

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee

held at 7.00 pm on Thursday 24 October 2013

at the Council Chamber, The Abbey House, Abingdon



Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillor Jim Halliday (Chairman), Charlotte Dickson (Vice-Chairman), Tony de Vere, Jason Fiddaman, Debby Hallett, Mohinder Kainth, Sandy Lovatt, Julie Mayhew-Archer, Fiona Roper and Richard Webber

Officers: Steve Bishop, David Buckle, Adrian Duffield, Susan Harbour and Sally Truman

Number of members of the public: 0

Sc.45 Notification of substitutes and apologies for absence

Apologies	Substitutes
Councillor Eric Batts	Councillor Yvonne Constance
Councillor Alison Thomson	Councillor Bill Jones
Councillor Elaine Ware, Cabinet member, economy, leisure and property	Councillor Matthew Barber, leader of the council

Sc.46 Minutes

The minutes were approved as a correct record of the meeting on 19 September 2013 and were signed by the chair. The following additions were noted:

SC41, Review of the two hour free parking scheme: signs at entry points to towns which were confusing drivers, were only present in Abingdon, and were erected by the Abingdon Partnership.

Sc.47 Declarations of interest

None.

Sc.48 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

Councillors Jim Halliday and Mohinder Kainth were leading a survey of councillors on access to emails, the intranet and the extranet. All councillors were encouraged to respond promptly.

Sc.49 Statements, petitions and questions from the public relating to matters affecting the Scrutiny Committee

None.

Sc.50 Corporate Plan - annual review of performance

Matthew Barber, Cabinet member for corporate strategy and Sally Truman, policy, partnerships and engagement manager, attended the meeting to present this item.

The committee discussed this item, the main points are included below:

- In future reports, officers were asked to present the target for the year being reviewed and the performance against target;
- Corporate assessment is carried out by an external assessor;
- Matthew Barber agreed to provide details of the date when conditional contracts were exchanged on the Botley West Way development;
- Large retail units in the Abbey shopping centre in Abingdon had not yet been filled as the council wished to secure the right mix of retailers;
- The Milton Park Local development Order was adopted in December 2012, not 2013 as stated in the report;
- The committee would like more detail on Wantage in future reports;
- Paragraph 29 of the report states that “£7m funding has been allocated to fund infrastructure to support delivery in the Enterprise Zone”. The Committee felt that there was insufficient clarification on who the money was going to and what it would be used for;
- It was agreed that the committee would produce a detailed list of specific concerns which arose from the report, and that these would be responded to by the policy, partnerships and engagement manager and circulated to the committee.

Sc.51 s106 Progress Report

Roger Cox, the Cabinet member for planning development management and enforcement; Adrian Duffield, head of planning, and David Burson, planning officer, presented the report and answered questions from the committee.

The committee discussed this item, the main points are included below (responses included where appropriate):

- In the minutes from a previous meeting (28 June 2012) the committee had requested that ward councillors be told how much money/what s106 commitments were outstanding in each parish in their wards; ward councillors and parishes were still struggling to access this information. Although this had been delayed, it was now available on the intranet, which can be sorted by parish. *Intranet/Council/planning/Section 106 Details (Vale)*.
- There is now an s106/CIL officer in place who engages directly with parishes. There is also a pro-active system of engaging with parishes, which includes writing to parishes on all major applications.
- The committee requested that the head of planning circulate details of where and how parishes have been consulted.
- The committee requested that information regarding outstanding amounts of s106 money per parish should be made available to councillors and to parishes.
- The committee requested that the head of planning remind councillors of how they can be trained in accessing the information.

- Paragraph 12 of the report relates to how the planning department monitor development. The committee suggested that ward councillors and parishes could be co-opted into the process to provide further information.
- By March 2014, information about where developers have failed to make s106 payments will be on the internet so that parishes and ward councillors will be able to access the information directly.
- The information regarding the s106 agreements and payments was previously split between legal, planning and finance: this has now been brought together under the planning department and an officer appointed to collate and consolidate the information.
- The committee requested that clearer tables were produced in the annual reports at year end.
- The committee requested that up to date information was brought back to Scrutiny in June 2014
- The committee recommended to Cabinet that sufficient resources continue to be made available to support this work.

Sc.52 Planning Service Delivery

Roger Cox, the Cabinet member for planning development management and enforcement; Adrian Duffield, head of planning presented the report and answered questions from the committee.

The committee discussed this item, and requested the following information from the officers:

- How is customer service monitored at present, and how will it be monitored in the future?
- A training session is required by members, along the lines of “a members’ guide to planning”;
- The committee requested that a structure plan, including names and numbers of all officers be sent out to members, and that this be updated regularly;
- Members were encouraged to use the email address: planning@whitehorsedc.gov.uk for queries where they were unable to contact the relevant officer;
- Councillors were advised to look up planning applications on the internet by the planning reference number, or integrated map, which would show which officer was dealing with the case and where it was in the process.

Sc.53 Call in of Cabinet decision regarding letting Abbey House and relocating staff

Matthew Barber, Leader of the Council; David Buckle, Chief Executive and Steve Bishop, Strategic Director, came to the table to introduce the individual Cabinet member’s decision and to assist the discussion.

The decision had been called in because some members of the committee considered that the decision did not fully follow these key principles:

- a) proportionality – i.e. the action must be proportionate to the desired outcome
- b) due consultation and the taking of professional advice from officers
- c) clarity of aims and desired outcomes
- d) an explanation of the options that were considered before a decision was taken, and the reasons for that decision
- e) the social, economic and environmental well-being of the community.

The full reasons for the decision are attached to the agenda pack for this committee.

The committee discussed this matter:

- A project board will be established to oversee this project;
- There will be a core staff of approximately 50 Vale employees remaining at Abbey House, on any day the headcount might be nearer 100 as there was provision for hot-desking and meetings;
- Some teams would maintain a significant presence in Abbey House, such as development management and health and housing;
- Vale of White Horse District Council would continue to be based in Abingdon from the public point of view;
- The sharing of accommodation with Oxfordshire County Council would enable better joint working with the County Council, particularly in the area of vulnerable people;
- A “one stop shop” could be created with social services, health and housing and possibly the Citizen’s Advice Bureau, all accessible in the one building;
- Vale Council are sensitive to the concerns over the CAB’s independence and their needs, and will work to accommodate these;
- Capita have the capacity to provide reception services for the County Council if required;
- The decision which had been called in was a decision in principle, there will be additional savings and costs;
- The Scrutiny committee considered that more detail should be available on the figures to enable the Scrutiny committee to fully carry out its role;
- Matthew Barber agreed to make available to Scrutiny, any information which Cabinet has which is not confidential relating to the County Council;
- Other options have been considered and assessed but are not financially or operationally viable.

The Committee agreed to meet again on 28 November to discuss the matter further, with up to date information. The Cabinet would meet immediately following this to make a decision.

The meeting closed at 9.35 pm

Sc.54 **FIELD_TITLE**

FIELD_SUMMARY