

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Joint Scrutiny Committee

held on Tuesday, 2 August 2016 at 6.30 pm

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

Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members:

South Oxfordshire District Councillors: Richard Pullen, Toby Newman, John Walsh, Ian White and Bill Service (in place of David Dodds)

Vale of White Horse District Councillors: Debby Hallett (Chairman), Alice Badcock, Monica Lovatt, and Ben Mabbett

Officers: Gerry Brough, David Buckle, Phil Ealey and Ron Schrieber

Also present: Councillors Elizabeth Gillespie, Lynn Lloyd (SODC), Roger Cox and Elaine Ware (VoWH)

Sc.9 Notifications of substitutes and apologies for absence

Apologies were received from:

- South Councillor David Dodds; substitute Bill Service
- Vale Councillor Katie Finch

Sc.10 Minutes and actions arising

The committee agreed that the minutes of the meeting on 24 May 2016 were an accurate record of the meeting and the Chairman signed them as such.

Further to Minute 7. Performance review of Biffa Municipal Limited 2015, the committee was advised that the requested wider circulation of the leaflet for new residents would commence in the autumn.

Sc.11 Declarations of interest

None.

Sc.12 Urgent business and chair's announcements

There was no urgent business.

The Chairman reported that:

- Her aim was to increase the engagement of Scrutiny in the decision making process, thereby adding value and to increase the engagement of Cabinet members in Scrutiny.
- If members noticed any typographical or grammatical errors in any of the committee documents, they should notify democratic services outside of the meeting.

Sc.13 Statements, petitions, questions from the public relating to matters affecting the scrutiny committee

None.

Sc.14 Temporary Accommodation Strategy

Gerry Brough, interim head of development and regeneration, introduced this item. Also present to answer questions were David Buckle, chief executive and Phil Ealey, housing needs manager. South and Vale Cabinet members also attended to hear the committee's views.

The committee considered an early draft of the temporary accommodation strategy which set out the ways in which both councils would meet their statutory duties cost effectively and respond to the perceived likely increase in homelessness by providing additional temporary accommodation.

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

- There was an increase in the number of assured shorthold tenancies being ended by landlords as they could charge higher rents on the open market. This was exacerbated by a shortage of private rented accommodation.
- Although housing benefit was no longer paid directly to landlords, the councils could arrange for payments to be made directly for landlords who were letting through the councils.
- Oxfordshire County Council was responsible for providing accommodation for young people/looked after children.
- Rough sleepers could get access to hostels rather than temporary accommodation although this would become increasingly difficult following Oxfordshire County Council budget reductions.
- The "limit" in the graphs on page 11 of the strategy was an internal target as the councils could not fetter their statutory duties.
- When someone presented as homeless they would normally be placed in temporary accommodation pending further inquiries, subject to meeting the statutory requirements. Where possible, action would be taken to find private accommodation when someone was at risk of homelessness. If statutory homelessness could not be avoided then the most cost effective temporary accommodation would be sought.
- The Strategic Options section of the draft strategy required more detail and further options for cost effective ways of providing temporary accommodation.

The committee suggested the following amendments to the draft strategy:

- The first time that an acronym is used, the full wording should also be included.
- Page 8, Introduction: a summary of the principles that local authorities need to apply when assessing vulnerability to be included.
- Page 8, Temporary Accommodation: the numbers and percentages in this paragraph to be checked.
- Page 9, Private Rented Sector: the graph to include local data.
- Page 9, Private Rented Sector: the paragraph on the increase in the number of homeless households be rewritten to explain that the reasons include the shortage of affordable accommodation as well as the ending of assured shorthold tenancies.
- Page 10, Rough Sleepers: the graph to include local data.
- Page 11, The Local Picture, in both graphs delete "Limit" and insert "Target".
- Page 12, Dealing with people accepted as homeless: a summary of the councils' legal duty to be included.
- Page 12, Dealing with people accepted as homeless: figures for the number of families in bed and breakfast accommodation to be included.
- Page 14, Welfare reform: insert "Housing Association" after "Sovereign".
- Page 14, Welfare reform: second paragraph to be rewritten to clarify that it is not clear what proportion of the 320 directly affected households may face the possibility of eviction.
- Page 15, Purchasing a property: second paragraph to be rewritten and detailed calculations to be removed.
- Page 17, Strategic Objectives: second paragraph to be amended to specify the timescale of the "long term view".

Officers and Cabinet members thanked the committee for its constructive comments.

RESOLVED: to request the Cabinet members and officers to take the committee's comments, detailed above, into account and submit a revised version of the draft strategy to a future meeting.

Sc.15 Scrutiny Call In Arrangements

The committee considered a report from the head of legal and democratic services setting out the current arrangements for call in.

The report stated that as South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district councils were distinct legal entities, when both councils made what appeared to be a joint decision e.g. approval of a joint policy, each council had to issue its own decision which could only be called in by that council's members.

Both councils' scrutiny procedure rules provided that, if a decision was called in, the chairman of the district scrutiny committee could refer the matter to the joint scrutiny committee for consideration. In this way the joint committee could consider a call in relating to a matter that would affect both councils jointly.

RESOLVED: to note the report.

Sc.16 Work schedule and dates for all South and Vale scrutiny meetings

The committee considered its current work schedule which had been updated to reflect recent changes to Vale Cabinet membership and portfolios.

It was agreed to invite representatives of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) to attend a meeting in late October to give a presentation and answer questions on their Strategic Economic Plan.

The meeting closed at 7.55 pm