

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting of the Council

Held in the Council Chamber at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 19 October 2022**

#### PRESENT

Councillors: Julian Cooper (Chair), Andrew Coles (Vice-Chair), Joy Aitman, Alaa Al-Yousuf, Lidia Arciszewska, Luci Ashbourne (to item 34), Hugo Ashton, Andrew Beaney, Michael Brooker, Jill Bull, Mike Cahill, Owen Collins, David Cooper, Suzi Cooper, Colin Dingwall, Harry Eaglestone, Duncan Enright, Ted Fenton, Andy Goodwin, Andy Graham, Jeff Haine, Gill Hill, David Jackson, Mark Johnson, Natalie King, Richard Langridge, Nick Leverton, Dan Levy, Norman MacRae MBE, Charlie Maynard, Martin McBride, Michele Mead, Lysette Nicholls, Mathew Parkinson, Rosie Pearson, Rizvana Poole, Elizabeth Poskitt, Andrew Prosser, Carl Rylett, Geoff Saul, Alaric Smith, Ruth Smith, Harry St John, Dean Temple and Alex Wilson.

Also present: India Mae Thompson. West Oxfordshire District Council Youth Champion.

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive), Jan Britton (Managing Director, Publica), Frank Wilson (Group Finance Director - Publica), Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer), Susan Sale (Interim Monitoring Officer), Andrew Brown (Business Manager Democratic Services), Michelle Ouzman (Strategic Support Officer) and Janet Eustace (Democratic Services)

#### **CL.25 Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 20 July 2022 were approved and signed by the Chair as a true record of the meeting subject to Councillor St John being shown as present and Councillor Jackson sending apologies.

Councillor MacRae raised a point of order under Rule 15.14. on a question previously asked. Councillor MacRae asked Councillor Aitman for an update on the Monahan Way pitches and on the work needed at the play area in the Country Park. Councillor Aitman said that she had not received an update and undertook to discuss with Councillor MacRae outside the meeting.

#### **CL.26 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Chapple, Doughty, Leffman and Woodruff.

#### **CL.27 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **CL.28 Receipt of Announcements**

##### Chairman of the Council

- (a) Tribute to her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

The Chair and Leaders of the political groups paid tribute to her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in particular her dedication to public service over an exceptionally long reign.

The Council observed a period of silence in memory of Her Majesty.

(b) Presentation of past Chairman Badge to Councillor McBride

The Chair presented a past Chairman Badge to Councillor McBride. Councillor McBride said it had been an honour to Chair the Council and to represent the West Oxfordshire over a wider sphere. He thanked Councillors for the support he had received and for the opportunity to serve.

(c) Other announcements

The Council congratulated Cllr Booker on the new arrival in his household. Secondly the Chair reminded the meeting it was St Frideswide's Day who is the patron saint of Oxfordshire. Thirdly the Chair asked councillors to put 10 March 2023 in their diaries as Mr Simon Hoare M.P. The Chairman of the Northern Ireland select committee was coming to address the authority on the future of the province. Fourthly the Chair sadly informed the Council that the Chair's reception on 11 November 2023 had been cancelled due to technical reasons.

The Leader of the Council

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, thanked Councillors for their kind wishes during his recent illness and thanked Councillor Enright for deputising in his absence. The Leader updated the Council on the rising number of COVID cases and said that the Council remained committed to supporting the NHS.

The Leader introduced the newly appointed Youth Champion, India Mae Thompson, from Finstock. He listed her many sporting achievements on the world stage and looked forward to her representing the Council at future events.

Cabinet member for Stronger, Healthier Communities

Councillor Joy Aitman reminded Council that there would be a briefing after the meeting to report on the work of the Cost Of Living Crisis Working Group.

Cabinet Member for the Environment

Councillor Lidia Arciszewska said that the Council was organizing a 'Waterways Day' at Woodgreen on Friday 18 November. The event would focus on the current state of watercourses, their ecology and how to manage them to prevent flooding. Thames Water, WASP, OCC and other organizations and community groups would be in attendance. All Councillors were invited to attend.

**CL.29** **Appointments to Future Oxfordshire Scrutiny Panel**

The Chair invited Council to approve the appointment of three non-executive members to the Future Oxfordshire Scrutiny Panel. Nominations had been received for Councillors Julian Cooper, Richard Langridge and Charlie Maynard.

Council **resolved** to appoint Councillors Julian Cooper, Richard Langridge and Charlie Maynard to the Future Oxfordshire Scrutiny Panel.

**CL.30 Participation of the Public**

There were none.

**CL.31 Members' Questions**

The following questions were asked at the meeting, and below are the recorded answers:

Question 1. Councillor MacRae for Councillor Enright (Cabinet Member for Economy). As a largely rural area with infrequent transport links, the residents of our District are, in many ways reliant on taxis to enable them to carry out activities such as shopping and visits to medical facilities. The energy situation we are experiencing has resulted in a massive increase in fuel prices and therefore a very marked increase in taxi operating costs, thus potentially putting some operators at risk of going out of business. The new rates for fares, which came into effect on 12 October, would help the taxi drivers but would put increased pressure on residents who could ill afford to pay more.

Answer: It is recognised that taxis are a very important part of the District's infrastructure. There are a range of issues that might be considered including licensing which it might be possible to harmonise across a wider area. More discussions were being held with officers to discuss the options. Councillors were encouraged to come forward with proposals.

Supplementary Question Councillor MacRae: Following the adoption of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy, which came into effect on 1 October 2021, it was proposed that a second piece of work would follow in 2021/22. This would look at the vehicle part of the Council's Policy and review in line with the Council's climate change priorities. It was also promised that a consultation, supporting the DfT's Statutory Standards for the taxi/private hire trade, would be carried out to identify if there are local circumstances which indicate that the installation of CCTV in vehicles would have either a positive or an adverse net effect on the safety of taxi and private hire vehicle users, including children or vulnerable adults, and taking into account potential privacy issues. What progress has been made on this and when can Council be made aware of the results of the review?

Answer: Councillor Enright would ask for an update for Councillor MacRae.

Question 2. Councillor MacRae to Councillor Arciszewska (Cabinet Member for the Environment). How many times have there been reports of multiple (i.e. involving several or all households in a street) missed bin collections in the last six months?

Answer: 4,729,943 collections have been made in the last six months (1/4/22-30/9/22). The collection accuracy remains high at 99.85%. 25 premises have reported repeat missed collections during this period.

19/October2022

Supplementary Question Councillor MacRae: Whilst I realise that the Cabinet member feels she has more important things to do than chase up missed bin collections, as she advised Cllr Fenton in a recent email, does she agree with me that providing a waste collection service is one of the most significant services for which all households pay their Council Tax? What steps has she taken to reverse the decline in the service that residents have noticed since the current administration came into office? I can quote a personal example of the unacceptable decline in waste services where I, and some of my neighbours had a missed food bin collection on Friday last. As we ask, I completed a missed collection report on Friday, had an automated receipt – number 01185727, timed at 1547, advising that the aim was to return within two working days i.e. Monday or Tuesday. The bin was still there when I left to come here Is this an acceptable level of service, I certainly don't think so?

Answer: Officers are saying that the service is improving. Those collections which are missed are the result of human error. There have been some problems with the introduction of in-cab technology but as operatives are becoming more accustomed to using the technology, missed collections are reducing.

Question 3. Councillor Fenton to Councillor Arciszewska (Cabinet Member for the Environment). How many of the District's sewerage treatment works are due for upgrade within the next two years?

Answer: One. Witney Sewage Treatment Works is the only one in the District due to be upgraded in terms of increasing capacity within the current AMP7, which runs from 2020 - 2025. According to information obtained from Thames Water the project is expected to be completed by March 2024.

I view this upgrade inadequate in terms of both quantity and quality, given the scale of pollution occurring in our rivers. With that in mind, I will give you an update of the actions we are taking and the progress we have made to date:

1. We've been working closely with WASP to query TW's stated population data per STW. This is important as the population of a STW catchment area is a key input into calculating the necessary capacity of a STW. If the population data is false, so will be the STW's capacity calculation. As a result of this work, TW have now admitted publicly that they use two different sets of books to calculate population. This is deeply concerning and needs to be fixed. We have asked for both sets of population data for each of the last ten years by each STW catchment area. We will compare these datasets to our own population data calculations.
2. We're seeking confirmation of the exact formula and inputs that TW uses to calculate STW capacity. With all of this data in hand, we will be able to draw our own conclusions as to which STWs are most under-capacity. We've also asked TW to provide their own views as to which STWs are most under-capacity.

19/October2022

3. We've asked TW to provide the make and model of the volume flowmeters it installs to measure volume flows into the environment from STWs ranging in size from Witney's down to a 15l/s size. We've asked them to outline what data can be captured from the magflow volume flowmeter at Witney STW's outlet and whether all data that TW receives from this flowmeter be made publicly available by year end?
4. We've asked TW to provide a list of all phosphoric strippers either already installed at STWs in our area, or planned to be installed during AMP 7 (i.e by Dec 2025). We've asked for TW's views as to which future installations they view as representing the best bang for their buck.
5. We've asked TW to provide an overview of TW leak fixing activity in West Oxfordshire and upstream on the Evenlode and Windrush catchments. Over the past year, how many people days have been spent fixing this, fixing how many leaks, over the past year? Plus a summary of what works are planned going forward in the area.
6. TW have confirmed that all STW sewage spill data will be available in real time online by year end. We intend to hold them to this commitment.

We met with TW on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> October and have another meeting with them on the 4<sup>th</sup> November to run through the above data, which they will be providing us ahead of the meeting.

Supplementary Question Councillor Fenton: What action can the Council take if Thames Water's performance fails to improve?

Answer: The District Council has no legal powers and so must work with Thames Water to motivate them to improve their performance.

Question 4. Councillor Al-Yousuf to Councillor Graham (Leader) and Councillor Rylett (Cabinet Member for Planning and Sustainable Development). Do you agree that this Council is in a planning crisis because it cannot demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply and therefore needs an emergency response?

Answer: Whilst I acknowledge that the District Council cannot currently demonstrate a 5-year supply of deliverable housing land, this is not a planning crisis that requires an emergency response – rather it is a common issue faced by many local authorities and requires a measured and robust plan of action.

Whilst the final figure is still being verified, the total number of housing completions for 2021/22 is expected to exceed 1,000 units which is a very strong performance and would mean that nearly 6,500 new homes will have been built in West Oxfordshire since the start of the Local Plan in 2011. This is a significant uplift in housing delivery compared to long-term past trends.

Council

19/October2022

Looking forward, the Council is currently in the process of finalising a new Housing Land Supply Position Statement for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2027 which will set out the number of homes expected to come forward over that 5-year period. In preparing the statement, Officers have been seeking additional information from landowners and developers to provide clearer evidence to support any assumptions made. It is anticipated that the updated position statement will be published later this month.

Officers are also seeking to identify suitable opportunities to increase the capacity of sites where the principle of residential development has already been established and have started a review of the Local Plan which will consider future housing needs and provide an opportunity to identify additional housing sites in a plan-led manner in consultation with local communities and other key stakeholders.

Supplementary Question Councillor Al-Yousuf: When will the Council issue an updated public position statement? It is important to regain public confidence in the planning system.

Answer: Councillors have already received advice and a more detailed statement will be issued by the end of the month. This issue is not unique to West Oxfordshire with 37% of other planning authorities in a similar position. Government has recognised that planning legislation is not working and that more control needs to be given to local councils.

At this point the Chair advised that the time allowed for Members Questions had expired but that he would allow a further question which had been tabled under the Urgent Question procedure.

Question 5: Councillor MacRae for Councillor Graham (Leader of the Council). Councillors received the following advice from Democratic Services on 13<sup>th</sup> October – “The postal strike will affect delivery of the following Committee Papers: Council 19 October, Audit and Governance 26 October and Economic and Social 24 November. It is highly likely that these will get caught up in the backlog so we will not be posting these papers. Electronic versions will be sent to you once published and paper copies will be available on the day of the meeting.”

When accessing the papers on my PC, I am provided with the ‘Public’ version that does not include sensitive ‘green’ pages as I am not on the internal intranet system. It is important, for me, and I am sure others, to have all papers in advance of meetings in order that they can be fully considered. If the disruption to postal services continues as advised above and perhaps beyond, how do Councillors access ‘green pages’ other than by driving into Woodgreen to collect them in person.

Answer: Members can register for restricted papers on the Modern.gov app. Andrew Brown, Business Manager, Democratic Services has circulated instructions on how this can be done and I have asked him to recirculate this. Members can also access private papers via the Intranet. A link is included when the papers are published. For Members unable to use either of these methods, Democratic Services will, on request, email restricted papers. The private

Council

19/October2022

pack for the Performance and Appointments Committee meeting on 26 October was circulated to members of that committee by email.

Councillors reported that the Intranet link was not working. Democratic Services was asked to investigate.

#### **CL.32 Recommendations from Cabinet and the Council Committees**

There were none.

#### **CL.33 Motion - Proposed by Councillor Pearson**

Councillor Pearson, introduce the motion that West Oxfordshire District Council should resolve:

- a) To support the Climate and Ecology Bill;
- b) For the Leader to write to Robert Courts, MP letting him know that the motion has been passed, and urging him to sign up to support the Bill.
- c) For the Leader to write to Zero Hour, the organisers of the cross-party campaign for the Bill, expressing the Council's support ([joinus@ceebill.uk](mailto:joinus@ceebill.uk))."

In debate it was noted that the Private Member's Bill had been drafted by scientists, lawyers and activists. It had been gathering support from a broad range of campaign groups, businesses and charities. The Bill allowed for the creation of a Citizens' Assembly that would put forward recommendations contributing to the work of both the UK Government and UK Parliament in delivering an essential climate and ecological emergency strategy. The District Council must set an example by tackling the climate and nature crises; doing what it can to cut emissions and halting and reverse UK biodiversity loss.

Points in opposition to the motion included ceding constitutional rights to an unelected Citizen's Assembly, the involvement of the more extreme activists and the rapid transitional from fossil fuels before alternatives are available.

The Council **resolved** 25 in favour and 20 against:

- a) To support the Climate and Ecology Bill;
- b) For the Leader to write to Robert Courts, MP letting him know that the motion has been passed, and urging him to sign up to support the Bill.
- c) For the Leader to write to Zero Hour, the organisers of the cross-party campaign for the Bill, expressing its support ([joinus@ceebill.uk](mailto:joinus@ceebill.uk))."

Councillor Ashbourne left the meeting.

#### **CL.34 Report of the Constitution Working Party**

Councillor Fenton introduced the report which set out proposals from the Constitution Working Group for amendments to the Constitution to adopt new Council Procedure Rules, Officer Employment Procedure Rules and a Protocol on the Conferment of Honorary Titles. He thanked Councillors who had served on the Group some on whom had now left the Council.

Council

19/October2022

Councillor Fenton mentioned that Councillor Coul would no longer be on the working group and would be replaced by Councillor Mead. He explained that the Council Procedure Rules had been extensively rewritten but that future amendments would be marked up to allow alterations to be tracked. He confirmed that the Protocol on Conferment of Honorary Titles did not preclude the award of titles to those Councillors who had lost seats in elections.

The Council **resolved** to:

- a) establish a Working Group, to report to Council, to be known as the Constitution Working Group, with immediate effect until the Annual Council meeting in May 2023;
- b) approve the terms of reference of the Constitution Working Group as set out in Annex A to the report;
- c) appoint to the membership of the Constitution Working Group as set out in Annex B to the report, but substituting Councillor Coul with Councillor Mead, and to note that the Group appoint Cllr Fenton as their Chair;
- d) approve the Council Procedure Rules at Annex C to the report and formally adopt them as part of the Council's Constitution from 20th October 2022;
- e) approve the Officer Employment Procedure Rules at Annex D to the report and formally adopt them as part of the Council's Constitution from 20th October 2022;
- f) approve the Protocol on Conferment of Honorary Titles at Annex E to the report and formally adopt it as part of the Council's Constitution from 20th October 2022;
- g) delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer to make minor and consequential amendments to the Constitution.

The Meeting closed at 3.35 pm

CHAIR