

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee

held on Thursday, 27 July 2017 at 7.00 pm

at the Meeting Room 1, 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, Milton, OX14 4SB



Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Debby Hallett (Chairman), Alice Badcock (Vice-Chairman), Mike Badcock, Ed Blagrove, Mohinder Kainth, Sandy Lovatt, Chris Palmer, Dudley Hoddinott (In place of Judy Roberts) and Katie Finch (In place of Vicky Jenkins)

Officers: Mark Stone, Phil Ealey, Helen Novelle, Sally Truman and Susan Harbour

Also present: Councillor Elaine Ware

Sc.1 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Vicky Jenkins, her substitute was Councillor Katie Finch; and from Councillor Judy Roberts, her substitute was Councillor Dudley Hoddinott.

Sc.2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 March 2017 were approved by the committee as an accurate record of the meeting and were signed by the Chairman.

Sc.3 Declarations of interest

None.

Sc.4 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

The Chairman introduced herself to new members of the committee.

She stated that a principle objective of the Scrutiny Committee was to increase the engagement of members, Cabinet members and officers. Her aim was to move scrutiny "upstream" so that it is contributing to policy making at the pre-decision stage.

She stated that Scrutiny Committee does the following things:

- Holds Cabinet members and senior officers accountable for the decisions which they make and the services which they deliver;
- Helps to improve decision making;

- Informs members of the public of what the council does and how it does it;
- Provides the opportunity to learn from our performance, to do more of what works, and to stop or change what does not work.
- Scrutiny likes to receive good news too, and well-prepared policy and performance reports that show successes, as well as problem areas.
- Scrutiny is an opportunity for members to learn how officers think and work and also for officers to learn about how members look at things. It is a chance for everyone to learn about different perspectives. That all leads to a richer and more fertile ground for doing good work.

Adding value: members were requested to collate all grammar, punctuation, typos, formatting issues etc and send to Democratic Services who will forward it to the relevant officers. The meeting and preparation time should be used to find options for improving the policy or strategy which is being scrutinised. Members were encouraged to look for recommendations on the substance of what they saw and to find ways to make it simpler, fairer, cheaper, more transparent, better business practice, or to add another perspective.

Members of the committee commented that the current set of reports were well structured and straight forward to read. They commended the officers and felt that this represented an improvement in the format and content of reports.

Sc.5 Public participation

None.

Sc.6 Corporate Delivery Plan

The Corporate Delivery Plan had come to Scrutiny in advance of going to Cabinet and would return to Scrutiny on a six-monthly basis, with updates and showing progress against targets ("RAG" statuses). It would next come to Scrutiny in November and would include details of what had stood in the way of progress. The current report was a baseline report.

The committee discussed this item and related topics.

The Corporate Delivery Plan used a mix and match approach to project management methodology to fit the needs of each project.

Members were advised that any questions of clarification should be sent to the Policy and Partnerships Manager who would get a response from the relevant officer and circulate it to committee members. Any strategic issues should be brought back to the Scrutiny Committee review of the Plan in November.

In response to questions from councillors, the Acting Chief Executive clarified the current position on the Unitary Council bid. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse councils had submitted a unitary application to the Secretary of State which had been well received. Following the general election, the proposal continued to be the policy of these councils but there was no government workplan or sufficient majority to enable this to be decided at present. The councils were working on the assumption that this will **not** be subject to a decision within the next two years.

Councillors discussed the Plan and raised a number of issues which resulted in the following action points.

In order to provide more consistency across all activities on the Corporate Delivery Plan:

- Provide each activity with a unique identifier code;
- Check dates and relevant quarters for activity;
- Report on Q1 – Q16 to reflect the lifetime of the plan, or include the year in which action will happen
- Clarify which projects are across years and which are ongoing (and to make clear that Neighbourhood Plan support is ongoing);
- Include the specific benefits to be achieved by a project/action;
- Include percentage of project completed and whether it is on track or not
- Increase in housebuilding compared to last year – needs to be a new target each year, not an ongoing action;
- Add headings to identify strategic objective in the Corporate Plan;
- Clarify whether activity is South or Vale or both;
- Present any reasons for timetable slippage on activities;
- All actions should be SMART;
- Provide review dates for activities.

Sc.7 Temporary Accommodation Provision 2017-2022

The Cabinet portfolio holder, Councillor Elaine Ware, introduced the report.

The Council had a statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation to certain homeless households. It fulfilled this duty by using either hotels or its own housing stock.

The Temporary Accommodation Provision report addressed how Vale Council could effectively meet demand for temporary accommodation over the next five years. The report recommended that the council's two hostels be converted into self-contained units. This would enable the council to meet future demand in suitable temporary accommodation. A capital budget had been identified to fund the conversion of the hostels.

Phil Ealey, the Housing Needs Manager also spoke to the report. A more proactive approach was required to manage future demand for temporary accommodation and to make it more responsive to customer need, based on forecast projected future demand.

Option E, to reconfigure both the Wantage and Faringdon hostels into self-contained units, would be the most cost effective. The current accommodation could be used more effectively. South Oxfordshire District Council, which currently made use of Vale council's temporary accommodation, would invest in its own stock and free up places for Vale residents. Many of the residents in the hostel accommodation were vulnerable residents, and shared facilities could cause problems when there are no wardens on site. Option E provided the best option for the residents. There was sufficient money in the capital provision for new properties which could be diverted to the refurbishment of the hostels.

The Scrutiny Committee debated this item. Concern was raised as to whether there was a contingency included for the project going over budget. The officer confirmed that there was a ten percent contingency built into this budget. The committee required more details on the transitional plan during the refurbishment, including the cost implications. This could not be fully completed until the project was agreed by Cabinet, however, the plan was in

place to work with Registered Social Landlords to use “decant” properties as part of the transitional plan.

The committee considered that the decision on the best option should be made based on the focus on duty of care to vulnerable residents and not just on the financial issues.

In response to councillor questions it was confirmed that:

- The average stay in temporary accommodation was three to six months;
- The majority of homeless applicants came from the Abingdon area.

Concern was raised about moving vulnerable people away from their communities for a period of three to six months. However, the housing needs team concentrated on preventing homelessness and were successful in locating over 90 per cent of potentially homeless households in their local areas. Temporary accommodation was the last resort for homeless families. Homelessness prevention rates were very high in Vale and South Council areas, compared to other areas of the country.

The Committee requested the homelessness prevention figures from the officer who reported as follows:

SUCCESSFUL HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION CASES

Year	Number as of 31.03.
2014/15	355
2015/16	460
2016/17	559

An increase of 57 per cent over three years.

HOUSEHOLDS IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Year	Number as of 31.03.
2014/15	18
2015/16	8
2016/17	9

A reduction of 50 per cent over three years. Nationally, there has been a 50 per cent rise in temporary accommodation numbers since 2010.

GROSS VALE TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION EXPENDITURE:

Year	£
2014/15	71,883
2015/16	55,201
2016/17	20,773

A reduction of 71 per cent over three years. Nationally, expenditure on temporary accommodation had risen by 30 per cent since 2013.

RESOLVED to:

- a) request that the transitional plan come back to Scrutiny if Cabinet approve the report and recommendations.
- b) request that the officer add actions to the Corporate delivery plan for Vale.

Sc.8 Joint Housing Strategy

Councillor Elaine Ware, the Cabinet portfolio holder, introduced the item. She offered her apologies if the Committee were expecting a strategy that covered all aspects of housing. This strategy aimed to deal with the challenge of delivering new build properties. Following the concerns raised by the Scrutiny Committee Chair, Councillor Ware proposed that the title of the report be amended to read “Housing Delivery Strategy” and that paragraph 17 be deleted.

Other areas of housing related work were covered by separate strategies, policies and procedures. There was a separate Homelessness Strategy and document for temporary accommodation provision, which fell under the remit of the development and housing services; and matters relating to Disabled Facilities Grants, energy efficiency and the private housing sector were covered by the environmental health team. The planning department also had responsibilities for the delivery of housing.

A Housing Delivery Strategy was a key document for councils – underpinning corporate goals and providing clarity on the councils’ priorities for housing delivery, which was particularly important given the task of delivering challenging numbers of new homes. This was a high-level document setting out the direction of travel over the next ten years that would enable the councils to take a proactive approach in driving the delivery of housing.

This approach was not just about accelerating the delivery of a certain number of homes, but was centred on developing the role of “Housing Delivery Enabler” which would put greater emphasis on delivering the right types of homes, in the right area and to required standards, seeking out new opportunities and partnerships and finding solutions to problems impacting on development progress.

Of particular importance, was the need to develop much of the future housing in partnership with local people, - chiefly in coordination with Neighbourhood Plans, but also through capturing the capacity for innovation, opportunity and passion that existed in other parts of our district community – including local major employers, community land trusts etc.

The Strategy would support other important planning and housing documents such as the Homelessness Strategy, temporary accommodation provision, the Local Plan and the future development of the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document.

As this was a high-level document, it did not include specific detail, but provided an action plan of intention and initiatives to be built up over a ten year period, leaving the councils far better able to influence and direct the type of housing development that supported opportunities for current and future residents, employment, leisure and education.

The committee raised its concern that this joint strategy had come separately to South and Vale Scrutiny Committees and wanted to ensure that in future these joint strategies would come to the Joint Scrutiny Committee.

The purpose of the strategy is to get deliverability and it is important whatever the Strategic Housing Market Assessment numbers are. The action plan is about delivery rather than absolute numbers.

The committee noted that paragraph 17 of the Interim Head of Housing's report would be removed from the Strategy, but that the work it mentioned, would need to be done elsewhere:

"Because the strategy is focussed on delivering the councils' significant new-build housing targets, this Joint Housing Strategy does not address other aspects of housing provision that are sometimes included in other Local Authority Housing Strategies, such as raising quality of existing private sector housing stock, providing disabled facilities grants to improve accessibility of existing housing etc. which are addressed by South and Vale's Environmental Health Service"

This strategy is about delivering the housing numbers but also about delivering the type of housing which is actually needed in the local area.

A detailed action plan would be implemented following the adoption of the Strategy which would add further details.

RESOLVED to:

- a) commend the strategy to Cabinet, together with the comments of the members of the committee as part of the consultation process;
- b) send the comments of Vale Scrutiny Committee to South Cabinet as part of the consultation process as it is a joint strategy;
- c) recommend that the Strategy is updated and comes back to Scrutiny Committee for review in the light of any major infrastructure projects such as the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway and the possible reservoir;
- d) request that the Action Plan should come back to Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis, to keep the committee abreast of progress;
- e) request that joint strategies come to the Joint Scrutiny Committee in future;
- f) add the Joint Housing Delivery Strategy to the Corporate Plan.

Sc.9 Work schedule and dates for all South and Vale Scrutiny Committee meetings

The committee noted these and expressed the need for further work needed to be carried out to ensure a workable and useful workplan.

Action points:

- The committee would like to see the energy plan at Scrutiny in November;
- Councillors are encouraged to raise issues in advance of the Scrutiny committee to ensure that the correct heads of service can be present.

The meeting closed at 9.10 pm