

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet

Held in the Council Chamber at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 12 October 2022**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andy Graham (Leader), Duncan Enright (Deputy Leader), Joy Aitman (Cabinet Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities), Lidia Arciszewska (Cabinet Member for Environment), Dan Levy (Cabinet Member for Finance), Mathew Parkinson (Cabinet Member for Customer Delivery), Andrew Prosser (Cabinet Member for Climate Change), Geoff Saul (Cabinet Member for Housing and Social Welfare).

Also present Councillors: Alaa Al-Yousuf, Colin Dingwall, Jeff Haine, Gill Hill, Norman MacRae MBE, Michelle Mead and Alaric Smith.

Officers: Andrew Brown (Business Manager, Democratic Services), 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), Susan Sale (Monitoring Officer, Leadership and Management Team), Mandy Fathers (Business Manager - Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service, Revenues & Housing Support) and Michelle Ouzman (Strategic Support Officer).

69 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 21 September 2022 were approved by the Cabinet and signed by the Leader, Councillor Andy Graham.

70 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Carl Rylett the Cabinet Member for Planning & Sustainable Development.

71 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

72 Participation of the Public

There were no participation of the public registered to speak.

73 Receipt of Announcements

The Leader, Councillor Andy Graham thanked everyone for all the best wishes and support he had received from the Council Members and Officers, whilst he was away.

The next Cabinet meeting was set for Wednesday 16 November, at 2pm and would be back on tour, to be held at the Town Hall in Chipping Norton.

Councillor MacRae enquired if there was adequate parking, Councillor Enright was able to confirm that there were two carparks, one in Albion Street and one in New Street, both nearby the Town Hall.

74 Recommendations from Scrutiny Committees

To consider a recommendation arising from the Climate and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 29 September 2022.

That the Leader of the Council writes to the Secretary Of State for the Environment calling on him to:

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- Ensure the Environment Agency is fully funded to carry out flood protection and 'river cleanliness' works,
- Ensure legislation is tight enough to bring forward successful prosecutions of breaches to river pollution,
- Alter Planning Legislation to make the Water Authorities statutory consultees in planning applications.

The Cabinet response to the above recommendation (circulated prior to the meeting) was proposed by Councillor Arciszewska the Cabinet Member for Environment, and seconded by Councillor Enright the Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member Economic Development. The response was to agree the recommendation.

Councillor MacRae, Chair of the Climate and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, referred to the recent fines announcement from the Secretary of State, and asked if this could be mentioned in the letter and to ask if the fines could be used to address the issues, for enforcement and assist in the clearance of the rivers.

Councillor Enright thought this was an excellent suggestion, and put it to the Cabinet that this be included within the letter, this was unanimously agreed.

Resolved Leader to write to the Secretary of State.

75 Commercial Solar Photovoltaic Installations on Council Estate

To seek agreement to proceed with a procurement to obtain costs which will inform a full business case for the installation of solar PV on the roofs of buildings owned and leased by the Council. To agree to proceed with investment subject to the proposal being in line with the Councils Investment Strategy.

Councillor Levy the Cabinet Member for Finance proposed the following agreements, which was seconded by Councillor Prosser the Cabinet Member for Climate Change.

- (a) Agree that the Council should proceed with an open procurement process to identify costs and income potential to inform a business case for investment, and that,
- (b) Agree that the Council explore implications for selling energy generated to tenants.
- (c) Agree that viable business cases in line with the Councils Investment Strategy, are submitted to the Council's Capital Investment Board for consideration before a formal decision is brought before Council to allocate capital to undertake the works.
- (d) Delegate Authority to the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Finance and Climate Change, to appoint a contractor as it may be necessary for the selected contractor to carry out more detailed financial analysis before business cases can be formally considered.

Councillor Dingwall was concerned about the cost of implantation and maintenance of roof solar panels, and asked if the widening of the scope could be considered to include ground-level solar panels and could section 106 agreements be made on strategic sites.

Councillor Levy agreed it was an interesting idea, however there was little ground level land owned by the Council available, and that strategic sites not owned by the Council was also out of scope.

Councillor Prosser the Cabinet Member for Climate Change confirmed that the scope was focussed on feasibility on roofs. Via planning solar panels on commercial buildings should be encouraged.

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Clare Locke the Group Manager - Commissioning, Leadership and Management Team confirmed that high level sites would give the Council good return within five years.

Councillor MacRae enquired if any thought had been given to the Council forming a company to provide solar panels to the district, like other councils have done. This would make money for the Council but also reduce the costs for the residents, as they are expensive to purchase.

The Leader, Councillor Graham, stated it was worthy consideration but not for this item, but thanked Councillor MacRae for his comments.

76 Data Retention Policy

This report seeks approval for an updated Data Retention Policy to ensure compliance with the Council's statutory obligations whilst at the same time being open and transparent in relation to records management.

Councillor Parkinson the Cabinet Member for Customer Delivery proposed the Cabinet approves the policy as stated within the report. Councillor Prosser the Cabinet Member for climate change seconded the proposal.

Cabinet resolved to approve the Data Retention Policy

77 Council Tax Exceptional Hardship Policy

To consider and approve the implementation of an Exception Hardship Policy to ensure additional financial assistance is available to help with Council Tax payments to those residents who are in severe financial hardship.

Councillor Levy the Cabinet Member for Finance proposed that the Cabinet approve the Policy, this was seconded by Councillor Enright the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development.

Councillor Levy stated that there was a revenue dedicated to this and it would be limited, it was supported and matched by the County Council, Officers would have authority to grant applications and that the scheme was well thought out to assist the residents in need.

Councillor Enright thanked the Officers for their expertise and determination to support our Town and Parish Councils, it was good joint working.

- a) Approve the Revenues spend to support this scheme;
- b) Approve the implementation of the Exceptional Hardship Policy as a matter of urgency;
- c) Note the additional revenue given by Oxfordshire County Council in support of this Policy; and,
- d) Grant delegated authority to the Group Manager for Resident Services to approve all payments made under the Exceptional Hardship Policy.

Cabinet resolved to approve the policy.

78 Combe Village Design Statement (VDS)

To consider the Combe Village Design Statement (VDS) and agree that it should be subject to a 6-week period of public consultation prior to it being potentially adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document.

Councillor Parkinson the Cabinet Member for Customer Delivery introduced the statement and thought it was a good design, and set the bar high, asking to go out for public consultation.

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Councillor Graham, the Leader, applauded the Parish Council's diligent work, and hoped it encouraged other Parish Councils to follow suit.

Councillor Enright the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development thought that Combe people deserved respect for producing the document.

Councillor Mead asked why a design statement had been produced and not a Neighbourhood Plan, she felt that a Neighbourhood Plan would have given them more legal rights.

Councillor Enright said he thought it was genuine lack of capacity as to why the statement was chosen rather than the Neighbourhood Plan approach.

Councillor Parkinson the Cabinet Member for Customer Delivery proposed and Councillor Arciszewska the Cabinet Member for Environment seconded that the Cabinet:

- a) Note the content of the report including the consultation summary report attached at Annex A be noted;
- b) Agree that the Combe Village Design Statement attached at Annex B and prepared by Combe Parish Council, be published for a 6-week period of public consultation; and
- c) Agree that the District Council's current Local Development Scheme (LDS) published in July 2022 be updated as per the LDS addendum attached at Annex C.

Resolved the Cabinet noted and agreed the above recommendations.

79

Oxfordshire Plan 2050

To provide an update on the cessation of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 programme and the transition to a process focused on Local Plans.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Graham, invited The Chief Executive, Giles Hughes, to provide an update on the cessation of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 programme and the transition to a process focused on Local Plans.

The Chief Executive stated that it was disappointing that the Oxfordshire Plan did not work as Officers had worked hard, but the main issue was housing and an agreement could not be reached. West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) tried very hard and worked constructively and attached to the report is an update to work forward, think about cross boundary issues, housing targets, strategies and delivery of net carbon zero.

There is an agreed Oxfordshire strategic vision which has been adopted by WODC.

Councillor Graham informed the Cabinet that Councillor Alaa Al-Yousuf had submitted the following questions for the Cabinet member for Planning and Sustainable Development and Councillor Carl Rylett provided the following answers:

Q1. The main implication of the decision to no longer progress the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 is on the emerging West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041. The Risk Assessment is that: "In the absence of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, there is a risk that the current timetable for taking the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 through to submission and examination may not be achieved." Does the Cabinet member agree that such a slippage in the timetable will prolong the period of vulnerability of the District to speculative developments when it is unable to demonstrate at least a 5 year land supply? Does he also agree that potentially for the next 12 months the District will be in a planning crisis and, if so, what urgent measures is he going to take in response?

A1. The decision to no longer progress the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 has a number of implications including on the scope and timing of individual local plans. This does not however

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relate to, or impact upon, the Council's ability to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply which is benchmarked against the currently adopted Local Plan. Whilst I acknowledge that the District Council cannot currently demonstrate a 5-year supply of deliverable housing land, this is not a planning crisis, rather it is a common issue faced by many local authorities and requires a measured and robust plan of action. The Council is currently in the process of finalising a new Housing Land Supply Position Statement and Officers have been seeking additional information from landowners and developers to provide clearer evidence of anticipated delivery. It is anticipated that the updated position statement will be published later this month. Alongside this, the review of the Local Plan provides the opportunity to consider future housing needs and identify additional housing sites in a plan-led manner in consultation with local communities and other key stakeholders.

Q2. The Chief Executive's report in the annex refers to Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy but does not refer to the likely loss of Government funding which will affect WODC and the Local Plan delivery. In a written answer to a written question at the Cabinet meeting on 17 August, the Chief Executive said: "£30 million of funding from the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal is currently outstanding from Government. ... If the £30 million outstanding is lost then that will unfortunately affect the delivery of infrastructure across Oxfordshire." Can the Cabinet Member please provide a timeline for a new Infrastructure Delivery Plan and explain how the loss of Government funding will be made up for?

A2. As set out at page 100 of the agenda, discussions are currently ongoing between the County Council, City and Districts to determine how the next phase of the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy work can be effectively integrated with local plan making. It is anticipated that a separate infrastructure delivery plan for West Oxfordshire will also be prepared to inform the new Local Plan. With regards to the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, it is not appropriate to speculate on the outcome of discussions which currently remain ongoing, however clearly if the funding is not received, other alternative sources of funding will need to be considered.

Councillor Graham thanked Councillor Al-Yousuf for the questions and promised to keep everyone updated on progress.

Councillor Enright wanted to reassure all members present, that this Council, Officers, Chief Executive, past administration and current administration were hugely supportive of Oxfordshire Plan and wanted to see it through to conclusion.

WODC will always be supportive of our neighbours and will continue to play a role, and have a duty to be cooperative, to be a peacemaker and unifier across Oxfordshire, to meet the needs of all residents. Looking forward to work for the future, work has begun on infrastructure strategy, delivering on housing growth deal, net carbon zero, addressing inequalities.

Councillor Mead was concerned by the cessation of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 programme and asked how these relationships would be rebuilt, as the Oxfordshire Plan failed to progress in August, it is now October, so what has happened since August and what is going to happen. Have Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) meetings progressed, and how is information being reported back.

Councillor Graham assured members that the Local Plan was on going, Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) meetings were continuing, and that these were being reshaped to be more efficient and effective, working in partnership with other neighbouring local authorities. There is a positive sense of willingness to work together, and Future Oxfordshire Partnerships need to cooperate. The Councils may not agree to what is in each other's plans but need to respect

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what is in those plans. Local authorities are waiting for the government to give clear direction. The Council needs to build the right houses for the right people. Growth isn't just about housing, its health and wellbeing and community sustainability. The £30 million is not lost, there is no factual evidence as yet that it's lost. Further updates will be provided.

Councillor Enright the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development proposed that the report be noted and this was seconded by the Leader Councillor Graham.

Cabinet resolved to note the content of this report including Annex A

80 Salt Cross Garden Village Area Action Plan Proposed Main Modifications

To agree the District Council's formal response to consultation on proposed Main Modifications to the Salt Cross Garden Village Area Action Plan (AAP).

Councillor Levy the Cabinet Member for Finance proposed that the Cabinet agree the suggested draft response attached at Annex A, this was seconded by Councillor Aitman the Cabinet Member for Stronger Healthy Communities.

Councillor Levy stated as Councillor Rylett was not in attendance, he wanted to address the members as he lived close to Eynsham. People at first were concerned about the location of Salt Cross, but people had moved on from that. The communities in Eynsham had got behind the project and wanted to ensure that the garden village was something that we all could be proud of. WODC put together an area action plan to ensure that the design met the needs of the residents, businesses and communities to be a genuine example to others how a garden village could evolve. Local residents were involved in putting together the action plan. Following consultation the action plan report went out to the inspectorate.

The Inspectorate produced a report which removed transportation connections, removed the need for net carbon zero, all in all very disappointing. The Council is now in a position to respond to the consultation that has gone on in the amended report, and requesting it be amended to go back to the original report. The Council believe the garden village should be an exemplar as it was in the original report. It was disappointing that things were removed that WODC feel should have remained in the report.

WODC Officer Chris Hargreaves has scribed a letter of response on the Council's behalf for submission to the AAP examination.

Councillor Haine was supportive of what Councillor Levy had said and thought that the Council's Officer Chris Hargreaves had written a good letter.

Cabinet resolved to agree the suggested draft response attached at Annex A for the purposes of submission to the AAP examination

The Meeting closed at 2.50 pm

CHAIR