

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting of the **Cabinet**

Held in the Council Chamber at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 13 July 2022**

#### PRESENT

Cabinet Members present: Councillor Joy Aitman, Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Councillor Duncan Enright, Councillor Andy Graham, Councillor Dan Levy, Councillor Mathew Parkinson, Councillor Andrew Prosser, Councillor Carl Rylett and Councillor Geoff Saul

Also present: Councillor Alaa Al-Yousuf, Councillor Gill Hill, Councillor Norman MacRae and Councillor Michelle Mead.

Officers present: Andrew Brown (Business Manager, Democratic Service), Janet Eustace (Democratic Services Manager), Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer), Chris Hargraves (Planning Policy Manager), Giles Hughes (Chief Executive), Claire Locke (Group Manager - Commissioning) and Frank Wilson (Group Finance Director).

#### **30 Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 22 June were approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record subject to noting that Councillors Arciszewska and Aitman should not have been shown as present.

#### **31 Apologies for Absence**

There were none.

#### **32 Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Enright declared an interest in item 39 as the Portfolio holder at Oxfordshire Country Council and said he would leave the Chamber.

Councillor Rylett declared an interest in item 38 as living adjacent to the site but confirmed that there was no pecuniary interest.

#### **33 Participation of the Public**

No requests for public participation had been received.

#### **34 Receipt of Announcements**

The Leader of the Council Councillor Graham welcomed everyone to the Cabinet meeting.

The Chair welcomed Andrew Brown as the new Business Manager, Democratic Services.

The Chair mentioned recent rises in COVID cases and asked all to be mindful of crowded spaces, test regularly and wear face masks if they wished.

The Chair announced that the Cabinet had decided to hold meetings at different locations within the district in order to be more accessible to residents. Details would follow shortly.

#### **35 Review of Legal Services, Interim Monitoring Officer Arrangement and Retained Officer Structure**

The Chair introduced this item. He confirmed that Cotswold District Council had recently agreed to remain party to the shared Cotswold/Forest of Dean/West Oxfordshire legal service and to support the formalisation of the shared service under a Collaboration

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Agreement and Section 101 agreement. A review of economy, efficiency and effectiveness for shared services would be undertaken.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the current interim monitoring officer services agreement had one year to run and that now would be a good time for a review. He would discuss how to progress the matter with other Chief Executives in the partnership.

In answer to a question from Cllr Mead, the Chair confirmed that the needs of Publica and Forest of Dean would also be taken into account.

**Resolved** that Cabinet:

- a) Note the decision of Cotswold District Council on their commissioning review of legal services.
- b) Agree to remain party to the shared Cotswold/Forest of Dean/West Oxfordshire legal service, to support the formalisation of the shared service under a Collaboration Agreement and Section 101 agreements, and a review of the shared service for economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- c) Authorise the Chief Executive to undertake a review of the current interim monitoring officer arrangement and the retained officer structure, including interrelationships with the shared legal service and Publica, with recommendations from the review reported to Cabinet and Council as appropriate.

### **36 Outline Business Case to Improve Openness and Transparency in Council Business and Support Agile Working and Decarbonisation Measures**

The Chair introduced this item. He said that the Council's facilities needed to be appropriate and accessible. Elmfield was under occupied and it made sense to move Planning to Woodgreen where officers would be much more accessible to residents. The Council Chamber was unwelcoming and in need of updating to allow other uses such as weddings. Technology needed improving to allow hybrid working and remote access.

Councillor Prosser reported on the decarbonisation and sustainability measures set out in the report and said that he would be revisiting the assumptions underlying the proposed new heating systems. Councillor Levy emphasised the importance of updating the Council's estate and the positive impact this would have on the Council's income. Councillor Enright spoke of the need to ensure that all the Council's properties support the Council's priorities to increase openness and transparency.

In answer to a question from Councillor MacRae, Claire Locke, Group Manager for Commissioning, confirmed that there was sufficient flexibility to allow all those who wished to work in the office to do so and to allow space for the Elections team. Councillor Al-Yousuf was assured that a detailed report would be taken to Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Mead said that ICE had committed to there being accommodation for Parking Services in their building and she asked that consideration be given to retaining at least a partial Registration service at Woodgreen for the bereaved who preferred not to use the Welch Way office.

The Chair said that these points would be taken into consideration.

**Resolved** that Cabinet:

- a) Support Option 2 in section 4 to upgrade technology in the Council Chamber and Committee rooms plus modernisation of the Council Chamber and public spaces to create an attractive, flexible and publicly accessible space;

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- b) Confirm that, the first floor of 3 Welch Way offices will not be re-let when the current tenancy ends to enable use of this space for staff;
- c) Note that a report will be brought back for decision on the future letting options of Elmfield, to consider how that space is utilised;
- d) Delegate a final decision on a replacement heating solution to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet members for Climate Change and Finance;
- e) Recommend to Council to allocate £2.15m of funding from the Capital Programme “Investment Strategy for Recovery” line item to facilitate the changes and deliver up to £186,000 of net annual revenue benefits with a return on capital of up to 10% after capital financing costs.

### **37 Local Development Scheme (LDS) update**

Councillor Rylett, Cabinet Member for Planning and Sustainable Development, introduced this item. He said that the aim was to submit the new Local Plan for examination by the end of 2023. The Salt Cross Garden Village Area Action Plan was due to be adopted during the autumn of 2022. Further consultation of the Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document was due to take place in August. Work will begin on the Hanborough Station Master Plan this summer with a decision being taken at a later stage about whether this should be a formal Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). Consideration is to be given to producing a new Statement of Community Involvement to reflect an increased digital process.

Councillor Al-Yousuf asked if Ward Councillors and the Parish Council could have a copy of the Hanborough Station Masterplan and, given the controversy around parking, whether funding could be found for the production of an SPD. Chris Hargreaves, Planning Policy Manager, undertook to provide copies of the Master Plan and to consider further the question of an SPD.

**Resolved** that Cabinet:

Approve the updated Local Development Scheme.

### **38 West Eynsham Masterplan**

Councillor Rylett, Cabinet Member for Planning and Sustainable Development, reported that the Masterplan had been approved in March 2022 by the then Cabinet. However certain landowners had been excluded from the process so further discussions were needed. Councillor Levy said that this now needed to be progressed speedily. The original Masterplan was good, but if it did have to be revisited, developers should be encouraged to improve energy efficiency.

The Chair confirmed that the findings of the Scrutiny Committee would be taken into account and that Group Leaders would brief Members on issues surrounding land ownership.

**Resolved** that Cabinet:

- a) Note the content of the report;
- b) Agree that Officers should invite the four main landowners/developers responsible for the preparation of the masterplan to engage with all other third party landowners within the SDA boundary; and
- c) Agree that any updates/consequential amendments to the masterplan arising from that process of further engagement be reconsidered at a future meeting of the Cabinet.

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**39 Approval of Funding for West End Link Study**

Councillor Duncan Enright left the Chamber at 2.42 pm.

Councillor Rylett, Cabinet Member for Planning and Sustainable Development, proposed that £15,000 from the Council's unallocated Housing and Planning Delivery Grant be used to part fund transport options appraisal relating to the West End Link.

Following questions from Councillors MacRae and Mead, Chris Hargraves, Planning Policy Manager, confirmed that the findings of this study would feed into the North Witney Development Masterplan. The failure of the Cogges Link project had demonstrated the importance of robust evidence. The total cost of the Study was in the region of £60,000 with the County Council funding the bulk. The results would inform both the County and the District Council.

Councillor Hill mentioned problems with securing funding for a study into flooding in Ramsden and was advised to take this up via the County Councillor.

The Chair emphasised the need to consider the bigger picture. He recognised that residents would have concerns and wanted to be sure that Cabinet had as much evidence as possible to inform further deliberations.

**Resolved** that the Cabinet:

Approve the release of £15,000 from the Council's unallocated Housing and Planning Delivery Grant (HPDG) to part fund the transport options appraisal work commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council.

Councillor Enright returned to the Chamber at 2.50 pm.

**40 Investment Plan for UK Shared Prosperity Funding**

Councillor Enright, Deputy Leader, said that the Council had been awarded £1m in funding over the next 3 years. A series of workshops had been held and he thanked the officers for their innovative approach to identifying projects and themes which will be included in the Council's Investment Plan.

In response to a question from Cllr Al-Yousuf, Councillor Enright confirmed that young people had been identified as key recipients.

**Resolved** that the Cabinet:

- a) Support the inclusion of the projects and interventions listed in this report in the Council's Investment Plan for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- b) Delegate authority for the final approval of the Investment Plan submission and any subsequent amendments to it, to the Group Manager - Property and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development.
- c) Agree a variation and pay Publica the £20,000 revenue allocation from the UK SPF for Investment Plan preparation the application of which is to be approved by the Chief Finance Officer.
- d) Agree that 4% of the fund is used for administration of the Programme, with the total sum of £40,000 over the life of the project being paid to Publica to employ a shared UK SPF Programme Manager, to monitor and manage project progress and undertake the required reporting.
- e) Delegate authority for the award of contracts to consultants/contractors to deliver projects highlighted for delivery in 2022/23 to the Group Manager - Property and

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Regeneration in consultation with the S.151 Officer and the Cabinet Member for Economic Development.

#### **41 Oxfordshire Food Strategy**

Councillor Aitman, Cabinet Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, said that it was a great shame that such a strategy is needed but sadly the situation was only going to get worse. She emphasised the importance of moving quickly. She noted that Witney Food Bank had recently advised that it was low on food stocks.

**Resolved** that Cabinet:

- a) Review and comment on the Oxfordshire Food Strategy: Part 1 including the principles and framework for delivery;
- b) Note that Part 2 will see the development of detailed action plans for partners involved in the strategy and that this will return to Cabinet, in the autumn;
- c) Note the grant allocation proposed by the County Council to assist with the development of Part 2.

#### **42 West Oxfordshire Council Plan**

The Chair emphasised the Cabinet's commitment to involving residents in the production of the Council's plan. In particular he was looking for both face to face and digital communications with Town and Parish Councils over the summer.

Councillor Mead queried the time table. The Chair explained the need to fit in with the Council's cycle of meetings but accepted that consultation may need to extend into September.

**Resolved** that Cabinet:

- a) Agree to a revision of the West Oxfordshire Council Plan.
- b) Agree to the development of an Action Plan setting out activity to be taken to deliver the priorities of the Council Plan.
- c) Agree to a programme of engagement that will inform the revision of the West Oxfordshire Council Plan and development of supporting Action Plan.

#### **43 Budget Monitoring Report Year End outturn**

Councillor Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, thanked officers and the previous administration for ensuring the Council is in a sound financial position. Due to financial support from central government during COVID and the Council's low spending there is a surplus. It is however important to deliver the services that residents expect, particularly during a cost of living crisis. Also funding is needed to improve the Council's estate and work towards decarbonisation. An underspend of £300,000 in the year plus reserves there is £750,000 available for new initiatives. There was an underspend on capital of £14.4m which would be carried forward. It is important that the Chief Finance Officer has the flexibility to look for new opportunities. He added that there would be some difficult decisions ahead.

**Resolved** that Cabinet:

- a) Note the 2021/22 end of year financial performance.
- b) Recommend to Council to approve the carry forward of Capital Budget of £14,399,348 as detailed in Annex B

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- c) Recommend to Council to approve the transfers to and between Earmarked Reserves as detailed in the report
- d) Delegate authority to the Chief Finance Officer to spend from the Project Contingency Earmarked Reserve to fund ad hoc investigation, advice and consultancy services for potential investments and projects

#### 44 Exclusion of Public and Press

**Resolved** that, in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, the public were excluded from the meeting for the remaining item of business

#### 45 Recovery and Investment Strategy Proposal

Councillor Enright, Deputy Leader, presented details of an investment opportunity in the strategic economic infrastructure of West Oxfordshire in line with the Investment Strategy for the Recovery of West Oxfordshire. The proposal was to acquire a site which supports the Council's priority for re-invigorating commercial centres and ensuring economic vibrancy. Independent advice would be sought on valuation and due diligence be carried with costs being charged to the Project Contingency Earmarked Reserve should the acquisition not be pursued. The Capital Programme Investment Board would be asked to comment on the proposal.

Councillor Al-Yousuf had a number of questions he would raise at a later date but at this stage wanted to query whether an independent valuation should be obtained from a different source and whether a second valuation might be advantageous. He also asked for assurances that the purchase would not proceed if due diligence identified concerns.

Councillor Levy confirmed that in addition to contributing to the regeneration of the town the purchase would have to make money for the Council. If this was not the case the acquisition would not proceed.

The Chair confirmed that the Council could walk away from the purchase if it was demonstrated not to be viable and drew attention to recommendation (c) in the paper.

**Resolved** that Cabinet:

- a) Approve the decision in principle to acquire the site in line with its priority for re-invigorating commercial centres and ensuring economic vibrancy;
- b) Confirm the proposed acquisition price subject to receipt of independent advice on valuation;
- c) Approve that appropriate due diligence be carried out noting that any costs incurred will be charged to the Project Contingency Earmarked Reserve should the acquisition not be pursued;
- d) Seek the views of the Capital Programme Investment Board on the proposal;
- e) Delegate to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chief Financial Officer and the Cabinet member for Economic Development the final terms of the acquisition.

The Meeting closed at 3.25 pm

CHAIRMAN