

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 10 October 2023



Committee members present:

Councillor Altaf-Khan	Councillor Corais
Councillor Diggins	Councillor Douglas
Councillor Fry	Councillor Jarvis
Councillor Muddiman (for Councillor Pegg)	Councillor Mundy
Councillor Snowton (in the Chair)	

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Alice Courtney, Scrutiny Officer
Lucy Brown, Committee and Member Services Officer
Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy
Tina Mould, Sustainable Innovation Programme Team Manager
Sarah Hassenpflug, Project Manager – Innovation Team

Cabinet Members present:

Councillor Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management
Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Pegg, Rowley, Arshad and Lygo sent apologies.
Substitutes are shown above.

32. Election of Chair

On agreement of the Committee, Cllr Snowton was elected as Chair for this meeting.

33. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

34. Chair's Announcements

There were none.

35. Minutes

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 05 September 2023 as a true and accurate record.

The Committee agreed to take items 10, 8 and then 9, next on the agenda, and then return to items 6, 7 and 11 to make best use of officer and Cabinet Member time.

36. Utilities Procurement 2024-2028

Cllr Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, presented the report which sought delegated authority to approve contracts for gas and electricity and approval to extend the Council's current contract for water utilities. Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy highlighted that the Council utilises the services of a Public Buying Organisation for utilities procurement, and extending this contract would allow the Council to mitigate against rising energy prices and volatile markets whilst a full review of the Council's overall energy approach was undertaken over the next six months. In response to questions from the Committee, he advised the following:

- There were a large number of properties, both residential and commercial, that would be affected by any changes to energy prices, however it was noted that this only applied to communal areas within residential properties.
- Whilst it would be impossible to determine the precise level of energy usage, prices were fixed dependent on estimated usage based on prior usage levels.
- Following advice from the Council's scientific advisor, Cabinet had previously made a decision not to source its energy from renewable energy companies, as savings made from the value of the additional revenues by using green energy, were better utilised by being incorporated into the Net Zero Transition Fund.
- Funds raised towards the Net Zero Transition Fund were used to fund reductions in energy consumption, such as replacing the lighting systems in the Council's leisure centres which were not covered under other government schemes.
- The Council had not extended the buying scheme to its commercial tenants, as the Council was not a decision maker in how those businesses were run and there were licensing constraints, however this could be investigated through leaseholder agreements in the future.

The Committee did not make any recommendations.

37. Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge

Cllr Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management presented the report which updated members on the key scope and process of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge, recommendations from the July 2023 Peer Review Team, and the outline the future Action Plan. He highlighted that the process was very thorough and professionally undertaken and emphasised that the report was positive overall with ten recommendations for improvement, mostly around structures, focus and processes.

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy highlighted the very comprehensive process undertaken throughout the review, and the engagement with external stakeholders and community groups. All recommendations had been formulated into an action plan which would be brought to Cabinet in December. In response to questions from the Committee, Mish Tullar advised the following:

- Longer term recommendations would be prioritised through the corporate plan process.
- In regard to recommendation 5: Communicating the regeneration, it had been recognised that further work be undertaken in ensuring the Council communicated with all parties, and not just those that were interested parties in Council projects.

- The review had identified certain risks surrounding the Oxford Model, and good challenge had been provided of which the Council had acknowledged following a recent internal audit review from the Council's internal auditors.

The Committee did not make any recommendations.

38. Delivery of Electric Vehicle Infrastructure for Oxford

Cllr Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities, presented the report which (i) sought approval of Oxford City Council's Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (EVI) Delivery and Implementation Plan, which clarified the work packages and resources needed to deliver the first chapter of Oxford's EVI strategy (OxEVIS) up to April 2026; (ii) sought delegated authority for officers to enter into contracts and agreements with third parties to deliver the OxEVIS Implementation Plan; and (iii) sought agreement to changes to the GULO (Go Ultra Low Oxford) project. She reported on the successes achieved by the Council which had put it ahead of neighbouring authorities and the target of net zero carbon emissions for Oxford by 2040 or earlier.

Cllr Upton advised that the Government's recent Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy 'Taking Charge' published in March 2022 transferred responsibility for EVI to Tier 1 local authorities. In this context Oxfordshire County Council would take full control of EVI on the highways, including the existing installed Go Ultra Low Oxford (GULO) estate, and future GULO phase 2 deployment. This had been taken into account in the Implementation Plan, shifting from a direct delivery approach towards a partnership approach focused on working in collaboration with the County Council and neighbouring Districts and the joined up collaborative approach to EVI deployment was outlined in the report.

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy outlined the estimated net income detailed in the report and highlighted the importance of implementation of Electric Vehicle Infrastructure for the Council.

In response to questions from the Committee, Mish Tullar, Tina Mould, Sustainable Innovation Programme Team Manager and Sarah Hassenpflug, Project Manager – Innovation Team, advised the following:

- Charging via a faster charger outlet was more expensive than home charging due to differences in how the energy was taken from an external charging point, which included implications on tax and time taken to charge.
- It was not expected that any differences would be experienced in the roll-out of the GUL-e system being developed by ODS in the formulation of this partnership.
- The introduction of Car Club charging points was being deployed in the majority of City Council car parks; however these were dependent on size and accessibility.
- As part of the EVI tender, there were opportunities for micro-hubs to be developed by communities and social enterprises and grants available for their implementation.
- Joint working had taken place with the Planning department to review the scope of electric charging points in conservation areas within the city.
- Generic contracts were being developed to ensure that charging points that were broken or in a state of disrepair were fixed.
- The majority of the infrastructure for installation of charging points was allowable under Permitted Development.

The Committee resolved to make the following recommendations on the report for Cabinet:

1. That the Council works closely with Oxfordshire County Council to consider options for reserved parking spaces outside homes specifically for at-home onstreet EV charging in areas of Oxford where a need for this provision is identified (e.g. because of parking constraints in those areas).
2. That the Council works closely with Oxfordshire County Council to consider options for at-home EV charging in conservation areas to ensure that residents living in these areas do not experience disproportionate access to onstreet EV charging opportunities.
3. That the Council works closely with Oxfordshire County Council to explore options to incentivise concessionaires to promptly repair EV Infrastructure when a unit is out of service.
4. That the Council works closely with Oxfordshire County Council to investigate the viability of EV co-charging between employment and the public on employment sites.

39. Work Plan and Forward Plan

The Committee **noted** the Forward Plan.

The Committee reviewed the Work Plan and noted the extraordinary informal remote meeting to consider the Local Plan and CIL Charging Schedule Partial Review reports, and **confirmed** its agreement to consider the following reports at future meetings:

- November Cabinet reports:
 - Grant Allocations to Community & Voluntary Organisations 2024/25
 - Equalities Update
 - Central (City & University) Conservation Area Appraisal
 - FutureFit Oxford(shire) Project Grant Funding Bid
- December Cabinet reports:
 - Local Government Association Corporate Peer Review: Council Action Plan
 - Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2022/23 (annual)
 - Oxfordshire Food Strategy Action Plan
 - Leisure Management Contract
- January Cabinet reports:
 - Thriving Communities Strategy Update
 - Joint Venture LLP for South Oxford Science Village
 - Developing a Sustainable Building Control Service

The Committee was advised that the following Cabinet items were set to be considered by Scrutiny Panels in December:

- Private Rented Sector Regulation Policies – results of consultation and approval (Housing and Homelessness Panel)
- Integrated Performance Report for Q4 2022/23 – *post Cabinet* (Finance and Performance Panel)
- Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25 (Finance and Performance Panel)
- Integrated Performance Report for Q2 2023/24 (Finance and Performance Panel)
- Treasury Management Mid-Year Report (Finance and Performance Panel)

- Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 – 2027/28 and 2024/25 Budget for consultation (Finance and Performance Panel)

The Housing Revenue Account Rent Setting Report 2024/25 was set to be considered by the Finance and Performance Panel in January.

The Scrutiny Officer updated the Committee on the following Scrutiny-commissioned items since the last meeting and requested that any further suggestions be forwarded via email:

- DAHA Accreditation and Domestic Abuse Review Group Update – January 2024
- Adult Exploitation – February 2024

40. Report back on recommendations and from Scrutiny Panel meetings

The Chair presented the report back on recommendations.

The Committee noted that on 13 September 2023, Cabinet considered recommendations relating to four reports, responses to which were set out in the agenda pack:

- Delivery of a New Burial Space
- The Leys Pool & Leisure Centre – Youth Club
- City-wide Smoke Control Area Declaration
- HRA Energy Efficiency Projects 2023/24

The Chair of the Finance and Performance Panel provided an update of the Panel's first meeting of the municipal year held on 06 September 2023. The Panel was attended by Cllr Fry, Cllr Jarvis and Cllr Snowton; Cllr Fry thanked Cllr Turner and officers for their attendance to answer questions. At this meeting the Panel agreed their work plan, and considered the following three substantive reports; Integrated Performance Report Q1 2023/24, Treasury Management Annual Report 2022/23 and Scrutiny Performance Monitoring. The Panel was due to meet next on 06 December 2023 and it was expected to be a busy agenda, including initial consideration of the 2024/25 budget ahead of the Budget Review Group meetings which would commence in January.

The Scrutiny Officer provided an update on the Climate and Environment Panel which had met on 12 September 2023. The Panel held a wide-ranging discussion culminating in the formulation of six recommendations to Cabinet, two on the HRA Energy Efficiency Projects 2023/24 report, two on the City-wide Smoke Control Area Declaration report, and two on the Scrutiny-commissioned Air Pollution report. The recommendations on the HRA Energy Efficiency Project 2023/24 and City-wide Smoke Control Area Declaration reports were agreed by Cabinet in September, and the Air Pollution report would be submitted to Cabinet in October for a response.

The Chair of the Housing and Homelessness Panel advised the Committee that the Panel had met on 05 October 2023 where they considered reports on Housing First

progress and outcomes, with representation from St Mungo's, A2Dominion and Council officers, and the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment; no recommendations were made.

The Committee noted the updates from Panel Chairs and the Scrutiny Officer.

41. Dates of future meetings

The dates of future meetings were noted.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.40 pm

Chair

Date: Monday 06 November 2023

*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.*