

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

At the Meeting of the
WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen,
Witney, on Wednesday 29 April 2015 at 2.00 pm.

PRESENT

Councillors: N A MacRae MBE (Chairman), Mrs M J Crossland (Vice Chairman), Mrs J C Baker, M A Barrett, A C Beaney, R J M Bishop, M R Booty, M Brennan, Mrs L C Carter, Mrs L J Chapman, A S Coles, N G Colston, J C Cooper, D A Cotterill, C Cottrell-Dormer, R A Courts, H G Davies, P J G Dorward, Mrs J M Doughty, H B Eaglestone, P Emery, D S T Enright, Mrs E H N Fenton, S J Good, J Haine, P J Handley, H J Howard, P D Kelland, R A Langridge, Ms E P R Leffman, Mrs L E C Little, R D J McFarlane, J F Mills, T J Morris, B J Norton, T N Owen, G Saul and B J Woodruff.

58. MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 25 February 2015, copies of which had been circulated, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

59. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs E M Coles, Mr A D Harvey, Mr E H James, Dr E M E Poskitt, Mr A H K Postan, Mr W D Robinson and Mr T B Simcox

60. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from members or officers.

61. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS

61.1 Witney Town Councillor Chrissie Curry

The Chairman reported of the recent death of Witney Town Councillor Chrissie Curry. Mr MacRae highlighted that she had been a very active member of the local community and a member of Witney Town Council including being Town Mayor from 2006-2008.

Mr MacRae advised that a service of thanksgiving would be held on Monday 18 May 2015 and details had been circulated to all councillors.

Those present then stood in silence in memory of Mrs Curry.

61.2 Retiring Members

Councillor Hywel Davies

Mr Davies had represented Charlbury and Finstock since May 2011. Throughout his term of office Mr Davies had served on the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Audit and General Purposes Committee. In 2012 he was appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, holding that position to date.

Mr Davies represented the Council on the County Council Pension Fund Committee, the Charlbury Conservation Area Advisory Committee, the Charlbury Motor Fire Brigade Trust, the Cotswold and Malverns Transport Partnership and the Wychwood Project Board.

Councillor Mark Booty

Mr Booty was elected as representative for Bampton and Clanfield in May 2003 and served on numerous committees, including Cabinet and had been Deputy Leader of the Council since 2012.

Councillor Eve Coles

Mrs Coles joined the Council in May 1994 and represented Chipping Norton since that time.

She was initially appointed to the Public Health Committee and the Recreation Committee, serving on both these and their successor bodies, the Environment and Leisure and Tourism Committees until the introduction of the Cabinet system in 2001.

Reflecting her interest in Environmental issues, Mrs Coles joined the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and has continued to make a valuable contribution to its work to the present date.

Mrs Coles was also appointed to serve on the General Purposes Committee and has also served on the Human Resources Committee, the Audit and General Purposes Committee, the Miscellaneous Licensing Committee and a variety of Working Groups.

61.3 Councillor Mrs Laetisia Carter

The Chairman welcomed Mrs Carter to her first meeting of the council since the birth of her daughter in January.

62. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

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

63. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND COUNCIL COMMITTEES

The Council considered the report of the Chief Executive setting out recommendations made by the Cabinet and the Council's Committees from 11 March to 16 April 2015.

The recommendations were proposed by Mr Norton and seconded by Mr Booty and on being put to the vote were carried.

RESOLVED: that the recommendations made by the Cabinet and the Council's Committees from 11 March to 16 April 2015 be approved in relation to:

- (a) Business Rate Relief (Minute No. CT/117/2014/2015);
- (b) Business Rate Transitional Relief (Minute No. CT/118/2014/2015); and
- (c) Mobile Homes Site Licence Fees Policy (Minute No. A&GP/34/2014/2015)

64. REPORTS OF THE CABINET AND THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES

The reports of the meetings of the Cabinet and the Council's Committees held between 11 March and 16 April 2015 were received:

64.1 Open Space Grass Cutting (Minute No. ENV/48/2014/2015)

Mr Enright asked if there was any progress in respect of examining arrangements for grass cutting arrangements following the transfer of services to UBICO.

Mr Norton responded that a written response would be provided to Mr Enright as the relevant portfolio holder, Mr Harvey, was not at the meeting.

64.2 Car Park Strategy
(Minute No. ENV/48/2014/2015)

Mr Enright sought an update regarding the strategy and asked when the consultation document would be available and whether it would cover on and off street provision.

Mr Norton advised that the draft strategy was being prepared and would be presented to members in due course.

64.3 Appointments to Outside Bodies – 2020 Board
(Minute No. FMOS/62/2014/2015)

Mr Enright referred to the on-going 2020 project and asked if there would be wider consultation and workshop sessions with members.

Mr Norton indicated that further details would be forthcoming after the elections and this would include details of the consultation process.

64.4 2020 Vision – Staffing Implications
(Minute No. HR/46/2014/2015)

Mr Enright referred to the transfer of services to UBICO and asked how many staff were agency staff and the number that were earning less than the living wage.

Mrs Chapman, Chairman of the Human Resources Committee, indicated that Mr Enright could have asked the question at the Human Resources meeting when the relevant officers were present. Mrs Chapman advised that a written response would need to be provided. Mr Norton suggested that notice of such questions would be beneficial in the future.

65. NOTION OF MOTION – POST OFFICE BRANCHES

The following motion had been received in the names of Ms E P R Leffman and Mr J C Cooper, namely:

"This council supports the Government's strategy for maintaining post office branches that are within 3 miles of 99% of the population. However, it also notes that in West Oxfordshire, this strategy has resulted in the down-grading of a number of rural branches, so that for a full range of services residents have to travel to the main centres of population, which are often considerably more than 3 miles away.

This council therefore resolves to write to the Minister with responsibility for Post Offices in the new government, outlining the difficulties that rural communities face when their Post Offices are closed or downgraded, and requesting a review of this policy.

Further, Council resolves that, in relation to the Post Office in Charlbury, it will request the Post Office to reconsider its plan to downgrade and relocate the service, and to conduct research into the needs of the local community before taking further action"

Ms Leffman, in moving the motion, advised that she had undertaken a lot of research on the matter. Ms Leffman acknowledged the post office had been subject to significant budget cuts and the post office counters were now a separate service.

Ms Leffman advised that the strategy for post office services was to retain the existing number of branches. As a consequence of budget reductions this meant an alternative approach was being undertaken by moving services in to existing retail outlets rather than maintaining stand-alone branches. Ms Leffman acknowledged that this could work where there was a large retailer but it was sometimes difficult to find suitable locations in smaller communities.

Ms Leffman referred to the situation in Charlbury where it was proving difficult to find a suitable retail outlet and as a consequence the post office service, whilst being retained,

could be downgraded and fewer facilities offered. Ms Leffman highlighted concern raised by a Commons Select Committee about the potential for withdrawal of services such as international parcels, limits on cash transactions and withdrawal of DVLA services.

Ms Leffman indicated that the motion, whilst making reference to Charlbury, was designed to highlight wider issues as they could impact on other communities in the district. Ms Leffman emphasised the importance of community facilities and need for sustainable services in rural areas.

Ms Leffman summarised her motion and highlighted that it was unlikely that the current facility could be retained in its current form in Charlbury as it was not sustainable. It was advised that there was to be a four week consultation period but this may be too late as it was likely to be on a preferred option. Ms Leffman suggested that the motion gave an opportunity for the council to seek a review of the policy by being proactive at this stage.

Mr Cooper seconded the motion and reserved the right to speak later in the debate if necessary.

Mr Norton indicated that his group would support the motion and it was right that representation be made at this stage. Mr Norton highlighted that the council had been proactive in responding to changes in post office services at other sites in the past.

Mr Norton suggested that it was a particular issue for larger villages as in many smaller communities the post office often helped maintain the village shop. Mr Norton advised that the motion was in line with the council's aims and values and so was happy to support it.

Mr Handley expressed his support and sympathised with the situation in Charlbury. Mr Handley outlined that post offices were often the hub of many communities and provided a vital service for many, including the elderly, in those areas.

Mr Langridge, Portfolio Holder for Local Economy, Communities and Culture, advised that the council had a good record in protecting local services. Mr Langridge indicated that services had been protected elsewhere and in some cases extended hours for counter services had been achieved. Mr Langridge emphasised the need for local people to support facilities in their areas and any degradation of service was not acceptable.

Mr Enright supported the approach of concentrating on maintaining a range of services as this had proved successful elsewhere. Mr Enright concurred with other speakers that significant local support was important when dealing with such issues. Mr Enright advised that his group would support the motion.

Mr Davies, in supporting the motion, suggested that it was important that in any response an alternative solution was provided. Mr Davies emphasised the need for local people to help shape their own communities. Mr Davies agreed that any degradation of service could impact on viability and highlighted the success of the shop and post office at Finstock.

Mr Booty suggested that often an innovative approach was needed and cited a recent planning decision to allow an extension to a facility in Clanfield that would provide a post office alongside a bistro. Mr Booty suggested that local facilities could be tailored to the needs and nature of individual communities.

Ms Leffman thanked members for their support and highlighted a similar situation at Steeple Claydon in Buckinghamshire where local people raised a petition and saved their post office service. Ms Leffman advised that a petition had been started in Charlbury.

Ms Leffman acknowledged the need for innovation but suggested this may not be feasible in many cases.

On being put to the vote the proposition

WAS CARRIED

66. SEALING OF DOCUMENTS

The Council received and noted the report of the Chief Executive which gave details of documents numbered 11066 to 11092 sealed since the last meeting.

67. CHAIRMAN'S CLOSING REMARKS

The Chairman wished those members seeking re-election good luck at the forthcoming elections.

The meeting closed at 2.35pm

CHAIRMAN