

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Council

Held in the Council Chamber at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 26 January 2022**

PRESENT

Councillors: Alex Postan (Vice-Chair), Mike Cahill, Merilyn Davies, Joy Aitman, Alaa Al-Yousuf, Luci Ashbourne, Andrew Beaney, Jill Bull, Nathalie Chapple, Andrew Coles, Owen Collins, Julian Cooper, Derek Cotterill, Suzi Coul, Maxine Crossland, Jane Doughty, Duncan Enright, Ted Fenton, Andy Graham, Jeff Haine, David Harvey, Gill Hill, David Jackson, Richard Langridge, Liz Leffman, Nick Leverton, Dan Levy, Norman MacRae MBE, Michele Mead, Elizabeth Poskitt, Geoff Saul, Harry St John, Rupert Dent, Colin Dingwall, Andy Goodwin, Mark Johnson, Lysette Nicholls, Mathew Parkinson and Alex Wilson.

Officers: Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer), Giles Hughes (Chief Executive), Frank Wilson (Group Finance Director - Publica), Amy Bridgewater-Carnall (Democratic Services Manager) and Angela Claridge (Interim Monitoring Officer).

CL.13 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 October 2021 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to:

the addition of Councillor Andrew Coles to the attendance; and

an amendment to Minute CL.12 – Report of the Cabinet and Council’s Committees which Councillor David Jackson advised should read “...Speed Watch were supporting a bid from two parish councils to request a 20mph speed limit from the County Council...”.

CL.14 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from the Chairman, Councillor Martin McBride and Councillors Jake Acock, Rosa Bolger, Laetisia Carter, Harry Eaglestone, Steve Good, Carl Rylett, Dean Temple, Andrew Prosser and Ben Woodruff.

CL.15 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

CL.16 Receipt of Announcements

The Chairman advised that the motion originally listed as Agenda Item 9 had been withdrawn by the proposer. A strengthened motion would be resubmitted for consideration at the Council meeting on 23 February 2022.

Leslie Roy Cooper

Councillor Postan advised the meeting that Leslie Roy Cooper had passed away suddenly on Friday 17 December 2021. Roy was the beloved husband of former Councillor and Woodstock Town Clerk, Ann Cooper and father to District Councillor Julian Cooper. A celebration of his life took place on 14 January 2022 and he would be remembered for his hard work and dedication to the residents of Woodstock.

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Councillor Postan then handed over to Roy's son, Councillor Julian Cooper. (insert Julian's words) He explained that his family connections were deeply set in West Oxfordshire, originating from Great Rollright. His father had been the Chairman of the Housing Committee in 1973 before leaving the Council in 1979. In 1988, Roy had joined Woodstock Town Council where he had served the residents for a further 16 years. Councillor Cooper took the opportunity to thank all officers and Councillors for their support during this time.

Tony Walker

The Chair advised that Tony had been Chairman of the Council between 1998 and 2002 and Cabinet Member for Tourism. He was instrumental in the twinning between Burford and Potenza Picena and a former resident of Chadlington. The Chairman handed over to Councillor Cotterill who described the work that Mr Walker had been involved in during his time as Chairman including the twinning with Potenza Picena. Whilst Covid had put paid to many twinning activities it was hoped that school exchange trips would be able to take place in the future. He described Mr Walker as the 'suntanned Chairman' following his two trips to the beaches of the Adriatic to establish the twinning connection.

The Council stood to hold a minute's silence in respect of the two gentleman.

Thames Water Surgeries

Councillor MacRae addressed the meeting and advised that, at the request of Thames Water and through the Leader of OCC, the Council had agreed to facilitate a series of 'surgeries' for the benefit of Parish Councillors, Parish Clerks and, of course District Councillors. These would be multi-agency events and would encourage dialogue between fellow Councillors and Thames Water. Officers were finalising details and the aim was for the surgeries to be held in April or May and details would follow in due course. Councillor MacRae emphasised that these surgeries for Councillors and Parish Clerks were intended to be educational and informative, rather than adversarial.

Water Days

Councillor MacRae announced that as instigated by Councillor Harvey, he was aiming to hold a Water Day at the Council offices now that Covid restrictions were beginning to ease. These events included presentations from Thames Water, the Environment Agency, WASP and others, followed by frank and robust discussions. This format had proven successful and popular in the past and officers had been asked to start working on a target date of October for the event.

Section 19 – Flood Report

Councillor MacRae advised that the long awaited report from the December 2020 flooding would soon be completed and it was hoped this could be published by the end of the day. Officers were awaiting official sign-off from the County's legal department and once published, this would be submitted to the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee for detailed consideration.

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Community Grants

Councillor Doughty was pleased to announce that a number of Community Activity Grants had been awarded, each of £500, covering many parts of the District and a variety of activities. Councillor Doughty went on to outline three recipients of the grants including the Long Meadow Foundation and Nature Recovery Network of Eynsham, the Burford Environmental Action Group and the 2120 (Witney) Squadron RAF Air Cadets.

Housing First Project

Councillor Davies was pleased to update Members on the continued success of the Housing First Project, which helped under 35 year olds who had been dealing with prolonged homelessness. Other partners working with the Council were Cottsway Housing and Spire.

Energy Efficiency Standards

Councillor Harvey advised that a scheme was in progress with a cross cutting theme across Environment and Housing. This was aimed at rented properties and ways that landlords could improve their energy ratings. Funding would be available via grants to landlords to ensure rentals were brought up to the Energy Efficiency Standards.

Hedgehog Highways

Councillor Harvey was delighted to announce the start of a Hedgehog Highway project across the District. Residents would be encouraged to cut a hole in their garden fences to enable the hedgehogs to roam more freely, forage and travel throughout the night. Households could submit a photograph of their 'highway hole' and could be rewarded with a Hedgehog Highway sign for their efforts.

Councillor Coles welcomed the initiative and asked if the Council could lead by example and create these highways on the Woodgreen site initially.

Business Grants

Councillor Coul provided an update on the Business Grants which had been awarded to 1712 independents and 5263 awards being made overall. These brought the total to £48,370,387 of grants being given to businesses over the past two years, along with £30 million in Rate Relief. In addition, 2416 business were signed up to the Business Matters emails which provided them with instant updates and Councillor Coul asked Members to encourage all businesses in the District to sign up.

Welcome Back Funds

Councillor Mead advised that a number of Welcome Back Funds had been distributed to town centres with a view to improving the street scene and encourage residents and visitors back to the towns. The grants had been used on a variety of items including maps, notice boards, signage, benches and hanging baskets.

CL.17 Participation of the Public

There was none.

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CL.18 Recommendations from the Executive

Council were asked to consider the recommendations made by Cabinet and the Council's Committee since its last meeting. A list of the recommendations was attached at Annex I to the report.

Councillor Mead introduced the report and proposed that the recommendations be accepted as written.

The Leader therefore proposed that the two recommendations be approved as laid out and this was duly seconded by Councillor Harvey.

Resolved that the recommendations set out in Annex I to the report be adopted.

CL.19 Emergency / Urgency Delegations and Decisions

Members received a report from the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer which asked them to note the decisions taken under the emergency and urgency delegation arrangements approved by Council on 13 May 2020.

The report highlighted two decisions that had been taken since the last Council meeting. These related to Winter Covid-19 Uplift Payments and the approval of an Additional Restrictions Grant Policy (ARG).

Both of the decisions had been taken following a request by officers to the Chief Executive and had been decided in consultation with the Leader. The use of urgency powers was necessary to enable officers to provide financial support for any households requiring assistance from 23 October 2021 and to deliver services without delay.

In relation to the ARG, officers were requesting to go live with the first grant prior to Christmas, with the Business Support Grant process going live from 10 January 2022.

Councillor Mead outlined the decisions and advised that the report was for noting.

Having considered the report, Council

Resolved that the report be noted.

CL.20 Calendar of Meetings 2022 - 2023

Members received a report which asked them to consider and agree a programme of meetings for the civic year 2022/2023, attached at Annex I to the report.

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The report noted that in relation to all three of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees it had been the practice for those Committees to consider their start time for the remainder of the civic year at their first meeting after the annual meeting of the Council.

The Leader proposed the report as laid out and this was duly seconded by Councillor Harvey.

Councillor Enright felt that it was important to try to arrange meetings outside of school holidays and noted that officers always attempted to achieve this. Councillor Mead noted his comments and advised that it was not always possible to avoid February half term dates because of the restrictions of the budget setting process.

Having considered the report along with the revised Annex I, Council

Resolved that

- (a) the Calendar of Meetings for 2022/2023 set out in the revised Annex I to this report be approved; and
- (b) the times for the first meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees after the annual meeting of the Council be as set out in Annex I, but that each Committee be invited to consider the timing of its subsequent meetings during the year.

CL.21 Motion - Thames Water

As advised at the start of the meeting, this item had been withdrawn by the proposer with a view to submitting a strengthened motion for consideration at the Council meeting on 23 February 2022.

CL.22 Reconsideration of Motion - Re-use of IT Equipment

At the Council meeting held on 28 April 2021 the following Motion was proposed and seconded by Councillors Graham and Enright respectively:-

“This Council notes that The Covid-19 lockdowns have shown how vital technology is to keeping people connected, in particular the vulnerable in society, many of whom have been confined to their homes and unable to see loved ones, and that according to Age UK 51% of digitally excluded people are over the age of 65, while refugees and the homeless also face worrying levels of digital exclusion.

This Council calls for:

1. The Council, public bodies in West Oxfordshire, and local businesses to reform their procurement policies by donating IT locally to those in need rather than scrapping it, using schemes such as the Laptops for Homeless and Vulnerable Initiative;
2. A local re-use and recycling centre to enable *SocialBox.Biz* and its charity partners to collect and distribute old technology to those in need in West Oxfordshire; and

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3. Direct council suppliers to support the *SocialBox.Biz* initiative and, together with the Council, to proactively take part in sponsoring and promoting the *SocialBox.Biz* message to local businesses, through traditional media and social media channels.”

The motion having been duly proposed and seconded stood referred without discussion to the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee for comment and advice.

The report considered by the Economic & Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25 November 2021 was attached at Annex 1 and the relevant minute from the meeting was attached at Annex 2. Following receipt of the officer’s report, the Committee recommend Option 2 to Council as follows:

“The Council donate their ‘end of life’ laptops, computers and phones for re-use to either the Oxford IT Bank or IT Schools Africa” and continue to use the existing arrangements for all other ICT Hardware.

The Chairman of Economic & Social Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Beaney, addressed the meeting and reiterated the reasons that Members had recommended Option 2 to Council.

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

Resolved that the Council would donate their ‘end of life’ laptops, computers and phones for re-use to either the Oxford IT Bank or IT Schools Africa” and continue to use the existing arrangements for all other ICT Hardware.

CL.23 Report of the Cabinet and the Council's Committees

The reports of the meetings of the Cabinet and the Council’s Committees held since 10 November 2021 were received and noted with the following comments:

Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 2 December 2021 – Minute Number 31

Councillor Jackson addressed the meeting and advised that he wanted to put on record his appreciation of two WODC officers, Bill Oddy and Louise Oddy following a recent site visit to Middle Barton. Councillor Jackson had requested the meeting to discuss the appropriate location of waste bins. The officers had met with himself and the Chair of the Parish Council and following the visit, had amended the bin locations expeditiously.

Councillor Davies also expressed her gratitude to the officers following a similar conversation relating to Hanborough.

Councillor Al-Yousuf thanked Councillor Jackson for his comments and echoed the sentiment with regards to the rollout of the Waste Bin Placement and Renewal Programme. He passed

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his gratitude to Bill Oddy, Louise Oddy, the Cabinet Member for the Environment and the whole team involved.

Cabinet – 15 December 2021 – Minute Number 63

Following a query from Councillor Graham, Mr Wilson advised that all partner Councils had agreed to the Extension to Agreement for Support Services with Publica.

Cabinet – 19 January 2022 – Minute Number 74

Councillor Graham referred to the question he had raised at the meeting relating to section 3.5 of the report which dealt with the refurbishment of play parks. He again queried the work being done to evaluate costs and asked if there was a timeline and rationale he could view. In response, Councillor Coul advised that there were amendments awaited and Councillors would be updated as soon as further details were known.

Councillor Leffman raised a query relating to comments Councillor Graham had made at the meeting relating to GLL and management fees. Having asked if there were contingencies and plans in place should the leisure industry find themselves in difficulty, the Cabinet Member assured her there were.

Councillor Cooper raised the issue that the Sealing of Documents no longer appeared on the Council agenda. He asked the Interim Monitoring Officer for an explanation and queried when this decision had been made. In response, Mrs Claridge explained that following the review of the Constitution, it had been noted that there was no requirement for this document to be submitted to Council. The sealing register was accessible on request should any Member wish to see it. In her opinion, by the time Councillors had sight of the document it would be too late to make any amendments because the sealing of the legal papers had been concluded and she suggested that earlier intervention would be more beneficial.

In response, Councillor Cooper cited an incident where he had highlighted a spelling error which had been subsequently amended.

The Meeting closed at 2.42 pm

CHAIRMAN