

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting of **Annual Council.**

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB,  
at **2.00pm on Wednesday 22 May 2024.**

#### PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Coles, Elizabeth Poskitt, Lidia Arciszewska, Thomas Ashby, Hugo Ashton, Andrew Beaney, Michael Brooker, Adam Clements, Julian Cooper, Steve Cosier, Rachel Crouch, Jane Doughty, Genny Early, Duncan Enright, Roger Faulkner, Phil Godfrey, Andy Goodwin, Andy Graham, David Jackson, Edward James, Natalie King, Liz Leffman, Nick Leverton, Dan Levy, Paul Marsh, Martin McBride, Stuart McCarroll, Michele Mead, Rosie Pearson, Rizvana Poole, Andrew Prosser, Nigel Ridpath, Carl Rylett, Geoff Saul, Sandra Simpson, Ruth Smith, Tim Sumner, Sarah Veasey, Liam Walker, Mark Walker, Adrian Walsh, Alex Wilson and Alistair Wray.

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance), Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Frank Wilson (Managing Director, Publica), Bill Oddy (Assistant Director – Commercial Development), Phil Martin (Assistant Director – Business Services), Andrew Brown (Business Manager – Democratic Services), Max Thompson (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer), Christine Elsasser (Democratic Services Officer), Elise Chowdhury (Communications Officer) and Jess Randle (Communications Officer).

#### **CL.158 Election of Chair for 2024/25**

The outgoing Chair of the Council, Councillor Andrew Coles, welcomed Members and Officers to the annual meeting of Council.

Councillor Andrew Coles proposed that Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt be elected to the position of Chair of the Council for the municipal year 2024/2025. This was seconded by Councillor Andy Graham, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by Council.

Council **Resolved** to:

- I. Appoint Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt to the position of Chair of the Council for the municipal year 2024/2025.

Following the appointment, Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, wished the new Chair of West Oxfordshire District Council, Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt, the best of fortune for the forthcoming 12 months, and paid tribute to their continuing service as a Member of West Oxfordshire District Council.

Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt was presented with the Chair's Chain of Office. Councillor Poskitt also signed a Declaration of Acceptance of Office in the presence of the Council's Director of Governance after taking their seat.

#### **CL.159 Election of Vice-Chair for 2024/25**

Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt, Chair of the Council, thanked Council for their appointment to the position of Chair of the Council for the municipal year 2024/2025. The Chair thanked Members and Officers for their endeavours and reaffirmed their commitment to working with Council Members and Officers during their time in office.

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The Chair asked Council for nominations to the position of Vice-Chair of the Council for the municipal year 2024/2025.

Councillor Duncan Enright proposed that Councillor Andrew Coles be appointed to the position of Vice-Chair of the Council for the municipal year 2024/2025. This was seconded by Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by Council.

Council **Resolved** to:

- I. Appoint Councillor Andrew Coles to the position of Vice-Chair of the Council for the municipal year 2024/2025.

Councillor Andrew Coles signed a Declaration of Acceptance of Office in the presence of the Council's Director of Governance after taking their seat.

#### **CL.160 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Joy Aitman, Alaric Smith, Andrew Lyon, David Melvin, David Cooper, and Charlie Maynard.

#### **CL.161 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made by Members of the Council.

#### **CL.162 Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Councillor Andy Graham proposed that the minutes of the previous meeting of Council, held on Wednesday 13 March 2024, be agreed by Council as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chair of the Council. This was seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by Council.

Council **Resolved** to:

- I. Agree the minutes of the previous meeting, held on Wednesday 13 March 2024 as a true and accurate record.

#### **CL.163 Receipt of Announcements**

Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt, Chair of the Council, welcomed the 8 new members of West Oxfordshire District Council to their seats, congratulated them on their recent election and stated that they were most welcome. The Chair read aloud the names of the 8 new members, who rose to introduce themselves to the Council.

The Chair also paid tribute to the 8 members who had left Council at the end of the last municipal year, and stated that the Chief Executive had written to the former members, thanking them for their service to West Oxfordshire District Council, and wishing them well for the future.

The Chair also stated they would visit the principality of Woodstock in Ontario, Canada whilst overseas in June 2024. The Chair recalled when the Mayor of Woodstock, Ontario visited West Oxfordshire District Council and observed a meeting from the public gallery. The Chair stated they would attend a Council meeting whilst overseas and would represent the Council whilst passing on the best wishes of the West Oxfordshire district.

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The Chair also announced and gave a brief overview of their chosen charities for the 2024/25 municipal year, which were:

- Woodstock Exhibition Foundation;
- Oxfordshire Museum; and
- Save the Children (Carterton Branch).

#### **CL.164**Vote of thanks to the retiring Chair and Vice-Chair

Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt, Chair of the Council, paid tribute to the work and contribution to Council by former Chair, Councillor Andrew Coles, and highlighted their graceful chairing of meetings and paid tribute to their stellar work in supporting their chosen charities. The Chair highlighted a quiz night held by Councillor Coles, stating it was a very enjoyable evening for worthwhile charities and causes.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, paid tribute to the work of Councillor Andrew Coles, adding that their integrity, honesty and transparency always shone through during their time in office, and stated the Council was very grateful.

Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economic Development, also paid tribute to the work of Councillor Andrew Coles, highlighting their great friendship over many years. The Deputy Leader also announced that they had attended the 2024 Football League I Play-Off Final at Wembley, where Oxford United defeated Bolton Wanderers to gain promotion back to the Football League Championship after 25 years outside the second tier.

In return, Councillor Andrew Coles highlighted that the year they served in the Chair had been one of challenges, adding that refurbishment of Council meeting rooms had played a part in such challenges. The Chair gave an overview of the community and civic events they had attended during their time in office, stating how proud they were to have represented the district in such a way.

Councillor Coles also stated that their charity events throughout the previous municipal year had raised £3,000 for their chosen charities – Witney Woodland Volunteers, West Oxfordshire Community Transport and West Oxfordshire Foodbank. Councillor Coles also paid tribute to all Members and Officers for their support during their time in office, and highlighted the support of the Council's Executive Support Team, Democratic Services, Electoral Services, and personally highlighted the work of the Council's Executive Assistant, Mandy Smith, for their exceptional work 'behind the scenes'.

Councillor Coles also highlighted their attendance at the 2024 Football League I Play-Off Final at Wembley, where Oxford United defeated Bolton Wanderers 2-0 to gain promotion to the Football League Championship. Councillor Coles stated they hoped to be cheering on "The Yellows" from a new stadium very soon.

#### **CL.165**Report of the Leader

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the report and informed the Council of the appointments to the Executive for the new municipal year, which were as follows:

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- Councillor Andy Graham – Leader of the Council;
- Councillor Duncan Enright – Deputy Leader of the Council, and Executive Member for Economic Development;
- Councillor Alaric Smith – Executive Member for Finance;
- Councillor Charlie Maynard – Executive Member for Planning and Sustainable Development;
- Councillor Rizvana Poole – Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities;
- Councillor Geoff Saul – Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare;
- Councillor Lidia Arciszewska – Executive Member for the Environment;
- Councillor Andrew Prosser – Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery; and
- Councillor Tim Sumner – Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects.

The Leader paid tribute to the work of Councillor Joy Aitman who had stepped down from the Executive, adding they would be missed and that their work was of outstanding significance to the Council, the residents, and the wider district. The Leader also reaffirmed that the West Oxfordshire Alliance would work hand in glove to put the residents of the district first.

The Leader also confirmed the following joint Executive arrangements and appointments to external bodies:

- Councillor Andy Graham – Future Oxfordshire Partnership;
- Councillor Charlie Maynard – Infrastructure Advisory Group;
- Councillor Charlie Maynard – Planning Advisory Group;
- Councillor Geoff Saul – Housing Advisory Group;
- Councillor Andrew Prosser – Environment Advisory Group.

The Leader drew the attention of the Council to the Executive Scheme of Delegation, covered in Part 3D and Part 4 of the Council's constitution.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed that Council note the report of the Leader. This was seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by Council.

Council **Resolved** to:

- I. Note the Report of the Leader.

#### **CL.166 Returning Officer's Report on Elections held on 2 May 2024**

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the report, which detailed and summarised the results of local elections, held on 2 May 2024.

The Leader stated that the report was a factual representation of the results of the elections to West Oxfordshire District Council held on 2 May 2024, and paid tribute to the work of the Returning Officer, Electoral Services Team, and officers & staff that assisted with the delivery of the local elections.

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The Chair paid tribute to all personnel who had helped with the facilitation of the 2024 Local and Police & Crime Commissioner Elections. The Chair thanked them for their long hours of work to ensure that the Elections ran smoothly and went without a glitch.

The Leader paid tribute to Sharon Ellison and Zena Holliday in Electoral Services for their exceptional commitment and resolve in their work relating to the Elections. The Leader said that they had presented the Electoral Services team with a bouquet of flowers in appreciation for their hard work and dedication.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed that Council note the Return of the Returning Officer. This was seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by Council.

Council **Resolved** to:

1. Note the Returning Officer's report on Elections held on 2 May 2024.

#### **CL.167 Appointment of Members to the Council's Committees, including Substitute Members**

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the report, which sought to:

- Establish the Council's committees as defined in Part 3C of the Council's Constitution, for the Civic Year 2024/25;
- Establish the allocation of seats to political groups based on political proportionality;
- Appoint members to the Council's committees, working groups external committees for the Civic Year 2024/25;
- Make appointments to the positions of Chair and Vice-Chair of Council's committees and working groups for the Civic Year 2024/25.

The Leader drew the Council's attention to the additional supplementary papers relating to the agenda item, which were published ahead of the meeting.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed that Council agree recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7 as listed on the original report, with recommendation 6 put to a separate vote. This was seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by Council.

Council **Resolved** to:

1. Agree to establish the Council's Committees as defined in Part 3 of the Council's Constitution, for the Civic Year 2024/25;
2. Determine that, in accordance with Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 ("the Act"), the Council shall continue to apply the political balance provisions under the Act to committees as shown in Annex A;
3. Agree to reduce the size of the Audit and Governance Committee to 11 Councillors (from 17);
4. Agree to include a rule in the Constitution (Part 3C) that no Members of the Executive will sit on the Audit and Governance Committee;

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5. Authorise officers to undertake a recruitment exercise for up to 2 Independent Persons to become non-elected Members of the Audit and Governance Committee;
6. Note the arrangements for substitute members set out in part 5 of the report.

Councillor Duncan Enright proposed an amendment to recommendation 6 on the original report, whereby Councillor Lidia Arciszewska would replace Councillor Charlie Maynard on the Local Plan Cross-Party Member Working Group. Councillor Charlie Maynard would chair the Local Plan Cross-Party Member Working Group as an ex-officio member in their capacity as Executive Member for Planning and Sustainable Development.

Councillor Michele Mead queried whether the amendment was constitutional. The Business Manager for Democratic Services confirmed that the Local Plan Cross-Party Member Working Group was not covered by the Constitution but that officers' reading of the terms of reference for the working group (previously agreed by Council) was that the Executive Member would attend and chair the working group as an ex-officio member.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Andy Graham and was put to a vote. There were 29 votes in favour, 11 votes against with 1 abstention. The vote was carried.

Council **Resolved** to:

7. Appoint councillors to serve on the Council's committees, working groups and external committees, as set out in Annex B for a term of office expiring at the next Annual Meeting of the Council, with Councillor Lidia Arciszewska replacing Councillor Charlie Maynard on the Local Plan Cross-Party Member Working Group.

#### **CL.168 Scheme of Officer Delegations**

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the item which, as required by the Council's Constitution, invited Council to confirm the Scheme of Officer Delegations, other than those relating to Executive functions.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed that Council adopt the Constitution, and agree the Scheme of Officer Delegations, other than those relating to Executive functions, as set out in Part 4 of the Council's Constitution. This was seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by Council.

Council **Resolved** to:

1. Adopt the Council's Constitution and agree the Scheme of Officer Delegations, other than those relating to Executive functions, as set out in Part 4 of the Constitution.

#### **CL.169 Recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel**

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the report, which considered recommendations made to Council by the Independent Remuneration Panel, from its meeting held on 23 April 2024.

Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economic Development, highlighted the increased workload of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the ever-developing role of the Committee's Vice-Chair. The Deputy Leader also paid tribute to the work of the Independent Remuneration Panel and thanked them for their work to produce an effective report with effective recommendations to Council.

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In response to a question, the Business Manager for Democratic Services confirmed that whilst the report was written by officers summarising the deliberations of the Independent Remuneration Panel, the Panel had agreed the report.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed that Council agree the recommendations listed on the original report. This was seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright and was put to a vote. There were 42 votes in favour, 0 votes against with 1 abstention. The vote was carried.

**Council Resolved to:**

1. Agree that the Vice-Chair of a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) of 0.5x the basic allowance paid to all Councillors, reducing to 0.25x basic allowance if there is more than one Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
2. Agree to backdate the payment of the SRA paid to the Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to first meeting of the new Overview and Scrutiny Committee (8 November 2023).

#### **CL.170 Appointment of a Temporary Parish Councillor to Fulbrook Parish Council**

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the report, which sought to agree the appointment of a temporary member of Fulbrook Parish Council, enabling the Parish Council to become quorate.

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

**Council Resolved to:**

1. Agree to make an order under Section 91 of the Local Government Act 1972 ('the Act') appointing Councillor Hugo Ashton as a temporary member of Fulbrook Parish Council, enabling the Parish Council to become quorate;
2. Note that the appointment shall be effective until Fulbrook Parish Council is quorate (i.e., it has three members of the Council in place, excepting the temporary appointee);
3. Delegate authority to the Director of Governance to make orders and make temporary appointments to Town/Parish Councils as required, under the powers in Section 91 of the Act.

#### **CL.171 Dates of Future Meetings**

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the agenda item, which advised the dates of future Council meetings for the municipal year 2024/25.

The Leader proposed that the meeting of 25 September 2024 be held at 6.00pm on a trial basis. This was seconded by Councillor Michele Mead, who highlighted that many members have full-time employment outside of the Council, and that a later start time would make the Council more inclusive and would encourage stronger public attendance at meetings.

Councillor Andrew Coles, Vice-Chair of the Council, proposed an amendment to the proposal, whereby Council would defer the decision regarding the start time of the September meeting of Council, to the next meeting in July 2024, so that members could be surveyed on

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meeting start times, ahead of any trial. Councillor Coles explained the rationale for the amendment, highlighting that later start times for meetings of Council would raise challenges for members who had additional commitments outside of the Council, such as shift work and childcare commitments, and that the best way for all views to be considered, would be for members to be consulted on the matter.

In seconding the proposed amendment, Councillor Steve Cosier explained that future candidates for elections may become disenfranchised from putting themselves forward for election, if the role of councillor did not work with their pre-existing commitments. Councillor Cosier affirmed that a consultation for Members was a reasonable approach to seek the view of Members regarding start times of meetings, so that all views could be taken into consideration ahead of a decision being taken.

In debate, Members stated that if a trial did not work as originally proposed owing to a lack of consensus from the Council's membership, a simple solution would be to revert to the original timetable as previously agreed.

Members also expressed their support for a survey and stated that as elected Councillors, they were mandated to attend meetings wherever possible, and that flexibility could be exercised in order to make meeting start times more accommodating.

Members also highlighted that start times to meetings had been consulted on in the past with no firm resolutions being agreed, and that other councils had been through a similar process previously.

Several members also highlighted the additional workload a consultation would pose upon officers, adding that the consultation must be worthwhile and effective in order for a consensus to be achieved, and that the right balance must be applied when taking into consideration all views.

Councillor Andy Graham advised that they were happy to accept the amendment proposed by Councillor Andrew Coles, to defer a decision regarding the start time of the September meeting of Council, until the meeting of Council in July 2024 pending a member survey on preferred start times. Councillor Michele Mead, as seconder to the original motion, confirmed they would also accept the amendment. This was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by Council.

Council **Resolved** to:

- I. Defer a decision regarding the start time of the September meeting of Council, until the meeting of Council in July 2024.

The Meeting closed at 3.12pm.

CHAIR