

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Joint Scrutiny Committee

held on Monday, 7 November 2022 at 6.30 pm
at the Abbey House, Abingdon OX14 3JE

Open to the public, including the press

Present in the meeting room:

Committee Members:

South Oxfordshire District (South) Councillors: Ian White (co-chair in the chair), Stefan Gawrysiak, Kate Gregory, Jo Robb, David Turner

Vale of White Horse District (Vale) Councillors: Nathan Boyd (co-chair), Andy Cooke, Amos Duveen

Cabinet members: Councillor Helen Pighills (Vale, Healthy Communities), Councillor Judy Roberts (Vale, Development and Infrastructure)

Officers: Candida Basilio (Democratic Services Officer)

Also present online:

Cabinet members: Councillor Bethia Thomas (Vale – Engagement), Councillor Maggie Filipova-Rivers (South – Community Wellbeing), Councillor Robin Bennett (South – Economic Development and Regeneration)

Officers: Suzanne Malcolm (Deputy Chief Executive – Place), David Fairall (People and Culture Manager), Mark Minion (Head of Corporate Services), Karen Brown (Community Safety Team Leader), Louise Birt (Community Hub Team Leader), Diane Foster (Licensing and Community Safety Manager), Jayne Bolton (Community Wellbeing Manager), Stephen May (Affordable Housing Team Leader), Paul Fielding (Head of Housing and Environment), Liz Bisset (Housing Delivery Consultant).

Guests

From Good Food Oxfordshire, Fiona Steel, and from Thames Valley Police, Superintendent Dave Horsburgh and Chief Inspector Rachel Patterson

Sc.1 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillor David Grant.
Deputy Chief Executive for Transformation and Operations also gave apologies.

Sc.2 Urgent business and chair's announcements

Chair ran through the new emergency evacuation procedures, as the meeting was being held in a new space after office relocation.

Sc.3 Declaration of interests

None.

Sc.4 Minutes

Resolved:

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2022 were agreed as a correct record, and the chair shall sign them as such.

Sc.5 Public participation

None.

Sc.6 Work schedule and dates for Joint scrutiny meetings

No comments raised.

Sc.7 Joint Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

The Joint Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and proposed delivery plan was introduced by Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing (South) and Cabinet Member for Community Engagement (Vale). Officers supporting the item were the People and Culture Manager and the Head of Corporate Services.

Cabinet member for South gave some examples from her case work of access to service barriers, such as neurodiverse children who struggle to access swimming sessions due to noise and sensory issues, Ukrainian refugee language barriers, and phonelines not being free, which makes access more difficult for low-income residents. Cabinet member for Vale added that this was a journey, an evolving strategy.

Committee asked questions. The discussion clarified that the strategy was in relation to equal access to council run services. A member queried some strike through wording on the strategy – it was confirmed that this was updated since, after survey feedback, to not only include the protected characteristics, but to include factors from people's lived experience, such as economic status, and physical and mental abilities. The aim was to help remove barriers for people accessing our services. The updated version was read out and would be circulated to committee after the meeting for comment but would be incorporated into the strategy once approved by Cabinet. It was noted that this wording needed agreeing by South and Vale.

A member mentioned geographical location and considered there was inequality of access to services for those who live in remote rural areas in the districts.

Members were encouraged to feedback their findings from their own wards, in terms of diverse groups local knowledge, to help inform the mapping exercise. More face-to-face events were hoped to reach more groups. A member of the committee mentioned the Black Swimming Association

(thebsa.co.uk), in response to the subject of swimming lessons for neurodivergent children, and the importance of swimming as a life skill.

There was some discussion about the range of respondents to the consultation generally being over 50 years old.

Resolved:

Members considered the consultation responses and revised draft Joint Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and provided feedback for consideration by the councils' Cabinets.

Thanks were given to all those involved in the strategy.

Sc.8 South and Vale Community Safety Partnership performance 2021-22

South and Vale Community Safety Partnership performance 2021-22 report was introduced by Cabinet member for Healthy Communities (Vale) and Cabinet member for Community Wellbeing (South). Supporting officers were Community Safety Team Leader, Community Hub Team Leader and Licensing and Community Safety Manager.

Guests from Thames Valley Police supported the item, being present to answer questions – Superintendent Dave Horsburgh and Chief Inspector Rachel Patterson were introduced and welcomed to the meeting.

The main purpose of the report was to update the committee on the progress that the South and Vale Community Safety Partnership (CSP) was making to reduce crime and the fear of crime, focusing on the benefits it generated for residents, businesses, and partner agencies in the two districts.

Committee discussed the report, including resources, grant funding, PCSO availability for youth services, and neighbourhood conflict intervention.

Superintendent Horsburgh informed that 62 new officers were expected on patrol, and the future looked bright, so resources shall increase, but there were different routes of entry (degree or non-degree), meaning officers may be away in college for some of the time, meaning neighbourhood teams had been impacted. PCSO's had also moved on to become PC's, so we needed to look for new PCSO's to replenish the staffing, but today's recruitment market was difficult.

Committee overall agreed that good progress had been made despite the challenges of this particular year. Members gave examples of community conflicts (neighbour disputes, for example) they were aware of which were of concern.

A member asked about reoffending, Superintendent Horsburgh explained the multi-agency and problem-solving approach to reoffending used. Higher risk groups are prioritised. Ownership given quickly to cases of reoffending, and also to anti-social behaviour / neighbour disputes.

Resolved:

The report's recommendations below were supported by committee.

The report was warmly received, and committee added that they were very pleased with the partnership work involved and how this work and the reporting had evolved over the years.

(a) To note the progress that the South and Vale Community Safety Partnership (CSP) made in 2021-22 in delivering its priorities and statutory functions and

(b) To support the CSP's view that the 2022-25 plan will deliver core priorities and statutory functions and focus on these four key priorities:

- reducing harm caused by domestic abuse
- supporting young people at risk of exploitation
- tackling violence against women and girls

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- reducing rural crime

Sc.9 Oxfordshire Food Strategy

The Oxfordshire Food Strategy report was introduced by Cabinet member for Healthy Communities (Vale) and Cabinet member for Community Wellbeing (South). Supporting officers were Community Wellbeing Manager and Community Hub Team Leader. A guest from Good Food Oxfordshire, Fiona Steel, was present to help answer questions because she helped produce the strategy. She was welcomed to the meeting.

The strategy came into being due to an identified need to join up various organisations and strands of work happening across the whole county to tackle food challenges faced by residents, with the whole county having a common framework to work from for consistency.

Committee discussed the issues faced and were reminded that this was the initial stage and that action plans would be developed at the next stage for the councils, with districts having ownership of action plans. Committee were keen to highlight that limitations should be flagged at the earliest opportunity, for example, the staff resources potentially needed. Cabinet member for South did add that there was no commitment to resourcing yet.

It was agreed that joint working gave more weight to tackle the issues and more access to funding – action plans will come to Cabinet for prioritising.

Committee discussed the need to find examples of communities who were “getting it right”, acknowledging that there was no perfect solution, and holistic approaches were needed to keep people out of food poverty rather than temporary fixes. What does success look like? Officers explained that districts can determine this through their action plans.

Committee members were agreed that the strategy needed to be progressed as the facts on food insecurity in the county were considerable and action needed to be taken. It was felt that joint work on this strategy would help to achieve more.

Resolved:

Scrutiny considered the Oxfordshire Food Strategy (Part One) principles and framework for delivery and support the strategy’s progression to both Cabinets. Committee wanted their comments to be considered as outlined above.

Sc.10 Affordable Housing Guidance Note

The affordable housing guidance note was introduced by Cabinet Members for Development and Infrastructure (Vale of White Horse) and Economic Development and Regeneration (South Oxfordshire).

Officers supporting the item were Affordable Housing Team Leader and the Head of Housing and Environment.

The Affordable Housing Guidance note will be published as an online document. The document aimed to assist planning applicants and others with the identification of relevant published policy and guidance, where it related to the provision of affordable housing. The separate district websites will have their own links to the relevant information in the guidance note. This note showed what can and can’t be done under the current local plan.

Committee asked questions. The committee considered it to be a very helpful document. The document presented will be separated out into separate documents for the two districts. An interim update was expected on commuted sums in the new year. The document itself was informative, and there were no implications stated in the report because the scope was no wider than the guidance

note itself. The next item on the agenda, as a strategy, had the relevant implications stated (environmental, financial and so on).

It was queried whether a briefing on this document would be worthwhile in future, for Cabinet members to consider.

Resolved:

Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the report which provides information to councillors on the Affordable Housing Guidance Note.

Sc.11 Joint Housing Delivery Strategy

The affordable housing guidance note was introduced by Cabinet Members for Development and Infrastructure (Vale of White Horse) and Economic Development and Regeneration (South Oxfordshire).

Officers supporting the item were Head of Housing and Environment, Deputy Chief Executive for Place and the Housing Delivery Consultant.

The Housing Delivery Strategy outlined a direction of travel in how the council will increase the amount of affordable and social housing in the district, whilst taking account of important factors relating to the local community and environment.

The associated Action Plans identify a range of actions that services from across the council will undertake to support in the delivery of that strategy. By continuing to use Section 106 funds to support applications from Registered Housing Providers and supporting community led housing initiatives, the councils had a clear opportunity to support the provision of the four key objectives as set out in the Housing Delivery Strategy. A Housing Delivery Manager was currently being recruited, to start in the new year. The Head of Housing added that there was a fast-moving position with the economy and housing market, so we needed to move things at the right speed.

The strategy was positively received by committee, and some members stated that they were in support of the multi strand approach and collaborative working with partners. Members discussed the need to make housing truly affordable in the districts.

Resolved:

Joint Scrutiny Committee endorse the Housing Delivery Strategy and provided their views on the Housing Delivery Strategy and associated action plans and thanked all those involved in its production.

The meeting closed at 9.05 pm