

## Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 2 June 2020

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### Committee members present:

Councillor Gant (Chair)

Councillor Altaf-Khan

Councillor Aziz

Councillor Djafari-Marbini

Councillor Howlett

Councillor Lloyd-Shogbesan

Councillor McManners (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Arshad

Councillor Corais

Councillor Fry

Councillor Kennedy

Councillor Simmons

### Also present:

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council,

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery

### Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Mish Tullar, Corporate Policy, Partnership and Communications Manager

Adrian Arnold, Head of Planning Services

Carolyn Ploszynski, Planning Policy and Place Manager

Amanda Ford, Planning Policy Team Leader

Sarah Harrison, Team Leader (Planning Policy)

Andrew Brown, Committee and Member Services Manager

Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Officer

John Mitchell, Committee and Member Services Officer

### 1. Election of Chair for the Council Year 2020-21

The Committee resolved to elect Councillor Gant as Chair for the Council year 2020-21.

### 2. Election of Vice Chair for the Council Year 2020-21

The Committee resolved to elect Councillor McManners as Vice Chair for the Council year 2020-21.

### 3. Declarations of interest

None.

### 4. Chair's Announcements

The Chair reminded the Committee of the protocols to be followed at a remote meeting and proposed a reordering of the agenda for the benefit of guests of the Committee which was agreed.

### 5. Minutes

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

### 6. Scrutiny Operating Principles and Standing Panel Arrangements

Councillor McManners proposed an amendment to replace paragraph 9 of the operating principles with the following wording:

*For the council year 2020/21 the Chair of the Housing Panel is elected by the Panel from among its membership, not by the Scrutiny Committee; and that the Scrutiny Committee elects a Vice-Chair of the Housing Panel from among the membership of the Scrutiny Committee. The Vice-Chair will be responsible for reporting back on the work of the Housing Panel to the Scrutiny Committee. The Committee may also ask the Chair of the Panel to attend.*

*Panel Chairs are asked to report back to the main Committee if there are any issues arising from these operating principles in good time for any changes to be considered at the first meeting of the Committee in the council year 2021/22.*

On being seconded and put to a vote the amendment was carried by a majority.

The Committee noted:

- The suggested revision to the titles of the Housing Panel and the Finance Panel and the slight revision to the remit of the latter.
- The proposal that Chairs or Vice Chairs of Panels report back to the Committee on a regular basis about the work of their Panels.
- The desirability of a flexible approach to the scheduling of Scrutiny work given the current exceptional circumstances caused by Covid-19.

While the Committee is meeting remotely, members of the Committee were encouraged to let the Scrutiny Officer know if alternative meeting times meeting times (afternoon rather than early evening for example) would be preferable.

The Committee then resolved to:

1. **Agree** the proposed Committee Operating Principles for the 2020/21 municipal year, as set out in Appendix 1;
2. **Agree** to re-establish three standing panels for the 2020/21 municipal year with the following remits:

- i) Finance and Performance Panel – finance and budgetary issues and decisions, annual review of the Council’s budget, quarterly monitoring of finance and performance;
  - ii) Housing and Homelessness Panel – strategic housing and landlord issues and decisions, homelessness, housing services performance;
  - iii) Companies Scrutiny Panel - executive decisions made in relation to any companies wholly or partly owned by the Council;
3. **Agree** the number of seats of each standing panel for 2020/21 as follows (Finance and Performance Panel: 4, Companies Scrutiny Panel: 4, Housing and Homelessness Panel: 6) with the political make up as given in the report;
  4. **Appoint** Cllr Fry as Chair of both the Finance & Performance Panel and Companies Panel and Cllr Aziz as Vice-Chair of Housing & Homelessness Panel;
  5. **Co-opt** Tony Buchanan as a Council tenant representative onto the Housing Panel; and
  6. **Agree** temporary ways of working until September 2020 to reflect the particular challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic

## 7. 2019-20 Annual Update on the Oxford City Council Corporate Plan 2016-20

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council, introduced the report and was pleased to see its account of good progress and many notable achievements over the previous 12 months. She drew particular attention to the Council’s attraction of 27 self-certified Oxford Living Wage employers (most notably the University of Oxford and the Oxford Bus Company, as two of the biggest local employers) and the Council’s Citizens’ Assembly on Climate change.

Mish Tullar, Corporate Policy, Partnership & Communications Manager, reminded the Committee that this was the final annual report about progress against the targets in the Corporate Plan 2016-20. Priorities for 2020-21 would be set out in the Council’s Business Plan for 2020-21 which was currently being reviewed in the light of Covid-19.

Progress in relation to the Oxford Living Wage (OLW) was welcome and it was suggested that there might be merit in setting a target for the number of employers to adopt the OLW. Cllr Brown noted that attention should be paid to the number of employees who benefit from the OLW as well as to the number of employers. The question also raised a more fundamental question about the merit of targets in relation to which the Council might have influence but no direct control. Care would be taken to ensure that only indicators over which the Council had some reasonable measure of control would be included in the Corporate Strategy/Business Plan for 2020/21. Irrespective of the presence or absence of a target, no opportunities are lost to point out to employers which have not adopted the OLW the desirability of doing so.

The Committee noted that many significant achievements had been achieved over the last year as reflected in the report. At the same time it was important that the language used to report these achievements presented an honest appraisal and did not give a false impression about the degree of success or merit. It was suggested, for example, that while money had been allocated to addressing the challenge of rough sleeping, not all of it had been spent. It was also noted that the quoted figure of a 5% reduction in

the Council's carbon footprint implied an absolute reduction of 5% when the target was for a 5% reduction against a projection of what the carbon footprint would have been had no mitigating action been taken.

Councillor Brown said that the report expressed performance against a very specific set of predetermined indicators. The Corporate Policy, Partnership & Communications Manager agreed to pick up the point about the carbon reduction measure with relevant officers. The Committee requested the inclusion in the report of a reference to the work of the Committee's Climate Emergency Working Group which had taken place within the period covered by the report.

In relation to activities supported by the Oxfordshire Growth Deal which had not met their targets, Cllr Brown acknowledged the significant challenges of delivering some of them in short measure as required. Nonetheless it was important not to lose sight of the fact that the city had benefited greatly from the deal.

In conclusion, the Committee recommended that:

The Council agrees to the following amendments to the Annual Update on the Corporate Plan 2016-20 for inclusion in the published version:

In Appendix 1 to the covering report:

1. Add to the existing text relating to the Council's achievements regarding 'Convene a Citizens' Assembly in Oxford to help consider additional carbon reduction measures to address the climate emergency' the following text: 'The Council's Scrutiny function also established the Climate Emergency Review Group which, over seven meetings, developed 56 recommendations on how to realise the expressed ambition of Citizens' Assembly members regarding the Climate Emergency, particularly in relation to the built environment.'
2. After 'Implementation of measures calculated to reduce the City Council's carbon footprint by 5% each year' add the words 'below what it would otherwise have been.'

## **8. Adoption of Oxford Local Plan 2036**

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning & Housing Delivery, introduced the report noting that there was no option, at this late stage, for the Committee, Cabinet or Council to make amendments to the plan. The plan had been some 4 years in the making and he thanked officers for their significant contribution to it over that time. He said officers were liaising closely with the County's other authorities to bring the timescales for all of Oxfordshire's local plans into line as far as possible. This would be particularly valuable in the future in relation cross-county discussion of housing numbers.

The Committee considered a suggestion to make a recommendation that would require a timetable for the next Local Plan, which is aligned to the latest Oxfordshire Plan 2050 timetable, to be brought to Cabinet in July 2020 with a view to urgently addressing the recent challenges presented by the Climate Emergency, in particular the recommendations presented by the Climate Emergency Review Group and the intent to 'build back better' post-COVID-19.

Cllr Hollingsworth said that the Forward Plan already included a new Local Development Scheme to go to Cabinet in July, which as set out in the introduction, would seek to align to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 timescales. He explained that he

would not be able to commend such a recommendation to Cabinet as the second part of the recommendation implies that the current Local Plan does not take account of issues like Climate Change, which was not the case although it was acknowledged that some would have liked it to go further. Councillor Hollingsworth and officers advised against making such a recommendation at this point, not least because of forthcoming Government White Papers on Planning. It was noted that if Scrutiny did not wish to make such a recommendation to Cabinet, Councillors could put such a recommendation to Full Council.

Officers answered several questions on the plan. This included clarification around the removal of Policy E3 was due to the Inspectors view that it made distinctions on the basis of the nature of the applicant that was not in accordance with national policy. Officers also explained why the increased capacity for the City to meet its housing need did not result in a reduction of neighbouring authorities' unmet need allocations.

The Committee Clerk drew attention to a number of detailed corrections to Appendix 1 to which the Committee had been alerted before the meeting and which had since been published on the Council's website.

## **9. Work Plan and Forward Plan**

Members of the Committee were encouraged to get in touch with the Scrutiny Officer with suggestions for the emerging workplan for the new Council year which would be considered at the Committee's July meeting.

The report before the Committee noted that the Council had been working under the emergency measures provisions of its Constitution to ensure it was able to maintain business continuity amidst the Covid-19 pandemic and respond swiftly to the new challenges arising from its consequences. The scale of this challenge had caused officer capacity to be significantly reduced.. The report went on to recommend that until September the Scrutiny function should

- Continue with its schedule of meetings so long as there is business to conduct
- Does not commission additional reports but limits its consideration to Cabinet papers
- Requests attendance of senior officers only when absolutely necessary.

The recommendation was agreed.

The Scrutiny Officer reminded the Committee that the workplan was driven largely by the Cabinet Forward Plan which had been subject to a recent review in the context of the consequences of Covid-19. The Committee agreed that a new Scrutiny meeting should be scheduled for 15 June, in anticipation of an additional Cabinet meeting on

24 June. The Scrutiny Officer agreed to send the Committee an updated list of Committee and Panel dates.

**10. Report back on recommendations**

The Committee noted Cabinet’s responses to its previous recommendations. In relation to the response to the Blackbird Leys Development Project, it was regretted that Cabinet had not been able to accept the recommendation that the project adopt Passivhaus standards of insulation and air tightness.

**11. Dates of future meetings**

The next meetings are scheduled for:

- 15 June
- 06 July
- 04 August
- 01 September

**The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.00 pm**

**Chair .....**                      **Date:**