

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Scrutiny Committee

HELD ON MONDAY 11 OCTOBER 2021 AT 6.00 PM

135 EASTERN AVENUE, MILTON PARK OX14 4SB

The meeting was live streamed.

Watch the recording here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=339coMJdZA>

Present:

Ian White (Chair) Mocky Khan (Vice Chair)

Anna Badcock, David Bartholomew, Stefan Gawrysiak, Alexandrine Kantor, Jo Robb and David Turner.

Councillor George Levy joined remotely.

Officers

Remote attendance by Patrick Arran, Adrian Duffield, Paula Fox, Simon Hewings, Tracy Smith and Richard Spraggett.

Candida Mckelvey and Adrianna Partridge attended in person.

Also present:

Cabinet members: Councillors Leigh Rawlins and Anne-Marie Simpson.

13 Apologies for absence

Councillor Sam Casey-Rerhaye sent her apologies. Councillor Jo Robb attended as substitute.

14 Minutes

A member asked a question about signing off minutes from the previous meeting. The Chair explained that the minutes of 20 September would be published shortly and be presented at the next meeting along with the minutes of this meeting, therefore bringing this up to date.



Listening Learning Leading

No comments were raised regarding the minutes of the meetings held on 8 March 2021 and they were therefore approved as a correct record.

15 Declarations of interest

None.

16 Urgent business and chair's announcements

The Chair announced that agenda items 7 and 8 were being reordered to make the best use of officer and councillor time, therefore the Financial Outturn report would be considered before the report on planning appeals.

The Chair reminded the committee that for the report on planning appeals, the committee would look at historic outcomes and that due to ongoing legal proceedings, the committee could not discuss issues relating to the 5-year land supply. He said that there would be an update to the committee at an appropriate time.

17 Public participation

None.

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

The Chair was keeping this under review and in particular regarding the timings of reports coming to the committee meetings. He stated that when the legal issues are resolved, a report he had commissioned would be brought to the committee regarding planning appeals process.

The Chair announced that there will be a new task and finish group regarding sewage issues across the district. He explained that there have been issues with overflow encroaching on homes. The task and finish group would be chaired by Councillor Jo Robb, who was the Thames River Champion. Terms of reference would be set up when a councillor group was established.

19 2020/21 Financial outturn

This was item 8 on the agenda but was brought forward to item 7.

Cabinet member Leigh Rawlins presented the report with support from Finance officers Simon Hewings (Section 151 Officer) and Richard Spraggett. Councillor Rawlins explained that this was retrospective report for the year 2020-21 which was a challenging year in general.

Committee members were asked to send detailed questions by email to the Finance officers. Further questions of clarification were asked of the Cabinet member and responses given. A request was made for further clarity as the Council started to return to normal post-Covid.

In response to a question about whether staff shortages led to delays in providing financial updates, the Head of Finance confirmed that there was recruitment of more finance staff which would assist with more timely reporting in future.

Thanks were given to staff for ongoing work and adaptability during a difficult period. A motion was suggested to note the report, and the committee voted in favour.

Resolved:

That committee noted the report and had provided comments to the Cabinet member during the meeting.

20 Planning appeals

This item was item 7 of the agenda and was moved to item 8.

At the invitation of the Chair, Councillor Arlett spoke to the committee, expressing support for the planning committee and officers. He suggested that the report could have focussed more on the positives and that councillors and officers should communicate more as well as having additional training to improve outcomes. He said that overall, the work of the planning team and planning committee was very good, and that committee were not obliged to agree with officer recommendations.

This item was introduced by Cabinet member Anne-Marie Simpson and supporting officers present were Paula Fox, Adrian Duffield and Tracy Smith.

In summary, committee members felt that the performance overall was good, especially considering the changes to working that occurred during the pandemic. Members discussed the metrics the council's planning decisions were measured against (quality of decision making) and whether they were fair, although the committee was reminded that the authority had to follow the metrics from central government (Planning Inspectorate).

The committee discussed benchmarking and how to compare with other high land price areas / districts. The report had links to live tables and the data was available for comparison. High land price tended to incentivise appeals if the application was not granted.

The committee discussed the difference in success between major and minor planning applications and asked whether it was possible to quantify the difference and explain this to the Planning Inspectorate. It was noted that there tended to be more senior legal representation for major application appeal hearings, but officers explained that this was not in the council's control.

The committee noted that a report will come to it in future which will give further information on appeals process, staffing, approach and strategy.

The committee agreed that there needed to be further training, and it was suggested that focus should be on analysing 'lessons learned' from appeals in order to better inform training for councillors and officers. Parish councils were also mentioned for training needs. A view was expressed that it was important to not be over cautious in making decisions because of the metrics we were measured against.

A motion to note the report was seconded and the committee voted in favour.

Resolved:

Committee noted the report and provided comments to the Cabinet member.

The meeting closed at 8.09 pm

Chairman

Date

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