

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee

held on Thursday, 28 March 2019 at 7.00 pm
at The Hanney Room, The Beacon, Wantage



Open to the public, including the press

Members: Councillors Debby Hallett (Chairman), Chris Palmer (Vice-Chairman), Robert Hall, Vicky Jenkins, Sandy Lovatt, Ben Mabbett, Judy Roberts and Simon Howell (In place of Mike Badcock)

Officers:

Adrian Duffield, Ben Duffy, Holly Jones, William Jacobs, Adrianna Partridge and Ron Schrieber

Also present:

Councillors Roger Cox and Robert Sharp

Sc.65 Apologies for absence

Councillors Mike Badcock, (substituted by Simon Howell), and Matthew Barber, submitted apologies.

Sc.66 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2019 were agreed as an accurate record and were signed by the Chairman.

Sc.67 Declarations of interest

None.

Sc.68 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

None.

Sc.69 Public participation

None.

Sc.70 Authority monitoring report 2017/18

The committee considered the report of the head of planning on the Authority Monitoring Report 2017/18, an annual report which set out the council's progress on Local Plan preparation and assessed the effectiveness of the policies and objectives contained in the Core Strategy, as well as reporting on a number of other statutory requirements.

Roger Cox, Cabinet member for planning, introduced this item. Also present to answer questions were Adrian Duffield, head of planning, Holly Jones, planning policy manager, and Ben Duffy, local plan monitoring officer.

In response to members' questions, it was reported that:

- Consultation on the Local Plan 2031 Part 2 would be ending shortly. All responses would then be provided to the Inspector prior to the issuing of his final report. Once this has been received it was anticipated that the Local Plan Part 2 would be adopted in June 2019.
- Whilst the Council strongly supported and encouraged local communities who wished to prepare neighbourhood development plans, there were no targets for the number of plans made as this was an entirely voluntary process.
- 58 planning applications had been fast tracked since the adoption of the Milton Park Local Development Order.
- The adoption of the Design Guide had assisted the authority in defending appeals against the refusal of planning permission.
- Whilst Core Policy 34: A34 Strategy, did not specifically aim to relieve pressure on the A34, a consequence of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc could do this – depending on its route.

Members expressed the view that future Authority Monitoring Reports should provide more information regarding the effectiveness of the core policies.

RESOLVED: to

1. note the Authority Monitoring Report 2017/18; and
2. request that, in future, more information be provided on the effectiveness of core policies.

Sc.71 Councillor budget task group update

The committee considered the report of Councillor Chris Palmer, the chairman of the Budget Task Group, which provided an update on the task group review of how scrutiny members could be more actively involved in the council's budget setting process.

The committee welcomed the report. A member suggested that more information should be provided regarding the Task Group's membership and dates of meetings.

With regard to the report's recommendation that quarterly budget monitoring reports were presented to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee, it was agreed that requested details to be included in the committee report should be confirmed by the next chairman of Scrutiny Committee to the head of finance.

RESOLVED: to **RECOMMEND** to Cabinet that:

1. quarterly budget reports are presented to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee, requested details to be included in the committee reports to be confirmed by the chairman of Scrutiny to the head of finance.
2. the council's corporate plan is revised as soon as possible and, following public consultation and formal adoption, its priorities should be used to shape future budgets.

Sc.72 Parliamentary report on the effectiveness of local authority overview and scrutiny committees

The committee received a presentation from Adrianna Partridge, deputy chief executive – transformation and operations, on the Parliamentary report on the effectiveness of local authority overview and scrutiny committees.

The report called on the Government to revise guidance on scrutiny committees as follows:

- That overview and scrutiny committees should report to an authority's Full Council meeting rather than to Cabinet.
- That scrutiny committees and the Cabinet must be distinct.
- That councillors working on scrutiny committees should have access to financial and performance data, and this access should not be restricted for reasons of commercial sensitivity.
- That scrutiny committees should be supported by officers that are able to operate with independence and offer impartial advice to committees.
- That members of the public and service users have a fundamental role in the scrutiny process and their participation should be encouraged and facilitated by councils.

The report was generally welcomed by members although the view was expressed that it failed to recognise the political realities of local government.

In the light of the report the committee was asked the following questions:

- what improvements did it wish to recommend to improve the council's ability to effectively scrutinise the services provided to residents?; and
- what areas should the councillor induction programme focus on in terms of ensuring effective scrutiny moving forward?

The committee agreed that, following the May Council elections, every Scrutiny committee member should receive a copy of the Parliamentary report. It was also agreed that the new members should identify the actions required to improve the effectiveness of scrutiny.

RESOLVED: to:

1. note the presentation;
2. request that, as part of the councillor induction programme, following the May Council elections, all Scrutiny committee members receive a copy of the Parliamentary report;
and
3. request that, following the May Council elections, Scrutiny members should identify the actions required to improve the effectiveness of scrutiny.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm