

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

Record of decisions taken at the meeting of the **Cabinet** held via video conferencing on **Wednesday 17 February, 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, Richard Bishop, Jill Bull, Julian Cooper, Derek Cotterill, Maxine Crossland, Harry Eaglestone, Duncan Enright, Hilary Fenton, Ted Fenton, Steve Good, Andy Graham, Gill Hill, Liz Leffman, Dan Levy, Martin McBride, Alex Postan, Elizabeth Poskitt, Carl Rylett and Harry St John.

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive); Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer and Deputy Chief Executive); Frank Wilson (Executive Director, Finance); Bill Oddy (Group Manager – Commercial Development); Chris Hargraves (Planning Policy Manager); Claire Bromley (Planner - Policy); Claire Williams (Interim Finance Business Manager); Louise Thomas (Chief Accountant); Vanessa Scott (Climate Change Manager); Adrienne Frazer (Strategic Support Officer) and Amy Bridgewater-Carnall (Senior Strategic Support Officer).

100. NOTICE OF DECISIONS

RESOLVED: That the record of the decisions taken at the meeting held on 13 January 2021, copies of which had been circulated, be approved and signed as a correct record.

101. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

102. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

103. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

No submissions were received from the public in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure.

104. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS

104.1 Recommissioning of Homelessness Provision

Councillor Davies advised that in conjunction with all other districts in Oxfordshire, as well as the County Council, the Council had been looking at the re-commissioning of our homelessness provision. After an extensive study undertaken by Crisis, it had been agreed that a new, housing-led approach to homelessness, was needed in order to tackle this issue across the County. Currently, the default provision placed a homeless person in temporary accommodation, or a hostel, resulting in people often being moved. A housing led approach would change this emphasis to a rapid rehousing one, which put the person first, and was led by the belief that everyone had a right to home. It gave individuals choice and control over the services they needed, based on their own strengths, goals, and aspirations and would provide these services flexibly and for as long as needed.

Councillor Davies expressed her support for the scheme and hoped that by separating Housing from Support, the Council stood a greater chance of providing people with their own long-term home.

104.2 Climate Action – staffing update

Councillor Harvey announced that Rachel Crookes had been appointed as the Council's Countryside, Biodiversity & Countryside Land Management Officer and was due to start on 22 February 2021. Rachel brought a wealth of knowledge and experience with her working with the County Council and other community groups in the past. Councillor Harvey also welcomed Louise Croot, Climate Support Officer, back to the team following her recent maternity leave.

Finally, Councillor Harvey advised that the Climate Action Winter Bulletin was due to be published shortly and he encouraged residents to sign up to receive it.

104.3 Affordable Housing

Councillor Haine reminded Members that the decision had been taken last year to fund HALO housing with £510,000 to build affordable homes. He was pleased to announce that not only had HALO managed to build the homes for less money, they had also increased provision up to 43 homes.

104.4 Street Tag – Family Friendly App

Councillor Coul was pleased to introduce 'Street Tag' - a family friendly app aimed at primary school children to encourage them to do more walking, running, cycling etc. Primary schools had been encouraged to join up, and there were currently 24 primary schools in West Oxfordshire participating. The first 12 week season had just finished with the current season running until the beginning of April. The winners of the first season were The Batt Church of England Primary School, second and third were Witney Community Primary and Eynsham Community Primary.

Councillor Coul encouraged all schools to participate, especially as prizes were available for the winning schools.

105. LOCAL PLAN MONITORING REPORT 2019/2020

The Cabinet received the report of the Planning Policy Manager, which asked Members to consider the Council's Local Plan Annual Monitoring Report for 2019/20.

The report advised that under current legislation, the Council was required to prepare an Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) providing an update on the matters including Progress of the Local Plan; Implementation of Local Plan policies; Neighbourhood Planning; Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL); and How the Council had fulfilled its obligations under the Duty to Co-Operate.

The AMR had to be made available on the Council's website, at its main offices and any other appropriate locations and a copy of the AMR covering the period 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020 was attached as an appendix to the report. A brief overview of the main points arising was provided at section 2 of the report.

Councillor Haine proposed the recommendations in the report subject to the following amendments:

Page 20 of 36 – the figure of 32833m² net should read 33133m² net;

Figure 10 on page 20 – fourth column labelled ‘Eynsham-Woodstock’, the red area be reduced by 300m²;

Page 21 of 36 – the bottom bullet point be amended to read “Permitted changes of use to residential in 2019-20 would result in a loss of 989m² employment floorspace, including a scheme to convert offices to residential in Witney and two light industrial to residential schemes approved under permitted development in Bampton and Burford”.

Councillor Haine thanked officers for their work on the report, in particular Chris Hargraves and his team and highlighted the key sections in the report. He brought Members attention to section 2.21, which advised that 1086 new homes had been completed in the District with affordable housing making up 454 of that number.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor Davies, who agreed that officers had put together a positive and comprehensive overview.

Councillor Graham asked questions relating to an update on the provision of Gypsy and Traveller Sites, registration of self-build properties and the need for infrastructure to keep pace with the development of housing.

In response, Councillor Haine agreed that infrastructure was a vital piece of the process and assured him that the Council was doing everything it could to improve it. He also advised that he would get back to Councillor Graham about the Gypsy and Traveller information.

Councillor Leffman noted that the past 12 months had brought about a large amount of change and queried how this may impact on next years’ report. She asked if the report could be produced earlier for the 2021 period. Councillor Haine stated he would note the request and advised that at present, the report was planned for Autumn 2021.

Comments were made relating to the use of colours in the pie charts, which were sometimes hard to distinguish, the drop in numbers on the Council’s housing waiting list, the delivery of affordable housing targets and how greater investment was encouraged from Thames Water and the Environment Agency.

In response to a query from Councillor Postan, Councillor Haine advised that officers had communicated with Parish Councils regarding the creation of their Neighbourhood Plans and had encouraged them to develop them. However, despite the potential increase in CIL contributions it was noted that this was often a time consuming exercise for the parishes.

Councillor Poskitt referenced the Woodstock Neighbourhood Plan, which mainly focused on Green Spaces and queried if the town would benefit from higher levels of CIL as a result. Councillor Haine advised he would respond after the meeting.

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

DECISION: That the content of the Local Plan Annual Monitoring report be noted.

REASONS: To give Councillors the opportunity to consider the content of the AMR, which the Council was required to prepare under current legislation.

OPTIONS: Councillors could choose to request amendments or agree the document as written.

106. EXTENSION OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES CONTRACT WITH UBICO

The Cabinet received and considered the report of the Business Manager, Contracts which updated Members on the Ubico contract for Domestic Waste and Recycling collections, Trade Waste and Recycling collections (includes markets), Street Cleansing, Grounds maintenance, Bulky Waste collections, Pest Control & Dog Warden service and Bin deliveries. This contract was due to end on 31 March 2022 and the report put forward a recommendation to extend the agreement term by two years to 31 March 2024.

West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) along with Forest of Dean District Council (FoDDC), Cotswold District Council (CDC) and four other partners in Gloucestershire were shareholders in Ubico Limited, a Teckal company designed to deliver environmental services, offering better value for money than commercial contracts.

The report advised that feedback from service managers confirmed that Ubico performed well and delivered a good level of service, within the time constraints set by the Council. Collection accuracy was high at 99.92%, and there was a good relationship between officers in Publica and Ubico which had been crucial over the time of the pandemic. A short update on the last six months of service delivery was attached at Annex A to the report.

The alternative options available to Councillors was provided at section 2.2 of the report with a Pro's and Con's summary detailed at section 3.

Councillor MacRae proposed the report as laid out and thanked the Managing Director of Ubico, Beth Boughton, and her staff for their hard work and assistance over some very trying months. He acknowledged that officers were undertaking an Environmental Services Improvement Plan, which would be considered by the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Councillor MacRae highlighted an amendment relating to the decision by Cotswold District Council to extend their contract with Ubico by five years instead of two as detailed.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor Harvey, who endorsed the good service provided by Ubico.

Councillor Cotterill queried the cost of replacement vehicles falling to the Council, and was advised that these were Council vehicles and its responsibility to replace when they reached the end of their usable life.

In response to a query from Councillor Levy, Councillor MacRae assured him that officers were in discussions about how to make savings and deliver services more efficiently throughout the shareholder group.

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

DECISION: That Council be recommended to authorise the extension of the current Ubico contract by two years, from 1 April 2022 until 31 March 2024.

REASONS: To ensure the Council continued to lead the way in protecting and enhancing the environment by taking action locally on climate change and biodiversity.

OPTIONS: The Council can choose to enact the contract extension with Ubico or retender the contract with an alternative provider. However, given the risks surrounding the economy as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic and Brexit, it would be unlikely to receive competitive bids, when compared with that currently being paid to Ubico.

107. BUDGET 2021-2022

The Cabinet received and considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer, which asked Members to consider the revenue budget proposals for 2021/22, the Council's Capital Programme for 2021/22 to 2030/31 and the level of Council Tax for 2021/22.

This report also fulfilled the requirements of the Local Government Act 2003 relating to the Council's Treasury Management function and implementation of the Prudential Code Capital Finance System arrangements. Cabinet would recommend the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, Capital Programme, Capital Strategy, Investment Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy to Council for approval, and the report included the Chief Finance Officer's report on the robustness of estimates and the adequacy of the Council's reserves.

The draft base budget for 2021/22 had been considered by Cabinet on 13 January, and by Council on 20 January. This report updated Cabinet on the proposed changes to any expenditure budgets and funding streams, included details of feedback from consultation on the Council's budget proposals and drew together the Council's suite of strategic financial documents for 2021/22.

The report outlined the main changes to the budget, Business Rates, Council Tax and advised on the consultation carried out and responses received. There were a number of appendices attached to the report for consideration as detailed below:

Annex A, Medium Term Financial Strategy; Annex B - Summary of General Fund Revenue Budgets 2020/22; Annex C - Forecast Collection Fund Surplus 2020/21; Annex D - Capital Programme for 2021/22 to 2030/31; Annex E - Fees and Charges 2021/22; Annex F – Council Pay Policy Statement; Annex G – Capital Strategy 2021/22; Annex H – Investment Strategy 2021/22; Annex I – Treasury Management Strategy 2021/22; Annex J – Feedback from the budget consultation; Annex K – Report of the Chief Finance Officer; Annex L – Estimate of Business Rates 2021/22 (extracts from NNDR1 return); Annex M – Parish Precepts and Taxbase 2021/22; and Annex N – Summary of Prudential Indicators.

The Cabinet Member for Resources, Councillor Morris introduced the report and thanked the Chief Finance Officer, her team and all Cabinet Members for their input and hard work in pulling together a balanced budget. He reminded the meeting that the Council had continued to deliver all services under very difficult circumstances and highlighted the key points in the report.

Councillor Morris noted the significant pressure within the Medium Term Financial Strategy and recognised that there were some difficult years ahead for local authorities, with a number of changes to be prepared for. He proposed the report as laid out.

This was seconded by Councillor Mead, who echoed her thanks to all officers involved and to Councillor Morris for responding to communications and queries promptly.

Councillor Cotterill stated that this was a reassuring report and passed his congratulations to the team and, having asked for clarification on a number of posts detailed in the report, was advised that these posts had been approved as part of the Covid Recovery Strategy.

Councillor Coul recognised that this had been an unprecedented year and thanked all officers for their work in such difficult times.

Councillor Cooper reminded the Leader of his proposal relating to the potential for the Council to recognise the 150th anniversary of Winston Churchill's birth, which he felt could shine a spotlight on the District. The Leader noted his request.

There were some Councillors who felt that the publication of the budget reports did not coincide with Scrutiny committees effectively enough and queried whether there was anything that could be done to make this easier. Councillor Morris noted their frustration and reminded them that officers were reliant on receiving information from Central Government but noted that this could be addressed if the Council moved to a multi-year settlement.

Councillor Graham thanked senior officers for engaging fully and transparently in the budget process. He queried the reference to the money markets in Annex I to the report, raised a concern that the consultation response rates were still low and wondered whether it had been promoted extensively enough.

In response, Councillor Morris and the Chief Finance Officer assured Councillor Graham that the consultation had been very widely promoted and had received a higher response rate than in previous years. Clarification was also provided on the money market funds, the yields they provided and the potential for green investments.

Councillor Enright added his thanks to officers and acknowledged the timing difficulties experienced in producing the papers. He highlighted the importance of grants being used alongside 'bounce back' plans for the economy and hoped that these would be widely promoted.

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

DECISIONS:

(a) That Council be recommended to approve:

- (i) The updated Medium Term Financial Strategy in Annex A
- (ii) General Fund revenue budgets as summarised in Annex A
- (iii) The Capital Programme for 2021/22 to 2030/31 as set out in Annex D
- (iv) Fees and Charges for 2021/22 as set out in Annex E
- (v) The Council's Pay Policy Statement as set out in Annex F
- (vi) The Council's Capital Strategy 2021/22 as set out in Annex G
- (vii) The Council's Investment Management Strategy 2021/22 as set out in Annex H
- (viii) The Council's Treasury Management Strategy 2021/22 as set out in Annex I
- (ix) The Prudential Indicators as set out in Annex N
- (x) The level of District Council Tax for 2021/22 for a Band D property of £109.38

(b) That the estimate of Business Rates income for 2021/22, as set out in the excerpt from the government return NNDR1, in Annex L, and the Parish Precepts and Tax Levels set out in Annex M be noted.

REASONS: The report fulfils the requirements of the Local Government Act 2003 relating to the Council's Treasury Management function and implementation of the Prudential Code Capital Finance System arrangements and supports the priority themes set out in the Council Plan, approved by Council in January.

OPTIONS: Councillors could choose to amend the figures proposed in the budget and propose an alternative budget to Council.

108. OXFORDSHIRE PARK AND CHARGE PROJECT – APPROVAL OF LEGAL AGREEMENTS

The Cabinet received and considered the report of the Climate Change Manager, which provided an update on the Oxfordshire Park & Charge project and next steps.

The report also included a request that the Chief Executive be authorised, in consultation with Group Manager for Commissioning, Group Manager for Business Support Services and the Solicitor for the Council, to enter into Legal Agreements with the proposed Charge Point Operator (CPO) and utility company providing electricity to charge points based in the Council's car parks, as part of the Oxfordshire Park & Charge project.

The Council was a partner in the Innovate-UK funded, Oxfordshire Park & Charge Electric Vehicle Charging Point (EVCP) project, as approved in April 2020. During 2020, the Council worked extensively with the Oxfordshire Park & Charge team to assess the viability of car parks within the Council's stewardship. Six car parks had been selected as part of Tranche One for EVCP being installed in West Oxfordshire during the spring and summer of 2021 and these were listed in 1.2 of the report.

Officers had recently received draft Legal Agreements for the Oxfordshire Park & Charge project which were subject to review by the Council's Legal Team, in consultation with the WODC's Park & Charge project team. A summary of the main points noted as part of a legal review of contracts was provided in a confidential Annex 2 to the report.

Councillor Harvey presented the report and welcomed the next phase of the project. The proposals were seconded by Councillor MacRae.

Councillor Cooper raised a query relating to the figures detailed in the confidential appendix for the Woodford Way car park. Officers agreed to respond to him outside of the meeting. In addition, Councillor Cooper raised a concern that the car parking issue in Woodstock remained difficult and hoped that monitoring of any proposed arrangements would be balanced with ensuring the town remained vibrant and attractive to visitors.

In response, Councillor Harvey advised that the issuing of fixed penalty notices would be managed in the same manner as other parking policies.

Following a query from Councillor Leffman, Councillor Harvey explained that the original installation date had been extended by 12 months following recent events and agreed that the report should be updated to reflect that. With regard to her question relating to provision for Charlbury, he assured her that all areas would be considered equally.

Councillor Postan asked how this project would integrate with the Council's own project to deliver EVCP's in the District and why there seemed to be little progress with it. Councillor Harvey stated that he had been informed very recently that officers had looked at a revised plan and were hoping to send this out for tender in due course. With regard to the integration of the two projects, he advised that they were two separate entities.

Councillor Poskitt welcomed the report and noted that the dates in the report would be amended to avoid confusion. Councillor Harvey advised that a second meeting to discuss the car parking provision in Woodstock was due to take place on 26 February.

Having considered the report, the Cabinet agreed the recommendations.

DECISIONS:

- (a) That the contents of the Oxfordshire Park & Charge document provided in Annex 1 be noted;

- (b) That the risks identified within the report and in Annex 2 be noted, and the Chief Executive be authorised, in consultation with Group Manager for Commissioning, Group Manager for Business Support Services and Solicitor for the Council, to enter into Legal Agreements with the proposed Charge Point Operator (CPO) and utility company providing electricity to charge points based in the Council's car parks as part of the Oxfordshire Park & Charge project; and
- (c) That the project next steps and legal review underway be noted, as referenced in the exempt Annex 2.

REASONS: The project enabled the Council to protect the environment whilst supporting the local economy; Work with communities to meet the current and future needs and aspirations of residents; and provide efficient and value for money services, whilst delivering quality front line services.

OPTIONS: Alternative options were for the Council to carry out the installation and operation of 35 EVCP in six Council-owned car parks at the Council's direct cost or to take no action to install EVCP's – however, this was not recommended given the Council's declaration of a climate and ecological emergency and its commitment to responding and delivering targeted climate action across the District.

The meeting closed at 3.12 pm

Leader of the Council