

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday 14 September 2022

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Committee members present:

Councillor Brown	Councillor Turner
Councillor Aziz	Councillor Chapman
Councillor Hollingsworth	Councillor Munkonge
Councillor Linda Smith	Councillor Thomas
Councillor Upton	Councillor Walcott

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Laura Bessell, Benefits Manager
Tom Bridgman, Executive Director (Development)
Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer
Amanda Ford, Environmental Quality Team Manager
Stephen Gabriel, Executive Director (Communities and People)
Caroline Green, Chief Executive
Sarah Harrison, Team Leader (Planning Policy)
Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services
Emma Lund, Committee and Member Services Officer
Susan Sale, Monitoring Officer and Head of Law & Governance
Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy
Rachel Williams, Principal Planner
Jane Winfield, Head of Corporate Property
Ian Wright, Head of Regulatory Services and Community Safety

Also present:

Councillor Lizzy Diggins, Vice-Chair of Scrutiny
Councillor Dr Christopher Smowton, Chair of Scrutiny

Apologies:

No apologies were received.

49. Declarations of Interest

None.

50. Addresses and Questions by Members of the Public

None.

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

None.

52. Councillor Addresses on Neighbourhood Issues

None.

53. Items raised by Cabinet Members

None.

54. Scrutiny reports

Scrutiny Committee had met on 6 September 2022 and had considered two reports: the Oxford Local Plan 2040 Preferred Options Regulation 18 Consultation; and Future Workplace: Relocation from St Aldate's Chambers to Oxford Town Hall.

Twelve recommendations had been made in relation to the Oxford Local Plan 2040 Preferred Options Regulation 18 Consultation, all of which had been accepted. These had largely been aimed at seeking to make the consultation process as accessible as possible, so that responses could be garnered from all areas of the community. Recommendations had also been made in relation to clarifying references to some elements of the document, and highlighting their importance. Councillor Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery, responded that the scrutiny review had been very productive, and had resulted in helpful recommendations in relation to both the document and the consultation process.

One recommendation had been made in relation to Future Workplace: Relocation from St Aldate's Chambers to Oxford Town Hall. This had related to ensuring the provision of secure cycle storage at the Town Hall. Councillor Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen-Focused Services, responded that the recommendation had been accepted.

55. The Regulation of Short Let Accommodation

The Executive Director (Communities and People) had submitted a report which sought approval for the cessation of domestic waste collections at premises which were registered as self-catering and holiday let accommodation for business rates.

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing, explained that the proposal sought to control the loss of residential properties which, instead of being available for much needed use by permanent residents of the city, had been converted to short term let businesses. The Council had for some time been calling for greater powers for councils to be able to regulate and control the trade of short term lets, and would be reiterating this as part of a forthcoming government consultation. In the meantime, it was committed to using powers which were already available, including planning enforcement, and would continue to be proactive in prioritising investigations by the Planning Enforcement service into the unauthorised change of use from residential accommodation into self-catering and holiday let accommodation.

The proposal before Cabinet would enable a 'loophole' to be closed whereby short term let businesses which were currently paying business rates and not council tax (and which were often very profitable) were receiving free collection of their waste by Oxford Direct Services. This was considered to be unfair to both other businesses (which were

required to pay for commercial waste collection) and residents (who were required to for waste collection through their council tax).

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Cease** providing a domestic waste collection service at premises which are registered as self-catering and holiday let accommodation for business rates; and
2. **Continue** to use business rates data to prioritise investigations by the Planning Enforcement Service into the unauthorised change of use from residential accommodation to self-catering and holiday let accommodation.

56. Future Workplace: Relocation from St Aldate's Chambers to Oxford Town Hall

The Executive Director (Corporate Resources) had submitted a report to seek authority to let the whole of St Aldate's Chambers and enter into contracts and carry out associated works to vacate the building and consolidate staff office accommodation in the Town Hall.

Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen-Focused Services, explained that the original intention had been to let out two floors of St Aldate's Chambers. However marketing of the building, which had begun earlier in the year, had demonstrated that demand was largely for more, or less, than two floors. An offer had recently been received for the lease of the whole building and approval was therefore now sought to let the whole of St Aldate's Chamber, with council staff to be re-located within the Town Hall. Consolidation at the Town Hall would offer a number of benefits including savings on energy usage and carbon reduction, improved use of space, and the opportunity for staff to work in a historic and familiar local building. Consultation had begun with the trade unions, which were supportive, and staff. Leasing of St Aldate's Chambers would also provide a significant improvement to the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

It was noted that a further feasibility study was planned to look at longer term options for the Town Hall in order to create additional space for a variety of potential uses, as well as a review of the ongoing management and maintenance of the building.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** a reallocation from the capital programme to the Future Workplace programme of a budgeted £1million to support the works required to vacate St Aldate's Chambers and relocate staff office accommodation to the Town Hall;
2. **Delegate authority** to the Executive Director of Development, in consultation with the Head of Law and Governance, the Head of Financial Services / S151 Officer and the Deputy Leader (Statutory) - Finance & Asset Management to enter into appropriate contracts to implement required changes to St Aldate's Chambers or the Town Hall;
3. **Recommend to Council** the approval of a contingency budget of £300,000;
4. **Delegate authority** to the Executive Director (Development), in consultation with the Head of Financial Services / S151 Officer, the Head of Law and Governance

and the Deputy Leader (Statutory) - Finance & Asset Management to enter into lease(s) to let the whole of St Aldate's Chambers in line with the strategy set out in the confidential Appendix 1 or on other terms which fulfil the requirements of S123 Local Government Act 1972; and

5. **Approve** the decision to relocate staff from St Aldate's Chambers (subject to any changes to terms and conditions of employment required).

57. Oxford Local Plan 2040 Preferred Options Regulation 18 Consultation

The Executive Director (Development) had submitted a report to seek approval of an Oxford Local Plan 2040 Preferred Options document for Regulation 18 consultation.

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery, explained that all local authorities were required to have an up to date Local Plan. The Council's current Local Plan was up to date; however a revised version was being prepared which would add a further four years, bringing the Plan to 2040. One of the benefits of bringing forward a revised Plan at an early stage would be to enable Oxford's unmet housing need to be considered earlier within the development cycle of neighbouring authorities' Local Plans.

The failure of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 also meant that further work was required on the precise housing need number, and it was intended that a separate consultation process to produce this would be undertaken in the next few months, in readiness for the Regulation 19 consultation. It was expected that Oxford's housing need would significantly exceed capacity however it were calculated, so that the policies being consulted upon under Regulation 18 were considered sound on that basis.

Councillor Hollingsworth drew attention to three main threads which underpinned the Plan: fifteen minute neighbourhoods; an accelerated move towards zero carbon; and addressing inequalities, and explained some of the policies which would support these.

Cabinet Members highlighted the need for the consultation process to seek to canvass as broad a range of diverse views as possible. Officers confirmed that a number of tools and approaches would be used with the aim of encouraging responses, including a social media campaign, a paper questionnaire to every residence and business and an online questionnaire.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the Oxford Local Plan 2040 Preferred Options document at Appendix 1 for Regulation 18 public consultation; and
2. **Authorise** the Planning Policy and Place Manager, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery, to make any necessary editorial corrections and minor amendments to the documents and the supporting evidence base prior to going out to consultation.

58. Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report to seek approval for a consultation on changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24.

Councillor Aziz, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Communities and Culture, reported that the consultation questions remained the same as last year. They had been written to allow residents to comment on the requirement to protect certain groups and consider whether to remove a 100% funded scheme for those who were working, in addition to other proposals. The consultation would run throughout September and October: any changes to the scheme would be considered within the entirety of budget proposals as part of the overall budget process before being presented for approval early next year.

Councillor Aziz commented that the Council remained proud to retain a Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which was offered by few other authorities, and which was of particular importance given the cost of living crisis.

Attention was drawn to the need for the consultation to be widely advertised and it was suggested that officers also look at ways of publicising it in locations which offered free wi-fi access.

It was noted that the eight week consultation was now planned to start on Tuesday 20th September, and not Monday 19th September as shown in the report. This was due to the latter being the date for the state funeral of Her Majesty The Queen.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Agree** that the proposals for the 2023/24 Council Tax Reduction Scheme outlined in the report be subject to consultation for an eight week period from 20th September 2022; and
2. **Note** the intention of the Head of Financial Services to bring a further report to Cabinet in January 2023 to outline the outcome of the consultation process and make proposals for the 2023/24 Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

59. Financial Outturn Report 2021/22 (Integrated Performance Report for Q4)

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report to update Members on the financial outturn for the year ended 31 March 2022.

Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) – Finance and Asset Management, reported that although there had been some variances, the final outturn position had been a surplus of £0.041million which, in the context of an overall net budget of c£23.6m, indicated that projections and budgets had been robust. This position had been achieved in the context of a lack of an expected dividend from ODS; it had also required a transfer of £5,067m from the Covid reserve. Many of the financial challenges faced by the Council had resulted from effects of the pandemic, for which there had been insufficient recompense from the government.

Councillor Turner clarified that the additional budget of £153k to be added to the Bullingdon Community Centre capital scheme was required as a result of rising building costs; building cost inflation was likely to become an increasing issue for the Council over the coming months.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the financial outturn and performance of the Council for the year 2021/22 and also the position on risks outstanding as at 31st March 2022;

2. **Agree** the carry forward requests in respect of the General Fund of £0.453 million and HRA of £0.986 million as shown in appendix D;
3. **Agree** the transfer of the HRA Contributions to HRA Reserves to fund future years' capital works of £3.065 million detailed in paragraphs 15-20;
4. **Recommend to Council** the approval of the fees and charges for Law and Governance which were omitted from the final Council Budget report in February 2022, as per Appendix E and detailed in paragraph 5;
5. **Approve** the virement of £0.483 million of capital budget from the Regeneration Property Purchase budget to the "Exploring future options for Council owned land in the City Centre" within the capital programme which has previously been funded from the capital feasibility budget, as detailed in paragraphs 2 and 3;
6. **Recommend to Council** an additional budget of £153k to be added to Bullingdon Community Centre capital scheme as detailed in paragraph 4.

60. Integrated Performance Report for Q1 2022/23

The Head of Financial Services and the Head of Business Improvement had submitted a report to update Cabinet on finance, risk and corporate performance matters as at 30 June 2022.

Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader – Statutory (Finance and Asset Management) reported that the outturn position was forecasting a favourable variance of £0.100m against the net budget agreed by Council in February 2022 of £22.382m. However, there were a number of areas of volatility in the budget, particularly in relation to energy costs, although was expected that the dividend from ODS would be received in the current year which would help to offset some of the pressures on the budget.

The Head of Financial Services reported that the Monetary Policy Committee was expected to announce a further rise in interest rates imminently which would further raise the Council's borrowing costs, and income streams also remained under pressure. An improvement to the financial climate was not expected within the near future.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the projected outturn as well as the position on risk and performance as at 30 June 2022.

61. Treasury Management Annual Report 2021/22

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report setting out the Council's Treasury Management activity and performance for the financial year 2021/22.

It was noted that there had been a slight favourable variance in net General Fund interest (£4.82m against a target of £4.73m).

The Head of Financial Services reported that the outcome was awaited of the government's second consultation on Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP), but it was hoped that this would be favourable. Officers (particularly the Financial Accounting Manager) and the Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management were thanked

for their work in raising concerns about the initial proposals during the first consultation, which were considered to have been instrumental in securing changes.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the report.

62. Minutes

Cabinet resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 10 August 2022 as a true and accurate record.

63. Dates of Future Meetings

19 October 2022

16 November 2022

14 December 2022

25 January 2023

8 February 2023

15 March 2023

All meetings start at 6.00pm.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.18 pm

Chair

Date: Wednesday 19 October 2022

When decisions take effect:

Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired

Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal decision notice is issued

All other committees: immediately.

Details are in the Council's Constitution.