

OXFORDSHIRE PLACE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Wednesday, 22 September 2021 commencing at 1.00 pm and finishing at 3.35 pm.

Present:

Councillor – Ian Snowdon in the Chair

Councillors:

Brad Baines
Charlie Hicks
Dan Levy

Kieron Mallon
Jane Murphy
Sally Povolotsky

Judy Roberts
Richard Webber

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Pete Sudbury, Cabinet Member for Climate Change Delivery and Environment; Councillor Duncan Enright, Cabinet Member for Travel & Development Strategy; Councillor Neil Fawcett, Cabinet Member for Community Services and Safety; Councillor Tim Bearder, Cabinet Member for Highway Management.

Officers: Steve Jordan, Corporate Director Commercial Development Assets and Investments, Anita Bradley, Director for Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer; Bill Cotton, Corporate Director Environment and Place; Rachel Wileman, Assistant Director Strategic Infrastructure and Planning, Rob MacDougall, Chief Fire Officer; Jodie Townsend and Deborah Miller, Democratic Services.

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 and Addenda, copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes.

1/21 ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR REMAINDER OF 2021/22 MUNICIPAL YEAR

(Agenda Item 1)

Councillor Mallon nominated and Councillor Murphy seconded that Councillor Snowdon be elected as Chair.

AGREED: (nem con) that Councillor Ian Snowdon be elected as Chair for the remainder of the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

2/21 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR FOR REMAINDER OF 2021/22 MUNICIPAL YEAR

(Agenda Item 2)

Councillor Baines nominated and Councillor Levy seconded that Councillor Hicks be elected as Deputy Chair.

AGREED: (nem con) that Councillor Charlie Hicks be elected as Deputy Chair for the remainder of the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

3/21 DEVELOPING THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FUNCTION

(Agenda Item 6)

The Committee had before it a report which outlined proposals and initial ideas to develop the Overview and Scrutiny function of the Council. The report asked members to consider the proposals and comment on how they would like to develop them further.

Jodie Townsend, Interim Governance Advisor, in introducing the report, set out the initial thinking behind the proposals. He reported that it would take time to embed and develop a new approach to Overview and Scrutiny, and that if the Overview and Scrutiny function was going to truly add value, then it would need to be supported by Members, both Scrutiny and Cabinet, and by Officers. He indicated that there was a strong commitment from officers and Cabinet to facilitate more effective scrutiny. Training and development had started and would be a continuous process to look at best practice.

He stressed the importance of creating a strong organisational culture that supported scrutiny work and could add real value to policy-making and the efficient delivery of public services. The Committee would need to develop Core Scrutiny Proposals and actions and keep those at the centre of all it did; Suggested proposals for which were set on in paragraph 6 of the report.

Other work being undertaken included the development of Scrutiny operating procedures, including a Cabinet/Scrutiny Protocol; an effective and focused work programme, ongoing training and development for all scrutiny members; the development of an Oxfordshire Scrutiny Handbook and dedicated officer support.

The Chair thanked Mr Townsend for his presentation. The Chair welcomed the report and that he hoped as Chair that the Committee could add real value to the areas which it scrutinised, He expressed the importance of working together in a constructive and respectful manner, acknowledging that effective scrutiny happened when cross-party members worked together on scrutiny.

Members made the following points during discussion on the report:

- Members expressed the importance of having reports well in advance and of scrutiny being engaged at the earliest possible stage of policy making.
- Early sight of the Cabinets forward plan needed to be added to the process.

- Clear guidance on Scrutiny Stakeholders should be added to the core principals, as should language such as transparency and working together to develop.
- There needed to be a clear definition of what 'place' and the areas of work which fell under that heading was.
- Information on Champions and relevant user groups should be made available to all scrutiny committees.
- Members queried the budget commitment for officer support and whether there would be any budget for bringing in experts for specific pieces of work
- There was a need to have clear guidance on what each of the committees covered and for that to be relayed to the public. Plain language needed to be used. A business mission statement could enable the other committees to understand the areas of work under consideration and reduce blurred lines.
- The Committee acknowledged the need to be disciplined and focused on a few areas rather than trying to look at everything.
- Joint scrutiny with district councils should be considered.
- A mission statement should be added to the work programme for the coming year, to include political engagement, aims and values.
- Working Groups should be considered as an effective way of covering some of the work

Following discussion, Duncan Enright, Cabinet Member for Travel & Development Strategy and Councillor Neil Fawcett, Cabinet Member for Community Services & Safety welcomed the points made by the Committee. Councillor Enright noted that utilising the whole of the Council and scrutiny enabled better decision making by the Council. Councillor Fawcett endorsed the points about the early involvement of scrutiny and indicated that the Cabinet may need to look at the way it produced papers for the future.

The Chair thanked the Committee for their points and summarised the main points to take forward as follows:

- What is Place?
- Role and remit
- Mission Statement to be added to work programme.

4/21 WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22

(Agenda Item 7)

The Committee had before it a report to support and advise Committee members on determining their work programme for the 2021/22 municipal year.

Jodie Townsend, Interim Governance Advisor, introduced the report, which set out proposals from Cabinet members and senior officers on issues the Committee may wish to look at. He emphasised that the Committee did not have to agree the whole work programme for the rest of the municipal year at

this meeting. A limited process had been conducted to get an initial list of ideas. However, a more complete process was to be developed for prioritising items for work programmes going forward.

The Committee could also consider activities outside the meetings such as Task and Finish Groups, deep-dives, briefings, and public engagement days.

The Committee made the following points during discussion of the work programme:

- A request was made that work of the past Performance Committee was taken on board such as the renewed Skanska contract and loss of £1.6m.
- Members noted that some of the issues it would wish to look at were due for consideration at the October Cabinet Meeting.
- Members noted that no decisions had been taken on climate and sustainability for the past 18 months.
- Members felt that an informal workshop where members could sit round a table for a broader discussion on the work programme would be a more effective way of agreeing a work programme.

The following areas for Scrutiny were put forward:

- Library Strategy
- Recycling Centres
- Road Work Permissions (Utilities)
- Covid Planning to include Resilience planning for other major events such as Climate and Flooding
- Street Design Guide
- Budget for Highway Maintenance
- Bus Improvement Plan
- Carbon Reduction Framework
- Active Travel
- Freight

The Cabinet Members and Directors then set out further areas of work that the Committee could get involved with in the future and indicated that although some of the topics that the Committee had raised were going to Cabinet in October, that further opportunities for engagement on those areas would be available over the next 12 months.

Councillor Baines made a formal proposal which was seconded by Councillor Levy, to request that an additional Meeting of the Committee be held prior to the October Cabinet Meeting to consider the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, National Bus Strategy – Bus Service Improvement Plan and 20 mph Policy and New Approach.

Jodie Townsend reminded the Committee that they were not able to look at everything and needed to focus on 3 or 4 topics for effective scrutiny. He

stressed that the Committee looking at the items above at a meeting in October would not be effective scrutiny as proposals were already formulated at this stage.

Anita Bradley, Director for Law & Governance and Rachel Wileman, Assistant Director Strategic Infrastructure and Planning indicated that there was not the officer resource to bring the reports forward in October.

Following Officer advice, the proposal was put to the vote and was carried by 5 votes to 3.

The Committee further agreed that officers should arrange an informal workshop as soon as possible to set the work programme for the Committee.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing