

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the
West Oxfordshire District Council
held via video conferencing at 12:30 pm on **Wednesday 24 February 2021**

PRESENT

Councillors: Harry Eaglestone (Chairman), Jane Doughty (Vice-Chairman), Joy Aitman, Alaa Al-Yousuf, Luci Ashbourne, Andrew Beaney, Richard Bishop, Jill Bull, Nathalie Chapple, Andrew Coles, Owen Collins, Nigel Colston, Julian Cooper, Derek Cotterill, Suzi Coul, Maxine Crossland, Marilyn Davies, Duncan Enright, Hilary Fenton, Ted Fenton, Steve Good, Andy Graham, Jeff Haine, David Harvey, Gill Hill, David Jackson, Ed James, Richard Langridge, Liz Leffman, Nick Leverton, Dan Levy, Norman MacRae MBE, Martin McBride, Michele Mead, James Mills, Toby Morris, Neil Owen, Elizabeth Poskitt, Alex Postan, Carl Rylett, Geoff Saul, Harry St John and Ben Woodruff.

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive); Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer); Frank Wilson (Executive Director Finance); Vanessa Scott (Climate Change Manager); Rachel Crookes (Biodiversity and Countryside Land Management Officer); Keith Butler (Head of Democratic Services); Amy Bridgewater-Carnall (Senior Strategic Support Officer); and Adrienne Frazer (Strategic Support Officer).

66. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 20 January 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

67. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jake Acock, Rosa Bolger, Laetisia Carter and Kieran Mullins.

68. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Cooper declared an interest in Agenda Item 11, Sealing Report, because Deed Number 11868 affected a relative's property.

69. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS

69.1 Covid Cases

The Leader advised that positive Covid cases were decreasing in West Oxfordshire with only two cases announced the previous day. She reiterated the need to maintain strict measures in order to keep everyone safe and try to ensure that residents could meet up with each other soon. It was noted that the last time Council had met 'in person' was the Budget meeting in 2020.

69.2 Climate Action Working Group & Winter Bulletin

Councillor Harvey highlighted that the Climate Action Working Group had met recently and work was continuing to move forwards at pace. In addition, the Climate Action Winter Bulletin had been published and residents could sign up to receive it via the website.

69.3 Safeguarding Training for Councillors

Councillor Davies addressed Members and reminded them that following a recent Safeguarding report it had been suggested that Councillors be able to access the same training in safeguarding issues as staff. This was now available on the Councillors Portal and she encouraged Members to undertake the e-lessons, which could then be logged as part of their training.

69.4 Christmas 2020 Flooding

Councillor MacRae made a statement regarding the flooding across West Oxfordshire at Christmas time and recognised the impact that this had on some 96 homes and 23 businesses, spread across a number of Parishes. He noted that issues relating to Thames Water and the Environment Agency had contributed to the significant flooding issues encountered. Councillor MacRae applauded Ubico for their swift response in delivering sandbags across the District and all those involved in filling and deploying an additional one thousand sandbags on Christmas Eve. He noted the work of the Council's Communications team who kept the social media channels up to date with the latest information and acknowledged that there had been difficulties getting a response from the Out of Hours Service, which was being examined. Members were advised that the Council would ensure that the County Council and the Environment Agency carried out thorough investigations into the flooding and report back. The Chairman of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee had invited officers from the County Council to attend its next meeting and Councillor MacRae would look forward to hearing their comments. Finally, he reiterated the Council's support and encouragement to Town and Parish Councils to produce emergency plans and noted the work undertaken by the Community Flood Wardens.

Councillor Coles queried how Councillor MacRae would be addressing the issues raised regarding the Out of Hours service and asked whether representatives from Thames Water and the Environment agency could be invited to attend the Environment Overview & Scrutiny meeting due to the essential partnership working involved.

In response, Councillor MacRae advised that the responsibility for the invitees lay with the Chairman of the Committee. Councillor Morris provided a response relating to the Out of Hours Service and stated that this was being looked at and reviewed. Members would be updated in due course.

70. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

There was no participation by members of the public.

71. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EXECUTIVE

The Council considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services setting out recommendations made by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 17 February 2021.

Councillor Mead introduced the report and requested that the recommendations relating to the budget for 2021/22 be considered after agenda item no. 7 relating to the reports of the Cabinet and the Council's Committees. Therefore, Members noted that they were looking at the decision relating to the extension of the Environmental Services Contract with Ubico. This was seconded by Councillor Morris.

Councillor Leffman addressed the meeting and requested that the recommendation be amended and an additional recommendation be added as follows:

“That, prior to the expiry of the revised contract in 2024, WODC will enter discussions with other members of the shareholder group and with other authorities to improve

efficiency, bring forward low carbon refuse collection, and create savings through collaboration in ways that are not currently envisaged by the existing Ubico contract”

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Cooper, who reserved his right to speak.

In response to the amendment, Councillor MacRae felt that the amendment was meaningless due to the work already being covered by the Environmental Services Improvement Programme which would review the service provided by Ubico and deliver efficiency savings. With regard to low carbon refuse vehicles, this work would be undertaken by officers and Members would be provided with options in due course.

Councillor Levy felt that the amendment formalised the fact that the current contract contained a number of flaws which needed to be resolved.

The amendment was supported by Councillors Enright and Graham who felt it would underpin the work the Council wanted to do. However, Councillor Mills felt that the work was already being undertaken and he endorsed the comments made by Councillor MacRae.

Councillor Al-Yousuf reminded the meeting that the Environmental and Regulatory Service (ERS) Improvement Programme was due to be considered by the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its next meeting on 15 April 2021.

In seconding the amendment, Councillor Cooper did not feel that the ERS improvement programme was part of the consideration and stated that there had been issues with the Ubico contract in the past. He felt this would be a wise addition to the resolution.

In summing up, Councillor Leffman highlighted that the amendment solidified the recommendation and put in writing what was expected of Ubico.

The Leader summarised the original motion and did not support the amendment.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

The original motion then put to the vote, and was carried.

RESOLVED: That the recommendation made by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 17 February 2021 in relation to the extension of the Environmental Services Contract with Ubico be approved (minute no. CT/106/2020/2021).

72. REPORTS OF THE CABINET AND THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES

The reports of the meetings of the Cabinet and the Council's Committees held since 20 January 2021 were received.

72.1 Consultation on Draft Developer Contributions SPD Minute No. Ec&Soc/32/2020/2021

Councillor Cooper asked the Chairman of the Committee whether he was prepared to invite a representative from the Ministry of Defence to the meeting to explain why progression with the REEMA North Site in Carterton did not appear to move forwards.

In response, Councillor Beaney suggested that Councillor Cooper raise this as a request at the next meeting.

72.2 Corporate Risk Register - South Oxfordshire District Council Local Plan – Legal Challenge Minute No. Audit & GP/32/2020/2021

Councillor Mills requested an update from the Chief Executive regarding the potential risks to the Council in relation to the challenge on South Oxfordshire District Council's Local Plan. The Chief Executive provided an update on the recent legal challenge and advised that the Secretary of State was also party to the proceedings. He advised that it

was not yet clear what the implications would be should the challenge be unsuccessful but noted that the risk was slightly smaller than previously because South Oxfordshire had now adopted its Local Plan.

Councillor Mills noted that any update should be given at the next Audit and General Purposed meeting, when consideration was given to the risk register.

72.3 Draft Ubico Budget and Business Plan
Minute No. ENV/30/2020/2021

Councillor Fenton referred to the signwriting on the sides of refuse vehicles and asked if work had begun and for an update on the present situation.

Councillor Al-Yousuf agreed that the vehicles were an ideal advertising tool to deliver the Council's "Reduce, Re-use, Recycle" message throughout the District. As Cabinet Member, Councillor MacRae advised that work had commenced on the vehicles and should be completed by 8 March 2021.

(The Chairman announced a short break at this stage and the meeting resumed at 1.32pm)

73. BUDGET 2021/22

The Council considered the recommendations made by Cabinet at its meeting held 17 February 2021 relating to the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy, General Fund Revenue Budgets, the Capital Programme for 2021/22 to 2030/31, Fees and charges for 2021/22, the Council's Pay Policy Statement, the Council's Capital Strategy 2021/22, the Council's Investment Strategy 2021/22, the Council's Treasury Management Strategy 2021/22, and Prudential Indicators.

The Leader, Councillor Mead introduced the report and noted the extraordinary events of the past 12 months and acknowledged the losses encountered by many residents and neighbours. She highlighted the £4m support grants that had been delivered by the Council and the wide ranging community responses. She expressed her thanks to Councillor Morris, the Chief Finance Officer and all staff involved in the Finance team for their hard work in producing the budget. Councillor Mead proposed the recommendations as laid out and a copy of her speech is appended to these minutes.

This was seconded by Councillor Morris who reserved his right to reply.

Councillor Graham recognised the effort made in exceptional circumstances with regards to the pandemic and thanked all those involved. Whilst he supported the budget, he noted that the Liberal Democrat Group would have liked to see more funding for Youth Services and younger people who had missed out during the pandemic. He noted that many people would struggle financially due to job losses, businesses closing and the furlough scheme. Councillor Graham felt this was the most transparent process he had experienced and he commended the Cabinet's approach to the budget.

Councillor Enright stated his support for the budget and applauded the positive and collaborative process undertaken by officers and the Cabinet. He highlighted the need for the District to 'Build Back Better', and to support businesses and economic development, in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors. He also noted the "uptick" in homelessness and those struggling to pay rent and hoped the Council could continue to support those in need.

Councillor Postan noted that the Council had not had to make any cuts to services unlike other authorities in financial crisis. He thanked officers and Cabinet Members.

Councillor Davies noted support for the approach which it was hoped was inclusive and transparent and was a key part of the Cabinet mentality. With regards to the comments

relating to Youth Services and as Chair of the Community Safety Partnership, she highlighted the enhanced provision to Youth Services, in particular mental health support. She advised that she would be happy to share future plans as they developed.

Councillors Cotterill and Coles noted the need to invest in ethical and green investments and divest the Council's finances away from fossil fuels. Councillor Al-Yousuf assured them that this issue was being addressed by the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Good recognised that this was the first West Oxfordshire budget proposed by a female leader and passed his congratulations to Councillor Mead.

In seconding the proposal, Councillor Morris thanked all Members for their support and reminded his colleagues that any residents struggling with their Council Tax bills should contact the Council Tax Support Team. He reiterated that the Council had continued to deliver the same services, provide support and invest in communities despite the current health crisis.

As required by statute, voting on the proposition was recorded, and the voting was as follows.

For the proposition: Councillors Aitman, Al-Yousuf, Beaney, Bishop, Bull, Chapple, Coles, Collins, Colston, Cotterill, Coul, Crossland, Davies, Doughty, Eaglestone, Enright, Hilary Fenton, Ted Fenton, Good, Graham, Haine, Harvey, Hill, Jackson, James, Langridge, Leffman, Leverton, Levy, MacRae, McBride, Mead, Mills, Morris, Owen, Poskitt, Postan, Rylett, Saul, St John and Woodruff.

Against/Abstentions: None.

There being 41 votes in favour and none against, the proposition was **carried**.

RESOLVED: That the following be approved:

- (a) the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy at Annex A to the report to Cabinet;
- (b) General Fund revenue budgets as summarised at Annex B to that report;
- (c) the Capital Programme for 2021/22 to 2030/31 as set out at Annex D to the report;
- (d) Fees and charges for 2021/22 as set out in Annex E to the report;
- (e) the Council's Pay Policy Statement as set out in Annex F to the report;
- (f) the Council's Capital Strategy 2021/22 as set out in Annex G to the report;
- (g) the Council's Investment Strategy 2021/22 as set out in Annex H to the report;
- (h) the Council's Treasury Management Strategy 2021/22 as set out in Annex I to the report; and
- (i) the Prudential Indicators as set out in Annex N to the report

74. COUNCIL TAX 2021/2022

Councillor Mead informed the Council that she wished to propose the recommendations as per the published and circulated report. This proposition was seconded by Councillor Morris.

As required by statute, voting on the proposition was recorded, and the voting was as follows.

For the proposition: Councillors Aitman, Al-Yousuf, Beaney, Bishop, Bull, Chapple, Coles, Collins, Colston, Cotterill, Coul, Crossland, Davies, Doughty, Eaglestone, Enright,

Hilary Fenton, Ted Fenton, Good, Graham, Haine, Harvey, Hill, Jackson, James, Leffman, Leverton, Levy, MacRae, McBride, Mead, Mills, Morris, Owen, Poskitt, Postan, Rylett, Saul, St John and Woodruff.

Against/Abstention: None.

There being 40 votes in favour and none against, the proposition was **carried** and the Council -

RESOLVED: That

- (1) for the purpose of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 Section 35(2), there are no special expenses for the District Council in 2021/22;
- (2) it be noted that at its meeting held on 13 January 2021 the Cabinet calculated the Council Tax Base for 2021/22:
 - a) for the whole Council area as 44,917.96 [item T in the formula in Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended (the “Act”)]; and
 - b) for dwellings in those parts of its area to which a Parish Precept relates as in the attached Schedule 1.
- (3) the Council Tax requirement for the Council’s own purposes for 2021/22 (excluding Parish Precepts and Special Expenses) is £109.38
- (4) the following amounts be calculated for the year 2021/22 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
 - a) £48,081,322 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act, taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils and any additional special expenses.
 - b) £39,075,406 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) of the Act.
 - c) £9,005,916 being the amount by which the aggregate at 4(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 4(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act).
 - d) £200.50 being the amount at 4(c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (2(a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish Precepts and Special Expenses);
 - e) £4,092,790 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish Precepts and Special Expenses) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act as per the attached Schedule 2.
 - f) £109.38 being the amount at 4(d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 4(e) above by Item T(2(a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish Precept or special item relates;
 - g) the amounts shown in Schedule 2 being the amounts given by adding to the amount at 4(f) above, the amounts of the special item or items relating to dwellings in those parts of the Council’s area shown in Schedule 2 divided in each case by the amount at 2(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with

Section 34(3) of the Act, as the basic amounts of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate;

- h) the amounts shown in Schedule 3 being the amounts given by multiplying the amounts at 4(f) and 4(g) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation Band D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands;
- (5) it be noted that for the year 2021/22 the Oxfordshire County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley have issued precepts to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each category of dwellings in the Council's area as indicated below:

Valuation band	Oxfordshire County Council £	Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley £
A	£1,048.74	£154.19
B	£1,223.53	£179.88
C	£1,398.32	£205.58
D	£1,573.11	£231.28
E	£1,922.69	£282.68
F	£2,272.27	£334.07
G	£2,621.85	£385.47
H	£3,146.22	£462.56

- (6) the Council, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the amounts shown in Schedule 4 as the amounts of Council Tax for the year 2021/22 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings.
- (7) the Council's basic amount of Council Tax for 2021/22 is not excessive in accordance with principles approved under Section 52ZB Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- (8) the following Council/Public Officers: Chief Finance Officer, Group Manager – Resident Services, Legal Services Manager, Legal Executive, Business Manager – Operational Support, Revenues Manager, Revenues Lead and Court Officer be authorised to:
- a) collect and recover any National Non-Domestic Rates and Council Tax, and
- b) prosecute or defend on the Council's behalf or to appear on its behalf in proceedings before a magistrate's court in respect of unpaid National Non-Domestic Rates and Council Tax.

75. CLIMATE ACTION BI-ANNUAL REPORT

The Council received and considered a report from the Climate Change Manager and the Cabinet Member for Climate Change which presented a biannual report on the climate action taken in response to the climate and ecological emergency during the past six months; the West Oxfordshire Climate Change Strategy for approval and a Sustainability Standards checklist in Planning for approval.

Councillor Harvey introduced the report and welcomed Rachel Crookes to the team, along with Louise Croot who had returned from maternity leave. He thanked all of the team for their hard work.

With regards to the information relating to the Electric Vehicle Charging Points installation date, Councillor Harvey advised that this date had now been amended to the year 2021/22 to reflect the extension in funding from Government. He applauded the change in culture that this work had brought about across the Council, including officers and Members.

Councillor Postan reiterated the importance of tackling climate change and urged the Climate Action Working Group to look at options for moving away from the use of diesel power.

Councillor Leffman supported the report and noted the need to encourage people to move away from carbon dependant heating.

Councillor Rylett was pleased with the progress made and made particular points about the Local Area Energy Plan and highlighted the role that the Council could play. He hoped that the Local Plan could be reviewed sooner rather than later to ensure that the highest standards were met when building new homes and continue to drive towards achieving Net Zero.

Councillor Coles acknowledged that this work had moved a long way but noted the time it had taken to push the issues forward. He commended everyone who had worked on this matter and reiterated the pressing need to act because nature was being depleted on a massive scale.

Councillor Mills thanked everyone involved in bringing the paper forward and listed a number of other organisations who had produced reports such as the England Economic Heartland and the Oxford Cambridgeshire ARC framework. He also noted the ethos to develop Carbon Positive housing.

Councillor Graham felt a bolder statement needed to be made with regards to building on flood plains and the inadequate approach from Thames Water to manage with the infrastructure. He also recognised the need to reduce the reliance on the motor car and encourage alternative transport methods.

Councillor Poskitt hoped that the Sustainability Checklist would afford officers some 'teeth' to negotiate with developers and reminded the meeting of the importance of bird boxes and encouraging local breeds of birds.

Councillor Ted Fenton reminded the meeting that Oxfordshire County Council had committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030, so this Council was not acting in isolation.

Councillor Harvey proposed the recommendations as laid out and assured Councillor Postan that he had noted his request for the Climate Action Working Group, along with the officers present who had noted Members' comments.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor Al-Yousuf.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the contents of the biannual report on climate action for West Oxfordshire be noted;
- (b) That the Climate Change Strategy for West Oxfordshire and Sustainability Standards Checklist for planning be approved; and
- (c) That the Council's priorities for the next six months be noted.

76. EMERGENCY AND URGENCY DELEGATIONS

The Council received the previously circulated report of the Head of Democratic Services, which specified decisions taken under the emergency and urgency delegation arrangements approved by Council on 13 May 2020.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

77. SEALING OF DOCUMENTS

The Council received and noted the report of the Head of Paid Service which gave details of documents numbered 11860 to 11874F sealed since its last meeting.

The meeting closed at 2:48 pm

CHAIRMAN