

# Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

## Scrutiny Committee

HELD ON TUESDAY 26 NOVEMBER 2019 AT 6.30 PM

MEETING ROOM 1, 135 EASTERN AVENUE, MILTON PARK, MILTON, OX14  
4SB

### Present:

Ian White (Chairman)

Mocky Khan, Anna Badcock, Sam Casey-Rerhaye, Stefan Gawrysiak, Alexandrine Kantor,  
George Levy and Anne-Marie Simpson

### Officers:

Steven Corrigan, Phil Ealey, Paula Fox, Liz Hayden, Emma Turner

### Also present:

Councillor Leigh Rawlins – Cabinet member for planning

Councillor David Rouane – Cabinet member for housing and environment

Councillor David Turner – Cabinet member for finance

## 22 Minutes

**RESOLVED:** to approve the minutes of the meetings held on 17 September and 1 October 2019 as correct records and agree that the Chairman sign them as such subject to the inclusion, in the minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2019, of confirmation from officers that it would take approximately eight months to update the housing needs assessment but that an estimate of the cost was not available.

## 23 Declarations of interest

None.

## 24 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

None.



Listening Learning Leading

## **25 Public participation**

Mr Blake, an Ewelme resident, addressed the committee regarding the erection of permanent structures which would prevent access for emergency and other vehicles to properties further along the track. He stated that whilst planning enforcement officers had agreed that planning consent should have been requested, they had concluded that it was not expedient nor in the public interest for the council to take any formal action to have the structure removed.

Mr Blake was advised that the committee could not consider individual planning cases. If he would like to make a formal complaint regarding the handling of this matter he should submit a complaint through the council's corporate complaints procedure.

## **26 Review of planning enforcement performance 1 April 2018 to 30 September 2019**

The committee considered the head of planning's report, which reviewed performance of the planning enforcement service from 1 April 2018 to 30 September 2019.

Councillor Leigh Rawlins, Cabinet member for planning, attended the meeting and asked the committee for its comments on the report and for any suggestions on how the team should prioritise its work in the future.

The report set out the role of the enforcement service, the legal requirements, and the relevant local plan policies. The report also set out the limitations of the service. The focus was on remedying planning harm but not to 'police' the district or punish those that had followed the rules. Other than unauthorised works to listed buildings, protected trees and the unauthorised display of advertisements, breaches of planning control were not criminal acts. The service provided by the council was set out in the planning enforcement statement, which was published on the council's website. This explained how the council monitored implementation of planning conditions and how the council investigated unauthorised development. The statement was being reviewed to update it in line with the latest guidance.

The report also set out the enforcement workload, analysed the unresolved cases, and showed performance against the council's targets. The committee noted that the service had just missed the target to investigate and determine the cause of 80 per cent of cases within six weeks of the original enquiry. However, the increase in voluntary compliance was three times the target as more people were engaging with the planning system. The enforcement team had taken formal action where necessary and had defended successfully all four of its decisions at appeal.

The team aimed to get the public to engage rather than to impose immediate penalties. On larger sites, officers would attempt to be proactive by monitoring development as it happened to pick up issues in a timely manner. The enforcement team had taken formal action where necessary and had defended successfully its decisions at appeal. Officers gave examples of their more complex cases.

The committee noted that ability to improve performance was restricted by resourcing difficulties including the recruitment and retention of staff. However, performance

compared favourably against benchmark councils. Although the South and Vale team was larger than average when fully staffed, it had a larger number of planning applications to monitor and more strategic housing sites than other benchmark authorities.

The committee welcomed the performance of the team noting the resourcing issues. Committee members requested further information in respect of the type of enforcement cases submitted to the team and the financial implications of cases. Consideration should be given to the recruitment of a specialist data analysis resource to provide information on planning enforcement cases for the team.

The committee requested a roundtable briefing session for councillors on the enforcement statement and that the enforcement statement comes to the committee prior to consideration by Cabinet.

In response to a question, officers responded that the team does not ordinarily investigate anonymous complaints because they need a contact to obtain further information or to provide feedback on a case. Anonymity could also increase the number of neighbour disputes and vexatious complaints. If a customer has a genuine concern about providing their name, they are encouraged to use the parish council or district councillor to act as a contact. This process does not prevent whistle blowing complaints.

**RESOLVED:** to

1. note the head of planning's report and thank the planning enforcement team for its work over the past 18 months;
2. request officers arrange a roundtable event for councillors on the planning enforcement statement;
3. review the draft planning enforcement statement prior to consideration by Cabinet;
4. ask officers to provide a breakdown of the category of enforcement cases;
5. ask officers to provide details of the financial implications/costs of cases and taking enforcement action; and
6. request officers consider the recruitment of a data analyst resource.

## **27 Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025**

The committee considered the head of housing and environment's report on the draft homelessness and rough sleeping strategy 2020 to 2025. The strategy was the subject of public consultation which had resulted in 198 responses. The Scrutiny Committee was asked to feed its views back to officers and the Cabinet member.

The Homelessness Act 2002 required the council to review its strategy every five years. The current joint homelessness strategy with Vale of White Horse District Council would expire in September 2020. As part of this review, officers had taken into account the government's intention to half rough sleeping by 2022 and eradicate it by 2027. The addition of 'tackling rough sleeping' was the biggest difference compared to the current homelessness strategy. The strategy and action plan must be submitted to the government for approval.

Councillor David Rouane, Cabinet member for housing and environment, reported that although homelessness and rough sleepers had increased nationwide, this was not reflected in South Oxfordshire. He congratulated the previous administration on the good work undertaken in this area. In 2018/19 alone, the council had assisted 495 households

at risk of homelessness. The number of households in temporary accommodation had also fallen, and the number of rough sleepers recorded in South Oxfordshire in November 2018 was three. Against benchmark authorities, South Oxfordshire's figures were very low.

The council had adopted a preventative approach rather than reactive. This was continued in the draft strategy, which had the following aims:

- To prevent homelessness whenever possible
- To end incidents of homelessness at the earliest opportunity
- To end the need for rough sleeping

To achieve these aims, the strategy had five objectives:

1. To improve county-wide partnership working to prevent and reduce homelessness
2. To minimise the use of temporary accommodation
3. To further develop the council's housing needs service to prevent and relieve homelessness at the earliest opportunity
4. To improve access to emergency accommodation and increase support for rough sleepers
5. To improve access to sustainable accommodation for households that are either at risk of homelessness or who are homeless

Officers reported that they worked in close collaboration with partner councils and organisations. The council relied on these partnerships for its success. Officers did not use a gatekeeping approach, rather households at risk of homelessness were encouraged to approach the council at the earliest opportunity, as early intervention was a key ingredient in preventing homelessness. A range of solutions were available to suit differing circumstances. The portfolio of options was set out in the strategy.

The new strategy had a bigger focus on tackling rough sleeping. Officers intended to increase both the housing and support available for rough sleepers, including a Housing First model, that provided accommodation together with support for rough sleepers. Officers were investigating the possibility of a Housing First project in South Oxfordshire.

The committee supported the aims and objectives of the draft strategy and reviewed the action plan. The success of the strategy would be measured against key performance indicators and targets, which would be set annually. The strategy would also be reviewed annually, and the findings published on the council's website.

In response to questions officers advised that South Oxfordshire District Council did not own a temporary housing stock following the housing transfer, but this may be addressed as part of the corporate plan work and the property asset review. However, the council had agreements in place with SOHA and Vale of White Horse District Council to meet the need. Officers worked with armed forces personnel in advance of them leaving the armed forces to provide housing advice and support. Details of the housing register were available on request from officers.

Councillors suggested that the strategy should reference that the council will treat people suffering from homelessness with respect, how the council would prioritise help for victims of domestic abuse, include details of any winter shelter provision (if approved), reference the specific support available for young women rough sleepers and the needs of young adults (18-24 year olds) and include details of animal sanctuaries to care for the pets of the homeless.

The committee also noted that officers would be publishing a guide on how to help homeless people for councillors and suggested that a similar guide should be published on the council's website for members of the public to access.

The committee noted that following the consultation period, the final strategy would be submitted to Cabinet for approval on 30 January 2020.

**RESOLVED:** to

1. welcome the draft homelessness and rough sleeping strategy 2020 to 2025; and
2. ask officers to publish a guide on the council's website setting out how members of the public could assist the homeless
3. recommend the Cabinet member for housing and environment and officers to consider the following suggestions to further improve the draft strategy before submitting it to Cabinet for adoption:
  - reference how the council will treat the homeless with respect;
  - include details of any winter shelter programme the council provides;
  - set out how the council will prioritise help for the victims of domestic abuse;
  - set out the specific needs and support available to young women rough sleepers and young adults (18-24 year olds);
  - include details of animal shelters to care for the pets of the homeless

## **28 Work schedule and dates for all South and Joint scrutiny meetings**

The committee reviewed its work programme and agreed that the review of air quality management areas (AQMA) include the monitoring of these, the reports commissioned which are then used for all manner of issues surrounding AQMA, the companies they use to prepare the reports, the quality of the reports currently used, how the information informs responses to traffic and planning issues and how teams who rely on the validity of these reports inform their own decisions, recommendations and work.

The meeting closed at 8:55pm

Chairman

Date