

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Monday 4 March 2024



Committee members present:

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

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

David Butler, Head of Planning & Regulatory Services
Lorraine Freeman, CIL, Data Analysis and Reporting Team Leader
Lan Nguyen, Senior Data Analyst
Hagan Lewisman, Active Communities Manager
Tom Garrod, Zero Carbon Oxford Officer
Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy
Lucy Cherry, Policy and Partnerships Officer
Alice Courtney, Scrutiny Officer
Lucy Brown, Committee and Member Services Officer

Also present:

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Aziz and Thomas sent apologies.

88. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

89. Chair's Announcements

There were none.

90. Minutes

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 06 February 2024 as a true and accurate record.

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

91. Request for Exceptional Circumstances Relief from the Community Infrastructure Levy

Cllr Douglas joined the meeting.

David Butler, Head of Planning and Regulatory Services introduced the report which sought Cabinet approval to award Discretionary Exceptional Circumstances Relief (DECR) for the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) charge on the BMW Mini Plant for a total sum of £832,421. He highlighted that the BMW Cowley Plant was the successful recipient of a Government grant to enable the plant to prepare for the sole production of the new electric Mini models. He advised that whilst the DECR Policy was introduced by Oxford City Council in 2019, this was the first application received.

Lorraine Freeman, CIL, Data Analysis and Reporting Team Leader, and Lan Nguyen, Senior Data Analyst, also attended the meeting to speak to the item and answer the Committee's questions.

During discussion, the Committee noted the following:

- The project was in a viability deficit regardless of whether or not DECR was granted.
- The risk register at Appendix 2 detailed the likely impact of the Council not awarding DECR for this application.
- The application was judged to be appropriate and eligible in line with the DECR Policy.
- Conversations were ongoing with BMW in relation to the need for investment in public electric vehicle infrastructure in Oxford.
- Other local authorities had granted DECR, however officers did not have any specific examples to hand.
- The option to submit an application for DECR was open to anyone; all applications would be judged on merit, with a very strict framework around awarding DECR.
- Any CIL funding from the development would have been spent on infrastructure generally across the city, as CIL monies went into a single pot that was not application specific. CIL money was not allocated to projects until there was a high degree of certainty that CIL would be received by the Council.
- The project would not increase the number of jobs at the Cowley Plant, it was more around sustaining the life of BMW/Mini as an employer in Oxford.
- There was no option to grant a partial CIL exemption, the Council was required to either grant DECR or not.

The Committee resolved to make the following recommendation on the report to Cabinet:

1. That the Cabinet, in the making of its decision, has regard to the relative insignificance of the value of the proposed CIL exemption compared to the overall project viability gap and thus the limited impact that the CIL exemption, if agreed, would have on influencing and/or changing the behaviour or intentions of BMW.
2. That the Cabinet, in the making of its decision, has regard to the existence of other entities that are able to provide subsidies of a similar scale, in particular Central Government.

3. That the Council, should the CIL exemption be approved by Cabinet, asks BMW to provide a statement setting out how it will mitigate the impact of the development without the use of CIL monies.

David Butler, Head of Planning and Regulatory Services, Lorraine Freeman, CIL, Data Analysis and Reporting Team Leader and Lan Nguyen, Senior Data Analyst left the meeting and did not return.

92. Oxfordshire Food Strategy - City Action Plan

Hagan Lewisman, Active Communities Manager, introduced the report from the Executive Director (Communities and People) which sought Cabinet endorsement of the City Food Action Plan that accompanied the Oxfordshire-wide Food Strategy which had been developed in partnership with the County Council, District Councils, representatives from Good Food Oxfordshire and Oxfordshire community food groups. The Food Strategy was endorsed by Cabinet in June 2022. The Active Communities Manager highlighted that the City Food Action Plan supported the delivery of a number of the Council's priorities, with strong links to the Council's Thriving Communities Strategy, which was key to addressing inequalities and improving the health of the City's residents.

Tom Garrood, Zero Carbon Oxford Officer attended the meeting to speak to the item and answer the Committee's questions.

During discussion, the Committee noted the following:

- The food pipeline for community larders could on some occasions be patchy depending what surplus was available from FareShare, which was sometimes why there was not a huge variety of different fruit and veg; work was being done with charities and partners related to the specific food needs of different community groups.
- Work had been undertaken with community larders in relation to food storage such as funding fridges and freezers to mitigate food quality issues as well as campaigns to support the donation of specific food products and logistical low cost support of the provision of a community van.
- Whilst more deprived areas were listed within the report as priority areas of the city where action would take place, the areas identified were at the ward level only; setting priority areas at the sub-ward level would ensure that smaller pockets of deprivation across the city were picked up.
- On reviewing the action plan there was one key action relating to diet changes (promoting healthier diets), there were no actions specifically relating to diet changes in the action plan, there were actions around increasing education on sustainable diets.

The Committee resolved to make the following recommendation on the report to Cabinet:

1. That the Council engages with local food larders with a view to improving the variety of fruit and veg available, having regard to the outcome of the recent study undertaken at Oxford City Farm in relation to mothers and the impact of the cost of living crisis.
2. That the Council reviews its policy in relation to the management of leftover food from Town Hall events so that it does not go to waste.

3. That the Council promotes reducing food waste and encouraging diet change as the most impactful factors from a climate perspective, as well as reducing food miles.
4. That the Council, working with the community, explores options for the collection of food waste from larger generators of food waste within the city and distribution among food larders; and adds this to the City Action Plan.
5. That the Council re-evaluates the priority areas of the city where activity will take place set out in the City Action Plan, which are currently set at the ward level, with a view to setting priority areas at a sub-ward level to more accurately reflect levels and pockets of deprivation across the City.

Hagan Lewisman, Active Communities Manager and Tom Garrod, Zero Carbon Oxford Officer left the meeting and did not return.

93. Voluntary Adoption of the Socio-economic Duty

Cllr Susan Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships, introduced the report which proposed the Council's voluntary adoption of the socio-economic duty (SED) set out under the Equalities Act 2010, but not applied in England, with implementation in a way that minimised legal and resourcing impacts. She highlighted the importance of obtaining a balance between ensuring the SED was deliverable whilst mitigating the potential added risks related to legal implications and resource constraints. She added that the report was as a result of a motion passed by Full Council in 2022, which requested that the Head of Corporate Strategy submit a report to Cabinet with options for the implementation of the SED.

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy advised that further work would be required to establish an implementation plan for the SED, which would allow the Council to ensure the provision of comprehensive training for all officers and Members.

Lucy Cherry, Policy and Partnerships Officer also attended the meeting to speak to the item and answer the Committee's questions.

During discussion, the Committee noted the following:

- The Council had assessed SED implementation approaches across several other local authorities, and it was found that they had integrated the SED within their existing Equalities Impact Assessment process; Oxford City Council would seek to do the same.
- Further work would be required to develop an implementation plan for the SED; it was expected this would take place during the 2024/25 Council year. Cllr Brown and officers did not believe that this should delay the adoption of the SED.
- Oxford University, a member of the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership, would be encouraged along with other members to undertake further initiatives inclusive of the SED.
- It was recognised that the proposal to implement the SED, whilst in response to a motion passed by Council, had originated from the Child Poverty Review Group, which was commissioned by the Scrutiny Committee. Cllr Brown apologised for the work of the Child Poverty Review Group not being recognised within the report and confirmed that this could be addressed going forward to ensure appropriate recognition.

- It was hoped that by following a light touch approach to implementing the SED, it would ensure that the Council was able to integrate the approach into all working practices, rather than it becoming a bureaucratic ‘tick box’ exercise.

The Committee noted the report; there were no recommendations.

Cllr Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships, Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy and Lucy Cherry, Policy and Partnerships Officer left the meeting and did not return.

94. Work Plan and Forward Plan

The Committee noted the updated Forward Plan, which had been published as a supplement to the agenda.

The Committee reviewed the updated Work Plan set out in the agenda and confirmed its agreement to consider the following reports at the April meeting:

- Integrated Performance Report Q4 2022/23
- Oxford City Council’s Corporate Business Plan Priorities 2024/25 and Progress of the 2023/24 Priorities
- Tourism Review Group Update
- Adult Exploitation

The Scrutiny Officer advised the Committee that any changes to the Forward Plan after this meeting but ahead of the April meeting may result in changes to the Work Plan, and if so, any changes would be agreed by the Scrutiny Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee.

95. Report back on recommendations and from Scrutiny Panel meetings

The Chair presented the report on recommendations.

The Committee noted that on 07 February 2024, Cabinet considered recommendations related to three reports, responses to which were set out in the agenda pack:

- Capital Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28
- Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25
- Report of the Budget Review Group 2024/25

The Committee noted that the Scrutiny Officer had followed up on the following actions from the January 2024 Committee:

- The Cabinet response to the public address from the Leisure Services Contract Award was shared with the public speaker and Committee on 12 February 2024.
- The discrepancy regarding domestic abuse training identified between the response to recommendation 4 on the DAHA Accreditation and Domestic Abuse Review Group Update report and responses to the initial recommendations of the Domestic Abuse Review Group had been followed up. Officers had confirmed that domestic abuse training would be offered in 2024 for all Members.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the Climate and Environment Panel had met on 27 February 2024; it was the first time the Panel had met with its new membership of six following the changes to the political composition of the Council. The Panel considered

four items: Biodiversity Net Gain; Citywide Retrofit Strategy; Heat Network & Zoning; and the Net Zero Masterplan. Two recommendations were made in respect of the Biodiversity Net Gain item and a further two recommendations were made in respect of the Citywide Retrofit Strategy item, which would be submitted to Cabinet in March. The Panel was due to meet again on 20 March 2024 for its final meeting of the municipal year.

96. Dates of future meetings

The dates of future meetings were noted. The Committee was reminded that the April Committee meeting would be held remotely via Zoom as an informal remote meeting.

The meeting started at 6.04 pm and ended at 7.50 pm

Chair

Date: Thursday 11 April 2024

*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.*