

OXFORDSHIRE PLACE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Wednesday, 6 December 2023 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.25 pm

Present:

Councillor Kieron Mallon – in the Chair

Councillors:

Charlie Hicks - Deputy Chair Richard Webber
Alison Rooke Nick Field-Johnson

Councillors present by invitation:

Cllr Judy Roberts, Cabinet member for Infrastructure and Development Strategy;

Cllr Neil Fawcett, Cabinet member for Community and Corporate Services

Officers present for some or all of the meeting:

Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer;

Bill Cotton, Corporate Director for Environment and Place;

Rachel Wileman, Director of Environment, Planning, and Climate Change;

Nicholas Perrins, Head of Strategic Planning;

Mark Haynes, Director of Customer Experience, Cultural & Property Services;

Mark McCree, Service Manager: Libraries and Heritage

The Council 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.

11/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Bennett, Cllr Constance, Cllr Enright, and Cllr Fenton (substitute: Cllr Field-Johnson). It was confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

Cllr Bennett attended remotely as a guest of the Committee, at the discretion of the Chair.

12/23 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE

(Agenda Item 2)

There were none.

13/23 MINUTES

(Agenda Item 3)

The Committee resolved to **AGREE** the minutes of the meeting of 13 September 2023 as a true and accurate record.

14/23 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda Item 4)

There were none.

The Chair advised that he had been asked to take item 6 on the Libraries and Heritage Strategy Update before item 5 and the Committee resolved to **AGREE** that the agenda would be amended accordingly.

15/23 INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING STATEMENT 2022/23

(Agenda Item 5)

Cllr Judy Roberts, Cabinet member for Infrastructure and Development Strategy, attended to introduce the Infrastructure Funding Strategy (IFS) which detailed the developer contributions secured, spent, or received during the previous financial year, 1 April 2022-31 March 2023.

Cllr Roberts was accompanied by Bill Cotton, Corporate Director for Environment and Place, Rachel Wileman, Director of Environment, Planning, and Climate Change, and Nicholas Perrins, Head of Strategic Planning, who attended to answer the Committee's questions.

Cllr Roberts introduced the report by outlining the purpose of the Infrastructure Funding Statement, which was to satisfy a central government requirement that the Council report on its activities around Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and s.106-derived infrastructure spending over the previous financial year.

The Director of Environment, Planning, and Climate Change provided further detail. In 2022/23 the Council had secured 68 new planning obligations for developer contributions worth £124m. Of that, £28.2m had been spent in-year, the overwhelming majority on education and transport. A total of £62.3m of contributions were received in 2022/23 but the Committee was concerned to note that only 45% of this amount, namely £28.2m, was spent. In total, including monies received in 2022/23, the Council was holding £276m for the purposes of future projects, and had secured (though not received) additional funding of £291m. Of the money held, £97.7m had been allocated to projects which were either in the capital programme or had a business case.

In-year education spending, £18.4m across 31 projects, was aimed at adding additional pupil places to support new development. Transport spending, £6.7m over 50 different projects had tended to relate to active travel, bus

travel or junction improvements. Eight libraries had received upgrades or refurbishments at a cost of £351k.

Assessing future priorities for infrastructure funding made reference to a number of factors, including statutory requirements, Local Plans, County Council policies such as the Local Transport and Connectivity Plans and service plans, externally-held policies such as the Future Oxfordshire Partnership's Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy, and the feedback from Localities meetings.

Key future priorities included:

- i) future school expansions;
- ii) active and sustainable traffic projects to reduce traffic levels;
- iii) tackling congestion, improving air quality and making bus journeys quicker;
- iv) providing new household waste recycling facilities;
- v) specialist housing, such as for adult social care;
- vi) resourcing fire and rescue services;
- vii) developing community hubs.

It was clear that the Council was effective at collecting developer contributions to pay for infrastructure crucial to the Council's functions. A significant sum was being held (£276m) of which 35% was earmarked for spending. A corporate project was underway to review how s.106 monies could be used to support the capital programme and ensure faster delivery of projects which would benefit local communities.

In response to the presentation, the Committee discussed multiple issues which included:

- The profile of capital expenditure necessary to achieve the Council's transport ambitions as set out in the Local Transport Connectivity Plan;
- The flexibilities, barriers and constraints around expenditure of s. 106 monies;
- The capacity, communication and integration of the Council's officers responsible for s. 106;
- The impacts of recent developments such as the loss of support for the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan and the call-in of the Housing Infrastructure Fund decision by the Secretary of State on priorities and funding;
- The Council's forward planning of projects;
- Means of improving governance, communication and cross-working between different infrastructure-providing stakeholders, particularly the County and District/City Councils.

The Council resolved to **AGREE** recommendations under the following headings to Cabinet in time for its meeting on 19 December 2023 when Cabinet would also be considering the IFS.

- That the Council is mindful to build in as much flexibility as possible to its s.106 agreements at negotiation and agreement stages;
- That the Council holds conversations with non-CIL collecting district councils in the county to emphasise the benefits of collecting CIL funding over s.106 contributions;
- That the Council's progress review of s. 106 funded infrastructure projects provide, for each project, an easy to read summary of the barriers, constraints and trigger points it is subject to;
- That the Council involves local members throughout the full process of infrastructure delivery in their areas via, in the first instance, its Locality meetings;
- That the Council improves the involvement and communication between all stakeholders in the infrastructure delivery process, particularly between the negotiation and delivery teams, and the delivery teams and the wider Council;
- That the Council invests in its infrastructure delivery, including project management, to enable it to reach a high level of efficiency and effectiveness, reducing delays or the threat of handing back developer contributions for undelivered infrastructure;
- That the Council leads on improving strategic coordination between tier 1 and tier 2 authorities in the county via the Future Oxfordshire Partnership to embed necessary infrastructure requirements for the achievement of the LTCP targets in the next iteration of the OXIS;
- That a back-casting exercise from 2030 in reference to the OXIS refresh be undertaken and the required investment in infrastructure to achieve LTCP targets to be compared with current plans and the OXIS be updated as necessary;
- That the Council develops a pipeline of infrastructure projects, particularly around Active Travel;
- That the Council undertakes an audit of its spending on pavements, street-lighting and other walking infrastructure.

16/23 LIBRARIES AND HERITAGE STRATEGY UPDATE

(Agenda Item 6)

Cllr Neil Fawcett, Cabinet member for Corporate Services, gave a brief introduction to the report which sought to update the Committee on the outworking of the Libraries and Heritage Strategy since it was launched in June 2022. Cllr Fawcett commended the work of the Director of Customer Experience, Cultural, and Property Services, Mark Haynes, (the Director) and that of the Service Manager: Libraries and Heritage, Mark McCree, (the Service Manager) who attended alongside him.

The Director explained that the Strategy was now very well-established and that it continued to evolve and develop. Libraries were about far more than simply borrowing books and it was important for the Council to respond to the needs of the community.

The Service Manager gave an extensive but succinct overview of the report and its annexes. The main report set out for the Committee the planning and

performance framework that was established prior to the launch of the strategy and which had been subsequently implemented over the last 18 months. The implementation of these were demonstrated in the annexes to the report. He explained to the Committee that he had been determined that the strategy would not 'gather dust' but rather had provided quarterly updates measuring achievements against the service plan. The Committee's attention was drawn to the infographic at annexe 9 setting out how Cultural Services had benefited the people of Oxfordshire in 2022/23. Amongst that it was noted that there had been 1.6m visitors to Oxfordshire libraries with over 800 activities run, attended by 133k people.

The Service Manager assured the Committee that there was a constant and consistent commitment to further improvements for the benefit of residents in accordance with the Council's priorities.

The Committee were grateful for the clarity of the report and for its presentation. The infographic in annexe 9 was commended as a particularly excellent example of good practice which should be shared with colleagues more widely as it set out so clearly and so easily the service's data.

In discussion with members, the following were raised:

- That the Council had partnered with the Library of Things but that there was no intention for the Council to run one itself;
- There were Digital Champions who supported those who struggled with ICT to use such in libraries and the staff and volunteers in libraries were commended for their helpfulness by members of the Committee;
- The Committee was advised that 11000 validations for bus passes had been supported in libraries last year and that the library populations tended to mirror background demographics with those in the greatest need tending to navigate to the library; the Libraries Services had reached out to partners and had worked with those supporting homeless people and local colleges; greater awareness of the support libraries could offer was to be encouraged;
- It was noted that there are many services to support vulnerable users but what would be most helpful would be a single point of access triage service which could support people to access all the services the Council could support them with;
- That the Council did not want libraries to be standalone but embedded in their communities as community assets, with a number of organisations present at the Westgate; there was exploration of whether cafés and banks could be placed in libraries; the Committee was advised that there were live discussions with two commercial banks about access to rural banking services. Regrettably, financial constraints meant that any return to a mobile library provision was very unlikely but the Council's Home Library Service was valuable to those unable to visit libraries themselves;
- Whilst the service had come in on budget this year, there were financial constraints and ongoing pressures to provide the optimum

service necessary with hesitations regarding the Asset Development Plan; it was suggested that the experiences of the French Ambassador to the OECD, might be worth exploring as she had conducted significant work in this area;

- It was noted that the whole county had a rich and diverse living heritage – far wider than simply ancient buildings, towns, and trees but including motor-cars, bicycles, and music - and, whilst most of the heritage focus was led by partners rather than the Council itself, the Council was keen to draw attention to that aspect of the service; the Committee's attention was drawn to the Heritage Search part of the website (<https://heritagesearch.oxfordshire.gov.uk/>) which had many and varied resources available;
- The question of how heritage was protected across the county whilst nonetheless building the necessary houses was explored briefly.

In closing the item, the Committee once again commended the clarity of the presentation and of the infographic and observed that it would be well worth the Scrutiny function drawing other services' attention to it as an exemplar. The Committee also observed that the Cabinet member would do well to contact the French Ambassador to the OECD to seek her advice.

The Committee resolved to make recommendations to Cabinet under the following headings:

1. That the Council should consider how best to partner with other organisations to provide community hubs in libraries;
2. That the Council should continue to work with Age UK and Family Centres and other organisations to encourage awareness of the facilities available in libraries;
3. That the Council should proactively advertise the Home Library Service;
4. That the Council should proactively raise the profile of the heritage aspect of the service and also of music education;
5. That the Council should consider how best to integrate the Libraries and Heritage Strategy with the Street Homelessness Strategy to ensure easy navigation of services for vulnerable users.

17/23 TRANSPORT WORKING GROUP

(Agenda Item 7)

The Scrutiny Officer had circulated a report of the meeting on 15 November 2023 when members of the Committee had met informally for a briefing on the Street Design Guide to which all members had been invited.

This meeting was to feed into the work of the Transport Working Group.

An informal meeting was scheduled for members of the Working Group with the Corporate Director and the Head of Transport.

18/23 ACTION AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKER

(Agenda Item 8)

The Committee was advised that an updated Action and Recommendation Tracker would be provided.

19/23 FORWARD PLAN AND COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

(Agenda Item 9)

The Committee requested the opportunity to consider in-depth its ongoing work programme and was advised that the Scrutiny Officer would seek to organise that.

20/23 CABINET RESPONSES TO PLACE OSC RECOMMENDATIONS

(Agenda Item 10)

The Committee resolved to **NOTE** Cabinet's response to its recommendations from 13 September 2023 relating to Oxford United Football Club.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing

This page is intentionally left blank