

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



Listening Learning Leading

Scrutiny Committee

**HELD ON MONDAY 7 FEBRUARY 2022 AT 6.00 PM
IN PERSON AT 135 EASTERN AVENUE, MILTON PARK, OX14 4SB**

The meeting was live streamed and can be watched here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KGpQp80eLF4>

Present in the meeting room:

Councillors: Mocky Khan (Chair), Ken Arlett, Sam Casey-Rerhaye, Alexandrine Kantor, George Levy, David Turner, David Bartholomew and Jane Murphy
Officers: Simon Hewings (Head of Finance) and Candida Mckelvey (Democratic Services Officer)

Remote attendance:

Councillors: Committee member Councillor Anna Badcock, Cabinet members (introducing items) – Councillor Andrea Powell (Corporate Services), Leigh Rawlins (Finance) and Anne-Marie Simpson (Planning)

Officers: Harry Barrington-Mountford (Head of Policy and Programmes) Emma Baker (Planning Policy Team Leader), Andrew Down (Deputy Chief Executive – Partnerships), Adrianna Partridge (Deputy Chief Executive – Transformation and Operations), Richard Spraggett (Strategic Financial Manager)

Cabinet members were invited to watch. Remote attendance was noted for Councillors Robin Bennett, David Rouane and Maggie Filipova-Rivers.

Guests: Public speakers Dr Geoffrey Botting and Suzanne Mclvor.

28 Apologies for absence

Apologies received from Councillors Ian White and Stefan Gawrysiak. Councillors Jane Murphy and Ken Arlett were present as the respective substitute members.

29 Declarations of interest

None.

30 Urgent business and chair's announcements

Chair reminded the committee that when discussing the budget item, councillors should refrain from discussing topics of previous confidential reports, as this would necessitate going into confidential session. The chair hoped that the whole meeting could be conducted in public.

31 Notes of the last meeting

The notes of the meeting on 29 November 2021 were agreed as a correct record and were noted by the committee.

Resolved:

To note the notes of the meeting held on 29 November 2021.

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

There were a few changes since the publication of this agenda. The committee were informed that the Q3 corporate plan performance management report would be coming to the March meeting. The communications and engagement strategy will also come to the March meeting, and the public consultations report had been moved to the May scrutiny meeting.

Resolved:

To note the work programme.

33 Public participation

There were two public speakers present. Dr. Geoffrey Botting spoke to the committee first, as Chair for South Oxfordshire CPRE (The Countryside Charity Oxfordshire). Suzanne Mclvor spoke second, and represented Need Not Greed Oxfordshire, as a coalition member. Both speakers spoke to item seven, Oxfordshire Plan 2050 consultation results.

Dr Botting's main point was that there was a need to reach net zero carbon by the end of the plan, otherwise government money and resources would need to be diverted to climate induced emergencies. He felt that a stable climate was not an add-on to economic and housing growth, it was the critical success factor. How will the conflict between growth and CO2 production or between more new homes and protecting nature be resolved?

Dr Botting urged the Scrutiny Committee

- To make the establishment of effective policies to deliver net zero carbon by the end of the Plan period the top priority.
- To seek confirmation that the decisions on housing numbers rest with our elected councillors.
- To subject the evidence on housing needs to independent analysis.
- To obtain, and review, the climate change assumptions that support this plan.
- To seek a detailed explanation of how the contradictions inherent in the Plan themes will be resolved.
- To support a robust policy on housing density as a major contributor to ensuring affordable, climate friendly development and reducing the land take.

Suzanne Mclvor spoke on behalf of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire. Her main concerns were about lack of scrutiny of the process, with large reports being sent to scrutiny committees simply for noting. She felt that the suggestion for a green belt review was misleading and had led to a Need not Greed sending a complaint to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership. It was felt that local groups and residents views were not heard over promoters and developers.

Suzanne asked that the scrutiny process be taken seriously, with views of residents given a fair hearing, and for local district councils to have control over setting housing numbers.

Notes from both speakers were requested by committee. Both speakers were thanked for their time.

34 Oxfordshire Plan 2050

Cabinet member for planning introduced the report written by the Project Lead for the Oxfordshire Plan Team. Five local councils are involved in the Plan, so this report was not from SODC officers. It was a summary of consultation responses. The report had three appendices as follows:

Appendix 1: Regulation 18 (Part 2) Consultation Report

Appendix 2: Statement of Community Involvement

Appendix 3: Risks associated with the next stages of the Oxfordshire Plan

Cabinet member addressed the public speaker's comments. Cabinet member explained that she was committed to lower housing numbers as per government standard method. Transformation on housing numbers was still being discussed. Regarding independent analysis of numbers, it was felt by the Cabinet member that peer review may be more damaging than political negotiations – however officers could look at why peer review was not discussed.

In regard to density, Cabinet member felt that a countywide policy could be a good idea. Local plans would need to look at the detail.

In response to the mention of the green belt review (this was suggested only in consultation responses) – officers should look at what this would entail exactly. Cabinet member spoke of the positive impact officers and district councillors had on the plan, particularly from the environmental policy perspective.

Scrutiny committee was asked to consider the following recommendations from the report of the Oxfordshire Plan Team Project Lead officer:

1. note the summary results from the recent regulation 18 (part 2) consultation
2. note the revised scope of the Oxfordshire Plan, with clarification over its relationship to city and district Local Plans and supporting evidence base
3. note the next steps of the Oxfordshire Plan process; and
4. recommend the adoption of the revised Statement of Community Involvement, subject to approval at the cabinets of the five Oxfordshire councils.

Councillors commented the following:

- Discussion on high density housing – the pros and cons – it was suggested that high density may cause a lower quality of life. Cabinet member suggested a county wide policy would be helpful, but that local plan teams should look into this in detail. Another view was that high density housing would be more affordable and could be attractive and energy passive, and possibly supportive to community diversity and inclusion.
- The impact of employment / commercial development being given more weight in Oxford City, then the housing burden falls onto surrounding villages.
- Suggested creating a plan for dealing with stresses on community infrastructure and environmental quality of large housing developments. Officer responded that

stakeholders do provide comments (environment agency as an example), and these will be looked at in the working group.

- Concern over the categorising of responses – industry led responses aren't clear – the pecuniary interest should be stated, and it was not clear in the report.
- What would a green belt review entail and would scrutiny committee support it?

Committee debated in order to decide what recommendations they wished to put forward.

Debate focussed on concerns over whether there should be a greenbelt review to ascertain the future requirements of the district, and also the gaps in the report and concerns over the vested interest that some consultees would have.

Concern was raised about the suggestion of a green belt review, as the detail of what this would entail was not clear and could be detrimental to the green belt. The decision to have a review would need to be proposed to all five members (of the Plan) to decide. Was a review to strengthen or weaken the green belt? A view was expressed that there was uncertainty. Committee debated having a review in order to strengthen the green belt.

Committee was concerned about the potential vested interest of some consultees, resulting in incorrect conclusions being made, and the weighting this may have on future plans, and therefore a motion was moved and supported by the committee, and forms an additional recommendation which is stated below, point 5.

The committee resolved to note the following:

Resolved:

1. To note the summary results from the recent regulation 18 (part 2) consultation;
2. To note the revised scope of the Oxfordshire Plan, with clarification over its relationship to city and district Local Plans and supporting evidence base;
3. To note the next steps of the Oxfordshire Plan process; and

Resolved:

4. To recommend the adoption of the revised Statement of Community Involvement, subject to approval at the cabinets of the five Oxfordshire councils.

Committee added on a further recommendation to the Cabinet member for Planning.

Recommendation:

5. Scrutiny committee request that the Cabinet member for planning obtains greater clarity about the nature of the consultation responses to uncover any potential conflicts of interest. It was requested that the Cabinet member respond to the scrutiny committee's concerns in writing.

A committee member asked that the notes of the public speakers be circulated to committee, due to the helpfulness of the points made.

35 Budget setting 2022-23

The chair opened this item by thanking officers and the cabinet members for their work, including the briefings that had been held. He reminded committee that they should refrain from discussing items that were previously discussed in confidential meetings. If so,

discussions would need to go to a confidential session if seen as necessary. The aim was to consider as much as possible in public. If any amendments to the report were requested, this will be implemented before Cabinet review in a meeting being held tomorrow (if necessary).

The report brought together all relevant information to allow Cabinet to recommend to Council a revenue budget for 2022/23 and a capital programme for 2022/23 to 2026/27 and recommended the prudential indicators to be set by the council in accordance with 'the Prudential Code' introduced as part of the Local Government Act 2003. It contained the opinion of the council's chief financial officer on the robustness of estimates and adequacy of the council's financial reserves. It also contained the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which provided details of the forward budget model for the next five years.

Cabinet member for finance introduced the report. Below are his key points:

- Principles and method of approach, in line with the Corporate Plan priority of financial sustainability, were discussed with officers and cabinet members. The finance team was now in-house, and they went through a forensic and detailed budget review process, and the Cabinet member thanked them for their work.
- Base budget savings had been achieved without reducing key services to residents but delivering them more efficiently instead. For example, work on a joint local plan, returning to in-house to make service savings, reduction of office rent.
- Thorough review of fees and charges.
- SODC was a low-cost operator but loses money on band D properties after council tax. We had not benefitted from the business rates retention scheme, but had benefitted from New Homes Bonus, but this may reduce due to government review.
- There was projected unsustainable use of reserves in 2021, so in 2022-23 the thorough base budget review has sought a more managed use of reserves. This had resulted in an improved revenue deficit than previously forecasted, as per the agreed approach with Cabinet.
- Transformation activities were central to tackling the budget gap. Provision given to Corporate Plan priorities and no cuts to services.
- There was a £5 increase to council tax for a Band D property, the maximum allowed under draft referendum rules.
- There was a lack of clarity from central government over the medium-term fair funding framework, and the current settlement is for one year only.

Committee asked questions of the Cabinet member. Chair then read out the proposed recommendations before the committee moved onto debate.

- A committee member suggested asking Cabinet for clarity on expectations for the capital receipts from the sale of Crowmarsh, during the years of the MTFP. Cabinet member responded that without a process in place, figures could not be reliably added to the MTFP, it was too early to say. An option list was going to be reviewed at Cabinet, for Crowmarsh.
- Some questions asked about the new office build costs. Cabinet member Cllr Rouane reminded that a financial envelope had been put forward but it hadn't gone out to tender and so the final cost was not known. Cabinet member reminded that there was legal obligation to achieve best value.

Resolved:

South scrutiny committee note the report on Revenue Budget 2022/23 and Capital Programme to 2026/27 and agree that the recommendations on this report be left as they are for debate at full Council.

36 Quarter 2 Corporate Plan performance report

Committee considered the Quarter two corporate plan performance management report, introduced by the Cabinet member for Corporate Services.

Individual Cabinet Member Decisions (ICMDs) were now included in theme two and there were now more graphics, as per recommendations.

Cabinet member for corporate services reminded committee that specific questions could be taken up with the relevant Cabinet member or officers.

A committee member gave thanks to the comms team for some outreach on social media, which benefitted diversity and inclusivity.

A suggestion was made to include case studies for longer term actions.

Resolved:

Committee noted the Quarter two corporate plan performance management report.

The meeting closed at 8.22 pm

Chair

Date

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