reduce food waste was also having an effect. Additional houses increased the total amount of waste produced. However, there was no clear reason why the national trend should be for increased waste tonnages and decreased recycling rates. Councillors noted that waste would now be sent to Ardley for incineration. The termination of the Oxfordshire Waste Partnership reduced the ability of councils to publicise and co-ordinate waste reduction campaigns.

They asked for confirmation of the accuracy of 2013 figures in table one on page 6.

Councillors expressed the view that the evaluation of the missed bins target as fair was harsh as the number of missed bins was very low. The calculation should be revised. They appreciated the work done during the deep clean, and residents were pleased with the results. They suggested a campaign to encourage people not to drop litter and ruin the good work of the street cleaning teams.

RESOLVED:

To recommend that the Cabinet member for finance, parks and waste assess the performance of Biffa Municipal Limited in delivering the household waste collection, street cleansing, and ancillary services in South Oxfordshire from 1 January to 31 December 2013 as:

Good

30 Performance review of Sodexo to December 2013

The committee considered the report of the head of corporate strategy setting out the performance of Sodexo Limited in providing grounds maintenance services in South Oxfordshire from 1 January to 31 December 2013.

Mr Ian Matten, Waste and Parks Service Manager, and Mr David Dodds, Cabinet member, introduced the report and answered questions from the committee. Mr Kevin Harkness, representing Sodexo, answered questions.

They explained that performance had improved since the previous review. The majority of the work under the joint contract was carried out in Vale of White Horse District Council. Work for this council covered diverse small areas mainly around Didcot and burial grounds in Kidmore End and Wallingford. Customers and council officers looked for different things from the contractor. The apprenticeship scheme was going very well. Officers were working on setting more realistic and achievable timescales for resolving complaints and notifications.

Councillors congratulated Sodexo on its apprenticeship scheme and on exceeding its health and safety targets.

RESOLVED:

To recommend that the Cabinet member for finance, parks and waste assess the performance of Sodexo Limited in providing grounds maintenance services in South Oxfordshire from 1 January to 31 December 2013 as:

Good

31 Strategic Housing Market Assessment

The committee considered the report of the head of planning setting out the derivation of the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) numbers for South Oxfordshire District. The chairman explained that this was the first of several opportunities for councillors to discuss the SHMA findings and consequential changes to the Local Plan in open session.

Mrs A Robinson, Strategic Director, Mr A Duffield, Head of Planning, Mr P Moule, Senior Planning Policy Officer, and Mrs A Ducker, Leader of the Council introduced the report and answered questions from the committee as summarised below.

1. All Oxfordshire local authorities were involved in the process through the Oxfordshire Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Partnership and jointly appointed GL Hearn to carry out the work. There were few firms which carry out this work. The council did not have access to the computer models used to develop the housing and economic figures, but had challenged the figures and the methodology used to generate these.
2. The core strategy is based on a 2006/7 evidence of housing requirements, taken from the South East Plan, which was the most up to date evidence at the time of the core strategy examination. The planning inspectorate now consider housing evidence from the revoked Regional Spatial Strategies to be outdated for plan

making purposes. The SHMA provides figures based on more recent data. It is important that the local plan is based on sound and up to date evidence, otherwise it could be deemed unsound. The council could adopt different figures from those in the SHMA provided it had sound evidence to justify these. Local plans are not static documents but are updated on a regular basis and the new housing figures in the SHMA form part of this ongoing process.

3. The employment growth forecast was based on a survey of business' ambitions for growth. It was higher than previously predicted but not unachievable. The selected consultant's model was understood to provide less optimistic forecasts than other models, and had received good references from other clients. Employment growth in the district contributed towards the identified need for housing but this need was increased further as a result of the need for affordable housing in the district.
4. Officers were content that the council had an adequate five-year land supply across the district, although there is less than a 5 year supply at Didcot. Not having a five-year land supply would leave the district at risk of speculative development on areas not specified in the local plan.
5. Calculations of overall and affordable housing mix were complex but had to be based on evidence of need which could be supplied both by social and market housing.
6. The requirement that 40 per cent of major developments should be affordable housing is the starting point for negotiations. This could be altered depending on the overall requirements for contributions to infrastructure and the impact on the viability of the scheme, with a view to negotiating the best deal for the district without affecting the ability of the developer to deliver housing.
7. The number of people registered with the council as in housing need did not equate to the largely hidden demand for housing from those in unsuitable housing, wishing to form new households, or wishing to move closer to their employment. The guidance for the SHMA required any shortfall in delivery of previous targets to be included in the new targets.
8. Those parishes in the process of making their neighbourhood plans should continue. Those who had completed their plans would be able to review these, as they would normally have to do in time, and would have to go through the referendum process again. Planning policy officers would offer advice. The current funding to support the neighbourhood planning process was not guaranteed.
9. All documents would be available to councillors and the public online¹.
10. A number of workshops for councillors were planned to ensure that they had answers to technical questions and all the information they required.
11. All decisions affecting the local plan, housing numbers, and sites would be taken in public by Cabinet and Council and would be open to scrutiny.

¹ <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/spatial-planning-and-infrastructure-partnership>
(documents at the end of the web page)

12. An issues and options paper would be published for public consultation after all parishes and town councils had been contacted to explain the options and process.

Councillors did not make specific recommendations but commented:

- Should the council consider allocating sites at smaller villages where communities would like more housing to protect their viability? The SHMA gave scope for a more targeted approach to long-term growth than simply adding houses in proportion to those agreed.
- Were the predictions on employment growth sound and had the economic forecasting model been shown to accurately predict growth patterns based on known data and growth for past periods? The growth in planning permissions, housing, employment, and demand had to be in step.
- The council should very carefully consider the maximum requirements set out in the SHMA; challenge the soundness of the evidence; and ensure that the right type of housing is planned for and delivered.
- Incorporating the SHMA's targets added significant costs and time for councillors and communities in revising the local plan and neighbourhood plans. This process would not of itself deliver any more houses and may in fact delay delivery. There was concern over the level of growth in the south-east.

Councillors asked for more information on the risk assessment findings.

The meeting closed at 7.45 pm

Chairman

Date