

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the  
**Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee**  
held via video conferencing at 2 pm on **Wednesday 7 October 2020**

### PRESENT

Councillors: Derek Cotterill (Chairman); Alaa Al-Yousuf, Julian Cooper, Maxine Crossland, Harry Eaglestone, Duncan Enright, Richard Langridge, Liz Leffman, Dan Levy, Martin McBride, Harry St John and Geoff Saul.

Also in Attendance: Councillors Andy Graham and Toby Morris

Officers: Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer and Deputy Chief Executive); Frank Wilson (Group Director – Finance); Phil Martin (Group Manager, Business Support Services); Andrew Sherbourne (Accounting Technician); Keith Butler (Head of Democratic Services); and Amy Bridgewater-Carnall (Senior Strategic Support Officer)

#### 11. START TIME OF MEETINGS

At the request of the Chairman, the Committee considered an urgent item which invited it to consider the start time for its meetings for the remainder of 2020/2021.

It was noted that concerns had been raised by some Councillors that the staggered collection times brought in by primary schools since the Covid-19 outbreak, was making it difficult to attend 2pm meetings.

The Chairman proposed that the start time be moved to 12:30pm for the remainder of the year and this was seconded and agreed by Members.

**RESOLVED:** That the start time of meetings be amended to 12.30pm until the end of the municipal year.

#### 12. MINUTES

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8 July 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### 13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Alex Postan, and the following temporary appointments were reported –

Councillor Martin McBride for Councillor Gill Hill

Councillor Duncan Enright for Councillor Rosa Bolger.

#### 14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

#### 15. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

There were no requests received.

#### 16. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2020-2021

The Committee considered the previously circulated report of the Head of Democratic Services, which invited it to consider its Work Programme for the remainder of 2020/2021.

Questions and comments from Members on the work programme included:

- Introduction of Electric Vehicle Charging Points in Council Car Parks - Officers advised that information was needed from the Distribution Network Operator and had been further delayed by the impact of Covid-19 and lockdown. Members noted that officers were investigating changing supplier
- Treasury Management Activity and Performance – Councillor Al-Yousuf reminded Members that the Environmental, Government and Social issues relating to Investment Principles had been discussed prior to Covid-19. He hoped to see a paragraph indicating compliance in the quarterly reports.
- Budget – Councillor Cooper felt that large amendments to the Budget should be passed through the Committee before agreement. Officers reminded him that these went to Council for full agreement. The Chief Finance Officer explained that there would be movement in the budget after the December scrutiny meeting because details on income were awaited and could not be finalised until the New Year.
- Medium Term Financial Strategy – Councillor Langridge queried if this needed an annual refresh following the impact of Covid-19. Councillor St John asked if consideration of the MTFS should be brought forward but was advised that, given the lateness of the government finance settlement, this would need to be a post-Christmas report.
- Ubico Business Plan – The Chairman queried if the committee should pass this item to the Environment O&S committee and the relevant Chair and Vice Chair agreed. Councillor Enright felt that this committee still had a need to scrutinise costs.
- Building Control Targets – Officers advised that there had been a reduced number of applications for the first two months of the Covid crisis, however since then applications had picked up to previous monthly totals. This has led to a reduced income for the service, however, the Business Manager had discussed this with the Section 151 Officer and had given a guide to what income target is likely to be achieved.

**RESOLVED:** That (i) progress on the 2019/20 work programme be noted; and (ii) the proposed 2020/21 work programme be approved, subject to the comments and amendments referred to above.

## 17. 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 22 September 2020.

Questions and comments from Members on the Cabinet work programme included:

- Approval of Investment Strategy for the recovery of West Oxfordshire – Councillor Langridge queried if FMOS would be looking at this. Frank Wilson advised that the Cabinet Advisory Group had considered it and it had been circulated to all Members as part of the recently held workshop. The strategy would be submitted to Cabinet then Council so all Members would have the opportunity to consider it.
- Consideration of principles for a review of the Tourism Service – Councillor Cotterill expressed his interest in this item, with particular interest in the Visitor Information Centre in Burford.

**RESOLVED:** That the contents of the Cabinet Work Programme published on 22 September 2020 be noted.

## 18. COUNCIL PRIORITIES AND SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020-21 QUARTER ONE

The Committee received and considered the report of the Chief Executive, 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 Quarter One.

Comments and queries from Councillors included:

- Councillor Enright was pleased with the new reporting format and thanked officers for the revised version. He queried how widely the information was shared and officers advised that each scrutiny committee had received a copy for comment. The report was also published to the public on the website.
- It was noted that some of the indicators on the graphs dropped dramatically for WODC compared to the other authorities. Officers explained that this was due to the other authorities being in a different reporting period and their latest figures had not been included.
- It was clarified that the Draft Affordable Housing SPD had been consulted on over the summer and a revised draft was due to be consulted on in the Autumn.
- Councillor Langridge highlighted the red indicator relating to the website. It was noted that the website had improved and further work was ongoing to make it a more transactional tool rather than solely an information provision tool.
- With regard to the number of households living in emergency accommodation, the Committee noted that this matter sat in the remit of the Economic & Social O&S Committee.
- Councillor Crossland expressed her disappointment in a recent encounter using the website. She had submitted a request ten days ago and this had received no response.

Having considered the report and following debate, the Committee

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

#### 19. TREASURY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY AND PERFORMANCE 2020/21

The Committee received and considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer, which advised it of treasury management activity and the performance of internal and external fund managers for the period 1 April 2020 – 31 August 2020.

The Chief Finance Officer, Elizabeth Griffiths outlined the report and was joined by Accounting Technician, Andrew Sherbourne.

Members were advised that given the ongoing scale of the capital programme it was clear that the Council would need to borrow externally or recall pooled investment funds. Arlingclose had advised that nothing needed to be recalled immediately but had advised that the investments continue to be monitored closely. It was noted that there would be a large cash shortfall by the end of the financial year due to funding large capital expenditure in 19/20 and 20/21.

Officers advised that the Council would need to look at borrowing £15m before the end of the year to cover the fall in cash flow.

The Chairman reminded Members that the Council had been fortunate to date to remain debt free and noted the high figure needed.

Members asked a number of queries including whether any investments would be recalled, who the Council may borrow from and the status of the Icelandic investments.

Officers advised that they would continue to be guided by the Council's Treasury Management advisors with regard to the existing investments and that a final dividend from Kaupthing, Singer and Friedlander was expected but any sums were likely to be insignificant now

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Morris explained that this was timing issue with regard to borrowing externally and reminded Members that it was July 2016 when the Council had first borrowed 'internally'.

Councillor Leffman expressed her support for the recommendation and concurred with the comments made by Councillor Morris. She felt that it was a sensible time to borrow when the rates were low.

Having considered the report and having received clarification from officers, the Committee

**RESOLVED:** That treasury management and the performance of in-house and external Pooled Funds' activity for the period 1 April 2020 – 31 August 2020 be noted.

20. MOTION: LIVE STREAMING OF COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Committee received and considered the report of the Group Manager, Business Support Services, which asked that consideration be given to the motion as set out below, and comments or a recommendation be made to Council.

At the Council meeting on 23 October 2019, the following was proposed by Councillor Jake Acock and seconded by Councillor Andy Graham:

*“One of the ethos of this council is to be inclusive; not exclusive. We want to welcome people in and get more and more active with local government. This council recognises we are living in an age of technology that can be used to keep in touch, improve communications and change peoples lives for the better. Therefore, in order to improve our communications, we charge that every council and committee meeting is filmed and recorded, then placed on the West Oxfordshire District Council website for West Oxfordshire residents to view and listen to our meetings. Across the country from Manchester, Wandsworth and Bath, council meetings are recorded. Therefore, this council charges that we will now record and stream live all of our council meetings and committee meetings”*

It was resolved at the meeting that the motion would stand referred without discussion to the Finance & Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and a copy of the minutes was attached as an appendix to the report.

Council further considered the matter at its meeting on 22 January 2020 and resolved:

- (a) That further study was required on the various methods of recording available, location options and cost of installation;
- (b) That the meetings rooms to be included in the evidence gathering should be Committee Rooms 1 & 2 and the Council Chamber, and that feedback should be sought from other Councils which had installed systems, or were due to do so; and
- (c) That the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee be requested to consider the costings and other information prior to further consideration by the Council.

The report noted that this work had been delayed as a consequence of the Coronavirus pandemic, including the cancellation of some meetings earlier in the year.

The report outlined a number of options for Councillors to consider which varied in the location that the equipment could be installed in, the type and functionality of the units and whether there were individual or dual units provided.

The indicative, one off costs for each option were broken down and explained in section 6 of the report and varied in value from £92,189 to £270,347. However, there were also maintenance and hosting costs to be taken into account. The report also highlighted that there was not any funding available in existing budgets and any decision would therefore be subject to the budgetary process.

The Group Manager, Business Support Services, Phil Martin, introduced the report and reminded Members of the current legislation relating to virtual meetings that was only in place until May 2021. He also advised that across the Publica partnership, Forest of Dean District

Council had introduced webcasting of its Council and Planning Committee meetings in May 2018; Cheltenham Borough Council introduced webcasting from its Council Chamber only, in October 2019; and Cotswold District Council had recently approved the award of a contract for the purchase and implementation of a hybrid web casting solution.

There were differing opinions across the Committee with some feeling that the costs described were too high to consider at the moment, whereas others supported the investment as it was important to ensure the public could continue to participate in decision making.

It was noted that Council meetings were operating in a different environment compared to when the motion was originally considered and the Webex solution was satisfactory for the time being.

In response to a query from Councillor Leffman, Mr Martin explained that any contract would need to be subject to an open tender process and each authority was operating on differing timelines.

Councillor Langridge proposed that the motion should be deferred for a twelve month period because there were other financial priorities to consider at the present time. This was seconded by Councillor McBride.

Councillor Al-Yousuf suggested that the Committee amend the proposal to include reference to Option 3 which would help give officers a steer as to the style and location of equipment preferred. It was broadly supported that Committee Room 1 was a more suitable location for the equipment as the costs were lower and there could be potential for hiring out the space in the future.

As the proposer of the existing motion, Councillor Langridge did not feel that the officer time involved in supporting Option 3 could be justified and did not want to amend his recommendation.

The Committee therefore

**RECOMMENDED:** That the motion be deferred for twelve months because there were other financial priorities to consider at the present time.

## 21. MOTION: ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

The Committee received and considered the report of the Group Manager, Business Support Services, which asked that consideration be given to the motion as set out below, and comments or a recommendation be made to Council.

At the Council meeting on 22 January 2020, the following was proposed by Councillor Jake Acock and seconded by Councillor Andy Graham:

*“West Oxfordshire District Council places great importance upon communications with councillors, whether that be sending out agendas for meetings or through regular email updates.*

*West Oxfordshire District Council also places great importance upon environmental credentials and cost-effective projects.*

*Therefore, this council resolves that we will no longer send paper copies of communications including agendas for all meetings and will issue every councillor with an iPad for council business.*

*This will allow the council to:*

- a) have stronger greener credentials and help to tackle the climate crisis.*
- b) be more cost and staff efficient.*

c) be more GDPR friendly.

*This council resolves that this will be added to the 2020 budget and that all councillors will be issued with an iPad by May 2020”.*

It was resolved at the meeting that the motion would stand referred without discussion to the Finance & Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee. A copy of the minutes from the Council meeting was attached as an appendix to the report.

The report noted that this work had been delayed as a consequence of the Coronavirus pandemic, including the cancellation of some meetings earlier in the year.

Officers had investigated the option of providing Ipads to all Councillors and the cost implications associated with this were detailed in section 3 of the report. Additional costs were also detailed which needed consideration including the provision of keyboards, screen covers, implementation costs and ICT support time.

Members noted that there was not any funding available for this project and should the Council choose to proceed, it would need to be subject to the budgetary process.

Some Members felt that the move to electronic documents was a positive one and many had experience of this way of working through their town councils. However, some Members also felt that it may not be a sensible use of public money at this time.

Councillor Langridge proposed that Council be advised that the Committee did not feel the motion should be pursued at this time. This was seconded by Councillor St John.

**RECOMMENDED:** That the motion is not pursued at the present time.

## 22. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

The Chairman confirmed that he had not received notice of any questions prior to the meeting and none were raised under the agenda item.

There were no further questions and the Chairman thanked Members and Officers for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 4:10 pm

Chairman