

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of **Executive.**

Held in The New Hall, Warwick Hall, Church Lane, Burford, Oxfordshire OX18 4RY at
6.00pm on **Wednesday 11 October 2023.**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andy Graham, Duncan Enright, Carl Rylett, Andrew Prosser, Alaric Smith, Geoff Saul, Lidia Arciszewska and Tim Sumner.

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive), James Howse (Interim Director of Finance), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance), Frank Wilson (Executive Finance Director - Publica), Zoe Campbell (Assistant Director, Organisational Effectiveness), Phil Martin (Assistant Director, Business Services), Claire Locke (Assistant Director, Property and Regeneration), Jon Dearing (Assistant Director, Resident Services), Sue Hughes (Business Manager, Support and Advice), Max Thompson (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Chris Hargraves (Planning Policy Manager), Heather McCulloch (Community Wellbeing Manager), Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer), Barry Clack (Communications Officer) and Elise Chowdhury (Communications Officer).

Other Councillors in attendance: Michele Mead, Thomas Ashby, Rosie Pearson, Hugo Ashton, Julian Cooper, and David Melvin.

87 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillor Joy Aitman.

Councillor Duncan Enright arrived late to the meeting at 6.15pm.

88 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest made by Members of the Executive.

89 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on Wednesday 13 September 2023, were unanimously agreed by the Executive, and signed by the Leader of the Council as a true & accurate record.

90 Receipt of Announcements

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, welcomed all attendees to the meeting, and thanked members of the public for attending proceedings. The Leader advised that the meeting was the sixth in the Council's "Executive on Tour" series, with previous meetings being held around the West Oxfordshire District in Charlbury, Chipping Norton, Woodstock, Carterton and Eynsham. Councillor Graham also advised that the next meeting of the Executive, would take place on Wednesday 15 November 2023, at 2.00pm in Committee Room 1 at the Council's offices at Woodgreen in Witney.

The Council's Senior Democratic Services Officer, Max Thompson, was invited by the Leader to give the members of the public in attendance an overview of the way that the meeting would run. Public attendees were advised that Members of the Executive would remain in attendance after the meeting had concluded, so they could meet each other on an informal basis.

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The Senior Democratic Services Officer further advised that the final two Agenda Items contained commercially sensitive information and details of a private nature, and as such, the meeting would need to agree to enter private session and that attendees that this would be highlighted at the appropriate juncture.

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare announced that as part of the Council's Strategic Housing Project, a recruitment exercise would take place for the recruitment of a Strategic Housing Officer. The post would also be shared with Cotswold District Council, with the post holder being employed by Publica Group, as part of the Council's working partnership.

Councillor Tim Sumner, Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects announced and welcomed the appointment of Jacqui Wright as the Council's new Head of Leisure and Well-Being. The role had been designed to drive a focus on Leisure and Well-Being provisions within the District, putting residents first.

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Change welcomed Stephany Chan to the meeting who was present in the public gallery. Stephany Chan was an undergraduate from Oxford Brookes University and had taken up post as an internship during the current semester and would be hosted by the Green Party Group of the Council.

Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for the Environment, advised that 23 November 2023 would be 'Waterways Day', taking place at The Corn Exchange in Witney. There would be an extensive list of Speakers at the event, such as Thames Water, Environment Agency, and Oxfordshire County Council. The Executive Member expressed a desire for maximum participation at the event.

91 Participation of the Public

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, advised the Executive had received 3 public questions, submitted to them through Democratic Services in advance of the meeting.

The Executive provided the following answers to the following questions:

Q1 Asked by Councillor Perryn Bruce, Burford Town Council:

Please could the respective Executive Members for Planning & Sustainable Development (responsible for conservation and the historic environment) and Economic Development (responsible for the visitor economy) outline a programme for achieving remedial works on 121 High Street, Burford?

The Grade 2 listed building at 121 High Street has been empty for at least seven years and is deteriorating rapidly. In the last year or so, the following has been noted:

- Window glass has fallen from rotten window frames onto the High Street, posing a Health and Safety risk to the public;
- A hole in the roof of 121 can be seen from buildings across the road. We assume this hole is enabling rainwater ingress, accelerating the dereliction of the building;
- Rainwater is penetrating a neighbour's property at the rear of 121, creating a potential health hazard for the resident;
- There is a constant drip from an overflow pipe at the side of 121 also affecting the neighbour mentioned above;

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- There has been no maintenance or cleaning in seven years or so, making the building an eyesore for Burford.

Given the Health and Safety issues regarding this property and the impact to a listed building, surely the current situation cannot be sustained?"

A1 Answered by Councillor Carl Rylett, Executive Member for Planning and Sustainable Development:

121 High Street, Burford, has been a property that has been monitored by the planning team, involving regular visits from the Conservation Officers and Enforcement Officers. WODC has a locus in assessing the state of the Listed Building in terms of its architectural and historic integrity, but is not to intervene in civil issues as regards water penetration to a third-party property, and nor does the Listed Building legislation control Health and Safety matters, albeit that it is accepted that there is some overlap between resolving one issue and helping to move others on.

The key problem with this site has been tracking down the owner. It has taken considerable work on behalf of the team, firstly to track the owner down, and secondly to arrange a meeting where the issues can be put face to face. A meeting took place today (Wednesday 11 October 2023) to seek to progress matters more quickly than has been possible whilst we have been trying to establish contact. However, the matter may be extended as the property is registered to a foreign company, which may complicate the enforcement process if enforcement is eventually required. If there are any updates from the meeting, Officers will update you as appropriate.

The defective rainwater goods and potential water penetration may be investigated by the Environmental Health team if required, because depending on the extent of harm, powers under Statutory Nuisance and Building Act legislation can be used to remedy the situation if required.

Q2 Asked by Councillor John White, Burford Town Council:

Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) has a team working on finding a regional solution to the problems caused by HGVs rumbling through small towns and villages in the County, especially Burford.

What is the District Council's position on this project?, and has it, or will it tell OCC where it stands on these issues?

A2 Answered by Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare, (on behalf of) Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economic Development:

In a previous role in the County Council, Councillor Enright put in place a new freight routing strategy, which will use a range of measures to work with hauliers and other HGV users, in order to reduce inappropriate traffic on our rural road network. The pilot for the new approach at the County Council will take place in the Windrush Valley, covering everything in the triangle between Fosseway, A40 and A44 (as well as the Henley area).

As the Executive Member for Economic Development at West Oxfordshire District Council, Councillor Enright is well aware of the need for our many businesses in the district, including in agriculture, quarrying and haulage, to have appropriate access. This must be balanced by the

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need of residents and businesses to be safe on our roads, and not suffer from heavy goods traffic unnecessarily.

There is no solution which fits every situation, and our neighbours (for example in Gloucestershire and Warwickshire) have the same problems. There is goodwill on all sides, which is a strong place to start finding a solution to HGV traffic routing, particularly around our quarrying and construction sites, and in sensitive locations like town centres in Burford and Chipping Norton, Leafield and Woodstock, and on West End in Witney.

West Oxfordshire District Council will work with the County Council to facilitate the pilot and future work to the fullest extent, as well as considering the needs of businesses and residents in the forthcoming new Local Plan.

Q3 Asked by Councillor Peter Higgs, Mayor of Burford:

I submitted a question to you regarding WODC's action plan to improve Car and Coach parking in Burford on 12 September 2023.

Please could I receive the council's formal plans to improve Burford Car Park both in capacity and in resilience against flooding, and how WODC can help provide proper coach parking to support Burford's tourist industry.

A3 Answered by Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council:

Car parking in Burford as everyone knows is very popular, particularly at the Guildenford car park. During a recent usage survey carried out by the District Council, 32.75% stated they travel under 10 miles to the town, indicating that they live in the local area. The remaining 67.25% were from outside the area, and the average occupancy of car parking throughout the duration of the study was 61%.

The Guildenford car park is most popular between the peak times of 1.00pm and 3.00pm, when on average 80% of spaces are occupied. This increases during summer months when it becomes more popular with tourists, reaching levels of 80-90%.

The majority of customers using the car park are short stay, which indicates a high turnaround of customers and spaces. There is additional parking available on the street permitting both short and longer stay, for which there is currently no charge. Analysis of our enforcement activity in the area, highlighted that the majority of enforcement action was taken as a result of customers parking beyond the bay markings.

At the meeting tonight, the Executive are recommended by officers to resolve to:

- a) Agree that a further review in 2024 of Guildenford car park, supports the best use of council assets to identify parking issues and capacity levels; and
- b) Agree to delegate the decision to approve the costs associated with undertaking a further review of Guildenford car park, to the Assistant Director for Resident Services, in consultation with the Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects.

These reviews would incorporate proposals to mitigate against flood risks, and look at the issues related to coach parking in the town. So, in short, we are on it, and we will work with you to find a solution.

92 Review of Housing Resources

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare, introduced and gave an overview of the report, which briefed members on the continuing pressures facing the Housing Service, and outlined the work carried out by Fixed Term Contract Staff.

The report also set out the impact on the service should these be lost, with a recommendation to make these staff permanent, and seek approval to recruit an additional member of staff to assist with the complex and increasing volumes of Housing financial transactions.

In debate, the Executive paid tribute to the ongoing work of officers and for their efforts on the subject matter. Clarification was also provided by officers, whereby the additional member of staff being recruited to assist with the complex and increasing volumes of Housing financial transactions, as well as the three post holders on fixed term contracts, would be employed by Publica Group and would carry out work specifically for West Oxfordshire District Council.

Councillor Geoff Saul proposed that the Executive agree to the recommendations as listed on the report. This was seconded by Councillor Alaric Smith, was put to a vote, and was agreed unanimously by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Agree that the three fixed term contract posts as described in Section 4.3 are moved to permanent posts;
2. Approve the recruitment of a new Housing Finance Project Officer (WODC specific) as laid out in Section 6.

93 Human Resources (Employment) & Health and Safety Policies

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced and gave an overview of the report, which updated the Executive on plans relating to the refresh of all Employment and Health & Safety policies for West Oxfordshire District Council.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed that the Executive agree to the recommendations as listed on the report. This was seconded by Councillor Andrew Prosser, was put to a vote, and was agreed unanimously by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Request that the Constitution Working Group considers the expansion of the terms of reference of the Performance and Appointments Committee to include responsibility for the adoption and amendment of Employment and Health and Safety Policies;
2. Recommend that Council adopts the twenty-six Employment and Health & Safety Policies (included in Annex A of the original report);
3. Recommend to Council to delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Director of Governance, to approve subsequent amendments to any West Oxfordshire District Council employment policies that may be necessary, in line with legal changes and best practice, to ensure the Councils policies remain compliant.

Review of Car Parks

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced and gave an overview of the report, which considered proposals promoting the efficient utilisation of the Council's free off-street car parks.

The report also sought to support access to the District's Town Centres and smaller service centres, including the gathering of further data on car park usage and implementation of amended stay times.

In debate, the Executive were pleased to highlight a positive response received from the Store Manager of Waitrose in Witney, whereby the results of a trial of longer, permitted stays in the Woolgate Car Park in central Witney had made a significant difference to the morale of staff at Waitrose, and that it had also made a substantial increase in staff retention at the store. The longer stay time frame had also been of benefit to local charitable organisations who required the car park for their own work. The Executive also gave a further detailed overview of the reviews undertaken by the Council and the benefit it would provide to both residents and businesses.

The Executive also gave an assurance that issues surrounding on-street parking in the town of Woodstock, particularly when outside events take place at Blenheim Palace, would be investigated by Council Officers ahead of the summer season of 2024. The Executive also reaffirmed the ease to both residents and businesses of free car parking within the district, and that the extension of the Oxford Tube bus service to Carterton and Witney from Oxford and London, would also result in increased monitoring of car parks, as a part of ongoing reviews.

The Executive stated that the improvements to signposts and general signage within car parks around the district, would also be of benefit to the local economy, meaning that visitors would not become confused when arriving at car park locations.

Councillor Alaric Smith proposed that the Executive agree to the recommendations as listed on the report. This was seconded by Councillor Tim Sumner, was put to a vote, and was agreed unanimously by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Agree that a further review in 2024 of Guildenford car park, Burford, supports the best use of council assets to identify parking issues and capacity levels. As per paragraph 3.5 of the report;
2. Agree to delegate the decision to approve the costs associated with undertaking a further review of Guildenford car park to Assistant Director for Resident Services Group in consultation with the Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects;
3. Agree that a further review in 2024 of Hensington Road car park, Woodstock, would support best use of council assets once the impact of charging on street by Oxfordshire County Council has been assessed as per paragraph 3.39 of the report;
4. Agree to change the restriction time in Zone G of Woolgate Car Park, Witney, to 12-hour maximum stay as per paragraph 3.30 of the report;
5. If changes to stay times are agreed (as per recommendation D), delegate the decisions following outcome of the legally required consultation to the Assistant Director for Resident Services Group in consultation with the Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects;

6. Approve expenditure up to £8,000 to improve car park signage from the Support from either UKSPF funding or Council Priorities Reserve;
7. Agree in principle that condition surveys on Council Car parks should be considered further to establish the condition of Council assets as per paragraph 5.2 of the report.

95 Youth Needs Assessment Recommendations

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced report, before inviting Heather McCulloch, Community Wellbeing Manager, to provide a further overview regarding the report and its recommendations.

The Youth Needs Assessment Report considered recommendations made to Council as a result of the Youth Needs Assessment, in which the Council obtained views of approximately 4000 young people to better understand the challenges they faced.

The Executive encouraged young persons and other residents within the district to read the findings of the survey undertaken, which were available on the Council's website, and to explore ways of accessing vital funding for projects from a fund set aside by the Council.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed that the Executive agree to the recommendations as listed on the report. This was seconded by Councillor Andrew Prosser, was put to a vote, and was agreed unanimously by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Ask officers to engage with Oxfordshire County Council, to work up a proposal to create a dedicated youth specialist role for the County Council, to lead on Young People and carry forward the recommendations of the Youth Needs Assessment. This proposal should come back to the Executive for approval if it has direct financial implications for the Council;
2. Dedicate a specific stream of funding on the WestHive platform for youth activities particularly those led by young people themselves.

96 West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 - Regulation 10A Review

Councillor Carl Rylett, Executive Member for Planning and Sustainable Development, introduced and gave a detailed overview of the report, which considered a review of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 in accordance with Regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

In debate, the Executive highlighted that work to assess Local Housing Needs would be commissioned externally, owing to the technical nature of the work desired to be undertaken, and that external commissioning would provide appropriate robustness within the project.

The importance of effective updates to the Local Plan was also emphasised by the Executive, and that a series of workshops held around the district, were of vital importance when engaging with residents to determine the most appropriate ways of creating a new, purposeful, and effective Local Plan.

Assurance was also provided that heritage site buffer zones would also be kept fully up to date as part of the Local Plan refresh.

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Councillor Carl Rylett proposed that the Executive agree to recommendation 'A' as listed on the report, with recommendation 'B' amended to include 'subject to the inclusion of additional wording, clarifying that the strategic allocations will be subject to an assessment of anticipated deliverability, prior to being taken forward as identified commitments'.

This was seconded by Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, was put to a vote, and was agreed unanimously by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Note the content of the report;
2. Approve the Regulation 10A review of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031, attached at Annex A, subject to the inclusion of additional wording, clarifying that the strategic allocations will be subject to an assessment of anticipated deliverability, prior to being taken forward as identified commitments.

97 Treasury Management Quarterly Update Report

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced and gave an overview of the report, which provided a quarterly update on the Council's Treasury Management operations.

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

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Note the contents of the report.

98 Exclusion of Press and Public

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, proposed that Executive agree to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the remaining exempt items of business, on the basis that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

This was seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright, was put to a vote and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** in accordance with the provisions of Paragraph 4(2)(b) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 to:

1. Exclude the press and public from the meeting on the grounds that their presence could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 and 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

99 The Unicorn, Great Rollright - Listed Building in Poor Repair

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare, introduced and gave an overview of the report, which reviewed previous decisions to take action to conserve The Unicorn (former Public House) at Great Rollright, a listed building in disrepair.

The report also sought to agree whether the Council should proceed with any action to secure the protection or renovation of the building, based on the financial risk this poses to the Council.

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In debate, the Executive highlighted that problems relating to The Unicorn were not uncommon to the Council, and that ongoing work with officers and the owners of the building had previously been troublesome. The Executive were reassured by Officers that work would continue to find an appropriate and reasonable solution, notwithstanding any related financial implications for the Council, with current market positions taken in to account.

Councillor Geoff Saul proposed that the Executive agree to the recommendations as listed on the report. This was seconded by Councillor Alaric Smith, was put to a vote, and was agreed unanimously by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Continue to work with the building owners who are responsible for its condition and renovation, and to monitor the structural condition of the building as set out in Option 4 to comply with its statutory duties but not proceed with discretionary legal action (covered in Options 1, 2 and 3) due to the significant financial risk to the Council and burden on the taxpayer, of doing so;
2. Note that should the structural stability of the building deteriorate further placing people and property at risk from collapse, the Council will have to take action to remove the risk.

The Meeting closed at 7.11pm

CHAIR