

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Council



Listening Learning Leading

held on Thursday, 17 February 2022
at 6.00 pm in 135 Eastern Avenue,
Milton Park, OX14 4SB

Open to the public, including the press

Present in the meeting room:

Councillors: Jo Robb (Chair), Ken Arlett, Anna Badcock, Pieter-Paul Barker, David Bartholomew, Robin Bennett, David Bretherton, Sam Casey-Rerhaye, Sue Cooper, Peter Dragonetti, Maggie Filipova-Rivers, Stefan Gawrysiak, Kate Gregory, Victoria Haval, Lorraine Hillier, Kellie Hinton, Alexandrine Kantor, Mocky Khan, George Levy, Lynn Lloyd, Axel Macdonald, Jane Murphy, Andrea Powell, Leigh Rawlins, Sue Roberts, David Rouane, Anne-Marie Simpson, Ian Snowdon, Alan Thompson, Ian White and Celia Wilson

Officers: Patrick Arran, Head of Legal & Democratic and Monitoring Officer, Steven Corrigan, Democratic Services Manager and Adrianna Partridge, Deputy Chief Executive – Transformation and Operations

Remote attendance:

Councillors: Elizabeth Gillespie

Officers: Harry Barrington-Mountford, Head of Policy and Programmes and Simon Hewings, Head of Finance

Apologies for absence received on behalf of Councillors Tim Bearder, Caroline Newton, David Turner and Andrea Warren

65 Minutes

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2021 as a correct record and agree that the Chair sign them as such.

66 Declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest

None.

67 Urgent business and chair's announcements

The Chair of Council, Councillor Robb, advised that, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972, she had agreed to take one item of urgent business at the meeting – for Council to amend its Council Tax Reduction Scheme to disregard Energy Bill rebate payments when determining eligibility for Council Tax Reduction.

The reason for urgency being that Council must agree the change by the statutory deadline of 11 March 2022 and the matter arose since the publication of the agenda for this meeting. The Chair further advised that the item would be taken after the Council Tax setting item.

68 Public participation

None.

69 Petitions

None.

70 Treasury Management and Investment Strategy 2022/23

Council considered Cabinet's recommendation, made at its meeting on 3 February 2022, on the council's treasury management and investment strategy for 2022/23.

Councillor Rawlins, Cabinet member for finance, reported that several changes were proposed to the strategy, designed to widen the scope of the available instruments the council can invest in with the aim of achieving an increase in yield whilst still maintaining the primacy of security and liquidity in determining where to place the council's investments.

The Joint Audit and Governance Committee had considered the report at its meeting on 25 January 2022 and had not recommended any adjustments to the strategy and resolved to recommend Cabinet to approve the treasury management strategy, the prudential indicators and limits for 2022/23 to 2024/25 and the annual investment strategy 2022/23 as set out in the report.

Cabinet agreed to recommend Council to approve the strategy.

RESOLVED: to

1. approve the treasury management strategy 2022/23 set out in appendix A to the head of finance's report to Cabinet on 3 February 2022;
2. approve the prudential indicators and limits for 2022/23 to 2024/25 as set out in, appendix A to the report; and
3. approve the annual investment strategy 2022/23 set out in appendix A to the report, and the lending criteria detailed in table 6.

71 Capital Strategy 2022/23-2031/32

Council considered Cabinet's recommendation, made at its meeting on 3 February 2022, on the council's capital strategy for 2022/23 to 2031/32.

Councillor Rawlins, Cabinet member for finance, set out the key proposed change to the strategy to broaden the areas where capital investment will be considered to include property investments, loans and renewable energy schemes. He stressed that in all cases investment would need to be within the council's legal powers, must be proportionate to the council's financial standing, and should support the council's corporate objectives. However, investment could not be purely for commercial gain.

RESOLVED: to

1. approve the capital strategy 2022/23 to 2031/32, contained in appendix one of the head of finance's report to Cabinet on 3 February 2022; and
2. agree the strategy for flexible use of capital receipts which is contained as annex 1 of the capital strategy.

72 Revenue budget 2022/23 and capital programme 2022/23 - 2026/27

The chair referred to regulations that require councils to record the names of those councillors voting in favour, against or abstaining from any vote on the budget, including amendments, and the council tax. In accordance with the regulations she would call for a named vote on each of these matters at this meeting.

The chair reminded councillors that they were not entitled to vote on any issue affecting the level or administration of the council tax or other decisions which might affect the making of any such calculation such as the budget, if they were over two months in arrears with their council tax payments. Where such circumstances applied, councillors were under a statutory obligation to disclose the restriction placed on them and refrain from voting at the relevant meeting. No councillor made any such declaration.

Council noted the report of the chief finance officer on the robustness of the budget estimates and the adequacy of the reserves.

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations, made at its meeting held on 3 February 2021, on the revenue budget for 2021/22 and the capital programme to 2025/26. Scrutiny Committee had considered the report of the interim head of finance on 7 February and had made no recommendations.

Councillor Rawlins, Cabinet member for finance, presented Cabinet's proposals for the revenue budget and capital programme. He moved and Councillor Rouane, Leader of the council, seconded a motion to approve Cabinet's recommendations as follows:

To

1. set the revenue budget for 2022/23, as set out in appendix A.1 to the head of finance's report to Cabinet on 3 February 2022;
2. approve the capital programme for 2022/23 to 2026/27, as set out in appendix D.1 to the report, together with the capital programme changes as set out in appendix D.2 and appendix D.3 to the report;
3. set the council's prudential limits, as listed in appendix E to the report;
4. approve the medium-term financial plan to 2026/27, as set out in appendix F to the report;
5. allocate £500,000 to fund the Communities Capital and Revenue grant scheme;
6. ask officers to review the Medium-Term Financial Strategy following the announcement by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities of changes to the council's future funding streams.

In introducing the budget proposals, the Cabinet member stated that the budget would help chart the council back to a more stable financial position and recovery from the position the administration had inherited at the district council elections in 2019. The council had faced significant financial issues in the preparation of the budget. Its council tax was the fifteenth lowest in the country for a shire district and well below the national average; the council was unable to increase its council tax significantly. The council had not benefitted from the business rates retention scheme and, whilst the council had benefitted from the New Homes Bonus scheme, this was under review by the government and was expected to be less generous in future.

The revenue budget set for 2021/22 had predicted an unsustainable use of the council's reserves that was unsustainable over the medium to long term. Following the thorough review of the base budget, the medium term financial plan now predicted a significantly better position with less reliance on reserves. The transformation activities identified in the report during 2022/23 were central to tackling the budget gap for future years.

The budget proposed no cuts to services and included revenue growth to support the council's corporate plan priorities in climate action, nature recovery, and community wellbeing. Council tax was proposed to increase by £5 for a Band D property—the maximum allowed. The capital programme included several new schemes to be funded from the community infrastructure levy income, and also income from section 106 receipts to support affordable housing schemes.

A number of councillors expressed views against the budget proposals. They opposed the capital costs for the building of a new council headquarters at the Didcot Gateway site. Alternative council owned accommodation was available, notably Abbey House in Abingdon, which could be repurposed reducing carbon costs and allow the site in Didcot to be made available for alternative uses including social housing. Financing the new offices would account for a substantial element of the council's capital programme and had necessitated the council borrowing money for the first time in many years. There was also an assumption that part of the building could be rented out for office space which, in light of the current surplus availability of office space, was not guaranteed and could worsen the financial burden. Other councillors expressed the view that the budget did not include sufficient funds to address the climate and ecological crisis. The proposed increase in council tax, together with the

increase in car park charges, would have a detrimental impact on residents and businesses at a time of rising fuel bills and inflation.

However, the majority of councillors supported the budget proposals. A number of councillors welcomed the reduction in the budget deficit going forward. Others welcomed funding to support the climate action plan work and nature recovery (including tree planting schemes and promoting green construction skills). Capital growth schemes would improve the leisure centres across the district, the replacement of the roof at Cornerstone and support the provision of affordable housing. A number of councillors expressed views that initiatives such as the decision to work on a joint local plan with Vale of White Horse District Council and bring services back in house had saved significant sums. The decision to develop new council offices shared with Vale of White Horse District Council, would save significant sums in terms of current office rental charges, provide the opportunity to earn income and would also contribute towards the regeneration of an important site in Didcot.

In accordance with regulations requiring councils to record the names of those councillors voting in favour, against or abstaining from any vote on the budget the chairman called for a recorded vote which was carried with the voting being as follows:

For	Against	Abstain
Councillors	Councillors	Councillors
Ken Arlett	Anna Badcock	
Pieter-Paul Barker	David Bartholomew	
Robin Bennett	Lorraine Hillier	
David Bretherton	Lynn Lloyd	
Sam Casey-Rerhaye	Jane Murphy	
Sue Cooper	Sue Roberts	
Peter Dragonetti	Ian Snowdon	
Maggie Filipova-Rivers	Alan Thompson	
Stefan Gawrysiak	Ian White	
Kate Gregory		
Victoria Haval		
Kellie Hinton		
Alexandrine Kantor		
Mocky Khan		

For	Against	Abstain
George Levy		
Axel Macdonald		
Andrea Powell		
Leigh Rawlins		
Jo Robb		
David Rouane		
Anne-Marie Simpson		
Celia Wilson		
22	9	0

RESOLVED: to

1. set the revenue budget for 2022/23, as set out in appendix A.1 to the head of finance's report to Cabinet on 3 February 2022;
2. approve the capital programme for 2022/23 to 2026/27, as set out in appendix D.1 to the report, together with the capital programme changes as set out in appendix D.2 and appendix D.3 to the report;
3. set the council's prudential limits, as listed in appendix E to the report;
4. approve the medium-term financial plan to 2026/27, as set out in appendix F to the report;
5. allocate £500,000 to fund the Communities Capital and Revenue grant scheme;
6. ask officers to review the Medium-Term Financial Strategy following the announcement by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities of changes to the council's future funding streams.

Councillors thanked the head of finance and his team for the work undertaken to prepare the budget.

73 Future provision of external audit services

Council considered Cabinet's recommendation, made at its meeting on 3 February 2022, on the appointment of the external auditor to the council for the accounts for the five-year period from 2023/24.

The Joint Audit and Governance Committee, at its meeting on 25 January 2022, supported the recommendations set out in the report.

RESOLVED: to

1. accept Public Sector Audit Appointments' invitation to opt into the sector-led option for the appointment of external auditors to principal local government and police bodies for five financial years from 1 April 2023; and
2. authorise the head of finance to opt into the national scheme for auditor appointments for the provision of external audit services, starting with the audit of the 2023/24 accounts.

74 Council tax 2022/23

Council considered the report of the interim head of finance on the setting of the Council Tax for the 2022/23 financial year.

In accordance with regulations requiring councils to record the names of those councillors voting in favour, against or abstaining from any vote on the council tax the chairman called for a recorded vote which was carried with the voting being as follows:

For	Against	Abstain
Councillors	Councillors	Councillors
Ken Arlett		
Anna Badcock		
Pieter-Paul Barker		
David Bartholomew		
Robin Bennett		
David Bretherton		
Sam Casey-Rerhaye		
Sue Cooper		
Peter Dragonetti		
Maggie Filipova-Rivers		
Stefan Gawrysiak		
Kate Gregory		
Victoria Haval		
Lorraine Hillier		

For	Against	Abstain
Kellie Hinton		
Alexandrine Kantor		
Mocky Khan		
George Levy		
Lynn Lloyd		
Axel Macdonald		
Jane Murphy		
Andrea Powell		
Leigh Rawlins		
Jo Robb		
Sue Roberts		
David Rouane		
Anne-Marie Simpson		
Ian Snowdon		
Alan Thompson		
Ian White		
Celia Wilson		
31	0	0

RESOLVED:

1. To note that at its meeting on 9 December 2021 the council calculated the council tax base 2022/23:
 - (a) for the whole council area as **60,343.7** [Item T in the formula in Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended (the “Act”)]; and
 - (b) for dwellings in those parts of its area to which a parish precept relates as in column 1 of appendix 1.
2. That the council tax requirement for the council’s own purposes for 2022/23 (excluding parish precepts) is £8,221,226

3. That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2022/23 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
- (a) £80,209,413 being the aggregate of the amounts which the council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act taking into account all precepts issued to it by parish councils.
 - (b) £65,708,812 being the aggregate of the amounts which the council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) of the Act.
 - (c) £14,500,601 being the amount by which the aggregate at (3)(a) above exceeds the aggregate at (3)(b) above, calculated by the council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act as its council tax requirement for the year. (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act).
 - (d) £240.30 being the amount at (3)(c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (1(a) above), calculated by the council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year (including parish precepts).
 - (e) £6,279,375 being the aggregate amount of all special items referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act, as set out in column 2 of appendix 1.
 - (f) £136.24 being the amount at (3)(d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at (3)(e) above by Item T (1(a) above), calculated by the council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no parish precept relates.
4. That for the year 2022/23 Oxfordshire County Council has stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Band A	£1,101.07
Band B	£1,284.59
Band C	£1,468.10
Band D	£1,651.61
Band E	£2,018.63
Band F	£2,385.66
Band G	£2,752.68
Band H	£3,303.22

5. That for the year 2022/23 the Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley has stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Band A	£160.85
Band B	£187.66
Band C	£214.47
Band D	£241.28
Band E	£294.90
Band F	£348.52

Band G	£402.13
Band H	£482.56

6. That the council, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the aggregate amounts shown in appendix 3 as the amounts of council tax for 2022/23 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings shown in appendix 3.
7. To determine that the council's basic amount of council tax for 2022/23 is not excessive in accordance with principles approved under Section 52ZB Local Government Finance Act 1992.

75 Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme - Energy Bills Rebate disregard (Prescribed amendment)

Council considered the urgent report of the head of finance seeking approval for the council's current Council Tax Reduction Scheme's wording to be amended so that it can disregard Government's £150 one-off Energy Bills Rebate as income, in accordance with new legislation, when calculating a person's entitlement for council tax support and the amount of the support deduction.

RESOLVED: to approve an amendment to its Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (working age & pension age), inserting appropriate income disregard wording which takes account of Government's one-off £150 Energy Bills Rebate.

76 Pay policy statement 2022/23

Council considered the report of the deputy chief executive on the adoption of a pay policy statement to meet the requirements of the Localism Act.

RESOLVED: to approve the statement of pay policy for 2022/23 attached to the report of the deputy chief executive to the Council meeting on 17 February 2022.

77 Report of the leader of the council

Councillor Rouane, Leader of the council, provided an update on a number of matters. The text of his address is available on the council's [website](#).

Council noted the details of an urgent decision taken by Councillor Robin Bennett, Cabinet member for Development and Corporate Landlord, to approve amendments to the South Oxfordshire District Council Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) scheme.

78 Questions on notice

Question from Councillor Anna Badcock to Councillor Leigh Rawlins, Cabinet Member for finance and property assets

What would it take politically and monetarily to have a swimming pool built in Watlington, considering the options currently and in the future and mindful of the

development at Berinsfield where a current facility, in need of update, resides, and the anticipated planning applications for Chalgrove?

Answer

Strategic leisure is already in the process of undertaking a strategic review of leisure need across the district in partnership with Sport England, the output of which will be a facilities planning model. That work and model is expected to be ready by the end of this year and its purpose is to identify an appropriate level of sports provision in an area. It will take into account recent and planned population changes and housing delivery, and it is this document that will provide the best basis upon which to make decisions as to where new sports facilities are provided.

Funding for significant capital projects and potential sites would need to be identified in any such case, and clearly s106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) are sources of funding, derived from the development of new homes, that have the potential to be used.

We will of course be very happy to report the findings of the strategic leisure work to Councillor Babcock, particularly in regards to its findings regarding Watlington.

Supplementary question

Councillor Badcock asked if the Cabinet member for leisure would meet in person, within the next few weeks, with Watlington Parish Council to discuss the findings from their survey and strategy to ensure that the Cabinet member, head of service and team undertaking the review are fully aware of the leisure needs of a neglected rural area and appraises the parish council of all the considerations and requirements for the delivery of the key desirable facilities requested by the residents of the parish.

Answer

In response Councillor Filipova-Rivers, Cabinet member for community wellbeing, confirmed she would attend such a meeting.

79 Motions on notice

No motions were submitted for consideration by Council.

The meeting closed at 7.57pm