

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the
WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen,
Witney, on Wednesday 21 October 2015 at 2.00 pm.

PRESENT

Councillors: N A MacRae MBE (Chairman), Mrs M J Crossland (Vice Chairman), A J Adams, Mrs J C Baker, A C Beaney, R J M Bishop, M Brennan, Mrs L C Carter, A S Coles, N G Colston, J C Cooper, D A Cotterill, C Cottrell-Dormer, R A Courts, C G Dingwall, P J G Dorward, D S T Enright, Mrs E H N Fenton, E J Fenton, S J Good, A M Graham, J Haine, P J Handley, A D Harvey, Miss G R Hill, H J Howard, E H James, 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, Sir Barry Norton, T N Owen, Dr E M E Poskitt, A H K Postan, Mrs C E Reynolds, W D Robinson, G Saul, T B Simcox and G H L Wall.

32. MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 2 September 2015, copies of which had been circulated, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

33. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from M A Barrett, Mrs L J Chapman, Mrs J M Doughty, H B Eaglestone, P Emery and B J Woodruff.

34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chief Executive declared an interest in Agenda Item No. 8 – 2020 Vision Programme. He indicated that if there was discussion relating to the appointment of the Partnership Managing Director he would leave the meeting.

35. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS

35.1 Repatriation

The Chairman reported that the bodies of two RAF officers killed in a helicopter crash in Afghanistan had been repatriated. Flt Lts Geraint Roberts and Alan Scott were both part of the Puma helicopter force based at RAF Benson.

35.2 Reports from Councillors

Mr MacRae advised that if members had anything they wanted other councillors to be aware of, such as information from outside bodies, then they could advise the Head of Democratic Services and he would disseminate the information to members.

35.3 Chairman's Civic Dinner

The Chairman reported that the civic dinner held on 11 September had raised over £3000 for Helen and Douglas House.

35.4 Agenda Order

Mr MacRae indicated that he intended taking Agenda Item No. 12(a) – Housing of Refugees from Syria before Agenda Item No. 9.

35.5 Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) Budget Consultation

Sir Barry Norton, Leader of the Council, announced that OCC had commenced a consultation in respect of their budget proposals. The Leader of the Council advised that the information was on the OCC website and encouraged members, local councils and the public to respond.

It was clarified that consideration would be given to the consultation by Cabinet in due course.

35.6 Chipping Norton Hospital

Mr Mills, Cabinet Member for Health, advised that a public meeting was to be held later in the day at St Mary's Church, Chipping Norton as part of the consultation process on future arrangements for intermediate care at Chipping Norton Hospital.

36. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

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

37. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND COUNCIL COMMITTEES

The Council considered the report of the Chief Executive setting out recommendations made by Cabinet and the Council's Committees from 10 September to 14 October 2015.

The recommendations were proposed by The Leader of the Council and seconded by Mr Robinson.

Mr Graham referred to the recommendation relating to Budget Parameters and sought clarification for the rationale of increasing fees and charges by 2% where they were discretionary and the market would bear the increase. Mr Langridge, Cabinet Member for Resources, advised that it reflected the agreed Medium Term Financial Strategy and fees would be assessed to see if an increase was appropriate.

Mr Graham asked about the budget consultation process. Mr Langridge responded that there was full consultation including consideration of the draft budget by all the overview and scrutiny committees.

On being put to the vote the proposition was carried.

RESOLVED: that the recommendations made by the Cabinet and the Council's Committees from 10 September to 14 October 2015 be approved in relation to:

(a) Budget Parameters 2016/2017 (Minute No. CT/41/2015/2016)

(b) Gambling Act 2005 – Review of Gambling Policy Statement (Minute No. LIC/9/2015/2016)

(c) Contract Procedure Rules (Minute No. CT/52/2015/2016)

(d) Carterton Leisure Centre – Installation of Solar Panels (Minute No. CT/60/2015/2016)

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

The reports of the meetings of the Cabinet and the Council's Committees held between 10 September and 14 October 2015 were received:

38.1 Quality of Care in Hospitals
(Minute No. E&S/33/2015/2016)

Mr Morris referred to recent press coverage regarding Witney Hospital and asked for an update on the current position.

Mr Mills, Cabinet Member for Health, advised that following the Economic and Social Overview & Scrutiny meeting Oxford Health were contacted encouraging them to make a public statement to allay the understandable fears that had been expressed about the situation. In response Oxford Health had indicated that their position was clear and in the public domain so a further statement was not needed.

Mr Mills referred members to the second paragraph of on Page 5 of the Economic and Social minutes which outlined the position regarding staff that had left during the consultation and not as a result of the decisions that had been made.

As a result of the press coverage Oxford Health had been contacted again to provide clarification of the current situation and a response was awaited.

38.2 Children's Centres

(Minute No. E&S/37/2015/2016)

Mr Cooper asked about the financial implications, including pay back of set up costs, if the new model for children's centres was implemented. Mr Cooper also sought clarification from Mr Handley, Chairman of Economic and Social O&S Committee, on his position on the matter particularly as he was also a county councillor.

Mr Handley responded that full details of the proposals were awaited and he would respond outside of the meeting when full information was available. Mr Enright reminded members that the overview and scrutiny committee was scheduled to consider the consultation at the November meeting.

38.3 Planning Application No. 14/02063/OUT – Land East of Woodstock, Oxford Road, Woodstock

(Minute No. DC/8/2015/2016)

Mr Cooper expressed his thanks to the committee for the decision and that the refusal was based on sound policy reasons. Mr Cooper suggested the proposal would have changed Woodstock and encouraged the council to work with Blenheim Estates to identify alternative funding for repairs to the palace.

The Leader of the Council indicated that the council acknowledged the importance of Blenheim to the district in economic and tourism terms and the problems of maintaining the palace. The Leader of the Council advised that he would work with Blenheim to try and identify external funding options and a meeting had been arranged for early November to progress this.

Dr Poskitt indicated that she had not taken part in the consideration of the application because she had a disclosable pecuniary interest but, following advice from officers, she was now making a statement on the matter.

Dr Poskitt, as Mayor of Woodstock, thanked officers for their hard work in preparing the report and the Leader of the Council for his commitment to work with Blenheim. Dr Poskitt highlighted that Blenheim Estates owned land in a number of communities in the area and it was acknowledged that the relationship between those communities and the estate had been positive to date. Dr Poskitt indicated that whilst appropriate development was acceptable it was important that the relationship was not changed due to large scale growth.

Mr Enright emphasised the importance of communities identifying their own priorities for growth and being involved in the decision making process. Mr Enright highlighted issues in respect of conflicting demands from other districts and that development in West Oxfordshire should not be driven by that.

Mr Dingwall expressed support for exploring alternative finance options and acknowledged the positive benefits that Blenheim had on the district.

Mr Robinson reminded members that decisions on any planning application should be based on policy as this was crucial particularly when defending refusals at appeal.

38.4 Affordable Housing Working Party
(Minute No. FMOS/36/2015/2016)

Mr Graham asked if there had been any progress in convening a meeting of the working party. Mr Morris, Chairman of the Finance and Management O&S Committee, acknowledged that it had originally been hoped to convene a meeting in September/October. It was advised that a lot of information was still awaited, including details of possible legislative changes, and a meeting would be called when that was available.

38.5 2020 Vision Programme
(Minute No. FMOS/38/2015/2016)

Ms Leffman sought an update regarding the current position of Cheltenham BC in respect of the 2020 programme. The Leader of the Council advised that the report had been approved by their Council with cross party support.

39. 2020 VISION PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the report of Frank Wilson, Strategic Director, regarding the 2020 Vision Programme. It was noted that Cabinet had considered the report at the meeting held on 14 October 2015 and had supported the recommendations contained in the report.

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and outlined that the other partner authorities were considering the matter and they had supported the proposals. The recommendations of Cabinet were detailed and The Leader of the Council proposed acceptance subject to recommendation i (v) being amended to read:

'to agree to appoint the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the 2020 Vision Programme as this Council's members of the 2020 Vision Joint Committee'

The Leader of the Council explained that the programme would deliver savings and was an integral part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The new organisation would preserve service provision and generate savings and it was advised that other local authorities were expressing an interest in the model being proposed.

Mr Dingwall seconded the proposal and reserved the right to speak later in the debate.

Mr Enright welcomed the proposals and highlighted the detailed debate that had been held at the Cabinet meeting. Mr Enright emphasised the importance of the district retaining its identity, the need to continue working relationships with other Oxfordshire authorities and that staff were supported through the process. Mr Enright indicated that controls were in place to ensure that individual authorities were not subsidising other partners.

Mr Enright highlighted the importance of consultation with trade unions and staff representative bodies and the role of scrutiny in reviewing progress and ensuring that the project was delivering the expected outcomes. Mr Enright advised that the Labour Group would be supporting the recommendations.

Mr Cotterill highlighted the changing relationship the town and parish councils have with the county and district councils. Mr Cotterill suggested that it was important that local councils were kept advised of progress with the project and links with local communities

were retained. The Leader of the Council gave a commitment to liaise and keep local communities advised of progress.

Mr Handley, in supporting the proposals, emphasised the need to involve all councillors as it was important that there was wide support so that the project would be successful. Mr Handley also asked that plain English be used, if possible, so it was understandable to all.

Mr Dingwall, in response to Mr Enright, gave an assurance that it was important that the proposals were fully scrutinised. Mr Dingwall highlighted that 2020 was an extension of existing shared services with more clearly defined governance arrangements. Mr Dingwall advised it was the way forward for the council and expressed the hope that it would be supported by councillors.

The Leader of the Council advised that any matters that needed decision would be taken through the democratic process. The Leader of the Council agreed that retaining the sovereignty of the district council was paramount and it was important to build on the past success of the council.

The Leader of the Council highlighted that the Oxfordshire devolution application was at an early stage and it was considered that the 2020 programme would work alongside other joint working initiatives.

On being put to the vote the proposition was unanimously carried.

RESOLVED:

- (a) To enter into the Shared Services Partnership Structure described in Appendix A of the Annex to the report;
- (b) To determine an appropriate consequential revised Senior Management Structure for the Council, prior to the Joint Committee becoming operational;
- (c) To adopt the Commissioning Strategy given at Appendix B to the Annex to the report;
- (d) To approve the Business Case shown at Appendix C to the Annex to the report;
- (e) To note the financial implications, costs and benefits shown in Section 13 of the Annex to the report;
- (f) To agree to the establishment of the 2020 Vision Joint Committee in accordance with Sections 101 and 102 of the Local Government Act 1972, Section 9EB of the Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Authorities (Arrangement for the Discharge of Functions) (England) Regulations 2012, with the draft Constitution as given in Appendix D to the Annex to the report;
- (g) To authorise the Strategic Director (Resources), in consultation with the Leader and the Monitoring Officer to finalise and complete the Inter Authority Agreement (including the Constitution) and other documentation on terms to be approved by the Joint Head of Legal and Property Services and to take all necessary steps for the 2020 Vision Joint Committee to be operational by April 2016;
- (h) To agree that the existing Member Governance Board arrangements will continue until the 2020 Vision Joint Committee is created;
- (i) Upon the establishment of the 2020 Vision Joint Committee:
 - (i) to authorise the delegation to the 2020 Vision Joint Committee of this Council's functions as described in the Constitution for the 2020 Vision Joint Committee;
 - (ii) to agree to appoint Forest of Dean District Council as Administering Authority to provide administration support to the Joint Committee;

- (iii) to agree to appoint Cotswold District Council as the Accountable Body to provide financial support to the Joint Committee and enter into any contracts required on behalf of the Joint Committee;
- (iv) to agree to appoint the following Councils for the following functions of the Joint Committee:
 - Forest of Dean - Monitoring Officer
 - Cotswold - S151 Finance Officer
 - Forest of Dean - Clerk to the Joint Committee; and
- (v) to agree to appoint the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the 2020 Vision Programme as this Council's members of the 2020 Vision Joint Committee;
- (j) To confirm the appointment of David Neudegg as the Partnership Managing Director, effective from 1 November 2015, with a salary of £125,000 pa plus local benefits;
- (k) To amend Section 5 of the Pay Policy Statement to incorporate the position of Partnership Managing Director with a spot salary of £125,000 pa;
- (l) Pursuant to Section 113 of the Local Government Act 1972, to make available to the Joint Committee such staff as are required by the Joint Committee to fulfil the functions delegated to it;
- (m) To receive a report and business case during 2016 on the establishment of a local authority company for the delivery of the functions of the 2020 Partnership, or alternatively the continuation of the Joint Committee; and
- (n) To authorise the Head of Democratic Services to make any consequential amendments to the Council's Constitution.

40. HOUSING OF REFUGEES FROM SYRIA

The Leader of the Council presented the report and advised that it had been brought forward as an additional item as decisions were needed before the next Council meeting. It was explained that guidance from government was coming forward slowly and outlined the background to the recommendations.

The Leader of the Council advised that a steering group consisting of officers and relevant members had been established to co-ordinate the council response. It was emphasised that the paper provided a way to progress the matter and explained the financial implications and support package that would be needed to help refugee families.

The Leader of the Council proposed the recommendations and this was seconded by Mr Courts who reserved the right to speak later in the debate.

Ms Leffman, in supporting the proposal, advised that a recent public meeting in Charlbury had been attended by over 100 people who had expressed concern regarding the refugee situation including those currently in mainland Europe. Ms Leffman indicated that there was a clear determination to help refugees including members of the public offering accommodation.

Ms Leffman suggested that whilst the proposal was positive the council should aim to do more if possible. It was indicated that taking 20,000 refugees nationally over five years was not enough and more could be done.

Mr Cooper indicated that the refugee problem was not limited to Syria and refugees in mainland Europe also needed help. Mr Cooper highlighted that there was spare accommodation in the district and gave empty housing at RAF Brize Norton as an

example. Mr Cooper suggested that a more imaginative approach could be taken to address the problem.

Mr Cooper advised that the UK had a good record on such issues and there was an opportunity to help more than six families. Mr Cooper indicated that the recommendation did not go far enough and he would vote against it.

Mr Graham thanked the Leader of the Council for bringing the paper to council and emphasised the need to progress the matters as quickly as possible. Mr Graham advised that whilst he had reservations he would be supporting the recommendations as a starting point and expressed the hope that more could be done in the future.

Mr Langridge indicated that the council had a moral duty to help if possible. Mr Langridge emphasised the need to support genuine refugees rather than economic migrants and the proposed approach was sensible. Mr Langridge suggested that a balance with the needs of existing residents was important.

Mr Handley suggested it was a good initiative and it was important that the support package was in place in advance. It was indicated that once a process was in place then it may be possible to take more refugees.

Mr Handley questioned the practicality of using RAF housing at Brize Norton as there could be a number of issues such as security. Mr Handley advised that there were a lot of empty properties in private ownership and that a multi-agency approach was needed to deliver the necessary support to refugee families.

Mr Morris expressed his support and asked if it would be possible to accommodate more families in the future.

Dr Poskitt emphasised the importance of ensuring that families were placed near to each other so that they could support each other. Dr Poskitt echoed the views of others that hopefully more families could be housed in the future.

Mr Enright expressed support for the recommendations as a starting point and that it demonstrated the strength of the district in such situations. Mr Coles concurred and that once they were settled the families would contribute to the district.

Mr McFarlane indicated there was a lot of support from residents and the integrated response was the right way forward and helping six families was a positive start.

Mr Howard referred to the potential for refugees from the UK Sovereign Base Area in Cyprus needing support which could increase the pressure on services. Mr Howard suggested that if all local authorities matched the commitment made in West Oxfordshire a significant number of refugees will be helped.

Mr Kelland suggested there were conflicting views and emphasised the need to ensure that existing residents were not disadvantaged. Mr Kelland expressed support for the initial commitment to six families and the support to help them integrate.

Mr Courts suggested that the council had a moral obligation and emphasised that the report made it clear this was an initial commitment. Mr Courts acknowledged the shortage of housing in the district and the need to be cognisant of the needs of existing residents. Mr Courts indicated that it was positive that private landlords had come forward but the government's preference was to use social housing providers.

Mr Courts thanked the public for their offers of help but highlighted that the requirement was for five years, the accommodation needed to be self-contained and it was important that families were not isolated and unable to access services and public transport. Mr

Courts emphasised that the council was being proactive on this matter and urged members to support the proposition.

The Leader of the Council reiterated that a support package would need to be in place and it would be interesting to see how a rural district coped with the situation.

On being put to the vote the proposition was carried.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That support be given to the making of an offer to government for six refugee families to be taken in West Oxfordshire, in three phases (December 2015; and March and May/June 2016); and
- (b) That the Head of Revenues and Housing Support be authorised, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Members for Communities and Housing and Leisure and Health, to take the necessary steps to secure the housing of those families in the period to June 2016.

41. NOTICE OF MOTION - REFUGEES

The following motion had been received in the names of Mr A M Graham and Mr G Saul namely:

‘This council thanks the Leader for his swift response in convening meetings of relevant Cabinet Members and officers to address the council’s response to the refugee crisis.

Further, council (i) in recognition of the non- adversarial and humanitarian nature of the crisis, agrees that a representative of each of the Liberal Democrat and Labour Groups be invited to attend future meetings, via the respective group leaders; and (ii) requests the Leader to include a report on the matter as a standing item on Cabinet agendas, for the duration of the emergency.’

Mr Graham suggested that it was important that as much help as possible was available to refugees and the council had already shown commitment by looking to house some families in the district.

Mr Graham indicated that it would be positive to include representatives from opposition groups in the work of the steering group and this was the intention of the motion. Mr Graham highlighted the positive work of groups helping refugees in Calais and that he had personally visited the camps there. It was suggested that other councillors could bring expertise to the work of the group and enhance its effectiveness.

Mr Graham proposed the motion and this was seconded by Mr Saul who reserved the right to speak.

The Leader of the Council advised that he was not minded to accede to the suggestion. It was suggested that the steering group had been established to deal with matters as efficiently as possible and it was emphasised that only three members were involved with the majority of work being undertaken by officers.

The Leader of the Council indicated that members would continue to be briefed on progress and any feedback from members was welcomed. It was however considered that expanding the group could make it more problematic to quickly convene meetings.

The Leader of the Council suggested it would be better to continue the process of regular briefings for members as this would be more frequent than if reports were being taken to Cabinet. It was clarified that if any further decisions were needed then they would be brought forward for consideration by members through the usual democratic process.

Ms Leffman acknowledged the need for efficiency and reiterated the wide public interest in the matter and suggested a wider forum with input from others could be beneficial. Ms Leffman indicated that other ideas could be developed and it would provide a channel for communication and feedback.

Mr Cooper welcomed the commitment to keep members updated but supported the idea of opposition members being involved in the steering group and helping with the on-going work.

Mr Coles concurred with other speakers that the knowledge and expertise of other members would be useful. Mr Coles suggested it was important that councillors worked together and the motion should be supported.

Mr Courts indicated that opposing the motion was not a rejection of offers to help. Mr Courts suggested the current constitution of the group was right and was efficient in the way it operated. Members were reminded of the role of scrutiny and individual councillors were welcome to feedback ideas but it was not appropriate to expand the group. Mr Courts reiterated the importance of disseminating information.

Mr Saul, in acknowledging that members had been kept advised of progress, expressed disappointment that other members were not more closely involved. Mr Saul suggested that even attendance as observers would be positive.

Mr Graham advised that he understood the need for efficiency but still considered that this was feasible even with a larger group. Mr Graham thanked the Leader of the Council for his work to date and this could be built on if there was discussion amongst a wider group.

Mr Graham highlighted issues with refugees in mainland Europe and that this also needed to be borne in mind as well as those coming from Syria. Mr Graham emphasised the need to make help available and prioritise accordingly. Mr Graham urged members to support the motion.

The Leader of the Council clarified that the steering group was dealing with the housing of Syrian refugees in the district only as had been requested by government. The issue of other refugees was a separate matter and the council was working with voluntary organisations that were helping in this regard.

On being put to the vote the motion

WAS LOST

42. NOTICE OF MOTION – AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The following motion had been received in the name of Mr G Saul namely:

‘In his speech to his party’s annual conference, the Prime Minister confirmed that planning laws would be changed to allow developers to fulfill their obligation to build affordable homes by offering starter homes priced at 20% below market rate in place of building affordable homes for rent or for sale through “intermediate” housing schemes such as shared ownership.

As the National Housing Federation has stated, this is likely to lead to fewer homes being built for social rent or affordable rent at a time when the extension of right to buy to housing association tenants is also likely to reduce the available stock of social housing.

In the light of the above, this Council:

- I. Confirms its support for the creation of mixed tenure developments that recognise the District’s significant need for affordable rented accommodation in contributing towards the District’s identified affordable housing needs as set out in the provisions of Policy H3 in the Council’s emerging Local Plan 2031; and

2. Requests that in promoting schemes to encourage new starter homes for sale the government should also introduce measures that encourage the building, in at least equal numbers, of a combination of (a) affordable, secure homes for rent and (b) affordable shared ownership properties in the various forms that Housing Associations have developed (e.g. *rent to buy; part buy part rent; shared equity*) so that the creation of new starter homes is not at the expense of these latter forms of social housing.'

Mr Saul, in proposing the motion, indicated that recent announcements regarding changes to the provision of affordable housing and right to buy legislation could be detrimental to the delivery of affordable units. Mr Saul suggested that existing housing stock could be squeezed and exacerbate current problems. Mr Saul acknowledged that encouraging home ownership was positive but it was difficult for many to obtain a mortgage.

Mr Saul advised that offering a wide range of tenures, including shared equity, was the best way to deliver housing in an equitable way to people. Mr Saul expressed concern that there was potential for homes to fall within the private sector/buy to let market which could lead to increased rents. It was further highlighted that right to buy changes would impact on the availability of social housing and discounted new homes would not necessarily be accessible to many buyers.

Mr Saul suggested that a rethink of the proposal may be required although it was acknowledged that more detail was needed before a meaningful debate could be undertaken. Mr Saul concluded by indicating that building homes with a variety of tenures and having clearly defined policies were paramount.

Ms Leffman seconded the motion and concurred with Mr Saul that there needed to be debate about options for housing.

The Chairman of the Council suggested that as more detail was needed it would be appropriate to refer the motion to a future Cabinet meeting.

Mr Cooper asked why it was not being referred to a scrutiny meeting. The Chief Executive clarified that Council made the decision about referral and any response would need to come back to Council. It was advised that this did not preclude the Overview & Scrutiny Committee from looking at issues separately if it so wished.

On being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That the motion be referred to a future Cabinet meeting for consideration and report back to Council.

43. NOTICE OF MOTION – BUSINESS RATES

The following motion had been received in the name of Mr G Saul namely:

'While welcoming the proposal that Councils should set their own business rates and retain 100% of the proceeds, this Council supports the Local Government Association in calling for:

- Measures to ensure that local areas with less ability to generate business rates income do not suffer as a result of these changes; and
- The power for all councils to vary business rates up as well as down in order to raise funds for vital infrastructure projects; and
- Protection of the funding of local services in November's spending review so that the financial pressures now facing local councils are not exacerbated by further spending reductions.

In addition, this Council requests:

- clarification of the “extra responsibilities” that local government will be expected to fund through business rates income; and
- details of existing grants that may be lost.’

Mr Saul thanked the Strategic Director (Resources) for providing background information on this issue and that it would be reported to the Finance and Management O&S Committee. Mr Saul acknowledged that it was early to assess the potential impact of changes on the council and further information was needed.

Mr Saul suggested the retention of business rates locally was, in principle, a good idea and may provide some flexibility for the council to help businesses and raise funding for projects. Mr Saul expressed concern at potential requirements, such as having an elected Mayor, which may be part of the process. It was further suggested that equity was needed to ensure that those areas that had strong local economies did not benefit at the expense of other areas.

Mr Saul concluded by suggesting that there were likely to be further cuts required as a result of spending reviews and it was important that there was wide debate to ensure that all options were explored.

Mr Cooper seconded the motion and concurred with the views of Mr Saul. Mr Cooper highlighted the problem of large employers closing, as had been the case in Redcar and Scunthorpe, and the impact this could have on business rates income.

Mr Cooper suggested that further discussion was needed and a sound base put in place with the necessary safeguards and scrutiny.

The Chairman of the Council suggested that as more detail was needed it would be appropriate to refer the motion to a future Cabinet meeting.

Mr Morris, Chairman of Finance and Management O&S Committee confirmed that the issues would be discussed at that committee.

On being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That the motion be referred to a future Cabinet meeting for consideration and report back to Council.

44. START TIMES OF MEETINGS

Consideration was given to the report of the Leader of the Council enabling the Council to give further consideration to the start times of meetings.

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and thanked members for their responses to the questionnaire. It was highlighted that there had been a good response and there was a clear preference for retaining current practice.

The Leader of the Council proposed the recommendation in the report and this was seconded by Mr Robinson.

Mr Cooper, in acknowledging the rationale for the recommendations, suggested members also needed to consider what arrangements were best for encouraging people to stand for election. Mr Cooper indicated that it was important there was a wide cross section of ages and skills to make the council as effective as possible. Mr Cooper reported that this council was the only one in Oxfordshire to hold its Council meeting at 2pm.

Mr Graham concurred and indicated that the basis of being elected was to represent the people and it was important that the electorate could attend meetings if possible. Mr

Graham suggested that accessibility for the public was key and the current timetable did not facilitate this. Mr Graham indicated he would vote against the proposal.

Mr Enright agreed that the matter did need consideration and a balance of times was required if possible. Mr Enright indicated that a lot of councillors had other commitments in the evening such as attending parish councils and he would be supporting the recommendation.

Mr Enright highlighted that one scrutiny meeting already met in the evening but the council could also look at other initiatives to increase public engagement. Mr Enright suggested that meetings could be held elsewhere in the district if there was a matter of particular local concern. It was further indicated that webcasting of meetings may also assist.

Mr Dingwall suggested that it was very difficult to find times that would suit everybody and if people were interested they would make every effort to attend.

Mr Handley, in supporting the proposal, highlighted the potential costs of keeping buildings open later for meetings. Mr Handley indicated that better promotion of meetings including through the local press could help encourage public attendance.

Mr Mills suggested that engagement with the community was important but suggested that encouraging people to stand for election was not entirely dependent on meeting times. Mr Mills advised that it was necessary to have the support of employers in letting staff have time off to undertake councillor duties. Mr Mills advised he would support the proposal.

Mr Coles expressed support for more use of technology to make meetings accessible and that it was difficult to find start times to suit all. Mr Coles indicated he would abstain from voting.

Mr Robinson reminded members that councillors had an opportunity to propose alternative start times when the calendar of meetings was considered by council. Mr Robinson reiterated that there was clear support for retaining the current position.

Dr Poskitt concurred with others that there was no simple solution but there was a need for a greater flexibility. Dr Poskitt highlighted that some meetings were very short and it would be better use of time if these could be held around other meetings if possible to ensure best use of time.

Mr McFarlane supported others in suggesting that the timing of meetings was not the only factor and issues such as allowances also had an impact. Mr McFarlane agreed that use of improved technology should be looked at further.

Mr Harvey indicated that if people felt strongly enough about an issue then they would attend meetings irrespective of the start time.

On being put to the vote the proposition was carried.

RESOLVED: That, having regard to the responses summarised in Appendix B, no change be made to the current arrangements, including the continuation of the practice whereby each Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviews its start time at the beginning of each civic year.

45. SEALING OF DOCUMENTS

The Council received and noted the report of the Chief Executive which gave details of documents numbered 11132 to 11143A sealed since the last meeting.

The meeting closed at 4.10pm

CHAIRMAN