

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee



held on Tuesday, 1 February 2022 at 6.00 pm
in person at 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, OX14 4SB

The meeting was broadcasted live. The recording can be watched here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKSJhLwNm-o>

Open to the public, including the press

Present in the meeting room:

Councillors: Nathan Boyd (Chair) Jerry Avery, Ron Batstone, Hayleigh Gascoigne, Eric de la Harpe, Ben Mabbett, Patrick O'Leary and Diana Lugova
Officers: Paul Bateman (Democratic Services Officer) and Simon Hewings (Head of Finance)
Cabinet Member: Councillor Andrew Crawford (Finance)

Also present (remotely):

Councillors: Cabinet members Debby Hallett (Planning Policy and Corporate services), Helen Pighills (Active Communities), Emily Smith (Leader), Catherine Webber (Environment and Climate Emergency)
Officers: Emma Baker (Planning policy team leader), Harry Barrington-Mountford (Head of Policy and Programmes), Andrew Down (Deputy Chief Executive - Partnerships), Adrianna Partridge (Deputy Chief Executive for Transformation and Corporate Services), Richard Spraggett (Strategic Financial Manager)
Guests: Public speakers Julie Mabblerley and David Marsh

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Max Thompson and David Grant.
Councillor Diana Lugova substituted for Councillor Thompson at this meeting.

2. Declarations of interest

None.

3. Urgent business and chair's announcements

No urgent business.

Chair reminded committee that some questions may be appropriate to be answered after the meeting by the Cabinet member by email. Also, to be mindful of asking questions that were related to confidential reports and not appropriate for this meeting. The chair hoped to conduct the meeting completely in public.

Please get in touch with chair if you wish to join the Joint pollution task and finish group.

4. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 20 December 2021 were agreed as a correct record and the chair will sign them as such.

Resolved:

To agree the minutes of the meeting on 20 December 2021 as a correct record.

5. Work schedule and dates for all South and Vale scrutiny meetings

Resolved:

Committee reviewed the work programme.

6. Public participation

Public speakers were David Marsh and Julie Maberley.

David Marsh spoke first, representing the Vale District of CPRE, as chair. He spoke to item 7, Oxfordshire Plan 2050. CPRE had previously circulated an email with details for the committee to refer to. He asked:

1. Who will set the housing numbers? It was not clear. A higher transformational growth option, supported by developers, may take precedence over the standard lower method, as supported by community and civic groups.

- I ask scrutiny to seek a clear and transparent role for district council in deciding housing numbers, and:
- To seek confirmation that local people's views take precedence over those with vested interests.

2. There is no clear review of the need for a green belt review, and it was not in the original document – can scrutiny determine what the justification is?

3. The document supports a robust policy on housing density – we think this should be done at a county level. Please seek clarity on the next steps, with the inclusion of a density policy.

David clarified that a density policy at county level was recommended as once at county level, it would be easier to establish the need at county level, then introduce it at local plan level.

Julie Maberley spoke on behalf of Need not Greed Oxfordshire.

We support real need, not speculative need. This report was a crucial step, please robustly scrutinise this report. Housing numbers were still a mystery. We believe each council should look at housing numbers openly and transparently, before they become embedded in the final plan. The points in 1.4 do not seem to reflect the consultation responses. The request for a peer review was not listed. Concern of the influence of out of area developers in the consultation. There seemed to be a heavy bias to higher growth scenarios. We ask you to consider asking Oxfordshire Plan officers to amend the summary of the report so it was less biased.

7. Oxfordshire Plan 2050

Cabinet member for Planning policy introduced the report of the Project Lead for Oxfordshire Plan 2050. Cabinet member informed that she was a Vale representative on the sub-group for Oxfordshire Plan 2050, to whom she can feedback to.

Scrutiny were asked to note the latest update and the proposed roadmap from consultation to adoption. Once adopted, it would provide a high-level spatial framework to shape future planning until 2050, alongside local plans and neighbourhood plans.

A summary of responses was within the report, along with an update to the scope, including the conclusions from the consultation results and updates to the national planning policy framework and Environment Act.

The statement of community involvement had been updated and was included, to reflect the lifting of coronavirus act restrictions. The last appendix was next steps and risks associated with ensuring the timely implementation of the plan.

On noting the public speakers comments, cabinet member informed that she was awaiting the process for agreeing the numbers with the other councils, which was not clear yet. Cabinet member was committed to lower housing numbers and was not convinced that a peer review was the best approach. Regarding the consultation response suggesting a green belt review – Cabinet member would ask why this was not in the original document. Regarding a density policy, Cabinet member felt such a policy would need to be considerate of large rural areas with small parts that were very urban.

The spatial framework may be consulted on, including housing numbers - we should find out soon. Cabinet member agreed that Regulation 19 was too late to decide on numbers.

Cabinet member would take questions and points back to the sub-group.

Concern was raised about large transformational numbers wanted in Oxford City, to support affordable housing - however it was surrounding areas that needed to fulfil the affordable housing.

Officers and senior management present to support the item were Harry Barrington-Mountford, Emma Baker and Andrew Down.

Questions from the committee:

- Regarding when the numbers would be decided – details will be brought back as soon as possible. Details of getting to the Regulation 19 stage was being revised, so there was no fixed timeframe yet. Councillor Smith can take this point back to the sub-group (as Chair) and see what scrutiny could do to influence. There may be added research to do to come to a decision. Committee were reminded by Cabinet member that 5 councils involved needed to agree, and agreement was still being worked on. We had safeguarded our five-year land supply whereas neighbouring councils had not.
- If no agreement, the timeline would be adjusted and we would need to ask for an extension from the government (Department of Levelling up, housing and communities) if possible. The pressure on the timetable was dependent on agreement and Acting Deputy Chief Executive for Partnerships felt that the conversations would need to take as long as they take. Agreement needed to take it forward.
- Green belt review – it was responded that this was a consultation response. The report did not commit to a green belt review. Spatial options testing would reveal if a review was required.
- What was the process to incorporate the responses into the plan? Will scrutiny be able to relook at this? Emma Baker explained that viability and spatial options needed to be conducted. As the team does this, consultation responses will be reviewed. The sub-group would consider as well when the evidence studies were completed.
- Philip Wadsworth works for all authorities as Project Lead. The template of the report was not in Vale format, as the timeline for publishing the report was very close.
- Density was for the district to decide currently. Feedback on having a county wide density policy was given and would be considered. Committee discussed whether having a county wide policy was potentially detrimental to making plans locally.
- Concern raised over lack of response from areas such as Didcot, based upon the map of responses. Emma Baker explained that some did not add their postcode. Noted that this was not complete data.
- Discussions over the intent and ramifications of a green belt review. Concern was expressed by committee.

Committee decided that for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 report, recommendations 1-4 in the report were to remain, but with an additional decision made (point 5) on housing density.

Committee voted in favour of the following:

Resolved

To:

1. note the summary results from the recent regulation 18 (part 2) consultation
2. note the revised scope of the Oxfordshire Plan, with clarification over its relationship to city and district Local Plans and supporting evidence base
3. note the next steps of the Oxfordshire Plan process
4. recommend the adoption of the revised Statement of Community Involvement, subject to approval at the cabinets of the five Oxfordshire councils and
5. request that officers examine the suitability of a housing density policy, either as part of the Oxfordshire Plan or locally, and that preferably this work should be undertaken before a final decision on the Oxfordshire Plan at the regulation 19 meeting (the formal plan preparation stage).

Chair thanked all involved for their work.

8. Budget setting 2022-23

Cabinet member for finance introduced the report.

A budget briefing was run by officers and attended by councillors. Cabinet member thanked Head of Finance and his team, and the Head of Policy and Programmes for their work. Cabinet member was happy to take any comments to Cabinet who would be reviewing the documents the following day.

Comments from the committee were as follows:

- Level of council tax we charged was low comparatively. Could we take council tax to a referendum as we were in deficit year on year? It was responded that referendums were very expensive and Cabinet member was not aware of successful referendums.
- The committee were content with the report and its thoroughness.

Committee voted in favour of supporting the recommendations in the report.

Resolved

Scrutiny committee support the following recommendations in the budget report.

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet recommends to Council that it:
 - sets the revenue budget for 2022/23 as set out in appendix A.1 to this report
 - approves the capital programme for 2022/23 to 2026/27 as set out in appendix D.1 to this report, together with the capital programme changes as set out in appendix D.2 and appendix D.3 to this report,
 - sets the council's prudential limits as listed in appendix E to this report
 - approves the medium-term financial plan to 2026/27 as set out in appendix F to this report.
2. That Cabinet agrees that the cabinet member for finance, in conjunction with the head of finance, may make minor adjustments to this report and the prudential indicators should they prove necessary prior to its submission to Council on 16 February 2022.

9. Quarter 2 Corporate Plan performance report

Cabinet member for corporate services introduced the report. Cabinet member explained that she was aiming to improve timeliness of reports to committees. She recommended that performance items could be included on scrutiny work programme with invitations given to the relevant cabinet

member. We were hoping to improve the website that supports this document – which explains what progress we have made to the public.

Quarter 2 performance was from 31 July – 01 September 2021. Cabinet will consider the report in March. We had made changes based on feedback. We welcome any comments. Harry Barrington-Mountford was also present to support the item, as well as attending cabinet members.

Comments:

- A member asked a question on active communities strategy. Deputy Chief Executive for transformation and corporate services answered that it would be a wide-reaching strategy – the timeframe was not in place yet, we need to work on the engagement process first to enable it to be wide-reaching. It can go on the scrutiny work programme.
- A member queried the time taken to collate the report. Head of Policy and Programmes explained it was a large effort across many teams, with Policy and Insight collating all responses. There was a 6-week period after quarter end to produce the report – we were aiming to make it smoother rather than reduce the timeline. Q3 had been a different process, the effort was resulting in improved communications.
- Noted that there was more detail to items in this second quarter.
- Performance summary, first page typo – it was meant to say “employees on furlough” across the district in general.
- 59 new affordable homes granted for planning permission – data extract came from the planning system.
- “No progress reported” sounded very matter of fact – consider rewording? It was responded it could be that no update was given or just no work in that given quarter. Members were urged to contact the relevant cabinet member or officer if they were interested in a particular line item. Councillor Webber added that for the bulky waste item, she had discussed this with Head of Housing and Environment, and they had since identified items that can be reported as progress. There were some projects being explored regarding bulky waste.
- Chair suggested a comparison between Q2 and Q3, and committee members could send questions to Cabinet member ahead of meeting.

Corporate plan performance reports are found here: <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/about-the-council/corporate-plan/>

Resolved:

To note the Q2 corporate plan performance report.

The meeting closed at 7.35 pm

Chair:

Date: