

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee

held on Wednesday 11 February 2015 at 7.00 pm
at The Beacon, Portway, Wantage, OX12 9BY



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, Richard Webber and Robert Sharp (in place of Mohinder Kainth)

Officers: William Jacobs, Steve Bishop, Steve Culliford, Adrian Duffield, Liz Fay, Simon Hewings and Carolyn Organ

Also present: Councillor Mike Murray

Number of members of the public: Nil

Sc.201 Notification of substitutes and apologies for absence

Councillors Jason Fiddaman and Mohinder Kainth gave their apologies for absence. Councillor Robert Sharp attended as Councillor Mohinder Kainth's substitute.

Sc.202 Declarations of interest

Councillor Jim Halliday declared a personal interest in the Science Vale Area Action Plan as he was an employee of STFC within the Science Vale area.

Sc.203 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

The chairman announced that there would be a briefing on the Science Vale strategy on 23 February at 7.30pm in Didcot Civic Hall.

Sc.204 Statements, petitions and questions from the public relating to matters affecting the Scrutiny Committee

Julie Maberley made a statement on behalf of the Wantage and Grove Campaign Group about the Science Vale Area Action Plan. She queried why the Wantage and Grove area was due to receive a smaller percentage of Oxfordshire's infrastructure funding compared to the county's percentage of development planned for the Wantage and Grove area. How would this make the development in Wantage and Grove sustainable? When would the

investment come to retain Wantage as a quality market town? She asked the committee to support the case for Wantage and Grove.

Sc.205 Action List

The chairman asked for the action list to come to the next meeting.

Sc.206 Review of the Final Draft Budget

The committee considered the head of finance's report which set out Cabinet's draft budget proposals for 2015/16. The budget included the revenue budget for 2015/16, the capital programme for 2015/16 to 2019/20, the prudential indicators (tabled at the meeting), and the medium term financial plan 2015/16 to 2019/20.

The committee asked questions on the detail contained within the budget and noted that:

- the accounting rules dictated the way items were presented in the budget and it was accepted this could give rise to some confusion, one example being the need to reverse out the planning income budget
- officers would provide detail after the meeting on the reasons behind the proposed net reduction in the waste budget
- the capital expenditure allocated to the leisure facilities resulted from contractual commitments
- the income from planning applications was a cautious estimate
- this year's budget had removed any uncertain expenditure from individual budgets and included additional provision in the contingency budget instead
- an allowance had been made this coming year to part fund grass cutting on highway verges as the county council had cut its budget on this
- there was provision for an additional tree officer post; officers would confirm outside of the meeting whether this post would provide advice on diseased Ash trees
- new posts to assist with accelerated housing growth in the Science Vale area were being funded by government grant, and therefore were not shown as growth bids in this budget; officers agreed to include a separate note on this to the Council meeting in February
- unspent capital expenditure in 2014/15 had been carried forward to 2015/16
- officers would provide detail of the expenditure on improving public conveniences in 2014/15 and that planned for 2015/16

The committee thanked the officers for their work in preparing the draft budget. The committee also thanked officers for holding an all-councillor budget briefing last week, which allowed the committee to conduct better scrutiny of the budget proposals.

RESOLVED: to ask officers to provide further detail on the questions raised above where detailed answers could not be provided at the meeting.

Sc.207 Science Vale Area Action Plan

The committee considered the head of planning's report on the Science Vale area action plan. The report set out a draft issues and scope document that the Cabinet member for planning was due to approve for public consultation. Prior to his decision, the Cabinet member sought the committee's views on the document. He attended the meeting for this purpose.

The Science Vale area action plan would support the local plan, to meet housing need and support the local economy in the part of the district where most development was concentrated. The area action plan would have considerable weight when the council assessed planning applications in the Science Vale area. It would allow the council to properly plan infrastructure for new developments. The Cabinet member asked the committee, or individuals through the consultation process, to comment on whether the boundary of the Science Vale area was correct, and whether policy issues had been omitted.

The committee noted that:

- there would be an all-councillor briefing on this matter, a public exhibition, a community briefing, a stakeholder briefing, and leaflets to publicise the consultation and explain the issues and scope document
- the Science Vale area action plan must interact with the local plan and neighbourhood plans
- the area action plan would allow the council to lead and influence the design of large developments, not react to them

The committee welcomed the concept of the area action plan and made suggestions to the Cabinet member on the issues and scope document.

RESOLVED: to urge the Cabinet member for planning to introduce the Science Vale area action plan speedily and ask that the issues and scope document:

- be proofread for typographical, grammatical and punctuation errors before publication to make it easy to read and comprehend
- summarises questions 1 to 5 at the end of the document, and includes them in a clear online consultation form
- refers to health services to support development
- explains the boundary of the Science Vale area

Sc.208 Community Infrastructure Levy: Charging Schedule

The committee considered the head of planning's report on the community infrastructure levy. Following consultation on the preliminary draft charging schedule and government changes to the rules around charging a levy for affordable housing, Cabinet had reviewed the schedule and recommended a draft schedule for recommendation to Council and further public consultation.

The government had announced that there must be no requirement for affordable housing or for the council to charge tariff-style contributions on developments of ten homes or fewer. However, affordable housing could be provided through rural exception sites.

The committee noted the rates proposed by neighbouring councils and noted that the council had to set its rates at a level that could be supported by viability testing. The council was also in competition with other districts to attract science-based industries so could not set its rates too high.

The council was expected to keep a 'live' plan in place, meaning that it should be subject to review. The committee suggested that a review of the community infrastructure levy charging schedule should be carried out after two years' operation. The officers agreed, believing that this review should be carried out after publication of the annual housing statement, to assess whether the rates were correct.

RESOLVED: to recommend Council on 18 February 2015 that it should review the Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule two years after its adoption. The Council should receive a report recommending whether the charging schedule should be amended or not.

Sc.209 Indicative Scrutiny work programme

The committee reviewed its work programme, noting that a review of the effectiveness of the business continuity plan would be included on the work programme for consideration in June.

Sc.210 Dates of meetings

The committee noted that its last meeting before the elections would be held on Thursday 26 March 2015.

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm