

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney at 2.00 pm on
Wednesday, 15 September 2021

PRESENT

Councillors: Michele Mead (Leader), David Harvey (Deputy Leader), Suzi Coul, Merilyn Davies, Jane Doughy, Jeff Haine and Norman MacRae MBE.

Others present, Councillors; Julian Cooper, Colin Dingwall, Andy Graham, Martin McBride and Alex Postan.

Officers: Amy Bridgewater-Carnall (Senior Strategic Support Officer), Mandy Fathers (Business Manager - Operations Support and Enabling), Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer), Chris Hargraves (Planning Policy Manager), Giles Hughes (Chief Executive), Bill Oddy (Group Manager - Commercial Development) and Frank Wilson (Group Finance Director - Publica).

27 Notice of Decisions

The notice of decisions taken at the meeting held on 21 July 2021 were noted.

28 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence received.

29 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

30 Participation of the Public

Mr Charlie Maynard addressed Members on Agenda Item 6 - Update on the Community Infrastructure Levy and Item 7 - Creating a vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc. A copy of his submission is attached to the original copy of these minutes.

31 Receipt of Announcements

Expression of Gratitude to Ubico

Councillor MacRae addressed Members and paid tribute to the Council's colleagues at Ubico for their efforts in continuing to manage, deliver and maintain all of the waste streams across the District. He noted the difficulties being encountered across the country due to a shortage of HGV drivers and thanked all Ubico staff for their hard work.

Loyal Free West Oxfordshire

Councillor Coul announced that to date there were over two thousand registered users of the Loyal Free West Oxfordshire app, with 15 thousand interactions and 5.5 thousand trail interactions. She encouraged anyone who had not already done so, to download the app.

Afghan Resettlement Programme

Councillor Davies provided a summary update on the Afghan Resettlement Programme and reminded Members that a full report would be considered at Economic & Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the following day. She advised that a Cabinet Support Group had

been set up to assess how the Council would deliver its fair share of accommodation and wraparound services. Councillor Davies concluded by stating that the Council was actively working to support families and were proud to be working with partners across Oxfordshire.

Covid-19 Update and Council Newsletter

Councillor Mead addressed the meeting and reminded everyone that Covid-19 cases were rising with 99% of deaths being associated with unvaccinated individuals. She stressed the need to continue to encourage residents to take up the vaccine and for everybody to continue to follow government advice.

Councillor Mead announced that the Council would be producing a Newsletter later in the year, encouraged Members to sign up and to recommend this to all residents as well. She advised that there was an information banner on the Council's website directing visitors to sign up and the project was due to go live in a month or two.

Following a question from Councillor Graham, it was confirmed that Councillors would be able to contribute to the newsletter.

32 Update on Community Infrastructure Levy and decision to hold in abeyance in light of the Government's Planning Reforms

Members received a report from the Planning Policy Manager which provided an update on the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in West Oxfordshire, in light of the previous public consultation held in July 2020 and the Government's subsequent proposed planning reforms, announced through the Planning White Paper in August 2020 and Queen's Speech of May 2021.

The report reminded Members that the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) was a charge that could be levied on most forms of development, to help fund the infrastructure that was needed to support the future growth of an area. CIL was intended to complement the current system of Section 106 planning obligations.

Members had considered a charging schedule in February 2020, which was then the subject of a six week, public consultation. The consultation was deferred from July 2020 to 21 August 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the responses received were made available to Members.

During the consultation, the Government published its Planning White Paper "Planning for the Future" which set out proposals to improve infrastructure delivery and would ensure that developers played their part through a reform of developer contributions. The paper stated that CIL and the current system of planning obligations (Section 106 agreements etc.) would be reformed as a nationally set, value-based flat rate charge (the 'Infrastructure Levy'). Subsequently, the Queen's speech confirmed the Government's intention to take these proposals forward through a new Planning Bill, expected to be published in Autumn 2021.

Therefore, officers felt that it would be prudent to hold any further progress towards submission and examination of the Council's draft CIL charging schedule in abeyance, until the Planning Bill had been published.

An alternative option was that Cabinet could choose to continue as originally planned but, due to the lack of detail and information available from central Government at the present time, this was not considered to be an effective use of officer time.

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Councillor Haine, introduced the report and proposed the recommendations as laid out. This was seconded by Councillor MacRae.

In response to a question from Councillor Cooper relating to the impact this decision would have on the review of the Local Plan, Councillor Haine confirmed that work on the review was due imminently. Mr Hargreaves addressed the meeting and advised that the current programme of works on the Local Plan showed that the initial review was due to commence in November and it was hoped more information would be available on the Government Bill by then. However, he advised that the initial works would focus mainly on high level scoping, with officers seeking views on the process, therefore, the detailed work on the Local Plan would begin at a later date.

Councillor Graham asked for clarification on the term 'affordable housing' and queried if this included social housing. Councillor Haine advised that social housing was just one of many forms of affordable housing covered and agreed that a list, elaborating on the types of housing covered, could be included.

Having considered the report, and having heard from the Members present, Cabinet

Resolved that

- a) the report be noted; and
- a) any further progress in relation to the submission and examination of West Oxfordshire's draft CIL Charging Schedule be held in abeyance until further information on the Government's proposed planning reforms have been set out in the forthcoming Planning Bill.

33 Creating a Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc

Members received a report from the Planning Policy Manager which asked Members to agree the District Council's formal response to the current MHCLG public consultation '*Creating a vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc*' which was running for twelve weeks from 20 July 2021 – 12 October 2021.

The report reminded Members of the background of this project which had started in 2016 with the Government asking National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) to look at how infrastructure development in the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc could maximise the potential of the area. The Commission's final report, was published on 17 November 2017 and one of the key recommendations was the need for a long-term vision for the arc and its sub-regions. As a consequence, the government designated the Oxford-Cambridge Arc as a key economic priority.

This report related to the development of the Arc Spatial Framework which covered three core phases, the first of which was to develop a vision for the future of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, utilising public engagement to shape a vision for the area, through consultation in summer 2021. Consultation on this paper was due to close on 12 October 2021 and comments would be taken into account in developing the Spatial Framework's vision for the Arc to 2050.

Members noted the suggested draft response attached at Annex A to the report and were asked to approve submission of this as the Council's formal response to the consultation.

An alternative option was that Cabinet could make comments or changes to the submission as laid out.

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Councillor Haine, addressed Members and proposed recommendation a) as laid out. He then proposed the following amendment to recommendation b):

b) That the suggested draft response attached at Annex A to the report be submitted as the Council's formal response to this consultation, *subject to authority being given to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, to consider any comments made at the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee.*

Having considered the report, and having heard from the Members present, Cabinet agreed to the revised recommendations.

Resolved that

- a) the report be noted; and
- b) the suggested draft response attached at Annex A to the report be submitted as the Council's formal response to this consultation, subject to authority being given to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, to consider any comments made at the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

34 Service Performance Report 2021-22 Quarter One

Members received a report from the Chief Executive which provided details of the Council's operational performance at the end of 2021-22 Quarter One (Q1), and enabled Councillors to assess operational performance.

The report reminded Members that a review of performance indicators was currently underway, Portfolio Holders were having discussions with relevant managers about priority areas and finding metrics that would be most representative and provide assurance as to how the Council was performing.

The report noted that in relation to Service Performance, the last two quarters had resulted in mixed performance but this was beginning to show a more positive outlook into quarter two. Details regarding the National Lockdown and the start of restrictions being lifted, and the impact this had on services were also included. The full Performance Indicator report was attached at annex A to the report.

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Members also noted the information provided at section 4 of the report, which related to the Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review 2020/21. This set out the complaints made against the Council along with the relevant outcomes.

An alternative option was that

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Coul, addressed Members and explained that the report highlighted the areas that the Council had performed well in as well as some of the issues encountered. She proposed the recommendation as laid out and this was seconded by Councillor Harvey.

Following a query from Councillor Graham relating to Food Safety statistics, he was reminded that the quarter being scrutinised covered the last lockdown period and this may have an impact on the data. Councillor MacRae reminded Councillor Graham that the service area was working hard to support local businesses in the hospitality industry, in order to help them revitalise and recover.

Having considered the report, and having heard from the Members present, Cabinet

Resolved that the 2021/22 Q1 service performance be noted.

35 Finance Performance Report 2021/22 Quarter One

Members received a report from the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer which provided details of the Council's financial performance at the end of 2021-22 Quarter One (Q1).

The report highlighted that the Quarter 1 results overall were as expected with a few notable outliers. Several budget lines had received grants which had created surpluses but would be spent over the year. Green waste was significantly exceeding budget but this was due to an error where the increase in fees was not reflected in the budget. Car parking penalty charges was the one area which was significantly worse than expected. Income was hugely down in 2020/21 but while the budget expected this to bounce back in 2021/22 this had yet to be seen. It was noted that restrictions were still in place.

One of the issues exacerbated by Covid was the Council's level of aged debt but the council had successfully engaged a credit controller on a fixed term contract and the issue was being addressed.

The report outlined significant variances and those worth noting in the main text, however a full list of variances by cost centre was included at Annex A to the report. Further detail was provided on the budget monitoring for each Service Area at section 1.5 of the report along with information on the Business Support Grants, GLL, Trade Waste income, Council Tax Support and Treasury Income. An overview of the Capital spend against the budget was provided at Annex B to the report.

There were no alternative options provided as this report was for information.

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The Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Coul, addressed Members and stated that this quarter's reporting had covered the last lockdown period and, whilst the Council was on a stable footing, it was still important to remain prudent. She proposed the recommendation as written and this was seconded by Councillor Mead.

In response to a question from Councillor McBride, officers advised that it was anticipated that the outstanding debt owed by GLL Ltd would be cleared by the end of the financial year. Members agreed that it was important to encourage residents and visitors to use the District's leisure facilities.

Councillor Cooper queried if this was an indication that the outdoor swimming pool at Woodstock would be remain open. In response, Councillor Doughty advised that the pool had done very well over the summer, attracting over 1200 visitors. She assured Councillor Cooper that it was a positive sign but reminded him that Covid-19 was still a risk to the leisure industry.

Having considered the report, and having heard from the Members present, Cabinet

Resolved that the 2021/22 Q1 finance performance be noted.

36 Council Tax Section 13A Policy

Members received a report from the Group Manager for Resident's Services which outlined proposals to introduce a Council Tax Section 13A Policy to support the Council in making decisions when considering such applications from Council Tax payers in the District.

The report reminded Members of the discretionary powers provided to them by Section 76 of the Local Government Act 2003 which introduced Section 13A (Billing Authority's Power to Reduce Amount of Tax Payable) into the local Government Finance Act 1992. In accordance with Section 13(A)(1)(a) of the LGFA 1992 as amended, the Council had a Council Tax Support scheme which provided assistance to those deemed to be within financial need. Council Tax legislation also provided for a wide range of discounts, exemptions and reductions that had the effect of reducing the level of council tax due.

The Council Tax Section 13A Policy, attached at Annex A to the report, would require the applicant to have exhausted all other options before making an application under the policy. When applying this policy, officers would similarly consider whether alternative actions could be undertaken and any relief awarded under Section 13A (1) (c) would be intended only as short term assistance and not a means to reduce Council Tax liability indefinitely.

No alternative options were provided.

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Coul, addressed Members and proposed the recommendations as laid out. This was seconded by Councillor Davies.

Having considered the report, and having heard from the Members present, Cabinet

Resolved that

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- a) the Council Tax Section 13A Policy included at Annex A to the report be adopted; and
- b) the decision making process detailed within paragraphs 4.2 and 4.3 of this report, be approved.

The Meeting closed at 2.26 pm

CHAIRMAN