

PERFORMANCE & CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Friday, 19 July 2024 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.00 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Eddie Reeves - in the Chair

Councillor Bob Johnston
Councillor Damian Haywood
Councillor Kieron Mallon
Councillor Ian Middleton
Councillor Calum Miller
Councillor Nigel Simpson
Councillor Glynis Phillips
Councillor Susanna Pressel

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Liz Leffman, Leader of the Council
Councillor Dr Nathan Ley, Cabinet Member for Public Health, Inequalities and Community Safety
Councillor Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance

Officers: Lorna Baxter, Executive Director Resources and Section 151 Officer
Ansaf Azhar, Director of Public Health and Communities
Robin Rogers, Programme Director (Partnerships and Delivery)
Chloe Taylor, Head of Economy
Nigel Tipple, LEP Chief Executive
Emily Urquhart, Policy Officer
Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Manager
Ben Piper, Democratic Services Officer

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.

21/24 ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR THE 2024/25 COUNCIL YEAR (Agenda No. 1)

The Democratic Services Officer invited nominations for Chair of the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the 2024/25 Council year. Cllr Johnston proposed Cllr Reeves, and Cllr Mallon seconded the nomination.

With no other nominations, Cllr Reeves was **ELECTED** Chair for the 2024/25 Council year.

22/24 ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIR FOR THE 2024/25 COUNCIL YEAR

(Agenda No. 2)

Cllr Johnston was proposed as Deputy Chair by Cllr Mallon, and Cllr Middleton seconded the nomination.

There being no other nominations for Deputy Chair, Cllr Johnston was **ELECTED** Deputy Chair for the 2024/25 Council year.

23/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 3)

There were apologies from Cllr Baines, substituted by Cllr Pressel, and from Cllr Fatemian, substituted by Cllr Simpson.

24/24 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

(Agenda No. 4)

Cllr Miller indicated a potential conflict of interest to the Committee following his recent election as Member of Parliament for Bicester and Woodstock.

25/24 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda No. 5)

There were none.

26/24 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 6)

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 April 2024 were **AGREED** as a true and accurate record.

27/24 COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING AND WIDER SOCIAL VALUE

(Agenda No. 7)

Cllr Dr Nathan Ley, Cabinet Member for Public Health, Inequalities and Community Safety, Robin Rogers, Programme Director (Partnerships and Delivery), and Emily Urquhart, Policy Officer, were invited to present a report on the Council's approach to Community Wealth Building and Wider Social Value outside the statutory processes relating to procurement.

Cllr Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Lorna Baxter, Executive Director Resources and Section 151 Officer, and Ansaf Azhar, Director of Public Health and Communities, were also present to help answer any questions.

The Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report and explained the concept and principles of community wealth building, which aims to reshape the economic system to benefit local communities and address inequalities and environmental challenges.

The Cabinet Member of Finance highlighted some of the achievements and benefits of implementing community wealth building approaches, such as the social value policy, the support for small businesses and social enterprises, and a recent collaboration with the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES). The collaboration with the CLES developed a set of recommendations on a number of areas, such as economic development, employment and skills, and social economy.

The Cabinet Member also presented the draft social value definition statement, which outlines the Council's ambitions to integrate social value across its activities and consider the social, economic, and environmental impacts of its decisions.

Cllr Pressel joined the Committee meeting following the presentation.

The Committee welcomed the report and expressed support for the community wealth building approach. They made the following observations and raised a number of questions and comments, such as:

- How to ensure that the approach is not Oxford-centric and that it addresses the needs and opportunities of different areas and communities in the county. There was a desire for more granular information in relation to the geography of the county within the report.

The Cabinet Member assured the Committee that one of the main objectives of the report was to target the deprived areas of the county. There was a focus on employment, skills, and education. Additionally, the anchor institutions, within the county such as the NHS, would play a key role in this.

There was also an emphasis on the importance of getting communities and locality groups more involved. The Committee welcomed the idea of locality groups being part of the drafting process for plans in their communities.

- The members talked about ways to collaborate with different groups like local government, universities, businesses, and community groups to promote projects that increase wealth in the community.

The Programme Director described how the report helped set out a formal approach to bring together what had been a fragmented offering. The Council, along with the Local Enterprise Partnership and other partners, would work together to reach out to those in the community less likely to find the support they needed.

- The Committee explored ways to refine the Community Asset Transfer policy for greater consistency, clarity, and conformity with community wealth building values, while addressing the associated difficulties and necessary compromises.

The Cabinet Member for Finance informed the Committee that while the Council was looking to sell or dispose of several properties there were conflicting priorities, including best financial value and best social value, which made the process difficult.

The Executive Director described plans, through the corporate landlord approach, to determine the true cost of these properties. This would allow the Council to make more informed decisions on the best outcome for each property.

Members stressed the need to address issues preventing unused Council properties from being utilised for community benefit. The longer it takes to determine the properties' best use, the more negative the perception among community members eager to repurpose these assets. Additionally, there were concerns that Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972, which dictates how best value should be obtained, might be outdated and impeding progress.

- Methods for evaluating the results and effects of community wealth building, considering not just economic factors but also social, health, and well-being aspects, and the process of harmonising these with current metrics and strategies.

The Director of Public Health and Communities explained to the Committee that the long-term Health and Well-Being Strategy would aid in assessing the effects shown in the community wealth building report, which covers adding a health impact evaluation unit to improve assessments on community health and well-being.

Cllr Simpson left the Committee meeting and did not return.

The Committee **AGREED** to make the following recommendations to Cabinet:

- Work with the Local Government Association to open discussion with the government to clarify s.123 of the Local Government Act 1972.
- Provide draft documentation of the CAT policy to Locality Groups.

The Committee requested the following **ACTION**:

- Provide a list of the buildings that are in the hands of the community groups in one legal form or another.

28/24 LEP INTEGRATION

(Agenda No. 8)

Cllr Liz Leffman, Leader of the Council, Chloe Taylor, Head of Economy, and Nigel Tipple, LEP Chief Executive, were invited to present a report on Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Integration.

The Leader introduced the report and explained the background and rationale of the LEP integration following central government's decision to withdraw funding, which aims to enhance the strategic leadership and coordination of the local economic development and recovery.

The Leader outlined the benefits and opportunities of the integration, such as streamlining the governance and funding arrangements, strengthening the

partnership and collaboration between the County Council and local businesses, and aligning the economic and social objectives.

The Leader highlighted some of the challenges and risks involved, such as managing the expectations and interests of different stakeholders, ensuring the continuity and quality of the LEP functions and services, and complying with the legal and financial requirements.

The LEP Chief Executive discussed the integration report, explaining the handover of LEP operations to the County Council, as the sole 'member,' following central government's discontinuation of independent LEPs nationally. The second phase of the transition included revising the LEP's Strategic Economic Plan, creating a new business strategy, and stakeholder engagement. The LEP continued to dedicate itself to overseeing public projects, promoting commerce, advancing skills development, and fostering innovation, while also representing local economic interests. Aligning with the County Council's corporate objectives, the LEP considered new policy environments and approaches like community wealth building, circular economy, and doughnut economics. The LEP's governance was adapted during this transition and reports directed to the County Council as the sole 'member.'

The Committee welcomed the report and expressed support for the LEP integration. Several issues and questions were raised concerning the LEP Integration report, as follows:

- Members emphasised their desire to see as wider a range as possible of Oxfordshire businesses being represented, especially those in retail and manufacturing.

The Banbury Business Improvement District was cited as a valuable resource for local business knowledge by Councillors and the LEP's Chief Executive. Members also recommended utilizing local groups and council members as resources for insights into area businesses. The Chief Executive of the LEP emphasised that companies from various sectors are central to their efforts, with a local business database containing about eight thousand entries reflecting a wide range.

- Members questioned the level of liability the Council had as a result of the integration of the LEP, especially in relation to the LEPs on-going budget.

The Leader emphasized that if the LEP were to maintain its current form, its reserves would suffice in covering expenses for two years, although this would be contingent on the manner in which the new administration allocates funds to such initiatives.

The Chief Executive of the LEP clarified that the Council has the authority, via the Leader, to ask for or insist on the approval of the LEP's business plan. This blueprint was currently undergoing preparation, with a preliminary version expected by September.

As far as finances are concerned, the LEP was already fully financed up until March 2025, and it would not require additional monetary support from the Council.

- Clarity was sought over the governance of the LEP following its integration into the Council, especially with the Council becoming the sole member, where there had previously been a board.

The Leader informed the Committee that the structure of the LEP governance was still a work in progress with various avenues and forms being investigated. The Leader insisted that the local councils and Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) would continue to work closely with the LEP.

The Committee continued to question who held ultimate accountability for the LEP. Officers were unable to provide a definitive answer during the meeting.

- The Committee noted that they had discussed in detail the need for LEP governance, and that further scrutiny of the LEPs governance should be conducted by the Audit and Governance Committee.

Cllr Mallon left the Committee meeting at this point and did not return.

29/24 COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN
(Agenda No. 9)

The Committee discussed its work programme for forthcoming meetings, having heard any changes from previous iterations, and taking account of the Cabinet Forward Plan and of the Budget Management Monitoring Report.

Members were informed that there would be a number of all-member briefings, rather than Scrutiny-specific ones, concerning the development of the Council's forthcoming annual budget.

The Committee **AGREED** to make the following amendments to its work programme:

- Add an item on significant changes from central government and the impacts on the Council, particularly around economic development, and devolution.
- Remove the item on Advice Centres for September and hold briefing instead.
- An item on options on investigated options for the future use of County Hall in December or January.

30/24 RESPONSES TO PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS
(Agenda No. 10)

The Committee **NOTED** that no responses had been made by Cabinet since the previous meeting.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing