

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee

held on Thursday, 18 October 2018 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 Chris Palmer (Vice-Chairman), Mike Badcock, Matthew Barber, Robert Hall, Vicky Jenkins, Sandy Lovatt, Ben Mabbett, Judy Roberts and Emily Smith (In place of Debby Hallett)

Officers:

Shaun Berry, Duncan Grainge, Liz Hayden, Ian Matten, Donna Pentelow, Ron Schrieber and Mark Stone

Also present:

Councillors Alice Badcock and Elaine Ware. Jason Sherwood, Oxfordshire County Council

Sc.40 Apologies for absence

Councillor Debby Hallett (substituted by Emily Smith), submitted apologies.

Sc.41 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2018 were agreed as an accurate record and were signed by the Vice-Chairman in the chair.

Sc.42 Declarations of interest

Councillor Mike Badcock declared that he would be stepping down from the committee for Agenda Item 6: The Beacon, Wantage, because the portfolio holder was his daughter.

Councillor Ben Mabbett declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 6: The Beacon, Wantage, as the offices of Wantage Town Council, of which he was a member, were located at The Beacon.

Sc.43 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

None.

Sc.44 Public participation

Andy Crawford had registered to speak on Agenda Item 6, The Beacon, Wantage (see Minute 45 below).

Sc.45 The Beacon, Wantage

The committee considered the report of the head of community services which updated the committee on actions taken in response to its recommendations in September 2017 and which set out progress towards The Beacon's 2018/19 targets.

Councillor Alice Badcock, Cabinet member for community services, introduced the report. Also present to answer questions were Donna Pentelow, head of community services and Duncan Grainge, arts and community centres manager.

The committee was informed that, in 2017/18 The Beacon's income had increased; the gap between income and expenditure had been reduced since 2016/17; the programme of events had expanded and customer feedback had been excellent.

Andy Crawford addressed the meeting and acknowledged the venue's value as a local facility. However, he expressed concern about its financial viability given the continuing substantial gap between expenditure and income and requested a more detailed financial breakdown of expenditure, including the cafe accounts and room occupancy rates.

In response to members' questions, the committee was informed that:

- A new, more detailed, business plan for 2019/20 onwards would be produced.
- Income from ticket sales had increased from 13 per cent of total income in 2016/17 to 26 per cent in 2017/18, reflecting the expanding programme of events.
- The Beacon received the income from rooms hired out to other council services.
- The Beacon was a valuable community asset, providing many facilities for the public which did not generate an income.
- Whilst customer feedback was generally very positive, it was largely unprompted. It was intended to be more proactive in seeking customer feedback including a post performance survey.
- Greater and better use of social media was being made to promote The Beacon.

Members noted that, whilst the report referred to the gap between income and expenditure as "a deficit", this was incorrect as the expenditure had been budgeted for by the council.

Members complimented The Beacon's staff on their excellent, friendly and efficient service.

Whilst generally welcoming the report, members requested that more detailed financial information be provided in future.

RESOLVED: to

1. Note the report and the progress made by The Beacon; and
2. Request that the draft business plan for 2019/20 onwards, when completed, be submitted to the committee.

Sc.46 Vale of White Horse Air Quality Action Plan 2015 Update

The committee considered the report of the head of housing and environment which updated the committee on progress made on the council's Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) adopted in 2015.

Councillor Elaine Ware, Cabinet member for housing and environment, introduced the report. Also present to answer questions were Liz Hayden, head of housing and environment, Ian Matten, environmental services manager, Shaun Berry, environmental protection team leader, and Jason Sherwood, Oxfordshire County Council.

The committee was informed that the AQAP set out the actions proposed or taken to combat and mitigate air quality issues within the district. The document proposed how the council will work with other authorities and organisations that have the power to make the necessary changes to tackle the air quality problems, specifically within the Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) but also across the district.

As a largely rural district, with several market towns and villages, the air quality throughout the district was generally very good. There were, however, air pollution hotspots where nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) associated with traffic emissions was higher and where it had been necessary to declare AQMAs.

These areas are typically where houses are close to busy roads and pollution can be worsened by problems with congestion. There were three AQMA's in the district all declared because NO₂ levels were either predicted to or were exceeding national objectives. These were in Abingdon, Botley and Marcham.

Levels recorded during 2017/18 demonstrated that there had been a reduction in NO₂ levels in all three AQMAs. Whilst in Botley and Marcham, NO₂ levels. Still exceeded national objectives, in Abingdon the reduction in NO₂ levels had been significant, taking it below national objectives. Air quality in Abingdon would continue to be monitored and, subject to levels recorded, consideration would be given to revising or revoking the AQMA.

With regard to improving air quality in the AQMAs and elsewhere, the committee noted the measures set out in the action plan and the fact that many of these were dependent upon technological advancements, additional funding or were the responsibility of other bodies. The committee was informed that, in order to maximise staff resources, a team of officers would be responsible for air quality issues rather than it being the role of a designated officer.

The committee noted the success of the Abingdon AQMA and, with regard to the proposed Oxfordshire wide anti-idling strategy set out in the AQAP, asked officers to request taxi drivers not to leave their engines running whilst waiting on ranks.

Members expressed concern about the possibility of the proposed Oxford to Cambridge expressway generating additional traffic on the A34 at Botley, so further reducing air quality.

RESOLVED: to

1. Note the report and the progress made on the council's Air Quality Action Plan and, in particular, to recognise the significant improvements to traffic management in Abingdon through the Abingdon Integrated Transport Strategy, implemented in 2007, which has subsequently resulted in a reduction in NO₂ levels.
2. Request the Cabinet member for housing and environment to write to the Secretary of State for Transport to express concern about the possibility of the proposed Oxford to Cambridge expressway generating additional traffic on the A34 at Botley, so further reducing air quality.

Sc.47 Work schedule and dates for all South and Vale scrutiny meetings

The committee noted its work programme and agreed that, in view of the number of members unable to attend the meeting scheduled for 15 January 2019, this meeting be cancelled with the agenda items deferred to the next meeting.

The meeting closed at 8.35 pm