

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Cabinet



Listening Learning Leading

HELD ON FRIDAY 10 MARCH 2017 AT 5.00 PM

DIDCOT CIVIC HALL, BRITWELL ROAD, DIDCOT, OX11 7JN

Present:

John Cotton (Chairman), Anna Badcock, Elizabeth Gillespie, Tony Harbour, Lynn Lloyd, Jane Murphy and Robert Simister

Officers:

Pat Connell, Steven Corrigan, Steve Culliford, David Hill, Alice Lynch, and Mark Stone

Also present:

Robin Rogers (Oxfordshire County Council)

86 Apologies for absence

Councillor Will Hall had sent his apologies for absence.

87 Declaration of disclosable pecuniary interest

None

88 Chairman's announcements

None

89 Public participation

Two members of the public had registered to speak at the meeting.

- (1) Mr Phil Davies addressed Cabinet on the Didcot Garden Town proposals. Over 700 negative comments and a petition containing over 2000 signatures opposed the proposed location of a technology campus on green space at Ladygrove in Didcot. Mr Davies asked Cabinet to instruct the council's officers to stop the proposal to build on this park and to find another location. He believed that there were some good elements in the Garden Town proposals but the proposal to build on open space at Ladygrove was not one of them. There were other more suitable vacant locations nearby, some already owned by the council. He urged Cabinet to remove the technology campus from the Ladygrove open space before commencing the public consultation on 22

March. Rather than being the sacrifice, Ladygrove Park could become the centrepiece of the Garden Town proposals.

(2) Mr Simon Hewerdine withdrew his request to address Cabinet.

The chairman thanked Mr Davies and Mr Hewerdine. Cabinet noted the comments made.

90 Unitary authority proposals for Oxfordshire

Cabinet considered the report of the chief executive on proposals for the future organisation of local government in Oxfordshire. The report updated Cabinet on the joint statement by the leaders of Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire district councils and Oxfordshire County Council relating to the One Oxfordshire engagement proposals and on the current position on negotiations regarding the One Oxfordshire discussion document.

Cabinet noted that since the publication of the One Oxfordshire proposal, the leaders and chief executive of the Vale and South Oxfordshire had entered into dialogue with the leader of Oxfordshire County Council to improve the One Oxfordshire proposal and to promote the 'A New Council for a Better Oxfordshire' proposal. The Better Oxfordshire proposal, based on feedback from the public engagement, included executive area boards for decision making at a more local level and bespoke arrangements for Oxford city area. The proposal for executive area boards included:

- Localised decision making and budgets
- A membership of unitary councillors with voting powers, together with non-voting parish/town council representatives
- The number of executive area boards would be determined by the further work of a new joint committee
- The executive area boards would be formal committees of the unitary council with significant devolved powers, decision making and resources, the detail to be developed by the joint committee
- Local engagement on unitary-wide matters such as consultees on the budget and formulation of policy
- Creation of dedicated 'area' plans to target resources and direct activity

The Better Oxfordshire proposal also included five local planning committees and a strategic planning committee.

The Scrutiny Committee considered the report at its meetings on 2 and 9 March 2017 and made the following recommendations to:

1. ask Cabinet and Council to note a number of concerns raised on matters of detail; and
2. support the proposal for the future organisation of local government in Oxfordshire as set out in the chief executive's report to Cabinet and the "New Council for a Better Oxfordshire" proposal.

Cabinet welcomed Scrutiny Committee's input.

Three documents were tabled at the meeting to provide clarification on the proposal:

1. A vision of a governance structure for the new unitary authority;
2. An indicative model showing projected council tax levels in Oxfordshire; and
3. A comparison of the Better Oxfordshire proposals with those of the original One Oxfordshire proposals and the governance of Wiltshire and Cornwall.

Cabinet noted that the council tax modelling was based on figures published in the Oxfordshire districts' and county council's medium term financial plans, and assumed council tax increases across these councils in the lead up to the new unitary council being established. The figures also assumed that there would be a new council for the city of Oxford, setting a precept of £150 in a new town council role. The model showed that it would be possible to achieve levels of council tax no higher than would be expected under the current two-tier principal council system in Oxfordshire.

The report set out the options open to the council. In 2016 the council had considered a three or four unitary council option. However, this was no longer considered to be the preferred option as:

- There was an indication that this would not be financially viable and was likely to be rejected by the government
- There were indications from government departments that they would not endorse strategic safeguarding services being provided on a smaller scale
- There was no longer consensus from Oxfordshire districts over the scope of such unitary authorities, a combined authority, and the potential of a directly elected mayor
- There were strong indications from the Local Government Association that devolution in its previous funded form was not a realistic prospect
- The Secretary of State had indicated a unitary council population size of between 300,000 and 800,000 would be acceptable; Oxfordshire fell within this range.

Cabinet noted that the Better Oxfordshire proposal involved some decision-making at a more local level with area planning boards and area executive boards. Some concern was expressed at the short time it had taken to develop the Better Oxfordshire proposal and that more time should be given to work out the detailed proposals. However, the details of how this would work would be developed by a joint committee; all principal councils in Oxfordshire would be invited to take part in the joint committee.

Cabinet was convinced that the council should work with the County Council and other district councils to form a single unitary council, a better council for Oxfordshire. This would provide a more efficient form of local government for Oxfordshire's future. The Better Oxfordshire bid had improved significantly on the county council's One Oxfordshire proposal. The Vale of White Horse District Council had already supported the proposal. If the proposal was also supported by this council and Oxfordshire County Council, it would form the unitary council bid to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Cabinet supported the recommendations set out in the chief executive's report, with the amendment of recommendation 7 to read (additional words shown in **bold type**):

“authorise the head of legal and democratic services, **in consultation with the leader and the chief executive**, to agree the terms of reference of the joint committee, which will include making recommendations regarding the initial functions of the implementation executive, and to make this council's appointments to the joint committee”.

Cabinet expressed its gratitude to the leader, John Cotton, and the officers for their work in preparing the Better Oxfordshire bid.

RECOMMENDATIONS: to Council on 10 March 2017 to:

1. note and commend the approach taken by the Leaders of Vale, South Oxfordshire, and the County Council in putting the interests of residents, business and communities first in bringing forward these proposals;
2. consider the proposals, in particular taking note that 70 per cent of those responding to the County Council's representative household survey supported the proposal for a new unitary council for Oxfordshire;
3. respond to the recent letter from the Secretary of State and submit proposals to Government subject to any amendments required provided that they are materially in accordance with the attached proposal;
4. delegate the power to make such amendments to the chief executive in consultation with the leader and with South Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council;
5. ask officers to seek local support from key stakeholders and the wider public to promote the proposals to government and respond to any subsequent consultation undertaken by the Secretary of State;
6. support the further development of the Area Executive Board model, a joint committee, open to all Districts and City Councils across Oxfordshire and the County Council, should be formed as early as possible. This joint committee should work with the existing County Council advisory group, local communities, Town and Parish Councils, and key delivery partners to develop detailed proposals that articulate the role, powers, format, scale and responsibilities of the Area Executive Boards which will be submitted to the Implementation Executive for inclusion with the proposed constitution of the new council;
7. authorise the head of legal and democratic services, in consultation with the leader and the chief executive, to agree the terms of reference of the joint committee, which will include making recommendations regarding the initial functions of the implementation executive, and to make this council's appointments to the joint committee;
8. ask officers to take steps to establish the City Convention to work with residents and local stakeholders to design the new model of governance in Oxford; and
9. in light of the above decisions, and the absence of unanimity among the current local authorities, confirm that Council does not support the proposals for a Mayor and Combined Authority as being the best structure for Oxfordshire.

The meeting closed at 5.47 pm

Chairman

Date