



Listening Learning Leading

# Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

## Scrutiny Committee

HELD ON TUESDAY 4 FEBRUARY 2020 AT 6.30 PM

MEETING ROOM 1, 135 EASTERN AVENUE, MILTON PARK, MILTON, OX14 4SB

### Present:

Ian White (Chairman)

Mocky Khan, Anna Badcock, Sam Casey-Rerhaye, Stefan Gawrysiak, Alexandrine Kantor, and Anne-Marie Simpson

### Officers:

Steven Corrigan, Simon Hewings, Candida Mckelvey, Richard Spraggett, Mark Stone

**Also present:** Councillor Robin Bennett, Councillor Sue Cooper, Councillor Maggie Filipova Rivers, Councillor David Turner, Councillor Sue Roberts and Councillor Andrea Powell

### 36 Apologies for absence

Councillor Levy sent apologies for absence.

### 37 Declarations of interest

None.

### 38 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

None.

### 39 Public participation

Councillor Sue Roberts, Chair of the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee (CEAC), addressed the Scrutiny Committee regarding the £106,000 in the draft budget to fund the proposed one year climate emergency work programme, to address the climate emergency declared by the Council. Councillor Roberts commended this budget to the committee. The task and finish group, which includes councillors from the CEAC, carefully prioritised cost effective project options with the highest impact. These include office

electric pool cars and the Crowmarsh office, which should aim to be zero carbon in build and operations without offsetting offsite. County wide collaboration will be important to deliver targets.

The committee discussed the scoped one day conference for officers and key stakeholders. Councillor Roberts confirmed that the event was cost effective and important to bring people together on climate related issues. The task and finish group would carry out cost analysis and gauge the number of attendees.

A dedicated officer will be needed in the year ahead to support the plans and the nature recovery network.

Councillor Roberts was thanked for her time and was asked to email her speech to the committee members.

## **40 Budget 2020/21**

Prior to the conclusion of the debate on this item, and prior to the expiry of two and a half hours, the committee agreed in accordance with scrutiny committee procedure rule 35, to extend the meeting for a further period not exceeding 30 minutes.

The committee considered the interim head of finance's report on the revenue budget 2020/21 and capital programme to 2024/25. Councillor Turner, Cabinet member for finance, introduced the report. Also present to answer questions were Simon Hewings, Interim Head of Finance and Richard Spraggett, Senior Finance Business Partner. Several Cabinet portfolio holders were also present.

Cabinet's budget would be presented to Council on 13 February 2020.

In order to prioritise balancing the budget, savings had been made. Accountants worked with services to identify over £1 million in base budget savings.

The S151 Officer has signed off the 2020/21 budget as prudent and robust.

Committee members asked for clarifications, which were answered by officers, the Cabinet member for finance or the relevant Cabinet portfolio holder, who were invited to speak.

- In relation to New Home Bonus – this will potentially be replaced with another scheme and the budget has been prepared with this in mind. Assumed honoured amounts for the next four years.
- The budget cannot predict volume, for example, the number of benefits applicants, or the number of planning applications. The figures for planning were based on past volume and knowledge of future land that will be available for development.
- Budget savings have been carefully identified by officers. Vacant posts have been removed where there is no longer the need for the role. Services are performing well and savings have been identified where services were working at a level that extra staff would not create any improvement in service.

- Leisure facilities were discussed with the portfolio holder for community services, and these will be part of the leisure strategy review, to improve the income and social value of community facilities. The work will include creation of a working group and public consultation. Scrutiny requested that the portfolio holder for community services present a report to Scrutiny Committee, post task and finish group.
- The proposed budget included a transformation budget, to support achieving future financial sustainability and income generation ideas.

Other topics discussed were:

- Household waste – the proposed increase in the charge for a brown bin.
- The cost per dog litter bin collection has risen as the previous price was very below cost. Residents can use their black waste bins for dog litter. The cost of a regular household waste bin was requested.
- Listed properties and fuel costs. There should be energy advice available for people renting listed properties. Enforcing conditions versus enforcing planning law– changes are needed to legislation. The Climate Emergency Advisory Committee will be involved in this –planning regulations for illegal EPC energy rated properties.
- Interim Head of Finance confirmed that the budget report's inflation figures are consistent, 3.9% for staffing, as per contract, and future assumed at 2.7%
- The audit budget reduction is due to a previously overstated budget and is therefore a saving.
- Base budget saving – this is a budget correction, not a budget reduction.
- Neighbourhood Plans – these would still receive officer support but will be encouraged to seek other available funding streams, such as Localis.
- Budget set for potential new Local Plan.
- Potential merging of both South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils could generate savings.
- There is now more certainty regarding Capita costs that can be taken out.
- Confirmation that Air Quality is still in the budget.

The committee supported that the Cabinet recommend to Council to adopt a 5 year and 10 year financial strategy in time.

Scrutiny Committee considered and debated Cabinet's invitation, made at its meeting on 30 January 2020, to consider the following issues:

a) to maintain car park fees and charges at current levels pending a review later this year.

The committee made no recommendation in respect of car park fees and charges. A number of councillors expressed the view that the review should have already been undertaken with appropriate fees and charges included in the budget to address the car park deficit.

b) a reduction of the councillor grants budget from £180,000 to £90,000.

The committee discussed at length the proposed reduction in councillor grants budget. The following views were expressed:

- a possible gradual reduction and review of the grant;
- needs based grants;
- the potential for applicants to apply to capital grants instead;
- Scrutiny councillors strongly agreed that the grants were a vital link to their constituents – being able to help directly is positive.
- where there have been reductions proposed in other areas, the councillor grants reduction makes sense;
- A proposal was made that the councillor grants should remain at £180k (as part of the £500k grants budget, which comprises of £180k councillor grants (revenue scheme) and £320k communities capital grants scheme).

Officers were thanked for their hard work and the detailed report.

**RESOLVED:**

To recommend to Cabinet to retain the allocation of £500,000 to fund the Communities capital and revenue grant scheme.

## **41 Work schedule and dates for all South and Vale scrutiny meetings**

The committee noted it's work programme and the following additional items:

- Leisure Strategy Review and;
- Car parking fees and charges

The meeting closed at 9.08 pm

Chairman

Date