

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee

held on Thursday, 24 September 2015 at 7.00 pm
at 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, Milton, OX14 4SB



Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Judy Roberts (Chair), Alice Badcock (Vice-Chairman), Katie Finch, Debby Hallett, Vicky Jenkins, Monica Lovatt, Ben Mabbett and Robert Hall (In place of Chris Palmer)

Officers: Kate Arnold, David Buckle, Susan Harbour and Bob Watson

Also present: Councillor Matthew Barber

Number of members of the public: 0

Sc.8 Notification of substitutes and apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Ed Blagrove and Chris Palmer. Councillor Robert Hall served as a substitute.

Sc.9 Minutes and actions arising and referral

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 August 2015 were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and were signed by the chair.

Matters Arising

The Chair reported back that a meeting was scheduled between the chief executive of Sovereign Vale Housing Association, the Council's head of housing and the portfolio holder. She would report back the committee after this meeting had taken place.

Council Tax reduction scheme sample correspondence had been circulated to all members of the scrutiny committee.

Referrals

Oxford Unmet need paper

The Leader noted the comments of the Scrutiny committee on the Cabinet paper and reiterated the intention to revise the paper to take some of these comments onto account. Work in preparation for the Local Plan Examination had delayed the publication of the revised report but it will be brought forward as soon as practicable.

Letter to the Secretary of State

It was reported at the last meeting that the Leader had written to the Secretary of State requesting him to compel Oxford City Council to revise their Local Plan. A response had been received in the last week stating that the matter was being considered by the Housing Minister.

Sc.10 Declarations of interest

None.

Sc.11 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

There would be a district scrutiny meeting to discuss the proposed Botley supplementary planning document. This would be at 7.30 on Thurs 22 October after the joint meeting.

ALL scrutiny meetings will now be held at 135 Milton Park (unless there is likely to be significant public interest). Joint scrutiny will start at 6.30, Vale district will start at 7.00, but this will be reviewed.

Sc.12 Statements, petitions and questions from the public relating to matters affecting the Scrutiny Committee

None.

Sc.13 Work schedule and dates for all South and Vale scrutiny meetings

Noted and updated accordingly.

Sc.14 Financial Outturn 2014/2015

Matthew Barber, the Cabinet member for finance, introduced this item. Also present to answer questions were William Jacobs, head of finance, and Bob Watson, accountancy manager.

The committee discussed the financial outturn asking questions of the cabinet member and officers, and the following points were raised.

- The impact of the fire had affected the forecasts and created both variance in the revenue budget and slippage in the capital programme.
- There had been an overachievement, against budget, in planning income. However this would result in future additional expenditure on staff costs to meet demand.
- Budget holders had been working hard to improve the accuracy of their forecasting and contingency had been removed from service areas and put into a central pot. These two measures were improving forecasting and outturn accuracy.
- The underspend in the planning department was caused by a shortage of staff, but they had still been able to meet their performance targets.

Recommendations and referrals.

This item was “to note” and so there were no recommendations or referrals arising.

Sc.15 Annual review of The Beacon, Wantage

Mathew Barber, leader of the Council, introduced this item. Kate Arnold, leisure services manager was also present to answer questions.

The committee discussed the performance of the Beacon asking questions of the cabinet member and officer, and the following points were raised.

- Local perception of the facility had improved and there was a greater awareness of how the venue could be used and what it could offer.
- The team had tough financial targets to meet but were improving the budget monitoring and usage.
- Plans were in place to further increase local awareness and initiatives had been undertaken such as working with the local care home on dementia projects.
- In past years the objective had been to decrease costs because the venue was underutilised, now there was a focus on investment to improve the nett position.
- The Beacon was still receiving £100,000 per annum more than it did in 2012 and that the original plan was that it should cease to require any money at the end of 5 years.

Recommendations and referrals.

- That the matter come back to scrutiny in a year's time
- That future reports should include the nett expenditure figures over a longer period for comparison purposes.

The meeting closed at 8.00 pm