

# Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

## Scrutiny Committee

HELD AT 6.00 PM ON TUESDAY, 15 JANUARY 2013

COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, CROWMARSH  
GIFFORD

### Present

Mrs Eleanor Hards (Chairman)

Mr Roger Bell (as substitute for Mr David Turner), Ms Joan Bland, Mrs Celia Collett, MBE, Mr Steve Connel, Mr John Cotton, Ms Kristina Crabbe, Mr Will Hall and Mr Paul Harrison

### Apologies

Mrs Pat Dawe, Mr Leo Docherty, Mr Stephen Harrod, Ms Elizabeth Hodgkin and Mr David Turner tendered apologies.

### Officers

Mr Steve Bishop, Mr David Buckle, Mr Simon Hewings, Mr William Jacobs, Mr Matt Prosser, Mrs Margaret Reed and Mrs Jennifer Thompson

### Also present

Mr David Dodds, Cabinet member for finance, waste and parks.

## 22 Minutes, 11 December 2012

**RESOLVED:** to adopt the minutes of the committee meeting held on 11 December as a correct record and agree that the chairman signs them as such.

## 23 Conduct of the 2011 local elections: update on progress

The committee considered the report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services setting out progress on the implementation of the scrutiny committee's recommendations on the review of the 2011 local elections.



Listening Learning Leading

Mr D Buckle, Chief Executive, Mrs M Reed, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, and Mr S Corrigan, Democratic Services Manager, introduced the report and answered questions from the committee.

The Local Returning Officer had now received formal notification from the Electoral Commission that he had met all the requirements for the Police and Crime Commissioner elections apart from the wording on the postal vote statement. This had followed the original guidance issued but the council had been unable to incorporate late guidance issued without risking the postal vote packs being issued too late. The wording was not incorrect and the Police Area Returning Officer for the Thames Valley Returning Officer had been content with the pack.

The White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre in Abingdon would be used for the County Council elections count in 2013. There was no venue in South Oxfordshire large enough to accommodate a combined general, district and parish election count in 2015. If the returning officer decided it was suitable, the White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre would also be used for the combined elections in 2015.

The committee agreed with the proposal to bring a report to the committee in September 2014 on the project plan for the district, parish, and parliamentary elections in May 2015.

The committee noted the report and the progress made.

## **24 2013/14 Budget update report**

The committee considered the report of the Head of Finance setting out the politically neutral budget target for 2013/14, the composition of the base budget, government funding for 2013/14, and the issues to be considered by councillors before council sets a revenue and capital budget for 2013/14.

Mr S Hewings, Shared Accountancy Manager, Mr W Jacobs, Head of Finance, Mr S Bishop, Strategic Director and Mr D Dodds, Cabinet member, introduced the report and answered questions from the committee.

They explained the main changes in government funding and that the council would use £10 million of its reserves to compensate fully for the reduction in government grant over the five year medium term. There were risks in any budget setting and the budget had to be accompanied by a statement on viability from the Section 151 officer.

The formula for calculating the distribution of business rates dictates that the council will initially be allocated forty per cent of business rates collected prior to the payment of a tariff. The tariff payable is the difference between our business rate baseline and our spending baseline. Both figures are set by the government and are given in the Scrutiny report. Oxfordshire County Council will receive ten per cent of business rates collected and the government will receive the remaining ten per cent. The effect of major changes in the business rates collected could be considerable. Forty per cent of the cost of appeals against ratings would now be borne by the council. However a safety net will operate that will limit the loss the council can suffer. The current business rates software does not separately identify refunds resulting from successful appeals.

The council tax reduction scheme replaced council tax benefit. This affected parish council tax bases and the council tax levied for a given precept. The council was passing on government grant to parish and town councils to offset any changes in their council tax base. Although this should be taken into account as extra income in their budgets this year, no decision had been taken yet on future years' grants as it was not clear how much government funding would be received from 2014/15 onwards.

On specific items:

- The costs of the proposed nappy recycling scheme were the net amount of the costs of the scheme less the reduction in landfill tax and increase in recycling credits.
- A vacancy factor of two per cent had been introduced to improve the accuracy of the budget.
- Flood prevention was now the responsibility of Oxfordshire County Council. Reductions in waste contract costs were due to a previous over-estimate of the costs rather than a service reduction.
- Car park income was increasing as the new requirement to get a ticket for the free hour was reducing abuses of the free period.
- The growth bid for the Didcot and Science Vale UK co-ordinator would be split 70:30 between South and Vale to reflect the workload and included a budget for project work.
- Net property income would be known more accurately by the time the budget was set in February.

Officers have taken a prudent and cautious view of both the savings that can be realised and the use of the council's reserves and are confident that the budget is realistic.

There is a statutory duty to consult on the council's budget and this was advertised and focus groups invited to comment. Councillors should decide how to evaluate the consultation results.

The meeting closed at 7.00 pm

Chairman

Date