

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting of the **Executive**

Held in the Carterton Community Centre, Marigold Square, Carterton OX18 1AX at 2.00 pm  
on **Wednesday, 8 March 2023**

#### PRESENT

Councillors: Andy Graham, Duncan Enright, Joy Aitman, Lidia Arciszewska, Dan Levy, Mathew Parkinson, Andrew Prosser and Geoff Saul.

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive), Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer), Susan Sale (Monitoring Officer), Andy Barge (Assistant Director - Communities), Phil Martin (Assistant Director - Business Services), Bill Oddy (Assistant Director - Commercial Development), Max Thompson (Democratic Services Manager), Elise Chowdhury (Communications Officer), Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services), Barry Clack (Communications Officer), Mandy Fathers (Business Manager - Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service, Revenues & Housing Support) and Michelle Ouzman (Democratic Services).

Other Councillors in attendance: Alaa Al-Yousuf, Jill Bull, Ted Fenton, Natalie King, Norman MacRae MBE, Charlie Maynard, Martin McBride, Michele Mead and Rosie Pearson

#### **11 Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Executive, held on Wednesday 8 February 2023, were unanimously approved by the Executive, and signed by Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council.

#### **12 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillor Carl Rylett.

#### **13 Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Dan Levy, Executive Member for Finance, stated that the last item of exempt business on the agenda had arisen as a result of a previous decision he had executed. Councillor Levy advised that he would take leave of absence when that item of business was heard.

#### **14 Participation of the Public**

There was no public participation at the meeting.

Councillor Norman MacRae MBE rose on a Point of Order, (15.14 Questions Previously Asked), regarding a question which had been submitted prior to a previous meeting of the Executive that had not been answered.

Democratic Services committed to looking into this matter and responding to Councillor MacRae.

#### **15 Receipt of Announcements**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Andy Graham, welcomed all attendees to the meeting, and thanked members of the public for attending. The Leader advised that this meeting was the fourth in the series of the Council's "Executive on Tour", having held previous meetings around the West Oxfordshire district in Charlbury, Chipping Norton and Woodstock.

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The Leader advised public attendees that Members of the Executive would remain in attendance after the meeting had finished, so that they could meet each other and answer any questions raised by residents.

The Leader further advised that the final two Agenda Items contained commercially sensitive information and details of a private nature, and as such, the meeting would be required to enter private session. The Leader informed attendees that this would be highlighted at the appropriate juncture.

After a round of introductions from other Executive Members and Officers present, the Leader was pleased to introduce Andrea McCaskie, who will, in due course, become the Council's Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer. Andrea will join West Oxfordshire District Council from the Peak District National Park Authority, and has previously worked and held senior positions at a number of different local authorities.

Councillor Joy Aitman, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, advised attendees that the day of the meeting was also International Women's Day. Councillor Aitman highlighted that the theme for the day in 2023 was Equity, and that the campaign strived to create a more inclusive world for everyone. Councillor Aitman paid tribute to all female Members and Officers of the Council for their continuing hard work.

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Change, reminded attendees of an event which would take place after the Executive Meeting, at the Council's main offices at Woodgreen in Witney, where Town and Parish Councils would come together for a Climate and Nature Recovery event. All attendees were encouraged and welcome to attend.

## **16 Service Performance Report 2022/23 Quarter Three**

Councillor Dan Levy, Executive Member for Finance, introduced and gave an overview of the report which provided details of the Council's operational performance for 2022-23 Quarter Three (Q3).

In debate, it was highlighted that there were certain factors that had contributed to the detail contained within the service report, such as current levels of inflation, the 'cost of living crisis' and the effects of the ongoing war in Ukraine. Councillor Levy stated that there were actions plans in place to address the shortfalls contained within the report.

Councillor Levy added that significant work had been executed in the management of the Witney hotel, which was being used for safe accommodation of refugees that had arrived in the area. This was ultimately akin to the work of the Home Office.

The issue of fly tipping was also highlighted during the debate, and that the reporting tool 'Fix My Street' was not working as desired, and that redirection to the Council's website was the default action. Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for the Environment committed, in response, to writing to Councillor Ted Fenton regarding this matter.

Councillor Mathew Parkinson, Executive Member for Customer Delivery, added that the Customer Services area had seen a noticeable improvement in its service output and call response times, even with the increased call volumes regarding the implementation of Voter ID ahead of the upcoming Elections in May 2023. Councillor Levy paid tribute to the work of the Council's Electoral Services team for their work in this area.

Councillor Parkinson and Councillor Norman MacRae MBE both highlighted the ease of reporting a missed waste collection, and that it is far more efficient for residents to go online and report a missed collection, rather than the traditional method of calling the Council's

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customer services department. Online reporting enabled residents to obtain a receipt of acknowledgement, rather than a verbal assurance, which provided an audit trail should there be a need for one.

Councillor MacRae highlighted that some waste collection vehicles fall foul of inclement weather, and that their efficiency decreases in time of inclement weather conditions. Councillor Arciszewska further committed to write to Councillor MacRae with details on the provision of newer, modernised and more efficient waste collection vehicles for the district.

Councillor Levy proposed that the Executive note the 2022/23 Q3 Service Performance Report. This was seconded by Councillor Andy Graham, was put to a vote and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Note the 2022/23 Q3 service performance report.

## **17 Financial Performance Report 2022/23 Quarter Three**

Councillor Dan Levy, Executive Member for Finance, introduced and gave an overview of the report which provided details of the Council's Financial Performance at the end of Quarter 3, 2022/23.

In debate, it was highlighted that much of the detail within the report would have been detailed at the Budget Council meeting in February 2023, and that the detail had also passed through the Finance and Management Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting which also took place in the same month. As with the Service Performance Report, attention was drawn to external pressures being felt in terms of resourcing. Attention was also drawn to the fact that the Council does not charge for car parking in the district (except for enforcement action where appropriate), which was a contributing factor to shortfalls seen in the report, however the Executive were keen to remind attendees that there was no plan to introduce charging. Trade Waste income was also on the rise, and the Executive highlighted the work of officers in this particular area.

Parking enforcement for off street parking would remain under the jurisdiction of the District Council, with Oxfordshire County Council being responsible for enforcement in other areas, including issuing of littering fixed penalty notices. Recruitment issues were highlighted, with emphasis being given to no temporary staff being in place to ease the burden on resourcing shortfalls.

A timetable of the review of parking enforcement resourcing would be brought to the Executive in June.

There was an overspend under Democratic Services for the provision of Honorary Alderman badges, which were ready to be presented as appropriate.

Attention was drawn to the perceived lack of advertising around the work of the Executive and the Council. For example, it was suggested that there was little advertisement of the Executive on Tour meeting series, and that more advertisement could have seen higher levels of public attendance.

Attention was also drawn to the shortfalls in income surrounding land charges and surveys. Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare, pointed out that there was stiff competition from the private sector in this matter.

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Councillor Levy proposed that the Executive agree to the recommendation in the report. This was seconded by Councillor Andrew Prosser, was put to a vote and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Note the content of the Financial Performance 2022/23 Quarter Three report.

## **18 Flood Management Service Review**

Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for the Environment, introduced and gave an overview of the report which provided the Executive with a structured summary of the Flood Management Service review, the areas explored, relevant findings and a proposed way forward that will not only meet current but future challenges facing the District and its residents regarding the risk from flooding.

In debate, the Executive, along with Councillor Norman MacRae MBE, were keen to praise the work of Laurence King, the Council's Lead Flood Risk Management Officer in this area, and to commend him for the work he has undertaken. Many members had spoken in the past regarding the contribution of his work in the area. Particular attention was given to the work of Officers who were working in liaison with Thames Water and the Environment Agency. The County Council, along with Witney Town Council were currently seeking to recruit volunteers to act as flood wardens, as part of a trial in the area.

Phil Martin, Assistant Director for Business Support Services, highlighted that Oxfordshire County Council was the lead flood authority locally. Resourcing issues had played a major role in the shortcomings of both Thames Water and the Environment Agency, and the Council was meeting with them on a monthly basis to address a wide range of issues that arose from this subject.

Councillor Arciszewska proposed that the Executive agree to the recommendations as listed on the report. This was seconded by Councillor Andrew Prosser, was put to a vote and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Note the outcomes of the review;
2. Agree the recommendations outlined within the report.

## **19 Review of Community Grant Schemes**

Councillor Joy Aitman, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, introduced and gave a detailed overview of the report, which proposed a new approach to community grant funding, better aligned to the outcomes intended from the Council Plan, and the fostering of greater community engagement & involvement.

In debate, Members in attendance stated that this review was welcome and asked whether new tranches of funding would go ahead as planned. Reference was made to the report that new applications for Facilities Grants would not be considered until January 2024.

The issue of Town and Parish Council funding was also highlighted, with an example of Kencot Parish Meeting not having the funds that they had previously desired for the provision of a bucket swing to be installed in a play park. A further example was given to a local education setting which did not have the desired funds for an ecological project.

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Attention was also drawn to the fact that local community groups, such as Women's Institute (WI) did not have a social media presence due to internet connectivity, so it was perceived that some community groups may miss out of work surrounding the project, which was deemed to tie in to perceived shortfalls in advertising.

Help would be provided through 'SpaceHive' and the overall Community Grant Schemes to counteract issues that communities face in grant applications.

The Assistant Director for Communities committed to confirming the number of 'tranches' and would clarify as appropriate with the Leader of the Opposition.

Reassurance was also given that the project was 'good value for money', and this was backed up by feedback received by the Executive Member from others who had experience in the area.

Councillor Aitman proposed that the Executive agree to the recommendations as listed on the report. This was seconded by Councillor Andy Graham, was put to a vote and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Introduce a new approach to revenue grant funding from 2024/25, aligned to four lots and supported by three year service level agreements;
2. Agree the four lots as:
  - a. Improving our natural environment and the access to it, so that we enable physical and mental wellbeing and cohesive, connected communities;
  - b. Taking action towards the climate and ecological emergencies, so that we reduce carbon footprints and encourage nature recovery;
  - c. Increasing community resilience and amplifying the voice of the seldom heard, so that we take action on issues most important to our residents and their needs, such as access to food, supporting young people and cultural provision;
  - d. Providing residents with high quality, independent housing advice, welfare and debt advice services, so that they are empowered to tackle their problems and we support those who are unable to deal with difficult circumstances on their own;
3. Request officers to consider potential outline allocations within each of the lots and report back on proposals;
4. Agree that the community revenue grant funding awarded in 2022-23 be awarded again in 2023-24 to the same recipients and at the same level to allow a managed transition;
5. Approve civic crowdfunding as an alternative to community facilities grants and make up to £120,000 available to pledge against proposed projects;
6. Agree the proposed procurement route to appoint 'SpaceHive' as the Council's civic crowdfunding platform provider on a three year contract;
7. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader and Executive Members for Stronger Healthy Communities, Planning and Sustainable Development, Environment, and Climate Change to agree the type of projects to be supported and the pledge criteria for crowdfunding;

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8. Approve the allocation of £25,000 to increase the Council's grants capability, as described in the report.

## 20 West Eynsham Strategic Development Area (SDA) Masterplan Addendum

Councillor Dan Levy, Executive Member for Finance, introduced and gave an overview of the report, which considered an addendum to the West Eynsham SDA masterplan, produced by the four main landowner/developers in response to further engagement with third party landowners.

In debate, it was highlighted that the report was before the Executive as a result of amendments to the Masterplan, which had arisen from land owners in Eynsham claiming that they had not been consulted on the Masterplan. Developers in the area had since consulted with the land owners, and these had formed the amendments for consideration at the meeting.

Councillor Levy proposed that the second recommendation on the report's front sheet be amended to refer the matter to Overview and Scrutiny Committee ahead of further consideration by the Executive at a future meeting.

Councillor Levy proposed that the Executive agree the recommendations as amended.

This was seconded by Councillor Andy Graham, was put to a vote and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Note the content of the report; and
2. Request that the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee consider this item and provide any comments, before it is re-considered by the Executive.

## 21 Council Tax Premiums - Second Homes

Councillor Dan Levy, Executive Member for Finance, introduced and gave an overview of the report which considered proposals to implement a Council Tax Premium on second homes.

In debate, it was highlighted that there was a significant community and societal value to the proposition although the idea had not yet been formally approved by central government. A premium on second homes would potentially over compensate for paid services such as lower waste collections and community 'wear and tear' for properties that were not primary residencies, The anticipated council tax premium on second homes would pave the way for societal and financial protection for some of the most rural communities within the district.

In debate, attention was drawn to a lack of funding received by the Council from "Airbnb" properties, that the full tax receipt will increase as part of a second homes premium, and that short term lets should pay Council Tax, but were not mandated to. This proposition and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) had been deemed to have been brought forward before legislation had been introduced. Other authorities, such as one in Wales had licensing schemes in place already to limit the number of holiday lets and short term let properties. It was confirmed that a reason for early introduction was to allow Officers sufficient time to put preparatory work in place ahead of the legislation being passed. Home owners had 12 months' notice of the introduction. The Executive stated that this work allowed the Council to be 'on the front foot' ahead of the anticipated introduction of legislation.

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Councillor Levy proposed that Executive agree to the recommendations as listed on the report. This was seconded by Councillor Geoff Saul, was put to a vote and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Note the report and agree in principle to the implementation of charging 100% premium for second homes, and reducing term for applying charge for empty properties from 2 years to one year, subject to the emerging legislation being passed;
2. Instruct officers to bring a further report back to the Executive when the legislation has been passed, providing detail on the legislative implications and proposed implementation.

## **22 Business Rates Relief 2023/2024: Retail, Hospitality & Leisure Scheme**

Councillor Dan Levy, Executive Member for Finance, introduced and gave a brief overview of the report which considered a scheme of rate relief for retail premises as outlined by the Government in the Autumn Statement of 2022.

The Executive stated that many were concerned about the knock on effects to small businesses as a result of ongoing and rising costs, such as energy & the cost of living crisis, and this scheme would go a long way to help them address issues faced.

Councillor Levy proposed that the Executive agree to the recommendations as listed on the report. This was seconded by Councillor Geoff Saul, was put to a vote and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Note the content of the report;
2. Endorse the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Scheme, detailed in Annex A of the report;
3. Delegate Authority to the Assistant Director for Resident Services to award such relief.

## **23 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Update**

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare, introduced and gave an overview of the report which provided an update on the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in West Oxfordshire.

In debate, it was noted that the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, introduced by central government, had taken the decision to abolish 'CIL' and replace it with a National Levy. The Executive stated that work must continue on the Levy in its current form and that it would take some time for the transition to take effect. The Council was commissioning a viability study, which would feed into the Council's work on its update to the Local Plan in 2041, and encourage affordable, quality homes within the district.

Councillor Saul proposed that the Executive agree to the recommendations as listed on the report. This was seconded by Councillor Andrew Prosser, was put to a vote and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Note the content of the report;

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2. Agree that new viability evidence is commissioned to inform both a draft CIL charging schedule and the new West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041.

## 24 Waste Service Review and Update and Ubico Contract Extension

Ahead of this item of business, Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, reiterated to those in attendance that if anyone wished to refer to information contained within the private document pack, the meeting would first have to agree to enter private session.

Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for the Environment, introduced the report which updated the Executive on the Council's waste service review, and the Ubico contract for waste, recycling and associated collections, services, street cleansing & grounds maintenance services.

Councillor Arciszewska gave a detailed overview of Ubico as a 'Teckal' company and how, as a whole, how it carried out its business on behalf of district councils, offering good value for money on services provided.

In debate, a question was raised as to whether or not a 'brake clause' be added into Ubico's contract after 1 year with the Council, and it was consequently confirmed that the Council does have a brake clause and could terminate the contract with 12 months' notice. It was also highlighted that there was a further additional income receipt of approximately £2 million from green waste collection.

Attention was also drawn to the fact that previous report versions of the waste service review had not been completed, and had not been subject to scrutiny from the appropriate committees of the Council. Officers confirmed that this was making reference to the service review report and that briefings had taken place. The Council's Chief Executive confirmed that this was a separate work stream.

Councillor Arciszewska proposed that the Executive agree to the recommendations as listed on the report. This was seconded by Councillor Andy Graham, was put to a vote and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Endorse the proposal contained in the report;
2. Recommend to Council that the current contract with Ubico is extended until 31 March 2026.

## 25 Exclusion of Press and Public

Councillor Graham proposed that Executive agree to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the remaining exempt items of business on the basis that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information. This was seconded by Councillor Mathew Parkinson, was put to a vote and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

Executive **Resolved** in accordance with the provisions of Paragraph 4(2)(b) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 to:

1. Exclude the press and public from the meeting on the grounds that their presence could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 and 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.



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**26 Waste Service Review Item 14 - Appendix C - Value for Money Assessment**

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the report which provided an update of the value for money assessment.

Councillor Graham proposed that the Executive note the content of the Waste Service Review Value for Money Assessment. This was seconded by Councillor Mathew Parkinson, was put to a vote and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

Executive **Resolved** to:

- I. Note the content of the Waste Service Review Value for Money Assessment.

**27 Section 13A Discretionary Council Tax Appeal**

Ahead of this item of Business being heard, Councillor Dan Levy, Executive Member for Finance, left the meeting room at 3.32pm whilst the item of business was heard.

Mandy Fathers, Business Manager for Environmental, Welfare and Revenues, introduced the report and gave an overview of the consideration by the Executive of a S13A Discretionary Council Tax discount appeal application.

The Executive debated the rationale for the appeal and what steps were being taken by the appellant to address the financial issues they were facing. The Executive noted that whilst payment provisions were being discussed with the appellant, the value of debt owed to the Council would still rise during the next final year. Officers advised that the appellant would be signposted to Citizens Advice to aid their recovery.

Councillor Graham proposed that the Executive agree to the refuse the appeal on the advice of Officers. This was seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright, was put to a vote and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

Executive **Resolved** to:

- I. Refuse the appeal for Council Tax Section 13A Discretionary discount submitted under Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

The Meeting closed at 3.39 pm

CHAIR