

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Cabinet

HELD ON THURSDAY 9 JULY 2020 AT 6.00 PM

THIS WAS A VIRTUAL, ONLINE MEETING.

Present:

Cabinet members: Councillors Sue Cooper (Chair), Robin Bennett, Maggie Filipova-Rivers, Pieter-Paul Barker, Andrea Powell, Leigh Rawlins, David Rouane and Anne-Marie Simpson

Officers: Shaun Berry, Steve Culliford, Andrew Down, Philip Ealey, Simon Hewings, Suzanne Malcolm, Adrianna Partridge, Margaret Reed, Mark Stone, Shona Ware and Michelle Wells

1 Minutes

RESOLVED: to adopt as correct records the minutes of the Cabinet meetings held on 30 January, 11 February, 5 and 10 March 2020 and agree that the Chair signs them as such.

2 Declaration of disclosable pecuniary interest

None.

3 Urgent business and chair's announcements

None

4 Public participation

Cabinet received a written statement from Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizens Advice in support of its grant allocation.

5 Recommendations from other committees

Cabinet considered recommendations from other committees.

Climate Emergency Advisory Committee – 29 June 2020 and Scrutiny Committee – 8 July 2020

Corporate plan 2020 to 2024



Listening Learning Leading

The Climate Emergency Advisory Committee had considered the draft corporate plan on 29 June and made the several suggestions for clarification. The Cabinet member and officers had agreed to take these points into consideration:

- regarding Finance Investment and Innovation – explicitly stating invest wisely with climate emergency in mind, e.g. avoiding fossil-fuelled companies
- clarify what is meant by the Gateway site
- support the concept of encouraging behavioural change on climate change matters
- pick out more third-party agencies to emphasise partnership working, for example the Chilterns Conservation Board and the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty authority
- use planning powers to enshrine green spaces
- encourage where possible net-zero in build and operation
- strengthen active travel and cycling infrastructure
- support the creation of an Oxfordshire-wide local nature partnership to promote an ambitious nature recovery programme, including tree and meadow planting, re-wilding and providing habitats for wildlife

The Scrutiny Committee had also considered the draft corporate plan on 8 July and asked that the following comments were taken on board in the final draft for consultation:

- In theme 1: homes and infrastructure that meet local needs, focus on what the council has influence to do
- Retrofit homes to make them sustainable
- Ensure the council is well-placed to tap into any government scheme/funding and advise and signpost residents to make use of schemes
- Would like to see more specific details such as a workable definition of affordable housing
- Balance between aspiration and pragmatism but the corporate plan must aspire and inspire—we can be champions of carbon zero
- Planning enforcement is important to our residents, consider whether to strengthen this in the illustrative projects
- Importance of picking up on contextual matters, e.g. operating within legal planning framework and central government changes that could be coming
- In theme 2: improved economic and community wellbeing—support, no changes suggested
- In theme 3: action on the climate emergency, focus on what we can influence
- Are the themes ranked in any particular order and should they be ranked, e.g. climate emergency first?
- The active travel illustrative project should include walking and bus travel
- In theme four: protect and restore our natural world, the council has a duty to protect the rural nature of the district
- Consider including the Environment Agency in the list of relevant partners, as a closer relationship would be beneficial, particularly in relation to flood risk
- Include wildlife corridors as a project and a project around local green space designation in urban areas
- In theme five: Investment and innovation that rebuilds our financial viability, maximise the value of the council's transformation budget
- The plan needs to be realistic on what is deliverable within financial constraints
- In theme six: openness and accountability, build on the Local Government Association's survey that demonstrated that public levels of trust in local authorities after the Covid-19 crisis are at an all-time high
- Add in representation of different groups into introductory theme text

- Consider increased public participation and accessibility of all public meetings
- Encourage diversity in democratic decision-making
- Promote the corporate plan in different languages, easy-to-read materials, and plain language to extend reach
- Consider hard copy materials in public places like libraries

The Cabinet member for corporate services thanked the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee and the Scrutiny Committee for their comments, which would be taken into account in building the final draft plan.

6 Corporate plan 2020 to 2024

Cabinet considered the draft corporate plan for 2020 to 2024. The Cabinet member for corporate services thanked the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee and the Scrutiny Committee for their comments, which would be taken into account in the final draft plan; the committees' suggestions were all valid. There would also be a variety of methods used to consult, including video messages from Cabinet members. The consultation would run from 16 July to 13 August. The consultation results would inform any changes needed to the plan before it was submitted to Cabinet on 1 October and to Council for approval on 8 October 2020.

Cabinet welcomed the feedback from the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee and the Scrutiny Committee and thanked officers and the Cabinet member for their work on the draft plan. Cabinet supported the draft corporate plan and looked forward to the consultation results in the autumn.

RESOLVED to approve the draft corporate plan 2020 to 2024 for consultation.

7 Homelessness and rough sleeping strategy

Cabinet considered the head of housing and environment's report on the homelessness and rough sleeping strategy. The strategy was reviewed periodically. This year, it included reducing rough sleeping, a government requirement.

The Cabinet member for housing reported on the work undertaken to develop the document. The strategy had three aims, to:

- prevent homelessness whenever possible
- end incidents of homelessness at the earliest opportunity
- end the need for rough sleeping

To achieve these aims the strategy had five objectives, to:

- improve county-wide partnership working to prevent and reduce homelessness
- minimise the use of temporary accommodation
- further develop our housing needs service to prevent and relieve homelessness at the earliest opportunity
- improve access to emergency accommodation and increase support for rough sleepers
- improve access to sustainable accommodation for households who are either at risk of homelessness or who are homeless

The Cabinet member pointed to the consultation results: 83 per cent had strongly supported the strategy. Scrutiny Committee had also considered the draft strategy and given its support also.

Cabinet welcomed the strategy and thanked officers for their work. Cabinet concluded that the council had a strong track record in the prevention and reduction of homelessness. The homelessness and rough sleeping strategy would build on this success by continuing to drive down homelessness and rough sleeping in the district. Many elements of the new strategy were already in place and had stood up well during the council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The latest figures for the district were low. The benefits of working with other councils and agencies across Oxfordshire during the past few months had proven that strategy was effective. Councillors also welcomed the aim to bring empty homes back into use. Officers were asked to update the data before publishing the strategy.

RESOLVED: to adopt the homelessness and rough sleeping strategy, as set out in the head of housing and environment's report to Cabinet on 9 July 2020, subject to the head of housing and environment updating the data within.

8 Housing assistance grants and loans policy

Cabinet considered the head of housing and environment's report on the draft housing assistance grants and loans policy.

The Cabinet member for housing reported that the aim of the policy was to:

- provide a fair and transparent policy for the administration and management of housing related grants and loans
- provide a clear framework for the delivery of grants and loans
- ensure the council met its statutory duties and exercises its powers in accordance with relevant legislation and regulations
- increase the range of grants and loans available to better reflect the needs of residents
- increase the delivery of grants and loans subject to available funding and
- accelerate the delivery of grants

The policy included new measures designed to deliver the aims of the policy by:

- introducing new grants and services to benefit residents, including a grant for persons living with dementia
- increasing the maximum disabled facilities grant entitlement from £30,000 to £50,000 to help fund more expensive adaptations
- removing the means test for disabled facilities grant adaptations under £8,000 that would accelerate delivery and reduce waiting times for residents
- using flexible funding arrangements introduced to improve service delivery, such as the secondment of an occupational therapist to accelerate and increase the delivery of grants and reduce waiting times for residents and
- in certain circumstances, recovering part of the cost of a disabled facilities grant from owner-occupiers to re-invest the funding in order to maximise the number of grants delivered

Cabinet supported the policy as it would provide a transparent framework for increasing the range of available grants and introduce new measures to enhance service delivery.

Most of all, it would improve the lives of people with housing support needs by enabling them to live safely and comfortably in their own homes.

Cabinet noted that officers were working on a communications strategy tailored to those in need of this service. Cabinet welcomed this and suggested that publicity material was provided to libraries, medical surgeries, health visitors, carers, Citizens Advice, and the many community support groups that had proved valuable during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Cabinet thanked the officers for their work.

RESOLVED to:

- (a) adopt the housing assistance grants and loans policy, as set out in the head of housing and environment's report to Cabinet on 9 July 2020; and
- (b) authorise the head of housing and environment to make minor amendments to the policy.

9 Oxfordshire Growth Board Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding

Cabinet considered the report of the acting deputy chief executive – partnerships. This set out a proposal to amend the Oxfordshire Growth Board's terms of reference and memorandum of association following a review undertaken by the Growth Board.

The adoption of these documents represented stage one of two in implementing outcomes from the Growth Board review. Subject to the new purpose and terms of reference being agreed by all six principal councils in Oxfordshire, stage two would involve a more detailed review of the Board's operating arrangements to reflect the increasing importance of protecting the environment and tackling climate change. This included assessing how the Board interacted with emerging proposals for a local nature partnership.

The revised terms of reference had an emphasis on sustainable development and the pursuit of a zero-carbon future for Oxfordshire. The updated memorandum of association provided greater operational clarity about handling freedom of Information requests. Several minor changes had also been included to reflect the terminology and arrangements included in the revised terms of reference.

Cabinet supported the changes.

RESOLVED to:

- (a) approve the Oxfordshire Growth Board's terms of reference and memorandum of association, as set out in appendices 1 and 2 to the 9 July 2020 Cabinet report of the acting deputy chief executive – partnerships; and
- (b) authorise the chief executive, in consultation with the leader and the Growth Board, to make minor amendments to the terms of reference and memorandum of association, as required to support the operational efficiency of the Growth Board's work.

10 Revenue grants scheme

Cabinet considered the head of corporate services' report regarding the revenue grant scheme. The report set out the options to:

1. offer the current recipients of a revenue grant a one-year extension, which would be conditional on them providing services to respond or recover from Covid-19 in 2021/22; or
2. close the scheme as planned at the end of the 2020/21 financial year.

Cabinet considered that the scheme should be extended as set out in option 1 above, to bring benefits to the community where it was most needed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The groups and organisations listed in the report had proved valuable during the last few months.

RESOLVED: to approve a one-year extension to the council's revenue grant scheme that offers the current recipients funding at the same level as this year (2020/21), conditional towards the provision of Covid-19 response and recovery services in 2021/22.

The meeting closed at 7.22pm

Chair

Date