

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee



held on Monday, 4 November 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: Committee members Katherine Foxhall (Chair), Judy Roberts (Vice-Chair), Ron Batstone, James Cox, Hayleigh Gascoigne, Robert Maddison and Eric de la Harpe
Officers: Adrianna Partridge (Deputy Chief Executive – Corporate and Communities), Candida Basilio (Democratic Services Officer), Tom Rice (Infrastructure Planning Team Leader).

Guests: Cabinet member for Policy and Programmes, Councillor Andy Foulsham

Also present:

Councillors: Councillor Debby Hallett (committee member)
Officers: Nick Bennett (Head of Legal and Democratic) Carmella Anderson (Leisure Development Officer), Tim Oruye (Head of Policy and Programmes), Lucy Murfett (Planning Policy Manager)
Guests: Councillors Bethia Thomas, Sue Caul and Emily Smith.

1. Chair's announcements

None

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Oliver Forder. Councillor Debby Hallett was present online so could participate in discussion but could not vote.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

Resolved:

The minutes of the meeting on 2 October were agreed as a correct record, and the chair would sign them as such.

4. Declaration of interests

There were no declarations of interest in respect of the agenda items, and the Head of Legal and Democratic confirmed that use of or membership to sports facilities did not represent a conflict.

5. Urgent business

None.

6. Public participation

Three public speakers addressed committee on the agenda item for Leisure Facilities and Playing Pitch Strategy.

Councillor Chris McCarthy, the Chair of Grove Parish Council spoke to committee. He discussed the concerns he had about sports teams sharing a small training space at the rugby club in Grove. There were a lot of teams sharing the space and it needed resting. It was a 60m x 60m space and with recent bad weather it had been out of bounds. The Parish Council had a recreation ground in front of the rugby club, but all around the area was privately owned and restricted. He questioned why there was not provision of a 3G pitch and asked why the district council was not investing in new facilities in Grove.

In questions of clarification, Councillor McCarthy responded that the report did not include Grove and people felt they were not contacted. He felt there was a lack of responses to requests made.

Councillor Lorna Berrett spoke to committee as the Chair of Botley & North Hinksey Parish Council.

She considered that an update to the strategy was needed to ensure replacement of lost facilities and for improving facilities. Councillor Berrett referenced two sites:

1. Brookes Harcourt Hill campus. In June, Brookes announced it was closing its swimming pool and closed the pool in September 2024. Primary schools needed to look for a new place for lessons etc. It was felt that local people felt let down. The strategy does not reference this closure.
2. Louie Memorial playing fields and pavilion: It was considered that the strategy should reflect the support for replacing the pavilion and the fund raising that was taking place. There was a skate park for youth provision. Councillor Berrett added that on Westway, new flats were being built, so facilities need will increase. The Parish Council had fed into consultation in April but consider that the strategy needed an update to reflect the Harcourt Hill pool closure and the Louie Memorial pavilion replacement and skate park.

Councillor Emily Smith, a district councillor and ward member for Botley spoke to committee. She explained that in the consultation, Botley skatepark and Pavilion was now mentioned but not complete in accuracy, mentioning that Botley was referred to as South Oxfordshire. Construction was underway for the pavilion and we don't want existing improvements, we have planning permission for a replacement pavilion. Councillor Smith felt that the wording was confusing at best and request the wording to be updated and made factually correct. Why was the pool closure not addressed? How will provision loss be addressed? Why had the consultant not been in touch with local representatives? In questions of clarification, it was explained by Councillor Smith that the strategy mentioned accessibility to be able to drive to places within 20 minutes. Some people needed to take the bus, so it will take longer than 20 minutes. As a district, we were encouraging active travel so why were we basing the strategy on how easy it was to get to facilities by car? Councillor Smith suggested tying in active travel routes to the strategy.

All speakers were thanked for their time, and the chair explained that their points would be discussed throughout the relevant agenda item.

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

Committee noted the work programme.

It was explained that the new Head of Legal and Democratic was looking at the suggestions in the Scrutiny Review report, and a task and finish would be formed in which the work programme would be covered.

Chair had been in touch with Councillor Caul and Deputy Chief Executive – Place to discuss the housing items on the work programme and how these can be covered together in the Housing Delivery Strategy. It was noted that items would be paired together where they were interlinked.

On the tenant's charges – members were asked to gather examples that would be sent to officers who, together with relevant members would work out the route to take. A member felt it was an item that should be worked on as early as possible.

8. Leisure Facilities and Playing Pitch Strategy

The Cabinet member for Policy and Programmes introduced the report, supported by the Infrastructure Planning Team Leader. The Head of Policy and Programmes, Planning Policy Manager and the Leisure Development Officer were also online.

The strategy was a joint project with South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) and it was a high-level snapshot in time. The aim of the strategy was to protect and maintain existing facilities and build new ones where there was a need. Facility owners were approached and spoken to, as well as a steering group with officers, and a public consultation was carried out (results were in the appendices of the agenda).

Regarding the public speakers' comments, the Cabinet member spoke about the Botley facilities. The changes in June were not in the strategy as it was a snapshot in time. It was confirmed that officers can provide a written update before the Cabinet meeting. Keeping the reference to the pool in the strategy helped secure the need for it.

Committee asked questions and provided their views:

- If the strategy was for up to 2041, how was change reflected? It was explained it was part of the evidence base to Joint Local Plan (JLP) to 2041. The strategy builds in anticipated population growth from a data driven model.
- A member felt that reflecting active travel in the strategy could not be fixed quickly. It was explained that the 20-minute drive rule was Sport England's guidance for reasonable distance of facilities to residents.
- There was discussion about why this was not a joint strategy with SODC? For example, cross border use of facilities. The cabinet member explained that the strategy had been developed jointly with SODC.
- The Cabinet member explained that regarding the request for a new 3G pitch - Grove Airfield was being considered whether it was a feasible site. The Cabinet member explained that there was some funding to Grove area not none as suggested, and he gave examples of committed projects in the village.
- Regarding active travel, it was explained that the strategy included a section on active / sustainable travel and decarbonisation. Furthermore, Policy HP2 of the emerging Joint Local Plan required that new provision should be near public transport. The Cabinet member added that the transport strategy was separate and should mesh together with this. An officer responded that that section eight included sustainable travel principles with Sport England advice.
- A member asked how do you keep this strategy updated without contacts for providers? The Cabinet member responded that the team had been working with Sport England and National Governing Bodies for each sport to obtain details, and partly through adding contacts through the consultation process. The team intended to maintain this approach in developing the action plan to deliver the strategy. The officer added that the consultant sent survey requests to all clubs and there were site visits and reminder emails.
- An officer explained that there was a mix of private and public run facilities in our districts and the strategy does not expect the public sector to operate all leisure facilities / playing pitches. Attempting to ensure all provision was public run, there was a risk of operating loss-making facilities.

On the Leisure facilities strategy:

- EX11: it was asked what does Stage E mean? An officer replied that it was the action plan that follows on from this strategy. It will follow up on where there was a lack of facilities and how to move towards implementation. For example, timescales for S106 spend and prioritising areas with need.
- Members discussed whether school sports halls were community facilities and accessible to the public.
- There was a discussion on Community Use Agreements to secure access. An officer confirmed that where the council provided S106 funds for these facilities there would be potential penalty clauses for failure to provide the facilities. The Head of Legal and Democratic explained that there would be some legal options to recover money, it was enforceable and protected.
- A member asked about Abbey Meadow lido and why it wasn't included in the strategy. The Cabinet member explained that it was not considered at length due to the short / seasonal operational period of the lido.
- Park Run - a member stated that they would have liked to have seen this mentioned in the strategy. Communities needed a safe loop route for activities such as running and off-road biking. The officer explained that the strategy mapped out actual physical infrastructure and suggested that the active communities team might be able to help community groups to set up routes. The existing and emerging local plans include a requirement for new developments to provide green infrastructure / trails etc.
- On accessibility – an officer explained to committee that the statutory stakeholder Sport England provided the guidance for accessibility, and that policies in the local plan also require developments to be accessible for all. Head of Legal and Democratic added that there was national legislation and Health and Social Care Act that cover these requirements.
- It was explained that the timescales identified in the report were for delivery (for example where a “scoping report” was mentioned, the timescales were for final delivery of the project, not the report).
- In reference to Valley Park having no leisure centre, members discussed the methodology and requirements for securing new provision. The officer explained that there was sufficient provision in Didcot as a neighbouring area and this would be looked at for all developments. A developer could add funds to an existing facility over creating a new one which would be considered unnecessary.
- MUGAs – a member raised the issue of even newer equipment not being to standard - wear and tear. The officer confirmed that there would be commuted sums for upkeep. The standards would come from Sport England.
- A member asked about encouraging maintenance. Officer added on page 102 there was mention of the subject.

After asking questions, committee considered what advice they could offer.

How can this strategy help us with the loss of opportunities for sports teams?

Regarding Harcourt Hill, the Cabinet member explained the need was still established in the strategy and was allocated for leisure.

The officer present explained that factual errors / minor updates based on key changes to the projects can be amended or clarifications added before the report and strategies got to Cabinet. Members were content that an update would be provided to the issues raised by public speakers.

Chair summarised the following conclusions from committee's questioning and discussion. The following points were agreed by committee to recommend to Cabinet:

Recommendations to Cabinet:

- Committee raised the conceptual issue regarding the 20-minute drive – they had concern over the clash with council plan objectives on active travel. Members suggested that Cabinet lobbies Sport England

- Members were concerned over how we intend to keep updated and track changes and the visibility to scrutiny committee (IDP / Action plan).
- Committee requested that the facilities updates raised by public speakers shall be provided before Cabinet in an update provided by Cabinet member and officers.
- Members asked Cabinet for a review of process for data gathering and the inclusion of local members in future, and to consider the timeliness of scrutiny reviews.
- Committee would like to see an estimate of community user agreements that had been achieved in the action plan and to provide robust reporting (potentially via council plan reporting).

The meeting closed at 21.20

Chair:

Date: