

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 5 October 2021

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Committee members present:

Councillor Wade (Chair)

Councillor Chapman (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Diggins (for Councillor Tidball)

Councillor Mundy (for Councillor Djafari-Marbini)

Councillor Linda Smith

Councillor Thomas

Councillor Abrishami (for Councillor Dunne)

Councillor Corais

Councillor Fry

Councillor Nala-Hartley (for Councillor Waite)

Councillor Smowton

Councillor Wolff

Also present:

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Pedro Rocha Abreu, Air Quality Officer

Jenny Barker, Regeneration Manager

Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Officer

John Mitchell, Committee and Member Services Officer

Apologies:

Councillors Djafari-Marbini, Dunne, Tidball and Waite sent apologies.

Substitutes are shown above.

49. Declarations of interest

None.

50. Chair's Announcements

The Chair reminded the Committee of the valuable role it had to play as a critical friend, working collaboratively and, where relevant, concluding with constructive recommendations on the basis of consensus.

51. Minutes

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 08 September as a true and accurate record.

52. Work Plan and Forward Plan

The Scrutiny Officer reminded the Committee of the interrelationship between the Cabinet Forward Plan, the Committee's workplan and its priorities. The timetabling of Cabinet reports meant that the Committee would not always be in a position to consider all of those reports in which it might have an interest. Final decisions about the Committee's workplan would always rest with the Committee.

Agreed that the substantive items proposed for the November meeting of the Committee should now be: Workplace Equalities & Action Plan; East Oxford Community Centre and Housing Development; and Anti-Social Behaviour Policy (subject to any changes which may be made to the Cabinet Forward Plan in the meantime).

53. Annual Air Quality Status Report

Pedro Abreu, Air Quality Officer, introduced the annual report which fulfilled a statutory duty and provided an overview of all monitoring data for the year and an update in relation to the air quality actions set out in the Council's Air Quality Action Plan 2021-2025.

The previous year had been atypical given the consequences of Covid and significantly reduced traffic volumes. As a result of this, for the first time since air quality monitoring started in Oxford, there were significant reductions in air pollution levels and the city had been compliant with all short and long term UK air quality objectives. The highest annual mean however continued to be in St Clements.

The Committee noted the importance of being able to monitor the consequences of the introduction of LTNs on air pollution, particularly where traffic had been displaced as a result. The Air Quality Officer said that working in partnership with the County Council, air quality was being measured at an additional 16 sites to capture the consequences of LTNs. In discussion it was noted that while measuring values within an LTN was likely to be directly attributable to the LTN, measuring those outside it might well be the consequence of other unrelated traffic flow considerations. A detailed briefing on air quality for all Councillors would take place the following day.

Live, accessible, reporting of air quality was agreed to be of potentially great benefit to the city's residents and might usefully extend to the provision of real time alerts. It was a source of regret that there were only three live monitoring points in the city. The Air Quality Officer confirmed the intention to make live data available in due course as part of the development of a new air quality website for Oxfordshire, a joint project being delivered by Oxford City Council together with the other District Councils. He noted however that the number of live reporting instruments was constrained by their considerable expense and other costs associated with their use. While a considerable number of air monitoring devices was commercially available, not all were reliable. Monitoring for the purposes of the statutory return necessitated the consistent use of devices of a recognised quality to ensure valid and comparable data over time. Data from the city's 71 diffusion tubes provide monthly means, which are then aggregated into an annual mean for comparison against the NO₂ air quality mean limit value.

Concerns about the use of wood burning stoves would be addressed by information programmes to draw attention to the impact of their use and advice about best practice in relation to their use.

Given the role of the County Council as highways authority, the importance of a close working relationship with it was recognised and the Air Quality Officer confirmed that there was close co-operation in relation to analysing the consequences of LTNs. He noted that at least 9 months of continuous monitoring would be needed before any firm conclusions could be drawn. The Committee noted that meaningful conclusions would need to be informed by traffic monitoring by the County and clarity, for example, of whether journeys were directly attributable to the introduction of an LTN or something else.

Given the significance of both universities as major employers in the City (and as the 'home' of thousands of students), the council might offer advice to inform their strategic plans in relation to matters of air quality.

It would be helpful if any educational graphics prepared about matters to do with air quality could be distributed as a matter of course to all Councillors and community groups.

The Committee agreed to recommend to Cabinet that Council:

- Reviews the location of its air quality monitoring equipment to support the monitoring of roads where there is the possibility of displacement traffic generated by LTNs (particularly around Hollow Way and the junction with Crescent Road); that the Council makes publicly available the findings as soon as possible when the Cowley, Headington and East Oxford LTNs are concluded; and that the information is also passed on to County Council colleagues;
- Builds a function into the new community Air Quality website to enable members of the public to subscribe to real time air quality alerts;
- Makes available to all Councillors all educational graphics developed by the Air Quality Team for further sharing with community organisations;
- Seeks to work with the County Council to ensure that sufficient concurrent data is collected and shared to enable contextualised analysis of the impacts of LTNs, with particular regard to identifying whether a displacement effect is evident; and
- Works with the Oxfordshire Strategic Partnership to engage major local employers in conversations with the Council about how they can incorporate air-quality positive measures into their strategic plans.

54. Reports for approval

Councillor Linda Smith, as Chair of the Housing & Homelessness Panel, spoke briefly to the Panel's report on Housing Performance in Q1. The presence of tenant ambassadors at the meeting had been of great value and, indeed, the one recommendation to Cabinet (increasing the breadth and depth of engagement with the Lived Experience Advisory Forum) had come from them. She was pleased to report that tenant ambassadors were to be invited, as a matter of course, to subsequent meetings of the Panel in the current Council year.

The Committee agreed that the report should now go forward to Cabinet.

55. Report back on recommendations and from Scrutiny Panel meetings

Domestic Abuse Review Group

The Chair said that this significant report had been well received by Cabinet and an update on progress with implementation of recommendations was expected in March.

Members of the Committee were reminded that if they had any concerns about a safeguarding matter and were unsure of how to respond they should contact Liz Jones (07485325798)

Urban Forest Strategy

The Chair said the three recommendations recorded had, for the most part, been positively received and agreed by Cabinet. It was noted that the report had omitted reference to the importance of permitting on street parking outside homes as a means of deterring the conversion of gardens into driveways.

QL Implementation

Cllr Fry, as Chair of the Finance & Performance Panel, was pleased with the positive response from Cabinet and its agreement to the Panel's two recommendations. He was pleased, also, to note that an audit of QL's implementation was to be held at some point.

Social Value in Procurement

Cllr Fry said that while a formal response had yet to be received, all indications were that Cabinet was well disposed towards the two recommendations.

EV Strategy

The Chair said that a formal response to the Committee's recommendations was still awaited. It was noted that there was a requirement for a response to be provided within two months and it was anticipated that one would be given in time for Cabinet in December.

56. Review Group Scope

The Scrutiny Officer introduced the report which set out the proposed scope of the review group on Child Poverty. He drew particular attention to the option of commissioning this review group in partnership with the County Council given its access to many of the key levers in relation to child welfare and related matters. The principle of involving the County was agreed to be worthwhile. It was not therefore possible, yet, to confirm who should Chair the review group. If, however, it fell to the City Council to appoint as seemed likely, it was agreed that the Chair should be Cllr Djafari-Marbini, who should otherwise serve as Lead Member. The other members of the review group, nominated by the Labour Group, would be Cllr Rehman and Dunne with the latter standing aside in the event that only four City Council members were to participate.

The Committee agreed that ways should be found of ensuring that the voice of children and young people is heard as part of the review.

The Committee resolved to:

1. **Agree** the draft scope, subject to points made above;
2. **Agree** that the County Council should be invited to join the Review Group;
3. **Agree** the membership level as set out in the report and accept the nominations for membership given at the meeting and those which will subsequently be given to the Scrutiny Officer by the Liberal Democrat and Green groups;
4. **Agree** that Cllr Djafari-Marbini should Chair or be the lead member of the Review Group; and
5. **Note** that further amendments may be required in the event of the County Council accepting the opportunity to contribute to the review, and agree that such changes be delegated to the Chair in discussion with the Scrutiny Officer.

57. Development of land at South Oxford Science Village (Land South of Grenoble Road)

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning & Housing Delivery, introduced the report which provided an update on proposals for the development of land in partnership with Magdalen College and Thames Water. The report set out options for delivery of the scheme and the rationale for the preferred option.

The Committee then passed a resolution in accordance with the provisions of Paragraph 4(2)(b) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 to exclude the press and the public from the meeting during consideration of the rest of the item on the grounds that their presence could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in the relevant paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

58. Dates of future meetings

Scrutiny Committee

- 02 November 2021
- 06 December 2021

Standing Panels

Housing & Homelessness: 06 October; 04 November

Finance & Performance: 08 December

Companies: 18 October; 24 November

All meetings start at 6.00 pm

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.45 pm

Chair

Date: Tuesday 2 November 2021