

Minutes OF A MEETING OF THE



Listening Learning Leading

Cabinet

Held on Thursday 9 March 2023 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 (Vice-Chair), Maggie Filipova-Rivers, Sue Cooper, Kate Gregory, Andrea Powell and Anne-Marie Simpson
Officers: Steve Culliford (Democratic Services Team Leader), Paul Fielding (Head of Housing and Environment), Simon Hewings (Head of Finance), and Mark Stone (Chief Executive)

Remote attendance:

Officers: Harry Barrington-Mountford (Transformation Programme Lead), Ben Coleman (Programmes and Assurance Manager), Jeremy Lloyd (Broadcasting Officer), Suzanne Malcolm (Deputy Chief Executive - Place), Mark Minion (Head of Corporate Services), Tim Oruye (Head of Policy and Programmes) and Adrianna Partridge (Deputy Chief Executive – Transformation and Operations)

75 Minutes

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 2 February 2023 as a correct record and agree that the Chair signs them as such.

76 Declaration of interests

Councillor Sue Cooper declared a personal interest in the agenda item on refugee accommodation as she hosted a family.

77 Urgent business and chair's announcements

None

78 Public participation

None

79 Recommendations and updates from other committees

Cabinet noted an update from the Scrutiny Committee. The committee had not made any recommendations to Cabinet but suggested possible improvements to the planning enforcement statement for officers to consider.

80 Refugee accommodation

Cabinet considered the report of the deputy chief executive – transformation and operations on work the council was progressing under the Afghan and Ukraine refugee accommodation workstreams.

In December 2022, the government had announced a scheme to part fund accommodation that was to provide sustainable housing for refugees under the Afghan and Ukraine schemes. The council had been offered a £3,756,708 grant to deliver 23 homes that met the eligibility criteria outlined in the Local Authority Housing Fund prospectus.

The Cabinet member responsible for housing reported that she was proud of the council's involvement in supporting refugees from Afghanistan and Ukraine in their time of need. The government grant should be taken up to provide these homes. The number of homes was not enough to provide for the many refugees staying in South Oxfordshire, but it was a start and was welcomed. The Cabinet member proposed accepting the grant and signing a memorandum of understanding with the government department. This would involve setting up a team to deliver these homes, through purchasing individual houses, and managing them thereafter.

In answer to a question from members, the head of finance reported that Cabinet was being asked to agree to continue to participate in the scheme by signing the memorandum of understanding. He had carried out an initial assessment of the financial risks, a broad-brush high-level modelling exercise, and had concluded that the scheme should be pursued, subject to more detailed financial checks. Officers would need to assess and be confident in the costs on a house-by-house basis. It was anticipated that the council could proceed to purchase these properties without the need to set up a Housing Revenue Account. Signing the memorandum of understanding was a non-binding commitment; the council did not have to proceed if the project was not financially viable. Although the council had allocated funds towards this project in its budget, there was no financial commitment to proceed at this stage until further work had been completed and the council satisfied with the costs.

Cabinet was pleased with the work undertaken to date on welcoming and supporting refugees in South Oxfordshire. Now the council needed to work on providing sustainable, settled accommodation to support these refugee families, either by purchasing properties or by seeking accommodation through registered housing providers. Cabinet supported the recommendations to accept the grant and sign the memorandum of understanding but noted that further detailed work would be carried out to assess the financial risks. The project also supported the council's housing delivery strategy. Members noted the timeline for this work.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) note the update regarding the refugee accommodation workstreams being reviewed to find sustainable housing for those who are in the UK under the Government Afghan and Ukraine schemes; and

- (b) accept the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) grant of £3,756,708 (total allocation) to deliver 23 homes that meet the eligibility criteria outlined within the Local Authority Housing Fund prospectus, and to authorise the Deputy Chief Executive – Transformation and Operations to sign the Memorandum of Understanding with DLUHC, which sets out the understanding between both parties for the use of funding.

81 Corporate Plan Performance Report, quarter 3 2022/23

Cabinet considered the Corporate Plan Performance Report for quarter 3, 2022/23. This set out progress against the Corporate Plan objectives during the period 1 October to 31 December 2022.

Cabinet was proud of the council's quarterly performance reporting. This was much improved on previous years. The reports were now easy to read and well presented. Officers were thanked for their work in compiling them.

The report highlighted many successful projects, including those where further work needed to be carried out. Cabinet members highlighted some examples, such as the work on Didcot Garden Town that was bearing fruit, the number of affordable homes that had been delivered, and the homelessness prevention work.

In answer to a question from members, officers confirmed that the report was made available to parish councils and published on the council's website.

RESOLVED: to note the Corporate Plan Performance Report Quarter 3, 2022/23.

82 Climate Action Plan Performance Report, quarter 3 2022/23

Cabinet considered the Climate Action Plan Performance Report for quarter 3, 2022/23. This set out progress against the Climate Action Plan objectives during the period 1 October to 31 December 2022.

Cabinet thanked officers for producing the report. The Cabinet member for climate change and nature recovery highlighted the array of schemes to tackle the climate and ecological emergencies, such as wildflower planting, schemes to improve air quality, and the decarbonisation project at the Cornerstone Arts Centre in Didcot.

RESOLVED: to note the Climate Action Plan Performance Report Quarter 3, 2022/23.

83 Exclusion of the Public

RESOLVED: to exclude members of the press and public from the meeting for the following items 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 paragraphs 3 and 5 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.

84 Recommendations and updates from other committees

Cabinet noted the updates from the Joint Scrutiny Committee meeting on 27 February 2023, relating to the exempt items on the Cabinet agenda.

85 Delivery of waste services

Cabinet agreed to a method of provision for the council's waste services.

86 Waste vehicle procurement

Cabinet authorised the procurement of waste vehicles.