

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet

Held in the at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 13 October 2021**

PRESENT

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

Also present: Councillors Joy Aitman, Alaa Al-Yousuf, Andrew Coles, Julian Cooper, Harry Eaglestone, Andy Graham, Alex Postan, Andrew Prosser and Harry St John.

Officers: Amy Bridgewater-Carnall (Democratic Services Manager), Angela Claridge (Interim Monitoring Officer), Giles Hughes (Chief Executive) and Frank Wilson (Group Finance Director - Publica).

37 Notice of Decisions

The notice of decisions taken at the meeting on 15 September 2021 were noted.

38 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Martin McBride.

39 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

40 Participation of the Public

Mr Roger Ball addressed Members in relation to Agenda Item 9 – Review of Temporary Traffic Restrictions in Witney High Street. Mr Ball advised that as a local resident he understood the County Council was the statutory authority responsible for highways matters but had wanted to express his support for the scheme. He agreed with the recommendation to keep the temporary restriction in place on Witney High Street and he supported the Police's view that this could be a permanent measure. He listed the Local Plan Policies that he felt supported the proposal and requested that, if the closure were to remain a permanent feature, suitable traffic calming measures be installed.

41 Receipt of Announcements

Introduction of Interim Monitoring Officer

Councillor Mead introduced the Council's Interim Monitoring Officer, Angela Claridge, to the meeting, welcomed her into her new role and wished her every success for the forthcoming months.

Publica AGM

Councillor Mead advised that she had recently attended the Publica Annual General Meeting, at which their Annual report was outlined. The report had highlighted key projects including Love West Oxfordshire, the Net Zero Carbon Toolkit, Salt Cross and the accessible website work, alongside the support provided to local businesses and the installation of broadband by Gigaclear ahead of schedule. Councillor Mead encouraged Councillors to read the report and she expressed her thanks to all Publica staff for their hard work.

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Middle Barton Road Accident

Councillor MacRae advised that a serious road traffic accident had occurred last week in Middle Barton resulting in a Ubico employee being injured and hospitalised. The employee had since been discharged from hospital and was recovering at home, whilst Police investigated the incident. Councillor MacRae advised that his thoughts were with the injured man at this difficult time. He concluded by reminding Members of the risks that were taken by Ubico staff on a daily basis in order to provide vital services to residents of West Oxfordshire.

Small Community Public Arts Schemes

Councillor Doughty was pleased to announce two Small Community Public Arts Schemes that were ready for implementation. The first scheme had been put forward by Theatre Chipping Norton who would lead an intergenerational project working with Holy Trinity Primary School and local care home residents. Each student would be matched with a resident to share stories and memories to create a script of a performance involving the children. The project would take place over five days in the Spring of 2022.

The second scheme had been proposed by Ducklington Parish Council who were creating a sensory garden for their local community on the edge of Chalcroft play park. The project would engage a local professional artist to enhance the environment of the garden through sculpture and/or lettered paving. The approximate start date was Spring 2022.

42 Adoption of Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

Members received a report from the Planning Policy Manager which asked them to consider the final version of the West Oxfordshire District Council Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and to recommend to Council that it be formally adopted. A copy of the final adoption version of the Affordable Housing SPD was attached at Annex B to the report.

The report highlighted that the SPD had been the subject of two separate periods of public consultation, the first of which ended in August 2020, with a revised draft being consulted on between March and April 2021.

There were no alternative options detailed in the report.

Members noted that a revised Annex B to Appendix 3 had been circulated following the publication of the agenda and copies had been made available at the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Councillor Haine, introduced the report and highlighted the importance of the inclusion of affordable housing in the Council plan. Councillor Haine provided an overview of the report, signposted Members to the introduction of a new form of affordable housing referred to as 'First Homes' and proposed the recommendations as laid out.

These were seconded by Councillor Davies.

Councillor Coles raised the issue of the term 'affordable' in relation to housing and both Councillors Davies and Haine recognised that this was an issue and whilst they welcomed suggestions for a more suitable phrase recognised that this was a nationally set standard which was used in many different contexts.

Councillor Graham welcomed the document, queried if the Council was meeting the need for one and two bedroom properties and urged caution with regard to remaining impartial whilst maintaining partnerships with developers. In response, Councillor Davies highlighted the number of one and two bedroom properties recently given approval at the Uplands Planning

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Sub-Committee and assured the meeting that partnerships with developers would remain for as long as it continued to benefit the Council and its residents.

Councillor Postan raised the issue of open ended permissions to enable developers to review options such as methods of construction and alternative heat sources. He also commented that the design of affordable housing was crucial to avoid any stigma. Councillor Mead reminded the meeting that Council policies were regularly updated to reflect modern methods of building. Councillor Harvey urged caution with regards to specifying heating sources because the technology was changing rapidly.

Councillor St John noted that the statistics showed that the Council had delivered 294 more affordable units than the original target set over the last two years.

Having been proposed and duly seconded it was

Resolved that

- a) the content of the report be noted; and
- b) Council be invited to formally adopt the final version of the West Oxfordshire District Council Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

43 Introduction of Charges at the Public Conveniences at New Street Car Park, Chipping Norton

Members received a report from the Parking Services Manager which sought approval for the introduction of charging for the use of the New Street Car Park public conveniences, Chipping Norton at a charge of 20p, as per all other units, as soon as practicably possible to install the equipment.

The report noted that the Council had introduced charges in public conveniences in 2004/05. All 12 sites were considered and only one site was excluded at that time but it was not clear why. The report also detailed the charging regime at other public convenience sites as well as the numbers of users of the site.

An alternative option was that Cabinet could choose to keep these facilities, free of charge.

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Councillor MacRae introduced the report and advised that the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee had supported the report at their meeting at the end of September. He endorsed the recommendations as laid out and these were seconded by Councillor Harvey.

Having considered the report and having heard from the Members present, it was

Recommended that Council approve the introduction of charging for the use of the New Street Car Park public conveniences, Chipping Norton, at a charge of 20p as per all other units as soon as is practicably possible to install the equipment.

44 Consideration of the introduction of Waste & Recycling Container Delivery Charging

Members received a report from the Business Manager - Contracts which presented Cabinet with the results of a review which had been completed on the numbers and costs of delivering waste and recycling containers to households in the district, and proposed options to introduce a charge for container deliveries.

The report provided details on the methods of recycling collections, the services delivered by the Council and the containers provided to households in order for them to access the services. The ongoing demand for containers and the financial impact of this had lead officers to review how this service was managed and financed. Members were also given a breakdown

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of the numbers of each type of container delivered in 2020/21, and the associated costs, the pricing options and Container Delivery Charges in other authorities.

Officers had provided a number of options for Cabinet to consider and these were outlined from section 2.3 of the report, along with the benefits if charging were introduced.

An alternative option was that the Council could continue with the current practice of not charging for containers. However, due to the high demand and significant costs, this option was not recommended.

The report was considered by the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 30 September 2021 and the comments noted at that meeting were as follows:

The Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee were supportive of the introduction, but put forward that the lowest rate of charge (Option 1), should be considered by Cabinet for the introduction.

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Councillor MacRae introduced the report and explained that the Council was spending a great deal on the service at present. He also advised Members that officers were looking into the potential of developers using S106 money to deliver an initial issue of containers for new build properties. Councillor MacRae proposed the recommendations, specifying Option 1 as the Cabinet's preferred price point.

This was seconded by Councillor Harvey.

Councillor Prosser supported the introduction of charging but raised a concern that the Council had recently removed some local recycling points. Councillor MacRae confirmed that the charge would be for additional containers and if a household needed a larger capacity bin, they could request it.

Councillor Cole advised that he had been unable to attend the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and highlighted that the report did not detail any potential loss to recycling rates if this scheme was introduced. He also raised a concern that S106 money should not be used for services covered by Council Tax.

Councillor MacRae advised that officers had only just started to look at the options relating to S106 contributions and no decision had been made as yet. With regards to recycling rates, he assured Councillor Coles that these were increasing.

Councillor Davies reiterated the importance of the message 'Reduce, Re-use, Recycle' and reminded Members that it was imperative to encourage residents to reduce waste in the first instance.

Having been proposed and duly seconded, it was

Resolved that Cabinet's view was that charges for waste and recycling containers should be introduced as set out in the report, and

Recommended to Council the Cabinet's preferred price point as Option 1 with an effective date of 1 December 2021.

45

Review of Temporary Traffic Restrictions in Witney High Street

Members received a report from the Business Development Officer which reported the results of the consultation survey on the temporary restrictions in Witney High Street and asked Members to consider the next steps in light of the current pandemic situation.

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The report explained that temporary traffic restrictions had been put in place in Witney High Street and Market Square to enable improved social distancing, as part of the national Covid pandemic response. Restrictions had been lifted in July 2021 but, as cases of Covid remained high, officers had followed advice from Public Health to only gradually ease restrictions.

A public consultation was carried out to establish views on the measures and options for the future of the High Street. A copy of the consultation responses was attached at Annex A to the report and these showed general support for the measures. A number of options were detailed in the report and OCC had advised that they were considering the long term future of the arrangements, although concepts were at an early stage.

The alternative options were detailed in full in the report.

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Coul introduced the report and she recognised that there had been issues in relation to the signage and there was some misinformation about the future options being considered. She outlined the Cabinet's preference to support the retention of the temporary traffic restrictions until the end of January 2022 and the immediate removal of the pedestrian guard rails. Councillor Coul felt it was important to support OCC and the Highway Authority whilst they looked at the longer term options for the High Street.

Councillor Mead seconded the recommendations whilst reporting that the response to the public consultation had been the largest to date. She assured the meeting that officers and members had listened to the public and it was hoped the measures would make visitors and residents more comfortable, whilst being environmentally friendly as well.

Councillor MacRae added his support and highlighted the importance of including consideration of the affected bus routes when further consultation was carried out.

Councillor Coles supported the proposals and advised that he had received a lot of correspondence from residents on both sides of the argument. He thanked Mr Ball for attending and addressing the meeting today and reminded Members that the High Street had been struggling as a consequence of the change in shopping habits. He reiterated the ethos of Build Back Better in order to encourage users back to this important part of the town.

Councillor Graham welcomed the report and agreed that he too had been contacted by residents from other areas of the District about the issue. He felt that Witney was a town for the whole district to enjoy and requested that any future consultation include reference to the disabled parking bays.

Councillor Prosser supported the recommendations and raised a query relating to enforcement. In response, Councillor MacRae clarified that the Parking Wardens could only issue parking tickets and would not have the jurisdiction to get involved in traffic management.

Councillor Postan referred to an excellent pedestrian site in Exhibition Road in London, which used level paving of differing colours to distinguish the pathways.

In response to a query from Councillor Cooper relating to funding, the Chief Executive explained that the temporary measures had been funded through the Welcome Back to Town Centre scheme, introduced by the Government, post Covid restrictions.

Having considered the report and having heard from the all parties present, it was

Resolved that

- a) the retention of the temporary traffic restrictions in Witney High Street is supported for a further period until January 2022;
- b) the immediate removal of the temporary pedestrian guard rails is supported, whilst retaining a measure of pedestrian/ vehicular separation through strategic use of planters;

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- c) support for Oxfordshire County Council pursuing funding for design of public realm enhancements that could support more permanent changes to traffic movements;
- d) the Highway Authority is requested to undertake additional public consultation on any design alternatives prior to any final decision on any scheme design or permanent changes.

46 Options for the future of Witney Town Centre Shop

Members received a report from the Group Manager for Resident Services which detailed a review of the usage on the Town Centre Shop (TCS) in Witney, in light of changing customer preferences for receiving Council Services and consider future options.

The report explained the current face to face customer access points delivered by the Council and highlighted the changes that had taken place with regards to demand, alternative ways that the public accessed services and the impact of the pandemic on direct customer service. It was noted that prior to the pandemic, footfall had decreased for both customer service functions and visitor information at the town centre shop. A graph detailing the footfall at the Witney TCS, between the period January 2017 to March 2020 was provided at Annex A to the report. A graph demonstrating the weekly footfall from December 2020 was attached as Annex B to the report.

The report outlined a number of options for the future use of the building and these were set out at section 3.1 of the report, followed by a more detailed synopsis of each option. Cabinet members could choose to support the recommendations as laid out, approve one of the other options listed or propose an alternative way forwards.

The Cabinet Member for Customer Delivery, Councillor Doughty introduced the report and highlighted the key influences that had impacted on the TCS in recent years. She assured the meeting that all options had been discussed at length with officers and had led to robust debate amongst the Cabinet members. Councillor Doughty had visited the TCS with some Cabinet colleagues and had seen the refurbishment needed for themselves. She therefore proposed the recommendation that officers be asked to look at relocating staff to the TCS as part of the Agile Working project but keep the TCS open to the public. She felt this would allow the Council to retain this customer service option whilst a longer term review of the demand for face to face customer contact points was completed.

The recommendation was seconded by Councillor Davies.

Councillor Coles addressed the meeting and was relieved to hear that Cabinet were considering keeping the TCS. He had used the space for Ward Member surgeries in the past but noted that it needed refurbishing. He raised a concern about the lack of a Visitor Information service which had been highlighted to him at a recent trip to the Witney Museum.

Councillors Mead, Coul and Postan added their support to the proposal and Councillor Coul felt there was an opportunity for the Town Council to address some of the issues raised, as the grass roots of Witney Town.

Having considered the report and having heard from the Members present, it was

Resolved that

- (a) Officers would be asked to work up an interim solution to relocate staff as part of the Agile Working project to the Town Centre Shop pending a longer term review of demand for face to face customer contact points and finalisation of the agile office outcomes; and
- (b) Officers would be asked to utilise the existing office footprint where possible with minimum refurbishment costs until the review was completed.

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47 Award of External Enforcement contract

Members received a report from the Business Manager for Operational Support and Enabling, which asked them to consider the proposals to award a new Enforcement Agency contract.

The report advised that the Council's current Enforcement Agent and Debt Collection Services Contract was due to expire on 2 October 2021 with the original term being for a period of three years with the option to extend for a further two. The services procured were for the collection of debt in respect of a number of areas of work, including council tax, housing benefit overpayments and parking fines.

Members were reminded that the use of enforcement agents and debt collection agencies was an absolute last resort, but they are an essential resource to have available to ensure that debts due to the Council were paid. Annex A to the report provided Members with the tender evaluation questions used and a list of the submitted tenders. The report proposed the preferred supplier along with a secondary contract award for the external provision of enforcement and suggested a three year period from 1 October 2021.

There were no alternative options reported because an external enforcement agency was required for the Council to be able to maximise its collection of debts.

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Coul introduced the report and proposed the recommendations as laid out. These were seconded by Councillor MacRae.

Councillor Cooper queried who the suppliers were and was advised that this information could be circulated to him after the meeting.

Having considered the report and having heard from the Members present, it was

Resolved that

- a) the main contract award for the external provision of enforcement to Supplier A identified within Annex A to this report, is approved;
- b) the secondary contract award for the external provision of enforcement to Supplier F identified within Annex A to this report, is approved; and,
- c) the contract is approved for a three-year period from 1 October 2021 (or a later date dependent on contract completion and sign off), on the terms indicated within this report and with the option to extend the contract for a further two years.

The Meeting closed at 3.00 pm

CHAIRMAN