

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 26 April 2017 at 2.00 pm.

PRESENT

Councillors: N A MacRae MBE (Chairman), Mrs M J Crossland (Vice Chairman), A J Adams, Mrs J C Baker, M A Barrett, A C Beaney, R J M Bishop, M Brennan, Mrs L C Carter, Mrs L J Chapman, A S Coles, J C Cooper, D A Cotterill, C Cottrell-Dormer, C G Dingwall, Mrs J M Doughty, H B Eaglestone, 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, Ms E P R Leffman Mrs L E C Little, R D J McFarlane MBE, J F Mills, T J Morris, K J Mullins, Dr E M E Poskitt, G Saul, T B Simcox, H E T St John and B J Woodruff.

68. MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 22 February 2017, copies of which had been circulated, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

69. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors, N G Colston, D S T Enright, A M Graham, P D Kelland, R A Langridge, A H K Postan, Mrs C E Reynolds and G H L Wall.

70. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

71. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS

71.1 Mr K J Mullins

The Chairman and Members welcomed Mr Kieran Mullins, the recently elected representative for Hailey, Minster Lovell and Leafield to the meeting.

71.2 Mr A C Beaney

All present joined with the Chairman in congratulating Mr Beaney and his wife on the birth of their daughter.

71.3 Publica Limited

Mr Mills advised Members that he had attended the launch of Publica Limited earlier in the week. The Board of Directors had been formed in advance of the transfer of staff to the new company in the autumn and Mr Mills advised that, in order to ensure that Members were aware of the forthcoming changes and were able to act as advocates for the Council's innovative approach, arrangements had been made for a presentation to take place at the conclusion of the Cabinet meeting on 14 June.

71.4 West Oxfordshire Business Awards

Mr Morris advised that the West Oxfordshire Business Awards had recently been held at Heythrop Park. It was encouraging to see so many successful businesses within the District and Members joined Mr Morris in congratulating Huffkins on their success in winning the Hospitality and Leisure, Employer of the Year and Business of the Year Awards.

71.5 Vernon Court, Burford Road, Chipping Norton

Mrs Baker advised that she had attended the launch of 19 new homes for affordable rent at Vernon Court, Chipping Norton on 21 April. The Council had contributed to the scheme through the planning process and the accommodation provided was excellent. The development was now fully occupied and the new tenants had been delighted with their new homes.

71.6 Support for Syrian Refugees

Mrs Baker advised Members that a meeting had recently taken place at the Council's offices between the Local Member of Parliament and the Syrian refugee families living in the District. She was pleased to note that the children were settling in well and making great strides in their education.

71.7 West Oxfordshire Local Plan

Mr Haine advised that the Examination in Public of the Council's Local Plan was to recommence on 9 May.

72. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

In accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure, Mr Sharone Parnes had given notice of his desire to address the Council on a matter related to the decision making process in the considerations about local government prospective changes to a Unitary Authority model. A copy of his submission is attached as an appendix to the original copy of these minutes.

The Chairman thanked Mr Parnes for his contribution.

73. 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 9 March to 19 April 2017.

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

RESOLVED: that the recommendations made by the Cabinet and the Council's Committees from 9 March to 19 April 2017 be approved in relation to:

- (a) The appointment of Proper Officer (Medical) - (Minute No. CT/140/2016/2017);
- (b) Writing Off of Debts - (Minute No. CT/141/2016/2017);
- (c) Business Rate relief (Minute No. CT/141(b)/2016/2017);
- (d) Update to Council Plan (Minute No. CT/152/2016/2017);
- (e) Application of Increased Planning Fees (Minute No. CT/155/2016/2017);

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

The reports of the meetings of the Cabinet and the Council's Committees held between 9 March and 19 April 2017 were received:

74.1 Waste Collection Contract (Minute No. ENV/50.1/2016/2017)

Dr Poskitt made reference to the concerns raised at the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding payment arrangements for the chargeable green waste collection service. She indicated that some residents and organisations found it difficult to make payment on-line or by telephone using a credit or debit card and enquired whether alternative arrangements could be made for those wishing to pay with cash. As the relevant Cabinet Member, Mrs Reynolds, was not present at the meeting, Mr Mills advised that he would ensure that Dr Poskitt received a response.

Mr Coles indicated that he had yet to receive a response from Mrs Reynolds to his question as to why paying by cash should give rise to additional costs and Mr Mills undertook to ensure that this was also addressed.

74.2 Garden Village (Minute No. ENV/52/2016/2017)

Mr Emery noted that the Council's submission envisaged a new Garden Village to the North of Eynsham, not to the East as indicated in the fifth paragraph on page 22.

74.3 Rural Superfast Broadband Project (Minute No. F&M/77.1/2016/2017)

Ms Leffman advised that she had recently attended the Fawler Parish Meeting and was aware that a number of parishes did not know how the rural superfast broadband project was progressing. Many residents who had been disappointed by the failure of Cotswold Broadband were keen to know when they might expect to receive the new service.

In response, Mr Dingwall indicated that he would be happy to attend local council meetings to discuss the project but explained that it was not sufficiently far advanced to enable individual connection dates to be established. Further information would be provided as the programme developed.

75. NOTICE OF MOTION – RURAL WEIGHTING FOR GENERAL PRACTITIONER SERVICES

The following motion had been received in the names of Ms E P R Leffman and Mr A M Graham:-

“This Council notes that during recent weeks the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group has been conducting a consultation, during the course of which it has been admitted that in Witney alone, we are short of 7 GPs.

Many patients across the District have to wait for as long as 4 weeks for a non-emergency appointment with their GP. With the closure of Deer Park Medical Centre this situation can only get worse. This is longer than the national average, and a very different experience to that found in many urban areas. This is in part due to the inability to attract GP's to serve in a rural area, especially one where house prices are very high compared with many parts of the country.

This Council asks our MP, Robert Courts, to lobby the Secretary of State for Health to introduce a scheme of 'rural weighting' for GP's who accept positions in areas such as West Oxfordshire. Similar to the accepted practice of 'London weighting',

such a scheme would aim to attract the needed physicians and in turn would facilitate the better provision of health services.”

In proposing the Motion, Ms Leffman expressed concern that, following the closure of the Deer Park Surgery, there were now fewer General Practitioners in the town than were required to meet the needs of local residents. She recently had attended a Clinical Commissioning Group consultative meeting at which the CCG had acknowledged that there were seven fewer GP's in the town than were required and that local practices had found it difficult to recruit.

It was clear to the CCG that it had a problem on its hands, not only locally but in Oxfordshire in general. In October 2016, an attempt to recruit 22 GP's had produced only 12 applications and Ms Leffman indicated that she was unaware if any appointments had been made as a result.

This was a real issue in a number of areas and West Lindsey District Council, an authority comparable to West Oxfordshire, had passed a Motion similar to that now before Members making representations to the Secretary of State through its Member of Parliament asking that consideration be given to the introduction of rural weighting.

Ms Leffman suggested that higher house prices in Oxfordshire placed the County at a further disadvantage to Lincolnshire and noted that a number of GP's premises in West Oxfordshire were run down, placing an additional financial burden upon practices seeking to keep their facilities up to date and well maintained. There was a need to secure additional financial resources as failure to do so would result in similar problems to those currently being faced in Witney being replicated throughout the County.

Given the closure of the Deer Park practice it was imperative that something was done to rectify this situation as difficulty in securing timely appointments with a GP resulted in greater pressure being placed upon Accident and Emergency Services. It was essential to ensure that the correct level of primary care was available in order to take unnecessary pressure off Accident and Emergency Services. Whilst the Deer Park Surgery had operated a walk in surgery, most other practices in the District did not and a recent survey by Citizens Advice had shown that most did not have a daily appointment system.

Ms Leffman encouraged Members to mirror West Lindsey and support the Motion as it was important to ensure that good primary care services were provided, particularly given that the ageing population in West Oxfordshire would require increased levels of care.

In seconding the Motion, Mr Mullins advised that this issue had been prominent in the minds of local residents during the recent election campaign. There were some 4,000 residents in Minster Lovell who were uncertain where to register following the closure of Deer Park. Given the level of residential development expected to take place in the area this was a real issue for local people.

Whilst agreeing with the sentiments expressed in the Motion, Mr Handley suggested that it needed to go further. It had not been made clear that the Clinical Commissioning Group had sought tenders for the Deer Park practice at a level of funding below that offered over the preceding five years. Mr Handley believed that this reduction in income had discouraged other practices from submitting tenders.

Mr Handley reminded Members that the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee had undertaken a lot of work in relation to the closure of the Deer Park surgery and on health related issues more generally. He also advised that the local Member of Parliament was already deeply involved in this issue.

Mr Handley expressed concern that the increased allocation of funding to the Universities for teaching and research placed Oxfordshire at a disadvantage, resulting in an allocation of funding per head of population some 5% below national levels. He considered it to be unfair for these costs to be placed solely upon Oxfordshire simply because the relevant institutions were located within the County, suggesting that they should be funded on a national basis. He believed that this situation had been allowed to continue for far too long and that the Clinical Commissioning Group should seek to address this anomaly.

Mr Fenton advised that he had recently attended the opening of the Richmond Villages care facility in Witney with the local Member of Parliament who was well aware of the situation and had already discussed the matter with the Secretary of State. Mr Fenton agreed with Ms Leffman with regard to the difficulties experienced in recruitment and advised that a similar problem had been experienced in Bampton. Given the difficulty faced by students in securing places in medical school, Mr Fenton questioned why there should be such an apparent shortage of doctors.

Mr St John suggested that the reluctance amongst newly qualified doctors to go into general practice was less to do with the level of financial remuneration than with the desire to specialise in more 'glamorous' fields of medicine. He also noted that many practices did not own their own premises but rented from freeholders in the same way as other businesses.

In response to a suggestion from Mr Coles, Ms Leffman and Mr Mullins agreed that, given the forthcoming General Election, reference in the Motion to Robert Courts, should be amended to refer to the next MP.

Mrs Baker reiterated that the Council had already carried out a lot of work in relation to health service provision. She made reference to the efforts made by Mrs Doughty as the Council's representative on the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to the work carried out by Mrs Hilary Hibbert-Biles, County Councillor for the Chipping Norton Division. She advised that she had also held meetings with the Local Member of Parliament to discuss all aspects of health service provision including issues such as skills, training and accommodation. Mrs Baker also reminded Members of the efforts made by the Deer Park Surgery Working Party to oppose the closure of that practice.

Mrs Baker acknowledged that there were many challenges to face towards which the Council should adopt a firm stance. She advised that she had spoken to local GP's and understood the issues that they faced and confirmed that she would maintain this dialogue in the future.

Mrs Doughty expressed her thanks to Members for their support and confirmed that the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee continued to scrutinise and challenge the decisions of the CCG. She too confirmed that Mr Courts was fully involved with these issues and advised that the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee would continue its work when it reconvened following the County Council elections.

Mrs Doughty indicated that the question of the Deer Park Surgery was not yet over and advised that Healthwatch was extremely concerned over the failure of a large number of patients from that practice to register elsewhere. Whilst it was a challenge for those involved, Healthwatch intended to contact all those on the practice list to explain the importance of re-registering so as to avoid unnecessary pressure on Accident and Emergency departments. As a Council it was important to work together with other agencies to challenge the actions of the Clinical Commissioning Group and keep local residents informed.

Dr Poskitt suggested that, given the length of the training period, it was difficult to anticipate the future requirement for doctors. However, she noted that, in the past, the UK was the only country in Europe that had constantly failed to produce enough doctors although there were now reports of junior doctors being unable to find jobs. Whilst pay rates contributed to the shortage of GP's, a variety of other factors came into play. Locally, house prices in Oxfordshire presented a significant deterrent.

Mr Mills indicated that, whilst he understood the sense of the Motion, he considered that it needed further development. Having recently spoken with Dr Joe McManners, the Clinical Chair of Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, Mr Mills noted that there were 'key enablers' such as the provision of housing for doctors and nurses and the standard of buildings available in which the Council had a key role to play through the planning process. Mr Mills advised that he had pressed for the inclusion of the CCG in the Oxfordshire Growth Board given that health service provision was a strategic issue in view of the significant levels of residential development coming forward in North Curbridge and Witney. The Council was working at all levels to secure the best possible health care provision for local residents and it was important that it continued to do so.

Whilst he was aware of the West Lindsey Motion, Mr Mills advised that the Sparsity Partnership for Local Authorities Delivering Rural Services (SPARSE) had also called upon member authorities to lobby the Secretary of State for Health to consider the introduction of a rural weighting. To take account of that request and requests from other rural authorities, Mr Mills proposed an amendment to the Motion to add the following initial paragraph:-

That the Council expresses its support for the Sparsity Partnership for Local Authorities Delivering Rural Services and other rural Districts in calling upon the Secretary of State for Health to introduce a scheme of rural weighting for GP's who accept positions in such areas.

The amendment was seconded by Mrs Baker and Ms Leffman and Mr Mullins indicated that they were happy to incorporate the additional wording.

As an aside, Mr Mills commended the service provided by the Witney Hub at the Windrush Health Centre which offered walk in appointments.

Mrs Carter welcomed the motion and expressed her concern that the lack of a sufficient number of general practitioners could result in issues being diverted through other services such as the homelessness service, domestic violence service and children's centres. Mrs Carter echoed the need to continue lobbying as, given the level of residential development within the District, the need for GP services would only increase. Mrs Carter also expressed concern over the loss of obstetric services in the north of the District.

Summing up, Ms Leffman thanked Members for their support and positive comments. She acknowledged the benefit of the CCG's membership of the Growth Board and the importance of 'joined up thinking'. Ms Leffman noted that Mr Courts was doing all that he could to support the Council and stressed the need to consider these issues in the round. She requested that he be asked to take this matter forward in conjunction with the other issues facing the Health Authority. Finally, Ms Leffman acknowledged the good work done by the Witney Hub and expressed the hope that Members would support the retention of the Minor Injuries Unit at Chipping Norton Hospital in the future.

On being put to the vote the motion

WAS CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

RESOLVED: That the Council expresses its support for the Sparsity Partnership for Local Authorities Delivering Rural Services and other rural Districts in calling upon the Secretary of State for Health to introduce a scheme of rural weighting for GP's who accept positions in such areas.

The Council notes that during recent weeks the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group has been conducting a consultation, during the course of which it has been admitted that in Witney alone, we are short of 7 GPs.

Many patients across the District have to wait for as long as 4 weeks for a non-emergency appointment with their GP. With the closure of Deer Park Medical Centre this situation can only get worse. This is longer than the national average, and a very different experience to that found in many urban areas. This is in part due to the inability to attract GP's to serve in a rural area, especially one where house prices are very high compared with many parts of the country.

This Council asks our new MP to lobby the Secretary of State for Health to introduce a scheme of 'rural weighting' for GP's who accept positions in areas such as West Oxfordshire, similar to the accepted practice of 'London weighting', such a scheme would aim to attract the needed physicians and in turn would facilitate the better provision of health services.

76. NOTICE OF MOTION – RIGHT TO REQUIRE VOTES TO BE RECORDED

The following motion had been received in the names of Mr A S Coles and Mr E J Fenton:-

“That Rule 15 in the Council Procedure Rules set out in Part 4 of the Constitution be amended by the addition of the wording shown in italics below;

Right to require Vote(s) to be recorded

Where any member requests it immediately after the vote is taken, their vote will be recorded in the minutes to show whether they voted for or against the question or whether they abstained from voting.

Where all the members of a political group have voted for or against a question, and if requested by the leader or spokesperson of that political group immediately after the vote is taken, the votes of the members of that political group will be recorded in the minutes to show whether they voted for or against the question or whether they abstained from voting.

Where any member requests prior to a vote being taken, and is supported by three other members who signify their support by standing, the vote will be taken by roll-call, and each member present shall signify whether he or she is voting in favour of the question, against the question, or is abstaining, which shall be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.”

In proposing the Motion, Mr Coles explained that it was intended to rectify an issue that had arisen at the previous meeting. He acknowledged that, under the Council's Rules of Procedure, the matter was not open for debate at this juncture but wished to express his thanks to Mr Mills, Mr Fenton and the Head of Democratic Services for their support and assistance. The Motion was seconded by Mr Fenton who explained that he considered that voting should be transparent.

In accordance with paragraph 21(b) of the Council Procedure Rules the Motion (being a Motion to add to the Council Rules of Procedure) having been duly proposed and seconded, stood adjourned without discussion to the next ordinary meeting of the Council.

77. SEALING OF DOCUMENTS

The Council received and noted the report of the Head of Paid Service which gave details of documents numbered 11316 to 11347C sealed since the last meeting.

The meeting closed at 2:50pm

CHAIRMAN