

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 2 August 2022



Committee members present:

Councillor Smowton (Chair)	Councillor Diggins (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Altaf-Khan	Councillor Arshad
Councillor Bely-Summers	Councillor Jarvis
Councillor Mundy	Councillor Rowley
Councillor Hunt (for Councillor Coyne)	Councillor Lygo (for Councillor Corais)
Councillor Muddiman (for Councillor Pegg)	Councillor Pressel (for Councillor Tidball)

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Alice Courtney, Scrutiny Officer
Lucy Tyrrell, Committee and Member Services Officer
Jane Winfield, Head of Corporate Property
Mike Scott, Senior Estates Surveyor

Cabinet Members present:

Councillor Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management

Apologies:

Apologies were received from Councillors Corais, Coyne, Pegg and Tidball.
Substitutes are shown above.

23. Declarations of interest

Cllr Lygo advised that he is a Cabinet Member for Public Health and Equalities for Oxfordshire County Council with some decision making responsibility for highways. This was not a pecuniary interest; he made the declaration for reasons of transparency.

24. Chair's Announcements

There were no announcements.

25. Minutes

The Committee resolved to **approve** the minutes of the meeting held on 5 July 2022 as a true and accurate record.

26. Work Plan and Forward Plan

Cllr Rowley joined the meeting.

The Committee **noted** the Forward Plan.

The Committee reviewed the Work Plan and **confirmed** its agreement to consider the following reports at future meetings:

- September Cabinet reports
 - Oxford Local Plan 2040 Preferred Options Regulation 18 Consultation Document
 - Transport Core Schemes – Oxford City Council's Position
 - Lease of Council Office Accommodation at St Aldate's Chambers
- October Cabinet reports
 - Procurement Strategy 2022-2025
 - Oxfordshire Food Strategy Action Plan
 - West End Osney Mead SPD
- November Cabinet reports
 - Grant Allocations to Community & Voluntary Organisations 2023/24

The Chair reminded the Committee of the Scrutiny Commissioned Work which the Scrutiny Officer would schedule into the Work Plan and reminded Members to respond with availability for the Covered Market Site Visit.

27. Asset Management Strategy 2021-2031

Cllr Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, introduced the report which sought Cabinet approval on the Asset Management Strategy 2021 – 2031 and recommendation to Council for adoption. The strategy provided an ongoing framework for the management of the Council's property assets, prior to adoption by the Council.

Cllr Turner highlighted that the Asset Management Strategy provided a clear statement of direction for internal and asset stakeholders and set out for the public the way in which the Council would manage its land and buildings during the next 10 years. He advised that it was a high level document encompassing a more flexible Asset Management Action Plan underneath it, monitored through an Asset Review Group to ensure strategic alignment with escalation to the Council's Development Board.

Jane Winfield, Head of Corporate Property, advised Members that the Asset Management Strategy had been prepared to replace the existing strategy adopted in 2016. She added that the pre-consultation version of the document had previously been reviewed by the Finance and Performance Panel prior to approval by Cabinet for it to go out for public consultation in December 2021. The version before the Committee at the meeting was the post-consultation version.

During discussions, the Committee noted the following:

- The lack of consultation responses was disappointing, however the Committee was in agreement that of the 180 organisations identified, which included the Council's commercial tenant base, the consultation would have benefited from engagement with more local community organisations and parish councils.
- The Committee was disappointed to note that the consultation was not delivered in a more user friendly format.

- Whilst the Committee recognised the challenge of preparing a Corporate Asset Strategy, it was disappointed that social and environmental outcomes had not been considered equally with economic outcomes within the document.
- The environmental impact of asset management activity would be monitored via workstreams as part of the Asset Management Action Plan.

Cllr Arshad joined the meeting.

- Other Council strategies would focus on detailed areas, the focus of the Asset Management Strategy was to provide an overall strategy on how the Council would achieve income revenue.
- The weighting of different elements within the report would be difficult to dissect from this comprehensive document, however increased emphasis on biodiversity especially in respect to Council buildings would be valuable.
- The report detailed conserving biodiversity, rather than enhancing and strengthening, and the Committee considered this could be reworded to address this imbalance.
- The lack of reference to climate resilience within the report was noted.
- The Committee queried whether the Council was exploring ethical investments.
- Whilst the report documented Oxford's waterways, the Committee was mindful that those documented should include specific reference to the Cherwell as a major waterway through the City.
- Council policy was not to allow additional food takeaway units within its parades of shop units in residential areas, prioritising the selection of tenants for social reasons (e.g. community health). Concerns were raised regarding the impact on Council income of selecting tenants for social reasons rather than necessarily selecting the first or highest offer.
- The report made reference to free parking at park and ride sites, which could be read as encouraging car use to the City. Officers advised that this section required rewording in order to clarify meaning and the Council's commitment to lower carbon access to the City Centre.
- Noted that the report did not provide information for numerical goals where they had been met or not met, which it agreed would be a useful inclusion.

The Committee resolved to make the following recommendations to Cabinet:

- That the Council ensures that, when the next iteration of the strategy is consulted on, it is sent directly to parish councils and community associations for their input – in a more user friendly format.
- That the Council explores opportunities to draw out and consider issues relating to the environment and biodiversity within the strategy, to ensure they are given equal weight to economic issues.
- That the Council addresses and emphasises the topic of 'climate resilience' within the strategy.
- That the Council explores ethical investments as part of its asset portfolio.
- That the Council formally reports on the degree to which Council income is reduced as a result of its policy of selecting tenants of district retail parade units for social reasons (e.g. community health), rather than necessarily selecting the first or highest offer.
- That the Council reports on the quantitative outcome where the strategy states numerical goals, rather than simply stating whether the goal was met or not.

28. Report back on recommendations and from Scrutiny Panel meetings

Cllrs Altaf-Khan and Arshad left the meeting and did not return.

The Committee noted the following Cabinet responses to its recommendations:

- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Report
- Oxford City Council Safeguarding Report
- Oxford City Council's Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy
- Growth Fund Cycle Routes
- Waterways Update

The Chair of the Companies Scrutiny Panel provided an update on the Shareholders and Joint Venture Group meeting held on 22 June 2022. He advised that whilst there were no formal recommendations made, Panel members were able to give valuable input on the OCHL business plan and the regular Barton Oxford LLP and OxWED updates which were noted. Of the meeting of the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group meeting in respect of ODS Group held on 28 July 2022 he informed the Committee that a dividend had been agreed, with a further dividend projected, and highlighted the requirement for Scrutiny in ensuring that the companies continue to meet their ambitious targets for financial contribution to the Council and maintain good service to Oxford residents.

The Committee **noted** the update.

The Scrutiny Officer advised the Committee that the Finance and Performance Panel met on 7 July 2022 where it considered the Medium Term Financial Strategy and their Scrutiny-commissioned performance monitoring for 2022/2023. No recommendations were made and the Committee **noted** that the Panel had met.

29. Dates of future meetings

The dates of future meetings were noted.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.45 pm

Chair
2022

Date: Tuesday 6 September

When decisions take effect:

Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired

Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal decision notice is issued

All other committees: immediately.

Details are in the Council's Constitution.