Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

South Oxfordshire District Council

Listening Learning Leading

Scrutiny Committee

HELD ON 6 MARCH 2023 AT 6PM
AT ABBEY HOUSE, ABBEY CLOSE, ABINGDON OX14 3JE

Present in the meeting room:

Councillors: Ian White (Chair), Leigh Rawlins (substitute), Alexandrine Kantor, Jo Robb and David Bartholomew.
Officers: Adrianna Partridge (Deputy Chief Executive for Operations and Transformation), and Candida Basilio (Democratic Services Officer)
Cabinet Member: Councillor Anne-Marie Simpson, Cabinet member for Planning

Remote attendance:

Councillors: none.
Officers: Emma Turner (Planning Enforcement Team Leader), Paula Fox (Planning Development Manager) and Adrian Duffield (Head of Planning)
Guests: Cabinet members Councillors David Rouane and Sue Cooper

1 Urgent business and chair's announcements

None.

2 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Turner, George Levy, Anna Badcock, Stefan Gawrysiak and Mocky Khan. Councillor Leigh Rawlins was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Turner.

3 Declaration of interests

None.

4 Minutes

Resolved: Minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2023 were agreed as a correct record, and the chair shall sign them as such.

5 Public participation

None.

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

Resolved:
Noting that this was the last scrutiny meeting of this administration, members agreed that no comments or additions were required to the work programme, as the scrutiny committee may have different membership after the May elections.

7 Planning enforcement statement

Cabinet member for Planning introduced the report, supported by the Head of Planning and the Planning Enforcement Team Leader.

Members asked the following:

- A member asked about whether a six-week period to decide what action to take on a case was considered satisfactory and how that decision was made? Head of Planning explained that it was a realistic timeframe to ensure officers could gather the information to make a decision
- There was discussion after a member considered that parishes and residents did not consider the process to be a success and felt that they were not updated enough or felt excluded from the process. Cabinet member explained that residents were cared for, in that transparency of the service made sure that residents understood the process. The service, despite being non-statutory, was kept by the council due to it being viewed as an important service to residents
- Flexibility – Team Leader explained that there were reviews where certain cases seem to not progress when deemed not expedient
- A member thanked the team for the new planning enforcement website for residents to report on. Member asked if the decision report / triage form when a case was rejected could be sent to the informant for the case. Team Leader explained that interested parties were written to with a basic explanation. Communications was under regular review to look for improvements
- A member stated that thanks should be given to the enforcement team on the reduction in open cases. His concern was with the national policy and GDPR preventing some detail being given in updates
- Team Leader explained that officers had to separate emotion from cases and focus on planning harm
- Member expressed that high planning harm cases should be processed quicker
- How do we define harm? Head of Planning explained that the level of planning harm was a judgement based on law. Varies by court case to court case. There was a distinction between an individual's perception of harm and planning harm
- Discussed integrated working with other teams

Recommendation:
The committee noted the report and the progress made and thanked the enforcement team for their work. Comments were made on where it was felt the process could be improved, but the committee did not suggest any changes to the statement at this time but asked for officers to consider increasing the range of points that could be awarded in relation to the scale of the breach of planning conditions and to the degree of planning harm.

The committee suggested that after the district council elections in May, the new Scrutiny Committee considers calling for a further progress review of the new planning enforcement approach in around 9 months' time, which could be reviewed at a scrutiny meeting in November 2023.

The meeting closed at 19:02

Chair Date