

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee

held on Thursday, 14 April 2016 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 Judy Roberts (Chair), Alice Badcock (Vice-Chairman), Ed Blagrove, Debby Hallett, Vicky Jenkins, Monica Lovatt, Ben Mabbett and Chris Palmer

Officers: Paul Howden, Ron Schrieber and Sally Truman

Also present: Matthew Barber

Number of members of the public: 0

Sc.37 Notification of substitutes and apologies for absence

None.

Sc.38 Minutes and actions arising and referral

The minutes of the meetings held on 14 January and 11 February 2016 were agreed as accurate and were signed by the Chair. There were no actions arising or referrals.

Sc.39 Declarations of interest

None.

Sc.40 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

None.

Sc.41 Statements, petitions and questions from the public relating to matters affecting the Scrutiny Committee

None.

Sc.42 Work schedule and dates for all South and Vale scrutiny meetings

A member suggested that the committee should consider the learning points arising from the creation of the Local Plan 2031. The Strategic Director informed the committee that an independent expert group had submitted a report to the Communities Secretary and to the Minister of Housing and Planning which recommended measures to help ensure efficient and effective production of Local plans.

It was agreed to add consideration of this report to the workplan.

The committee requested that the internet link to the Cabinet work programme be circulated to members so that they could monitor and review appropriate items.

A member asked why the Equalities Report had been taken off the work programme. The committee was advised that the report, which would be circulated to members via "In Focus", was for information. However, if there were specific issues within the report which members wished to scrutinise, then they could request that they come before the committee.

Sc.43 Draft Corporate Plan 2016 - 2020

Matthew Barber, Leader of the Council, introduced this item. Also present to answer questions was Sally Truman, policy and partnerships manager

The committee considered the head of corporate strategy's report, which proposed a new corporate plan to cover the period 2016 to 2020. This identified the council's strategic objectives and priorities, and would help guide decisions on the allocation of resources. The corporate plan, if adopted by Council, would replace the priorities set out in the corporate plan that ended in 2016.

The Leader stated that the corporate plan would focus activity, guide policy and operational decisions, and inform the public of the council's aims. The draft plan would be considered by Cabinet on 15 April and the committee was invited to consider and comment on the draft prior to that meeting.

In response to questions and issues raised by the committee, the Leader reported that:

- the plan was a high-level statement of objectives and actions. Further detail, including measures, targets and specific actions would be included in a corporate development plan, which would be reviewed annually by Cabinet;
- the list of objectives and priorities was not exhaustive and did not include the Council's many statutory duties;
- the plan had been developed from the previous corporate plan but incorporated, amongst other things, the administration's 2015 manifesto and some of the findings of the customer satisfaction survey.

Members suggested the following amendments and clarifications to the draft plan which the Leader agreed to take to Cabinet for consideration before a final version was submitted to Council on 11 May. The changes included:

- Several typographical amendments
- In the section titled 'housing and infrastructure' amend the fifth bullet point to read 'promote exemplars of housing design ...' and the sixth to read 'work with developers and other partners to develop a protocol that will ensure high quality, sympathetic designs appropriate to all areas of our district'
- In the section on tackling infrastructure challenges, add a reference to the Oxford and Abingdon flood alleviation scheme

- In the section on tackling infrastructure challenges, add a reference to health, education and other infrastructure
- In the section titled 'sustainable communities and wellbeing' amend the fourth bullet point to read 'continuous improvement programmes for our leisure centres, facilities and schemes'
- In the section titled 'sustainable communities and wellbeing' amend the ninth bullet point to read 'carrying out district-wide deep cleans of streets, pavements, public footpaths and to remove litter and graffiti'
- In the section titled 'building an even stronger economy', amend the eighth bullet point to read 'working with developers to introduce local apprenticeship and local workforce schemes that benefit our residents' and the tenth to read 'supporting, promoting and encouraging business collaboration'
- In the section titled 'running an efficient council', amend the first bullet point to read 'keeping district council tax low'
- In the section titled 'running an efficient council', amend second bullet point to read 'continuing to work in partnership with South Oxfordshire District Council and others to develop new ideas for improving service delivery, including considering the option for a unitary council covering southern Oxfordshire'
- Amend the last bullet point in the draft corporate plan by deleting the words 'South Oxfordshire and....'.

RESOLVED: to review the corporate development plan on an annual basis.

Sc.44 Council tax reduction scheme 2015/16 - the effects to date

Matthew Barber, Leader of the Council, introduced this item. Also present to answer questions was Paul Howden, revenues and benefits client manager.

The committee considered the head of finance's report on the effect of the council tax reduction scheme 2015/16 (CTRS) on council taxpayers. The Leader tabled additional information on comparative numbers affected and savings/costs in 2014/15

In response to questions and issues raised by the committee, the Leader reported that:

- The fact that the number of applications to the discretionary hardship fund (DHF) had reduced from 20 in 2014/15 to one in 2015/16 suggested that the scheme was working well
- The CAB, registered social landlords and the Capita staff administering the scheme knew about the DHF and it was publicised on the council website so that the reduction in applications was unlikely to be due to a lack of awareness
- The annual cost to the council of administering the scheme was £33,000 which, to date, had been funded by government grant. Future costs had been built into the new Capita contract.

RESOLVED: to review the effect of the council tax reduction scheme on council taxpayers on an annual basis.

The meeting closed at 8.05 pm