

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Held in the Committee Room 1, Council Offices Woodgreen, Witney OX28 1NB at 2.00 pm
on **Wednesday, 7 December 2022**

PRESENT

Councillors: Alaa Al-Yousuf (Chair), Alaric Smith (Vice-Chair), Hugo Ashton, Michael Brooker, Andrew Coles, Julian Cooper, Mark Johnson, Gill Hill, Charlie Maynard, Michele Mead and Ruth Smith

Officers: Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer), Phil Martin (Group Manager - Business Support), Bill Oddy (Group Manager - Commercial Development), Scott Williams (Business Manager - Commissioning Strategy) and Astrid Harvey (Strategic Policy and Partnerships Officer), Janet Eustace (Democratic Services Manager), Michelle Ouzman (Democratic Services Officer), and Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer).

Other Councillors in attendance: Andy Graham, Dan Levy and Mathew Parkinson

23 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2022 were approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

24 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Suzi Coul and Councillor Richard Langridge.

Councillor Harry St John substituted for Councillor Richard Langridge.

25 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

26 Participation of the Public

There was no public in attendance.

27 2023/24 First Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Dan Levy, and the Chief Finance Officer, Elizabeth Griffiths, who introduced the Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy report.

The Chief Finance Officer explained to the Committee that the budget had been hit by inflation and the expectation that government funding would be cut. West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) was fortunate to have reserves that could assist the funding gap for the next year, however the Council needed to be aware that reserves would not assist future years, which will be critical times ahead.

The Chair asked the Committee to focus on feedback comments to the Cabinet, this was the initial draft report that would return to the Committee for further scrutiny.

The Committee discussed the report at length, concluding with the following comments for Cabinet:

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- Clarity on the role of Head of Commercial to include clear key deliverables
- Concerns about the failing Leisure Services contract, and the reality of the lack of management fee income
- Concerns about the number of growth posts (Annex C)
- WODC Publica roles, could some these roles be shared roles with other Councils, so WODC could have an income?
- Local Plan extra £250,000, more detail required what the additional funding is for
- Any items in the budget not spent, other items may have been deleted to allow these items to be budgeted, therefore everything needs to be justified with extra care
- New Homes Bonus government funding may disappear
- Investments - more transparency
- Potential Council Tax and Business Rates increases
- Added “Forecast spend this year” column on the Charts in the report on page 11 (Quarterly reports do have the forecast)
Councillors wanted to know when would the Council know about the government funding, the Deputy Chief Finance Officer, Georgina Dyer confirmed that they were expecting detail on government funding 21 December 2022.

Resolved that the Committee commented on the report and acknowledged that the state of the budget was serious.

The Chair announced that the next item that would be considered at the Committee would be Agenda item 9 – Finance Performance, followed by Agenda Item 7, then 6.

28 Treasury Management Update

The Chief Finance Officer introduced the Treasury Management Update report.

The Chair asked the Committee if they had any questions or comments.

Resolved that the Committee noted the report.

29 2021/22 Treasury Outturn

The Chief Finance Officer introduced the 2021/22 Treasury Outturn report, which related to last year, summarising that the Cabinet welcomed comments from the Committee.

Councillors were concerned, but were keen to await the working group outcomes.

Resolved that the report had been noted.

30 West Oxfordshire Council Plan 2023 - 2027

The Strategic Policy and Partnerships Officer, Astrid Harvey introduced the West Oxfordshire Council Plan 2023 - 2027, summarising that the outcome of consultation was five key priorities.

The report was welcomed by the Committee and the general feeling was that it was clear and focussed.

Councillors were concerned about sewerage damaging the environment, the Leader of the Council, Councillor Graham was in attendance and was able to confirm that working with partners and the Planning team would be part of sewerage management moving forward.

Councillors' feedback to Cabinet:

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- Page 6. Priority 1. Welcomed the emphasis of putting residents first but queried whether in the current economic conditions the Plan should concentrate on the provision of core services.
- Page 8. Priority 2. Bullet point 1. 'Built, blue and green infrastructure' needed clarification as the terms were not understood.
- Page 10 Priority 3. Bullet point 1. Expand to include sewage over flow and the importance of Planning in ensuring adequate sewage services are provide.
- Page 12. Priority 4. Last bullet point. Revise to read 'Work with Oxfordshire County Council to deliver on our joint committee on active travel and public transport, including through improved walking.....'
- Overall, an attractive document which is clear and well-focused.

Councillors also agreed the plan would be challenging and would need to be reviewed in line with the changing economic conditions, to enable focus on core services.

The Strategic Policy and Partnerships Officer confirmed that once the plan had been finalised and passed at Council a softer version would be published for the general public.

Resolved, the Committee commented to Cabinet and noted the report.

31 Service Performance and Finance Performance Reports 2022-23 Quarter Two

The Chief Finance Officer introduced the Service Performance and Financial Performance reports, concluding that Officers and Cabinet continued to work on getting the budget and medium term financial strategy onto a sustainable path. Tough decisions were ahead, as well as looking carefully at the growth requests, leisure services contracts and initiatives for incomes streams.

14:55 Councillor Brooker left.

Councillors discussed the income decline in parking, the Cabinet Member for Finance explained that hopefully with enforcement of off street parking fines, there should be an increase in income moving forward.

The overspend on certain budgets concerned Councillors, Democratic Services had an overspend which the Deputy Finance was able to give some detail on, but would look into further detail and come back to members via email.

Councillors wanted staff to know that they appreciated the hard work that had gone into producing all the budget reporting.

There were some suggestions made on the performance reporting:

- Last quarter times to respond was in 5 minutes, this quarter in 2, could there be consistency in measurements in future reporting
- Running commentaries look like they have been cut and pasted from last quarter. There were commitments to action, and they are still to action, why were these not done, revise the wording in future reporting

Resolved the 2022/23 Q2 service and financial performance reports were commented upon, and had been noted.

32 Committee Work Programme

The Chair asked for comments the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2022/2023.

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The Committee

Resolved to note the Scrutiny work programme, with no comments.

33 Cabinet Work Programme

The Chair invited comments on the Cabinet Work Programme published November 2022.

Councillors were concerned that items had dropped off the Cabinet work program, in particular:

- Woodstock – Hensington redevelopment
- SIL review – replacement of S106

The Assistant Director for Business Services, Leadership and Management Team, Phil Martin, confirmed he would investigate and email the Committee with his findings.

The Committee

Resolved to note and commented on the Cabinet work programme.

The Chair announced a short comfort break at 15:40.

34 Exclusion of the Publish and Press

The Chair resumed the meeting at 15:55.

The Committee **Resolved** to pass a resolution in accordance with the provisions of Paragraph 4(2)(b) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 on the grounds that their presence could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in specific paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

35 Waste Service Review - Briefing on Waste Collection Options Appraisal

The Assistant Director (Commercial Development), Bill Oddy, briefed on the Waste Collection Options Appraisal. The Business Manager - Contracts, Environmental Services, Scott Williams, presented a summary of slides to support the options appraisal.

Councillors had received a confidential report prior to the meeting, that was commissioned for an independent waste collection options appraisal, which had concluded with nine options to consider.

Councillors were invited to ask questions and to comment to Cabinet on the options that they had been briefed upon, and the independent report.

Councillors entered into a discussion on the following themes for feedback to Cabinet:

- Kerbside sorting v collection and recycle centre
- Levels/rates of contamination
- Timelines for payback
- Official bidding process for transparency
- New bins and bags costs
- Vehicle options
- Residents' learning curve
- Residents' ability
- Staffing costs
- Gate fees

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- Population growth
- Doorstop service for assisted collections
- Piloting potential schemes

The Chair thanked Councillors for discussion points for the feedback to Cabinet as it was important to get this right being a vital decision for the Council.

Resolved that the Committee noted the options appraisal and commented feedback themes for Cabinet.

The Meeting closed at 4.52 pm

CHAIR