Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee

**held on Thursday, 23 October 2014 at 7.00 pm
at The Lockinge, The Beacon, Portway, Wantage, OX12 9BY**

**Vale
of White Horse**
District Council

Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Jim Halliday (Chairman), Charlotte Dickson (Vice-Chairman), Eric Batts, Tony de Vere, Debby Hallett, Sandy Lovatt, Julie Mayhew-Archer, Fiona Roper, Alison Thomson and Richard Webber, Bill Jones (In place of Mohinder Kainth), and St John Dickson (in place of Jason Fiddaman)

Officers: Adrian Duffield, Susan Harbour, Anna Robinson, Ron Schrieber, Emma Turner and Simon Turner

Also present: Councillor Reg Waite

Sc.161   Notification of substitutes and apologies for absence

Apologies were received from:

Councillor Jason Fiddaman; Councillor St John Dickson was his substitute
Councillor Mohinder Kainth; Councillor Bill Jones was his substitute.

Sc.162   Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 26 June 2014 were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and signed by the chairman as such.

Consideration of the minutes of the meetings of 24 July and 25 September 2014 was deferred to the next meeting.

Sc.163   Declarations of interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests or other interests declared by members of the committee.

Sc.164   Urgent business and chairman's announcements

There was no urgent business.

Sc.165   Statements, petitions and questions from the public relating to matters affecting the Scrutiny Committee

None.

Sc.166   Action List

The action list would be circulated with the actions from this meeting.

A member requested that the demonstration of the new audio visual recording equipment on refuse vehicles take place as soon as possible.

Sc.167   Indicative Scrutiny work programme

The committee requested that the following items be added to the work programme:

- Equalities
- Interaction with housing associations

These would be considered at the chairman's briefing.

A member requested that the work programme item on wifi in Vale towns, which did not yet have a meeting date, be submitted to the committee as soon as possible. An update on the roll-out of super fast broadband would be included in the 7 November "In Focus" news bulletin.

Sc.168   Planning Enforcement

The committee considered an overview of the current enforcement service and its performance together with the proposals to update and improve the service over the next twelve months.

Adrian Duffield, Head of Planning, and Emma Turner, Planning Enforcement Team Leader, introduced the report and answered questions from the committee.

Councillor Roger Cox, Cabinet member for Planning Development had been unable to attend but had submitted a brief report stating that:

- Three years ago there were over 1,400 on-going enforcement cases; this number had been reduced to 166.
- The structure of the department had been altered radically and the qualifications of the officers strengthened, resulting in a more efficient and effective operation.

In response to questions, it was reported that:

- The planning enforcement regime was not a punitive one. Powers to take formal action are discretionary and formal action must be proportional to the harm caused.
- Most enforcement powers were delegated to officers but some matters were delegated to the Chairman of the Planning Committee.
- A new enforcement plan was being drafted. It would include clear advice for members of the public on the action that could be taken by council departments and by other agencies e.g. Oxfordshire County Council and the police.
- The enforcement plan would be free from jargon and written in plain English.

- Successful outcomes were publicised but more could be done in this respect. However issuing a notice or a prosecution were not the only measures of success.
- With regard to proportionality each case was decided on its own merits. Extracts of the planning guidance on "expediency" would be circulated to members for information.
- The service was overseen by the Cabinet member for planning development and the Planning Committee. An annual report on enforcement would be submitted to the cabinet member and, once approved, would be circulated to all members.
- Details of enforcement cases could be accessed via the public website and a link would be sent to members together with guidance on how to monitor cases in their wards. Email notification of new enforcement cases would be introduced. A strategy would also be developed for keeping town and parish councils informed of enforcement issues.
- It was acknowledged that the figure of 60% of cases being resolved by negotiation was an aim rather than a target.
- It was proposed to hold a series of training and information sessions for councillors and planning officers to pass on information and share best practice. These sessions would be incorporated into the 2015 councillor induction programme.

The committee congratulated the enforcement team on its performance.

RECOMMENDATION:
That the enforcement plan set out clearly inter departmental and inter agency responsibilities and working on enforcement.

Sc.169   IT Procurement

The committee considered the report of the Head of HR, IT and Technical Services which updated the committee on the progress of the information technology (IT) infrastructure project.

Councillor Reg Waite, Cabinet member for HR, IT and Customer Services and Simon Turner, IT Operations Manager, introduced the report and answered questions from the committee.

In response to questions, it was reported that:

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- The management of IT services might be outsourced but Vale and South councils would continue to run their own hardware and software.
- The migration of the data centre and the uplift of servers were back office functions so would not affect users.
- HR was seeking to recruit external trainers to train staff on the move to the new version of Microsoft Offfice. Users would be trained at the same time as new desktops were delivered. This process was likely to be rolled out over a number of months.
- The pilot testing of training of new software and any subsequent user training would include councillors.
- Information would be provided on whether users could have low cost software installed on their home devices.
- Councillors would be kept informed of the IT procurement plan progress via regular updates in "In Focus" news bulletin.
- Care would be taken to ensure that implementation of the procurement plan would not impact upon the elections team in the run up to the 2015 elections.

The committee welcomed the IT procurement plan but emphasised the importance of ensuring that users were trained before the move to the new systems was implemented.

Sc.170   Dates of meetings

The committee noted the dates of future meetings.

The meeting closed at 8.25 pm