

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 14 January 2021 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 1.05 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE – in the Chair

Councillor Jenny Hannaby (Deputy Chairman)

Councillor Nick Carter

Councillor Mike Fox-Davies

Councillor Tony Ilott

Councillor Liz Leffman

Councillor Jeannette Matelot

Councillor Charles Mathew

Councillor Glynis Phillips

Councillor Judy Roberts

Councillor Michael Waine

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Yvonne Constance, Cabinet Member for Environment (including Transport), (for Agenda Item 6)

Officers:

Whole of meeting Anita Bradley, Director for Law and Governance; Louise Tustian, Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes; Colm Ó Caomhánaigh, Committee Officer

Part of meeting

Agenda Item

5, 8

Officer Attending

Lorna Baxter, Director for Finance

5

Tim Chapple, Treasury Manager; Steve Jordan, Corporate Director, Commercial Development Assets and Investment.

6

Jason Russell, Corporate Director, Communities; James Gagg, Infrastructure Strategy Team Leader; John Disley, Infrastructure Strategy and Policy Manager; Eric Owens, Assistant Director, Growth and Place

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Lara Patel, Deputy Director – Safeguarding

The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting, together with a schedule of addenda tabled at the meeting and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda, reports and additional documents are attached to the signed Minutes.

1/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

There were no apologies.

2/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - GUIDANCE NOTE ON BACK PAGE OF THE AGENDA

(Agenda No. 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

3/21 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 December 2020 were approved.

4/21 BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLANNING 2021/22: CAPITAL AND INVESTMENT REPORT

(Agenda No. 5)

Lorna Baxter, Director for Finance, introduced the item. She summarised the Capital and Investment Strategy (Section 5.1 in Addenda 2). Members were invited to provide comments for the discussion at Cabinet on 19 January 2021.

Treasury Management

Tim Chapple, Treasury Manager, summarised the Treasury Management and Annual Investment Strategies (Section 5.2 in Addenda) and responded to questions from Members as follows:

- The figures in Paragraph 82 were correct and the discrepancy with figures in Paragraph 5 will be corrected in the versions of the documents for Cabinet and Full Council.
- The figure for Capital and Developer Contributions in Paragraph 15 was a combination of capital grants, capital receipts and developer contributions.
- All of the Capital and Developer Contributions are forecast to be spent over a 10 year period and therefore it would not be prudent to use a proportion of it to invest in external funds as it is necessary to take a 10 year view.
- The last sentence in paragraph 35 indicated that borrowing for OxLEP may take place earlier in the year if interest rates are forecast to increase towards the end of the year.
- While the Bank of England had not ruled out negative interest rates it would be a draconian measure and was not considered likely.

Councillor Charles Mathew asked that consideration be given in this budget to raise the limit on investment in external funds from £101m to £125m as he believed that the rates available were worth what he saw as a minimal risk.

Investment Strategy

Steve Jorden, Corporate Director, Commercial Development Assets and Investment, summarised the strategy and responded to Members' questions as follows:

- Members should send to him a list of any Council owned properties in their area, not being fully utilised. Due to workloads, there was a need to prioritise the work of the property team.
- He did not have detailed information on the proposal in Eynsham West listed on Addenda Page 39 but would communicate with the local Member after the meeting (**ACTION**).
- Work was proceeding on the One Public Estate programme. The Council was talking with District Councils, the Fire Service and the University on possible sharing of properties.
- Post-COVID there may not be the same need for office space which may raise the possibility of sharing space with other partners. Currently the emphasis was on exiting costly leases.
- Meetings will not continue to be entirely online but may be a hybrid mix of some people in a room and others online. There will therefore still be a need for a council chamber – members of the public should be able to attend physically – but whether the current chamber was the best option was open to question.
- It was not proposed to invest in industrial property for the sole purpose of a yield but consideration would be given to developing social housing or investment for regeneration.

Property Strategy

Steve Jorden introduced the strategy. Officers responded to questions from Members as follows:

- The Council was working with the City Council on proposals for Speedwell House and he hoped that this would provide a platform for working together on other projects.
- The £65.7m allocated for the strategy will be invested wisely to develop and improve the Councils property assets. Specific proposals will come forward for discussions with the Director for Finance to consider financial implications.
- The Committee requested that non-operational smaller assets that had little value be reviewed annually.

Capital Programme

Lorna Baxter outlined the Capital Programme (Section 5.5) and the changes to it (Section 5.6). She then took questions from Members:

- In Section 5.6 the “Firm” projects were those starting in 2021/22 or 2022/23 whereas the “Pipeline” projects start beyond that and within the next 10 years.
- The reference to Kiosk Replacement on Addenda Page 47 related to self-service kiosks in libraries. She would have to come back to Members as to whether they were replacement equipment or for expansion of the service (**ACTION**).

The Chairman thanked officers for all the work on the budget and moved the resolution.

RESOLVED: to consider and comment on:

- a) **The Capital & Investment Strategy (Section 5.1), incorporating**
 - I. **The Treasury Management Strategy 2021/22 (Section 5.2)**
 - II. **The Investment Strategy 2021/22 (Section 5.3)**
 - III. **The Property Strategy (Section 5.4)**
- b) **The Draft Capital Programme 2021/22 to 2030/31 (Section 5.5)**
- c) **Changes to the Capital Programme (Section 5.6)**

5/21 LOCAL TRANSPORT CONNECTIVITY PLAN (LTCP) & ACTIVE TRAVEL
(Agenda No. 6)

Local Transport Connectivity Plan

Jason Russell, Corporate Director, Communities, introduced the item. James Gagg, Infrastructure Strategy Team Leader, gave a presentation summarising the report. Officers responded to Members' questions as follows:

- A plan focussed on walking, cycling and public transport was good in terms of equality because it favoured those who did not have access to a car. There will be an Equality Impact Assessment alongside the development of the LTCP.
- The baseline report recognised the issue of public transport in rural areas and there was a specific question in the consultation to get feedback on that. A new government bus strategy was due shortly and that was expected to include rural transport.
- There was a separate strategy on electric vehicles which is planned to come to Cabinet later this year.
- A number of smaller electric buses were being trialed for school transport and it was hoped to roll that out more widely.
- There were opportunities to make changes to new developments to ensure that they tied in with new policies and other developments.
- There was work on-going in partnership with bus companies to look at new routes but there will be places where it was not viable and where there was a need to look at alternatives such as shared transport. It was possible to "pump prime" services for new developments as had been done recently in Didcot.
- The consultation process was set out in the papers and there will be work with engagement colleagues on how to ensure a fair and transparent consultation.
- Officers had received training on the healthy streets approach which will help inform how transport schemes were developed.
- There was now a better engagement with the freight industry through their attendance at Strategic Transport Forum meetings and there was an opportunity to build on examples of freight consolidation in Oxford.

Members made the following suggestions which will be brought to the Cabinet discussion:

- The reduction of inequalities needs to be more strongly reflected and the public health team should be engaged in LTCP development to ensure it is in line with the Director for Public Health's emphasis on reducing inequalities. For example, a

person's employment prospects may be seriously limited by poor public transport connections where they live.

- There is a need for an equality impact assessment on the consultation itself to ensure that it reaches all communities. The consultation should include Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- More needs to be done on connectivity into and between main towns. Nearly all of the money for buses seems to be going to Oxford or for services to and from Oxford.
- Congestion on the Oxford Ring Road needs to be tackled and it was noted that much of the congestion takes place in areas experiencing deprivation.
- Members would support moves to develop delivery hubs to reduce the number of large lorries in built-up areas. More access control is needed to combat "rat running" by HGVs.
- Trees have an important role to play alongside main roads to assist in air quality.
- To assist the switch to electric vehicles there is a need to provide charging points for those who do not have a garage or driveway.
- School transport is generally operated with older vehicles but they should not have to wait a long time for electric buses.
- There is a need to ensure that connectivity improvements include out of town retail centres and that existing new development proposals are updated to reflect new policy priorities.
- Development needs to have more mixed use and to move away from large housing-only estates, looking more at place shaping, including better designed streets.

Active Travel

Eric Owens, Assistant Director, Growth and Place, gave a presentation on the latest developments and responded to Members' questions as follows:

- A resourcing assessment had been conducted and identified skills needs in transport planning, programme management and communications and engagement. Business plans were being finalised. The fact that the Department for Transport had put back the delivery deadline to March 2022 had helped with resourcing.
- He was happy to arrange a meeting afterwards to discuss the detail around concerns with plans for Bicester. The current scheme for Bicester was drawn from the LCWIP (Local Cycling and Walk Infrastructure Plan) and there were plans being developed to enhance the Market Square.
- There was a process to decide the selection of bids and prioritise those with the best chance of winning funding. With regard to Abingdon, an LCWIP was being developed which can then act as a vehicle for funding bids.

Councillor Yvonne Constance, Cabinet Member for Environment (including Transport), thanked Members for their comments which will help to ensure that the reach in these programmes is as wide as possible. She added that the Active Travel funds were specifically aimed at increasing access to public transport and that was why Oxford was prioritised. There was an LCWIP for Bicester, one was being completed for Didcot and Abingdon was next on the list.

The Chairman asked that all Members be circulated with the street tags in their area to ensure that they are engaged in new developments (**ACTION**). She thanked the officers for all the work that had gone into the plans and noted that the Committee should review the plans at a future date.

RESOLVED:

- a) **to note progress on the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan and the timetable leading to Plan adoption set out in Annex 1,**
- b) **to comment on any points on the Vision Document included in Annex 1 in an addenda to be submitted along with the Cabinet report of 19th January, when they consider the Vision Document as the basis for public consultation in February 2021.**

6/21 CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING SERIOUS CASE REVIEW (Agenda No. 7)

Lara Patel, Deputy Director – Safeguarding, introduced the report. While it had been completed in 2017, the publication had been delayed until November 2020 due to a police investigation. The most important issues in the review were the fact that the child was electively home educated and had therefore less contact with professionals, had complex health issues and had received fragmented service from health. There was now a clearer pathway for bowel and bladder conditions and a greater awareness that home education can result in a limited amount of contact for professionals with a child. All parents that home educate were now sent information on health services that they can access.

Lara Patel responded to Members questions as follows:

- Health professionals were now more aware of the link between constipation and mental health as well as the longer-term physical health effects. Constipation had been an issue in other serious case reviews.
- It was important to keep repeating to professionals the message regarding the limitations in accessing children who were home educated which needed parental consent. The former Independent Chair of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board had written to the Department for Education on this matter and they were currently reviewing the guidance but there was no indication of any major change soon.

The Chairman asked Anita Bradley as Director for Law and Governance to discuss with safeguarding and education officers what can be done under current legislation

in situations where parents refuse access to children who are being home educated and for the Education Scrutiny Committee to examine the issue (**ACTION**).

Councillor Michael Waine, Chairman of the Education Scrutiny Committee, stated that the committee had looked at the issue about a year ago but would review it again in light of this latest case and the fact that numbers being home educated in Oxfordshire had increased from 650 to 900 since the pandemic.

Lara Patel described two primary reasons behind the increase during the pandemic. Some parents had enjoyed home educating but some were afraid to send their children to school because of the risk of infection. The challenge for the DfE was to balance parental rights with safeguarding children in an appropriate way.

7/21 BUSINESS MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING REPORT

(Agenda No. 8)

Louise Tustian, Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes, summarised the report and officers responded to Members' questions as follows:

- The Committee will have an opportunity to review the Outcomes Framework in the new financial year as well as the targets and tolerances for the RAG ratings.
- While the government had not met in full the extra costs to the Council from COVID, it was possible to downgrade the leadership risk level (LR11 on Agenda Page 158) because the Council had adopted the revised budget and will hopefully agree the budget for 2021/22, both of which were balanced.

Louise Tustian agreed to come back to Members of the Committee after the meeting with responses to the following questions (**ACTIONS**):

- Why there was no rate available for air quality under indicator 12, Agenda Page 145.
- Whether the libraries' click and collect service was regarded as an essential service under COVID regulations.
- If the changes from Amber to Green were mostly due to the lockdown or if they actually reflected a real improvement.
- How the rating on the carbon neutral target could be green when the Council had not yet set out its ambition in the light of the commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030.
- Why the rating on air quality was amber when there had been a dramatic reduction of traffic under the pandemic.
- If it was possible to move more quickly on the installation of LED lighting.
- If care staff working under Home First had been prioritised for vaccination.

The Chairman moved the recommendation with the addition that she will bring the matters raised to Cabinet.

RESOLVED: to

- a) **note the report and consider any matters for future attention by the Committee; and**

b) report the issues raised to the Cabinet discussion of the papers on 19 January 2021.

8/21 WORK PROGRAMME
(Agenda No. 9)

It was agreed to add the following to the March meeting – possibly requiring a full day meeting:

- Income Generation
- NEATS, Apprenticeships, Young People

The following items to be added to the June meeting if the local elections are postponed:

- Transport, Place Setting and S106
- Home First
- Outcomes Framework

The following item to be added to the list of items ‘to be scheduled’:

- Children being cared for out-of-county.
- Review of LTCP and Active Travel

..... in the Chair

Date of signing 20