

# PERFORMANCE & CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES** of the meeting held on Friday, 10 December 2021 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 1.20 pm

**Present:**

**Voting Members:**

Councillor Eddie Reeves – in the Chair

Councillor Michael O'Connor (Deputy Chair)

Councillor Brad Baines

Councillor Ian Corkin

Councillor Donna Ford

Councillor Andrew Gant

Councillor Damian Haywood

Councillor Ian Middleton

Councillor David Rouane

**Cabinet Members in Attendance (Remotely):**

Councillor Tim Bearder

Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE

Councillor Duncan Enright

Councillor Neil Fawcett

Councillor Jenny Hannaby

Councillor Liz Leffman

Councillor Mark Lygo

Councillor Calum Miller

Councillor Glynis Phillips

Councillor Dr Pete Sudbury

**Other Members in Attendance (Remotely)**

Councillor David Bartholomew

Councillor Kevin Bulmer

Councillor Ted Fenton

Councillor Arash Fatemian

Councillor Kieron Mallon

Councillor Jane Murphy

Councillor Liam Walker

**Officers (Remotely):**

Ansaf Azhar (Director of Public Health), 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), Bill

Cotton (Corporate Director for Environment and Place), Steve Jordan (Corporate Director, Commercial Development Assets and Investment), Kerry Middleton (Head of Communications, Marketing and Engagement), Claire Taylor (Corporate Director of Customers and Organisational Development), Yvonne Rees (Chief Executive), Jodie Townsend (Law and Governance), 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.*

**5/21 MINUTES**  
(Agenda No. 3)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**6/21 BUDGET PROPOSALS 2022/23 TO 2025/26 AND STRATEGIC PLAN**  
(Agenda No. 5)

The Committee was provided with a report which set out budget proposals for the period 2022/23 to 2025/26, which were included in the 2022/23 budget consultation. In addition, the Committee was provided annexes on:

- The Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance's priorities.
- Engagement feedback on the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance's priorities
- Existing Planned Budget Pressures and Savings
- New Proposals for Investments, Pressures and Savings
- COVID-19 Pressures
- Overarching Equality Impact Assessment

The report provided the opportunity for the Committee to comment on these, alongside the financial context, and on the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance's priorities in which these proposals were made.

The Leader of the Council introduced the budget proposals for 2022/23 to 2025/26 and informed Members that the proposals were all based around the Administration's nine priorities. The Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee was invited to consider and comment on the engagement feedback on

the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance's priorities and how the budget proposals for 2022/23 – 2025/26 aligned with those priorities.

Members were reminded that comments on the proposals would be included in the Budget and Business Planning report which was submitted to Cabinet on 18 January 2022, along with the outcome of the public consultation. These would be taken into consideration by Cabinet in setting out their proposed revenue budget for 2022/23 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to 2025/26.

Reference was made to a number of pieces of information yet to be received which would have an impact on the proposed budget which included the Local Government Finance Settlement, confirmation of council tax base and the collection fund position for each of the County's district council, confirmation of business rates income including and the collection fund position and the outcome of the public consultation.

The Cabinet Member for Finance gave the Committee an overview of the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy for the Council. Reference was made to the uncertainty caused by Covid and the pressures this has caused.

The main financial pressures were around adult social care, the implications of the Environment Bill, demand for high needs education. There were £12.7m of savings earmarked. Details of directorate proposals were provided in the presentation.

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services provided the Committee with details of the five strands of the consultation process which was taking place on the budget. The public consultation on the 2022/23 budget proposals was launched on 2 December 2021 and would run until 5 January 2022.

Members were informed that throughout October and November 2021, the Council had undertaken public and stakeholder engagement to inform the development of the new strategic plan and the budget-setting process. There were five strands to this:

1. A residents' survey to understand residents' priorities and experiences
2. Public discussion groups
3. Young people's discussion groups to ensure that young people's voices are included
4. Stakeholder workshops and survey – with participation from the voluntary and community sector and town and parish councils
5. Councillor engagement – discussions at locality groups and follow-up survey to ensure the views of all county councillors were sought.

Members were informed there would be an in depth all Council briefing on the engagement work in January.

### **Points raised by the Committee**

- The Committee noted that the Council does not currently have a Corporate Plan. Therefore, the Committee focused on the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance's identified nine priorities to assess whether the budget proposals were appropriately allocated to resource delivery of the nine priorities. It had

been difficult to determine if appropriate resources had been allocated to each priority area as these had not been clearly defined.

- Members welcomed that details of deliverables and KPIs for each priority area would be developed.
- The priority areas were listed 1 to 9 which gives the impression that this was their order of importance. This was not the case, so this needed to be made clear in the Corporate Plan.
- Reference was made to Risk Stratification and whether budget proposals have taken account of the greatest risks to residents.
- Members recognised the pressures caused by Covid-19, however, it was not clear from the budget proposals how each Directorate budget allocation would enable the Council to achieve its objectives.
- The budget proposal does not set out details of how the new investment would contribute towards delivery of each priority with details of annual deliverables and targets.
- The proposed new investment does not correlate with the results of the public consultation exercise to date, for example: Children & Young People was number 1 priority in the consultation and yet level of new investment, placed this as 6th
- How would new investment address key public concerns of traffic congestion and improving roads and pavements?
- Young people had identified integrated transport and access to nature as top 2 priorities, yet this was not reflected in terms of additional investment.
- From the details on the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy and the proposed Council Tax increase contained in the report, it was not clear what residents would get as a result of the proposed Council Tax increase.
- Reference was made to the implications on the priorities of failed Council bidding for funding.
- With Climate Change at the heart of this Administration's work, the budget proposal (£690k) does not make clear how the budget proposals contribute towards combatting Climate Change. Reference was made to investments around supporting zero carbon infrastructure, development of pathways to zero carbon Oxfordshire, preparation for Environmental Bill and increasing capacity to deliver EV policy and others. However, there were no deliverables mentioned.
- Members noted the significant challenges which faced Adult Social Care and the implications this had on the budget, however, there was concern that more funding was required. A suggestion was made that to assist Cabinet for next year's budget setting process, a joint Working Group be set up between this Committee and People OSC to undertake a review of the pressures and challenges facing Adult Services in order to help Cabinet by identifying possible options and make recommendations.
- In relation to Children Services, the Committee noted that there were also budgetary challenges in this area and the proposals did not provide assurances that these challenges would be met. The Committee agreed that Cabinet should be asked how Scrutiny could support the Council on this issue.
- The accessibility of the budget needed to be better i.e. narrative was required to explain the various tables and graphs.

- Concern was expressed that the Family Solution Plus programme did not have the required level of investment due to the budgetary pressures of partners.
- Reference was made to an opportunity to invest to save in tackling health inequalities but providing additional funding to focus on Tier 1 tertiary prevention. A detailed action plan of how this could be delivered across all Council Departments would help shift Council focus into supporting health partners more effectively.
- The budget proposals were not clear for cultural services and libraries.
- Concern was expressed regarding the proportion of savings to re-investment, and it was asked that focus on this be given in future budget process.
- There were no details of the budgetary support in the future for the Scrutiny function in the budget proposal. Cabinet should consider what resources were required to deliver the best practice scrutiny function.
- There were some concerns regarding the Council's current approach to budget consultation and consultation in general.
- Workforce issues and retention and recruitment of staff was a concern for the Council and for significant public sector and business partners. Cabinet could consider the potential benefits of a County wide workforce commission to identify options moving forward.
- A clearer idea of how the revenue budget would support the delivery of the capital programme would be beneficial.
- There were questions asked relating to the reach of the consultation process and Members noted that the methodology and results of the process would be communication at the January briefing to all Members of the Council.

There were a number of observations and questions asked in relation to the engagement process in the budget process and responses were subsequently provided and are attached an appendix to these minutes.

The Committee considered and noted the Budget proposals for 2022/23, which included the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance's priorities, the engagement feedback on the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance's priorities, the revenue savings, pressures and investment proposals for 2022/23 to 2025/26 and combined impact on directorate budgets.

It was agreed that scrutiny officers would prepare a draft report on the Committee's comments and suggestions on the budget proposals, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee, for consideration at the next meeting of the Committee, prior to submission to Cabinet.

**RESOLVED – (1) That Budget proposals for 2022/23, including the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance's priorities, the engagement feedback on the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance's priorities, the revenue savings, pressures and investment proposals for 2022/23 to 2025/26 and combined impact on directorate budgets, be noted.**

**(2) That a report on the Committee's consideration and findings on the budget proposals be brought before the next meeting of the Committee for agreement, prior to submission to Cabinet for consideration.**

**7/21 DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES - SCOPING REPORT AND APPOINTMENT TO A WORKING GROUP**  
(Agenda No. 6)

Consideration was given to a report which sought approval to establishment of a Working Group to undertake a deep dive review of Democratic Processes in line with an agreed scope to be agreed by this Committee.

**RESOLVED – That a Scrutiny Working Group / Review Panel on the Council’s Democratic Processes be established, with the following membership:**

**Councillor Brad Baines,  
Councillor Donna Ford and  
Councillor Michael O’Connor,**

**And with the following terms of reference:**

**To review the key elements of support for democratic processes at Oxfordshire County Council, with particular regard to:**

- (a) how the Council plans to best support elected members so that they can more effectively fulfil their roles**
- (b) how the Council plans to ensure those elected to represent the people of Oxfordshire are engaged in effective decision-making**
- (c) how the Council plans to make Overview and Scrutiny at the Council an example of best practice**
- (d) how the Council plans to support Overview and Scrutiny at the Council in better representing the voice and concerns of the public.**

..... in the Chair

Date of signing ..... 200

## Appendix

### Minute No. 6/21

#### **Question Responses: engagement**

Please find below the responses to the questions made by the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee 10 December on the five strands of engagement that has taken place to inform the budget and business planning process.

#### **Question 1: Cllr Ford asked a question regarding health services in the residents' survey, and was context given e.g. does this mean doctors and/or public health.**

To confirm that no specific definition was given, it simply stated health services. This question has its origins in the communities and local government place survey 2008 - 09 that all councils were required to undertake.

#### **Question 2: Cllr Ian Middleton's raised queries on methodology for the residents' survey. He was keen to see how weighting had been applied and what population size this was applied to. He was unsure about the confidence level methodology and said he didn't recognise that. He also wanted to understand what population number had been used.**

Extract from the residents' survey report prepared by Marketing Means.

#### **Method**

The resident survey was undertaken using a postal survey supported by an online survey. This survey was carried out in line with ISO9001 and ISO20252 quality standards.

Marketing Means used a Royal Mail Postcode Address File (PAF) of all residential addresses in the Oxfordshire County Council authority area to generate a random sample of households. The PAF file was stratified by local authority area and postcode and a randomly selected '1 in n sample' was taken to obtain an overall sample of **4,841** households.

The reason for stratifying the sample by local authority area and postcode in the first instance was to assist with achieving a geographically representative response to the survey.

Marketing Means sent out a paper questionnaire, along with a covering letter and a c5 pre-paid business reply envelope to all households in the sample. One reminder mailing (including a new copy of the survey) was sent to non-respondents during the fieldwork period. Marketing Means also provided a free phone helpline number facility for residents to use in case of any queries about the survey or requests for different formats.

Each survey carried a unique ID number for identification purposes, to ensure any subsequent reminder mailings were only sent to non-respondents. All residents in the sample were also provided with the alternative option of completing the survey online if they wished, using their unique login details which were included in the covering letter along with a link to the online survey.

The survey was initially sent to all the households in the sample during the week commencing **4 October 2021**. Those who had not responded were sent a full pack reminder during the week commencing **1 November 2021**. All valid responses received back by the revised closing date of **21 November 2021** were included in the analysis.

Marketing Means inputted all survey data electronically using Conformat scanning software. Ten per cent of all responses were verified to check the accuracy of the data held. The analysis contained in this report was conducted using the SPSS statistical software package.

### **Confidence**

A confidence level or interval is a measure of how reliable the results from the sample are in relation to the wider population and is widely used in social and market research. For example, In the Local Government Association's published guidance for the statutory Place Survey in 2010, a minimum requirement of achieving +/-3% confidence with the sample achieved from the survey was set to allow councils to benchmark against each other.

For this survey a target was set to achieve 1,065 completed surveys in order to meet the recommended confidence level overall of +/-3%.

Example: A confidence interval of +/- 3% at a 95% confidence interval, means that any proportion given has a 95% likelihood of being no more than 3% higher or lower in the wider population; e.g. if the satisfaction level with a particular service is 65% for the sample (i.e. all respondents), the true figure for the entire population will be between 62% and 68%, 95% of the time.

The calculation for this is:

### **Weighting data**

In order to provide a representative view of the population of Oxfordshire as a whole the data achieved was weighted with consideration for the following factors: local authority area, age (18-44yrs, 45-64yrs and 65+yrs) and gender (using Office for National Statistics 2019 Mid-Year population estimates – 18+yrs population=545,544) to reduce any bias of over or under-represented groups in the achieved data.

### **Question 3: Cllr Michael O'Connor wanted a breakdown/explanation of urban versus rural for the young people selected and then specifically for the transport feedback.**

Please note that the engagement with young people used qualitative methodologies and is not designed to be statistically representative.

- • In the context of this engagement, urban has been defined as Banbury and Oxford.
- • Market towns and growing towns encompassed children and young people living in Shiplake, Wantage, Littlemore, Chinnor, Dry Sandford, Henwood, Abingdon, Towersey, North Leigh, Carterton, Witney.
- • Littlemore (the council's consultation and engagement team recognise that although Littlemore is a parish, it forms part of Oxford and not a rural market town or a growing town).

Overall, transport is discussed most by those from rural market towns or from growing towns, but it is still an important issue for those in cities.

Please find below a list of areas where transport was a high priority area.

### **Rural market towns / growing towns**

- • Abingdon
- • Bicester
- • Carterton
- • Henley
- • Littlemore (as identified above)

- • Thame
- • Wantage
- • Witney

**Oxford - Banbury**

- • Banbury
- • Greater Leys
- • Summertown