

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee**
held via video conferencing at **2 p.m.** on **Thursday 10 December 2020**

PRESENT

Councillors: Alaa Al-Yousuf (Chairman), Martin McBride (Vice Chairman), Richard Bishop, Jill Bull, Mike Cahill, Owen Collins, Harry Eaglestone, Duncan Enright, Ted Fenton, Liz Leffman, James Mills, Elizabeth Poskitt and Alex Postan.

Also in attendance: Councillors Toby Morris and Harry St John.

Officers in attendance: Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer); Bill Oddy (Group Manager - Commercial Development, Leadership and Management Team); Philip Measures (Service Leader ERS); David Rudland (Senior Officer ERS); Scott Williams (Business Manager Commissioning Strategy, Environmental Services); Simon Cluley (Ubico); Keith Butler (Head of Democratic Services); Amy Bridgewater-Carnall (Senior Strategic Support Officer); and Ben Amor (Strategic Support Officer).

13. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 1 October 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andrew Coles and Ben Woodruff, and from Councillor Collins for delayed arrival. The following temporary appointments were notified:

Councillor James Mills for Councillor Ben Woodruff
Councillor Duncan Enright for Councillor Andrew Coles

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers in matters to be considered at the meeting.

16. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

No submissions were received from the public in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure.

17. CALL-IN OF CABINET DECISION – COMMUNITY RECYCLING – BRING SITES IN WEST OXFORDSHIRE

The Committee was requested to consider the call-in request relating to the Cabinet decision of 18 November 2020 (minute no. 68) in respect of the future approach to community recycling bring sites in the district.

The Chairman advised that a brief statement by the Cabinet Member for Environment had been circulated to the Committee earlier that day, as follows:

“At the original presentation of this item, I said that we would not be suddenly removing the bins but would do so in discussion with the relevant Town and Parish Council. I would like to take this opportunity to make clear what I meant.

Before the sites are considered for removal, our officers will be consulting with the associated Town or Parish Council and the Ward Member(s).

In any event and being appreciative of the strong likelihood of significant amounts of recycling items being generated over Christmas and the New Year period, it is not intended to begin any changes before 1st February 2021.

I hope this helps.”

The Chairman also advised the Committee of the recommendations that (a) the Committee should decide whether or not to support the call-in request; and (b) that, if the request was supported, the Committee should determine whether it wished to submit any additional comments to Cabinet.

Councillor Leffman questioned how, if town or parish councils wished to retain bring sites in their respective parishes, this would be dealt with by the District Council. In response, the Group Manager responded that the cost of managing the bring sites would require further consideration, but that Officers were willing to undertake discussions with local councils on this matter and that an Officer from the Council's Waste Team was shortly to be redeployed to a role in the communications team with specific responsibility for Environment Promotions, to assist with this.

Councillor Fenton thanked the Cabinet Member for the information he had circulated and commented that the most common issue with bring sites was the overflowing of waste in the vicinity surrounding the various containers, especially cardboard waste.

Councillor Fenton then proposed that the call-in should not be taken forward and requested that instead an increase in community consultation and engagement with local residents and councils be undertaken before any further action by the Council. The proposition was seconded by Councillor Postan.

In supporting the proposition, Councillor Bishop explained that he had received much correspondence from residents regarding the removal of one bring site in his Ward. He added that he felt the matter had been badly handled by the Cabinet particularly in relation to communication and that for these reasons he would be supporting the proposition made by Councillors Fenton and Postan.

Councillor Mills highlighted that some sites had been removed at the request of local councils and residents as many had become frustrated by the level of mess and abuse of the sites. He added that he considered education for residents was important, in terms of what the sites could and should be used for. The Chairman responded that this had been the case in Hanborough and that removal of that particular bring site had resulted in two extra parking spaces in the car park being made available.

Various Members supported the suggestion that a leaflet previously circulated to all of the district's residents annually regarding items that could be recycled at the sites should be reproduced and circulated again to residents. Members also echoed the comments made earlier in the meeting by Members relating to further and improved consultation by the Council.

Councillor Enright sought confirmation that there would be no cost to the local councils for removal or relocation of any bring sites and that this operation would be funded by the District Council as had been previously discussed at Cabinet and Council. In response, the Group Manager explained that if there were any additional budget implications from the

removal or relocation of any sites or in the management of the sites, this information would need to be reported to the Cabinet owing to any possible budget implications.

Councillor Postan added that by locating the bring sites in prominent and visible locations; this would help to mitigate risks of fly tipping.

Councillor MacRae as the Cabinet Member then addressed the Committee and explained that communication was paramount and that he as the Cabinet Member with the relevant Officers needed to ensure this was improved going forward. Councillor MacRae, in reference to the leaflet referred to by the Committee, explained this was published on the Council's website and that he would ensure attention was drawn to it.

Councillors Cahill and Enright confirmed they were satisfied that the request for Cabinet to reconsider the matter need not be pursued.

RESOLVED: That the request for Cabinet to reconsider the decisions taken at its meeting on 18 November 2020 be not pursued.

18. WASTE SERVICE

The Committee received a verbal update and presentation on the Waste Service across West Oxfordshire from a Ubico representative and officers.

The Chairman extended his thanks on behalf of the Committee to the Ubico teams for their ongoing work in challenging times.

Councillor Fenton questioned whether crews were suitably protected when dealing with disposable facemasks that needed to be cleared from pavements and public spaces. In response, officers confirmed that crews were suitably protected and that facemasks were collected by grabbers and placed in bags so that no hand contact was required.

Councillor Leffman asked whether information regarding fly tipping could be separated into figures at ward level to enable the Council to determine whether certain areas within the district faced higher rates of fly tipping than others.

In response to a question from Councillor Mills, officers confirmed that stickers were left on fly tips highlighting that the Council had been made aware of the incident and that the matter was being dealt with.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

19. AIR QUALITY

The Committee received a verbal update followed by questions on the Air Quality situation across West Oxfordshire.

In response to various questions from Members, Officers reported that most Plans were dependent upon development schemes coming forward and would be contributed to by national schemes to remove the sale of new petrol and diesel powered vehicles in the future; real time air quality monitors had previously been used by the Council but there were issues in relation to the costs of both the internal and external maintenance of them; the Highways Authority and County Council had a duty to respond to issues of air quality; air quality data was currently produced monthly and levels varied over the months around the target figure of 40 micrograms of particulars and the County Council could implement restrictions on daytime traffic in attempts to mitigate particulars in certain areas where higher levels were regularly recorded.

The Chairman thanked the Officers for their presentations and attendance and asked for the presentations to be circulated to the Committee after the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

20. APPROACH TO LITTER BIN PLACEMENT AND RENEWAL PROGRAMME IN WEST OXFORDSHIRE

The Committee considered the report of the Business Manager - Waste, which sought to update Members on the issues being experienced with litter and dog bins in the District and to seek approval for a renewal programme to be delivered over the following five years.

The Group Manager Commercial Development, Leadership and Management Team advised that communication with some local parish and town council clerks had been undertaken and the recommendations arose from the fact that dog waste could now be placed in ordinary waste bins owing to its eventual incineration. The Group Manager added that in addition to the plan to reduce the number of bins in conservation areas to help improve the street scene, a pilot for smart bins was also intended to be trialled. Replacement bins were also being provided where bins were known to be in a poor condition.

Members expressed their support for the trial of smart bins but raised concern regarding the issue of smell from dog waste being placed in ordinary waste bins and questioned how this would be managed by the Council. In response, the Group Manager explained that where issues of smell could be expected to cause a public nuisance it was likely a standard dog waste bin would be installed alongside an ordinary waste bin. He added that replacement bins owing to poor condition were carried out on a like for like basis.

Councillor Eaglestone commented that he had faced difficulties in requesting the installation of new waste bins in his Ward. The Chairman advised that he should raise this matter with Officers outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the recommendations to Cabinet be supported.

21. UPDATE ON THE 2021/2022 BUDGET

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer which provided an update on the developing budget for 2021/22.

The Chief Finance Officer introduced the report and explained that the Budget could be considered as expected and that there would be a funding shortfall of £2 million over 2021/22 and a total of £9 million over the next five years. The Chief Finance Officer also drew attention to the difficulties the Council's Leisure Operator GLL had faced over recent months and the difficulties also faced by the Council's commercial tenants. She continued that the Budget for 2021/22 was based on a £5 uplift in Council Tax for a Band D property, but highlighted that savings in office supplies and working arrangements, owing to the move to working from home, had saved an approximate £300,000.

Councillor Morris drew attention to the fact that many of the variables for the Budget were still to be confirmed by the Government and that whilst changes to the New Homes Bonus had been deferred for a further year, the Budget needed to be based on a worst-case scenario. He added that recent calculations estimated the savings generated because of the transfer to Publica in 2017 were now around £8 million and, given the current

national financial climate, considered the £5 precept increase was correct and one that should be supported by Council.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

22. COUNCIL PRIORITIES AND SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020-21 QUARTER TWO

The Committee considered the report which provided details of the Council's progress towards achieving its aims and priorities set out in the Council Plan 2020-2024, and service performance during Q2.

Councillor Fenton questioned whether it was yet possible to calculate the total cost of the impact of Covid-19 on the Council. In response, the Chief Finance Officer explained that the Council was constantly being required to readjust its expectations and further information was required regarding how the Council's commercial input had fared before any suitable calculations could be undertaken.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Finance Officer for her attendance and continued efforts during the current situation.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

23. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2020/2021

The Committee was provided with an update on its work programme for 2020/21.

The Chairman advised that with regard to Bulk Waste Charges as outlined in paragraph 2.6 of the report, this would be considered at either the February or April 2021 Committee meeting.

The Chairman also advised that the Flood Prevention, Drainage and Sewerage Issues item was expected at the February 2021 Committee meeting alongside the Ubico Budget and Business Plan. He added that the Climate Change Manager would produce a summary from the Climate Action Working Group meeting that had taken place on 10 December 2020 and which would be circulated to all Members in advance of its presentation to Council in February 2021.

Councillors Mills requested the Group to be mindful of the Oxfordshire/Cambridgeshire Arc Work that was continuing.

Councillor McBride requested that he be included in invitations to future meetings of the Climate Action Working Group.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

24. CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services, which gave members the opportunity to comment on the Cabinet Work Programme published on 17 November 2020.

25. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

There were none.

The Chairman thanked all present for their attendance and closed the meeting.

The meeting closed at 4.20 pm

CHAIRMAN