

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday 15 December 2021

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Committee members present:

Councillor Brown	Councillor Turner
Councillor Hayes	Councillor Arshad
Councillor Aziz	Councillor Clarkson
Councillor Hollingsworth	Councillor Rowley
Councillor Upton	

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Caroline Green, Chief Executive
Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services
Susan Sale, Monitoring Officer and Head of Law & Governance
Ian Brooke, Head of Community Services
Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Officer
Rachel Nixon, Principal Planner
Michael Scott, Senior Asset Manager (Contractor)
Rose Dickinson, Carbon Reduction Team Manager
John Mitchell, Committee and Member Services Officer

Apologies:

Councillor Blackings sent apologies.

74. Declarations of Interest

None.

75. Addresses and Questions by Members of the Public

Sue Tanner, Chair of the Board of Trustees of Rose Hill & Donnington Advice Centre, speaking on behalf of all three of the City's advice centres addressed Cabinet in relation to item 12 on the agenda. The Strategic Grants Review proposed a cut of £25,000 in the funding for the three local advice centres and Citizens' Advice Oxford.

The advice centres were very grateful for the support they had had from Oxford City Council over many years and recognised that other authorities have made greater cuts in their advice services.

However, a further cut would come on top of many others over the years. Grants had been frozen since 2010 . In 2018 a cut of 5% was made in order to fund the Advice Development Fund, which it was now proposed should be removed.

The three centres were based in the most deprived areas of the city. Last year they had helped their clients to increase their income by £10 million – 19 times the value of the City Council grant. Much of this extra income would have been spent locally. If funding was reduced further it was likely to impact on the service provided to residents.

The centres currently administer the Government's Household Support Fund on behalf of the Council and while they were glad to do so, illustrated an effective resource the centres were.

She concluded by urging Cabinet not to agree to further cuts to the advice centre budgets.

Cllr Shaista Aziz, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Communities, thanked Sue Tanner for her contribution and acknowledged the important work of all the advice centres. Initial proposals for cuts to these services were only being made very reluctantly. She would be meeting representatives of the advice centres in the New Year to discuss their concerns and alternative proposals in more detail.

76. Councillor Addresses on any item for decision on the Cabinet agenda

None.

77. Councillor Addresses on Neighbourhood Issues

None.

78. Items raised by Cabinet Members

None.

79. Scrutiny reports

Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Officer, introduced the reports before Cabinet on behalf Cllrs Wade, Fry and Linda Smith in their capacities as Chairs of Scrutiny Committee; Housing & Homelessness Panel; and Finance & Performance Panel respectively

Workplace Equalities

The report's recommendations related to the extension of monitoring key performance indicators to ODS; monitoring and promoting the effectiveness of positive action; improving management engagement with disclosing details of protected characteristics; the importance of continued monitoring of the demographic profiles of responses to job advertisements and shortlisted candidates; and clarification over a possible misinterpretation of what lies behind pay gaps.

Cllr Mike Rowley, Cabinet Member for Customer Focused Services was pleased to have accepted the recommendations, noting that the additional data in relation to ODS

was being collected and that while they could not form part of the formal annual report it could be provided separately.

Strategic Grants

It had been agreed that the Budget Review Group would look specifically at grant funding and additional information would be provided to support this.

The report's recommendations sought to address the desirability of stability for grant funded organisations by proposing the opportunity to reapply well before a current grant has expired; and an idea for improving sales of Oxford lottery tickets.

Cllr Shaista Aziz, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Communities had not felt able to support the first recommendation which would have the unwanted consequence of making it harder for new organisations to access the limited funding available. The proposal in relation to lottery tickets was constrained to some extent by legal restrictions but work would be done see what could be done to promote sales.

Asset Management Strategy

The report's one recommendation that the phasing out of gas over the medium to long term should be a strategic objective, committed to within the Asset Management Strategy.

Cllr Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, responded at the meeting by explaining that the report would be amended to include a high level target, with the caveat that how this can be achieved, and the pace at which progress can be made, will be dependent, to a large degree, on government policy and funding decisions.

Air Quality Action Plan

This report's recommendations included matters tangential to air quality such as LTNs but also covered the importance of strategic and community level engagement, and the desirability of allowing residents to benefit from having a real-time alert function from the new Air Quality website.

Cllr Tom Hayes, Cabinet Member for Green Transport and Zero Carbon Oxford, noted that most of the recommendations related to matters already underway and suggested that it was unfortunate that the Committee had not been able to focus more on the Air Quality Action Plan. He would be pleased to attend Scrutiny again to address some of the bigger strategic issues around air quality.

Housing & Carbon Reduction

The report's recommendations were about having a general high and broad level of engagement with tenants from an early stage in parallel with special provision for those who have more complex needs as well as those learning to live with technologies.

The Chair, speaking in the absence of Cllr Blackings, said the recommendations had all been accepted and the principle of engaging meaningfully with tenants was very welcome.

Tourism Review Group Update

The recommendations from this report had come from the meeting when the report was originally heard along with additional recommendations made during the sign off process.

The original recommendations concerned a wish to work with partners to ensure tourist transport is made as sustainable as possible, and in readiness for the return of high visitor numbers to Oxford to reinvigorate the toilet scheme with city centre shops. The further recommendations concerned a tilting of strategy towards domestic tourists and a more wide-ranging review of the recommendations of the Tourism Review Group in the light of the consequences of Covid.

Cllr Mary Clarkson, Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure & Tourism said she had been pleased to accept the recommendations. While the proposed focus on domestic tourism was sensible in the present climate, sight should not be lost of pent up demand from overseas, particularly the USA.

80. Strategic Grants Review

The Head of Community Services had submitted a report which set out the findings, recommendations and implementation plan following the Grants Strategic Review. The report reflects what has been learnt during the Review and proposes changes to ensure the grants remain fit for purpose, with particular reference to processes, equalities and equity, partnerships, transparency and leveraging in external funding for Oxford.

Cllr Shaista Aziz, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Communities, said the proposed strategy represented a new approach which would, among other things, encourage applications from a wider range of groups than hitherto and took account of the desirability of environmental sustainability and equality. The strategy would streamline and demystify the application process.

Ian Brooke, Head of Community Services, said the preceding consultation had been extremely thorough and detailed as illustrated by the report. Completion of the report's Equality Impact Assessment had been an ongoing process during development of the strategy rather than something completed after the event. Appendix 4 as published with the agenda was not the finally agreed version and would be replaced on the Council website after the meeting.

The Chair noted the importance of all those with an interest in these matters responding to the forthcoming consultation.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Endorse** the recommendations and approach to implementation contained in the Communities Grants Strategic Review;
2. **Recommend** the Council to approve the establishment of a Community Impact Fund totalling £558,000;
3. **Recommend** the Council establishes a commissioning fund totalling £475,000 for domestic abuse, and advice services;
4. **Recommend** that the Council continues to use the £442,000 homelessness monies alongside the Government grant (section 22);
5. **Recommend** the Council agrees the savings shown in table one;

6. **Agree** the criteria and weightings (shown in table three) for assessment of Applications;
7. **Agree** that there should be an annual report to the Cabinet to confirm the criteria and weighting for assessing the following year's grants to ensure the programme remains fully transparent, inclusive and aligned with the Council's strategic priorities. This report will also update on the impact of the previous year's grants and commissioning programme; and
8. **Agree** that officers should engage directly with the groups impacted and people who responded to the consultation to explain the changes before they are implemented.

81. Oxford City Council's net zero targets and green gas purchasing

The Head of Corporate Strategy had submitted a report to seek approval to amend the Council's emissions reduction target for its estate and operations and to establish a Net Zero Transition Fund, reflecting advice from the Council's Scientific Advisor.

Cllr Tom Hayes, Cabinet Member for Green Transport and Zero Carbon Oxford, introduced the report which would contribute to the Council's ambition of achieving net zero by 2030 by repurposing existing funding to secure additional reductions. It was noted that it seemed unlikely that existing gas boilers could be converted to run off green gas as had been suggested in some quarters; the predominate solution was likely be through the installation of heat pumps. The challenges of securing sufficient heat pumps had been recognised and steps were being taken to stimulate local production of them. There was a lack of consistency in the definition of 'zero carbon' and related matters throughout Council documentation and this should be addressed.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the amendment to Oxford City Council's greenhouse gas emissions reduction target for its estate and operations to focus solely on achieving net zero carbon by 2030, thereby changing the Council's use of terminology to reflect advice from the Council's Scientific Advisor and to align with the emerging definition of net zero;
2. **Approve** the Council's continued commitment to net zero, with the same planned absolute reduction in carbon emissions by 2030;
3. **Approve** the diversion of funds already allocated in the 2021/22 and 2022/23 budgets for green gas purchase and offsetting to be used instead to create a 'Net Zero Transition Fund', which will direct resources towards additional emissions reduction actions;
4. **Note** that these amendments will be incorporated into the Council's 4th Carbon Management Plan to reflect new best practice and advice from the Council's Scientific Advisor and help to settle the evolving consensus on the emerging definition of net zero; and
5. **Note** the Council's commitment in the Carbon Management Plan to develop a greater understanding of ways to reduce Scope 3 emissions and develop a Scope 3 emissions reduction plan. This work will commence in 2022/23.

82. Budget 2022/23

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report to propose a Medium Term Financial Strategy and the 2022/23 Budget for consultation.

Cllr Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance & Asset Management introduced the report. Preparation of the budget for consultation had once again been challenging given, among other things, reduced income streams, the need to call upon reserves and the absence, so far, of a local government settlement for 2022/23. Despite these challenges there were some positive elements such as retention of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. Officers had worked hard to achieve a balanced, strong and progressive budget. He anticipated that the consequences of future inflation and interest increases could be mitigated in the short term. He paid tribute to the work of all those officers who had contributed to the development of these proposals particularly those in the Finance Team, a view echoed by the Chair.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the 2022-23 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budgets for consultation and the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Strategy as set out in Appendices 1-9, noting :

a) the Council's General Fund Budget Requirement of £22.333 million for 2022/23 and an increase in the Band D Council Tax of 1.99% or £6.37 per annum representing a Band D Council Tax of £326.54 per annum subject to confirmation of the referendum levels contained in paragraph 10 (d) of the report

b) the Housing Revenue Account budget for 2022/23 of £47.882 million and an increase of 4.10% (£4.51 per week) in social dwelling rents from 1 April 2022 giving a revised weekly average social rent of £112.00 as set out in Appendix 5

c) the increase in shared ownership rental in accordance with the lease as shown in paragraphs 77 -79 and the discretion used by the Head of Housing in setting the initial rent for the unsold share of 2% and giving delegated approval to the Head of Housing to set this for future shared ownership rents up to 2.75%

d) the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme as shown in Appendix 6.

2. **Agree** the fees and charges shown in Appendix 7;

3. **Delegate** to the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Board Member for Finance and Assets the decision to determine whether it is financially advantageous for the Council to enter into a Business Rates Distribution Agreement as referred to in paragraphs 25 of the report;

4. **Approve** the payment into the County Council Pension Fund of £5 million in 2023-24 as referred to in paragraph 32 of the report;

5. **Recommend** to Council the appropriation of Alice Smith House from the HRA to the General Fund in accordance with paragraph 87 subject to any consents which are required;

6. **Note** the disposal of 4 HRA properties in accordance with paragraph 88 subject to any necessary consents that are required; and

7. **Approve** the increase in the 'multiplier' for the use in Furnished Tenancy charges in accordance with para 84.

83. Workplace Equalities and Action Plan

The Head of Business Improvement had submitted a report to present and seek approval for the publication of the annual Workforce Equality Report 2021, which includes the Gender Pay Gap Report, Ethnicity Pay Gap Report and Disability Pay Gap Report; and to share current progress on the Workforce Equalities Report and Action Plan.

Cllr Mike Rowley, Cabinet Member for Customer Focused Services introduced the report and was pleased to note that the appointment of BAME colleagues had now exceeded the target for such appointments while recognising that there was still much more which could and would be done to recruit a workforce which was properly representative of the City's residents. It was agreed that further consideration should be given to the appropriateness of BAME as a descriptor.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the contents of the Workforce Equality Report 2021;
2. **Delegate** authority to the Head of Business Improvement to publish the Workforce Equality Report and to make any changes as may be required before publication following Cabinet discussion;
3. **Approve** the contents of the Gender Pay Gap, Ethnicity Pay Gap and Disability Pay Gap reports for this year; and
4. **Delegate** authority to the Head of Business Improvement to publish the Gender Pay Gap table at paragraph 19 before 30 March 2022, the Ethnicity Pay Gap table at paragraph 34 and the Disability Pay Gap table at paragraph 41 on the Council website.

84. Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement

The Head of Planning Services had submitted a report to approve the Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement for publication.

Cllr Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery, introduced the report which fulfilled a statutory duty to provide an annual account of performance against a number of indicators. The target for house building had, for the first time in several years, been exceeded, but adherence to it over the life of the Local Plan would require building on all sites identified for the purpose. He noted that there was a demand for employment sites within the City and these should be provided. They were generally more sustainable and preferable to work located outside the City in business parks.

Rachel Nixon, Principal Planner, drew attention to an amendment to Appendix 2 of the report; the updated version would replace the one which had originally been placed on the Council website.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2020/21 for publication; and
2. **Authorise** the Head of Planning Services to make any necessary minor corrections not materially affecting the document prior to publication.

85. Asset Management Plan

The Head of Corporate Property had submitted a report to approve the Draft Asset Management Strategy 2021 - 2031 which will provide an ongoing framework for the management of the Council's property assets prior to public consultation.

Cllr Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, introduced the report. It was important to manage the Council's assets well and the report set out how this was being achieved.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the Draft Asset Management Strategy 2021- 2031 for public consultation.

86. Integrated Performance Report for Q2

The Head of Financial Services and Head of Business Improvement had submitted a report to update the Cabinet on Finance, Risk and Corporate Performance matters as at 30 June 2021.

Cllr Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management introduced the report which had been prepared in the context of a significant draw down of reserves. He drew attention to the welcome addition of £2m to the homelessness budget.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the projected financial outturn as well as the current position on risk and performance as at 30 Sept 2021; and
2. **Recommend** to Council the addition of £2 million into the Homelessness budget, which will be fully funded by grant, as per paras 9 and 10.

87. Treasury Management Mid-Year Report

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report on the performance of the Treasury Management function for the 6 months to 30 September 2021.

Cllr Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management introduced the report and was pleased to note that investment income was forecast to be better than budgeted for.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the performance of the Treasury Management function for the six months to 30th September 2021.

88. County-Wide Homelessness Budget and Contract

The Executive Director of Communities and People had submitted a report to seek approval from Cabinet to amend the financial and contractual commitment by Oxford City Council to the county-wide pooled budget arrangement, relating to the provision of homelessness services.

In the absence of Cllr Blackings, the Chair introduced the report which sought, simply, to remedy a small omission from the report on this subject which had been agreed by Cabinet on 16 June 2021.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Amend** and **approve** Oxford City Council's commitment to the pooled budget arrangement and linked contract from 5 years plus 2 years to five years plus three years.

89. Minutes

Cabinet resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 10 November as a true and accurate record.

90. Dates of Future Meetings

Meetings are scheduled for the following dates:

26 January 2022

9 February 2022

16 March 2022

13 April 2022

26 May 2022

All meetings start at 6.00

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.30 pm

Chair

Date: Wednesday 26 January 2022