

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of **Executive.**

Held at The Spendlove Charlbury Community Centre, Enstone Rd, Charlbury, Oxfordshire
OX7 3PQ at 2.00pm on **Wednesday 13 December 2023.**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andy Graham (Leader), Duncan Enright (Deputy Leader), Charlie Maynard, Andrew Prosser, Joy Aitman, Alaric Smith, Geoff Saul, and Lidia Arciszewska.

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive), Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance), Frank Wilson (Executive Finance Director, Publica), Max Thompson (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Will Barton (Business Development Officer), Gemma Moreing (Business Information and Performance Lead – Data, Resources and Growth), Alison Borrett (Senior Performance Analyst), Mandy Fathers (Business Manager, Environmental, Welfare and Revenues), Philippa Lowe (Business Manager, Economic Growth and Prosperity), Barry Clack (Communications Officer) and Michelle Ouzman (Strategic Support Officer).

Other Councillors in attendance: Michele Mead, Dan Levy, Julian Cooper and David Melvin.

116 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillor Tim Sumner.

117 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest made by Members of the Executive.

118 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economic Development, proposed that the minutes of the previous meeting, held on Wednesday 15 November 2023, be agreed by the Executive as a true and accurate record, and signed by the Leader of the Council.

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

The Executive **Resolved** to:

- I. Agree the minutes of the previous meeting, held on Wednesday 15 November 2023, as a true and accurate record.

119 Receipt of Announcements

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, welcomed all attendees to the meeting, and thanked members of the public for attending proceedings. The Leader gave the members of the public in attendance a brief overview of the way that the meeting would run.

The Leader advised that the meeting was the seventh in the Council's "Executive on Tour" series, with previous meetings being held around the West Oxfordshire District in Chipping Norton, Woodstock, Carterton, Eynsham and Burford, along with a previous 'on tour' meeting held in Charlbury in Autumn 2022.

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The Leader also advised that the next meeting of the Executive would take place on Wednesday 17 January 2024, at 2.00pm in Committee Room 1 at the Council's offices at Woodgreen in Witney.

Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economic Development, stated the widely publicised success of a recent Christmas Market, which took place at Marriott's Walk in Witney between 8 and 10 December 2023. The Deputy Leader thanked the people of Witney and the wider district for their support to the event, which saw 30 wooden chalets, offering a range of festive fun and treats.

The Deputy Leader advised that footfall within Marriott's Walk, and across the wider town centre area, had increased by 59%, equating to 15,000 extra visitors over the long weekend, compared to the same three days in 2022, and had increased by 70% compared to the previous week.

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Change, advised that the Council had been awarded £50,000 from the Coronation Orchard Fund. The Executive Member advised that across the district, the Council would be able to support 50 orchards for a variety of different fruits, and the wider, local community would be able to apply for chunks of the funding, by accessing the Council's website. The Executive Member advised that the deadline for applications was 19 January 2024.

The Executive Member also stated that the Council had launched a consultation on the Biodiversity Action Plan and encouraged residents to participate in the consultation to help shape biodiversity within the County of Oxfordshire. The deadline for responses was advised of being 22 December 2023 with further information available in the 'WODC Voice' newsletter.

Councillor Joy Aitman, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, advised that information relating to WestHive Community Funding was available on the Council's website. The Community Funding had reached the end of the first round and saw 5 grant requests submitted, with more tranches of funding being available for bidding in due course. The Executive Member encouraged other Executive Members to spread the word to residents about the funding, and how it could be used for projects within the district.

120 Participation of the Public

There was no formal public participation at the meeting.

121 Council Tax Support Scheme 2024

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the report, which presented the results of a public consultation, on proposals for revising the current Council Tax Support scheme, with effect from 1 April 2024.

Councillor Alaric Smith 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 agreed unanimously by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

- I. Recommend to Council to:
 - a) Agree the increase in Council Tax Support, as detailed in paragraph 2.4, from 1 April 2024;

- b) Agree that any surplus in the Support Fund is transferred over to 2024/2025, for reasons detailed in paragraphs 2.6 and 2.7;
- c) Approve the amendment to the Council Tax Support Policy as recommended in paragraph 2.8.

122 Windrush Leisure Centre - PSDS 3c Funding Bid

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Change, introduced the report, which sought approval, ahead of an award decision, to accept Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme funding for Windrush Leisure Centre in Witney, and to contribute a maximum of £244,866, equating to 12% of total project costs.

In debate, and by invitation of the Leader, non-Executive Members in attendance raised questions regarding possible relocation of the Leisure Centre, and that funding may be better invested in a newer, more environmentally friendly site, compared to being invested in the current existing site. Giles Hughes, Chief Executive Officer, advised that the Council had no plans to relocate the leisure centre at present.

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

The Executive **Resolved** to:

- I. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Director of Finance and the Executive Members for Finance and Climate Change to:
 - a) Accept the grant funding, if awarded to the Council, and earmark the required client contribution of £224,866 in the 2024/25 budget;
 - b) Note that project risks have been identified and that project gateways will be used where any decision relates to capital spend.

123 Service Performance Report 2023-24 Quarter Two

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the report, which provided details of the Council's operational performance at the end of 2023-24 Quarter Two (Q2).

The Leader also gave an overview of the Council's Priority Report, detailed within the main report, which provided updates on a number of projects that the Council are engaged with across the district, along with targets surrounding missed waste collections and approval of applications for development.

In debate, Members stated they were in favour of the newer format that the report was presented in, although it was also highlighted that some of the printing of the performance data could be of larger print in future. Members also thanked the contributions made to the reporting process by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

At the invitation of the Leader, non-Executive Members queried what work the Council was undertaking regarding the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) embedded within work connected to the emerging Local Plan. It was later highlighted that CIL would be discussed at the next meeting of the Local Plan Cross-Party Member Working Group, and that the Chief Executive would also consult with the Council's Planning Policy Manager regarding the work.

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Non-Executive Members also highlighted a lack of experience within training of waste collection teams, owing to staff who had recently retired.

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

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Note the 2023/24 Q2 service performance report.

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Review of Weekly Markets

Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economic Development, introduced the report, which considered the outcome of a review of the outdoor markets of West Oxfordshire as completed by the consultant.

The Deputy Leader gave a detailed overview of the review work that had been undertaken, and referenced some of the troubles that Town Centres have faced more generally over recent years, particularly as a result of heftily increased levels of e-commerce, and because of the Covid pandemic. The Deputy Leader also highlighted that Outdoor Markets bring a vibrancy to local towns and can also help increase footfall simultaneously, particularly due to availability of goods that are not as easily available online, such as fresh fruit, vegetables and fish.

In debate, the Deputy Leader also referred to the work that the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee had undertaken on the review. The Deputy Leader stated the Committee had made a recommendation to the Executive suggesting that local ward members be invited to related meetings of town partnerships as consultees, and that a commercial market operator is sought for a period of 1 year rather than two years.

The Deputy Leader committed to sharing a draft brief following the expression of interest exercise with all members, and that a review report of the work undertaken by a commercial operator, be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 12 months before being re-considered by the Executive.

On invitation from the Leader, non-Executive Members stated they would be keeping a keen interest on the charter works with Witney and Chipping Norton, and how this could invigorate the market of Carterton back to its previous levels, alongside work with local Town Councils.

Councillor Duncan Enright proposed that the Executive agree to the recommendations as listed on the report, with additional wording added to Recommendation 2, stating that a further review report be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 12 months before being re-considered by the Executive. This was seconded by Councillor Andy Graham, was put to a vote, and was agreed unanimously by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in conjunction with the Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Economic Development, to undertake an Expression of Interest exercise to select a commercial market operator to run the weekly retail markets in Witney and Chipping Norton;
2. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Executive Member for Economic Development, to appoint a commercial market operator for an initial

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period of two years, with a review report be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 12 months before being re-considered by the Executive.

125 Review of Legal Services

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the report, which provided a detailed outline the conclusions and recommendations from a strategic review of the shared Legal Service by an external organisation, Cadence Innova Limited. The report also sought agreement to invest in the Legal Service.

Councillor Andy Graham 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 agreed unanimously by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Approve:
 - a) Ongoing revenue investment of £40,000 per annum into the shared Legal Service to recruit two additional roles, with any 2023/24 costs to be funded from reserves;
 - b) A one-off funding of £26,000 to contribute to a temporary (12 months) Legal Services Change Manager role to be funded from reserves;
 - c) A maximum contribution of £45,000, (in total over a four-year period), for the procurement of legal case management software.
2. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Director of Governance, the signing off of the Shared Legal Services Collaboration Agreement between Cotswold District Council, Forest of Dean District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council;
3. Note that a further update report will be provided to the Executive in six months detailing the transformation to date.

126 Update on Improvement Works with Thames Water

Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for the Environment, introduced the report, which gave an overview of the suggested improvements, as a result of closely working with Thames Water over the previous 12 months, and how the improvement suggestions would be considered.

The Executive Member thanked the work of Members and Officers for their engagement during the process of the works.

In debate, Members suggested that further improvement considerations be noted by the Executive and subsequently be progressed within routine engagements with Thames Water, such as burst water mains and weaker spots within the freshwater network. Members also stated that relations with the Environment Agency had also improved as a result of the improvements process.

The Leader also praised the work of the Windrush Against Sewage Pollution (WASP) for their engagement during the improvements process.

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Councillor Lidia Arciszewska proposed that the Executive agree to the recommendation as listed on the report. This was seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright, was put to a vote, and was agreed unanimously by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Note the content of the report.

127 Draft Budget 2024-2025

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the report, giving the Executive a detailed update on the developing budget for 2024-2025.

The Executive Member detailed some of the funding challenges experienced by the Council over recent months and years, with emphasis given to overall reductions in funding from Central Government, and costs associated with both the recent Publica Review and service improvements with Ubico.

The Executive Member also highlighted that the Council had received 361 responses to its ongoing Budget Consultation, and that the deadline was approaching.

In debate, the Executive highlighted that conversations were ongoing with the Council's Leisure provider GLL, and that financial viabilities and improvement works would be documented and explained within the wider budget process. It was also highlighted that increases in the National Living Wage, as set out by Central Government in the 2023 Autumn Statement, and other funding settlement figures would also have an impact on the progressing budget before its final considerations in 2024.

Councillor Alaric Smith 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 agreed unanimously by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** to:

1. Note the update on the developing budget for 2024-2025.

The Meeting closed at 3.23pm.

CHAIR