

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **Executive**

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB
at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 9 October 2024**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andy Graham (Leader), Duncan Enright (Deputy Leader), Hugo Ashton, Rachel Crouch, Andrew Prosser, Geoff Saul and Alaric Smith

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive), Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance), Bill Oddy (Assistant Director for Commercial Development), Phil Martin (Assistant Director for Business Support), Mandy Fathers (Environmental, Welfare, Revenue Services Business Manager) Andrew Brown (Democratic Services Business Manager) and Christine Elsasser (Democratic Services Officer)

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

233 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lidia Arciszewska and Tim Sumner.

234 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

235 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, proposed that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Wednesday 11 September 2024, be agreed by the Executive as a true and accurate record and signed by the Leader of the Council.

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

The Executive Resolved to:

1. Agree the minutes of the previous meeting, held on Wednesday 11 September 2024, as a true and accurate record

236 Receipt of Announcements

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, welcomed 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 wished to officially welcome Councillor Rachel Crouch as the new Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities who replaced former councillor Rizvana Poole. He also wished to thank the former Executive Member Rizvana Poole for her service.

A review of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP), whereby the Oxfordshire Council Leaders and strategic partners meet to discuss common ground, was being undertaken to ensure the FOP could meet future challenges. There was a FOP meeting scheduled for November and the outcome would then be reported to Members. Furthermore, Councillor Graham had been appointed by the FOP as its representative on the Oxford to Cambridge pan-regional partnership just last week.

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Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care provided an update on the ongoing work with Thames Valley Police (TVP), on a rural crime project and asked all Members to take part in the rural crime survey which could be completed online via the TVP website. A further short update on what had been achieved so far was also provided.

The Chief Executive reminded Members about the In-Person WODC All-Member Briefing – Publica Transition Phase I, Meet & Greet that would take place at 5:30pm on Thursday, 17 October.

237 Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

238 Reports from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

There were no recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

239 Matters raised by Audit and Governance Committee

No matters had been raised by the Audit and Governance Committee.

240 Waste Fleet Purchase

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the report, in the absence of Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment. The report sought approval to procure ten new waste fleet vehicles and the associated infrastructure for any electric vehicles.

It was outlined that the waste service had thirty-five frontline collection vehicles with most of these approaching the end of their life. It was suggested that the Executive consider the purchase of four vehicles and to delegate responsibility for the purchase or lease of a further six vehicles. This would make the procurement of the vehicles smoother and will allow for better management of the Council's Capital Programme.

It was explained that without reliable replacements, the vehicles, and therefore the service, would become unstable and could result in service disruption and additional costs relating to repairs and maintenance. Waste was the only council provided service that most residents used each week, so having an unreliable vehicle fleet would lead to reputational damage and could lead to significant impacts on residents.

A Member/Officer Steering Group met on 17 July 2024 and determined that the following vehicles were due for renewal:

- 4 x Food Waste Vehicles 7.5te and retain one of the existing fleet as a spare;
- 1 x 7.5te vehicle with bin lift for ultra narrow access collections;
- 2 x 26te vehicles used across both refuse and garden waste collections;
- 3 x supervisor vans

In debate, Councillor Michele Mead requested that the report go to Overview and Scrutiny and it was agreed that there was time for it to go to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Recommendations 1 and 2 could go ahead as planned and recommendation 3 would be agreed in principal but it was suggested that proposed procurements under the delegated authority would be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration. It was confirmed that the Council would be the first in the area that would operate a fully-electric food waste service.

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

The Executive Resolved to:

1. Agree to the purchase of 3 fully electric supervisor vehicles;
2. Agree to the purchase 1 standard fuel ultra-narrow access vehicle;
3. Delegate authority to the Assistant Director for Commercial Development, in consultation with the Executive Members for Environment and Finance, and the Director of Finance, to purchase or lease up to 2 x full size HGV's and up to 4 food waste vehicles and necessary charging infrastructure up to an estimated cost of £2.8M, (including a procurement contingency and estimated cost of borrowing), on the understanding that proposals under this delegation will be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

241 Long Term Empty Property Strategy 2024-2029

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the report, which presented an updated Long Term Empty Property Strategy to support the management of long-term empty properties within the West Oxfordshire district.

It was explained that this strategy stated the objectives West Oxfordshire District Council had set itself to bring as many long-term empty properties back into occupation as was practicable.

Work had continued over the years to address the impact that long term empty properties have within the district, and the objectives within this strategy aimed to build on this. The Council's intentions were to work with the owners of such properties to initially understand their reasons for keeping them vacant, and to support them, where possible, in bringing the properties back into use, to allow this unused resource to better serve the communities, mitigate the negative impact they have, and provide an increased opportunity to meet the Council's housing needs.

In debate, Councillor Duncan Enright said that there was also an with issue non-residential properties and therefore this strategy may be useful if applied to that issue as well. Councillor Michele Mead queried the resource around implementation of the strategy and whether there were financial implications and appropriate allowances for Officer time. The Chief Executive confirmed that they intended to keep the resource requirements under review to ensure the objectives of the strategy could be achieved.

The Environmental, Welfare, Revenue Services Business Manager explained that a collaborate approach was underway with Officers in other areas who would work together to achieve the objectives of the strategy.

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

The Executive Resolved to:

1. Approve the implementation of the Long-Term Empty Property Strategy for 2024 - 2029.

242 Council Tax Premiums – Second Homes and Long Term Empty Properties

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the report, which sought Executive to consider the proposals to introduce a Council Tax Premium on second homes and apply a premium to long term empty properties after one year.

The report set out, for consideration, the introduction of a 100% Council Tax premium in respect of Second Home properties commencing on 1 April 2025 as well as reducing the period a premium could be applied to a Long-Term Empty property from two years to one year from 1 April 2025.

The report also supported the Local Plan and its ambition to provide 15,950 homes over its period and was an incentive for those owners of unoccupied or second homes to consider their properties to be brought back into use and made available for either rent or sale.

In debate, Councillor Hugo Ashton suggested that there were 250 holiday lets in the West of the District that had been subject to business rates; those exempt from business rates needed to be examined to ensure that proper payment for services they received was recouped in some way. The Environmental, Welfare, Revenue Services Business Manager explained that this was an issue for the Valuation Office Agency to deal with and there was movement between business rates and council tax properties.

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

The Executive Resolved to:

1. Agree from 01 April 2025 to levy the maximum level of premium for Empty Homes as set out in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023:
 - i) Premium of 100% for dwellings which are unoccupied and substantially unfurnished (Empty Homes Premium) after 1 year up to 5 years of becoming empty;
 - ii) Premium of 200% for dwellings which are unoccupied and substantially unfurnished (Empty Homes Premium) between 5 years and 10 years;
 - iii) Premium of 300% for dwellings which are unoccupied and substantially unfurnished (Empty Homes Premium) for 10 years or more.
2. Agree from 1 April 2025 to the implementation of a premium (Second Homes Premium) of 100% for dwellings that are no one's sole or main residence and which are substantially furnished;
3. Note that where premiums are to be applied, the Council is mindful of the outcome of the government consultation which recommends exceptions in certain circumstances outlined within the report may be amended, and as such guidance may change;
4. Agree that any amendments to the guidance which may change the criteria for Premiums be delegated to the Chief Finance Officer in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance.

243 Public Health Funeral Policy

The Leader, Councillor Andy Graham on behalf of Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment, introduced the report, which sought Executive to consider and approve a new policy in respect of Public Health Funerals.

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The report explained that the council did not currently have an adopted Public Health Funerals policy. This could possibly leave the Council open to legal challenge from interested parties if it takes on a very basic funeral arrangement and the family wants something more tailored.

The Council needed to ensure it has an adopted policy to provide both a basis for a procedural framework for staff and further provide a consistent and transparent approach to the public on how it deals with such cases.

The provisions of section 46 of the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 states: "It shall be the duty of a local authority to cause to be buried or cremated the body of any person who has died or has been found dead in their area, in any case where it appears to the authority that no suitable arrangements for disposal of the body have been or are being made otherwise than by the authority".

The purpose of section 46 was to prevent the spread of disease through the proper disposal of bodies of deceased individuals where no-one else is willing or able to take responsibility for the funeral arrangements. In many cases the lack of suitable arrangement was due to there being no known next of kin. These cases were generally referred to the Council by the coroner's office but on other occasions family members were traced who were unable or unwilling to take responsibility for arranging the funeral.

In some circumstances a successful application to the Social Fund would help meet the cost of paying for the funeral including arrangement fee costs. Where this could not be achieved the Council had an obligation to make and pay for the necessary arrangements. The Council undertook on average four to six public health funerals per year at a current cost of approximately £1,650 per funeral. These costs, however, could be offset through the removal and sale of possessions from the deceased's estate.

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

The Executive Resolved to:

I. Approve the Public Health Funeral Policy, attached at Annex A.

The Meeting closed at 2.46 pm

CHAIRMAN