

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



Listening Learning Leading

Scrutiny Committee

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 6 DECEMBER 2023 AT 6.00 PM
THIS MEETING WAS IN PERSON AT ABBEY HOUSE, ABINGDON OX14 3JE.

Present in the meeting room

Councillors: Mocky Khan (Chair), David Turner, Tony Worgan, Leigh Rawlins and James Barlow

Officers: Candida Basilio (Democratic Services Officer)

Remote attendance:

Councillors: Katherine Keats-Rohan

Officers: Simon Hewings (Head of Finance), Mark Hewer (Infrastructure and Development Team Leader) and Richard Spraggett (Strategic Finance Officer)

Guests: Cabinet members Pieter-Paul Barker (Finance) Councillor David Rouane and Anne-Marie Simpson

24 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Kate Gregory, Ken Arlett and Jo Robb.

25 Urgent business and chair's announcements

The chair had no urgent business but paid tribute to the Head of Legal and Democratic, who recently passed away. A moment's silence followed.

26 Declaration of interests

None.

27 Minutes

On page three of the minutes, fourth bullet point, a member raised whether a response was had from the Deputy Chief Executive (DCE) for Transformation and Operations – in her absence, a response was given via Simon Hewings, Head of Finance, who was present. The feedback from the DCE was that the cost centre was labelled for the Climate Team, but in reality, it also covered the Insight and Policy team, where they were a number of staff vacancies and secondments. The budgets will be segregated in future for clarity.

Resolved:

The minutes on 7 November were agreed as a correct record by committee, and the chair shall sign them as such.

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

Members did raise the issue of a long agenda for the 6 February meeting. It was confirmed that the items will be interlinked, but that the weight of the agenda would be considered. It was possible to have two February meetings if desired. Scrutiny do need time to consider papers effectively and reasonable time to discuss in a meeting.

Topics were raised for the work programme – including;

1. Inviting Thames Water as a guest. Chair clarified that we would need to explain why we want to speak to external parties and give ample time to invite them in. A member added that we should also speak to the Environment Agency at the same time.

2. CIL monies that were unallocated – was it appropriate to call in those external partners involved in unallocated funds. Chair added that this may be a Joint Audit and Governance Committee. Another member added that it could be a duplication of work for some partners.

3. Can we look at procurement strategy? Officers would need to comment on what committee was planned to be involved.

It was noted that the budget date for Council was moved back one week.

There was discussion about whether there would be separate scrutiny meetings on the Joint Local Plan (JLP) rather than Joint Scrutiny, it was explained that all members can speak to and debate the JLP and that there were many stages and at those stages the appropriate scrutiny committee will be involved.

Resolved:

The committee noted the work programme.

29 Public participation

None.

30 SODC Community Infrastructure Levy Pilot Grant Fund Policy

Cabinet Member for Finance and corporate assets introduced the report.

We had raised significant funds, and now we had the challenge of filling in the infrastructure gap. He explained that infrastructure such as roads, health and schools was dealt with under Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) and Integrated Care Board (ICB) CIL funds. The topic of this grant scheme, for SODC and Parishes and Towns, was where community facilities come into play. This scheme aims to help towns and parishes to apply for such funds.

The CIL was portioned as follows:

- 50 percent to Oxfordshire County Council for delivery of the following infrastructure types: education, transport, libraries and household recycling centres

- 20 percent for public health care infrastructure
- 30 percent retained by the district council for infrastructure that it is responsible for, such as leisure and other community facilities

Development and Infrastructure Team Leader was present to answer questions. He added that not for profit organisations, third parties can apply also – such as sports clubs. The report was comprehensive in terms of explaining the scheme, and questions were welcomed.

Committee comments were as follows:

- Members were supportive of this scheme.
- Discussion was had on leisure centre facilities and having a better reach. Section 19 was queried – can we have full income and deductions for planned expenditure added for clearer analysis. Officer responded that the table was projected end of year balance for SODC and factors in spend and income. It was difficult to factor in how much will come in, with the slowing down of planning applications. The further breakdown was available. The income was a conservative prediction as there were variables out of our control. A member considered that the breakdown in the report would be helpful.
- Had consideration been given to 60 percent of SODC residents living in rural areas, and whether these residents get a fair share of CIL funds. Member asked if transport links to more urban leisure centres could be part of this? Cabinet member added that this approach should help with this issue, as CIL from urban areas can be spend widely across the district. The officer replied on the transport suggestion – he explained that the spend must be on physical infrastructure but suggested that Towns and Parishes could look at spending their funds on bus links to centres, for example. This scheme does support Towns and Parishes to apply for more funds for infrastructure projects, but transport would be for Towns and Parishes to arrange from their own funds not SODC, as Town and Parish funding portions had a wider remit.
- A member asked if figures for years three, four and five were complete? Can we purchase equipment with this funding? Officer replied to the first question by saying that there were more gaps as we looked further ahead. More might materialise later, and this was the best position provided for now. In response to the equipment question, the officer responded that this would be possible as part of delivering and kitting out a new facility (table, chairs, IT, sports). Applicants could not use SODC funds for existing centres, but Towns and Parishes could use their wider remit to apply for these under their funding portions.
- What percentage of the CIL income or expenditure does the £750,000 represent? Officer replied that based on the last 12 month's CIL collection, this represented 47 percent of our 30 percent CIL income. We will monitor how sustainable this figure was. Currently, the figure represents 19 percent of the current CIL balance overall.
- Cabinet member explained that this was a pilot scheme, and we were hoping to achieve a wide range of projects with it.
- Point six: five percent for administration – it was explained that the five percent was being fully used and was the maximum. If it could be lowered it would, but currently it was needed.
- The minimum project value of £75,000 was queried, could it be £50,000? Officer replied that exceptions could be considered by the Cabinet Member if the project fell slightly outside of the criteria but was judged to be of community value. £75,000 was the minimum value as the scheme was meant to deliver bigger projects, and

this figure aligned with the maximum threshold for smaller funding schemes available. An expression of interest stage was planned and would help tease out this sort of information.

- This would go to Cabinet on 18th December 2023, and we hoped to launch in early 2024. There was a window for us to fit in with other grant schemes in order not to significantly delay this new scheme.
- Discussed the link to the Leisure Strategy
- Member raised whether the further tranches may be better at a different time of year over January – this would be a test to see how it works and whether there will be further tranches and when.
- Scoring matrix: it was driven by appropriate use of funds as there were CIL criteria attached to the funds obtained. We also looked at Corporate Plan priorities, such as climate. Part of the criteria was that the application for an infrastructure project needed to result in completion of a project.
- Para 21, page 18: four-week deadline clause to claim funds. Member added that we needed to stress this deadline to ensure its met as some councils will not meet regularly enough to push this through.
- Officer explained that we were a member of a forum of councils that operate CIL. One other council had a similar scheme – Cornwall County.
- Member raised communication as it was crucial to the scheme's success. Officer had already got the Comms team onboard, and they had done similar with the Capital Grants Scheme. We also produced some clear guidance to go with the communications.
- The scoring matrix was discussed further to help understand its workings. There were multiple categories where a project could score a nine. Suggestions were made to the criteria wording.

In debate, members were in support of the scheme, and that it complemented other schemes. It had the potential to improve District coverage of infrastructure. Members supported some adjustments to the criteria but felt that it was thoughtfully put together. They discussed gaps in provision, and a member noted that where there was a provision filled, we had to look at it relatively, as due to population increases, another similar facility may be deemed necessary in the same area, to meet population needs. A member was glad to see that the policy stated that planning permission must be obtained in advance. We must ensure that the communications are strong and take learnings from a suggested 12-month pilot.

Committee proposed the below, which was seconded and agreed when put to the vote.

Resolved:

The Scrutiny Committee noted and supported Cabinet recommendations(s) as follows, and confirmed that they approve of the scheme:

- a) That Cabinet considers whether or not to approve the pilot scheme policy to award grants for delivery of infrastructure funded by the council's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) allocation, attached in appendix one, and:
- b) If Cabinet supports the pilot scheme policy, that it delegates authority to the relevant head of service in consultation with the relevant cabinet member to make minor amendments to the standard terms and conditions of the scheme.

The committee also made other suggestions for consideration of the officers and Cabinet member. The committee asked for the following amends to the report based upon their discussion and proposed amends to wording on the criteria and elaboration on finance:

Recommendations:

1. Clarity wanted on point 19 and its table – showing income and expenditure
2. On the scoring matrix, officer to check with the Climate Action Team on the addition of “climate adaptation” to column G scoring.
3. On the scoring matrix, column B, committee want inclusion of gaps in provision. Committee discussed inclusion of active travel as part of the scoring matrix, to help tackle gaps in provision.
4. Committee asked for consideration of communication of the pilot scheme – how will this be communicated? Committee also suggested a 12-month pilot scheme, to take learnings from and either rerun the scheme or make adaptations.

The meeting closed at 8.21 pm

Chair

Date

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