

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet



held on Thursday 2 December 2021
at 6.00 pm at 135 Eastern Avenue,
Milton Park, OX14 4SB

Open to the public, including the press

Present in the meeting room:

Councillors: David Rouane (Chair), Robin Bennett, Sue Cooper, Andrea Powell and Anne-Marie Simpson
Officers: Steve Culliford

Remote attendance:

Councillors: Maggie Filipova-Rivers, Pieter-Paul Barker and Leigh Rawlins
Officers: Patrick Arran, Emma Baker, Harry Barrington-Mountford, Pat Connell, Adrian Duffield, Diane Foster, Trevor Gaffney, Liz Hayden, Simon Hewings, Jeremy Lloyd, Suzanne Malcolm, Adrianna Partridge, Cheryl Reeves, Mark Stone, Emma Turner, Shona Ware and David Wilde

53 Minutes

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 4 November 2021 as a correct record and agree that the Chair signs them as such.

54 Declaration of disclosable pecuniary interest

Councillor Robin Bennett declared a personal interest in the item on distributing the SO charitable lottery's central fund as he was a trustee of a charity applying for funds (minute 62 below refers).

55 Urgent business and chair's announcements

None

56 Public participation

Carole Lindsey had submitted a statement to be read out at the meeting regarding the condition of the public conveniences at Thame Market House and the lack of action since the last Cabinet meeting. Her statement was made on behalf of market traders and was read out on her behalf in her absence from the meeting.

Councillor Sue Cooper, the Cabinet member with responsibility for this service, apologised for a lack of action since the last meeting and reported that she would be meeting with Carole Lindsey and an officer in Thame shortly.

57 Recommendations and updates from other committees

Cabinet received a paper summarising the updates and recommendations from other committees since the last Cabinet meeting. The Scrutiny Committee, the Joint Scrutiny Committee and the Joint Audit and Governance Committee had each discussed matters requiring Cabinet's attention. Cabinet welcomed the update and agreed to consider each matter under the relevant agenda item below.

58 Review of gambling policy

Cabinet considered the head of housing and environment's report regarding a review of the gambling policy. The Gambling Act 2005 required the council to have a gambling policy and to review it every three years. The draft policy had been considered by the Licensing Acts Committee and had been subject to consultation. The committee had recommended that Cabinet made a recommendation to Council to adopt the policy.

Cabinet noted that there had been no significant policy changes as a result of the review and public consultation. Mostly the changes updated references to statute. The one policy change was for a 'no casinos' policy, a theoretical change as there were no casinos in the district.

Cabinet supported the recommendations set out in the report. However, Cabinet asked officers to review the wording in the policy on the definition of gambling harm and what constituted a vulnerable person, in light of the council developing its own inclusion, diversity and equalities strategy.

RECOMMENDED to Council to:

- (a) adopt the proposed joint gambling policy;
- (b) authorise the head of housing and environment to make minor editorial changes to the joint gambling policy; and
- (c) authorise the head of housing and environment to publish the joint gambling policy in accordance with the Gambling Act 2005 (Licensing Authority Policy Statement) (England and Wales) Regulations 2006.

59 Treasury management mid-year monitoring report 2021/22

Cabinet considered the head of finance's report, which monitored the council's treasury management performance in the first six months of 2021/22. The report showed that the income from treasury activities was under the budget forecast; this was due to the lower than expected interest rates during that period. However, the council's performance had exceeded all benchmarks and there had been no need to borrow funds during the first six months of the financial year, nor was there any expectation of a need to borrow during the remainder of the year. The treasury activities had also been carried out within the prudential indicators and counterparty limits set out in the 2021/22 treasury management strategy.

The officer reported a correction that in paragraph 25 of the report; the interest rates quoted should be amended from 10 per cent and 25 per cent to read 0.1 per cent and 0.25 per cent respectively.

The Joint Audit and Governance Committee had considered the report on 30 November 2021 and was content that the treasury management activities had been carried out in accordance with the treasury management strategy and policy. Cabinet concurred.

RECOMMENDED to Council to:

- (a) note the treasury management mid-year monitoring report 2021/22; and
- (b) note that Cabinet is satisfied that the treasury activities are carried out in accordance with the treasury management strategy and policy.

60 Council tax base 2022/23

Cabinet considered the head of finance's report on the need to set the council tax for 2022/23. This was required to calculate the amount of taxable resources to allow Council to set its council tax in February 2022. Oxfordshire County Council, Thames Valley Police and all parish councils within the district would also be informed of the tax base relevant to them.

RECOMMENDED to Council to:

- (a) approve the report of the head of finance to Cabinet on 2 December 2021 for the calculation of the council's tax base and the calculation of the tax base for each parish area for 2022/2023;
- (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 2022/23 be 60,343.7; and
- (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 2022/23 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 2 December 2021.

61 War pensions and war widow(er)'s pension disregard top up in housing benefit

Cabinet considered the head of finance's report, seeking approval for the council to continue to disregard war pensions and war widow(er)'s pensions in calculating housing benefit entitlement.

Cabinet noted that it was being asked to re-affirm the council's previous policy without change. Cabinet endorsed the recommendations.

RECOMMENDED to Council to re-affirm its decision to approve the disregard of War Pensions and War Widow(er)'s pensions:

- (i) in full as income above the statutory £10.00 per week disregard in the calculation of Housing Benefit entitlement; and
- (ii) in full as income in relation to the means tested assessment of Council Tax Reduction Scheme discount.

62 Distributing the SO Charitable Lottery's Central Fund

Councillor Robin Bennett declared a personal interest in this item as he was a trustee of a charity applying for funds. He left the meeting during the consideration of this item.

Cabinet considered the head of corporate services' report. This set out options for the distribution of the council's SO charitable lottery's central fund to voluntary and community sector organisations:

- A. Giving all of the registered good causes a share of the central fund based on the number of tickets they have sold.
- B. Giving good causes who have sold 20 or more tickets per week a share of the central fund.

Cabinet preferred option B as this would be more proportionate than option A.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) distribute the income the council receives in its central fund from the SO Charitable Lottery Scheme to the voluntary and community sector organisations registered as good causes in the lottery; and
- (b) do this proportionate to the number of tickets sold by each organisation and to organisations selling 20 tickets a week (as a minimum threshold).

63 Joint statement of community involvement

Cabinet considered the head of policy and programmes' report. This proposed the adoption of a joint statement of community involvement as part of work on a joint local plan with Vale of White Horse District Council. The statement set out how the council would engage when preparing planning policy documents, including neighbourhood planning, and the support the council offered to neighbourhood planning groups. The statement also set out how the council would consult on planning applications, and included information on the pre-application advice, planning appeals and planning enforcement.

The statement had been through a public consultation, the feedback from which was largely positive. Some changes had been made, as set out in appendix 1 to the report.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee had given its support to the statement, including the consultation arrangements. Some strengthening of the language used, and some additional signposting were suggestions made by the committee; these suggestions would be taken on board by officers before publication.

Cabinet also supported the joint statement, especially the move to include digital engagement.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) adopt the statement of community involvement, subject to the amendments set out in the head of policy and programme's report and appendix 1 to Cabinet on 2 December 2021; and
- (b) authorise the head of policy and programmes, in consultation with the Cabinet member for planning, to make the changes set out in the report and appendix 1 and any other minor changes, typographical corrections or non-material amendments to the statement of community involvement prior to publication.

64 Planning enforcement statement

Cabinet considered the head of planning's report, which sought approval of an updated planning enforcement statement.

During the past year, officers had conducted a review of the planning enforcement service and had revised the planning enforcement statement, which had been subject to councillor consultation. The statement included sustainable improvements to service provision, resulting in a more efficient use of resources. All cases referred to the council would undergo a triage assessment to decide what action was necessary.

Cabinet noted that this council was one of the top performers in planning enforcement but there was always room for improvement. However, the Cabinet member considered that the public should be reminded of the limits placed on the council. Planning enforcement was not a policing function to punish individuals, the aim was to find remedies to unacceptable planning harm. The planning enforcement statement set this out clearly, stating what the council could and could not do.

Information on cases could be shared with councillors but there was a need to protect individuals' right to privacy, so personal information could not be shared. Training would be provided for councillors.

All parish councils would be provided with a copy of the statement. The council's website would also be improved to make it clear what the service could provide, where to find information, and how to contact the council about a potential enforcement case.

Cabinet welcomed the statement as a proper and considered approach to planning enforcement. Councillors were proud of the council's performance to date; the review and the statement would bring further improvements. The triaging system would help prioritise caseload. This would also help the council reduce the backlog of cases. Officers were thanked for their work in reviewing the service and preparing a revised statement.

Cabinet noted that there would be an ongoing monitoring of effectiveness of the statement, internal processes, and published information, with a review after 12 months. Elements would also be monitored through the corporate plan's performance monitoring reports, considered by the Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. Councillors could feed in any suggestions for further improvements.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) note the feedback from Scrutiny Committee;
- (b) approve the new enforcement statement and approach to managing planning enforcement; and
- (c) authorise the head of planning, in consultation with the South Oxfordshire District Council Cabinet member for planning, the Vale of White Horse District Council Cabinet member for community engagement, and the deputy chief executive – transformation and operations, to make any minor changes, formatting, typographical corrections or non-material amendments to the joint planning enforcement statement.

65 Customer transformation strategy

Cabinet considered the head of corporate services' report, which proposed a customer transformation strategy. This complimented the council's technology strategy but went further, to introduce a technology and digital strategy to support high quality and efficient service delivery.

The intention was to make it easier for the customer to interact with the council. To address this the strategy set out six core principles:

- Re-imagined front doors – service engagement points that were easy to use, designed around residents and businesses and their needs, not the council's organisational structure
- "Once and done" or "right first time" – the right outcome achieved without repeat referrals and the need for the customer to chase
- Safeguarding – meet statutory obligations whilst never compromising the safety of the customer
- Efficient and environmentally positive – deliver services in the most cost-effective way for the councils, whilst helping to tackle the climate emergency
- Transparency – ensure that customers understood how the council delivers services
- Accountability – take ownership of service fulfilment and ensure complaints and follow-up on commitments were dealt with quickly and properly

Cabinet recognised that adopting these principles and applying them to the way services were delivered would require significant change but would result in a more efficient and customer-centred council. Therefore, Cabinet approved the customer transformation strategy and its roadmap to ensure these principles were met.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) approve the customer transformation strategy and proposed roadmap for delivery; and
- (b) appoint the Cabinet member for corporate services as the lead Cabinet member, and the deputy chief executive – transformation and operations as the executive sponsor, and to delegate further decisions on the initiation of the programme to the deputy chief executive – transformation and operations in discussion with the Cabinet member for corporate services.

66 Housing and homelessness IT solution

Cabinet considered the head of corporate services' report on the need to procure a new IT solution for the housing and homelessness service. The intention was to upgrade current systems to run on a cloud-based platform. A procurement exercise would ensue; the estimated costs were detailed in an exempt appendix, which Cabinet noted.

Cabinet supported the proposal noting that it aligned with the recently adopted technology strategy and should bring efficiencies. Cabinet noted that the management of mobile home rent would become part of the new system.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) approve the budget based on proposed costs required for the housing and homelessness IT solution project (the breakdown of costs is shown in Annex A to the head of corporate services' report to Cabinet on 2 December 2021);
- (b) agree the procurement route by which to procure an IT solution for the housing and homelessness service using the Government GCloud 12 Framework Agreement;
- (c) authorise the head of corporate services, in consultation with the relevant Cabinet member, to award the contract and enter into the contract and any ancillary documents; and
- (d) note the transfer of the mobile homes site rents into the housing IT system for future management of those customer accounts.

The meeting closed at 7.30 pm