

Remote meeting
Minutes of a meeting of the
Scrutiny Committee
on Tuesday 3 November 2020

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Committee members present:

Councillor Gant (Chair)	Councillor McManners (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Altaf-Khan	Councillor Arshad
Councillor Aziz	Councillor Corais
Councillor Djafari-Marbini	Councillor Fry
Councillor Howlett	Councillor Kennedy
Councillor Lloyd-Shogbesan	Councillor Simmons

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Anita Bradley, Monitoring Officer
Jo Colwell, Service Manager Environmental Sustainability
Andrew Brown, Committee and Member Services Manager
Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Officer
John Mitchell, Committee and Member Services Officer

Also present:

Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for a Safer, Healthy Oxford,
Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Customer Focused Services

Apologies:

None.

45. Declarations of interest

Councillor Howlett declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to item 6 on the agenda (the Oxford Waterways project) as the owner of a boat in the City on which he lived.

46. Minutes

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 03 November 2020 as a true and accurate record.

47. Work Plan and Forward Plan

The workplan remained as set out in the paper before the Committee. The Committee noted that the response to the Climate Emergency Review Group's recommendations will be coming to the next meeting of the Committee and identified as a separate item for that agenda.

The Committee agreed to request that the recently cancelled Zero Emission Zone (ZEZ) Member briefing be rescheduled.

48. The Oxford Waterways Project

The Committee considered a report it had commissioned from the Transition Director on the Oxford Waterways Project.

The Chair welcomed Ian Green to the meeting. Mr Green addressed the meeting in his capacity as Chair of the Oxford Civic Society (OCS) and incoming Chair of the Oxford City Canal Partnership (OCCP).

From the OCS perspective the 2019 '*Oxford Waterways – A Shared Vision*' was the result of the Council putting dedicated specialist resources in place. This had set out a framework of key themes and identified where improvements could be made with partnership support. The report before the Committee demonstrated many examples of small improvement activities undertaken in the past two years, with the support of the Project Coordinator, which had helped to deliver against these themes.

Significant challenges, however, remained. Was the Environment Agency (EA), for example, adequately engaged in addressing the visionary themes? The Canal and River Trust (CRT) had shown itself to be a more willing partner, and Oxford was identified as a priority within its regional plan but its resources were limited.

Oxford waterways needed a "leader, champion, or driver" and could the Council provide senior-level leadership to ensure the agreement of priorities, including the contributions of the EA and CRT?

The waterways were part of the City's strategic infrastructure and needed investment. It was recognised that capital investment and recurring costs would be under great pressure but some areas which would benefit from a focus would not cost much and could even be cost recoverable.

OCS was concerned about a number of matters. Was sufficient attention being paid to the significant waterways development opportunities emerging in the City such as the 'Island site' (Hythe Bridge Street / Park End Street), Osney Mead and the Osney Industrial Estate redevelopments. How can the issue of unregistered land and unmanaged space at Folly Bridge be resolved positively? How can we work with the EA and local residents in the Osney area to maximise on the huge popularity of the visitor moorings there? Does the 'Thriving Communities' strategy adequately recognise the boat-dwelling communities in the city and respond to their needs? Does the Council's Housing & Homelessness Strategy present an opportunity to look again at the possibility of regarding boats used as homes? Should there be a more structured mooring system in the city that balances visitor moorings against the needs of those who live aboard?

Finally, from the OCS perspective, the heritage and history of Oxford's waterways should be better reflected. This was where the Council could lead while working with local communities, the CRT and others.

From the OCCP perspective, it was clear that there were still tensions between the boat-dwelling community in the city and the authority despite the improvements as a result of the work of the Project Coordinator.

It was important to ensure that waterways were adequately included in policy discussions across the board, this could, perhaps, be best achieved by the development of a new forum.

The Chair thanked Mr Green for his thought provoking contribution.

The Committee noted that it was hoped to hold the Oxford Canal Festival next year and that one of its objectives was to renovate a 100 year old narrow boat for educational and cultural purposes.

Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for a Safer, Healthy, Oxford, said she was pleased to be able to introduce the report which recorded the positive action taken in response to the Committee's recommendations. She paid tribute to the outstanding contribution which had been made by the outgoing Project Coordinator. He had achieved "small miracles" by working closely with the City's boating community and had identified a "myriad of issues" connected with the waterways for exploration and improvement. As a result of his work the relationship between the boating community and the Council was much improved and there was heightened awareness across Council departments of the potential or actual connection between them and the City's waterways.

The Service Manager for Environmental Sustainability also recorded her thanks to the Project Coordinator for his considerable contribution to this work. He had been a creative champion for matters to do with the City's waterways, working with great tenacity. The Council had been fortunate to benefit from his expertise over the two years he had been in post and as a result of which there was, among many other things, the heightened awareness across the Council which had been referred to by the Cabinet Member for Safer, Healthy Oxford.

The imminent departure of the Project Coordinator was regrettable but, at the moment and without prejudice to future budget decisions, an unavoidable consequence of the Council's present budgetary challenges.

The Service Manager for Environmental Sustainability went through the recommendations set out in the report and drew particular attention to some of them. The impact of the waterways on the new Local Plan had been significant and as had their impact in the consideration of individual developments. Officers across the Council were now much more aware of the value of and contribution which could be made by waterways throughout the City. To maximise and deliver the benefits of the waterways as an infrastructure asset required considerable investment and funding for officer post(s) to deliver.

The Project Coordinator's direct experience as someone who lives on a boat had been both enlightening and invaluable, not least in improving the relationship between the Council and the City's boating community. This had contributed to a better understanding of the facilities, or lack of them, for boat owners, particularly but not exclusively, for those who live aboard. Some of these issues had been picked up in the new Local Plan. There was a hope that there would be some vibrant cultural activity on

the City's waterways in 2021, once the impact of Covid-19 had lessened. It was clear that the waterways were well used as a health and wellbeing resource. In relation to the recommendation concerning initiatives to combat the climate and ecological crisis, a bid had gone to the Green Recovery Challenge Fund.

The Committee recorded its thanks to the Project Coordinator for his considerable contribution to this area of work and the progress made. The much improved relationship between the Council and the boating community was very welcome but accompanied by a residual concern lest his departure might jeopardise the progress made.

The recent Council motion concerning bathing water quality in the Thames was not within the scope of this project but the Committee agreed that it should be referenced.

The work to date had focussed attention on waterways in the Northern, Western and central parts of the City and sight should not be lost of those in the East and the South.

Given the financial challenges it was suggested that thought might be given to exploring the case for funding a shared officer resource with neighbouring authorities.

The Committee was reminded that boats are exempt from the Clean Air Act and so every opportunity should be taken to install electric charging points for boats, particularly in the case of moorings close to homes and playgrounds. There was concern at the absence of adequate boat servicing facilities in the City, especially for pumping out and fresh water, for all boat users in the City. However, all of this would require significant investment which would need to be weighed up in the round with other funding priorities.

Charging points and service facilities require capital investment. So while work in relation to the City's waterways may have been championed, the Council has not, yet, been in a position to put forward capital investment bids for such work.

It was important to recognise the potential contribution of boats to the Housing & Homelessness Strategy. Many of those living on boats were on low incomes and the potential cost of providing boat owners with social housing ought to be set alongside the potential cost of the infrastructure costs to support them, alternatively, in boats.

It was noted that in the case of a land based planning development, a developer would be obliged to make a significant contribution to the associated infrastructure. A planning application for boats as homes should logically include a similar requirement for provision of necessary infrastructure.

The following recommendations flowed from the Committee's discussion.

Recommendation 1: That the Council investigates the appetite amongst neighbouring authorities for establishing a shared Waterways Coordinator post.

Recommendation 2: That the Council establishes and administers a forum of key waterways stakeholders to coordinate strategic policy and activity.

Recommendation 3: That the Council ensures the provision of facilities for boats to dispose of waste, empty sewer tanks and take on fresh water at Redbridge Paddocks or an alternative venue locally.

Recommendation 4: That the Council explores the option of community ownership for moorings when ownership and management arrangements are decided.

Recommendation 5: That the Council incorporates the provision of electric charging points for boats into its strategic development plans for the waterways, particularly in those areas where moorings are in close proximity to housing and schools.

Recommendation 6: That the Council includes within its refreshed Housing and Homelessness Strategy a section to consider the implications and responsibilities arising from endorsing the use of boats as homes in Oxford.

Recommendation 7: That the Council proactively seeks to increase the number of projects in waterways to the East and South of the city.

Recommendation 8: That the Council refreshes the Waterways Vision document to reference the Council's motion on bathing water quality.

49. Street Naming and Numbering Policy

The Committee considered the Cabinet report on Street Naming and Numbering Policy.

Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Customer Focused Services, introduced the report. The Council had a legal responsibility to determine the policy for deciding on street names and numbers and there was a requirement for this to be reviewed every three years. The opportunity to review and clarify the policy was timely and welcome.

At the heart of the policy was recognition that local people should have a say in decisions balanced against the understanding that final decisions rest with the Council. The policy listed those people who should be consulted as a matter of course but the list was not exclusive and could be expanded if thought desirable. The basic rules behind the choice of names were commonsensical, such as the need to avoid duplication, unambiguous spelling etc. There was a principle that streets should not, normally, be named after someone until a period of 5 years after their passing had elapsed. This gave time for a considered perspective on their life but this was a guiding principle and not an absolute requirement.

The renaming of streets, although a less frequent occurrence, was something which remained topical in the case of names of historical/public figures whose position in society might be reappraised. Renaming decisions would be firmly based on the views of local residents which have the "active support of a substantial proportion of those residents living in the street at the time of the consultation."

In the case of subdivided properties the policy required a numerical distinction. This would be the position going forward and could not be applied retrospectively to the many historic examples of alphabetical or other forms of distinction.

It was confirmed that all future communications with consultees about street naming would make it clear that final decisions rest with the Council and, ultimately, the Cabinet.

While developers could propose names for new streets, they did not have an exclusive right and other interested parties could do so too.

The Committee was pleased to note the report and had no recommendations to make on it to Cabinet.

50. Domestic Abuse Review Group

The proposed scope of the Domestic Abuse Review Group before the Committee focused on those matters in relation to which the Council had some control or influence. The position of the abuse of older people was raised as something not explicitly within the proposed scope. Councillor Aziz, as Chair of Group, said that while the abuse of older people in care settings was without doubt a serious issue, it did not come under the umbrella of domestic abuse which was, strictly speaking, abuse perpetrated by an intimate partner. It was agreed however that the scope could be expanded to include reference to consider the position of older women living in Council accommodation in particular.

Cllr Aziz confirmed that the focus of the Review Group's work would reflect the demographic profile of victims of domestic abuse, with women being the primary focus but not excluding minoritised groups, including men.

It was noted that pastors/priests may occasionally be in receipt of information about domestic abuse which could be fed into the work of the group.

It was clarified that Cllr Altaf-Khan would be a member of the Review Group and not Cllr Landell Mills as given in the paper before the Committee. It was agreed that Cllr Djafari-Marbini could attend the 4th meeting of the Review Group.

51. Report back from Panel representatives

Cllr Aziz's feedback from the Housing & Homelessness Panel meeting on 8 October 2020 was cut short because of the loss of her internet connection. It was agreed that she should circulate an update to members of the committee after the meeting.

52. Dates of future meetings

Meetings are scheduled as followed:

Scrutiny Committee

- 01 December, 12 January, 02 February, 02 March, 08 April

Standing Panels

- Housing & Homelessness: 05 November
- Finance & Performance: 03 December
- Companies Scrutiny: 14 December

All meetings start at 6.00 pm.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.45 pm

ChairDate: Tuesday 1 December 2020