

Minutes of a meeting of the CITY EXECUTIVE BOARD on Tuesday 12 February 2019

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Committee members:

Councillor Brown (Chair)
Councillor Chapman
Councillor Hollingsworth
Councillor Upton

Councillor Linda Smith (Deputy Leader)
Councillor Hayes
Councillor Simm

Officers:

Gordon Mitchell, Chief Executive
Tim Sadler, Executive Director Sustainable City
Caroline Green, Assistant Chief Executive
Anita Bradley, Monitoring Officer
Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services
Adrian Arnold, Acting Head of Planning Services
Julia Castle, Senior Lettings & Disposal Surveyor
John Mitchell, Committee and Member Services Officer

Also present:

Councillor Andrew Gant
Councillor James Fry

Apologies:

Councillors Turner and Rowley sent apologies.

133. Declarations of Interest

None.

134. Addresses and Questions by Members of the Public

None.

135. Councillor Addresses on any item for decision on the Board's agenda

None.

136. Councillor Addresses on Neighbourhood Issues

None.

137. Items raised by Board Members

None.

138. Scrutiny Committee Reports

On 05 February the Scrutiny Committee had considered the report on the Oxford Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS) (item 10 of the agenda). Councillor Gant, in his capacity as Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, spoke to that report and the Board's response as given in the agenda supplement. He thanked the Board for its response to the Committee's recommendations. The Committee, while pleased to note the success of the scheme, had been concerned that it didn't address the needs of single people or couples. The bid for Government funding to run a pilot scheme for that group of people was welcome. The Committee would be pleased to hear the outcome of that bid and what contingency plans would be out in place to deal with the possibility that it wasn't successful.

The Board Member for Leisure and Housing, Councillor Linda Smith, said that if someone in need of help was not eligible for the RGS they would always be directed to such other support or a scheme for which they were.

The Scrutiny Committee had endorsed its Budget Review Group's report on the 2019/20 budget (item 8 of the agenda) before submitting to the City Executive Board for its consideration. Councillor Fry, in his capacity as Chair of the Budget Review Group, spoke to the report and the Board's response as given in the agenda supplement. Given the overarching financial climate, the Board Member for Finance and Asset Management and Head of Financial Services were to be congratulated on the quality of the balanced budget achieved. He drew attention to a few matters in particular: the fact that the Council could only keep a mere 8% of the Business Rates income after tariffs and levies have been taken into account; that 11-12% of the Council's budget was devoted to dealing with homelessness matters; and that the Council was one of the few councils to have a Council Tax Reduction (CTR) Scheme; and a risk that the Council's continued commitment to funding the CTR would trigger a further loss to the Council as a result of the so called "Fair Funding Review". Slippage in the Capital Programme remained a cause for concern and so the introduction of a new Programme Management Office was welcome. The anticipated drawdown on Homelessness reserves was worrying and thought should be given to contingency plans to ensure continuation of this important provision. It was noteworthy that only 2 of the 58 respondents to the Budget consultation were Council tenants.

The Chair thanked all those who had contributed to the development of the Budget before the Board. She too was very concerned about the possible consequences of the Fair Funding Review. It was right that the Council made homelessness provision a priority and anything which threatened it was a concern. Reliance on piecemeal and temporary funding streams to support it was difficult; the Council would continue to lobby for sustainable funding.

139. Budget 2019/20

The Head of Financial Services introduced a report on the outcome of the budget consultation and to agree the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2020-21 to 2022-23 and 2019-20 Budget for recommendation to Council. It was a positive budget,

despite a number of external pressures and one which, among other things, supported the Oxford Living Wage; prioritised homelessness services; and tackled poverty in a variety of ways.

The Budget proposals were a statement of the position at a point in time, but which would be reviewed and redesigned over the coming months. Some elements would come back to the Board for more detailed consideration in due course.

There was concern about the apparently limited reach of the budget consultation and thought should be given to finding a means of engaging with the public more effectively (and with particular reference to those with the greatest needs and who may be hard to reach).

Proposals for the Capital Programme were significant and welcome as was development of the Project Management Office. Capital investment in the Council's wholly-owned company, Oxford Direct Services, for example, would, in turn, increase the dividend payable to the Council.

The Chair moved the recommendations given in the report, together with those given in the supplement. The tabled and amended version of Appendix 6 is attached to these minutes.

The City Executive Board agreed the amendments to the Consultation Budget and **resolved to recommend that Council resolves to:**

1. **Approve** the 2019-20 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budgets and the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Plan as set out in Appendices 1-10, noting:
 - a) the Council's General Fund Budget Requirement of £24.167 million for 2019/20 and an increase in the Band D Council Tax of 2.99% or £8.94 per annum representing a Band D Council Tax of £307.80 per annum
 - b) the Housing Revenue Account budget for 2019/20 of £42.466 million and a reduction of 1% (£1.03/wk) in social dwelling rents from April 2019 giving a revised weekly average social rent of £102.26 as set out in Appendix 4
 - c) the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme as shown in Appendix 6, with the change referenced in 7 below.
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 Asset Management 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 12-14 of the report.

4. **Ratify** their decision to implement the Premium Council Tax of 100% for properties that have been empty for more than 2 years and approve the escalated rate of premium council tax when permitted to do so (paragraphs 17-19)
5. **Agree** the transfer of property from the General Fund to the HRA as referred to in paragraph 35.
6. **Formally adopt** the Business Rates Retail Discount Scheme and **apply** the scheme in accordance with the guidance issued; and
7. **Agree** that the Capital Budget for the Seacourt Park and Ride Extension scheme is increased by £945k in 2019-20, to be funded from Community Infrastructure Levy where available funds permit, with any balance to come from the Council capital financing reserve with a commensurate amendment to appendix 6.

140. Capital Strategy

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report to present the Capital Strategy for approval.

The City Executive Board resolved to:

Recommend that Council approves the Capital Strategy attached at Appendix A of the report.

141. Treasury Management Strategy 2019/20

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report to present the Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2019/20 together with the Prudential Indicators for 2019/20 to 2022/23.

The City Executive Board resolved to :

Recommend that Council approves:

1. The Treasury Management Strategy 2019/20 as set out in paragraphs 15 to 60 and the Prudential Indicators for 2019/20 – 2022/23 as set out in Appendix 2;
2. The Borrowing Strategy at paragraphs 23 to 35;
3. The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement at paragraphs 36 to 37 which sets out the Council's policy on charging borrowing to the revenue account; and
4. The Investment Strategy for 2019/20 and investment criteria as set out in paragraphs 38 to 59 and Appendix 1.

142. Oxford Rent Guarantee Scheme Pilot Review

The Head of Housing Services had submitted a report to review the Oxford Rent Guarantee pilot and recommend adopting this approach as the default model for placing households who are at risk of homelessness, into private rented accommodation.

The Board Member for Leisure and Housing said other valuable Council schemes to help those who were homeless sometimes overshadowed the importance of preventing homelessness in the first place. This pilot scheme had been a significant success, helping 73 families. The report sought to embed the practices of the scheme as “business as usual.” She placed on record her thanks to the officers for their work in developing the scheme over the previous two years.

The City Executive Board resolved to:

1. **Agree** in principle for the Oxford Rent Guarantee to be adopted as “business as usual” by the Private Sector team from April 2019, as outlined in the report. This is subject to adequate budget provision being made on an ongoing basis from uncommitted Housing Needs reserves in future years; and
2. **Delegate** authority to the Head of Housing Services to make any administrative changes to the scheme in order to improve the customer offer and to operate the scheme effectively

143. Sale and Leaseback of Flats at St Paul's House, Jericho to enable redevelopment of the wider site

The Interim Regeneration and Economy Programme Director had submitted a report to approve the sale of the freehold interest in St Paul’s House, Jericho to Lucy Group Ltd and leaseback of five flats on long leases to enable the whole site to be redeveloped.

The Surveyor (Regeneration and Major Projects) said the report sought to unlock the difficulties associated with the joint ownership of the St Paul’s House and allow for its timely and sympathetic redevelopment.

Key to the proposal was the protection which would be provided to existing Council tenants who would be guaranteed a home of equal size, either in the new development or elsewhere as they wished. It was agreed that these guarantees should be made clear on the signage associated with the project.

The City Executive Board resolved to:

1. **Approve** the disposal of the freehold interest in St Paul’s House and leaseback of the 5 tenanted flats on the terms set out in the not for publication Appendix 3; and
2. **Delegate** authority to the Interim Regeneration and Economy Programme Director or his successor, to vary those terms on condition that the revised terms continue to represent the best consideration reasonably obtainable.

144. Administration Fee for invalid planning applications that are returned

The Acting Head of Planning Services had submitted a report to seek agreement for the implementation of an administration fee for those invalid applications returned to the applicant.

The Board Member for Planning and Transport said that nearly half of planning applications submitted for the first time were incomplete and therefore invalid. The proposal was intended to discourage submission of incomplete plans (notably from

planning agents and architects) and to recover the costs of processing invalid applications. The Council would hope not to have to apply the fee and its introduction should lessen the number of invalid applications.

The Acting Head of Planning Services said the measure was part of a larger and ongoing programme of performance improvement for the Planning Service. This included, among other things, improving communication with users of the service, through, for example, an enhanced web presence.

The City Executive Board resolved to:

1. **Approve** the implementation of an administration fee for processing invalid applications that are returned to the applicant; and
2. **Delegate** to the Acting Head of Planning Services the authority to set the level of administration charge and time limit by which the charge should be sought for the respective invalid applications.

145. Minutes

The Board resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 22 January as a true and accurate record.

146. Dates of Future Meetings

Meetings are scheduled for the following dates:

- 13 March
- 10 April
- 22 May
- 12 June
- 10 July
- 07 August

All meetings start at 6pm.

147. Matters Exempt from Publication

No exempt matters were discussed.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 6.55 pm

Chair

Date: Wednesday 13 March 2019