

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

Record of decisions taken at the meeting of the **Cabinet** held via video conferencing on **Wednesday 21 April, 2021** at 2.00pm.

PRESENT

Councillors: Michele Mead (Leader); Toby Morris (Deputy Leader); Suzi Coul, Merilyn Davies, Jeff Haine, David Harvey and Norman MacRae MBE.

Also in Attendance: Councillors Alaa Al-Yousuf, Jill Bull, Owen Collins; Julian Cooper, Derek Cotterill, Harry Eaglestone, Duncan Enright; Hilary Fenton, Andy Graham, Steve Good, Dan Levy, Elizabeth Poskitt, Alex Postan, Carl Rylett and Harry St John.

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive); Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer); Frank Wilson (Executive Director, Finance); Maria Wheatley (Parking Services Manager); Jasmine McWilliams (Asset Manager); Scott Williams (Business Manager Commissioning Strategy); Bill Oddy (Group Manager – Commercial Development); Amy Bridgewater-Carnall – Senior Strategic Support Officer)

125. NOTICE OF DECISIONS

RESOLVED: That the record of the decisions taken at the meeting held on 24 March 2021, copies of which had been circulated, be approved and signed as a correct record.

126. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bolger, Bishop, Hill and Ted Fenton.

127. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers relating to matters to be considered at the meeting.

128. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

Mrs Jo Lamb addressed the meeting in relation to Agenda Item 6 – Allocation of Parking Funds.

Mr Nigel Pearce addressed the meeting in relation to Agenda Item 10 – Oxfordshire Growth Board Environment Advisory Group.

Copies of both submissions are appended to these minutes.

129. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS

129.1 Thank You to All

Councillor Mead took the opportunity to thank everyone present for their support over the past few months, as she noted that dependent on the result of the forthcoming election, there could be a change in leadership. In particular, she thanked her Cabinet colleagues for welcoming and advising her into the role of Leader. Councillor Mead also wished all those members not standing for re-election the best in their future endeavours and passed her good luck and wishes to all candidates in the election in May.

130. ALLOCATION OF PARKING FUNDS

The Cabinet considered a report from the Parking Manager which sought approval of proposals for the allocation of the parking fund to specific projects highlighted in the Council's Parking Strategy.

The report explained that the Council was responsible for parking in the off-street car parks that it owned or managed and the County Council was responsible for on-street parking throughout the district. The Council carried out enforcement on-street on behalf of the County Council under an agency agreement.

A Parking Strategy was adopted in 2016 and identified two key issues; a growing demand for additional parking capacity and a need for changes to parking regulations on-street in a few key locations. It was noted that the County Council had limited resources available to undertake on-street reviews so Cabinet had previously agreed to allocate funding of £35,000 to support the delivery of reviews in the District.

However, to date the balance on the fund remained at £35,000 with no deductions, however, commitments had been made as outlined in section 2.2 and 2.3 of the report. The report therefore proposed that the remaining funds be allocated to those parties detailed in 2.6 of the report on the understanding that the money would be used for parking related issues.

Councillor MacRae introduced the report and explained that the District Council was not the responsible for parking but acknowledged the difficulties and problems that many towns and villages faced in this area. It was hoped that this unallocated funding could be used to start to address some of the problems faced.

This was seconded by Councillor Harvey who reiterated that he hoped the Town and Parish Councils could make good use of the funds.

In response to a query from Councillor Cooper with regards to responsibility of functions, Councillor MacRae repeated that the County Council was the responsible body and despite the work undertaken by the District Council, had not responded to the results submitted to them.

Councillor Graham queried how the original amount of £35,000 had been arrived at and asked for the rationale behind the allocation of funds at 2.6 of the report. The Cabinet Member advised that the decision to set aside this funding was taken in 2016 and the minutes from those meetings were available should Councillor Graham wish to refer to them.

Councillor Enright supported the report and acknowledged the work already undertaken in Witney Town Centre. He queried how spending of the money would be monitored and managed to ensure it was spent solely on parking issues. Councillor MacRae advised that he did not wish to burden officers with more paperwork but noted that a letter or email from the town or parish council setting out what they had used the money for, would suffice.

Councillor Poskitt reiterated the comments made by the public speaker, Mrs Lamb, and did not feel that £7,000 would go very far in tackling the problems in Woodstock. Councillor MacRae acknowledged the seriousness of the issues in Woodstock and advised that discussions were ongoing with all affected parties to try to move forward with additional parking at Hensington Road.

Having considered the report and responded to the comments raised, the Cabinet agreed the recommendations in the report

DECISION: That

- a) the commitment to Oxfordshire County Council of the offer of up to £10,000 in relation to Church Green and/or Corn Street Witney be re-stated; and
- b) the remaining proposed allocations from the fund explained in the report and set out at the table in section 2.6 of the report, be approved.

REASONS: To continue to commit to building Strong Local Communities: Supporting and building prosperous and inclusive local communities.

OPTIONS: Cabinet could decide not to allocate any of the funds or make different allocations to those recommended.

131. PUBLICA BUSINESS PLAN 2020-22

The Cabinet considered a report from the Chief Executive which asked Members to consider the Publica Business Plan 2020-22, first approved in June 2020, to note progress and recommend that the Leader approve the Plan.

As part of the establishment of Publica a number of items were identified as reserved matters for Council approval and these were approved in October 2016 as part of the governance principles underpinning the establishment of Publica.

The reserved matters decisions fell to the shareholder representatives to determine and for each partner Council this was the Leader of the Council. To assist the Leader in reaching her decision the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet reviewed the Draft Business Plan in 2020 and were invited to suggest appropriate amendments before it was adopted.

In 2020 all of the Shareholder Councils adopted the two year business plan (2020-22) and this was attached as Annex A to the report. The report outlined the areas covered by the Business Plan and explained the action plans which supported the priorities and strategic actions. It was noted that progress had been affected as a result of the response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Leader introduced the report and acknowledged the impact that Covid-19 had on some of the progress originally planned, with staff being redeployed to actively respond to the needs of the communities in the District. However, she felt the document provided a good update and a clear direction of travel and proposed the recommendation as laid out.

This was seconded by Councillor Morris who noted the opportunity that this interim update provided with regard to looking at priorities for the future.

Councillor Postan asked that Cabinet note that there was still a feeling of separation between Members and officers and hoped this could be addressed.

Having considered the report, Cabinet approved the recommendations as laid out.

DECISION: Cabinet recommended that the Leader (as Shareholder) approve the Publica Business Plan 2020-22 as laid out.

REASONS: To deliver excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council.

OPTIONS: The Cabinet could make comments in relation to the Plan, and proposed amendments would need to be agreed by the other partner councils.

132. ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES IN-CAB TECHNOLOGY SYSTEM

The Cabinet considered a report from the Business Manager Commissioning Strategy which presented a business case on the costs, benefits and risks of procuring an Environmental Services In-Cab Technology system and sought approval to proceed in procuring the system using the capital budget of up to £140,000, set aside in the 2021-22 capital programme.

The report advised that 'In-Cab Technology' was a widely used system available on the market and allowed live data to be viewed and updated by teams involved in delivering environmental services. Cotswold District Council (CDC) had recently procured and implemented an Environmental Services Management System with In-Cab Technology from Yotta.

The CDC system was integrated with Salesforce this year and was now in the process of enabling the benefits to be realised as outlined in the business case. This meant there was now the opportunity for West Oxfordshire District Council to purchase the system which it was hoped would offer a number of financial, service related and carbon reduction benefits to the Council and Residents.

The report outlined the varying benefits of installing this system for the customer, for the company delivering the service, Ubico, and for the Council including fewer missed collections, faster enquiry response times and specific location data such as nearby schools and blind corners.

Councillor MacRae introduced the report and thanked the Chairman of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny for a robust discussion and support for the proposal at their recent meeting. He reiterated the advantage of lowering missed collections and the efficiency benefits the system would bring. He proposed the recommendations as laid out.

This was seconded by Councillor Harvey who noted that other neighbouring authorities were using this technology to great effect.

Having considered the report and having heard from the Members present, Cabinet approved the recommendations as laid out.

DECISION: That

- a) the business case be supported and approval granted for the allocation of up to £140,000 set aside in the capital programme for 2021-22, to be used to procure and implement the Environmental Services In-Cab Technology system from Yotta (including software licences and maintenance costs in year 1); and
- b) a proportion of the revenue savings in the Ubico contract costs of at least £50,000 p.a. will go to fund the software licences and maintenance costs of £34,103 per annum in years two to four inclusive of the contract.

REASONS: The proposal contained within this report supports the Council priority: Climate Action - Leading the way in protecting and enhancing the environment by taking action locally on climate change and biodiversity.

OPTIONS: Cabinet could choose not to procure the system and continue with the current method of service delivery.

133. AGREEING THE STRATEGIC VISION FOR OXFORDSHIRE

The Cabinet considered a report from the Chief Executive which introduced a final version of the Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire, attached as an appendix to the report. The report also

updated Members on the results of the consultation process and briefly summarised the main changes to the Vision, with the detail provided in the appendices. Finally, the report presented a final version of the Vision for consideration and agreement.

Cabinet had previously received a report in December 2020 detailing the Board's ambition to develop the Vision. It was hoped that the Vision would have a wider remit and would serve as an overarching Vision 'umbrella', under which both the Board and partners could develop future plans and strategies for their communities that articulated and planned for the future of Oxfordshire.

The report provided detail on the Consultation process carried out, timescales and next steps for the Vision.

The Leader introduced the report and felt that the input of the Board was invaluable. She proposed the recommendations as laid out.

This was seconded by Councillor Coul.

Councillor Graham queried if the wording used on pages 52 and 53 could be made stronger by replacing 'should' with 'will'. In response, Mr Hughes suggested that it may be better not to change the wording but to reiterate the importance and ambition of the vision.

Councillor Poskitt noted that younger people had been consulted on the document and yet there was no reference to apprenticeships or technical training. She also highlighted the importance in social equity.

Having considered the report and having heard from officers, Cabinet agreed the recommendations as laid out.

DECISION:

- a) That the Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire be approved; and
- b) Officers be requested to consider how to embed the Vision's ambitions for Oxfordshire in future plans and strategies of the Council.

REASONS: The Growth Board brings together all of the Principal Councils in Oxfordshire, together with other key partners, to work cooperatively on strategic issues. As such it is relevant to all of the key priorities identified in the Council Plan.

OPTIONS: Cabinet could chose not to approve the Strategic Vision.

134. OXFORDSHIRE GROWTH BOARD ENVIRONMENT ADVISORY GROUP

The Cabinet considered a report from the Chief Executive which set out a recent proposal, which was agreed by the Growth Board on 22 March 2021, to establish an Environment Advisory Group, together with a set of Terms of Reference. Wider information was also provided concerning the establishment of a Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire, and the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Environment Principles.

The Leader introduced the report and was pleased that the Advisory Group was being established. She proposed the recommendations as laid out.

This was seconded by Councillor Harvey who felt the establishment of the groups displayed an awareness of the importance of Biodiversity and Land Management and was another step in the right direction.

The Chief Executive, Mr Hughes addressed Members and explained the three aspects of the report, which it was hoped would be complimentary to one another and build on the climate action work already taking place across Oxfordshire.

Councillor Postan queried the lack of reference to the Task and Finish Group set up by the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel to look at infrastructure funded by private investment. He commended the report from the T&F group to Cabinet and asked if their point could be considered moving forwards.

Following the public submission from Mr Pearce, Councillor Graham asked if his points could be considered before this matter was noted at Council. Councillor Mead clarified that this was a Cabinet decision, not Council however, she would refer Mr Pearce's comments to the Growth Board. In response, Mr Hughes highlighted that it was important to recognise the role of the group was a consultative and advisory one and they were not a decision making body. However, he had noted the comments made and would raise them with Growth Board colleagues.

Having considered the report and having heard from officers present, Cabinet approved the recommendations as laid out.

DECISION:

- a) That the establishment of a Growth Board Environment Advisory group be supported;
- b) That the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Environment Principles be endorsed, as set out at Appendix 3, recognising that this statement of ambition applies to a diverse range of urban and rural communities, and that further evidentiary work will be required at a local level to understand their longer-term implications; and
- c) That the development of an Arc Environment Strategy, which will provide for how the principles can be delivered, be supported.

REASONS: The Growth Board brings together all of the Principal Councils in Oxfordshire, together with other key partners, to work cooperatively on strategic issues. As such it is relevant to all of the key priorities identified in the Council Plan.

OPTIONS: Cabinet could chose not to support the establishment of a Growth Board Environment Advisory group, and not to endorse the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Environment Principles.

135. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That, in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, (information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person), the public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining items of business.

136. CALL-IN OF CABINET DECISION - SALT CROSS GARDEN VILLAGE DESIGN WORKS

This item was withdrawn from the agenda by the Leader because, having debated the matter, the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee decided not to support the Call-In.

(See Minute Number 42 of the Finance & Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee minutes from Wednesday 14 April 2021)

137. INVESTMENT PROPERTY - ACQUISITION

The Cabinet considered a report from the Asset Manager requesting approval to acquire three long leases of investment property on a sale and leaseback basis.

The report outlined the details of the acquisition including the location of the site, supported by Annex A and information relating to the leases in question as shown in Annex B to the report.

Main points of the report were broken down and provided detail on the investment summary, the offer being proposed, due diligence processes and the involvement of the newly established Capital Programme Investment Board.

Following publication of the report, officers advised that a meeting of the Capital Programme Investment Board had taken place and a verbal update was provided at the meeting. Cabinet were also asked to consider an additional recommendation e), noting the Board's Terms of Reference as agreed at their meeting on 19 April 2021. Details of the additional recommendation were circulated in an addendum to the report, to all Members, prior to the meeting.

Councillor Morris introduced the report and proposed the recommendations as set out in the report and the addendum. This was seconded by Councillor Mead.

Members requested clarification from the Cabinet Member on details of the due diligence process that had taken place along with the timescales needed to take advantage of the opportunity.

Councillor Graham highlighted the need for the decision making to be transparent and was reminded that the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the overall Council portfolio annually and the Council's assets were a matter of public record.

Having considered the report and having heard from the officers present, Cabinet approved the recommendations as proposed.

DECISIONS: that Cabinet

- a) agrees to acquire the leasehold for the reasons set out in the report;
- b) that funds of the sum detailed in 1.4 of the report be released for due diligence and, if appropriate, subsequent purchase;
- c) authority be delegated to the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Head of Legal and the Cabinet Member for Finance to agree the final terms for the acquisition in line with the Heads of Terms;
- d) the foregoing decisions be implemented immediately, for the reasons explained in the report, and in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules and with the consent of the Chair of the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and
- e) the Terms of Reference of the West Capital Programme Investment Board, following their meeting held on Monday 19 April 2021, be noted.

REASONS: The decision supports the Council priority, Modern Council Services and Sustainable Finance: Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council.

OPTIONS: Cabinet could decide to withdraw its bid for the property and not proceed with the acquisition.

The meeting closed at 3.06 pm

Leader of the Council

DRAFT