

OXFORDSHIRE PLACE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Wednesday, 25 January 2023 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 1.55pm

Present:

Councillor Kieron Mallon – in the Chair

Councillors:

Charlie Hicks
Brad Baines
Arash Fatemian

Ted Fenton
Judy Roberts
Freddie van Mierlo

Richard Webber
Alison Rooke

Other Councillors in attendance:

Councillor Pete Sudbury
(Cabinet Member for
Climate Change and
Environment)

Officers:
Bill Cotton (Corporate
Director Environment and
Place)

Rachel Wileman (Director
Planning, Environment
and Climate Change)

Tom Hudson (Principal
Scrutiny Officer)

Marco Dias (Interim
Scrutiny Officer)

Chris Reynolds
(Committee Officer)

Also in attendance:
Nigel Tipple (Chief
Executive, OxLEP)

Jamine Gilhooly
(Business Strategist,
Banbury BID)

Phil Stride (Thames
Water)

Derek Stork (Group
Against Reservoir
Development)

Lesley Tait (Thames
Water)

The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and decided as set out below. Except insofar as otherwise specified, the reasons for the decisions are contained in the agenda and reports, copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes.

1/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Sally Povolotsky.

Councillor Alison Rooke substituted for Councillor Povolotsky.

2/23 MINUTES

(Agenda Item 3)

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

A member expressed concern that a number of resolutions recorded in the minutes were shown as unanimous decisions when they had been decided by a majority vote. The Chair recognised that a number of the issues considered by the Committee were controversial and it was open for members to submit minority reports on these issues if required.

RESOLVED that future decisions of the committee should be recorded as unanimous or taken by a majority of members present and voting.

3/23 FUTURE OF RETAIL AND THE HIGH STREET

(Agenda Item 5)

(Councillor Pete Sudbury, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment, Nigel Tipple, Chief Executive of OxLEP and Jasmine Gilhooly, Business Strategist, Banbury BID, attended the meeting for this item)

The Chair introduced the discussion on this item. He referred to the introduction of a number of the Council's environmental policies across the County and it was an appropriate time to consider the impact of these on the retail sector and town centres.

Nigel Tipple, Chief Executive of the LEP, gave a presentation on Oxfordshire Economy: Town Centres and High Streets covering the following issues:-

- Impact of the COVID pandemic on town centres, working at home and footfall
- Programme for enabling spaces for shops, cultural venues and other working facilities
- Visitor economy data – comparison with 2019
- Refresh of Oxfordshire Economic Plan
- Growth hub grants and business support
- Support footfall back to business and high streets
- Information on public transport and access
- Work with art and cultural partners to encourage more art installation and events
- Partnerships and action for each location

Jasmine Gilhooly, gave a presentation on Love Your Town: Shopping in Banbury and covered the following issues:-

- Proportion of local business rates allocated to town regeneration
- Role of the local community
- Shop window dressing competition
- Local businesses – quality and experience
- A video clip promoting Banbury as a place for new independent businesses

During discussion, members made the following comments:-

- The business community needed to improve the way in which it promoted economic activity in towns
- Place design is critically important in the regeneration of town centres
- There is scope to review park and ride car park fees and impact on footfall in town centres
- Moving health provision such as physiotherapy and occupational health to the street would have benefits
- Concern about investment in improved infrastructure in cycling without evidence that this would increase cycle usage in town centres
- Need to consider the impact of social media on promotion of local businesses
- Improved data on predictions of footfall resulting from traffic controls would be beneficial

RESOLVED to recommend the Cabinet that:-

- a) Major policy decisions by the Council should take into account impact on local economy and accessibility
- b) The Council should be proactive in communicating the benefits of its economic and environmental policies
- c) The Council influences place-shaping in partnership with District Councils and other organisations

4/23 WATER RESOURCES AND THE SOUTH EAST REGIONAL PLAN

(Agenda Item 6)

The Committee considered a report on the County Council's proposed responses to the current South East water resources regional and company draft plan consultations. Draft responses were being prepared for those with a deadline of 20th February 2023. The draft Thames Water WRMP24 had a delayed publication date, of 13th December 2022 and has a deadline of 21st March 2023, and therefore, a draft response has not yet been prepared.

The Director of Planning, Environment and Climate Change presented the report and referred, in particular, to the Council's opposition to the proposed strategic reservoir described in the Thames Water plan. She said that a representative of GARD had been invited to the meeting to explain their organisation's views on the proposed development.

Phil Stride from Thames Water gave a presentation on the consultation on the two plans. He said that Thames Water were keen to hear the Council's views on these plans. He made the following points:-

- The need for resource planning to address the potential shortfall in water resources in future decades
- Work with the Environment Agency and other stakeholders on scenarios for abstraction reduction
- The development of a best value plan
- Managing leakages and water demand effectively
- Development of new sources of water
- Proposals for the South East Strategic Reservoir
- Opportunities from the plan for Society, the Economy and the Environment
- Proposals for consultation and engagement

Derek Stork, Group Against Reservoir Development gave a presentation covering the following points:-

- Aims of the GARD campaign/response to the plan
- Analysis of water demand predictions
- Performance of Thames Water against government targets on water efficiency and leakage
- Drought resilience
- Supply-side solution -de- emphasising new reservoirs
- New infrastructure to 2040

During discussion, members made the following comments on the draft response to the plan set out in the report:-

- Too much emphasis on engineering solutions to the problems
- Targets on water leakage and performance were not sufficient
- Insufficient proposals on educating the public on reducing water usage
- Concern that an Oxfordshire-built reservoir will benefit other areas
- There was no local support for the reservoir plans
- Concern about the choice of language in the Council's proposed response set out in the report
- A holistic approach was needed to water resourcing before detailed matters raised in the proposed response are considered

The representatives from Thames Water answered a number of questions on their presentation.

RESOLVED to:-

- a) recommend that the Council includes, as part of its consultation response, a statement setting out Oxfordshire County Council's vision in terms of a holistic approach to water management, highlighting our preference for solutions that are based in nature and that recognise

the reality of an increasingly water scarce environment and the need to adapt to this reality.

- b) support the proposed response to the consultation set out in the report
- c) recommend that the Council ensures appropriate language is used in future responses to consultations and all Council documents, avoiding unclear and divisive words such as 'nonsense'
- d) recommend that the Council works with Thames Water to explore if more can be done to expedite water leakage repairs.

5/23 THE ENVIRONMENT ACT 2021

(Agenda Item 7)

The Committee considered a report on the Environment Act 2021 and the implications for the Oxfordshire Climate and Natural Environment Policy Statement.

The Director of Planning, Environment and Climate Change presented the report and summarised the implications of the legislation for the County Council.

The Director then answered a number of questions as follows:-

- Members noted that control of noise pollution was primarily a district function and the County Council would need to consider its role e.g. transport and infrastructure planning
- The Council had a role with District Council partners in managing air quality
- The Council was working closely with the local nature partnership and other partners on environmental issues
- There were staff restructuring exercises taking place to improve capacity to respond to environmental legislation. The Director could not comment on whether these would extend to legal services.

The Chair reiterated the Committee's concern regarding the need for adequate permanent staffing resources to respond to the demands of the Council's priorities and government legislation.

RESOLVED to:-

- a) note the report
- b) inform the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee of concerns regarding staffing resource issues within the Council and request an update on the restructuring of the Environment and Place Directorate in particular

6/23 ACTION AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKER

(Agenda Item 8)

The Committee considered the current action and recommendation tracker report.

RESOLVED to:

- a) note the current position on the Committee's actions and recommendations
- b) ask the Scrutiny Officer to review the items listed as amber and provide a timeline for their completion in the next report.

7/23 COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME AND THE COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

(Agenda Item 9)

The Committee considered its work programme.

RESOLVED to:-

- a) ask the Scrutiny Officer to arrange an informal meeting to consider its future work programme
- b) establish a transport policy task and finish group

..... in the Chair

Date of signing