

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee

held on Thursday 19 September 2019 at 6.30 pm

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



Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Nathan Boyd (Chair), Jerry Avery, Ron Batstone, Cheryl Briggs, Andy Foulsham, Robert Maddison, Mike Pighills and Max Thompson

Officers: Steve Culliford, Nadeem Din, Adrian Duffield, Dylan Evans, Simon Hewings, Holly Jones, Suzanne Malcolm, Melanie Smans, Richard Spraggett and Mark Stone

Also present: Councillors Andrew Crawford, Helen Pighills, Bethia Thomas and Catherine Webber

Number of members of the public: 5

Sc.1 Apologies for absence

Councillor Samantha Bowring had sent her apologies for absence.

Sc.2 Minutes

RESOLVED: to adopt as a correct record the minutes of the committee meeting held on 28 March 2019 and agree that the chairman signs them as such.

Sc.3 Declarations of interest

Councillor Mike Pighills declared a personal interest in the performance report for The Beacon, Wantage as his partner was the Cabinet member for leisure.

Sc.4 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

The chairman made two announcements:

1. advising all present of the emergency evacuation arrangements; and
2. requesting that all future committee meetings commence at 7pm.

Sc.5 Public participation

Two members of the public had registered to speak at the meeting as follows:

1. Mr Michael Tyce spoke on behalf of the Campaign to Protect Rural England about the Local Plan Part 2, which he believed was unsound. The housing numbers in the plan were too high and based on the outdated housing needs assessment from 2014. The plan also included an allocation of Oxford's unmet housing need, figures which had not yet been tested at the Oxford Local Plan examination hearing. With increased housing density in the plan, this would provide sufficient housing numbers. He urged the committee to recommend that the plan's adoption was deferred until Oxford's unmet housing need figures had been tested.
2. Honorary Alderman and former district councillor Joyce Hutchinson had registered to speak about The Beacon's performance report but was not present at the meeting.

Sc.6 Local Plan 2031 Part 2 - options for adoption

The committee considered the head of planning's report on the council's options on Local Plan Part 2. The report was presented by Councillor Catherine Webber, the Cabinet member for planning, together with planning officers. The report set out the background to the local plan's development to date, together with three options open to the council at this stage:

1. To withdraw Local Plan Part 2
2. To not adopt Local Plan Part 2
3. To adopt Local Plan Part 2

The Cabinet member for Planning recommended option 3, to adopt Local Plan Part 2, as the plan had been found to be sound by the independent planning inspector. Work could then commence on a new local plan.

The committee was being consulted on the options before Cabinet on 4 October made its recommendations to full Council on 9 October.

The committee raised several questions regarding the options, including whether the council had a fourth option to defer adoption of the plan, pending the outcome of the examination of Oxford City's Local Plan and its unmet housing need allocated to the Vale. Officers advised that the outcome of that examination could be some time away, in which time the Vale could be exposed to the threat of speculative housing development if it lost its five-year housing land supply.

The committee noted that the local plan preparation process was set out in detailed regulations. The analysis of the options and the risks attributed to each were based on officers' experience of this and other councils. The committee expressed concern that the process to form and describe the options, and the analysis of those options, provided insufficient detail to allow councillors to make an informed choice. In particular, councillors believed that the report had not sufficiently analysed the risks of each option, for example, was the council at risk of judicial review if it adopted the plan (option 3)?

It was moved by the chairman that the committee supports the recommendations as set out in the report, namely to note the inspector's conclusions, to note the options, and to recommend Cabinet to accept the inspector's report and recommendation and adopt Local Plan Part 2. However, this motion did not receive the support of a seconder and therefore was withdrawn.

It was then moved by Councillor Mike Pighills and seconded by Councillor Rob Maddison that the committee:

- notes the conclusions of the independent inspector, appointed to examine Local Plan Part 2, as set out in the head of planning's report to Scrutiny Committee on 19 September 2019;
- notes the options in relation to Local Plan Part 2, as set out in the report;
- requests that the confidential legal advice around the Local Plan, which the council has received, be released to all councillors; and
- requests officers to amend the report (i) to include the process for developing the options and (ii) to rate the risks relating to each option.

The committee supported the motion and hoped that the information would help Cabinet members and later all members of the Council to make a balanced decision.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) note the conclusions of the independent inspector, appointed to examine Local Plan Part 2, as set out in the head of planning's report to Scrutiny Committee on 19 September 2019;
- (b) note the options in relation to Local Plan Part 2, as set out in the report;
- (c) request that the confidential legal advice around the Local Plan, which the council has received, be released to all councillors; and
- (d) request officers to amend the report (i) to include the process for developing the options and (ii) to rate the risks relating to each option.

Sc.7 Financial outturn 2018/19

The committee considered the head of finance's report on the financial outturn from 2018/19. This showed that the council had a revenue and capital underspend at the year end.

The Cabinet member for finance welcomed the committee's comments on the report. He accepted that the council needed to be more focussed on better budgeting in future but recognised that it was difficult to set a budget and keep to it as some events were outside of the council's control.

The committee noted that the revenue underspend of £2.2 million was largely due to the revenue underspend carry forwards from the previous year. Capital expenditure on several projects was paused during the year due to uncertainty over future government funding, resulting in a capital underspend also.

The accountant present at the meeting answered councillors' questions on budget preparation, in-year monitoring, and budget variances. The committee challenged the effectiveness of the budget setting process. Notwithstanding the difficulties with setting reliable budgets, the committee considered that there must be lessons that could be applied and that the Cabinet member for finance and officers should look to improve the budget setting process. It was suggested that the committee reformed its budget task group to help improve the budget setting process. The Cabinet member for finance welcomed this.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) note the overall financial outturn position for 2018/19, as well as the outturn of individual service areas; and
- (b) reform the committee's budget task group to support the Cabinet member for finance to form the budget process.

Sc.8 Continuation of meeting

RESOLVED: to continue the meeting for an additional thirty minutes, in accordance with the committee's procedure rule 35.

Sc.9 Business and Innovation Strategy Action Plan update

The committee considered the head of development and regeneration's report, which updated on progress against the business and innovation strategy's action plan 2017 to 2020. The report showed progress up to 31 March 2019.

The Cabinet member for development and regeneration reported that the strategy had been developed to gain a better understanding of the needs of the Vale's business community, in particular the needs of small and medium sized enterprises. Most actions were either completed or on track for completion. The key successes were outlined in the report, as were the key initiatives for 2019/20.

The committee welcomed the report and congratulated officers on the work carried out to-date. Councillors also asked officers to feedback on customer satisfaction in the next monitoring report.

It was noted that the next iteration of the strategy would look at how the council could help businesses become greener and more sustainable. It was suggested that the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee could be asked for suggestions on this. The Cabinet member for development and regeneration agreed to pursue this.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) welcome the progress made against the business and innovation strategy's action plan 2017 to 2020, as set out in the head of development and regeneration's report;
- (b) advise the Cabinet member for development and regeneration that the committee supports the key initiatives for 2019/20 set out in the report; and
- (c) ask the Cabinet member for development and regeneration to seek ideas from the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee on how the council could help businesses become greener and more sustainable.

Sc.10 2018/19 Performance report for The Beacon, Wantage

Councillor Mike Pighills declared a personal interest in the performance report for The Beacon, Wantage as his spouse was the current Cabinet member for leisure, and therefore he left the meeting during consideration of this item.

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The committee considered the head of community services' report on the 2018/19 performance of The Beacon at Wantage. The Cabinet member for community services reported that The Beacon had achieved four per cent revenue growth during 2018/19 but accepted that transformation was a long-term project and that there was more work to be done.

The committee welcomed the report and congratulated staff on achieving four per cent revenue growth.

RESOLVED: to note The Beacon's performance in 2018/19.

Sc.11 Work schedule and dates for all South and Vale scrutiny meetings

The committee reviewed its work programme. The chair asked members to contact him with any suggestions for future agenda items.

The meeting closed at 9.25 pm