

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Monday 6 November 2023



Committee members present:

Councillor Pegg (Chair)	Councillor Rowley (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Altaf-Khan	Councillor Corais
Councillor Diggins	Councillor Douglas
Councillor Fry	Councillor Jarvis
Councillor Smowton	

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager
Lucy Brown, Committee and Member Services Officer
Ian Brooke, Head of Community Services
Paula Redway, Culture and Community Development Manager
Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy
Ruth Harris, Zero Carbon Project Manager
Rachel Williams, Planning Policy and Place Manager
Clare Golden, Team Leader (Urban Design and Heritage)
Clare Keen, Policy and Partnerships Officer

Cabinet Members present:

Councillor Ajaz Rehman, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Communities
Councillor Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice
Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Arshad sent apologies.

Substitutes are shown above.

47. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

48. Chair's Announcements

There were none.

49. Minutes

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 10 October 2023 and the extraordinary informal remote meeting on 16 October 2023 as a true and accurate record.

The Committee agreed to take items 7, 8, 9 and 10 next on the agenda, and then return to items 5, 6 and 11 to make best use of officer and Cabinet Member time.

50. Grant Allocations to Community & Voluntary Organisations 2024/25

Cllr Ajaz Rehman, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Communities, presented the report which demonstrated the impact of the Oxford Community Impact Fund and sought Cabinet agreement to the criteria/weighting for assessing the 2024/25 Oxford Community Impact Fund grants as set out in paragraph 5 of the report, with the additional requirement for applicants to comply with the safeguarding arrangements specified by the Council. He highlighted that following the simplification of the application process last year, and increased promotion of the availability of funding, there had been a significant increase in applications with over 20% of grants being awarded to new applicants.

Ian Brooke, Head of Community Services, further advised that the applications were scored by the grants team based on the overall impact of the work and the likelihood of the funding being available from alternative sources, and the recommended funding amounts put forward for agreement by Cabinet. The Big Ideas grants were agreed by Cabinet but the small and medium grants, as per the constitution, were agreed by the Head of Community Services (as the senior officer with budget responsibility) in consultation with the Executive Director and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Communities.

Ian Brooke and Paula Redway, Culture and Community Development Manager, answered questions as follows:

- Appendix 4 to the report provided information regarding funding leverage as reported in the grant monitoring form for Big Ideas grants for 2022/23, however future reports could provide further information regarding the breakdown of funding leverage per size of organisation.
- Whilst some of the percentage of funding could be considered low for larger organisations, it provided confidence to other lenders for increased funding for those organisations to benefit from.
- All applicants would be impacted by the new safeguarding obligations, and the team had worked with the Safeguarding Coordinator to ensure that the process was robust and proportionate, and that the criteria was linked to the safeguarding framework.
- Support would be provided to applicants to ensure they receive guidance on completing the application forms.
- Scoring of applicants was undertaken by Officers with an understanding of the area of work to be funded and were linked in with the Council's priorities.

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

1. That the Council, within the report includes a breakdown between 'Fully Funded', 'Partially Funded (50%)' and 'lower funding'.
2. That the Council, within the report, notes the minimum requirement for organisations that don't work with children, young people or vulnerable adults.

51. FutureFit Oxford(shire) Project Grant Funding Bid

Cllr Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice, presented the report which sought Cabinet approval for Oxford City Council's involvement in the FutureFit Oxford(shire) Project (FOx Project) and delegated authority for the facilitation and delivery of the project.

Ruth Harris, Zero Carbon Project Manager advised the Committee that following the successful bid of £75k to Innovate UK (IUK) to lead a consortium that undertook a feasibility study to look at options to develop a whole-system FutureFit One Stop Shop (FOSS) solution, to address barriers and accelerate the take up of decarbonisation measures by households and businesses, Oxford City Council had submitted a bid of £5.28m to take forward the project as lead of that consortium. The outcome would be known on 8 November 2023, and would lead a collaboration of 11 consortium members to accelerate retrofit solutions.

Cllr Railton, Ruth Harris and Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy, answered questions as follows:

- Area based insetting would take place at a local level to match projects with investors and interest had been received from local businesses at the Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership. Oxford City Council would lead the pilot of the insetting scheme within the project.
- The concept of making retrofit work smarter was developed by the Low Carbon Hub and aimed to make the system smarter and more interactive through its various components.
- The Council would be overall lead for the project consortium. The Council would lead a workpack on governance to establish a local strategic partnership on retrofit, and ensure adequate information and standards were available to support existing one stop shops to meet the increased demand for retro/FutureFit services. The Council would also lead a workpack on innovative finance, that would include a pilot of an insetting scheme (led by the Council) as well as a pilot of a salary-linked financial intervention (led by the University of Oxford, with input from Oxford Brookes University and Oxfordshire County Council).
- Developing a sustainable business model was a required deliverable of the project to ensure that the programme would continue beyond the grant funding that created a sustainable funded partnership.
- Should the bid be successful, engagement with planning and conservationist colleagues at the Council would be sought to ensure that the project progressed successfully.
- Two pilot one top shops already exist, one with Energy Solutions Oxfordshire who had already engaged with SMEs, and Cosy Homes Oxfordshire who were already engaged with homeowners. These one stop shops would support the project.

The Committee did not make any recommendations.

52. Central (City & University) Conservation Area Appraisal

Cllr Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities presented the report which requested Cabinet adopt the Central (City & University) Conservation Area Appraisal, enabling the document to be used to inform the decision-making process for Development Management and to form an evidence base to inform Planning Policy. She highlighted that the document covered the historic core and centre of Oxford and was implemented following guidance from Historic England, that recommended designated conservation areas should undergo a formal character appraisal to justify their original designation, to define their significance and values, and to inform decisions regarding future change.

Clare Golden, Team Leader (Urban Design and Heritage), Rachel Williams, Planning Policy and Place Manager and Cllr Louise Upton, responded to questions from the Committee as follows:

- The appraisal included Management Guidance, which set out the identified threats, issues and opportunities for conserving and enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- The Design Advice section of the appraisal included guidance for applicants and developers when undertaking new building and alterations within the conservation area.
- Expectations and ambitions on preserving historic frontage of buildings within the area had been increased following the use of the appraisal.
- The appraisal had been helpful for informing the decision-making process between Officers and the Planning Committee and would be useful when the Council had to make its case to the Planning Inspector of the outcomes of decisions taken.
- Although lengthy, the document was intended to be user-friendly for applicants to use when completing planning applications.
- The Design Advice section of the appraisal referred to design choice in keeping with the character of the building when reviewing applications, however, would ensure that energy saving alternatives were included within the documentation.

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

1. That the Council would encourage the use of modern windows and other retrofitting measures on historic buildings where appropriate, and the relevant documents are signposted within the report.
2. That the Council amend the appraisal to welcome applications that would make private green spaces more accessible to the public.

53. Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy - Consultation Response

Cllr Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities provided an overview of the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board which sets out how the Board will help Oxfordshire's residents stay healthy, well and cared for. The strategy set out what the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board would focus on between 2024 and 2030. She advised the Committee that the strategy was currently out for public consultation, and the Committee were invited to ask questions and confirm its agreement to the draft consultation response set out at Appendix B to the report, or agree any amendments as required.

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy provided an overview of how the strategy had been developed and shaped and themes and priorities included within the strategy.

Cllr Louise Upton, Mish Tullar and Clare Keen, Policy and Partnerships Officer, answered questions from the Committee as follows:

- Good practice was shared with the Health Improvement Board, and the community hub that had been set up in Abingdon and could be replicated in other areas.
- Leisure activities were available to all children and were not means tested.
- There was a target of non-smoking across the City, and therefore it was expected that advice provided would also be targeted to the partners of pregnant women.

The following were provided as suggested amendments to the draft consultation:

- Include an explicit mention regarding the implications of both partners regarding smoking while pregnant.
- Reference that employers should encourage cycling.
- Include a bespoke approach to addressing health inequalities for health inclusion groups, referring to homeless, vulnerable migrants, sex workers.
- Include the impact of healthy food, regarding the reduction in obesity and measurable date regarding healthy diets.
- Refer to the impact of economic pressure staff are facing, the impact this is having on staff retention and recruitment, and pay issues within the health and care sector impacting secure recruitment and retention.

The Committee **resolved** to:

1. **Confirm** its agreement to the draft consultation response set out at Appendix B to the report, incorporating the amendments listed above; and
2. **Delegate authority** to the Committee and Member Services Manager to submit the final consultation response via the consultation website on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee before the consultation closed on 12 November 2023.

54. Work Plan and Forward Plan

The Committee noted the Forward Plan.

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

December meeting

- Local Government Association Corporate Peer Review: Council Action Plan
- Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2022/23
- Equalities Update
- Leisure Management Contract

Any further items for future meetings would be agreed at the next Scrutiny Committee meeting in December.

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

Finance and Performance Panel:

- Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25

- Integrated Performance Report for Q2 2023/24
- Treasury Management Mid-Year Report
- Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26-2027/28 and 2024/25 Budget for consultation

55. Report back on recommendations and from Scrutiny Panel meetings

The Chair presented the report on recommendations.

The Committee noted that on 18 October 2023, Cabinet considered recommendations related to three reports, responses to which were set out in the agenda pack.

- Air Pollution
- Delivery of Electric Vehicle Infrastructure for Oxford
- Oxford Local Plan 2040 Regulation 19 Consultation document.

The Chair of the Companies Scrutiny Panel provided an update of the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group meeting of 01 November 2023, of which the Housing Group companies were represented.

56. Dates of future meetings

The dates of future meetings were noted.

The meeting started at 6.05 pm and ended at 8.00 pm

Chair

Date: Monday 4 December 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.