

Minutes of a meeting of the Housing and Homelessness Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee) on Thursday 6 October 2022

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Committee members present:

Councillor Dunne (Chair)

Councillor Diggins

Councillor Fouweather

Councillor Rawle

Councillor Sandelson

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer

Alice Courtney, Committee and Member Services Manager (Interim Acting)

Nerys Parry, Head of Housing

Amie Rickatson, Strategy & Service Development Manager

Richard Wood, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager

1. Apologies:

Councillor(s) Nala-Hartley sent apologies.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Housing and Homelessness Panel Work Plan

The Scrutiny Officer reported that he anticipated two more items would be available for consideration at the November Panel and was confirming that with officers. The Panel agreed that, during this municipal year, it wanted to consider thematic items rather than primarily focussing on Cabinet reports. It was agreed that the Scrutiny Officer would liaise with the Panel after the meeting so that the Panel could identify the themes it wanted to explore.

The Panel noted the work plan and agreed that amendments would be made after the meeting.

4. Draft Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Cllr Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing, presented the consultation on the Draft Housing, Homelessness, and Rough Sleeping Strategy which was due to be

considered by Cabinet on 19 October. Cllr Smith explained that the scope of the strategy was extremely broad and that she welcomed the Panel's input. Cllr Smith highlighted that the strategy document was organised in five areas:

1. More, affordable homes;
2. Great homes for all;
3. Going towards net zero
4. Preventing homelessness and adopting rapid rehousing response
5. Ending rough sleeping

Cllr Diggins joined the meeting.

Questions were raised by the Panel which were answered by Cllr Smith as well as by Nerys Parry, Amie Rickatson, and Richard Wood.

In a wide-ranging discussion, the Panel suggested that a glossary might be included to accompany the strategy for the consultation period so that the technical terms contained might be more easily understood.

The Panel expressed a preference that the Council might move away from referring to residents and service users as customers so as to emphasise that the Council is a provider of services to those with connections to the City rather than simply existing in a transactional way with people.

The Panel queried why there were seemingly four different figures for new houses in Oxfordshire and established that the different numbers relate to different targets. The Panel considered that it would be beneficial to explain this clearly within the strategy.

The Panel noted that the strategy refers to 2000 new homes in Oxfordshire and asked if this solely related to the houses considered necessary in other districts to meet Oxford's unmet housing need or whether it included houses in Oxford. The Panel heard that this included homes of all types, including some for private sale.

The Panel questioned why there were not specific targets for numbers of affordable homes and social rents but that, instead, reference was made to 'many' or to 'the majority.' The Panel heard it explained that the numbers largely related to OX Place's business plan for the next decade rather than to specific schemes that are planned in the short- to medium-term future. As a result, it was difficult to specify particular numbers. It was also explained that the statement of intent demonstrated a commitment to social rent.

The Panel also asked how realistic long-term plans were given the abandonment of the Oxfordshire Joint Statutory Spatial Plan ('Oxfordshire Plan 2050') and heard that there were ongoing discussions. The Panel was advised that, whilst the action plan would change from year to year, the strategy necessarily had a longer-term focus.

Cllr Sandelson joined the meeting.

The Panel discussed the interaction between the strategy and the Local Plan and it was confirmed that the Local Plan was the principal document which set out the Council's priority areas for housing. The Panel also discussed whether the strategy would have benefited from discussing the potential for higher density housing. However, the Panel accepted that this was a matter of planning policy and so also came under the auspices of the Local Plan.

The Panel explored what was meant by various terms in the strategy and considered that the strategy would benefit, in some places, from revision so that it was clearer.

It was explained that the consultation would end in December and that revisions following the strategy were planned to be completed by March which is when the strategy would go to Cabinet for approval.

The Panel resolved to make the following recommendations to Cabinet which would be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee for its approval on 11 October 2022:

1. That the Council produce a glossary for the consultation so as to make engagement more accessible.
2. That the Council employ the language of residents rather than customers in the strategy.
3. That the Council makes clear the difference and interplay between the different numbers of new houses (on, for example, pages 11, 27, 31, and 170)
4. That the Council consider revising page 23 of the draft strategy, particularly in the section headed 'Improve standards for new developments of council housing in the city' so that it is more readily accessible and understandable.
5. That the Council consider including reference in the strategy itself to the importance of the contribution the universities and colleges and the contribution could make.

5. Co-option of Tenant Ambassador

The Panel noted the report on the co-option of tenant ambassador(s). The Panel agreed that it wanted to co-opt more than one tenant ambassador but that it considered four to be the maximum number. It was agreed that the Scrutiny Officer would make contact with the Tenant Involvement Team to ask for expressions of interest. The Panel was keen that expressions should be sought from as diverse a range of people as possible.

The Panel resolved to defer the agreement of the arrangements and the recommendation of them to the Scrutiny Committee until its next meeting. In the meantime, the Scrutiny Officer was asked to progress arrangements.

6. Dates of future meetings

The Chair advised the Panel that she would be unable to attend the next meeting on its scheduled date. The Panel agreed that the Scrutiny Officer would liaise with members to identify a suitable alternative date.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.10 pm

Chair
2022

Date: Tuesday 1 November

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.