

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL

Monday 8 February 2016

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COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Humberstone (Lord Mayor), Cook (Deputy Lord Mayor), Malik (Sheriff), Abbasi, Altaf-Khan, Benjamin, Brandt, Brown, Clack, Clarkson, Coulter, Darke, Fooks, Fry, Gant, Goddard, Gotch, Haines, Hayes, Henwood, Hollick, Hollingsworth, Kennedy, Lloyd-Shogbesan, Lygo, Munkonge, Pegg, Pressel, Price, Rowley, Royce, Sanders, Simm, Simmons, Sinclair, Smith, Tanner, Tarver, Taylor, Thomas, Turner, Upton, Van Nooijen, Wade, Wilkinson and Wolff.

Council heard tributes and observed a minute's silence in memory of former Councillor and Lord Mayor Barbara Gatehouse.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors Anwar and Paule submitted apologies.

2. MINUTES

Council agreed to approve the minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 7 December 2015 as a true and correct record.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations.

4. APPOINTMENT TO COMMITTEES

There were no appointments.

5. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Lord Mayor announced:

- The list of engagements enclosed with the briefing note to draw Councillors' attention to the events attended since the last meeting;
- the upcoming Veterans' Medal of Honour Presentation and single act of commemoration;
- his charity dinner

The Leader of the Council announced:

- that work to transfer land ownership and secure the Oxpens site was complete, and thanked officers;
- the successful opening of the Rosehill Community Centre and the work of the Community Services team;
- that Oxford was designated the first city in the country;

updates to the devolution proposals submitted to government.

6. PUBLIC ADDRESSES AND QUESTIONS THAT RELATE TO MATTERS FOR DECISION AT THIS MEETING

There were no addresses or questions.

7. PROPOSED FREEHOLD PURCHASE OF THE OLD SCHOOL, GLOUCESTER GREEN

Council considered a report to the City Executive Board on 17 December 2015 seeking approval for the principle of acquiring the long leasehold interest in The Old School, Gloucester Green, including the confidential Appendix 1 circulated with the City Executive Board papers, and the relevant draft minute of the City Executive Board meeting.

Council resolved to:

increase the budget within the Council's capital programme by the requisite amount in 2015/16.

8. REVIEW OF THE STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY 2016 - 2021

Council considered a report presenting the revised Statement of Licensing Policy, considered by the Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee on 26 January 2016.

Council resolved to:

adopt the revised Licensing Policy Statement attached to the agenda.

9. OXFORD FLOOD ALLEVIATION SCHEME – DELEGATION OF PLANNING POWERS TO OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Council considered a report outlining the proposed Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme ("the Scheme") and seeking approval for the delegation to the Oxfordshire County Council of any planning responsibilities that would otherwise be exercised by the Oxford City Council in relation to the Scheme.

Council resolved to:

- 1. delegate the discharge of the District Planning Authority functions of the Oxford City Council to the Oxfordshire County Council, in connection with the processing and determination of the expected planning application for the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme, under section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972;**

2. **authorise the Head of Planning and Regulatory Services, in consultation with the Head of Law of Governance, to negotiate and agree a Memorandum of Understanding with the Oxfordshire County Council to determine the operational arrangements of the delegation of the Oxford City Council's planning functions in relation to the Scheme;**
3. **agree that a long stop date be placed on the delegation such that the delegation will be revoked if any Scheme application is not determined by the 18th February 2019.**

10. COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE PROGRAMME MAY 2016 TO MAY 2017

Council considered a report proposing the programme of Council and committee meetings for the 2016/17 council year (May 2016 to May 2017 inclusive) following a review agreed by Council in December.

Council resolved to:

1. **approve the programme of Council, Committee and other meetings attached at Appendix 1 for the council year 2016/17; and**
2. **delegate the setting of dates for the Standards Committee to the Head of Law and Governance.**

11. CITY EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES

Council had before it the minutes of the City Executive Board meetings of Thursday 17 December 2015, Thursday 14 January 2016 and Thursday 21 January 2016.

On Minute 127 (Councillor addresses), Councillor Fooks asked when the revised tree policy would be considered. Councillor Lygo replied this was in progress and could be considered by Scrutiny Committee prior to the Board.

On Minute 160 (Oxford Local Development Scheme), Councillor Wolff asked that the key views of Oxford be taken into account when considering increasing the height and density of buildings. Councillor Hollingsworth replied that views would be taken into account along with other factors including maintaining a varied skyline.

12. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

Members of Council submitted 38 written questions to Board Members and the Leader of the Council. Written answers and summaries of supplementary questions and responses are in the supplement to these minutes.

13. PUBLIC ADDRESSES AND QUESTIONS THAT DO NOT RELATE TO MATTERS FOR DECISION AT THIS COUNCIL MEETING

Council heard addresses from members of the public. The full text of the addresses where these were delivered as submitted and questions and responses are in the supplement to these minutes.

1. Alasdair de Voil, I Love Oxford Tours Director delivered an address requesting scrutiny of the contractual arrangements for the provision of tourism information services (address attached).

Councillor Price drew the speaker's attention to the written response in the supplement (response attached)

2. Roger Parry, Summertown Stars AFC delivered an address requesting Council to provide Facilities at Five Mile Drive Recreation Ground from September 2016. He presented a petition with over 500 signatures.

Councillor Lygo, the Board Member, replied, saying in summary:

The old pavilion facility at Five Mile Drive is being demolished due to its poor condition. It was previously used by Summertown Stars for toilet facilities, storage and to be able to make hot drinks. As a replacement we recently provided the club with a mobile unit which has toilet facilities, storage, areas to make hot drinks and a space for officials to use if needed. We will leave this facility on the site for the immediate future while we work with the club around alternate funding options at Five Mile Drive. Without raising expectations we will work with you to improve facilities.

We have worked closely with the club and the Oxfordshire F.A over the past few years. Currently we are undertaking a major refurbishment at Cutteslowe Park lower pavilion which is the main home of Summertown Stars. This is a significant investment from Oxford City Council, Football Foundation and Sport England of around £750,000.

And also be aware that there will be a meeting between relevant parties to look at the issues around the pavilion's maintenance.

3. Nigel Gibson, Save Temple Cowley Pools delivered an address titled Closing Temple Cowley Pools - the consequences (address attached).

Councillor Lygo, the Board Member, replied summarising the current usage of the replacement facilities.

4. Oxford University Student Union President Becky Howe delivered an address in support of the motion titled 'Scrapping of student grants and curbing of access to higher education for disadvantaged young people' (address attached).

Councillors Rowley and Hayes thanked Ms Howe for addressing the meeting.

5. Patrick McDonald, Oxford Catalyst Ventures Ltd delivered an address titled a growing social injustice - building starter-homes for first time buyers in Oxford (address attached).

Councillors Rowley and Hollingsworth, the Board Members, replied in summary that as even housing for purchase at 80% of market rate is unaffordable for most people in Oxford, this is why we will continue to focus our limited resources on providing affordable rented housing. However the speaker made some very good points and suggestions and Board Members would be happy to continue discussions with Mr McDonald to find ways to provide the housing people in Oxford need. The Council had launched a review of the local plan and in due course would be seeking comments on this.

6. Jane Alexander and Heather Dalitz delivered an address titled Oxford - Health Consequences of Poor Decisions (address delivered as attached with additional comments).

Councillor Lygo, the Board Member, gave a brief reply.

7. Judith Harley asked a question about land at Cox's Yard, Temple Cowley (text attached) and also asked why the plot was only fenced off in the last year.

Councillor Hollingsworth , on behalf of the Board Member, referred to the written response published in the supplement:

The land in question was not purchased in 2010: it was acquired as part of Temple Farm, Temple Road for the sum of £2800 on 9/4/1936. Temple Cowley Pool, Library and part of the School were subsequently built on the majority of the site. The land was officially registered in the City Council's freehold ownership in 2010 as part of the Voluntary Registration of Title (VRT) scheme. The small piece of land is currently unused as the Council has no direct access. In the short term there are no expectations for use or disposal, due to this issue of access. Longer term the land may be used to support local development. As far as officers are aware no income has been derived from the land. It may be possible to provide a written answer to the last point.

14. OUTSIDE ORGANISATION/COMMITTEE CHAIR REPORTS AND QUESTIONS

Council had before it the report of the Leader of the Council outlining the work of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership.

Councillor Price moved the report and answered questions around accountability and transparency of decision making.

Council noted the report.

15. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATE REPORT

Council had before it the report of the Scrutiny Committee Chair.

Councillor Simmons moved the report and asked for suggestions for major review topics for 2016/17. Councillor Rowley thanked the Housing panel for their work and Councillor Price noted that the committee's work would be submitted for a Municipal Journal 'excellence in scrutiny and governance award'.

Council noted the report.

16. MOTIONS ON NOTICE

Council had before it eight motions on notice and amendments submitted in accordance with Council procedure rule 11.17, and reached decisions as set out below.

Council agreed to suspend the standing orders relating to the total time allowed for motions for the first motion only.

1. Fairtrade Mark

Councillor Price proposed a submitted cross-party motion, seconded by Councillor Fooks and supported by Councillor Wolff.

On being put to the vote, the motion was declared carried.

Council resolved to adopt the motion as set out below:

Oxford City Council, as an important consumer and opinion leader, should continue to support and facilitate the promotion and purchase of foods with the FAIRTRADE Mark as part of its commitment to the pursuit of sustainable development and to give marginalised producers a fair deal.

Oxford City Council resolves to continue to contribute to the campaign to increase sales of products with the FAIRTRADE Mark by supporting the campaign to achieve the recertification of FAIRTRADE status for Oxford.

To this end, Oxford City Council resolves to ask the Executive to:

- 1. Continue to offer FAIRTRADE Marked food and drink options internally and make them available for internal meetings.***
- 2. Promote the FAIRTRADE Mark using Fairtrade Foundation materials in refreshment areas and promoting the Fairtrade Towns initiative in internal communications and external newsletters.***
- 3. Use its influence to urge local retailers to provide Fairtrade options for residents.***
- 4. Engage in a media campaign to publicise the recertification of Oxford as a Fairtrade Towns initiative.***
- 5. Nominate a Council representative to sit on the Fairtrade Steering Group.***

6. Support on-going work to promote Fairtrade.

7. Continue to support organised events and publicity during national Fairtrade Fortnight – the annual national campaign to promote sales of products with the FAIRTRADE Mark

2. Affordable private housing

Councillor Gant proposed his submitted motion, seconded by Councillor Wade:

Council notes

- *the increasing inability of people on low and middle incomes to be able to afford to buy or rent in or near the city, and that this is hampering the efforts to attract or keep key workers such as nurses, teachers, social workers, junior university staff and other essential employees*
- *that there are examples of innovative approaches and solutions to this problem in other parts of the country. Examples include the partnership between Pocket Homes and the Mayor of London and the creative policy of Cambridge City Council to assist the university to house employees in housing they can afford as the ‘affordable housing’ element of a development*
- *the work in hand to consider setting up a Local Housing Company and welcomes the work being done to encourage Oxford University and the Hospital Trust to plan to provide housing for their staff.*

Nevertheless, Council considers the need to be so great that, despite uncertainties in future Government policy which may prevent some desirable measures, it is urgent to explore all possible means of addressing the shortfall of essential affordable housing to rent or buy.

Council therefore asks the Executive Board to ask officers to investigate with the utmost urgency what changes are needed in the city’s policies to enable new models of housing and tenure to be allowed in new developments to help to meet this need. Council requests a report back to the April Council on the progress made.

Councillor Hollingsworth proposed his submitted amendment, seconded by Councillor Rowley.

Add further (points) under “Council notes”

- *that work has begun on a new Local Plan, taking forward Oxford’s planning policies to 2036*
- *that the commitment to the provision of social housing for rent, which has the considerable merit of actually being affordable unlike so-called ‘affordable housing’ as defined by the current Government, is a fundamental part of both our existing and future planning and housing policies*
- *that proposals to replace social housing requirements with ‘key worker’ housing while making no adjustment to the ‘market’ element on large sites*

runs counter to the spirit and letter of this Council's planning policies, and should not be supported

- *that major employers who are also major landowners who seek to provide housing for their employees can and should bring forward proposals that do so without the entire removal of social housing requirements from these sites*
- *that at this time of great uncertainty caused by the rapid and incoherent evolution of Government policy, albeit an evolution underpinned by an ideological desire to destroy the social housing sector entirely, the resources of the Council are best used by planning for a range of different eventualities rather than by taking precipitate action that is likely to prove nugatory*

Delete Sentence beginning "Nevertheless...."

Amend final sentence to read:

Council therefore ask the Executive Board to continue to develop the new Local Plan, to work with major public and private employers to develop balanced schemes for housing development, and also to explore, in the light of Government policy, options that will support the continued and increasing provision of genuinely affordable social housing for rent, permanently affordable housing for purchase or shared ownership and an appropriate number, range and balance of all housing tenures in Oxford, and to regularly report to and engage with all Councillors on these efforts.

After debate and on being put to the vote the amendment was declared carried.

On being put to the vote the amended motion was declared carried.

Council resolved to adopt the following motion:

Council notes

- ***the increasing inability of people on low and middle incomes to be able to afford to buy or rent in or near the city, and that this is hampering the efforts to attract or keep key workers such as nurses, teachers, social workers, junior university staff and other essential employees***
- ***that there are examples of innovative approaches and solutions to this problem in other parts of the country. Examples include the partnership between Pocket Homes and the Mayor of London and the creative policy of Cambridge City Council to assist the university to house employees in housing they can afford as the 'affordable housing' element of a development***
- ***the work in hand to consider setting up a Local Housing Company and welcomes the work being done to encourage Oxford University and the Hospital Trust to plan to provide housing for their staff.***

- *that work has begun on a new Local Plan, taking forward Oxford's planning policies to 2036*
- *that the commitment to the provision of social housing for rent, which has the considerable merit of actually being affordable unlike so-called 'affordable housing' as defined by the current Government, is a fundamental part of both our existing and future planning and housing policies*
- *that proposals to replace social housing requirements with 'key worker' housing while making no adjustment to the 'market' element on large sites runs counter to the spirit and letter of this Council's planning policies, and should not be supported*
- *that major employers who are also major landowners who seek to provide housing for their employees can and should bring forward proposals that do so without the entire removal of social housing requirements from these sites*
- *that at this time of great uncertainty caused by the rapid and incoherent evolution of Government policy, albeit an evolution underpinned by an ideological desire to destroy the social housing sector entirely, the resources of the Council are best used by planning for a range of different eventualities rather than by taking precipitate action that is likely to prove nugatory*

Council therefore asks the Executive Board to continue to develop the new Local Plan, to work with major public and private employers to develop balanced schemes for housing development, and also to explore, in the light of Government policy, options that will support the continued and increasing provision of genuinely affordable social housing for rent, permanently affordable housing for purchase or shared ownership and an appropriate number, range and balance of all housing tenures in Oxford, and to regularly report to and engage with all Councillors on these efforts.

3. Tackling Oxford's unaffordable private rented sector

Councillor Hollick proposed his submitted motion, seconded by Councillor Thomas

This Council notes that:

- *Oxford's housing is the most unaffordable in the country*
- *the Private Rented Sector is a significant (>25%) and growing part of the market*
- *the high turnover of tenants in the City contributes to the higher rents*
- *the current Government's housing policies are only likely to make the housing situation in Oxford worse*

This Council further notes that:

- *Letting agencies contribute to the high cost of renting by charging up-front fees, and benefit from short-term tenancies which maximise revenue.*
- *Neither landlords nor tenants are best served by this arrangement*

- *There is overwhelming popular support for rent control measures (59% for, 7% against)*
- *Rent control is common in many cities and the benefits of certain types of rent control are well-researched (for example, see the recent study commissioned by Camden Council in 2014)*

This Council therefore asks the City Executive Board to do what it can, using its influence and existing powers, to tackle unaffordability in the private rented sector in Oxford. Measures to include:

- 1. Setting up a new letting agency, either as part of the proposed housing company or separately, owned and operated by the Council*
- 2. Operate this letting agency according to best practice by:*
 - (a) charging no fees*
 - (b) offering longer tenancies*
 - (c) publishing and promoting fair rent levels*

This letting agency should adhere to ‘third generation’ rent controls coupled with strong contractual rights (including first refusal rights on the next tenancy and flexibility for landlords wishing to occupy/sell and so on)

- 3. The Council should also offer accreditation to other agencies wishing to operate under this standard.*

Councillor Rowley proposed his submitted amendment, seconded by Councillor Hollingsworth:

Under "Council notes", third bullet point, delete "the high turnover of tenants in the City" and substitute "the Thatcher and Major governments' introduction of the Assured Shorthold Tenancy as the default legal standard, combined with the effect of a high transient population".

Under "Council further notes", first bullet point, insert "especially to students who are often asked to pay a retainer up to a year before moving in".

Under "Council further notes", fourth bullet point, delete "many cities..." to end and substitute "many other EU Member States, and indeed there are calls to strengthen these controls to combat housing insecurity."

Delete "This Council therefore asks..." to end of clause and substitute:

"This Council notes the efforts already being made to tackle the lack of affordable private rented housing in Oxford, including the Real Lettings project approved by CEB which seeks to make accommodation available at LHA rates, and our proposed "rent guarantee" scheme which we hope will increase the number of private rented properties available via Home Choice and secure tenants' rights by giving the Council a role in the management of the property.

This Council is sympathetic to the principle of rent controls, and our policy representations will bear this in mind. However, we note that current proposals, such as the study commissioned by Camden Council in 2014, rely on a voluntary agreement between the Council and selected landlords. Experience of Oxford's housing bubble suggests that the feasibility of this may be very limited. Council does not therefore believe that, in the current

legislative climate, setting up such a scheme should be a priority in our work to expand the availability of affordable housing in our City.

Council asks the City Executive Board to proceed with its existing plans, and also in the longer term to take into consideration:"

Under point 1 following, delete "either as part of the Housing Company or separately".

Under point 2(a), add "to tenants".

Under point 2(b), add "where appropriate".

In sentence following, after "*This letting agency should*" delete "adhere to" and substitute "look at the feasibility of voluntary agreements involving".

After "*third generation rent controls*" add in parentheses "*inflation-linked rent stabilisation*".

Under point 3, delete "*should also offer*" and substitute "*may also consider offering*".

After debate and on being put to the vote the amendment was declared carried.

On being put to the vote the amended motion was declared carried.

Council resolved to adopt the following motion:

This Council notes that:

- ***Oxford's housing is the most unaffordable in the country***
- ***the Private Rented Sector is a significant (>25%) and growing part of the market***
- ***the Thatcher and Major governments' introduction of the Assured Shorthold Tenancy as the default legal standard, combined with the effect of a high transient population, contributes to the higher rents***
- ***the current Government's housing policies are only likely to make the housing situation in Oxford worse***

This Council further notes that:

- ***Letting agencies contribute to the high cost of renting by charging up-front fees, especially to students who are often asked to pay a retainer up to a year before moving in, and benefit from short-term tenancies which maximise revenue.***
- ***Neither landlords nor tenants are best served by this arrangement***
- ***There is overwhelming popular support for rent control measures (59% for, 7% against)***
- ***Rent control is common in many other EU Member States, and indeed there are calls to strengthen these controls to combat housing insecurity.***

This Council notes the efforts already being made to tackle the lack of affordable private rented housing in Oxford, including the Real Lettings

project approved by CEB which seeks to make accommodation available at LHA rates, and our proposed “rent guarantee” scheme which we hope will increase the number of private rented properties available via Home Choice and secure tenants’ rights by giving the Council a role in the management of the property.

This Council is sympathetic to the principle of rent controls, and our policy representations will bear this in mind. However, we note that current proposals, such as the study commissioned by Camden Council in 2014, rely on a voluntary agreement between the Council and selected landlords. Experience of Oxford’s housing bubble suggests that the feasibility of this may be very limited. Council does not therefore believe that, in the current legislative climate, setting up such a scheme should be a priority in our work to expand the availability of affordable housing in our City.

Council asks the City Executive Board to proceed with its existing plans, and also in the longer term to take into consideration:

- 1. Setting up a new letting agency owned and operated by the Council***
- 2. Operating this letting agency according to best practice by:***
 - (a) charging no fees to tenants***
 - (b) offering longer tenancies where appropriate***
 - (c) publishing and promoting fair rent levels***

This letting agency should look at the feasibility of voluntary agreements involving “third-generation” rent controls (inflation-related rent stabilisation) coupled with strong contractual rights (including first refusal rights on the next tenancy and flexibility for landlords wishing to occupy/sell and so on)

- 3. The Council may also consider offering accreditation to other agencies wishing to operate under this standard.***

4. LHA and Supported Housing

Councillor Hollingsworth proposed his submitted motion, seconded by Councillor Rowley.

After a short debate and on being put to the vote, the motion was declared carried.

Council resolved to adopt the motion set out below:

This Council notes that the provision of services to homeless and vulnerable adults in Oxford is already threatened by Oxfordshire County Council’s proposed cuts to budgets that support those services, at a time when the number of people either sleeping on the streets or at risk of sleeping on the streets is increasing sharply.

This Council therefore opposes absolutely proposals put forward by the Government in the 2015 Autumn Statement to cap Housing Benefit at the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) level on all tenancies, including supported accommodation, from 2018. The effect of this cap will be to make supported social housing such as homeless hostels, housing for vulnerable adults, the sick and the elderly, immediately financially unviable.

Housing Associations and charities have described the impact of this proposal as catastrophic. Even though the scheme does not come into effect for two years, already new sheltered and supported housing schemes are being put on hold or cancelled because it is not clear that the organisations running them will be able to afford to do so after 2018.

This Council believes that this Government, through this and other legislative and regulatory changes announced since the 2015 General Election, is committed to the wholesale destruction of all forms of social housing.

It further believes that this latest proposal, which will leave the most vulnerable people in our society – those with longstanding physical and mental health problems, often stemming from service in our armed forces or from childhood trauma and abuse – literally on the streets without support, to be completely incompatible with the basic tenets of a civilised society.

This Council therefore supports the campaign led by the National Housing Federation and others against the proposed changes to the Housing Benefit cap, and asks the Leader of the Council to write urgently to both of Oxford's MPs asking them to oppose these proposals in the strongest possible terms and to instead support the properly funded provision of support for sheltered and supported accommodation for all vulnerable people in Oxford.

Motions not taken

5. The Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (proposed by Councillor Benjamin, seconded by Councillor Wolff)
6. Scrapping of student grants and curbing of access to higher education for disadvantaged young people (proposed by Councillor Hayes, seconded by Councillor Hollingsworth)
7. Climate Change and Government Policy (proposed by Councillor Brandt, seconded by Councillor Simmons)
8. Community Involvement in Community Centres (proposed by Councillor Wolff, seconded by Councillor Simmons)

These motions were not taken because the time allowed in the Constitution had elapsed.

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 8.50 pm

