

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee



held on Monday, 31 July 2023 at 7.00 pm
at Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon OX14 3JE

Open to the public, including the press

Present in the meeting room:

Councillors: Katherine Foxhall (Chair), Judy Roberts (Vice-Chair), Hayleigh Gascoigne, Ron Batstone, Oliver Forder and Robert Maddison

Officers: Adrianna Partridge (Deputy Chief Executive – Transformation and Operations) and Candida Basilio (Democratic Services Officer)

Cabinet member: Councillor Sue Caul (Affordable Housing)

Also present:

Officer: Paul Fielding (Head of Housing and Environment) and Suzanne Malcolm (Deputy Chief Executive – Place)

1. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Urgent business and chair's announcements

There was no urgent business or announcements.

3. Declaration of interests

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Minutes of the last meeting

Resolved:

The minutes of the meeting on 12th July 2023 were agreed as a correct record, and the chair will sign them as such.

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

The committee noted the work programme.

A report was requested on the Beacon. Deputy Chief Executive for Transformation and Operations would follow up with the relevant officers on what could come forward and when.

6. Public participation

There were no public speakers.

7. Section 106 affordable housing funding

Cabinet member for affordable housing introduced the report. This was a requested refresh of the strategy for applications for bids for affordable housing. Aims to ensure bidders are clear on requirements before applying, and criteria will be given which will be used by officers for bid assessment.

The committee considered the report and policy document (plus application form) for Section 106 affordable housing funding.

The committee asked questions of the cabinet member (Cllr Sue Caul) and officers Paul Fielding and Suzanne Malcolm.

There was understanding that the policy was designed to encourage applications and ensure the funding was used up, not deterring smaller and different types of bidder.

The committee did make a range of observations on the report to Cabinet, and the policy. Although members did not vote on a recommendation, they were in agreement that officers and the cabinet members should action where possible the following suggestions that Scrutiny offer for improvement. It was noted that South Oxfordshire's scrutiny committee would be doing the same exercise and there would be joint discussions between south and vale cabinet members, in order to agree the best wording that would encourage bidders and stand by the aims of the councils. Officers and the cabinet member explained that the aim was to get the money spent and keep the policy open to many types of developer and not deter schemes that could potentially be worthwhile. Ensure that smaller bidders can access support to develop suitable schemes. The points below summarise the suggestions to be taken forward.

- It was requested that wording was strengthened in the report to emphasise that the money for bids was ringfenced
- Paragraphs 20-21 in the report – clarity requested on the spend limits for full council approval
- Paragraph three of the policy – clarify wording to explain this applies to housing sums only
- Paragraph four of the policy – wording to be amended to explain the delivery of affordable housing and that affordable housing in perpetuity was a requirement
- Paragraph four of the policy – it was asked that officers distinguish between essential and desirable. It was confirmed that this was in line with the Housing Strategy but officers agreed to streamline the wording.
- Wording requested in the policy to explain that a report on the assessment of the bid would be shared with the applicant.
- Members felt that criteria from page two of the policy could have more explanation, but officers did explain that the purpose was to not be overly prescriptive, as this would deter some bidders.
- Please remove undefined acronyms or provide explanation – as it was a public facing document
- A discussion was had on what “low cost” housing meant. Officer to add a line of wording on asking bidders to explain what the resident's experience would be for utilities/ low-cost housing.
- Make “low running costs” a markable criteria. This would include non-carbon utilities such as water.
- Explanation wanted of what “adding social value” was
- On page three of the policy, committee were in agreement that the wording suggested for South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) on gas boilers being given a rating of zero should be replicated for Vale of White Horse District Council (VOWH), but with reconsideration of the wording. It was agreed that the cabinet member would discuss with her counterpart at SODC to come up with suitable wording that aligns for SODC and VOWH. The committee were keen to balance encouraging bids with the commitment the council has to climate, noting that officers were intending to not exclude potential properties

that already had gas boilers installed, but would work with bidders to move towards efficient carbon zero options that have low running costs. Committee felt that if gas boilers scored low, it was one of many criteria and shouldn't deter bidders if the wording was considered carefully.

- Officer will check whether bidders would need to provide architect's drawings at this stage
- A member asked a question about paragraph 23 of the policy with reference to 'an indication of timescale', and whether more detail can be given. Chair suggested that this was something picked up in the communications on the website. Committee members noted the officer response as to why it would difficult to provide clarity within the policy as each case will vary.

The meeting closed at 8.33 pm

Chair:

Date: