

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 20 January 2016 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 Brennan, Mrs L C Carter, Mrs L J Chapman, N G Colston, J C Cooper, D A Cotterill, C Cottrell-Dormer, R A Courts, C G Dingwall, P J G Dorward, Mrs J M Doughty, H B Eaglestone, D S T Enright, P Emery, Mrs E H N Fenton, E J Fenton, S J Good, 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 and B J Woodruff.

46. MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 21 October 2015, copies of which had been circulated, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

47. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A J Adams, A S Coles, A M Graham, T B Simcox and G H L Wall.

48. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mr Harvey declared an interest in Agenda Item No. 13 – Sealing of Documents by virtue of being a party to one of the agreements.

49. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS

49.1 Former District Councillor Don Seale

The Chairman announced that former District Councillor Don Seale had passed away on Christmas Day.

Mr Seale had been elected as representative for Filkins and Langford in 1998, serving until May 2002.

He served on the Finance and General Purposes Committee, the Policy and Co-ordinating Committee, Human Resources Committee, the Planning Committee and the Lowlands Area Planning Sub-Committee. In 2001 he was appointed Chairman of the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Mr Seale also represented the Council on the Thames Valley Forum and the Local Government Association Rural Commission.

Those present then stood in silence in memory of Mr Seale.

49.2 Chairman's Award

Mr MacRae reminded members that nominations were being sought for the Chairman's Award that recognised the contribution of an individual or group to their local community. The deadline for nominations was 22 February 2016.

49.3 Mr Andrew Smith

The Chairman welcomed Mr Andrew Smith who had recently commenced his appointment as a Communications Officer, to his first meeting of the Council.

49.4 Councillor James Mills

Mr MacRae gave his best wishes to Mr Mills and his fiancée Emma for their forthcoming wedding. Members associated themselves with the Chairman's comments.

50. ROYAL GARDEN PARTY

Mr MacRae reminded members that at a previous meeting it had been agreed that the Chairman of the Council would be invited to attend a Royal Garden Party once during his or her term of office. Mr MacRae indicated that he would be accepting the invitation this year.

The Chairman then conducted the draw to select the remaining member to attend the Royal Garden Party, the outcome of which was that Mrs C E Reynolds would attend.

51. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

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

52. 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 11 November 2015 to 13 January 2016.

The recommendations were proposed by Sir Barry Norton, Leader of the Council, and seconded by Mr Robinson.

Mr Cooper referred to the recommendation regarding the Digital Nominations Scheme and indicated that he would support the recommendation. However, he emphasised the importance of monitoring the scheme, through the scrutiny process, to ensure that the indicated savings were being achieved.

Mr Cooper also expressed concern about some residents, particularly the elderly, not being able to access the online system and the potential for resource implications for staff when assisting in such cases.

Mr Handley, Chairman of the Economic and Social Overview & Scrutiny Committee, advised that the matter had been extensively discussed and that the committee had been satisfied that sufficient controls were in place to ensure that access was available for all residents.

Mr Courts, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing, advised that the council was one of only two in the country not currently using an online system. Mr Courts assured members that support would be available to people and the change away from a paper based system would achieve savings. In addition there could be an opportunity for an income stream and it was emphasised that the new scheme was being implemented for a trial period and would be reviewed.

Ms Leffman expressed her support for the changes and suggested that it empowered people to have a greater choice of housing options.

On being put to the vote the proposition was carried.

RESOLVED: that the recommendations made by the Cabinet and the Council's Committees from 11 November 2015 to 13 January 2016 be approved in relation to:

- (a) Digital Nominations Scheme (Minute No. CT/84/2015/2016)
- (b) The Smoke and Carbon Monoxide (England) Regulations 2015 (Minute No. CT/87/2015/2016)
- (c) 2016/17 Budget and Council Tax Base (Minute No. CT/94/2015/2016)
- (d) Delegation of Powers Relating to Article 4 Directions (Minute No. CT/95/2015/2016)

53. 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 November 2015 and 13 January 2016 were received:

53.1 Cabinet Work Programme
(Minute No. E&S/50/2015/2016)

Mr Cooper expressed his disappointment at the cancellation of the meeting of the Economic and Social Overview & Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 21 January 2016. Mr Cooper suggested that, in light of the suspension of the Local Plan, it was imperative that the committee discussed the way forward.

Mr Handley acknowledged the concern and advised that he had cancelled the meeting, after discussion with officers, as there were a number of issues that required further information before they could be properly considered. Mr Handley advised that there had been an additional meeting to consider a call-in request and a special meeting would be convened to receive an update from the registered social landlords operating in the area.

53.2 Recycling Bring Sites
(Minute No. ENV/36/2015/2016)

Ms Leffman highlighted the problem of the fly-tipping of material at the bring sites and that this had been a particular issue over the Christmas/New Year period. Ms Leffman suggested that it should be added to the agenda for Environment O&S to consider in detail.

Mr Harvey, Cabinet Member for Environment, acknowledged that there had been problems at some sites and stated that additional collections had been arranged with the contractor over the festive period. Mr Harvey advised that the costs for this were still awaited.

Mr Cotterill, Chairman of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee, indicated that the matter could be discussed as part of the Committee Work Programme at the forthcoming meeting.

Ms Leffman advised that problems continued at the Charlbury site and these had been reported on a number of occasions. Mr Harvey reminded members that fly tips that were being investigated were labelled and would remain for as long as the investigation was on-going.

53.3 Call-in of Cabinet Decision – Children's Services Consultation
(Minute No. E&S/58/2015/2016)

Mrs Carter advised that she had been unable to attend the meeting and expressed disappointment that the Cabinet decision had not fully supported the cross party opposition to closure of the centres at the original scrutiny meeting.

Mr Handley indicated that the scrutiny committee had been unable to support any of the options in the report and this view had been passed to Cabinet. The Cabinet had considered the consultation and, whilst supporting the view that any closures were not acceptable, had indicated that Option 3 should be put forward as a preference. At the call-in meeting this approach was supported.

Mr Courts clarified that there had been three options proposed in the consultation and it was important that an option was chosen. It had been considered that option 3 was the 'least worst' choice. Mr Courts emphasised that the minutes of the various meetings had been attached to the response so that Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) was cognisant of the strong views of members regarding possible closures.

The Leader of the Council reiterated that Cabinet was against any closures but that, if supported by OCC, option 3 would potentially give access to funding for voluntary provision.

54. NOTICE OF MOTION – PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The following motion had been received in the names of Mr D S T Enright and Ms E P R Leffman namely:

'Public participation in the business of the council improves decision making, creates transparency, and informs the people we serve about how their council works.

This Council resolves to establish a working party, to report back via the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with representatives from all groups and appropriate officer expertise, to find ways to improve public participation. Varying venues, new communication routes, using meetings technology, issuing invitations to key stakeholders and creating flexible agendas are all topics for the working party to consider.

The success of the working party, and the commitment of the Council to openness, will be measured by the extent of public participation in future.'

Mr Enright proposed the motion and expressed the hope that it could be referred to the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration. Mr Enright referred to the resignation of Councillor Snow who had cited the times of meetings as a factor in his decision.

Mr Enright highlighted the importance of public participation and suggested that peripatetic meetings could be positive in this regard. It was indicated that themed meetings could encourage public attendance and interested groups and individuals could be involved to give their views. Mr Enright advised that a working party could look at a wide range of issues and that it was an opportunity to review and refresh the whole process.

Ms Leffman seconded the motion and reserved the right to speak later in the debate.

The Leader of the Council advised that he would not be supporting the motion and cited the Local Plan process and waste service consultations as examples where the council was already doing proactive work and involving a wide range of people. The increased use of social media was also highlighted.

The Leader of the Council suggested that the council was very open and there was extensive public input either at meetings or through consultations. He indicated that the fact that a lot was already being done did not preclude new ideas coming forward, but that it was not necessary to have a working party and the associated costs and officer time involved.

Mr Postan concurred and suggested that the council was good at communicating with residents and organisations in the district.

Mr Handley reiterated that the council was not secretive and highlighted the work with local communities as part of the Local Plan consultation. Mr Handley reminded members that the timing of meetings was a democratic process and there was the opportunity to consider start times on an annual basis. Mr Handley acknowledged that meetings of the council could be better promoted in the local media.

Mr Robinson agreed with previous speakers and suggested that systems evolved in response to particular situations or requirements and emphasised that the public would attend in significant numbers if there were issues of particular local concern. Mr Robinson agreed that new technology was an area that could be improved in providing access to the democratic process.

Mr Mills agreed that encouraging public input was important but was sometimes difficult to achieve. Mr Mills suggested that only certain elements of the council's responsibilities, such as planning, attracted significant interest. Mr Mills outlined that the scrutiny committees had a good record in inviting and involving stakeholders and interest groups.

Mr Langridge acknowledged the intention of the motion but suggested that the council was good at holding discussions in open session as far as possible and had been proactive in taking meetings to other venues when needed. Mr Langridge outlined the Politics in Action initiative with local schools, the budget consultation and town/parish council liaison meetings as examples of good practice. It was suggested that a working party was not necessary and any ideas could be taken forward more informally.

Mrs Carter advised that she was involved in a communication and engagement role in her professional life and suggested that the motion was not a criticism of what the council was doing but was an opportunity to look at maximising public involvement. Mrs Carter emphasised the importance of hearing views from a wide cross section of residents and this could be achieved through new and innovative approaches.

Mrs Crossland highlighted the importance of press releases in the process and reiterated the work being done through the scrutiny process in liaising with stakeholders and interest groups.

Mr Harvey advised that public interest tended to be greater when the issue was contentious and highlighted the importance of public meetings and engagement when developing policies. Mr Harvey referred to the extensive discussion already undertaken by members and officers with interested parties.

Mr Morris suggested that the matter would have been better raised through the scrutiny process and concurred with others that there were already extensive engagement processes in place.

Mr Courts suggested that new technology was an area for further consideration and ideas could be brought forward in that regard.

Mr Cooper referred to consideration of a planning application at Woodstock and how the use of webcasting by Cherwell District Council at its meeting had opened up access to a wider range of people and they did not actually have to attend the meeting.

Dr Poskitt suggested that there was a large percentage of residents who were not engaged and whilst the council was doing some consultation well a working party would give an opportunity to develop new ideas and approaches.

Ms Leffman expressed her surprise at the apparent lack of support for the motion. Ms Leffman acknowledged the good work already done but suggested that it could be improved and a working party was a good forum to develop ideas. Ms Leffman suggested that it would not necessarily require significant resources and areas such as webcasting

meetings could be looked at. Finally Ms Leffman referred to lack of engagement at elections and the low turnouts in some areas.

Mr Enright reiterated the importance of direct participation and stated that there was a need to reinvigorate discussion as apathy in the current process was a concern. Mr Enright acknowledged that the council was good at communication and using social media. Mr Enright suggested that the working party may only need a couple of meetings to look at some of the ideas. Mr Enright concluded by expressing the hope that the motion had struck a chord with members and could be a catalyst for developing new ideas.

On being put to the vote the motion

WAS LOST

55. NOTICE OF MOTION – YES TO HOMES

The following motion had been received in the names of Mr D S T Enright and Mr G Saul, namely:

'We are not building enough homes in England. Rising house prices mean the dream of home ownership is beyond the reach of millions and the size of a mortgage deposit alone stops many would-be first-time buyers from getting on the housing ladder.

More and more people are therefore being pushed into the private rented sector and as demand rises there, so too do the rents. On average our residents spend 37% of their income on housing, our social housing waiting list is too long, and the average home costs 13.2 times the average salary in our area. In the UK 5 million people receive Housing Benefit.

If we want to end our housing crisis we need to start by building more of the right homes, in the right place, at the right price.

Public opposition is one of the main barriers to increasing housing supply. All too often the people who actually need homes are missing from local debates where the crucial decisions about new housing are made.

Councils need to take an active role in making the case for more homes locally.

West Oxfordshire District Council thus resolves to:

- *Support the Yes to Homes campaign (www.yestohomes.co.uk) and commits to the delivery of more of the right homes, in the right place, at the right price in West Oxfordshire.*
- *Show community leadership by working with Yes to Homes supporters, local groups, and organisations to actively make the case for new homes and explain the benefits of new homes for the whole community.*
- *Make sure our council lives up to the ambition of Yes to Homes through our council duties and processes'*

Mr Enright proposed the motion and expressed the hope that members had taken the opportunity to look at the website. Mr Enright indicated that there was a lot of cross party support for the campaign and the issues around the availability of homes and their cost.

Mr Enright outlined the statement of intent for the campaign and suggested that there were lots of matters relevant to West Oxfordshire. Mr Enright indicated that signing up would give access to a network of organisations in a similar position. Finally the role of the Local Plan was highlighted and the challenges for that process in meeting housing need.

Mr Saul seconded the motion and reserved the right to speak.

The Leader of the Council suggested that delivery of homes was the role of the Local Plan and the housing market was the main factor in respect of prices. It was emphasised that

the council did not directly build homes and the delivery of affordable housing was a key factor in the emerging plan.

The Leader of the Council indicated that the campaign was backed by developers and as a planning authority there was a risk in signing up to such a campaign. He further advised that he would not be supporting the motion and highlighted the problem of developers not delivering approved schemes quickly enough.

Mr Mills concurred that the Local Plan was the correct mechanism for supplying housing and it was the lack of delivery by developers, rather than public opposition, which was causing delay.

Mr Emery highlighted the importance of Neighbourhood Plans in the process as this allowed local communities to have input to future development. Mr Emery emphasised that many communities actually encouraged development to help improve infrastructure.

Mr Robinson concurred with other speakers in supporting the Local Plan as the best way forward. Mr Cotterill referred to the second bullet point in the motion and the importance of local councillors showing community leadership.

Mr Courts, in acknowledging the sentiment of the motion and need for housing, highlighted that only ten councils had signed up to date and there was concern that the campaign was developer led.

Mrs Chapman acknowledged the need for more affordable housing but felt that it was not necessary to sign up to the campaign to achieve that. Mrs Chapman agreed with others that the Local Plan was the way forward for the district.

Mr Cooper urged caution in respect of the effectiveness of Neighbourhood Plans and cited a recent case at Hook Norton where a planning refusal was overturned at appeal despite a plan being in place.

Mr Handley emphasised the need for more affordable homes to be provided particularly for young people in the district. Mr Handley highlighted that land should be opened up through the Local Plan and drew attention to the impact of S106 agreements on prices. Mr Handley acknowledged it was a difficult situation but he was unable to support the motion.

The Leader of the Council concurred with Mr Cooper that the inconsistency of appeal decisions was a concern and was proving unhelpful.

Dr Poskitt suggested that signing up to the campaign did not impact on what was already being done through the Local Plan and the campaign could be beneficial and was not a political matter.

Mr Dingwall outlined the history of the campaign and acknowledged that it had some success to date but reiterated concerns at developer involvement. Mr Dingwall suggested that the best approach for the district was paramount and rural exception sites were a key part of that.

Mr Saul referred to the Chipping Norton Neighbourhood Plan and that this would soon be going to a referendum after a lot of hard work in the town. Mr Saul indicated that social housing providers were the main organisations behind the campaign rather than private developers and it was a positive initiative. Mr Saul encouraged members to support the motion and show the intention of the Council.

Mr Enright indicated, as mover of the motion, that he had nothing further to add,

On being put to the vote the motion

WAS LOST

56. SCHEME OF MEMBERS ALLOWANCES FOR 2016/2017

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Democratic Services outlining the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel and seeking agreement for a scheme of allowances for Members to be effective for the financial year 2016/2017.

Mr MacRae welcomed Mr Michael Ryan, Chairman of the Independent Panel, to the meeting and advised that he was available to answer any questions if necessary.

Mr Langridge thanked the panel for their work and highlighted that the recommended 3.2% rise reflected increases given to staff in the previous few years. Mr Langridge then proposed the recommendations in the report.

Mr Good expressed his thanks to the panel and seconded the proposition.

Mr Enright referred to previous recommendations from the panel that had not been approved and highlighted that the principle of allowances for councillors was a good one. Mr Enright acknowledged the tight budgetary position and pressure on services and suggested that options to make the impact financially neutral could be considered.

On being put to the vote the proposition was carried, and it was -

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the recommendations from the Independent Remuneration Panel as set out in the Appendix to the report, and specified in paragraph 3.4 be approved; and
- (b) That the Strategic Director (Resources) be authorised to amend the scheme of allowances as formally set out in Part 6 of the Council's Constitution to reflect the changes made as a result of (a) above.

57. PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS 2016/2017

The report of the Head of Democratic Services seeking agreement of a programme of meetings for the 2016/2017 civic year was received and considered.

Mrs Crossland referred to the proposed changes in respect of the Lowlands Area Planning Sub-Committee and suggested that some members had made holiday arrangements based on the previous protocol of the meetings being held on the third Monday of the month.

Mrs Crossland then proposed the following:

- (a) *That the Calendar of Meetings for 2016/2017 set out in the Appendix to the report be approved, subject to meetings of the Lowlands Area Planning Sub-Committee being scheduled for Mondays 20 June, 18 July, 15 August and 19 September 2016 in place of the suggested dates in each of those months; and*
- (b) *That the times for the first meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees after the annual meeting of the Council be as set out in the Appendix, but that each Committee be invited to consider the timing of its subsequent meetings during the year.*

Mr Howard seconded the proposal.

Mr Cooper indicated that he could not support the proposal as members had the option to appoint a substitute and changes to the programme were not needed.

The Leader of the Council reiterated that moving Lowlands meetings to the second Monday was a new protocol and people had made arrangements based on previous practice. It was suggested that delaying until October gave more notice for members. Mr Robinson concurred that a number of members had planned holidays around the probable dates.

In response to Mr Cooper, the Head of Democratic Services confirmed that the Uplands Area Planning Sub-Committee generally met on the first Monday of each month but there were occasions where meetings needed to be held on a Tuesday or towards the end of a month to maintain the gap between meetings, or as a consequence of bank holidays or the period around scheduled elections.

On being put to the vote the proposition was carried, and it was -

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Calendar of Meetings for 2016/2017 set out in the Appendix to the report be approved, subject to meetings of the Lowlands Area Planning Sub-Committee being scheduled for Mondays 20 June, 18 July, 15 August and 19 September 2016 in place of the suggested dates in each of those months; and
- (b) That the times for the first meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees after the annual meeting of the Council be as set out in the Appendix, but that each Committee be invited to consider the timing of its subsequent meetings during the year.

58. SEALING OF DOCUMENTS

The Council received and noted the report of the Chief Executive which gave details of documents numbered 11144 to 11158 sealed since the last meeting.

The meeting closed at 4.05pm

CHAIRMAN