

Minutes

of a meeting of the

General Licensing Committee



held on Wednesday, 7 February 2024 at 7.00 pm in Meeting Room 1, Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon, OX14 3JE

Open to the public, including the press

Present in the meeting room:

Councillors: Ron Batstone (Chair), Patrick O'Leary (Vice-Chair), Paul Barrow, Dr, Kiera Bentley, Cheryl Briggs, Lucy Edwards, Neil Fawcett, Oliver Forder, Diana Lugova and Bethia Thomas

Officers: Emily Barry (Democratic Services Officer) and Simon Hill (Team Leader (Environmental Protection))

Remote attendance:

Officers: Paul Fielding (Head of Housing and Environment), Jeremy Lloyd (Broadcasting Officer) and Scott Williams (Environmental Services Manager)

GL8 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andrew Skinner and Val Shaw.

GL9 Minutes

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 17 May 2023 as a correct record and agree that the Chair sign these as such.

GL10 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

GL11 Urgent business and chair's announcements

None.

GL12 Public participation

There were no registered speakers.

GL13 Adoption of the council's new joint Air Quality Action Plan

The Environmental Services Manager introduced the report to the committee. He advised that the Joint Air Quality Action Plan represented a significant step forward for communities and included significant measures to improve air quality. The plan was the result of successful engagement with air quality partners and encompassed a wide range of key areas including the promotion of public transport, the review of options to reduce freight emissions, the promotion of cycling and the development of options to reduce traffic emissions within specific air quality management areas. The Environmental Services Manager advised that the plan had been compiled in line with strict technical guidance from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The plan sought to reduce nitrogen dioxide levels in the council's declared air quality management areas, those being Abingdon, Botley and Marcham.

The committee enquired as to whether there had been any discussions around a freight centre further to what was contained in the plan. The Environmental Services Manager confirmed there were as yet no details and that this would form part of the broader transport plan.

The committee asked how low emissions zones worked. Officers confirmed these were designed primarily for larger cities and were not viable in smaller market towns. They confirmed that it had been an idea to implement in Marcham and that Oxfordshire County Council had carried out some optioneering to relieve air quality issues in the village's pinch point on Packhorse Lane.

The committee enquired as to when the annual status reports would be produced and who the audience for them was. The Team Leader (Environmental Protection) confirmed that the reports were sent to DEFRA at the end of June and the reports were then published in September or October on an annual basis. Members asked that there was a raised awareness of these reports and officers agreed to provide a link to the relevant webpage. <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2023/09/SODC-VOWH-ASR-2023.pdf>

The committee asked officers to explain the consultation responses received, particularly those from residents of Abingdon who seemed concerned about no longer being in an Air Quality Management Area. The Team Leader (Environmental Protection) informed the committee that being in an Air Quality Management Area was not a positive thing and that monitoring continued regardless of being within one of these areas.

The committee then went on to ask what specific actions were being taken in relation to Botley and Marcham. Officers advised that details of actions could be found on page 65 - 69 of the agenda. Officers noted the actions as set out and advised that Botley was a difficult area to tackle.

Members asked how the Vale compared to other districts. Officers advised that the Vale was clean in comparison to others and there were only a couple of hotspots. Air quality had been improving over recent years with the increased use of electric vehicles, and the paradigm shift impact Covid had had with more people working from home.

Members went on to ask if the Covid shift in reduction in rush hour traffic had continued. The Team Leader (Environmental Services) advised that it appeared to be the case but that the data from the previous year was still being assessed.

The committee then asked if there was a relationship between poverty and clean air. Officers advised that there was a link and work was being done with public health colleagues at Oxfordshire County Council around this issue. Officers went on to advise there had been a shift in the field and links between the two were being looked at. They advised that the air quality issues in Vale of White Horse stemmed from traffic in the historic market town layouts.

Members asked officers if they were confident in the working relationships with air quality partners. The Team Leader (Environmental Services) confirmed that the working relationship with Oxfordshire County Council had made massive leaps and weekly meetings were held with them. Once the Air Quality Action Plan had been adopted officers would liaise with National Highways to ensure the delivery of their actions.

The committee reflected on how good the report was and that a lot of work had clearly gone into it. Specifically it was noted that the section on actions which would not be taken was useful and this should be considered for the Corporate Plan.

RESOLVED: to formally adopt the council's new joint Air Quality Action Plan.

The meeting closed at 7.20 pm