

# Minutes

## OF A MEETING OF THE



Listening Learning Leading

## Cabinet

Held on Thursday 28 November 2024 at 6.00 pm  
Meeting Room 1, Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon, OX14 3JE

### Present in the meeting room:

Cabinet members: Councillors David Rouane (Chair), Robin Bennett, Maggie Filipova-Rivers, Sam Casey-Rerhaye and Anne-Marie Simpson  
Officers: Mark Stone (Chief Executive), Daniel Harrison (Community Arts Manager), Abigail Brown (Arts Development Officer) and Becky Binstead (Democratic Services).

### Remote attendance:

Cabinet members: Sam James-Lawrie, Georgina Heritage, Pieter-Paul Barker  
Councillors: Stefan Gawrysiak and Ian Snowdon  
Officers: Susie Royce (Broadcasting Officer), Carmella Anderson (Leisure Development Officer), Nick Bennett (Head of Legal and Democratic), Andrew Busby (Head of Development and Corporate Landlord), Paul Fielding (Head of Housing and Environment), Simon Hewings (Head of Finance), Suzanne Malcolm (Deputy Chief Executive – Place), Mark Minion (Head of Corporate Services), Tim Oruye (Head of Policy and Programmes), Tom Rice (Principal Planning Policy Officer), Phil Barker (Head of Communities), Charles Packham (Senior Environmental Protection Officer), and (Scott Williams (Environmental Services Manager).

### 73 Chair's announcements

The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, outlined the procedure to be followed and advised on emergency evacuation arrangements.

The chair informed members that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) met on 26 November 2024 and agreed to refocus the FOP as a joint committee of local authority leaders. It was agreed to disband the FOP Scrutiny Panel and replace the advisory groups with project-specific task and finish groups under a refined governance structure.

The Chair announced that they would be attending the Flood Resilience Forum, hosted by Oxfordshire County Council, which would address the growing issue of flooding in the district.

### 74 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

### 75 Minutes

**RESOLVED:** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 10 October as a correct record and agree that the Chairman sign them as such.

## **76 Declaration of interests**

Councillor Robin Bennett declared an interest as a director of an arts company. However, they stated that this would not constitute a conflict of interest, as the organisation did not meet the eligibility criteria threshold for the Performing Arts Grants Policy.

## **77 Urgent business**

There was no urgent business.

## **78 Public participation**

Councillor Stefan Gawrysiak addressed Cabinet and expressed support for the Performing Arts Grants Policy. They acknowledged the positive contribution the arts make to communities and thanked officers for their work. They highlighted examples of how the grants will benefit local groups, support young talent and help with costs such as hall hire and performance rights. Councillor Gawrysiak expressed concerns that the policy excluded funding for core operational costs like rent, utilities and maintenance, which are essential for theatres to operate. They specifically mentioned the needs of theatres in Henley, Thames, and Wallingford, which require central funding to maintain their buildings.

Councillor Gawrysiak urged the Cabinet to reconsider the policy and include funding for core operational expenses. They also suggested simplifying the grant application process for smaller amounts, such as the grants for £500.

## **79 Recommendations and updates from other committees**

Cabinet received the recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee meeting, held on 5 November 2024, and their suggestions and recommendations were considered under the relevant item on the Cabinet agenda.

## **80 Leisure Facilities Strategy and Playing Pitch Strategy**

Cabinet received the Leisure Facilities and Playing Pitch Strategy report from the head of policy and programmes, which introduced the process and work undertaken to develop the South Oxfordshire Leisure Facilities Assessment and Strategy (LFAS) and Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS)

The cabinet member for planning introduced the report and recommended that Cabinet adopts the South Oxfordshire LFAS and PPS. Members were informed that the strategies were developed through a joint commission with Vale of White Horse District Council, ensuring a consistent approach to sports and leisure provision across both districts. They provided a high-level assessment of the key sports and leisure needs in the districts and outline where these facilities may be required. The strategies offer three main categories of recommendations: protecting existing facilities, enhancing current ones, and providing new facilities where needed. If the Cabinet agrees to adopt the strategies, they will move to the next phase and develop an action plan for delivery. This phase will involve specific projects, regular monitoring, and progress reviews.

Scrutiny Committee had supported the progression of the strategies but asked Cabinet to consider the following points:

- To take and develop a network strategy to pan-district provision and vision in future strategies
- For a monitoring presentation to go to Scrutiny annually. A spreadsheet on actions being taken was suggested to be sent out to members periodically.
- Consideration for Mountain bike tracks.
- Transport/Active travel between small parishes had to be safe.
- Section 106 agreements between planning officers and Infrastructure Planning team should take place on large developments for funding.

The cabinet member for planning thanked Scrutiny Committee for its suggestions and noted that responses to their comments could be found in Appendix 7 of the report. Key updates had been made, such as adjustments to the location of gymnastics facilities, recommendations for skate park improvements, and updates on climate change goals.

During the discussion, it was noted that the Scrutiny Committee had recommended developing a network strategy for leisure facilities across the districts. It was clarified that the current strategies already adopt a networked approach, assessing whether existing facilities met the needs of residents. Any potential changes to this approach would be considered in future iterations of the strategy, in alignment with the development of the Joint Local Plan.

Concerns were raised about incorporating active travel, such as cycling and walking infrastructure, into the leisure strategy. Cabinet acknowledged that transport matters fall outside the direct scope of the strategy however, they were addressed in the Joint Local Plan and other relevant strategies, including local cycling and walking infrastructure plans. Future updates to the Active Community Strategy could consider integrating these aspects.

It was noted that the leisure facilities strategy was a high-level document, and the more detailed action plan would follow. The action plan would involve specific projects and further collaboration with officers. Cabinet expressed appreciation for the contributions from both the public and officers.

**RESOLVED:** That Cabinet

- a) Adopt the South Oxfordshire Leisure Facilities Assessment and Strategy
- b) Adopt the South Oxfordshire Playing Pitch Strategy

## **81 Council Tax base setting 2025/26**

Cabinet received the Council Tax Base 2025/26 report from the head of finance. The report asked Cabinet to recommend the council tax base for 2025/26 to Council for approval, agree the amount calculated as the council tax base and the amounts calculated for each parish.

**RECOMMENDED** to Council to:

- a) Approve the report of the head of finance for the calculation of the council's tax base and the calculation of the tax base for each parish area for 2025/2026.

- b) Agree that, in accordance with The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by South Oxfordshire District Council as its council tax base for the year 2025/26 be 63,639.9.
- c) Agree that, in accordance with The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by South Oxfordshire District Council as the council tax base for the year 2025/26 for each parish be the amount shown against the name of that parish in Appendix A of the report of the head of finance to Cabinet on 28 November 2024.

## **82 Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTR) 2025/26 - Backdating rules**

Cabinet received the Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme 2025/26 report from the head of finance. The report sought recommendations to Council to adopt the scheme with an amendment to extend the period in which a new claim can be backdated from six months to 12 months.

The cabinet member for finance and property assets introduced the scheme, which aimed to help residents who apply late for a reduction in council tax. While the number of cases affected would be small, Cabinet agreed that it was a worthwhile change to support those in greatest need.

In response to a question regarding the council tax reduction caseload, it was confirmed that the cases listed in the report were those who had received the reduction, not just applicants. Cabinet expressed their support for the proposal, emphasising the importance of offering financial relief during difficult times.

**RECOMMENDED** to Council on 28 November 2024 that for the 2025/26 financial year onwards the council continues to adopt the previous 2024/25 Council Tax Reduction (CTR) Scheme but with the following amendment:

- a) Extend the period in which a new claim for CTR can be backdated from six months to twelve months, where good cause has been demonstrated.

## **83 Performing Arts Grants Policy**

Cabinet received the South Oxfordshire Performing Arts Grant Policy and grants award procedure from the head of communities. The policy sought to distribute grants to community arts and culture groups that benefit the South Oxfordshire District Council area.

The cabinet member for communities introduced the report, which proposed the allocation of £60,000 annually over the next three years to support community performing arts groups. The aim on the policy was to enhance community well-being, encourage inclusivity, support local creativity, and help build the capacity of the performing arts sector. The cabinet member thanked officers and the community grants team for their support in developing the policy.

During discussion, it was explained that core costs were not included in the grant scheme as the funding was intended as a one-off, three-year initiative. The focus was on stimulating growth and supporting the sustainability of community groups in the performing arts sector as organisations recover post-COVID. It was noted that organisations could apply for multiple projects and that the scheme is designed to support a variety of needs within the sector.

Members were informed that the scheme's funding would be reassessed each year as part of the budget setting process, allowing for adjustments based on effectiveness.

Cabinet acknowledged the concerns raised by Councillor Grawysiak during public participation. Members expressed the view that the redistribution of funding would benefit a range of arts organisations across the district. Cabinet also recognised the importance of improving arts networks in the district and the importance of geographical distribution to ensure village groups aren't excluded.

The discussion also touched on the "first come, first served" system for grant applications, with a focus on expanding access to ensure that well-established organizations were not the only ones benefiting. It was noted that towns and parish councils play a key role in supporting smaller arts organizations, particularly those that may struggle with formal registration processes, by acting as intermediaries to help them access funding.

The cabinet member for communities proposed an amendment to appendix 1, the Performing Arts Grant Scheme. This would enable the scheme to be updated to a four-week application period starting on 1 February 2025.

Following debate, and being put to the vote, the amendment was declared carried and became the substantive motion. The amendment added a third recommendation to the motion to delegate to the Head of Communities, in consultation with the Cabinet member for Communities, to update the policy.

On being put the substantive motion was approved.

**RESOLVED:** that Cabinet:

- a) Agree the Performing Arts Grants Policy as detailed at appendix 1 of this report and implement the distribution of the £60K grant funding each year for the next 3 years (2024 – 2027), subject to annual Full Council budget approval.
- b) Authorise the assessment and allocation of grant awards as detailed in this report and delegated to the Head of Communities in consultation with the Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and relevant Cabinet Member.
- c) Delegates to the Head of Communities, in consultation with the Cabinet member for Communities, to update the policy.

## **84 Update to the Joint Public Health Funerals Policy**

Cabinet received the updated Joint Public Health Funerals Policy report from the head of housing and environment. The report sought adoption of the updated policy and a delegation to the head of housing and environment to make future minor changes in consultation with the relevant Cabinet member.

The cabinet member for environmental services and waste introduced the report and informed members that it was the Council's statutory duty to arrange public health funerals where there was no next of kin or where they refuse to take responsibility for the funeral. The main objective was to adopt an updated version of the joint public health funerals policy to align it with current legislation.

Following discussion, it was explained that the update would clarify the level of funeral services provided and the processes to be followed by officers. It was emphasised that having a clear policy in place would ensure dignified and cost-effective funerals for the deceased.

One specific issue raised involved cases where next of kin were found but were unwilling to arrange the funeral due to financial constraints, yet still wanted larger attendance at the funeral service. This created challenges with funeral providers, as they were expected to provide a more extensive service than what was typically covered under the public health funeral arrangements.

**RESOLVED:** That Cabinet

- a) Adopt the updated Joint Public Health Funerals Policy
- b) Delegates to the Head of Housing and Environment to make any minor changes to future versions of the Policy in consultation with the Cabinet member for Environment

## **85 Waste Transfer Station Contract Award**

Cabinet received the Waste Transfer Station Contract Award report from the head of housing and environment. The report sought approval of the award of contract to the preferred bidder.

The cabinet member for environmental services and waste presented the report, outlining that the Culham depot was scheduled to close for redevelopment. As a result, the procurement process identified a suitable location for the new waste transfer station, which was necessary to ensure that the Council continues to meet its statutory duty to collect waste a recycling. It was proposed that the new transfer facility would be operational by June 2026, coinciding with the timeline for the Culham depot closure. Cabinet was asked to approve the award of the contract for the new facility.

**RESOLVED:** That Cabinet approves the award of the contract for a new transfer station facility to handle the council's dry mixed recycling (DMR) to the preferred bidder. The contract would run for a minimum of five years, starting in June 2026.

## **86 Exclusion of the Public**

**RESOLVED:** to exclude members of the press and public from the meeting for the following item of business under Part 1 of Schedule 12A Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 and as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 on the grounds that:

- i. it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, and
- ii. the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

## **87 Waste Transfer Station Contract Award**

The report was considered in public session.

## **88 Recommendations and updates from other committees**

Cabinet received the recommendations from the Joint Scrutiny Committee meeting, held on 18 November 2024, and their suggestions and recommendations were considered under the relevant item on the Cabinet agenda.

## **89 Land Acquisition**

Cabinet agreed to the land acquisition.

The meeting closed at 7.47 pm

Chair

Date