

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **Executive**

Held in Committee Room 1, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB at 2.00pm on
Wednesday 13 September 2023.

PRESENT

Councillors: Andy Graham (Leader), Duncan Enright (Deputy Leader), Joy Aitman, Lidia Arciszewska, Dan Levy, Andrew Prosser, Carl Rylett, Alaric Smith and Geoff Saul.

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive), James Howse (Interim Director of Finance), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer), Frank Wilson (Executive Finance Director, Publica), Andy Barge (Assistant Director, Communities), Jon Dearing (Assistant Director, Resident Services), Phil Martin (Assistant Director, Business Services), Andrew Brown (Business Manager, Democratic Services), Max Thompson (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer) and Ciaran O’Kane (Senior Procurement Business Partner).

Other Councillors in attendance: Michele Mead, Liam Walker, Alaa Al-Yousuf, Sandra Simpson and Julian Cooper.

75 Apologies for Absence

There were no Apologies for Absence received from Members of the Executive.

76 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, stated he had interest relating to the Agenda Item 12 (Endorsement of Cotswold National Landscape Management Plan 2023-25) in his role as an Oxfordshire County Councillor.

The Leader stated he was a representative on the Cotswold National Landscape Board, but did not have any pecuniary interests.

77 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on Wednesday 12 July 2023, were unanimously agreed by the Executive, and signed by the Leader of the Council as a true & accurate record.

78 Receipt of Announcements

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, welcomed all attendees to the meeting and thanked members of the public for attending. The Leader advised public attendees that the Members of the Executive would remain in attendance after the meeting had concluded, so they could meet each other on an informal basis and discuss any issues attendees wished to raise. The Leader also advised that the meeting was being live streamed to the Council’s website and welcomed viewers to the meeting.

The Leader announced a community project in Stonesfield to purchase The White Horse Pub. The purchase would be an asset to the community. The Leader, on behalf of the Executive, thanked Officers for their assistance with the project and their swift action, help and support. The White Horse planned to reopen in 2024.

The Leader advised that the Woodgreen Council Chamber would be undergoing extensive refurbishment work in the latter months of 2023, and as a result, the next Executive meeting on 11 October 2023 would be held at Warwick Hall in Burford. After speaking with residents, it

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was decided to hold the meeting at 6.00pm on an evening trial basis, to facilitate those residents who wished to attend meetings but had commitments in the daytime.

Councillor Carl Rylett, Executive Member for Planning and Sustainable Development, announced the Local Plan Consultation 'Your Place, Your Plan' had recently gone live and would be running for 8 weeks ending on 25 October 2023. The Council was keen to hear the points of view of the residents and had organised the following events at Town and Parish councils:

- 10 October 2023 at 6.30pm at Milton under Wychwood Village Hall;
- 18 October 2023 at 6.30pm at Woodgreen, Witney.

In addition, there would be 3 drop-in sessions at Local Plan Exhibitions:

- 26 September 2023 between 4.00pm and 8.00pm at Carterton Town Hall;
- 3 October 2023 between 4.00pm and 8.00pm at Woodstock Community Centre;
- 23 October 2023 between 4.00pm and 8.00pm at Klein Hall.

Details could be found on the West Oxfordshire District Council Website.

Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economic Development, welcomed Sports Direct to Marriot's Walk Shopping Centre. The Deputy Leader noted that Sports Direct was a welcome addition to the Centre, and complimented the mix of current retailers. Other planned events at Marriot's Walk would include a 'Vegan Fiesta' on 14 October 2023, a Christmas Market and Charter Markets.

The Deputy Leader also highlighted the upcoming first meeting of the Witney Town Partnership, which would bring together organisations within the town and also the District & Town Councils, to focus on how to support businesses in the town. There were plans to bring further partnership meetings to both Chipping Norton and Carterton.

The Deputy Leader advised that engagement and exhibitions were underway to gather ideas for the future of the High Street and Market Square in Witney. This would be led by County Officers, and would be portrayed as a good example of different councils working together.

Councillor Dan Levy, Executive Member for Finance, announced that the consultation on Council Tax Support for the next financial year had opened on the consultation pages of the West Oxfordshire District Council website. The consultation would run until 22 September. The consultation was the first part of setting the budget for next year and would focus on helping more residents who faced the challenges of the Cost of Living crisis and increased inflation.

Councillor Levy also welcomed Madhu Richards to West Oxfordshire District Council who was present in the public gallery. Madhu Richards would join the Council as the new Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer. Councillor Levy expressed that the Council looked forward to working with her in the future.

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Participation of the Public

There was no Public Participation at the meeting.

80 **Review of Community Grant Schemes**

Councillor Joy Aitman, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, introduced and gave an overview of the report, which considered proposals to refine the community grant funding schemes, to better align intended outcomes from the Council Plan, fostering greater community engagement. The report set out the process through which the Service Level Agreements would be awarded for 2024/25 onwards and the Civic Crowdfunding Platform that would be introduced to ensure that the defined outcomes were achieved.

In debate, the Executive welcomed the report and acknowledged the hard work completed by Officers. Communities would benefit from the scheme as they could extend their fundraising goals resulting in far more opportunities. It would bring new initiatives and new organisations would be able to benefit. The scheme would make sure young people were prioritised and there would be an amount of £20,000 set aside for youth projects and young people's initiatives.

Councillor Joy Aitman proposed that the Executive agree the recommendations as set out in the original report. This was seconded by Councillor Andy Graham, was put to a vote, and unanimously agreed by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Grant delegated authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader and Executive Members for Stronger Healthy Communities, Planning and Sustainable Development, Environment and Climate Change to approve Service Level Agreement awards;
2. Agree the maximum Service Level Agreement award will be £25,000 per annum unless in exceptional circumstances where evidence has been proven to justify the need for a higher award;
3. Permit organisations who are awarded a Service Level Agreement to also submit projects to the SpaceHive Crowdfunding Platform.

81 **Asylum Dispersal Grant**

Councillor Joy Aitman, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities introduced and gave an overview of the report, which considered the planned expenditure of the Asylum Dispersal Grant.

In debate, the Executive thanked the staff in the Witney Hotel who had worked hard to support asylum seekers and to the residents of Ducklington who had provided help as well as the various voluntary groups involved.

Councillor Sandra Simpson asked what dietary provisions were in place for vegetarians with focus on nutritional information and if there was a list of organisations where people could volunteer.

Phil Martin, Assistant Director for Business Services, confirmed that the nutritional details for meals provided could be found in addition to the menus. Monthly multi-agency meetings had been held to provide updates on the food being provided. There was a focus more localised food provision. All dietary requirements were met, and the providers were challenged over food quality. The Council had worked with Volunteer Link-up and brought in a co-ordinator post which coordinate would work being done by organisations to give opportunities to the residents of the hotel to be part of the support network. The list of organisations would be made available.

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More challenges were expected however the Council was supporting asylum seekers with the resources available. The Executive thanked the Assistant Director for all the work officers had done, and also thanked the community including community groups, churches and schools.

Councillor Joy Aitman proposed that the Executive agree the recommendations as set out in the report. This was seconded by Councillor Andrew Prosser, was put to a vote, and unanimously agreed by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Approve the expenditure of £147,000 detailed within the sections 3 and 5 of the original report;
2. Delegate authority to make any amendments to these allocations, providing these are compliant with the ring fenced grant conditions, to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Executive Member for Stronger Healthy Communities and the informal Executive.

82 Service Performance Report 2023-24 Quarter One

Councillor Dan Levy, Executive Member for Finance, introduced and gave an overview of the report, which provided details of the Council's operational performance at the end of 2023-24 Quarter One (Q1).

Councillor Dan Levy proposed that the Executive agreed to the recommendations as set out in the report. This was seconded by Councillor Andy Graham, was put to a vote, and unanimously agreed by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Note the 2023/24 Quarter I Service Performance Report; and
2. Ask officers to review the performance indicator data set to better reflect the emerging priorities and actions in the revised Council Plan.

83 Financial Performance Report 2023/24 Quarter One

Councillor Dan Levy, Executive Member for Finance, introduced and gave an overview of the report, which detailed the Council's financial performance for Quarter One 2023-24 (April to June).

The Executive thanked the Interim Director of Finance, James Howse, for his ongoing guidance and comments.

Councillor Alaa Al-Yousuf asked for clarification on rental properties and what income would be forthcoming for the rest of the year, and how this affect deficits, and what would be done to address the problem.

The Executive advised that there were property rental voids that would be expected given the current financial climate. However, the Council owned properties were doing well as reflected in the numbers of shops rented by good quality tenants in Marriot's Walk.

Councillor Dan Levy proposed that the Executive agree the recommendations as set in the report. This was seconded by Councillor Alaric Smith, was put to a vote, and unanimously agreed by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Note the Council's Financial Performance for Quarter One 2023/24 (April to June).

84 Channel Choice and Telephone Access

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects, introduced and gave a detailed overview of the report, which outlined the Council's success in supporting the shift in customer demand to digital channels and to consider adjusting telephone access hours as part of a balanced approach to customer contacts that responded to customer preferences.

Councillor Julian Cooper raised concerns about reducing telephone access and advised he did not agree with the proposal.

Councillor Michele Mead stated that she had voted against this proposal at the recent meeting of the Finance and Management Overview & Scrutiny meeting. Councillor Mead highlighted the number of residents who do not have access to computers or are unable to make calls in the morning due to working hours.

The Executive advised that money had been saved by taking this approach, but that investments had been made in the Welch Way Town Centre 'shop' and in systems to support the change. The Executive expressed that the changes were on a trial basis and access channels were remaining open. There were multiple means of accessing the service; residents to call in, use digital channels and walk into the Town Centre.

Councillor Alaric Smith proposed that the Executive agree the recommendations as set in the report. This was seconded by Councillor Andy Graham, was put to a vote, and unanimously agreed by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Agree the reduced telephone access hours, on a trial basis, with effect from Monday 16 October 2023; and
2. Receive a further report, detailing the finding and recommendations from the trial, to an Executive meeting in the first quarter of 2024/25.

85 Procurement and Contract Management Strategy

Councillor Dan Levy, Executive Member for Finance, introduced and gave an overview of the report, which presented an updated draft Procurement and Contract Management Strategy for comment and consideration by Executive.

In debate, the Executive highlighted that procurement was from ethical sources and reputable suppliers. There would be more control over contracts and reviews of contracts, working with companies who were aware of ethnic issues such as modern slavery, foreign suppliers and making sure current policies were adhered to.

Councillor Dan Levy proposed that the Executive agree the recommendations as set in the report. This was seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright, was put to a vote, and unanimously agreed by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Approve the update Procurement and Contract Management Strategy;
2. Delegate authority to the Director of Governance to amend the approved Contract Procedure Rules to remove reference to the obsolete Procurement Strategy and Procurement Code, which the Procurement and Contract Management Strategy will replace.

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86 Endorsement of Cotswold National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Change, introduced and gave an overview of the report, which sought the Council's endorsement of the Cotswolds National Landscape Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan 2023-2025, produced by the Cotswolds National Landscape Board.

In debate, the Executive expressed its obligation to protect the Cotswolds now and also in the future, including working in line with the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Development Plans for any future planning.

Councillor Andrew Prosser proposed that the Executive agree the recommendations as set out in the report. This was seconded by Councillor Carl Rylett, was put to a vote, and unanimously agreed by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

- I. Endorse the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025 for use as;
 - Part of the evidence base for the review of the Local Plan;
 - Part of the evidence base for the preparation of Neighbourhood Development Plans;
 - Part of the evidence base for the preparation and implementation of relevant Council strategies, policies and projects;
 - As a material consideration in the determination of planning applications; and to inform the development and delivery of the Council's services and activities.

The Meeting closed at 3.01pm

CHAIR