

# Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday 15 July 2020

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## Committee members present:

Councillor Brown (Chair)	Councillor Turner (Deputy Leader)
Councillor Hayes (Deputy Leader)	Councillor Chapman
Councillor Clarkson	Councillor Hollingsworth
Councillor Rowley	Councillor Linda Smith
Councillor Upton	

## Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Gordon Mitchell, Chief Executive  
Tom Bridgman, Executive Director (Development)  
Caroline Green, Assistant Chief Executive  
Anita Bradley, Monitoring Officer  
Carolyn Ploszynski, Planning Policy and Place Manager  
Andrew Humpherson, Regeneration Manager  
Mish Tullar, Corporate Policy, Partnership and Communications Manager  
Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Officer  
Bill Lewis, Financial Accounting Manager  
John Mitchell, Committee and Member Services Officer

## Also present:

Councillor Andrew Gant  
Councillor James Fry

## Apologies:

Councillor Tidball sent apologies.

## 23. Declarations of Interest

None.

## 24. Addresses and Questions by Members of the Public

None.

## **25. Councillor Addresses on any item for decision on the Board's agenda**

None.

## **26. Councillor Addresses on Neighbourhood Issues**

None.

## **27. Items raised by Board Members**

None.

## **28. Scrutiny Committee Reports**

Councillor Gant, Chair of Scrutiny Committee, said the Committee had met on 06 July to consider items 8 and 9 of the agenda (Local Growth Funded Workspace Projects and Local Development Scheme respectively) The discussion in relation to item 8 had resulted in one recommendation which had been partially accepted as described in the report before Cabinet. The discussion on item 9 had not resulted in any recommendations.

Councillor Fry, Chair of the Finance & Performance Panel, said it had met on 07 July to consider item 11 of the agenda (Integrated Performance Report for Q4). The Panel noted that there was a positive variance in relation to service charges and had recommended that the opportunity should be taken to review those charges to HRA council housing tenants to ensure that the charges reflect actual costs.

The Panel had also considered a draft report on monitoring social value which had resulted in two recommendations. One that the Council should benchmark its spending with SMEs against that of similar authorities. The second that the Council should underwrite an event on valuing social value in procurement to involve neighbouring authorities support services and their providers to learn from one another and improve overall standards.

In relation to the recommendation about service charges, Cllr Ed Turner, Cabinet member for Finance & Asset Management, said that the Council was broadly supportive and gave a detailed response, a copy of which is attached to these minutes.

Councillor Turner, said that Cabinet was very supportive of the recommendation in relation to social value and SMEs and, indeed, had already undertaken some of the recommended activity informally and would like to progress this further. The Council was also supportive of the recommendation for an event, whether virtual or otherwise.

## **29. Local Growth Funded Workspace Projects**

The Executive Director (Development) had submitted a report to seek approval to enter into a £1.93m Funding Agreement with Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership for Local Growth Funding to support the refurbishment of 1-3 George Street and redevelopment of Standingford House on Cave Street to provide affordable and innovative workspace to facilitate the inclusive economy.

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council, introduced the report which proposed a timely initiative to support local businesses, particularly small local businesses. The

project would provide a welcome addition to the mix of business and office space in the city centre, the need for which had been emphasised during the recent development of the Local Plan. It would also provide an opportunity for necessary improvements to the Council properties listed the report which would, among other things, contribute to the Council's carbon reduction targets.

Andrew Humpherson, Regeneration Manager, emphasised that the proposed work was necessary to get the properties concerned into a state fit to be let and so contribute to income for the Council. The immediate focus was on the building shells and getting them up to standard. In relation to their future use, internal designs would be heavily influenced by close co-operation with operators, a dialogue which was already underway. He confirmed that early conversations with the planning department were underway in relation to 1-3 George Street, those with Cave Street would have to wait until later in the process.

It was noted that the funding for this project was required to have been committed by the end of July and not the end of June as described in the report.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Delegate** authority to the Executive Director Development, in consultation with the Council's Section 151 Officer and the Head of Law and Governance to agree and enter into grant funding arrangements and contractual terms with OxLEP for £1.93m in Local Growth Funds for the delivery of city-centre based workspaces at 1-3 George Street and Standingford House, Cave Street.

### **30. Local Development Scheme (LDS) 2020-2023**

Councillor Hayes joined the meeting during this item.

The Head of Planning Services had submitted a report to present the updated programme for the preparation of documents that will form the Council's statutory Development Plan for approval.

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning & Housing Delivery, introduced the report which fulfilled a statutory requirement, setting out priorities for consultation on planning policy documents over the following three years. Among other things the report described initial steps towards development of the next Local Plan within the overall context of the 2050 plan for Oxfordshire and the development of the Technical Advice Notes which will flesh out elements of the new Local Plan.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the Oxford Local Development Scheme 2020-25

### **31. Oxfordshire Growth Board Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding**

The Assistant Chief Executive had submitted a report to propose revised Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding for the Oxfordshire Growth Board, which required approval by each of the Oxfordshire Council Cabinets / Executives. These were presented for consideration following a recent public review of the Growth Board's role and functions, which had helped to inform the revisions made.

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council, introduced the report which was being taken to all of the Oxfordshire's District Councils and the County Council, proposing

relatively minor changes to the Terms of Reference (TOR) and Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the Oxfordshire Growth Board. There had been discussion over the last year about more fundamental issues in relation to the Growth Board, such as how to ensure that the shared interest in dealing with the challenge of climate change was properly addressed.

Caroline Green, Assistant Chief Executive reiterated that this report represented just the first phase of a review of the Growth Board. The revised TOR now included a paragraph on the purpose of the Growth Board which fed into recognition of the need for there to be an improvement of communication with Members, stakeholders and the public.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding at Appendices 1 and 2 respectively; and
2. **Delegate** authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader and the Growth Board, to make minor amendments to these documents as required to support the operational efficiency of the Growth Board's work.

### **32. Integrated Performance Report for Quarter 4 2019/20**

The Head of Financial Services and Head of Business Improvement had submitted a report to update Members on Finance, Risk and Performance as at the end of the 2019/20 financial year.

Councillor Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance & Asset Management, introduced the report most of which covered a period before the effects of Covid-19 had been felt. Nevertheless the effects had, inevitably, been felt towards the end of the financial year, notably in relation to the end of year spends for both capital and revenue. The money which it had been possible to save by the end of the financial year was being put towards the Council's response to Covid-19. Carry forward requests into the present financial year were, necessarily, relatively few. The adverse variance on the general fund was largely contributed to by the reduced expectation in relation to the Oxford Direct Services dividend. A favourable variance in relation to commercial property income was welcome but unlikely to be sustained in the foreseeable future. In relation to the capital programme, a considerable amount of work had been done during the year to reschedule projects in relation to which there had been over optimism about their progress. Covid-19 had had a detrimental effect on the programme later in the year. Cllr Turner was in regular discussion with officers about the programme given the importance of its precision in a straitened financial environment.

Bill Lewis, Financial Accounting Manager, emphasised that while the report showed an overall positive variance, this was unlikely to be repeated in the near future as the Council managed a challenging financial environment.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the financial outturn and performance of the Council for the year 2019/20 and also the position on risks outstanding as at 31st March 2020;
2. **Agree** the carry forward requests in respect of the General Fund of £77,182 as shown in paragraph 7 and on Appendix D;

3. **Agree** the transfer to the Capital Financing and NNDR Retention reserve of £2.693 million detailed in paragraph 2 a;
4. **Agree** the carry forward requests in respect of the HRA of £722,000 as shown in paragraph 18; and
5. **Agree** the transfer to the HRA Contributions to HRA Projects Reserve of £4.809 million detailed in paragraph 2 (c).

### **33. Decisions taken under Parts 9.3(b) and (c) of the Constitution**

Councillor Linda Smith joined the meeting during this item.

The Head of Law and Governance had submitted a report on behalf of the Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive) asking Cabinet to note the decisions taken by the Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive) using the urgency and emergency powers delegated in Parts 9.3(b) and (c) of the Constitution.

Anita Bradley, Head of Law & Governance introduced the report which listed three decisions taken by the Chief Executive exercising urgency and emergency powers as a consequence of Covid-19.

In response to a question about recouping the costs of addressing the needs of the homeless, the Chief Executive first noted that additional costs would soon be incurred as the Council sought to extend the arrangements initially put in place, in line with revised Government policy. While the Government had provided some funding to Councils to assist with the additional costs associated with Covid-19, none of it had been earmarked specifically for this or indeed any other purpose. Strictly speaking it would not be until later in the year that it would be possible to judge whether the Council's estimate of additional costs exceeded the money which had been provided by Government.

In relation to expenditure on ICT, the Chief Executive confirmed that this was in addition to the programme of improvement which had already been in place and was to ensure that the Council was in a position to work effectively in the new environment necessitated by Covid-19.

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council, noted appreciation for the work of the ICT team in having enabled to Council Members and officers to work remotely in such a short time. In relation to the decision about the Discretionary Grant Scheme, she noted that this was an important mechanism which enabled the Council to support local businesses and help them survive and hopefully thrive in a challenging environment. The need for criteria for distribution had given the Council the opportunity to include ones to reflect its values, such as the social value of businesses.

There was appreciation of the speed with which the grants had been allocated and distributed. In relation to housing benefit and universal credit there was praise for the efficiency of those teams in dealing with an increase in the number of applications.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the decisions taken as set out in the report.

### **34. Minutes**

Cabinet resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2020 as a true and accurate record.

### **35. Dates of Future Meetings**

Meetings are scheduled for the following dates:

- 12 August
- 09 September
- 14 October
- 11 November
- 09 December

All meetings start at 6pm unless otherwise stated.

**The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 6.45 pm**

**Chair ..... Date: Wednesday 12 August 2020**

**Response by Councillor Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance & Asset Management, to recommendation from the Finance & Performance Panel, read out at Cabinet meeting on 15 July 2020.**

## Recommendation

That the Council reviews the service charges it makes to Council housing tenants to ensure current levels reflect actual costs.

## Response

The Council takes its responsibilities towards tackling poverty and extremely seriously and recognises that now is a particularly sensitive time financially for many. To ensure that tenants are not overcharged a selection of the charges made to tenants are reviewed each year. This has proven to be a cost-effective means of monitoring charging levels. It is worth noting that previous reviews have indicated minimal differences between the charges levied by the Council and its actual expenditure (between five and ten pence per week).

When we reconcile the actual charges for leaseholders each year, we compare those costs against the tenant service charges in the blocks and then make any changes to tenant service charges ahead of budget setting for the following year. It should be noted that the accounting periods for tenants and leaseholders are different so the charges won't be completely identical but they are usually very similar.

Where the Council has found discrepancies it has made changes, previously removing the window cleaning charges when the service was not fully delivered. It is the intention of the Council to continue to review the suitability its charging schedule and make any adjustments as required. This will obviously be especially important this year in view of the circumstances.

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