

Notes

of an informal meeting of

Scrutiny Committee members

held on Tuesday, 28 June 2022 at 6.00 pm
virtual meeting

The meeting was broadcast live. The recording can be watched here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRKZmhc1B3E>

Open to the public, including the press

In attendance:

Councillors: Nathan Boyd (Chair), Jerry Avery, Ron Batstone, Eric De La Harpe, Hayleigh Gascoigne, David Grant, Ben Mabbett and Max Thompson

Officers: Harry Barrington-Mountford (Head of Policy and Programmes), Jayne Bolton (Community Wellbeing Manager), Suzanne Malcolm (Deputy Chief Executive – Place), Candida Mckelvey (Democratic Services Officer), Adrianna Partridge (Deputy Chief Executive, Transformation and Operations), Shona Ware (Comms and Engagement Manager), Ben Whaymand (Leisure Facilities Team Leader)

Guests: Cabinet members Councillors Andrew Crawford (Finance), Debby Hallett (Corporate Services) Helen Pighills (Healthy Communities), and Bethia Thomas (Community Engagement)

Public speakers: 1

1. Apologies for absence

No apologies were received

2. Urgent business and chair's announcements

There were no urgent announcements, but chair did remind the committee of how to notify the chair should a member wish to speak.

3. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Minutes

Resolved:

Committee reviewed the previous meeting's notes, and no comments were raised.

5. Public participation

There was one public speaker – Councillor Hugo Raworth, speaking from Sutton Courtenay Parish Council.

Councillor Raworth expressed his opinion that Vale of White Horse District Council had an inadequate complaints procedure regarding handling of planning applications. He was concerned with a lack of oversight from the council or any independent evaluation for complaints.

Councillor Raworth explained that complaints were raised about the planning department and its handling of a planning application on the site of Hobby Horse Lane in Sutton Courtenay over several years.

He requested that Scrutiny Committee a) recommended to cabinet that the complaints procedure should be revised to overcome issues and include involvement of elected members and b) that the complaint made by the parish council on the planning departments handling of the application by reconsidered by an independent reviewer in conjunction with the council.

Committee thanked the speaker for his time. Councillor Raworth had since been advised to contact officers to find answers to his concerns regarding the process, or information on next steps.

6. Work schedule and dates for all Vale and Joint scrutiny meetings

Chair had moved future meeting times to 7pm for Vale scrutiny committee, considering feedback from other members, as there was now a requirement to travel after work to formal meetings. Joint scrutiny meeting times would be decided on a meeting-by-meeting basis, depending on what the chair decided (there were two co-chairs) to be a suitable time.

Chair updated committee that we were still awaiting information from National Highways on the A34 Diversion Routing. Vale officers had been chasing for information and had not received yet. Chair thanked officers for their efforts on this. When the information emerges, it will return to scrutiny.

Committee were reminded to let chair know if anything should be added to the work programme.

7. Public consultations

Cabinet member for Community Engagement, Councillor Bethia Thomas, opened this item.

A Senior Consultation Officer had been employed to lead this area of work. This report provided an overview of the current service, with suggested next steps for achieving ambitions. Key to this work was use of technology and social media to engage a wider audience.

Chair asked members whether they had any questions or comments, and below outlines the main comments.

- A discussion around paper consultations was had, but it was confirmed that paper copies were less popular, but they were offered to people if they wanted them. A lot of consultations were digital.
- In response to a query, it was commented by an officer that the smart survey system will be assessed and potentially replaced with a new more accessible platform.
- Was there any data that showed progress compared to other councils? Were lessons learned from consultations that did not get many responses? Officer confirmed that this would be evaluated and added to the work programme. It was difficult to compare to other authorities as we consulted on different things. The Corporate Plan consultation was very successful and had a creative approach, making it more engaging and human (the same approach was used for the recent Joint Local Plan consultation).

- A member asked about social media strategy to improve engagement. Cabinet member informed that the Communications Strategy had a good amount of detail on the social media side of our work. Officer responded that a social media approach and strategy would be explored, with a shared approach with customer services. It would be potentially resource intensive.
- A member asked for information on how people sign up for consultation updates (there was the ability to subscribe).
- Was there the prospect of joint working on forums with, for example, Oxfordshire County Council, or synchronising consultations? Cabinet member supported the idea as beneficial. Officer added that options to do this could be looked into.
- Can we emphasise the role councillors can play to do some of the work in the consultation process? Cabinet member did add that we could skew results if some members are highly active in their ward(s), so she felt some caution was required.

Officers and Cabinet member were thanked.

Resolved:

Committee noted the report and provided comments.

8. Active Communities Strategy

Cabinet member for Healthy Communities opened this item.

The strategy's main purpose was to support the health and wellbeing of communities and contribute to the delivery of several corporate priorities. The strategy fits into a wider framework for the community. Promotion of healthy lifestyle choices was important. The plan proposed maximising the use of natural green spaces and blue spaces. The strategy will be supported by a delivery plan which will be regularly reviewed and monitored to ensure it remains effective. Planned mapping work will help us to identify gaps and inequalities that need closing.

Committee were invited to ask questions for officer and Cabinet member consideration:

- Theme 6: offering advice and support for parishes and local clubs for S106 funding. Was the advice proactive, or only if asked for? Cabinet member responded that the Leisure Facilities Strategy would give more detail. Officer added that the S106 team did send updates to parishes on secured allocations and funding, and the CIL team had meetings with parishes and local clubs if specific funding was available (e.g a cricket pitch).
- Timescale for mapping? Cabinet member explained it was ongoing and we did not want to replicate work done by other groups, but it would always be changing. Officer explained that some data was already plotted on the GIS system. A scoping report will provide detail of the mapping and should be produced in the next few weeks.
- Delivery plan – how did this link to the planning process? A member expressed interest in having good uninterrupted running routes in new developments.
- Was bathing water status an aspiration? Officer confirmed that a site was being assessed in South Oxfordshire District. Bathing water status was in order to inform the public on the quality of water, good or bad.
- Theme two – walking and cycling. Suggestion of bike racks, to improve security.

Chair thanked officers and the Cabinet member

Resolved:

Committee noted the report on Active Communities Strategy and provided comments.

9. Quarter 4 Corporate Plan performance report

Chair reminded committee that detailed questions can be asked of officers and Cabinet member offline, as the detail may not be available in the meeting. Members had been encouraged to email if they wanted to drill down into particular items/projects.

Cabinet member for Corporate Services introduced the Quarter 4 report and the annual report 2021/22.

The annual report provided a year end summary / high level review with a RAG rating system.

Green = Objective will be met by the timescale given or the end of the corporate plan period.

Amber = On track but certain concerns had been identified, and actions were being taken to deal with that.

Red = Delivery Programme was behind schedule and won't make the deadline.

It was noted that no parts of the report were on a red status.

A reporting mechanism for the website had been created to help guide people to the reports on the website as well as social media promotion.

Head of Policy and Programmes added that no date had been set yet on adding things onto the website and instead this would be gradually phased in.

Members received the report positively and a member asked for a few diagram clarifications. Cabinet member reminded committee that specific projects could be added to the work programme (with chair's agreement) to ensure the correct officers were available to answer questions. A member did question the impact of inflation on delivery. Cabinet member stated that under current budget and for next year we were on track (this was what the report was based on), but in future, costs such as energy were uncertain but may not impact many projects. This would be reassessed with future budgets. Committee member suggested that leisure centre decarbonisation could be affected. Cabinet member added that there was an officer team to look into this and officers could take this point away.

Councillor Mabbett asked about the environment sections, requesting more detail around the aims and how the report was progressing to those aims. It was responded that there were bullet points stating the aims and how they will be met. Councillor Mabbett was asked to consider phrasing his question specifically in an email for a more targeted response from officers, in order to answer his concerns.

Officers and Cabinet member were thanked for all their work in producing these reports.

Resolved:

Committee noted the corporate plan performance reports and provided comments.

10. Exclusion of the public

Resolved:

Committee agreed to exclude the public to consider exempt information.

11. Covid 19 Leisure support package update

Committee considered a report on the outcome of negotiations of the Covid-19 leisure support package and committee thanked the Cabinet member for Healthy Communities and the officer team involved in achieving the outcomes.

The meeting closed at 7.58 pm

Chair:

Date: