

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee**



held at 7.00 pm on Wednesday, 12 February 2014
at the Council Chamber, The Abbey House, Abingdon

Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Jim Halliday (Chairman), Charlotte Dickson (Vice-Chairman), Dudley Hoddinott, Jason Fiddaman, Debby Hallett, Mohinder Kainth, Sandy Lovatt, Julie Mayhew-Archer, Fiona Roper, Robert Sharp and Richard Webber

Attending members: Councillors Matthew Barber and Mike Murray

Officers: Adrian Duffield, Susan Harbour, Simon Hewings, William Jacobs, Derek McKenzie, Anna Robinson and Mark Williams

Number of members of the public: 0

Sc.86 Notification of substitutes and apologies for absence

Councillor Eric Batts sent his apologies and Councillor Robert Sharp attended as his substitute.

Councillor Tony de Vere sent his apologies and Councillor Dudley Hoddinott attended as his substitute.

Sc.87 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings on 21 and 28 November 2014 were agreed and signed by the chairman, subject to a minor change.

Sc.88 Declarations of interest

No declarations were made by councillors.

Sc.89 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

There would be a workshop to discuss the Key Performance Indicators of the Leisure Contract, and Scrutiny were invited to send a limited number of members to this. The following councillors agreed to go on behalf of the committee: Eric Batts, Julie Mayhew Archer, Richard Webber, Tony de Vere, Sandy Lovatt and Jim Halliday

The meeting discussed the imminent move of the Scrutiny Committee to Wantage Civic Hall, rather than Abbey House. It is a political decision to move meetings to Wantage Civic Hall and, in the short term, the space at Abbey House will be difficult to use (the actual council chamber will be out of commission during April, with the lobby area being used for storage until that point). Moving microphones and other expensive equipment between sites can create difficulties and possible damage to equipment. Some councillors considered that it would be more equitable to hold the meetings alternately between Abingdon and Wantage. Members of the committee were concerned that the committee should retain its Thursday night slot. Democratic services were able to assure the committee that this would be the case during the forthcoming civic year when all Scrutiny meetings had been scheduled for Thursdays. Officers would report back to Scrutiny on this topic.

Full financial summary to be circulated on the outdoor pool, further to November meeting.

The committee raised concerns about the number of late papers which were submitted. This was particularly relevant to the papers relating to the Local Development Scheme. It was agreed that this would be raised with the relevant officers.

Councillor Sandy Lovatt is the Scrutiny Committee's representative on the Leisure Management Contract group; he gave committee the following project status update (to 10 February 2013)

- Three submissions were received by the detailed solutions return deadline on 13 December.
- Officers across both South and Vale Councils were involved in evaluating the submissions, along with external legal and leisure consultants.
- Project board members and officers discussed the evaluation process and scores at the meeting on 17 January.
- The cabinet member for leisure took the decision to invite the two highest scoring bidders to enter into dialogue with the councils and submit final tenders for the joint leisure management contract starting on 1 September 2014. Project board members confirmed their support for these recommendations.
- Dialogue sessions with both bidders are being held in February prior to invitations to submit final tenders being issued at the beginning of March;
- A joint scrutiny workshop to look at key performance indicators is being held on 24 February.
- Final tenders are due to be returned on 4 April.

Sc.90 Statements, petitions and questions from the public relating to matters affecting the Scrutiny Committee

None.

Sc.91 Revenue budget 2014/15, capital programme and the medium term financial plan

Councillor Matthew Barber, the Cabinet member for Finance came to the table to present this item and to answer questions from the Committee. Also at the table for this item were William Jacobs, Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer, and Simon Hewings, Accountancy Manager (Revenue).

The committee asked a range of clarification and explanation questions on the budget. Specific questions are below:

- P54: spending the ABTTS money – is it going to be spent. This will be clarified as an action point.
- P 53 There was a significant underspend for open market homebuy, and the budget for this has been rolled forward. The underspend in the current year is due to the length of time taken to build up interest in the scheme and to process applicants through the scheme. In addition, other schemes to assist people into market housing may have overtaken this one in terms of demand.
- P53. The Abingdon riverfront repairs are opposite Wilsham Road and the other side of Nag's Head Island, MB to clarify. This work was outstanding from before the 2014 flooding and the area would need to be assessed again once the floods had subsided.
- P55. Work to Rye Farm car park would have an impact on the lorries which parked there. However, there was adequate room for the haulage vehicles at the Nuffield Industrial Estate.
- The temporary housing stock is currently in the process of being evaluated and proposed changes to the stock are reflected in the budget. The Head of Housing has prepared a paper on re-evaluating the stock and this may be considered at a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

The committee wished to minute its thanks to William Jacobs and his team in finance for the work on the budget. The committee also wished to record how useful members had found the budget briefing which had been introduced and wished that these would continue.

Sc.92 Update on the Local Development Plan

Councillor Mike Murray, the Cabinet member for Planning Policy/Local Plan came to the table to present this item and to answer questions from the Committee. Also at the table for this item were Adrian Duffield, Head of Planning, Derek McKenzie, Planning Policy Manager and Mark Williams, Team Leader Planning Policy.

Councillor Murray described the history and government policy behind the Local Plan. The committee discussed the matter and the following points were made:

- Pre-submission consultation would be carried out in August/September 2014.
- The Local Plan would be submitted in October 2014.
- From August/ September 2014 any planning applications not in accordance with the Local Plan will be defendable and the Local Plan will be a material planning consideration.
- There had been considerable delays in the process of the Local Plan, these had been due to a number of factors:
 - The government had been changing the goal posts concerning the production of a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), so there was no tried and tested method of producing an SHMA;
 - There was a lack of available experts to assist in the production of the plan;
 - The SHMA was being produced in conjunction with the other district authorities in Oxfordshire, and with Oxford City Council.
- The date of the plan has changed from 2029 to 2031
- The SHMA will be for Vale within the Oxfordshire context, but where local authorities can demonstrate that they cannot meet their need within their own boundaries, then neighbouring authorities must seek to support them.
- There are protocols in place to protect partnership working between authorities.

- The feedback from the 2500 people previously surveyed will be taken forward and built on and covers a range of issues.
- The government has indicated that there will be penalties if council fails to produce a Local Plan.
- The council has, or has planned, enough resources to handle the workload in the necessary timescale.
- The production of a Local Plan, will help end the practice of “planning by appeal” currently suffered in the Vale.

The Local Plan Part 1: Strategic Sites and Policies will go to consultation as soon as possible, the consultation will be done by a multi-channel approach, including:

- website;
- leaflet covering key issues;
- Press and media publications;
- Face to face briefings with councillors, MPs, stake holders and local businesses;
- Public meetings;
- Through parish councils, actions groups, CPRE and others.

The consultation will be presented in plain English, not in “planning jargon”

The consultation summary from each round of consultation will be published with the next consultation.

The Cabinet member for planning policy and the planning policy team will come back to Scrutiny at its 26 June meeting to deliver a progress report and will include a Gantt chart for the Local Development Scheme and SHMA.

Sc.93 Councillors' IT survey

A narrative summary, together with a statistical summary of the councillors' IT survey was circulated prior to the meeting. It was agreed that a task group would meet to progress the work. The task group would consist of councillors: Debby Hallett, Jim Halliday, Mohinder Kainth and Sandy Lovatt. The group would be supported and advised by Democratic Services.

Sc.94 Action List

Not available at this meeting. Outstanding actions would be followed up before the next meeting.

Sc.95 Scrutiny work programme

Noted.

Sc.96 Dates of meetings

Noted.

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm