

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Cabinet



Listening Learning Leading

HELD ON THURSDAY 3 DECEMBER 2015 AT 6.00 PM

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

Present:

John Cotton (Chairman), Anna Badcock, Elizabeth Gillespie, Tony Harbour, Lynn Lloyd, Jane Murphy and Robert Simister

Officers:

John Backley, Steve Bishop, Steve Culliford, Robert Draper, William Jacobs, and Margaret Reed

Also present:

David Turner and Ian White

34 Declaration of disclosable pecuniary interest

None

35 Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2015 as a correct record and agree that the Chairman signs them as such.

36 Public participation

Councillor David Turner had asked to address cabinet on the council tax reduction scheme grant. This is recorded under minute 39 below.

Nick Wright, of Mind the Green Gap, addressed Cabinet on the need to protect the green gap between East Hagbourne and Didcot. He made a presentation on the need for a vision for southern Didcot to plan for any future development and infrastructure. He believed that there was a need to do this urgently to address the policy vacuum which had given rise to developers' speculative planning applications. There was a need to plan for the future to create a mixed development; a place for people to live and enjoy. He pointed to the government's pilot programme offering additional funding for innovative schemes for neighbourhood planning, local planning service redesign, and capacity building.

The leader, Councillor John Cotton, thanked Mr Wright for his presentation. Although Cabinet would not be discussing this at the present meeting, he suggested watching out for a local news announcement on Monday 7 December.

37 Car park fees and charges

Cabinet considered the report of the head of HR, IT and technical services. The report reviewed car parking fees and charges and invited Cabinet to consider whether any changes should be made in 2016/17.

Cabinet considered the options: to increase the fees and charges or keep them at the current level. Cabinet also considered whether the council should offer incentives to drivers of zero emission vehicles by reducing parking charges and providing electric charging points.

The Cabinet member with responsibility for car parks believed that as the council's car park fees and charges had not increased since 2007, it was now appropriate to increase them by a modest amount of 10 or 20 pence, as set out in appendix 3 to the report. The charges would remain competitive with neighbouring councils. He also recommended that the council should introduce electric charging points, one each in Wallingford and Henley, and that the council should offer free parking at the charging point for zero emission vehicles or chargeable hybrid vehicles. Cabinet agreed with this view.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) increase the car park fees from 1 April 2016 by a modest 10 or 20 pence, as shown in appendix 3 to the head of HR, IT and technical services' report to Cabinet on 3 December 2015; and
- (b) make available two spaces in car parks to charge electric vehicles, one in Wallingford and one in Henley, and that there is no charge for vehicles whilst they are charging.

38 Gambling policy

Cabinet considered the report of the head of legal and democratic services regarding a review of the council's gambling policy. The council was required to review the policy every three years. There had also been a legislative change requiring:

- local area profiles - councils must publish information on their areas with regard to geography, population information and economic data. This would allow operators of gambling businesses to complete risk assessments of their operations
- operator risk assessments - all operators of gambling businesses must complete a risk assessment of their activities and operations on the local area within which they were based

The Licensing Acts Committee had considered the draft policy and was content with it. The committee recommended the draft policy to Cabinet. Cabinet was invited to consider the policy and recommend its adoption to Council.

Cabinet noted that there had only been one response to the public consultation, which requested minor changes but also provided some additional clarification

without impacting upon the council's policy direction and aims. Cabinet believed that the low level of consultation responses demonstrated that the policy could be recommended for adoption subject to the identified responses and minor wording changes set out in the report, which had been incorporated into the policy.

Cabinet supported the draft policy.

RECOMMENDED: to Council to:

- (a) adopt the proposed Joint Gambling Policy;
- (b) authorise the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to make minor editorial changes to the Joint Gambling Policy in consultation with the Licensing Acts Committee chairman; and
- (c) authorise the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to publish the Joint Gambling Policy in accordance with the Gambling Act 2005 (Licensing Authority Policy Statement)(England and Wales) Regulations 2006.

39 Council tax reduction scheme grant

Cabinet considered the head of finance's report regarding the council tax reduction scheme grant to town and parish councils. The report proposed ceasing the grant in its current form and asking officers to bring forward options to allocate funds through a new grants scheme in 2016.

Councillor David Turner addressed the meeting, raising concerns that the recommendations would leave town and parish councils in a position where they had to set their precepts in December or January without knowing what grant they might receive from the district council. He asked Cabinet to reject the recommendations and to prepare a more detailed plan in 2016. However, if Cabinet was minded to approve the recommendations he asked that it also agreed to revisit its decision *if* the government introduced a cap on increases in town and parish council precepts for the 2016/17 financial year.

The Cabinet member for finance explained that the council tax reduction scheme took the form of a discount on the council tax bill and had the effect of reducing the council's council tax base. If a council's budget requirement remained the same, the amount of council tax charged would increase, or if council tax was not increased the income generated would reduce. This applied to county councils, district councils, and town and parish councils. To mitigate the impact of the reduced council tax base, each year the Government distributed, a non-ring-fenced grant via revenue support grant and the business rates retention scheme. The amount paid to district councils included an amount attributable to town or parish councils. For 2013/14, this amount had been specified by the government but since 2014/15, this funding was no longer been identifiable within revenue support grant.

In reviewing the scheme, Cabinet considered the following options:

1. to continue to distribute the grant applying the methodology used in previous financial years based upon town and parish councils' relative need following the reduction in their respective tax bases
2. to not distribute any grant at all
3. to move from option 1 to option 2 over a fixed time period

4. to cease the current scheme and introduce a new scheme in 2016

The Cabinet member considered that the current scheme was not operating correctly as not all town and parish councils used the grant to reduce their precepts. Cabinet agreed and thereby rejected option 1. Option 2 and 3 were rejected as these would penalise those local councils that had used the grant for its correct purpose: to reduce the council tax base. Cabinet considered that a better grants scheme was needed (option 4) and asked the officers to bring back options to Cabinet in 2016. It was hoped that parish councils would find themselves in a stronger position from these changes.

RECOMMENDED: to Council to

- (a) bring forward a new scheme of distributing the grant for consideration during 2016;
- (b) cease with immediate effect the current methodology for distributing the council tax reduction scheme; and
- (c) make £152,000 available for the new grant scheme when Council sets its revenue budget for 2016/17.

40 Council tax base

Cabinet considered the head of finance's report on the council tax base for 2016/17. Before the council tax could be set by the council, a calculation had to be made of the council tax base, which was an estimate of the taxable resources for the district as a whole and for each parish area. Cabinet was invited to consider the report and recommend the council tax base to Council. Cabinet agreed to recommend these to Council for adoption.

RECOMMENDED: to Council

- (a) that the report of the head of finance for the calculation of the council's tax base and the calculation of the tax base for each parish area for 2016/17 be approved;
- (b) 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 2016/17 be 54,965.0; and
- (c) 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 2016/17 for each parish be the amount shown against the name of that parish in Appendix 1 of the report of the head of finance to Cabinet on 3 December 2015.

The meeting closed at 6.25 pm

Chairman

Date