

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **Executive**

Held in the Council Chamber, Woodgreen, Witney OX28 1NB at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 8 February 2023**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andy Graham (Chair), Duncan Enright (Vice-Chair), Joy Aitman, Lidia Arciszewska, Dan Levy, Mathew Parkinson, Andrew Prosser, Carl Rylett and Geoff Saul

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive), Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer), Frank Wilson (Group Finance Director - Publica), Bill Oddy (Group Manager - Commercial Development), Andrew Brown (Democratic Services Business Manager), Caroline Clissold (Housing Manager), Georgina Dyer (Business Partner Accountant) and Hannah Kenyon (Sustainable Planning Specialist)

Other Councillors in attendance: Alaa Al-Yousuf, Norman MacRae MBE and Michele Mead

1 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous 'Cabinet' meeting, held on Wednesday 11 January 2023, were approved by the Executive, and signed by Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, as an accurate record.

2 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest recorded by the Executive.

4 Participation of the Public

There was no public participation at the meeting.

5 Receipt of Announcements

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Andy Graham, highlighted that the LBGTIQ+ flag was raised and above the Council's Woodgreen offices. This was in order to recognise LBGTIQ+ History Month, and raise awareness of experiences that members of the community had experienced in the past.

Councillor Joy Aitman, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, rose to inform the Executive and those present that the Council's Leisure Projects Officer post, funded by the Council's Priority Fund, had been advertised externally on the internet. The role would coordinate the delivery of the Council's new Playing Pitch Strategy alongside Town and Parish Councils, and local communities across the West Oxfordshire District.

6 Budget 2023/24 and Medium Term Financial Plan

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Andy Graham, highlighted that an amendment to recommendation 'ii', listed within the agenda item report, was subject to agreement by the Executive. The amendment sought agreement that the Council's Biodiversity Land Management Post, be a permanent post and not a 1-year fixed term contract.

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Councillor Levy introduced the report that provided an update on the developing budget for 2023/24. The report was for the Executive to consider the draft base budgets for 2023/24, the Council's Capital Programme for 2023/24 to 2031/32, the level of Council Tax for 2023/24, the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the response from the statutory budget consultation.

Councillor Levy paid tribute to the work of the Council's Chief Finance Officer and the wider finance team for the work that they had put into bringing the Budget resolutions together.

Councillor Norman MacRae MBE asked about potential anomalies within the report relating to salaries of individual posts, and funding of play parks within the district. Councillor Levy responded stating that figures contained within the document were total post costs, and that some were shared across the Publica partnership and estimated employment costs. The Chief Finance Officer also highlighted that any funds in the capital programme not spent on play parks within the current financial year, would rollover into the next financial year. If extra funds were desired, this would be recommended for approval by the appropriate committee.

Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economic Development, highlighted that there was a mixture of shared and non-shared posts within the report, and that some of the project costs were also included within the figures regarding the Leisure Strategy. Councillor Enright also mentioned that the upkeep and maintenance of play parks were largely the responsibility of Town and Parish Councils, although much larger parks, such as Kilkenny in Carterton, were a District Council responsibility.

The Council's Chief Executive Officer highlighted the work of Tony Galloway, who was overseeing scoping work to address issues surrounding leisure, and the contracted partnership with GLL.

Councillor Alaa Al-Yousuf sought to confirm if the Biodiversity Land Management Post was being funded by additional money received from central Government. The Chief Executive confirmed that this cost was taken into consideration when listing the salary costs for the upcoming budget. Further costs on the post will be added to base budget and included in Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

An additional supplementary paper for this item was circulated to Members ahead of the meeting. Within the paper, there was an additional recommendation for the Executive to recommend to Council to approve the level of District Council Tax for 2023/24 for a Band D property of £119.38.

The amendment for agreement was proposed by Councillor Graham, and seconded by Councillor Dan Levy, Executive Member for Finance. This was voted upon and agreed unanimously by the Executive.

Councillor Levy proposed to agree the recommendations to Council, inclusive of the aforementioned amendment, regarding the update on the developing budget. This was seconded by Councillor Graham, was voted on and agreed unanimously by the Executive.

Executive **Resolved** to recommend the following to Council for approval:

- i) The General Fund revenue budgets as summarised in Annex B;
- ii) The updated Medium Term Financial Strategy in Annex E;
- iii) The Capital Programme for 2023/24 to 2031/32 as set out in Annex D;
- iv) Fees and Charges, as previously circulated and set out in Annex H;

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- v) The Council's Pay Policy Statement as set out in Annex J;
- vi) The level of District Council Tax for 2023/24 for a Band D property of £119.38 as shown in Annex G;
- vii) Approve the level of District Council Tax for 2023/24 for a Band D property of £119.38.

and **Resolved** to recommend the following to Council for noting:

1. viii) The Parish Precepts and Tax Levels set out in Annex G.

7 Planned Expenditure of the Homelessness Prevention Grant 2023-2025

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare, introduced the report, which was to consider the planned expenditure of the Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2023 – 2025 (incorporating the Domestic Abuse New Burden's allocations for 2023 – 2025).

Councillor Saul gave an overview of the grant and the current situation regarding the pressures that are being felt locally within the district. DLUHC has awarded West Oxfordshire District Council through the Homelessness Prevention Grant £269,927 for 2023-24 rising to £282,704 in 2024-25. A further sum of £35,268 in 2023-24 rising to £35,932 in 2024-25 has been awarded to meet the Housing Domestic Abuse New Burdens.

Councillor Saul paid tribute to the work of Publica officers working in this area, particularly Caroline Clissold, Business Manager for Housing.

Councillor Saul proposed to agree the recommendations surrounding the planned expenditure of the Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2023–2025 (incorporating the Domestic Abuse New Burden's allocations for 2023–2025).

This was seconded by Councillor Andrew Prosser, was voted on and was agreed unanimously by the Executive.

Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Approve the expenditure detailed within section 2 of this report;
2. Approve expenditure for the Fixed Term Contract posts until 2025, as detailed in paragraph 2.7;
3. Approve the delegation of any amendments to these allocations to the Business Manager - Housing in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and the Chief Finance Officer subject to compliance with the ring fenced grant conditions;
4. Delegate authority to the Business Manager – Housing, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Chief Finance Officer, decisions on any other uplifts or grants that may be given over the financial years 2023-24 to 2024-25 to address increased demands on the Housing Service, subject to compliance with the ring fenced grant conditions.

8 Renewal or non-Renewal of LoyalFree

Councillor Duncan Enright, Executive Member for Economic Development, introduced the report, which sought to determine whether or not the Council should continue to fund the LoyalFree app.

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Councillor Enright gave a brief explanation of what the App's purpose and how it came into existence. LoyalFree is a place promotion mobile application (app) designed to support the local economy by encouraging people to save money when they 'shop local' and to explore their local area. The app would soon be reaching the end of its licensed period.

Councillor Michele Mead rose to pass on her thanks to Council's Communications Team for their tireless work in initially bringing the app into existence, adding that the app had recently served its purpose.

Councillor Enright proposed that the recommendation to Executive be adopted, whereby the Executive resolves to agree not to renew the contract with LoyalFree. This was seconded by Councillor Joy Aitman, was voted on and was agreed unanimously by Executive.

Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Agree not to renew the contract with LoyalFree.

9 Consideration of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: Reforms to National Planning Policy

Councillor Carl Rylett, Executive Member for Planning and Sustainable Development, introduced the report, which was to consider and agree a response to the Government's proposed changes to national planning policy.

Councillor Rylett gave an overview of the proposed changes and explained the Council's response to the consultation which runs until 2 March 2023. The Government remains committed to levelling up across the country and a Levelling Up White Paper was published in February 2022. The Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill currently working its way through Parliament.

Councillor Alaa Al-Yousuf stated that there were concerns about how much of the Levelling-Up agenda would actually come to fruition at the end of the parliamentary process, and that there was a clear need for a strategy from Officers regarding land supply and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) following a planning case with the Freeland area of the District. Councillor Al-Yousuf further stated that he had written to Councillor Rylett on this matter in January 2023, but a response had not yet been received. Councillor Rylett committed to responding to Councillor Al-Yousuf.

Councillor Rylett proposed that the recommendations in the report be agreed to by the Executive. This was seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright, was voted on and was agreed unanimously by the Executive.

Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Note the content of the report including the summary overview of proposed changes attached at Annex A;
2. Agree that the draft response attached at Annex B be submitted as the District Council's formal response to the consultation.

10 Consideration of Local Authority Housing Fund

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare, introduced the report, which was to consider whether to support an application to the Local Authority Housing Fund and to sign the associated Memorandum of Understanding.

Councillor Saul gave an overview of the scheme which aims to support local authorities who are facing challenges in providing move on and settled accommodation for Afghan and Ukraine

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families. The scheme, which Councillor Saul stated was a very positive one, also aimed to relieve pressures on short term accommodation and bridging hotels with a longer term of objective to see the housing being used for more general affordable purposes.

Councillor Saul proposed to agree the recommendations to support an application to the Local Authority Housing Fund and to sign the associated Memorandum of Understanding. This was seconded by Councillor Andy Graham, was voted on and was agreed unanimously by the Executive.

Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Approve that an application to the Housing Support Fund be made;
2. Authorise the Chief Executive to sign the Memorandum of Understanding (attached at Annex B);
3. Agree that further due diligence be conducted to determine the most appropriate delivery mechanism for the Council and a further report be brought back to the Executive to consider this;
4. Recommend to Council to allocate Capital Funding of £2m to match fund the capital grant payable by Department for Levelling Up, Communities and Local Government in the event of a direct acquisition approach;
5. Recommend to Council to allocate Section 106 funding to support the business case up to a maximum of £40,000 per unit to gap fund the scheme to deliver affordable rents in the event of a direct acquisition approach.

The Meeting closed at 2.39 pm

CHAIRMAN