

# Minutes OF A MEETING OF THE



Listening Learning Leading

## Cabinet

Held on Monday 3 July 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), Pieter-Paul Barker, Robin Bennett, Sue Cooper, Anne-Marie Simpson and Freddie van Mierlo

Officers: Steve Culliford (Democratic Services Team Leader), and Simon Hewings (Head of Finance)

### Remote attendance:

Cabinet members: Councillor Maggie Filipova-Rivers (Vice-Chair)

Officers: Patrick Arran (Head of Legal and Democratic and the Monitoring Officer), Andrew Busby (Head of Development and Corporate Landlord), Andrew Down (Deputy Chief Executive – Partnerships), Paul Fielding (Head of Housing and Environment), Jeremy Lloyd (Broadcasting Officer), Mark Minion (Head of Corporate Services), Tim Oruye (Head of Policy and Programmes), Adrianna Partridge (Deputy Chief Executive – Transformation and Operations), and Eliot Ward (Interim Masterplanning Lead)

Guests: Councillors Ken Arlett and Mocky Khan

## 10 Apologies for absence

Councillor Andrea Powell had sent her apologies for absence.

## 11 Declaration of interests

None

## 12 Urgent business and chair's announcements

The chair announced that an additional report had been circulated and published regarding the Local Authority Housing Fund 2. This would be considered alongside item 6 on the agenda.

## 13 Public participation

Cabinet received an address from one member of the public.

- (1) John Salmons made a statement regarding the proposed consideration of the office accommodation agenda item in exempt session. He believed that this item should be considered in public session. He asked the chair whether the council had a duty to

consult the public on the principle of its proposed developments before they reached the formal planning process. He believed that if the council found the public were opposed in principle to a development, it should back down accordingly.

In response the chair reported that the Cabinet report was an update on the design and programme of the proposed office accommodation, not on the principle, as the principle had been discussed at several public meetings previously.

The Monitoring Officer, Patrick Arran, reported that it was not an unlawful decision that was being considered at this Cabinet meeting. The council could lawfully exclude the public from a meeting if matters under discussion fell within the exempt criteria in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act. Prior to publication of the agenda, he had authorised that the office accommodation report could be considered in exempt session under paragraph 3 of the criteria, as it contained commercially sensitive information. He had also weighed up the public interest in being made aware of the content of the paper against the prejudice of the public interest if the council's commercial interests were brought into the public domain. He was clear that this was not unlawful but accepted that it was unusual for a report to be considered in exempt session; this was the exception rather than the rule. Whenever possible the council would publish its reports, even if this required an exempt appendix, as was evidenced by another report on the Cabinet agenda. However, his advice was that the office accommodation report should be considered in exempt session at this time. Details of the project would be published at the appropriate time. It was a matter for Cabinet to agree to consider the report in exempt or public session under agenda item 7.

## **14 Update on the council's Information Technology infrastructure**

Cabinet considered the head of corporate services' report, which summarised the discussions relating to the council's information technology arrangements. The report sought support to progress with the implementation of the council's previously agreed approach to create a single tenancy for its Microsoft 365 infrastructure with Vale of White Horse District Council. This was part of the councils' joint Technology Strategy, originally agreed in 2018 and re-affirmed in 2021.

Cabinet noted the options:

1. to agree to move forward with the segregation of the council's Microsoft 365 tenancy and create a stand-alone environment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district councils.
2. wait to the end of the Capita contract in 2025.

Cabinet considered that option 1 would allow the council to progress this work quickly and that this should not wait until the contract end. It also aligned with the council's Technology Strategy and transformation programme.

**RESOLVED:** to

- (a) note the update set out in the head of corporate services' report to Cabinet on 3 July 2023;

- (b) reaffirm the council's intention to pursue a separate Microsoft 365 tenancy as part of the council's overall transformation programme and planned exit from the outsourced IT arrangements; and
- (c) authorise the deputy chief executive - transformation and operations, in consultation with the Cabinet member for corporate services, to take all necessary steps to implement the council's withdrawal from the shared Microsoft 365 tenancy.

**RECOMMENDED** to Council:

- (d) that a supplementary estimate of £326,000 be added to the 2023/24 revenue budget, funded as set out in the head of corporate services' report to Cabinet on 3 July 2023.

## **15 Delivery and management arrangements for council-provided Local Authority Housing Fund housing**

### **(1) Local Authority Housing Fund**

Cabinet considered the report of the deputy chief executive – transformation and operations on work being undertaken to provide homes under government's Local Authority Housing Fund scheme.

The report set out the proposed framework to deliver a target of 23 homes that met the eligibility criteria outlined within the Local Authority Housing Fund prospectus. This was in accordance with the signed Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, which set out the basis for the use of the funding. The report sought approval to progress to the delivery phase.

The report outlined the work undertaken to date, including the Community Hub support. The report also set out the projected capital and revenue implications and potential risks and benefits of proceeding with the scheme. Given the capital funding and potential borrowing requirement, Cabinet would need to make a recommendation to full Council so that financial allocations could be made to allow the scheme to proceed.

The Cabinet member reported that the government scheme offered grants to councils to provide housing for Afghans and Ukrainians in the district that were at risk of homelessness. The council would receive grant funding of approximately 40 per cent of the cost of purchasing properties but would have to fund the remainder. Thereafter the homes would belong to the council. The council would need to temporarily outsource repairs and maintenance of these homes before a resource was available in-house.

Cabinet supported progressing with the Local Authority Housing Fund scheme as a matter of urgency to support those most in need. If the council did not take part in this scheme and families became homeless the council would still have a duty to house them. This scheme also supported the council's housing strategy and would provide secure accommodation at lower revenue costs than alternative housing provision.

Cabinet recognised that this was a significant undertaking for the council and thanked officers for their work in progressing the schemes in such a short timescale. Cabinet also thanked the local residents that had hosted refugee families.

**RESOLVED:** to

- (a) note the approach proposed for the delivery and management of the properties under the Local Authority Housing Fund scheme, noting the risks, and approve officers to proceed;
- (b) note the proposed phase one staffing structure for the delivery and management of these properties alongside those purchased or managed under other arrangements;
- (c) approve a virement from Contingency of up to £100,000 to cover potential unbudgeted revenue expenditure;
- (d) authorise the head of development and corporate landlord, in consultation with the heads of finance, legal and democratic, and housing and environment, to approve the freehold or leasehold acquisition of property under the Local Authority Housing Fund scheme following appropriate due diligence; and
- (e) note the financial and other risks presented by the decisions above, as set out in the report of the deputy chief executive – transformation and operations to Cabinet on 3 July 2023.

**RECOMMENDED** to Council:

- (f) to proceed the allocation of a capital budget envelope of £4.6 million, being the council's share of the purchase costs of properties bought under the Local Authority Housing Fund scheme.

**(2) Local Authority Housing Fund 2**

Cabinet then considered the supplementary report of the deputy chief executive - transformation and operations. This sought an additional decision to accept government grant funding made available under Local Authority Housing Fund 2, a second phase of the initial scheme. The report had been published after the Cabinet agenda as the details had only emerged from government in the preceding days. Cabinet noted that the second phase of this scheme would further support the provision of housing for the council's refugee accommodation programme.

Unlike the first phase, the Local Authority Housing Fund 2 also allowed the council to utilise the accommodation for general homelessness use and would deliver a further four homes. This would bring in government funding of £768,000 and require a recommendation to Council to add £1.92 million to the capital programme.

For the same reasons as the first phase above, Cabinet supported the proposal to accept the government funding and authorise officers to sign a Memorandum of Understanding. Doing so would allow the council to provide additional homes to support those most in need.

**RESOLVED:** to

- (a) accept the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' grant of £768,000 (indicative Local Authority Housing Fund 2 allocation) to deliver four homes that meet the eligibility criteria outlined within the Local Authority Housing Fund 2 prospectus, and to authorise the deputy chief executive – transformation and operations to sign the Memorandum of Understanding with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, which sets out the understanding between both parties for the use of funding.

**RECOMMENDED** to Council to:

- (b) add £1.92 million to the approved capital programme, part funded by Local Authority Housing Fund 2 funding of £768,000 to purchase four homes under this scheme.

## **16 Exclusion of the Public**

Cabinet considered whether to move into exempt session to consider the remaining agenda items. In the case of the office accommodation item, Cabinet concluded that the report was an update on the design and programme of the office accommodation and should be considered in exempt session as it contained commercially sensitive information.

**RESOLVED:** to exclude members of the press and public from the meeting for the following item of business under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended on the grounds that:

- (i) it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 and 5, Schedule 12A of the Act, and
- (ii) the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

## **17 Delivery and management arrangements for council-provided Local Authority Housing Fund housing**

Cabinet noted the financial arrangements for the Local Authority Housing Fund scheme.

## **18 New office accommodation – design and programme update**

Cabinet noted a report updating on progress with the detailed design and delivery programme for the council's new office accommodation building. Cabinet reaffirmed its previous decision to progress to the planning and procurement phases of the programme.