

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the
WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen,
Witney, on Wednesday 28 February 2018 at 2:00pm.

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, Mrs L J Chapman, A S Coles, J C Cooper, D A Cotterill, C G Dingwall, Mrs J M Doughty, H B Eaglestone, P Emery, 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, Ms E P R Leffman, R D J McFarlane MBE, Mrs M L Mead, J F Mills, T J Morris, K J Mullins, T N Owen, Dr E M E Poskitt, A H K Postan, Mrs C E Reynolds, G Saul, H E T St John, C J A Virgin, G H L Wall and B J Woodruff.

53. MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 14 February 2018, copies of which had been circulated, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

54. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs L C Carter, P J G Dorward, Mrs L E C Little and T B Simcox.

55. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

56. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS

56.1 Mrs M L Mead

The Chairman welcomed Mrs Michele Mead, the recently elected representative for Carterton South to the meeting and congratulated her on her election to the Council.

56.2 Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal

Mr Mills advised Members that the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal had been approved by all six Principal Councils in the county and the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership. A letter had been sent to the Secretary of State indicating the wish to proceed to the next stage of the process and a response was currently awaited.

56.3. Witney Artificial Turf Pitch

Mrs Baker advised that an event to mark the opening of the resurfaced artificial turf pitch in Gordon Way, Witney, was to be held at 1:00pm on Friday 16 March.

56.4 Superfast Broadband Project

Mr Dingwall informed Members that the roll-out of the superfast broadband project remained on track with installation work currently underway in Long Hanborough.

56.5 Council Newsletter - 'Creating Futures'

Mr Dingwall advised that copies of the Council's newsletter, 'Creating Futures', were being distributed to all residents.

The current issue outlined a variety of Council initiatives including the provision of more affordable housing, the rural broadband project and phase II of the Carterton Leisure Centre scheme. The publication allowed the Council to communicate with those residents who did not use electronic media now that the number of printed publications and leaflets it produced had reduced. As a cost of some 15p a copy, this was a cost effective way of providing information to residents.

With elections pending, Mr Enright questioned the timing of this publication which could benefit current incumbents.

In response, Mr Mills indicated that the purdah period had not commenced and advised that the publication was intended to provide information.

57. RECEIPT OF PETITION AND PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

Ms Rosa Bolger and Mr Owen Collins presented a petition in the following terms:-

“With residents spending months in unsuitable emergency accommodation, families separated by a lack of homes for the next generation and a spiralling rental market...we call on West Oxfordshire District Council to commit to using some of its reserves to build council provided housing to meet the crisis levels of need that currently exist”

Having given notice of their wish to address the meeting in accordance with the provisions of the Council’s Rules of Procedure, Ms Bolger and Mr Owen then spoke to the petition, calling on the Council to consider using some of its financial reserves to provide Council built housing. A summary of their submission appears as Appendix A to the original copy of these minutes.

In accordance with Paragraph 12 (iv) of the Council’s Rules of Procedure it was proposed by Mr MacRae and seconded by Mrs Crossland that the matter be referred to the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

On being put to the vote the proposition was carried.

RESOLVED: that the petition be referred to the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

58. ELECTION TO THE CARTERTON SOUTH WARD OF THE COUNCIL ON 15 FEBRUARY 2018

The Council noted the report of the election of Mrs M L Mead following the poll held on the above date. Members thanked the Head of Democratic Services and the election staff for their usual efficient conduct of the poll.

59. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND COUNCIL COMMITTEES

The Council considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services setting out recommendations made by the Cabinet and the Council’s Committees in the period from 25 January to 14 February 2018.

The recommendations were proposed by Mr Mills and seconded by Mr Morris.

Mr Enright requested that the recommendation at (c) be the subject of a separate vote as he continued to harbour concerns over the recommendation that Section 106 contributions be sought from developers in respect of all residential developments for the delivery and provision of waste and recycling containers.

Mr Morris indicated that the Council sought developer funding for a variety of purposes. He confirmed that the Council would continue to provide containers and the recommendation would only impact upon the way in which such provision was funded.

Ms Leffman sought an assurance that developer contributions would not be sought for this purpose at the expense of other areas. In response, Mr Mills advised that the Cabinet had acknowledged the concerns expressed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding viability. When significant numbers of new properties were being constructed, Mr Mills felt that it was only right that developers be requested to provide the necessary infrastructure as it would otherwise fall to existing Council Tax payers rather than the new residents to meet the cost.

Mr Mills reiterated that the Cabinet had considered the concerns expressed and invited Members to support the recommendation as he did not believe that the anticipated problems would arise.

In response to a question from Dr Poskitt it was confirmed that the Council provided replacement containers when required but Mr Mills stated that the recommendation before Members related to new developments. He could not foresee any particular problems in asking developers to provide containers through a Section 106 agreement as this did not represent a significant cost. The recommendation was intended to enable the Council to make the most effective use of the Council Tax.

Turning to the recommendation regarding the Council's future relationship with Cottsway Housing at (d), Mr Enright enquired how it would maintain a close relationship with the Company without Board representation. In response, Mr Dingwall advised that quarterly liaison meetings were held with all eight RSL's operating in West Oxfordshire, together with representatives of the Blenheim Estate. The reduction in costs arising from the new governance arrangements were a positive financial aspect.

RESOLVED: that the recommendations made by the Cabinet and the Council's Committees in the period from 25 January to 14 February 2018 be approved in relation to:-

- (a) The revised Medium Term Financial Strategy (Minute No. CT/115/2017/2018);
- (b) The Treasury Management Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision statement, Prudential Indicators and Limits for 2018/19 to 2020/21 (Minute No. CT/117/2017/2018);
- (c) The charges associated with the revised Waste and Recycling Policy, for 2018/19 (Minute No. CT/118(f) 2017/2018); and
- (d) The removal of the voting rights and the amendment of the rules to remove the Council's ability to nominate to the Board of Cottsway Housing, to be effective from 1 April 2018 (Minute No. CT/123(b) and (c) 2017/2018).

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

The reports of the meetings of the Cabinet and the Council's Committees held between 25 January and 14 February 2018 were received:

60.1 Rural Broadband Project Minute No. F&M/65/2017/2018

Mr Enright enquired whether any information was available regarding the timescale for the rollout of the rural broadband project by settlement. He also indicated that mobile phone coverage was poor in parts of the District and questioned whether the Council could bring pressure to secure improvements. In response, Mr Mills advised that work was currently underway at High Cogges and that the network was due for completion in the third quarter of the year. Full details of the schedule of work were included in the Council's newsletter.

Mr McFarlane advised that a public meeting held in his Ward by Gigaclear had been well attended. Similar meetings were to be held throughout the District in future.

Mrs Chapman reminded Members that the District Council had provided additional funding to supplement the coverage available through the County Council's project and Mr Dingwall advised that mobile phone coverage could be provided through high speed wifi.

60.2 Review of the Future Management of Revenue Grants
Minute No. F&M/66/2017/2018

Ms Leffman noted that, in addition to those areas for which the Council was responsible, Citizens Advice offered support across a range of subjects. Whilst the majority of its work was confined to the four key areas of benefits, debt, employment and housing, its clients were often faced with a range of overlapping issues. Ms Leffman enquired whether the Council had a plan in place to ensure that the proposed new arrangements would operate successfully. Mr Emery acknowledged that this was a complex issue and undertook to provide a written response.

Mrs Baker noted that the issue had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in some depth and assured Members that the key areas of work would continue to be covered.

61. BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX 2018/2019

The report of the Cabinet setting out its recommendations for the Council's General Fund revenue budgets for 2018/19, Capital Programme for 2018/19 to 2022/2023 and to enable the Council to set the Council Tax for 2018/19 was received and considered.

Mr Mills, the Leader of the Council, introduced the budget proposals and a copy of the budget speech is attached as Appendix B to the original copy of these minutes. Mr Mills then proposed the recommendations in the report, and this was seconded by Mr Morris.

Mr Cooper proposed an amendment to the Budget that the sum of £10,000 be allocated to meet the cost of taking a stall at the Country File Live event at Blenheim Palace during the summer to promote West Oxfordshire to the 100,000 visitors attending that event. Mr Cooper indicated that there were a variety of other attractions in the District and a strong tourism offer. By promoting West Oxfordshire at the event those attending could be encouraged to stay longer or return at a later date.

In seconding the amendment, Dr Poskitt advised that she was anxious to see visitors to the event return to the District.

Whilst acknowledging the significance of tourism to the local economy, Mr Enright questioned whether such provision should be considered in isolation. He opposed the inclusion of specific financial provision on an arbitrary basis as he considered that a planned programme of long term strategic investment would be far more effective.

Mr Mills agreed that persuading visitors to stay longer in the District was an issue and advised that Blenheim was considering the introduction of a single ticket linkage with other local attractions. He questioned how effective a stall at the Country File Live event would be in achieving greater levels of visitor retention and, whilst recognising that this was an issue to be addressed, was uncertain that this was the best way of doing so.

Mr Morris reminded Members that some £187,400 was included in the Budget for tourism promotion and suggested that it would be more appropriate for Service Heads to consider how best to allocate that sum.

The amendment was then put to the vote and

The following two Members voted for the amendment:

Councillors J C Cooper and Dr E M E Poskitt.

The following 33 Members voted against the amendment:

A J Adams, Mrs J C Baker, A C Beaney, R J M Bishop, Mrs L J Chapman, A S Coles, D A Cotterill, Mrs M J Crossland, C G Dingwall, Mrs J M Doughty, H B Eaglestone, P Emery, D S T Enright, 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, N A MacRae, R D J McFarlane, Mrs M L Mead, J F Mills, T J Morris, T N Owen, A H K Postan, Mrs C E Reynolds, G Saul, H E T St John, C J A Virgin and G H L Wall.

The following three Members abstained from voting:

A M Graham, Ms E P R Leffman and K J Mullins.

Returning to the substantive motion, Mr Enright congratulated the Council's staff on achieving a better financial position than had been anticipated. He advised that, whilst the Labour Group had abstained from voting on the Budget in previous years as they would have wished to have seen it formulated on a rather different premise. However, having worked across political divides to advance ideas to make West Oxfordshire a better place for everyone, they were proud to have been part of the budget setting process.

Mr Enright welcomed the restraint on fees and charges and Council Tax at a time when financial pressure on residents was tight. He noted the pressure upon the County Council's services and the stark contrast between their financial position and that of West Oxfordshire. The Council's plan for growth was an example of what could be achieved by working together and, now that the suggestion of a unitary Oxfordshire had passed, it would be possible to take this concept forward.

Mr Enright suggested that the Council should explore joint working through the Oxfordshire Together initiative. Local people continued to complain about issues such as highway maintenance and it was clear that the County Council was not in a position to resolve these issues. He invited the Leader of the Council to discuss how West Oxfordshire could work with the County to address this issue and to take back control of local services. West Oxfordshire's financial stability and capacity were greater than ever and there were ways in which it could contribute in terms of leadership.

Mr Handley thanked all those who had worked together to develop a budget that retained the Council's position as the second lowest charging shire district in the Country. He asked that the role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees be recognised by the provision of designated officer support.

Mr Cooper expressed his thanks to staff for their assistance during the budget process. He welcomed the Labour Group's suggestion to work on joint projects with the County Council but considered that homelessness rather than highway maintenance was the most significant issue and should be the first priority to be addressed.

Mr Cooper also expressed his support for Mr Handley's suggestion of designated officer support for overview and scrutiny.

Mr Cooper expressed some concern that the report on the future of the Human Resources Committee had yet to be considered as it was possible that this could have given rise to financial savings. He confirmed that the Liberal Democrat Group would support the budget proposals and welcomed the projects set out in the Capital Programme and the retention of the grants budget.

Mr Cooper noted that the Homelessness Reduction Act placed greater emphasis on addressing homelessness and emphasised that the Council ought not to be complacent in its approach to this issue as there were instances of rough sleeping within the District. He drew attention to an innovative project that provided emergency accommodation for rough sleepers on a specially adapted bus.

Ms Leffman welcomed Mr Enright's suggestion of closer collaboration with the County Council but advised that the estimated cost of undertaking necessary highway repairs throughout the County was some £150,000,000. Whilst she welcomed the idea that the Council should look wider than West Oxfordshire, Ms Leffman indicated that she was persuaded that a unitary county offered a better option. She indicated that parish councils were increasingly expressing their concern over the impact of reductions in funding on local communities. The petition presented earlier in the meeting emphasised the need for more affordable housing and Ms Leffman urged the Council to look at ways in which it could provide social housing as residents wanted to move into decent rented homes rather than the private rented market.

Mrs Chapman expressed her support for the Budget and indicated that the District Council was not able to raise sufficient funds to address the backlog of highway maintenance issues. Whilst it could lobby for additional funding, West Oxfordshire would not be permitted to raise Council Tax to a level sufficient to address the problem directly. West Oxfordshire was fortunate in that it did not have a great incidence of rough sleeping and had a good record on housing provision and the prevention of homelessness.

Mrs Chapman believed that the Council was performing well and, unlike most authorities it continued to provide free car parking. Members cared about local people and the Council should be proud of the services it was able to provide.

Mr McFarlane concurred and expressed his support for the Budget. He made reference to the recently approved Housing and Growth Deal, the new waste and recycling collection contract and the cost savings secured through the new leisure management contract. Prudent management and shared services had enabled the Council to invest in Phase II of the Carterton leisure centre project and the provision of high speed broadband whilst remaining the second lowest charging shire district in the Country. The retention of free car parking helped to support the local economy and tourism within the District. Mr McFarlane also welcomed investment in electric vehicle charging points and small scale rural housing developments.

Mr Morris thanked Officers for their work in preparing a balanced budget which retained the key aspects that made West Oxfordshire special whilst proposing a limited increase in Council Tax of £2.75 at Band D. Free car parking helped to support the local economy and the Council had been able to maintain its grants budget to support the voluntary sector and benefit local communities through Community Facilities Grants. West Oxfordshire continued to promote leisure and tourism throughout the District and was seeking to invest in the provision of electric vehicle charging points. Financial provision had been included in the Budget and joint working arrangements introduced to help deal with homelessness and the Council was seeking to provide emergency accommodation for those in need.

Mr Morris indicated that, whilst the provision of some £78,000 to parish councils would go some way towards meeting the shortfall from other sources, this was not something that could be met by West Oxfordshire alone.

The development of its shared working arrangements placed West Oxfordshire in the vanguard of a new way of working which would enable it to continue to provide top

quality services to local residents whilst controlling costs. Mr Morris expressed his thanks to Officers for the manner in which these new arrangements had been embraced.

Mr Morris went on to suggest that, once they recognised the savings that could be achieved, other authorities were likely to follow this route and West Oxfordshire would be receptive to their approach. The limited increase in Council Tax proposed would go some way towards mitigating the financial pressure faced by residents whilst ensuring that there was no reduction in the current level of service provision.

In conclusion, Mr Mills acknowledged that there was scope for a local solution to highway maintenance but stressed that this was not something the District could fund alone. In terms of joint working, the Growth Deal illustrated what could be achieved by co-operation across tiers of local government and the political spectrum. The deal would secure some £60,000,000 for the provision of affordable housing and, in addition, the emerging 'Blenheim Model' had generated interest at the highest levels of Government as a creative solution to securing affordable housing. This model represented a place based solution by which co-operation with institutional landowners would provide truly affordable housing and was one which Mr Mills believed had great potential.

Mr Mills advised that there would be increasing opportunity for joint working through the development of the Joint Spatial Strategy and, by continuing to work together, a further £5,000,000 of capacity funding could be secured. Mr Mills encouraged other authorities to take advantage of the opportunities on offer.

Mr MacRae expressed his own thanks to Members and Officers for their work.

The proposition was then put to the vote and **WAS CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

The following 38 members voted for the proposition:

A J Adams, Mrs J C Baker, A C Beaney, R J M Bishop, Mrs L J Chapman, A S Coles, J C Cooper, D A Cotterill, Mrs M J Crossland, C G Dingwall, Mrs J M Doughty, H B Eaglestone, P Emery, 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, Ms E P R Leffman, N A MacRae, R D J McFarlane, Mrs M L Mead, J F Mills, T J Morris, K J Mullins, T N Owen, Dr E M E Poskitt, A H K Postan, Mrs C E Reynolds, G Saul, H E T St John, C J A Virgin and G H L Wall.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the General Fund revenue budgets and use of balances for 2018/19 as detailed in Appendix A1 be approved;
- (b) That the Capital Programme for 2018/19 to 2022/2023 as detailed in Appendix A2 be approved;
- (c) That the Prudential Indicators as set out in Appendix B be approved;
- (d) That report of the Chief Finance Officer at Appendix C be noted;
- (e) That the 2018/19 Pay Policy Statement as set out in Appendix D be approved;
- (f) That for the purpose of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 Section 35(2), there are no special expenses for the District Council in 2018/19;
- (g) That it be noted that at its meeting held on 10th January 2018 the Cabinet calculated the Council Tax Base for 2018/19:

- a) for the whole Council area as 42,920.71 [item T in the formula in Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended (the “Act”)]; and
 - b) for dwellings in those parts of its area to which a Parish Precept relates as in the attached Schedule 1.
- (h) That the Council Tax requirement for the Council’s own purposes for 2018/19 (excluding Parish Precepts and Special Expenses) is £94.38.;
- (i) That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2018/19 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act:-
- a) £48,758,159 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act, taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils and any additional special expenses.
 - b) £41,129,651 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) of the Act.
 - c) £7,628,508 being the amount by which the aggregate at 9(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 9(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act).
 - d) £177.73 being the amount at 9(c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (7(a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish Precepts and Special Expenses);
 - e) £3,577,651 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish Precepts and Special Expenses) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act as per the attached Schedule 2.
 - f) £94.38 being the amount at 9(d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 9(e) above by Item T(7(a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish Precept or special item relates;
 - g) the amounts shown in Schedule 2 being the amounts given by adding to the amount at 9(f) above, the amounts of the special item or items relating to dwellings in those parts of the Council’s area shown in Schedule 2 divided in each case by the amount at 7(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(3) of the Act, as the basic amounts of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate;
 - h) the amounts shown in Schedule 3 being the amounts given by multiplying the amounts at 9(f) and 9(g) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation Band D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands;

- (j) That it be noted that for the year 2018/19 the Oxfordshire County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley have issued precepts to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each category of dwellings in the Council's area as indicated below:-

Valuation band	Oxfordshire County Council £	Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley £
A	950.79	121.52
B	1,109.26	141.77
C	1,267.72	162.03
D	1,426.19	182.28
E	1,743.12	222.79
F	2,060.05	263.29
G	2,376.98	303.80
H	2,852.38	364.56

- (k) That the Council, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the amounts shown in Schedule 4 as the amounts of Council Tax for the year 2018/19 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings;
- (l) That the Council's basic amount of Council Tax for 2018/19 is not excessive in accordance with principles approved under Section 52ZB Local Government Finance Act 1992;
- (m) That the Chief Finance Officer, Group Manager – Land, Legal and Property, Joint Principal Solicitor, Joint Legal Executive, Group Manager – Revenues and Welfare Support, Joint Operations Manager, Joint Support Lead Officer, Overpayments Officer, Senior Recovery Revenues Officer, Senior Revenues Officer, Revenues Officer, and Recovery Officer, being wholly or jointly employed by the Council and Publica Group (Support) Ltd, be authorised to:-
- a) collect and recover any National Non-Domestic Rates and Council Tax, and
 - b) prosecute or defend on the Council's behalf or to appear on its behalf in proceedings before a magistrate's court in respect of unpaid National Non-Domestic Rates and Council Tax.

62. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS

The following question submitted in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure was addressed.

62.1 Publica

The following question, addressed to the Leader of the Council, was put by Ms E P R Leffman in accordance with paragraph 10 (b) of the Council's Rules of Procedure (Questions with notice):-

“At the Publica meeting in Cheltenham last October, members were told that the 2020 Partnership Joint Committee would seek out the views of Councillors on the establishment of a group of Non-Executive Councillors to consider the performance and progress of Publica. Please can the Leader tell us what progress has been made on this?”

Mr Mills provided a comprehensive response, a copy of which is attached as Appendix C to the original copy of these minutes.

63. MOTION ON NOTICE: SUPPORT FOR THE LGBTIQ+ COMMUNITY

The following motion had been received in the names of Messrs A M Graham and A S Coles:-

“The LGBTIQ+ community as most recently defined (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, intersex and Questioning plus) should be an important and accepted part of our community.

This being the case, West Oxfordshire District Council will do everything it can to enable the LGBTIQ+ support group to flourish and succeed, thus demonstrating the council’s commitment to representing the needs of the whole community.

The council agrees to examine how best to support this group by referring the matter to the relevant committee with a detailed report from officers for members to make recommendations back to the next council meeting.”

In proposing the motion, Mr Graham made reference to the Notice of Motion on Equality and Tolerance passed unanimously on 7 September 2016 in which the Council condemned racism, xenophobia and hate crimes unequivocally and questioned what had changed. He advised that the organisation Stonewall had conducted some 5,000 interviews in 2017 in the course of which one in five of the participants indicated that they had experienced a hate crime or incident. This figure rose to two in five amongst the transgender community and four out of five incidents went unreported by younger people who were reluctant to report issues to the Police.

Mr Graham referred to a recent incident when a member of a far-right group had planned to attend a meeting with the intent to kill and maim. He advised Members that a LGBTIQ+ support group had been established in West Oxfordshire in August of 2017 in an effort to find out what was going on in the District. Local traders had been happy to advertise for the group and meetings had been held in various locations throughout the District, attended by a wide ranging age group. The formation of the group had been welcomed by parents who were relieved to see somewhere for their children to offer support to address issues of loneliness, isolation, bullying and hate crime. There had also been some positive stories of the way friends had rallied round to offer their support.

Mr Graham indicated that this appeared to be a much needed support group as members of the LGBTIQ+ community needed a place to go to meet within West Oxfordshire rather than in Oxford City. Members of the LGBTIQ+ community were not seeking tolerance but acceptance and it was imperative that they be recognised as an integral part of the wider community.

Mr Graham stressed that it was important that the support group be sustained and for the Council to send a message that hate crime would not be tolerated and that the LGBTIQ+ community was an inclusive part of the community of West Oxfordshire.

The motion was seconded by Mr Coles.

Mr Mills thanked Mr Graham and Mr Coles for bringing this motion before the Council as it was an important issue that needed to be addressed. He was sorry to learn that there had been instances of homophobic hate crime in the District and emphasised that there was no place for such behaviour in this day and age.

Mr Mills proposed an amendment to the motion that it be revised to read as follows:-

“The LGBTIQ+ community as most recently defined (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, intersex and Questioning plus) is an important and accepted part of our community.

This being the case, West Oxfordshire District Council will do everything it can to enable the LGBTIQ+ community to flourish and succeed, thus demonstrating the council’s commitment to representing the needs of the whole community.

The council agrees to examine how best to support this community by referring the matter to the relevant committee to consider any particular challenges in West Oxfordshire”

In seconding the amendment, Mr Morris indicated that the motion, as revised, reaffirmed that passed by the Council in June 2012 which recognised the importance of equality of all, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, religious belief, disability or race and in which the Council affirmed its support for equality and opposition to discrimination.

Mr Graham indicated that he would be prepared to accept the amendment subject to receiving an assurance that the existing support group would be supported as it had taken time and energy to establish and he would wish to see it continue.

In response, Mr Mills advised that the Council had a duty to address all forms of discrimination and would look at ways in which it could help.

Mr Graham and Mr Coles confirmed that they would be content to accept the amendment.

Mr Adams stressed that it was important for the Council to look after all sections of the community in equal measure.

Ms Leffman indicated that she was uneasy as to the way in which the motion had been re-phrased and felt that the Council should look at how to support this initiative. She expressed the hope that it would be able to offer some practical help.

Mr Handley questioned the timing of the notice of motion, implying that it had been politically motivated. He indicated that he was unaware of any homophobic incidents in West Oxfordshire and considered that the Council ought not to support any one section of the community over another.

Mrs Baker expressed her support for the motion and offered her congratulations to Mr Graham for establishing the group. She acknowledged that things had moved on since the motion passed in 2012 and that growth had continued throughout the District. The Council worked across all political boundaries and prided itself in offering support to all sections of the community and Mrs Baker expressed the hope that it would continue to do so.

Mr Postan rose to express his support for the motion and to disassociate himself from Mr Handley’s earlier remarks.

Mr Emery expressed his support for the motion and noted that the Council had a duty to respond. There were a number of ways in which it could look to assist; grants were available to individual organisations whilst the Council could offer support in more general terms.

Dr Poskitt agreed with Ms Leffman that the Council should offer practical support to the group and questioned if not now, when.

Mrs Chapman expressed her concern that Mr Handley’s earlier comments may have been misinterpreted as his view was that all sections of the community should be offered support and cared for on an equal basis. The LGBTIQ+ support group’s request should be dealt with in the same way as any other and Mrs Chapman indicated that she

felt it divisive to categorise specific sections of the community. The revised motion made that clear and Mrs Chapman suggested that future discussion should concentrate on how needs could be met rather than putting people into boxes.

Summing up, Mr Coles indicated that he had been encouraged by most of what he had heard. He welcomed the motion on equality and diversity passed in 2012 and the subsequent decision to show support for the LGBTIQ+ community by flying the rainbow flag following the tragic attack in the United States in 2017.

Mr Coles stated that the LGBTIQ+ community still faced a great stigma and, whilst he had been fortunate not to have suffered prejudice, many others had been far less fortunate having faced that stigma and been subjected to hate crime. There had been homophobic incidents in West Oxfordshire and Mr Coles refuted any suggestion that the notice of motion had been timed to impact upon the forthcoming elections; indeed, the original intention had been for it to be considered at the previous meeting. He asked Members to accept the motion in the way in which it was intended; as the beginning of a process to see how the Council might assist this new group, and to welcome that step forward.

In conclusion, Mr Coles addressed the implication that providing assistance to the group would be positive discrimination. When asked why there was no heterosexual equivalent to the Gay Pride movement, he always replied that the heterosexual community was born with the right to exist without persecution; the LGBTIQ+ community was not as fortunate and critics should be thankful that there had never been a need for a Straight Pride Week.

On being put to the vote the motion

WAS CARRIED

Mr Coles expressed his thanks to Members for their support and looked forward to further progress.

64. SEALING OF DOCUMENTS

The Council received and noted the report of the Head of Paid Service which gave details of documents numbered 11466 to 11485 sealed since its last ordinary meeting.

The meeting closed at 3:40pm

CHAIRMAN