

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Executive.**

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB
at 2.00pm on **Wednesday 6 March 2024.**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andy Graham (Leader), Duncan Enright (Deputy Leader), Joy Aitman, Charlie Maynard, Andrew Prosser, Alaric Smith, Geoff Saul, Tim Sumner and Lidia Arciszewska.

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive), Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance), Bill Oddy (Assistant Director – Commercial Development), Phil Martin (Assistant Director – Business Services), Andrew Brown (Business Manager, Democratic Services), Max Thompson (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Alison Borrett (Senior Performance Analyst), Christine Elsasser (Democratic Services Officer), Gemma Moreing (Business Information and Performance Lead), Mandy Fathers (Business Manager – Environmental, Welfare and Revenues), Heather McCulloch (Community Wellbeing Manager) and Hannah Kenyon (Climate Change Manager).

Other Councillors in Attendance: Michele Mead, Rosie Pearson, Julian Cooper and David Melvin.

154 Apologies for Absence

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

155 Declarations of Interest

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

A number of officers employed by Publica Group would leave the meeting for Agenda Item 8: Publica Transition Update.

156 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, proposed that the minutes of the previous meeting, held on Wednesday 14 February 2024, be agreed by the Executive as a true and accurate record, and signed by the Leader of the Council.

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

The Executive **Resolved** to:

- I. Agree the minutes of the previous meeting, held on Wednesday 14 February 2024, as a true and accurate record.

157 Receipt of Announcements

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, welcomed Members and Officers to the meeting.

The Leader advised that the Annex to the final Agenda Item contained commercially sensitive information, and if the Executive wished to discuss the information contained within the Annex, the meeting would need to agree to enter private session. The Leader advised the attendees that this would be highlighted at the appropriate juncture.

Executive

06/March2024

The Leader also highlighted that Annex A to Agenda Item 14: Retail Relief – Business Rates was an incorrect Annex contained within the printed agenda papers, adding that printed copies of the correct Annex were available on Members' benches, and was available to view on the Council's website.

Councillor Tim Sumner, Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects, provided the Executive with updates regarding regeneration work being undertaken at leisure locations in Chipping Norton, including refurbishment work at Chipping Norton Leisure Centre. The Executive Member stated that sign off on the works was imminent and that staff were very happy with works nearing completion.

The Executive Member also shared updates regarding the Open-Air Swimming Pool in Woodstock. The Executive Member gave an overview of the wide range of activities that were available and confirmed that the venue would be open throughout the summer months between May and September 2024.

Councillor Charlie Maynard, Executive Member for Planning and Sustainable Development, announced that in conjunction with Cotswold District Council, the Council had been awarded £95,000 from Round 4 of the Proper Tech Innovation Fund, which would help the Council to develop online tools to engage with the public, on several planning related issues such as site identification. The Executive Member stated that the work would begin in the coming months and would allow the Council to be more accessible to the public.

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare, provided the Executive with an update on the Homelessness Prevention Grant. The Executive Member stated that the fund would allow local authorities to make further provisions for the prevention of homelessness, as well as funding for the provision of temporary accommodation.

The Executive Member gave an overview of funding received from Central Government which included an additional £215,177 towards prevention measures in West Oxfordshire.

Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economic Development, gave an update regarding the West Oxfordshire Small Business Grant Scheme. The Deputy Leader highlighted that 41 applications had been received from different organisations around the local economy, with 36 applications successfully passing Counter Fraud checks thus far. The Deputy Leader further highlighted that all applicants had been invited to a session with the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP), with 34 successful applicants being awarded a grant of £5,000, to help further grow their businesses and employ further staffing resources.

Councillor Joy Aitman, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, provided the Executive with an update regarding 3-Year Service Level Agreement awards. The Executive Member stated that in March 2023, the Executive agreed a new approach to funding, better aligned to the intended outcomes of the Council Plan. The Executive Member announced that 17 applications had been forthcoming and that total funding across the applications totalled £1.1 million.

The Executive Member gave an overview of the applications that fell into the three 'lots' that Executive had previously agreed to in March 2023, and thanked the projects associated with the applications for their continued hard work across the district.

The Executive Member further highlighted that 1 of the 5 projects which were currently live on the 'WestHive' platform had reached its target - 'Cycles of Good'. The Executive Member

Executive

06/March2024

stated that additional workshop was held at the end of February 2024 for new round of funding, with 25 applicants attending.

The Leader advised that the next meeting of the Executive would take place on Wednesday 17 April 2024, at 2.00pm in the Council Chamber at Woodgreen, Witney.

158 Participation of the Public

There was no public participation at the meeting.

159 Reports from Overview and Scrutiny

The Leader stated that the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be considered as part of the Financial Performance Report Q3 2023/2024, and Carbon Action Plan agenda items.

160 Matters raised by Audit and Governance Committee

No matters had been raised by the Audit and Governance Committee.

161 Publica Transition Update

Ahead of the item of business being considered by the Executive, Officers employed by Publica Group left the Council Chamber.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the report, which considered a report from Local Partnerships and the findings and recommendations therein.

The Leader gave an overview of the implications that were associated with the report, and explained that, whilst not fully known, a wide-ranging scale of financial costings would be associated with the proposals, as well as legal and recruitment implications. The Leader highlighted that a full transition plan and full business case would be formulated in due, to ensure that residents and Council staff remained foremost in the aims of the Council. The Leader stated that an Interim Programme Director had recently been appointed to oversee the transition of services, and that the appropriate officers meet and engage with the Programme on a regular basis.

The Leader reminded the Executive that the Publica model, was not the same as the one that was initially set up in 2017, and the needs and aims of both individual council's and residents had changed over the time that the model had been in place. The Leader urged Members to exercise caution when highlighting potential associated costs with the transition and that such plans must be fully costed and with the best interests of residents and staff in mind.

In debate, the Executive thanked the work of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee for its input so far in scrutinising the proposals. The Executive reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring that the transition process was as smooth as possible, and that services to residents would not be affected. The Executive was also steadfast in ensuring that the terms and conditions of staff were protected as part of the transition.

The Executive also referred to the effectiveness of the Council, efficiencies of the Council, and feasibility of the project to ensure that the transition would be as smooth as possible, and the proposals associated with the transition project must be financially sound, and in keeping with the intended outcomes of the plan pertaining to West Oxfordshire District Council.

Executive

06/March2024

At the invitation of the Leader, Councillor Michele Mead and Councillor Julian Cooper, attending as non-Executive Members, highlighted that the proposals were lacking consistent detail in relation to the overall financial implications of that transition, and that it was imperative to have a 'cap' on the financial costings associated with the project, before fully entering into a business agreement.

The Chief Executive stated that no estimates were currently available as the overall transition project was still in its infancy, and that a more detailed transition plan would be brought before the Executive in the coming months, which would take into account the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

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

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Note the findings and recommendations set out in the Local Partnerships report;
2. Note that the Interim Programme Director shall prepare a detailed transition plan, building on the recommendations set out in the Local Partnerships report, for subsequent consideration by Executive, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Council.

Officers employed by Publica Group, returned to the Council Chamber at the conclusion of the item.

162 West Oxfordshire Food Action Plan

Councillor Joy Aitman, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, introduced the report, which presented the action plan produced by the Food Action Working Group (West Oxfordshire), noting the actions attributed to the Council. The plan was one of five district-specific action plans being produced as part of the Oxfordshire Food Strategy.

In debate, the Executive thanked the ongoing work of officers for producing a thorough plan and thanked local partners for their own commitments made in relation to the plan. The Executive referred to the difficult position that partners had been put in by a lack of funding received from central government.

The Executive also highlighted the important partnership working model with local partners across the district, including Cotswold National Landscape, Abingdon & Witney College, Oxfordshire County Council, Good Food Oxfordshire and the North East Cotswolds Farm Cluster.

Councillor Joy Aitman proposed that the Executive agree to the recommendations as listed on the report. This was seconded by Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Endorse the Food Action Plan (West Oxfordshire) attached at Annex A of the original report;
2. Approve the actions attributed to the Council as set out in paragraph 3.5 of the original report.

163 Service Performance Report 2023–24 Quarter Three

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the report, which provided details of the Council's operational performance at the end of 2023-2024 Quarter Three (Q3).

In debate, the Executive praised the work of Officers for a series of consistently thorough, detailed and high-quality reports, and thanked the wider analysis team, embedded within the Council's data team, for their continuing hard work.

The Executive praised the levels of the Council's operational service output across the quarter, including the processing of planning applications and increased collections of Council Tax. The Executive also highlighted recent events that had taken place in the district which had helped to achieve the levels of operational output detailed within the original report, and made specific reference to a Christmas Market, held at Marriott's Walk in Witney in December 2023, which contributed to substantially increased footfall in the town.

Officers gave the Executive clarity regarding the figures contained within missed waste collection target setting, and advised that missed collection figures overall were reducing. Officers and the Executive thanked the work of the Council's waste collection partner Ubico for their continued work in support of the Council.

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

The Executive **Resolved** to:

- I. Note the 2023-2024 Q3 service performance report.

164 Financial Performance Report – 2023/24 Quarter Three

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the report, which detailed the Council's financial performance for Quarter Three 2023-2024.

The Executive Member stated that the Executive had received a recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, requesting that the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be included as a consultee in the delegation to the Director of Finance, to review and repurpose earmarked reserves, in addition to the Executive Member for Finance.

The Executive Member stated that the Executive had decided not to accept the recommendation, highlighting that the additional consultation of the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee would blur Executive and non-Executive responsibilities and would therefore not be appropriate.

The Executive Member reminded Members and Officers that Delegation to the Director of Finance in consultation with the Executive Member of Finance, is proper in terms of governance, adding that any decisions taken by officers would be notified to Members and any key decisions taken by officers would be subject to call in by Members.

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

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Note the Council's Financial Performance for Quarter Three 2023-2024;
2. Delegate authority to the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance, to review and repurpose earmarked reserves to mitigate against the four main financial risks identified in the original report.

165 Road Closure Policy

Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economic Development, introduced the report, which considered a new policy for the administration of Temporary Road Closure applications.

In debate, and by invitation of the Leader, Councillors Michele Mead and Julian Cooper queried whether fees and charges related to road closures for significant national events such as Armistice Day, were required to be applied for by local town and parish councils where necessary, and also sought clarification as to whether road closures required authority for events such as national cycle races and major sporting events.

Officers clarified that the new policy was targeted at more local events and fees would be charged as appropriate. Officers gave further assurance that events of national significance had standing authority from Oxfordshire County Council, and that the County Council was the authority charged with the provision of such closures.

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

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Note the report and approve the Temporary Road Closure Policy;
2. Agree to implement the Temporary Road Closure Policy following the standard call-in period, but no sooner than 1 April 2024;
3. Agree to amend the Officer Scheme of Delegation and insert that the determination of Temporary Road Closure applications will be made by an appropriate officer in consultation with a legal representative, where there is no objection from any statutory consultee;
4. Approve the fees as set out in paragraph 4 of the report for Temporary Road Closure applications.

166 Fixed Penalty Notice Policy

Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment, introduced the report, which considered a new policy for the administration of Fixed Penalty Notices.

Councillor Lidia Arciszewska 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 unanimously agreed by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Note the report and approve the Fixed Penalty Notice Policy;
2. Agree to implement the Fixed Penalty Notice Policy following the standard call-in period.

167 Retail Relief – Business Rates

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the report, which considered a scheme of rate relief for retail premises, as outlined by Government in the Autumn Statement 2023.

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

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Approve the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure scheme as set out in Annex A for 2024/2025;
2. Delegate authority to the Assistant Director for Resident Services the award of such reliefs.

168 Carbon Action Plan

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Change, introduced the report, which presented the West Oxfordshire District Council Carbon Action Plan proposed to be adopted and resourced by the Council from April 2024.

The Executive Member stated that the Executive had received a recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which requested that Carbon training be provided to Members, to help inform decision making and communication on carbon reduction.

The Executive Member highlighted that, following discussions with councillors, climate teams, monitoring officers and a Climate Literacy Experience Workshop with 20 other Local Authorities within the Net Zero Living Programme, a proposal for a blended approach to Councillor engagement and training on carbon and climate was being produced for consideration by the Publica Councils.

Councillor Andrew Prosser proposed that the Executive agree to the recommendation as listed on the report, with an additional recommendation agreed to by the Executive, whereby training on carbon and climate literacy for Members would take place, to inform decision making and communication on carbon reduction.

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

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Approve the West Oxfordshire District Council Carbon Action Plan to deliver on the Council's commitment to become carbon neutral by 2030;
2. Agree that member training on carbon and climate literacy will take place to inform decision making and communication on carbon reduction.

Executive

06/March2024

169 Sport England Swimming Pool Support Fund Phase 2

Councillor Tim Sumner, Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects, introduced the report, which sought approval for the Council to enter into an agreement with Sport England for the acceptance of a grant from the Swimming Pool Support Fund (SPSF) Phase 2. The report also sought approval for the Council to draw down funding awarded to Chipping Norton Lido, acting in its capacity as lead authority for the delivery of the SPSF.

Councillor Tim Sumner 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 unanimously agreed by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Approve the acceptance of the SPSF Phase 2 grant awarded to West Oxfordshire District Council, valued at £243,328, to install rooftop solar PV (Photo Voltaic) and energy saving showers at the Windrush Leisure Centre, Witney;
2. Delegate authority to the Director of Finance to draw down and deploy the SPSF Phase 2 grant awarded to Chipping Norton Lido Ltd, valued at £84,366, to install solar PV and an air source heat pump.

170 Exclusion of Press and Public

The item was not considered at the meeting.

171 Exempt Annex A – Sport England Swimming Pool Support Fund (Phase 2) – Capital Grant Agreement (CGA)

The exempt annex was considered as part of the public consideration of the Sport England Swimming Pool Support Fund Phase 2.

The Meeting closed at 3.28pm.

CHAIR