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WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

Held in Committee Room 1, Woodgreen, Witney OX28 1NB at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 14 June 2023**

PRESENT

Councillors: Alaa Al-Yousuf (Chair), Julian Cooper, Hugo Ashton, Mark Johnson, Andrew Lyon, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Rosie Pearson, Ruth Smith, Phil Godfrey, Elizabeth Poskitt and Alex Wilson.

Officers: Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer), Phil Martin (Assistant Director – Business Services), Georgina Dyer (Chief Accountant), Will Barton (Business Development Officer), Max Thompson (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Maria Harper (Democratic Services Officer) and Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer).

Other Councillors in attendance: Dan Levy and Duncan Enright.

55 Election of Chair

The Vice-Chair of the Council, Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt, opened the meeting, welcoming Members and Officers to the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

The Vice-Chair of the Council asked the Committee for nominations to the position of Chair of the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2023/2024.

Councillor Michele Mead proposed that Councillor Alaa Al-Yousuf be elected Chair of the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2023/2024. This was seconded by Councillor Julian Cooper and was put to a vote. The vote carried.

Committee **Resolved** to:

1. Elect Councillor Alaa Al-Yousuf as Chair of the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2023/2024.

56 Election of Vice-Chair

The Chair of the Committee, Councillor Alaa Al-Yousuf, proposed from the Chair that Councillor Charlie Maynard be elected Vice-Chair of the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2023/2024. This was seconded by Councillor Julian Cooper and was put to a vote. The vote carried.

Committee **Resolved** to:

1. Elect Councillor Charlie Maynard as Vice-Chair of the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2023/2024.

57 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Charlie Maynard, Michael Brooker and Jane Doughty.

Councillor Rosie Pearson arrived late to the meeting at 2.16pm.

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58 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest received by Members of the Committee.

59 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on Wednesday 12 April 2023, were unanimously agreed by the Committee, and signed by the Chair as a true & accurate record.

60 Participation of the Public

There was no public participation at the meeting.

61 Decision - Decarbonisation of Carterton Leisure Centre

Claire Locke, Assistant Director for Property and Regeneration, joined the Committee virtually and delivered a briefing to the Committee regarding a decision taken under urgency rules relating to Carterton Leisure Centre.

The Council identified that an Investment Grade Proposal (IGP), is required to fully understand the requirements of decarbonising Carterton Leisure Centre. If the Council decided to proceed with or without grant funding, this advanced design proposal would still be required. A design and build contract was procured via a Framework and the Council has been working with Kier and their sub-contractor 'Hydrock', in preparing detailed modelling of the available options for replacement heating systems. The options considered were for space heating, swimming pool heating and hot water with the addition of Solar PV and battery storage to reduce the reliance on electricity from the grid.

The Chair invited the Committee to discuss the briefing and update received, which clarified the following points:

- Fees associated with the project;
- Planning permission required to undertake the work;
- Contractors procured to undertake the work;
- Elements associated with increased project costs;
- Impacts on service provision at the Leisure centre;
- Engineering works associated with the project;
- Improvement of a Council asset;
- Potential grant funding associated with the project;

The Chair proposed the Committee note the decision taken under urgency rules. This was seconded by Councillor Michele Mead, was put to a vote. The vote carried.

Committee **Resolved** to:

1. Note the decision taken under urgency rules regarding Carterton Leisure Centre;
2. Invite the Assistant Director to 6 December meeting to advise on progress made.

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62 Presentation on Commercial Waste

Stuart Rawlinson, Business Manager for Data, Resources and Growth, delivered a presentation to Committee relating to commercial waste, which included debt management and further work undertaken by his team.

The Chair invited the Committee to discuss the presentation, which clarified the following points:

- Reduction of historic aged debt levels;
- Partnership working with shareholders, e.g. Ubico;
- Additional service improvements;
- Collaboration with Customer Service departments;
- Processes of onboarding new customers;
- Reputation of trade waste services;
- Recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Trade waste collection not being a statutory service;
- Exclusion of fly-tipping collections;
- Compatibility of vehicles for trade waste;
- Returning to levels of profit;
- Identifying levels of resilience in the service;
- Services of commercial food waste collection.

The Chair proposed the Committee note the presentation received. This was seconded by Councillor Michele Mead, was put to a vote. The vote carried.

Committee **Resolved** to:

1. Note the presentation on commercial waste.

63 UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Will Barton, Business Development Officer, introduced and gave a high-level overview of the report, which updated the Committee regarding the delivery of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and Rural England Prosperity Fund, in West Oxfordshire.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) was launched in April 2022 and was part of the Government's Levelling Up and Regeneration agenda. The Fund provided £2.6 billion of new funding for local investment by March 2025, with all areas of the UK receiving an allocation. The primary goal of the UKSPF was to build pride in place and increase life chances across the UK. The Council had to submit an 'Investment Plan' in July 2022 setting out how the funds would be used in the district. The Plan identified the challenges the District faces and the opportunities to address these using the fund with interventions, outputs and outcomes from the list. The Investment Plan also set out the Council's governance structure which included a 'Local Partnership' comprising external stakeholders.

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The Chair invited the Committee to discuss the report presented, which clarified the following points:

- Collaboration with local, higher-education authorities, regional chambers of commerce and skilled working groups;
- Improvements to community infrastructure;
- Investment in small and medium sized businesses;
- Further opportunities for county-wide skill initiatives;
- Liaison with the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP);
- Skillset provision of military service leavers from RAF Brize Norton;
- Future, business support projects;
- Adaptation of green skills.

The Chair proposed the Committee note the updates received. This was seconded by Councillor Michele Mead and was put to a vote. The vote carried.

Committee **Resolved** to:

1. Note the updates provided regarding the UK Shared prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund.

The Chair announced a short adjournment at 3.43pm for Members to take a comfort break. Committee reconvened at 3.49pm.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer, Max Thompson, advised the Committee upon its return that owing to technical issues, the live streaming of the meeting had ceased and the meeting was no longer able to be viewed on the Council's website. The Senior Democratic Services Officer advised that the approval for the ceasing of the live stream was made between the Assistant Director for Business Services and himself. The Chair of the Committee thanked the Senior Democratic Services Officer for updating the Committee.

64 Service Performance Report 2022/23 Quarter Four

Elizabeth Griffiths, Chief Finance Officer, Section 151 Officer and Deputy Chief Executive, introduced and gave an overview the report, which provided details of the Council's operational performance at the end of 2022-23 Quarter Four (Q4).

The Chief Finance Officer clarified subject points made in the report, in discussion with the Committee, which were as follows:

- Reduction of aged debt;
- Liaison with leisure providers and consultants;
- Adaptation of leisure provisions for community use;
- Recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Heavily increased utility costs;
- Contractual position with GLL regarding Finances;

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- Management fees for Leisure provision;
- Increased inflationary pressures of service contracts;
- Pressures faced within the Council's finance teams;
- Enforcement action on fly-tipping;
- Impacts on waste service provision.

The Chair proposed that the Committee note the Service Performance Report for 2022-23 Quarter Four (Q4). This was seconded by Councillor Michele Mead and was put to a vote. The vote carried.

Committee **Resolved** to:

- I. Note the Service Performance Report for 2022-23 Quarter Four (Q4).

Councillor Ruth Smith left the meeting at 4.08pm.

65 **Financial Performance Report 2022/23 Quarter 4**

Elizabeth Griffiths, Chief Finance Officer, Section 151 Officer and Deputy Chief Executive, introduced the report, which provided details of the Council's financial performance at the end of 2022-23 Quarter Four (Q4).

The Chair invited the Committee to discuss the report, which clarifies the following points:

- Staffing levels within the Council's finance department*;
- Budget overspending and underspending;
- Budget building process leading up to February Council;
- Future provisions for moving to paperless meetings;
- Year-end financial positions;
- Controlled debt recovery;
- Transfer of parking services.

*Councillor Alex Wilson proposed that the Committee recommend that the Executive explore the idea of the recruitment of a permanent Credit Controller to help strengthen staffing levels within the Council's finance team. This was seconded by Councillor Michele Mead and was put to a vote, The vote carried.

Committee **Resolved** to:

- I. Recommend that the Executive explore the idea of the recruitment of a permanent Credit Controller to help strengthen staffing levels within the Council's finance team.

The Chair proposed that the Committee note the Financial Performance Report for 2022-23 Quarter Four (Q4). This was seconded by Councillor Michele Mead, and was put to a vote. The vote carried.

Committee **Resolved** to:

- I. Note the Financial Performance Report for 2022-23 Quarter Four (Q4).

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66 Committee Work Programme

The Chair asked the Committee if there were any comments Members wished to make regarding the Committee Work Programme.

Councillor Mark Johnson queried the Leisure Centre Strategy report, due to come to Committee at the next meeting, as to what it would entail. The Chief Finance Officer stated that the report would focus on the financial aspects of the strategy.

Committee **Resolved** to:

- I. Note the Committee Work Programme.

67 Executive Work Programme

The Chair asked the Committee if there were any comments Members wished to make regarding the Executive Work Programme, of which none were received.

Committee **Resolved** to:

- I. Note the Executive Work Programme.

The Chair of the Committee paid tribute to the Chief Finance Officer, Elizabeth Griffiths, and thanked her for her hard work and service to West Oxfordshire District Council. The Chief Finance Officer would leave the Council ahead of the next meeting to take up post at another local authority. The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, wished the Chief Finance Officer well for the future.

The meeting closed at 4.56 pm.

CHAIR