

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Scrutiny Committee

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 8 JULY 2020 AT 6.30 PM

THIS WAS A VIRTUAL MEETING:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhXa3TCqurM&t=12s>

Present:

Ian White (Chairman)
Mocky Khan, Sam Casey-Rerhaye, Simon Hewerdine, Stefan Gawrysiak, Alexandrine Kantor, George Levy and David Turner

Apologies:

None

Officers:

Michael Flowers, Candida Mckelvey, Adrianna Partridge, Michelle Wells

Also present:

Cabinet members – Councillors Andrea Powell (Corporate Services) Maggie Filipova Rivers (Community Services), Leigh Rawlins (Finance), Pieter Paul Barker (Didcot Garden Town)

42 Chairman's announcements

The chairman ran through protocol for the first virtual South scrutiny committee.

43 Minutes

The minutes of 4 February 2020 were agreed as an accurate record, and the chairman will sign them as such.

44 Declarations of interest

None.

45 Public participation



Listening Learning Leading

None.

46 Urgent business

None.

47 Review and comment on the draft Corporate Plan 2020-2024 for public consultation

The Cabinet member for Corporate Services introduced the draft Corporate Plan documents.

It was confirmed that comments made by the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee (CEAC) had already been incorporated into the draft. Now, the scrutiny committee is being asked to provide their comments.

The consultation to follow Cabinet briefing will be meaningful, and the public will be asked to prioritise what they want.

There are six themes. The need for strategic and operational partnership as an underlying principle has been reflected.

As well as the public, the consultation is important for staff, so they can see where they fit in our broader aims, and to increase job satisfaction and making sure staff are listened to.

Committee chairman led the committee through the report, followed by the illustrated themes.

On the report, Councillors has some comments on page three, item 15, regarding consultation. Cabinet member for Corporate Services informed the committee that improvements were being sought through an improved consultation survey, which includes multimedia, with video clips from Cabinet members introducing their themes. There will be an online questions and answers session in August also.

Discussion was had on what constituted a valid response to the consultation. Cabinet member for Corporate Services confirmed that the aim was for quality and a fair spread of responses from different groups within the community.

Councillors were keen to see reaching out to diverse groups.

Regarding the timelines for the plan, it was confirmed that the timelines were achievable despite Covid-19 impact. The Policy and Insight manager confirmed that her team had been working towards the October Council date, and there is confidence in this timing. The team are very focused on the Corporate Plan right now.

Cabinet member for Corporate Services added that there is confidence that people will engage, and that there would be engagement monitoring. In response to a question about monitoring, Cabinet member for Corporate Services confirmed there would be key performance indicators set once the lower projects (that are created from the six broader themes) were set. We are committed to two-way communication with the public and stakeholders. A yearly report will be produced.

The committee discussed reaching people on low income, the elderly etc, where some people might not have internet access. Can there be some poster distribution or placing of documents in libraries/public places. Cabinet member for Corporate Services did remind

the committee that Covid-19 restrictions may impede our movement (site visits are an issue) but the request is noted.

The timeline chart was praised.

Councillors were keen to ensure we kept promises. Promises of a leisure centre in the old Corporate Plan were cited. Cabinet member for Corporate Services emphasised that we have a theme on openness, as this is a very important priority to the council, and we are committed to it.

Next, the Chairman led the committee through the illustrative themes. The feedback is outlined as follows:

Theme 1

- Ensuring that we are being clear and honest – focussing on what we as a district council has influence to do.
- Can we link the work programme to the Corporate Plan goals? Chairman to consider.
- Retrofit was mentioned as a good method of improving homes, but it was also argued that making homes sustainable from new build would mean no costs later for the homeowner and be more cost effective. 20% of the district's carbon emissions are from housing.
- Consider ensuring we are well placed to tap into any government scheme/funding that presents itself – ensuring that our teams are well placed to access government schemes/funding with projects that are ready to go or advise and signpost our residents to make use of the scheme. Any further comments on this, please contact the Cabinet member for Corporate Services.
- Would like to see more specific details – e.g. definition of affordable housing, what is expensive housing, what price will we build houses to? – house prices in SODC 12.6x that of the average salary. Cabinet member for Corporate Services will feed this back to Councillor Robin Bennett.
- Balance between aspiration and pragmatism – we are unaware what is coming from Central Government, so we need to have a plan that can adapt to uncertainty – important to pick this up in framing the Corporate Plan.
- Ambition however is important to achieve. The aim is for the Corporate Plan to aspire and inspire. We can be champions of carbon zero.
- Planning enforcement is important to our residents – consider whether to strengthen this in the illustrative projects.
- Importance of picking up on contextual matters e.g. operating within legal planning framework/Central Government changes that could be coming – Chairman and Acting Deputy Chief Executive, Adrianna Partridge, to consider this as a future agenda item.

Theme 2

No comments

Theme 3

- The district declared a climate emergency, this is a big part of future thinking – focus on what we can influence.

- Question from committee on whether the themes are ranked in any particular order, and if they were which one would Cabinet member for Corporate Services put as number one – Climate Emergency theme was discussed as being number one if we were to rank them. They are grouped in a logical way, but very much want to see what feedback we get from the public first.
- Committee requested that the active travel illustrative project includes walking and bus travel
- Chairman was in support of this theme being ranked as number one.

Theme 4

- We know how much people have valued being in a rural setting in the South Oxfordshire over the last three months or so. We have a duty to protect it.
- Committee asked whether consideration could be given to including the Environment Agency in our list of relevant partners, as a closer relationship would be beneficial. Particularly in relation to flood risk.
- Possible addition to point five on illustrative projects slide to include wildlife corridors.
- It was asked whether a project around local green space designation in urban areas could be part of the plan – protect people’s connection to nature, even in urban areas – this is already included from CEAC feedback into theme two.
- Cabinet member for Corporate Services added that herself and Councillor Simpson are liaison officers for Earth Trust

Theme 5

- Committee discussed importance of maximising the value of the transformation budget that was agreed as £250,000 for 2 years.
- Clarification from Cabinet member for Finance that he is anticipating an emergency budget being presented in September/October that revises the existing budget to reflect losses arising from Covid-19, value of our assets reducing and the other many unknown impacts that are still working through.
- Need to be realistic on what is deliverable with financial constraints.

Theme 6

- Cabinet member for Corporate Services reiterated LGA survey that demonstrated that public levels of trust in LA’s after the Covid-19 crisis are at an all-time high. It is important to build on this.
- Add in representation of different groups into introductory theme text.
- Committee asked to give consideration to increased public participation and accessibility of all public meetings e.g. a review of the 3-minute speaking slot, potentially set up calls after debate for people to comment and ask questions. We would need to factor in a new office, new IT and also social media.
- Encouraging diversity in democratic decision making – more diverse make up of Councillors.
- Promotion of Corporate Plan in different languages – translation services available
- Promotion of Corporate Plan in easy read materials and plain language to extend reach of the Corporate Plan.
- Concern over just digital interaction – Insight and Policy manager confirmed they would have haveyoursay@southandvale.gov.uk email address and a telephone number for people to give their feedback.
- Consideration to be given to hard copy materials in public places, libraries etc.

Cabinet member for Corporate Services thanked the committee for their input. We do not want to overpromise or under deliver. The wording of the plan will be amended as per the feedback given today.

Councillor Mocky Khan motioned:

The South scrutiny committee formally note the draft corporate plan and ask that any comments and suggestions are taken on board in the revised version.

Chairman thanked Councillor Powell, Cabinet member for Corporate services, the officers involved and the guest Cabinet members.

48 Work schedule and dates for all South and Vale scrutiny meetings

The work programme was reviewed, and a few queries were raised as follows:

- What is the content of the item on 'affordable housing delivery vehicle' and what date was it due?
- Suggestion of combining 'civil parking enforcement' and 'car parking fees' item if possible.
- Queried the budget monitoring item – it was confirmed that this is a regular item that should be kept on the scrutiny work programme

The meeting closed at 8.15 pm

Chairman

Date