

# Minutes

## OF A MEETING OF THE

# Council



Listening Learning Leading

**HELD ON THURSDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2020 AT 6.00 PM**

**THE FOUNTAIN CONFERENCE CENTRE, HOWBERY PARK, CROWMARSH  
GIFFORD**

### **Present:**

David Bretherton (Chairman)

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

**Officers:** Steven Corrigan, Simon Hewings, William Jacobs, Margaret Reed and Mark Stone

### **52 Minutes**

**RESOLVED:** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 19 December 2019 as a correct record and agree that the chairman sign them as such.

### **53 Declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest**

None.

### **54 Urgent business and chairman's announcements**

The chairman provided general housekeeping information and advised there were no items of urgent business.

### **55 Public participation**

The chairman reported that Mrs Camps-Walsh, Chairman Beckley and Stowood Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee, had registered to address Council regarding Cabinet's decision to withdraw grants for neighbourhood plans. He advised that Mrs Camps-Walsh would address Council at agenda item 10 – revenue budget 2020/21 and capital programme to 2024/25.

With the agreement of Council, the chairman allowed Mr David Dickie, representing Henley-on-Thames & Clean Air for Henley, Greener Henley, to address Council. Mr Dickie referred to the report on air quality considered by the council's Scrutiny committee at its meeting on 21 January 2020. He referred to the air pollution issues facing Henley-on-Thames – the high numbers of children using inhalers and 14 days in January when the town exceeded the nitrogen dioxide level. He expressed concern that a number of activities undertaken in Henley by both the town council and Clean Air for Henley were not covered in the report. He set out a number of actions that should be taken forward to address poor air quality issues including more electric vehicle charging points, fines for drivers of vehicles idling, a reduction in the number of HGVs in the town and differential car parking charges.

## **56 Petitions**

No petitions were submitted to Council.

## **57 Treasury management mid-year monitoring report 2019/20**

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations, made at its meeting on 30 January 2020, on the treasury management activities for the first six months of 2019/20 and an update on the current economic conditions with a view to the remainder of the year.

The Joint Audit and Governance Committee had considered the report at its meeting on 27 January 2020 and had not recommended any adjustments to the strategy as a result of the first six months activities. That committee and Cabinet had concluded that the treasury management activities had operated within the agreed parameters set out in the approved treasury management strategy and policy and supported the changes to the counterparty limits.

### **RESOLVED: to**

1. note that the Joint Audit and Governance Committee is satisfied that the treasury activities are carried out in accordance with the treasury management strategy and policy; and
2. approve the interim head of finance's report to Cabinet on 30 January 2020;
3. agree the changes to the counterparty limits identified in paragraphs 21 and 22 of the interim head of finance's report.

## **58 Treasury management and investment strategy 2020/21**

Council considered Cabinet's recommendation, made at its meeting on 30 January 2020, on the council's treasury management and investment strategy for 2020/21.

The Joint Audit and Governance Committee had considered the report at its meeting on 27 January 2020 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 2020/21 to 2022/23 and the annual investment strategy 2020/21 as set out in the report. Cabinet agreed to recommend Council approve the strategy.

**RESOLVED:** to

1. approve the treasury management strategy 2020/21, set out in appendix A to the interim head of finance's report to Cabinet on 30 January 2020;
2. approve the prudential indicators and limits for 2020/21 to 2022/23, as set out in appendix A to the interim head of finance's report; and
3. approve the annual investment strategy 2020/21, set out in appendix A (paragraphs 41 to 82) to the interim head of finance's report, and the lending criteria detailed in table 5 to that report.

**59 Capital strategy 2020/21 to 2029/30**

Council considered Cabinet's recommendation, made at its meeting on 30 January 2020, on the capital strategy for 2020/21 to 2029/30. Cabinet agreed to recommend Council approve the strategy.

**RESOLVED:** to approve the capital strategy 2020/21 to 2029/30 which is contained in appendix one of the interim head of finance's report to Cabinet on 30 January 2020.

**60 Revenue Budget 2020/21 and Capital Programme to 2024/25**

Prior to the conclusion of the debate on this item, and prior to the expiry of two and a half hours, Council agreed, in accordance with council procedure rule 12, to extend the meeting for a further period not exceeding 30 minutes, and to defer the consideration of motions on notice (agenda item 15) until the Council meeting on 20 February 2020.

Mrs Camps-Walsh addressed Council against the Cabinet decision, made at its meeting on 30 January, to withdraw grant support for groups progressing neighbourhood plans. She stated that, contrary to information contained in the Cabinet report, the end of the grant support will have a significant detrimental effect on communities and could reduce the number of plans progressed. No consultation had been undertaken with neighbourhood plan groups. The other grants referred to in the report involved a complicated application process. To date the government had not confirmed whether government funding to local authorities would cease and therefore such a decision was premature. No analysis of the savings was set out in the report.

The chairman 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 he would call for a named vote on each of these matters at this meeting.

The chairman 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 considered Cabinet's recommendations, made at its meetings on 11 February 2020, on the revenue budget 2020/21, and the capital programme to 2024/25.

The Scrutiny Committee considered the report at its meeting on 4 February 2020. The committee recommended Cabinet allocate £500,000 to fund the Communities Capital and Revenue Grant Scheme and not to half the councillor grants budget from £180,000 to £90,000. The committee did not support Cabinet's minded decision, made at its meeting on 30 January, to maintain car park fees and charges at current levels pending a review later in the year.

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

Councillor Turner, Cabinet member for finance, presented the Cabinet's proposals for the revenue budget 2020/21 and capital programme to 2024/25. On behalf of the council he thanked officers for their part in continuing to control costs and in preparing the draft budget.

Councillor Turner moved and Councillor Cooper seconded a motion to approve Cabinet's recommendations as follows: to

1. set the revenue budget for 2020/21 as set out in appendix A.1 to the interim head of finance's report to Cabinet on 30 January 2020;
2. approve the capital programme for 2020/21 to 2024/25 as set out in appendix D.1 to the report, together with the capital programme changes as set out in appendix D.2 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 2024/25 as set out in appendix F to the report;
5. allocate £500,000 to fund the Communities Capital and Revenue grant scheme; and
6. ask officers to review the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2018/19 to 2022/23 following the 2020 spending review and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government announcements of changes to the council's future funding streams.

In moving the recommendation Councillor Turner drew attention to the funding issues facing the council – rising expenditure with lower central government funding and lower investment returns.

A number of councillors spoke against the budget proposals. Some expressed disappointment that the Cabinet had not engaged with other political groups during the budget process as had been the case in previous years. The objectives of the transformation activity fund were vague with no measurable targets. The savings proposals and increase in fees would impact on rural communities most – for example the increase in the charge for dog litter bin collections and cuts to the planning enforcement team reducing staff resources to address unauthorised/speculative development. A number of councillors opposed cuts to neighbourhood planning grants and expressed the view that the alternative funding could be difficult for groups to access. The one year grant to fund the work programme of the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee was inadequate and failed to address the urgency of the climate emergency. There were no proposals to harness the economic benefits of the River Thames. Others expressed concern at the lack of capital funding for leisure and arts facilities – Didcot Wave and Cornerstone. Concern was also expressed regarding the delay to the review of car park

fees and charges which currently showed a deficit. A number of councillors noted that a failure to increase council tax in previous years had placed pressure on the council's reserves to support the revenue budget and there were no plans to address the gradual decline in these reserves. Others did not support the reduction in the budget for grants which local communities rely on to fund community projects.

However, the majority of councillors supported the budget proposals. The inclusion of a transformation budget will include a review of a number of services and have the aim of achieving greater income generation. The reduction in the grants budget, whilst regrettable, was necessary and should not detract from the financial support provided to many organisations over recent years. The support for the one-year work programme aimed at helping to tackle the climate emergency in South Oxfordshire would help the council work towards achieving its zero target for all its facilities by 2025 and support other initiatives. In light of the uncertainty over New Homes Bonus, and in anticipation of the government's review of local government funding, it was necessary to set a prudent budget recognising the current pressures on funding. The budget did this with immediate cost savings and increased charges for some council services, garden waste and dog bin emptying services, and protected front line services.

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:

<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Abstain</b>
<b>Councillors</b>	<b>Councillors</b>	<b>Councillors</b>
Ken Arlett	Anna Badcock	
Pieter-Paul Barker	David Bartholomew	
Robin Bennett	Lorraine Hillier	
David Bretherton	Mocky Khan	
Sam Casey-Rerhaye	Lynn Lloyd	
Sue Cooper	Axel Macdonald	
Peter Dragonetti	Jane Murphy	
Maggie Filipova-Rivers	Caroline Newton	
Stefan Gawrysiak	Ian Snowdon	
Elizabeth Gillespie	Alan Thompson	
Sarah Gray	Ian White	
Kate Gregory	Celia Wilson	

For	Against	Abstain
Victoria Haval		
Simon Hewerdine		
Kellie Hinton		
Alexandrine Kantor		
George Levy		
Andrea Powell		
Leigh Rawlins		
Jo Robb		
Sue Roberts		
David Rouane		
Anne-Marie Simpson		
David Turner		
<b>24</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>

**RESOLVED: to**

1. set the revenue budget for 2020/21 as set out in appendix A.1 to the interim head of finance’s report to Cabinet on 30 January 2020;
2. approve the capital programme for 2020/21 to 2024/25 as set out in appendix D.1 to the report, together with the capital programme changes as set out in appendix D.2 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 2024/25 as set out in appendix F to the report;
5. allocate £500,000 to fund the Communities Capital and Revenue grant scheme; and
6. ask officers to review the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2018/19 to 2022/23 following the 2020 spending review and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government announcements of changes to the council’s future funding streams.

**61 Oxfordshire Electric Vehicle (EV) Infrastructure Steering Group**

Council noted that Oxfordshire County Council is proposing to develop an Oxfordshire Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy to establish the principles and an action plan to

deliver the charging infrastructure needed to support the transition to low emission vehicles in the county.

To assist with the development of the strategy, the county council had invited South Oxfordshire District Council to appoint a councillor to the Oxfordshire Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Steering Group. At its meeting on 28 January 2020 the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee considered an officer proposal that South Oxfordshire District Council's representative should be a member of the committee. The committee agreed to recommend Council to appoint Councillor Caroline Newton as the council's representative.

**RESOLVED:** to

1. appoint Councillor Caroline Newton as the council's representative on the Oxfordshire Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Steering Group;
2. appoint all members of the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee as substitute members.

## **62 Pay policy statement 2020/21**

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

**RESOLVED:** to approve the pay policy statement for 2020/21 attached to the report of the acting deputy chief executive – transformation and operations to Council on 13 February 2020.

## **63 Report of the leader of the council**

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

## **64 Questions on notice**

1. Question from Councillor Anna Badcock to Councillor Pieter-Paul Barker, Cabinet member for partnership and insight

“Can you detail the timescales for delivering against the climate emergency motion that was carried by the Conservative led Council in April 2019”?

### **Written answer**

The climate emergency declaration in April 2019 stated the intention of adopting an early carbon neutral target. Following the establishment of the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee 18 July 2019, the Committee have recommended targets for carbon neutrality to Cabinet and Council, which were approved at the beginning of October 2019. These targets aim for South Oxfordshire District Council to become a carbon neutral council by 2025 and for South Oxfordshire to become a carbon neutral district by 2030.

Committee members have worked with officers to develop a detailed one-year work programme proposal, to provide a strong foundation for working towards the adopted carbon neutral targets and a longer-term strategy to address the climate emergency. The

programme includes a range of projects, for example seeking to embed sustainability in Council policies and initiate some feasibility studies around energy savings in council buildings and leisure centres, including identifying opportunities to introduce solar energy and heat pumps. As well as, measures to support biodiversity, such as exploring the most appropriate tree planting projects.

The one-year programme was recommended by the Committee at their meeting on 28 January 2020 and that recommendation accepted at Cabinet on 30 January 2020. The proposed budget for implementation of the one-year programme will now go to Council for final approval in amongst their other budget priorities on 13 February 2020.

The projects within the one-year programme will be reviewed again by the Committee and officers pending Council's decision, in order to prioritise each action/project and implement timescales for their delivery.

### **Supplementary question**

In response to a supplementary question seeking further detail of the one year work programme the Cabinet member responded that he was content with the detail provided in the written response but was happy to discuss further outside the meeting.

2. Question from Councillor Ken Arlett to Councillor David Rouane, Cabinet member for housing and environment

“Over the past six months we have had on going complaints from members of the public, with the cleaning of the three toilet blocks in Henley. These complaints have all been serialised in the local Henley Standard.

Can the Cabinet Member please explain why this contract has been let for another nine months to the same contractor, when they are unable to clean the toilets to an acceptable standard”?

### **Written answer**

“We agree that the level of service provided in Henley is currently not acceptable and the service manager is working with the contractor to agree remedial action. It helps if the complaints are directed to the contractor (details on the website and signs on the toilets themselves) as the arrangement is for them to react to cleaning issues and phoning them directly helps to make them aware of the issue and react more quickly.

The councils have entered into a short-term, interim contract with the existing contractor from 1 January to 31 October 2020 and during this time we will review the service delivery options available to us which include procuring a new contract, including this service as part of a larger contract or bringing the service back in house.

We have started work on a project to repair and revamp the toilets in Greys Road. Officers are working up options to decide how best to use the space within the building including improved facilities for disabled users and which may also include a welfare space for the car park inspectors”.

3. Question from Councillor Celia Wilson to Councillor Maggie Filipova-Rivers, Cabinet member for community services

“Can you give assurances that any review of the Didcot Cornerstone Arts Centre will be:



- a) open and transparent;
- b) involve all concerned people including the population and elected representatives of Didcot; and
- c) allow enough time for remedies to the difficulties to be put in place”

**Written answer**

“The Cornerstone Arts Centre based in Didcot is important to us all, but in light of the financial position we find ourselves in, it is sensible and proportionate to review Cornerstone. Currently, we are predicting this year’s subsidy to be in the region of £642,000, which is more than double the original commitment from South Oxfordshire District Council when it was originally built and is simply not sustainable going forward. I am deeply committed and can assure you that the much needed review of the medium to long term future of Cornerstone will be open, transparent and wide-reaching in its engagement. My intention is to have a cross party member working group, supported by officers, that can lead on the review and engagement with users of the centre, residents, businesses, members and officers. Whatever the future is for Cornerstone, we must move to a position where the subsidy is effectively reduced back to £250,000 as identified within the medium term financial plan and ensure that the future of the centre is sustainable in the long term”.

**Supplementary question**

In response to a supplementary question the Cabinet member confirmed that the council would facilitate repairs to Cornerstone and seek new ways to make the centre profitable.

**65 Motions on notice**

Council agreed to defer consideration of the motions to the Council meeting on 20 February 2020.

**66 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 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.

**67 Corporate services contract**

Council considered and agreed Cabinet’s confidential recommendation, made at its meeting on 11 February 2020, on the corporate services contract (see confidential minute).

The meeting closed at 8.50pm

Chairman

Date