

PERFORMANCE & CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Monday, 17 January 2022 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 1.30 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Eddie Reeves – in the Chair

Councillor Michael O'Connor (Deputy Chair)

Councillor Brad Baines

Councillor Donna Ford

Councillor Andrew Gant

Councillor Damian Haywood

Councillor Ian Middleton

Councillor Jane Murphy (Substituting for Councillor Ian Corkin)

Councillor David Rouane

Cabinet Members in Attendance (Remotely): Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE
Councillor Duncan Enright
Councillor Neil Fawcett
Councillor Jenny Hannaby
Councillor Liz Leffman
Councillor Calum Miller
Councillor Glynis Phillips
Councillor Pete Sudbury

Other Members in Attendance (Remotely) Councillor David Bartholomew

Officers (Remotely): Lorna Baxter (Director of Finance), Anita Bradley (Director of Law and Governance), Michael Carr (Law and Governance), Stephen Chandler (Corporate Director of Adult and Housing), Tim Chapple (Treasury Manager), Belinda Dimmock-Smith (Service Manager - Executive Support), Kevin Gordon (Director for Childrens Services), Karen Fuller (Deputy Director Adult Social Care), Kerry Middleton (Head of Communications, Marketing and Engagement), Claire Taylor (Corporate Director of Customers and Organisational Development), Jodie Townsend (Law and Governance), Louise Tustian (Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes) Kathy Wilcox (Head of Financial Strategy), Susannah Wintersgill (Director of Strategy, Insight and Communications) and Khalid Ahmed (Law and Governance).

The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports are attached to the signed Minutes.

1/22 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2/22 BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLANNING 2022/23: CAPITAL AND INVESTMENT STRATEGIES: STRATEGIC PLAN - PROPOSED PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES: BUDGET CONSULTATION FINDINGS

(Agenda No. 5)

The Committee was asked to consider and comment on the Council's Capital and Investment Strategy, capital programme and supporting strategies, as part of the Committee's scrutiny of the Council's overall budget proposals for 2022-2023.

Members were provided with the following documents:

- Budget consultation 2022/23 findings and the draft strategic plan with accompanying engagement feedback on the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance's priorities
- The Capital and Investment Strategy which incorporated: -
 - I. The Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy 2022/23
 - II. The Investment Strategy for Property Investment 2022/23
 - III. The Property Strategy
 - IV. Proposed additions to the Capital Programme
 - V. The Draft Capital Programme 2022/23 to 2031/32.

The Committee was informed that on 18 January 2022, the Cabinet would consider the proposed revenue budget for 2022/23, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2025/26 alongside the Capital and Investment Strategy. In addition, Cabinet would be asked to consider a Budget Scrutiny report and recommendations from this committee, to be finalised and agreed later on the agenda for this meeting.

Councillor Calum Miller - Cabinet Member for Finance attended the meeting and introduced the item. The Committee was informed that the Capital and Investment Strategy was an overarching strategy that brings together the strategies that drive the Capital Programme, the Investment Strategy and the Treasury Management Strategy.

There were seven strands to the proposed Council Capital Strategy:-

- Pupil Place Plan
- Major Infrastructure
- Highways and Structural Maintenance
- Property and Estates

- ICT Strategy
- Passported Funds
- Vehicles and Equipment.

Points Raised by the Committee

- In relation to borrowing to cover contingency funds, Members were informed that when to borrow was down to the judgement of the Treasury Management advisers. Borrowing would not take place in advance unless advised to do so.
- In the Capital Programme Investment Overview, Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme, the extra £6m additional funding from the Council was relative to other parties. Savings would be achieved as a result of improvements to bus journey times expected to be achieved through the Bus Service Improvement Plan.
- The Capital requirement was increasing with changes to the cost of borrowing requirements and increases in interest rates.
- Property and Estates: Concern was expressed at the costs of invest to save and the return on the investment.
- Reference was made to the contingency of £50m and a Member expressed concern at the inability to scrutinise this figure due to a lack of financial detail.
- In relation to contingencies and the budgeted £50m, the Cabinet Member informed the Committee that this was based on future risks and pressures and had to be estimated.
- In response to a question regarding SEND provision in the capital programme, Members were informed that there was capital provision for two new SEND schools and to improve facilities in mainstream schools. The future plans for SEND provision were currently out for consultation.
- Regarding the governance of the capital programme, this would be more robust in the future to ensure better scrutiny.

Strategic Plan

The Committee was provided with a document which set out the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance's vision which was to lead positive change by working in partnership to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer, and healthier county.

Points Raised by the Committee

- In relation to tackling inequalities in Oxfordshire, there should be reference to economic inequality, the unequal distribution of income and opportunity between different groups in the county. This shaped social outcomes.
- There was no mention of gender-based inequalities.
- In relation to the priority of inequalities, there should be reference to developing plans by working with partners.
- What schemes were there for tackling food poverty, deprivation etc.
- Decarbonisation strategy should be linked into the all the strategies and there should be a timescale. There should be a rapid decarbonisation with ambitious targets.

- Work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit; – There should be inclusion of supply chains and dealing with waste.
- LED lighting; – lower environmental impact but problems with the impact on nature, particularly birds. This would be passed to the Cabinet Member for Climate Change Delivery and Environment for his information.
- In relation to the priority support carers and the social care system; there was no reference to community provision of care. The Council should look to actively shape care within the community.
- There was a lack of measurability of the strategic priorities. Members were informed that targets were being developed with officers and these would be submitted to the Committee's next meeting before the final Strategic Plan was approved by Cabinet in March. **[ACTION: Corporate Director – Customers, Organisational Development and Resources]**
- On the strategic priority of work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic, and social benefit; this seemed to be encouraging people to start up their own businesses in the care sector, rather than working in the public sector.
- Some of the language used in the strategy was contradictory, with a mismatch between commitments and objectives and areas of focus. This required further investigation.
- Areas of focus required updating annually.

Property Strategy

Highways - Part 6 - Moving Vehicle Violations – Cameras; – Concern was expressed at the time period for this capital provision (£2.7m) and how many cameras it equated to. Members were informed that this was for Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras and equated to the purchasing cost. The information on the number of cameras would be provided to Members. **[ACTION: Director of Finance]**

Connecting Oxford (Development Budget); - £300,000 allocated for this year. A request was made for further information on this allocation. **[ACTION: Director of Finance]**

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Members present for their attendance at the meeting and for their engagement in the budget process. Officers were asked for next year's budget consultation, that informal briefing meetings take place with the Committee to ensure a more efficient and structured approach to the process.

At 11.55am, the meeting adjourned to enable the Chair to summarise the points raised by the Committee, and the meeting reconvened at 12.10pm.

The Chair summarised the discussions of the Committee and recommendations were suggested to be forwarded to Cabinet for their consideration and executive response to.

It was moved that it be recommended that Cabinet ensure that the corporate Strategic Plan provides greater detail on the environmental ambitions at a strategic level and fundamental measures, and the changes to be made to the Council's

approach to tackling climate emergencies in future. Additionally, that Cabinet consider mainstreaming its approach to climate change so that it becomes part of the Council's policy framework and a mandatory consideration as part of setting the Council's budget proposals.

RESOLVED –

(1) That the following documents be noted:

- **Budget consultation 2022/23 findings (Section 2.1) and the draft strategic plan (Section 2.2) with accompanying engagement feedback on the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance's priorities (Section 2.3)**
- **The Capital and Investment Strategy (Section 5.1), incorporating**
 - i. **The Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy 2022/23 (Section 5.2)**
 - ii. **The Investment Strategy for Property Investment 2022/23 (Section 5.3)**
 - iii. **The Property Strategy (Section 5.4)**
- **Proposed additions to the Capital Programme (Section 5.5)**
- **The Draft Capital Programme 2022/23 to 2031/32 (Section 5.6).**

(2) That the following observations and suggestions be noted:

- **The need to mainstream Climate Change in the Council's approach so that it becomes a consideration in all policy and budget proposals, including the Capital Programme policy and strategy.**
- **The Council should commit to maximise social value in procurement and purchasing approach.**
- **The Council should ensure the integration of the decarbonisation strategy into the Council's capital strategies.**
- **The Council should include economic inequalities in the equalities analysis and with greater emphasis on gender inequality.**
- **The Council should give due consideration to the use and allocation of any unused borrowing, the use of capital resources to ensure improved SEND provision, the impact of capital programmes on the natural environment, including bird wildlife, and the LED roll-out.**
- **There should be greater clarity on the use and allocation of any unused borrowing and on the risks presented to the Council (including Covid-19 inflationary pressures, ongoing Council budgetary processes and increasing borrowing costs and interest rates) as regards its assessment of the deliverability of capital projects.**
- **Use appropriate capital resources to ensure improved SEND provision.**
- **Consider introducing a 'Wellbeing of Future Generations' policy. This could potentially draw inspiration from the pioneering Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, as part of its strategic ambition to "put the impact on... future generations at the heart of what we do", and to mainstream these considerations and apply them proactively as part of policy and budget design.**

(3) That Cabinet ensure that the corporate Strategic Plan provides greater detail on the environmental ambitions at a strategic level and fundamental measures, and the changes to be made to the Council's

approach to tackling climate emergencies in future. Additionally, that Cabinet consider mainstreaming its approach to climate change so that it becomes part of the Council's policy framework and a mandatory consideration as part of setting the Council's budget proposals.

3/22 CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022 - 2025

(Agenda No. 6)

The Committee considered a report which provided an overview of the draft consultation and engagement strategy 2022 - 2025, and was asked to provide any comments, suggestions or scrutiny recommendations on the draft Strategy, to the Cabinet meeting on 15th February 2022.

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services introduced the report and informed Members that the strategy set out a new approach to consultation and engagement at Oxfordshire County Council, putting residents at the heart of decision-making to support strong active and inclusive communities.

There were two key aims: - i) to engage with and listen to residents and other partners in a more active and inclusive way and ii) to widen the Council's reach so that diverse communities and audiences could be listened to.

Reference was made to a detailed action plan, which had been developed, with clear targets and measures, to ensure that progress was on track and there was a continued commitment to two-way engagement with residents. This would be updated on an annual basis

Points Raised by the Committee

- The list of people consulted should include the working class and those who had English as a second language. In response, Members were informed that community groups would be consulted and those in the community who were seldom heard.
- There should be a reflective statement in the strategy whereby reference could be made to the areas in the past, the Council have been criticised on, and the improvements which would be made to the Council's consultation and engagement with residents.
- There were many consultations which operated within a timeframe, on a particular topic, could consideration be given to a general consultation which took place throughout the year asking residents for comments/ views on the Council. Reference was made to 'Let's Talk Oxfordshire' which gave residents an opportunity to comment on the Council and to receive feedback.
- There needed to be a cultural shift on consultation, as sometimes consultation took place, for the sake of consultation. Residents could be asked for their views on what they wanted the Council to do. A framework on consultation needed to be built into the planning process of projects.
- Local Members should be included prior to consultations to ensure local expertise and knowledge was utilised and to keep local Members informed. Additionally, local Members should be included in the design of consultations.

- Discussion took place on the term “customer” and Members were informed that this was the preferred term of officers from customer services for residents
- The target of 10% respondents to consultations was the guide on best practise for engagement with residents and Members felt this should be more ambitious.
- The timelines for improvements to be made were ambitious but the Communications Team had been allocated extra resource to achieve the improvements.

The Chair informed Members that the comments and recommendations of this Committee would be referred to Cabinet for consideration at their meeting of 15 February 2022 and that Cabinet would be asked to respond to the Committee.

RESOLVED – That Cabinet be asked to consider the following:

- (i) due consideration be given to the role of consultation and engagement as a key part of an ongoing democratic process that involves listening to residents, not solely in order to cavass views and determine preferences, but also to ensure that their voices are heard as citizens,**
- (ii) that an indicative protocol should be produced to indicate which strategies will be deployed when and**
- (iii) that, as an addendum to an indicative protocol, a specific, detailed strategy be drawn up to include Active Travel schemes, given their effect on local areas. Such a strategy should include consideration of:**
 - **the capacity of the Council to deliver representative polling in line with the British Polling Council standards, as set out in the updated Department for Transport Network Management Duty Guidance,**
 - **consideration of the stakeholders that the DfT recommends Councils should engage with at an early stage of active travel projects in the Network Management Duty Guidance,**
 - **how active travel plans should be co-designed with local residents and businesses,**
 - **transparent data collection and sharing with the public for active travel projects with open data standards,**
 - **how live project updates are communicated in a timely and accurate manner to the public,**
 - **how to ensure consultations are secure and robust against potential interference,**
 - **whether the existing digital tools the County Council has access to have the required technical features to deliver the heightened communication, consultation, engagement and digital security needs, as set out above,**
 - **how best to engage with local councillors, bearing in mind their specific knowledge of a local area.**

4/22 BUDGET SCRUTINY REPORT
(Agenda No. 7)

Members were provided with this Committee’s draft Budget Scrutiny Report which had been developed following the consideration of the Cabinet Budget Proposals at this Committee’s meeting on 10 December 2021.

The Committee was asked to consider and agree the draft Budget Scrutiny Report at Appendix A for submission to Cabinet on 18th January 2022 and to Full Council at its budget setting meeting on 8th February 2022.

RESOLVED – That the Budget Scrutiny Report be agreed and submitted to Cabinet and Council for consideration.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing 200