

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday 16 June 2021

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Committee members present:

Councillor Brown

Councillor Hayes

Councillor Aziz

Councillor Clarkson

Councillor Rowley

Councillor Turner

Councillor Arshad

Councillor Blackings

Councillor Hollingsworth

Councillor Upton

Also present:

Councillor Andrew Gant

Councillor Linda Smith

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy

Tom Bridgman, Executive Director (Development)

Paul Leo, Interim Director of Housing

Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services

Susan Sale, Monitoring Officer and Head of Law & Governance

Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Officer

Richard Wood, Strategy & Service Development Manager

Emma Gubbins, Senior Estates Surveyor

Elaine Philip, Markets Manager

Deborah Wyatt, Affordable Housing Supply Senior Programme Officer

John Mitchell, Committee and Member Services Officer

Also present:

Councillor Andrew Gant,

Councillor Linda Smith

Apologies:

None

1. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Hayes declared an interest as the Chief Executive of a charity in the City supporting homeless people and therefore proposed to withdraw from the meeting from the relevant housing related agenda items.

2. Addresses and Questions by Members of the Public

None.

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

Cllr Gant addressed Cabinet about item 13 on the agenda, Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan. He wished to acknowledge this important moment in the development of the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan and to thank all those who had been involved in its preparation, Members, officers and the Neighbourhood Forum. He paid particular tribute to the Chair of the Forum, Christopher Hardman. He drew attention to the importance of Neighbourhood CIL in Wolvercote given the significant amount of development anticipated in the area.

Cllr Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery, said he would also wish to extend thanks to all those involved in the plan's development. He said that Cllr Gant's concerns about Neighbourhood CIL should be allayed by conversations with Council officers and the contents of the associated CIL guidance.

4. Councillor Addresses on Neighbourhood Issues

Cllr Linda Smith addressed Cabinet about the impact of the Cowley Low Traffic Neighbourhood Scheme which had increased vehicle traffic on Hollow Way and Oxford Rd and led to more frequent congestion and poorer air quality. This was a matter of great concern to residents of Lye Valley Ward who, because of the congestion, now faced great difficulty in going about their daily business, examples of which had been shared with Cabinet Members. These included the case of an elderly resident unable to taste car fumes in their home and a 4 year old feeling "sick and dirty" as a result of poor air quality on the walk to school. Residents of Lye Valley were angry not to have been consulted about the Cowley LTN, particularly as it had always been evident that traffic would be displaced into their neighbourhood and were now suffering from the negative consequences of the scheme with none of its benefits. She hoped the Leader and relevant Cabinet Members would press the County Council to ensure that Lye Valley residents were properly consulted about future LTNs and that the consequences of the Cowley LTN (particularly congestion and air quality) were properly monitored and understood by the highways authority.

Cllr Andrew Gant addressed Cabinet about Low Traffic Neighbourhood schemes more generally. He believed that LTNs should, properly, be part of a vision for the City as a whole, seen as part of the solution to that vision and as part of an overarching plan which takes full account of all the consequences, benefits and disbenefits for all sectors, demographics and communities. This would require deep, wide ranging and meaningful consultation with all those affected, whether positively or negatively. Decisions must be based on evidence. He noted the absence of reliable evidence that traffic increases on major and arterial roads were attributable to LTNs at a time when the City is emerging from lockdown. Strong cross-party political support for reducing car use in the City was evident at the last election. He urged the Cabinet to support the principle of LTNs and to work with other relevant stakeholders to achieve that end.

Councillor Tom Hayes, Cabinet Member for Green Transport and Zero Carbon Oxford gave a detailed verbal response to Cllrs Smith and Gant in which the following points were made among others.

The County Council had, as recently as that week, committed to more targeted consultation using a digital platform, better member engagement, an integrated transport strategy, and the introduction of any LTNs (if decided upon) in Autumn.

He and the Leader would continue to press the County Council as the transport authority to provide all residents with opportunities to contribute to all consultations and enable consultations to be inclusive and accessible to residents who do not use the Internet.

It was understood from the County Council that traffic monitoring was now underway, and they would be sharing information once they have fully analysed the data. They will provide the following metrics for all active travel schemes.

- % change in pedestrians, cyclists, cars
- Vehicle Speed Change
- Perceived Safety
- Air Quality (AQ)
- Changes in Accident Statistics

The City Council was monitoring air quality in the surrounding areas of the Lye Valley, which does not sit within an LTN area, in order to have a better understanding of any traffic impacts arising from the introduction of LTNs.

5. Items raised by Board Members

None.

6. Scrutiny Committee Reports

Scrutiny Committee had met on 08 June and submitted recommendations to Cabinet in relation to the Safeguarding Report and the County-wide Transformation of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping items.

Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Officer, introduced these reports in the unavoidable absence of Cllr Liz Wade, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee.

Safeguarding

The Committee had made two recommendations. The first related to the requirement to share information with the Secretary of State in relation to slavery and human trafficking and the need for an assurance that this was consistent with the City's status as a City of Sanctuary and would not be used for the purposes of immigration enforcement. The second related to the publication of outcomes in the Annual Safeguarding Report and a request that it provides sufficient context to be able to judge the effectiveness of those outcomes.

Cllr Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for a Safer Healthier Oxford, was happy to confirm that the data provided to the Secretary of State were not used for the purposes of immigration enforcement. The reporting was, rather, a means of helping to secure the support those people needed. She was happy to support the request for the provision of additional information to give a more rounded picture of the Council's safeguarding practice.

County-wide Transformation of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

The Committee was very supportive of the strategy and the vision behind it. The first recommendation was in recognition of the importance of homeless prevention and the desirability of taking account of good practice elsewhere, with particular reference to a scheme run by Derby City Council. The other three recommendations related to the new commissioning arrangements which were central to the report, namely: the need for governance of the new arrangements to include a political element; the need to secure the best professional advice when procuring services; and the desirability of promoting the added value the Council's services can bring to some of the services being commissioned.

Cllr Diko Blackings, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security and Housing the Homeless, thought the Scrutiny recommendations were helpful. The Chair added that, in relation to the second recommendation, there were already procedures in place to secure a political dimension to decision making.

7. Covered Market Leasing Strategy

Executive Director of Development had submitted a report to seek approval to implement the recommendations set out in the refresh of the Covered Market Leasing Strategy.

Cllr Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, introduced the report. The Covered Market was a jewel in the crown of the City Centre with a wonderful history and atmosphere. It was emerging from a difficult period as a result of some pandemic enforced closure as well as a decline in tourist and student numbers. The strategy before Cabinet was ambitious and sought to develop the Covered Market and what it had to offer in several ways. There would be greater focus on leases to those offering food and drink. It was proposed to open the Market for longer hours and that it should contribute to the evening economy. There would be particular support for local independent traders. Significant investment was planned to ensure its physical sustainability. The Market would be promoted more widely than hitherto to ensure a better understanding of what it can offer. He thanked officers for bringing the project to this point as a result of which the Council would be well placed to make the best of this important resource for the City Centre.

In relation to the promotion of the Market via social media, it was noted that the previous year had caused many Market traders to offer an on line ordering service, something which would continue. The use of social media would also bring the Market to the attention of a younger audience which was important.

The Chair shared Cllr Turner's view about the importance of the Market for the City Centre, as a place to visit and to shop, especially for local people. She was pleased that the Council had been able to support the Market's traders during an exceptionally difficult year and thanked officers for all their work in relation to it.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the Covered Market Leasing Strategy

8. Oxford City Council Safeguarding Report 2019/20

The Head of Corporate Strategy had submitted a report to report on the progress made on the Oxford City Council's Safeguarding Action Plan 2019/20.

Cllr Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for a Safer Healthier Oxford, introduced the report. The Council, through its day to day work, came into contact with a significant number of vulnerable people and had a statutory duty to keep them as safe as possible. As part of that duty its safeguarding processes were subject to an annual review and audit, the outcome of which was made public. All Members and staff had access to training about safeguarding and were made aware of the reporting mechanism "My Concern." The latest audit before Cabinet took account of some of the particular safeguarding issues flowing from the pandemic. She emphasised the importance of seeing this duty as one which should not just ensure that people survive but that they also thrive. She was pleased to note that as the result of an intensive peer review process the Council's safeguarding arrangements were judged to be examples of best practice in relation to the five areas under consideration.

The Chair passed on thanks to all those in the Council who had been involved with safeguarding over the previous year which had been exceptionally challenging.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the key achievements of the Safeguarding work delivered through Oxford City Council during 2019/20;
2. **Agree** the Safeguarding Action Plan 2021/22 set out in Appendix 1; and
3. **Approve** Oxford City Council's safeguarding policy updated May 2021

9. Approval to proceed and undertake the executive function of Cherwell District Council for housing allocation identified in the Duty to Cooperate.

The Head of Housing Services had submitted a report to seek approval for a scheme which involves exercising the Duty to Cooperate under the Localism Act 2011 with Cherwell District Council to meet Oxfordshire's unmet housing need and to provide an update on the wider Oxfordshire agreements with West Oxfordshire District Council, South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council.

Cllr Blackings, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security and Housing the Homeless, introduced the report which, at its heart, sought to secure a more co-ordinated and joined up approach to meeting Oxfordshire's unmet housing need. There was a need to work as closely with surrounding Councils as possible. She was grateful to the work of officers in bringing this proposal forward.

It was important that it should be made as easy as possible for residents of Oxford to register on housing lists notwithstanding the absence, at the moment, of one common County-wide scheme. Deb Wyatt, Affordable Housing Supply Senior Programme Officer, said that a joint communications plan was being prepared with West Oxfordshire District Council and South & Vale District Council the outcome of which would be shared with those on the City's housing register. A mechanism for monitoring the effectiveness of the new arrangements for residents was being developed which would inform the need for subsequent modifications.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** exercising the duty to cooperate under the Localism Act 2011 with Cherwell District Council and other neighbouring district councils to meet Oxfordshire's housing need;
2. **Agree** in principle to accept a delegation from Cherwell District Council using section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 to perform its statutory housing functions in respect of properties identified in order to meet Oxford's unmet demand;
3. **Note** the agreed approach with West Oxfordshire District Council;
4. **Note** the agreed approach with South Oxfordshire District Council; and
5. **Note** the agreed approach with Vale of White Horse District Council

10. Salix decarbonisation grant funding

The Head of Corporate Strategy had submitted a report to seek a Cabinet recommendation to full Council for the approval of the loan to Low Carbon Hub to support investment in the Ray Valley Solar Project.

Cllr Tom Hayes, Cabinet Member for Green Transport and Zero Carbon Oxford, introduced the report which sought agreement to invest c. £3.4m of government funding in the Low Carbon Hub's Ray Valley Solar Farm which would, in turn, result in an annual payment back to the Council of c. £177,000. This represented a good example of the Council pursuing a policy of community owned energy support. The Council had supported the Low Carbon Hub for over a decade to promote community owned energy. This development would lead to the country's largest community owned solar park, capable of generating enough energy to power the equivalent of over 6,000 homes a year.

The Chair echoed Cllr Hayes's thanks to Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy, for his work on this complex project which was having to be done at a great pace in order to meet the conditions of the government funding.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Recommend** to Council the approval of a loan to Low Carbon Hub of up to £3,385,200 together with the associated capital budget for investment in the in the Ray Valley Solar (RVS) local renewable energy project. The investment to be fully funded by the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme grant awarded to the council by Salix Finance Ltd a wholly owned Government department funded by the Business Energy and Industrial Strategy Department (BEIS);

2. **Delegate** authority to the Head of Corporate Strategy in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford to enter into a loan agreement with Low Carbon Hub on terms to be agreed by the Head of Financial Services/Section 151 Officer; and the Councils Monitoring Officer;

3. **Note** the reduction in the City Council's carbon emissions of up to an estimated 1,000 tCO₂ per year from the solar farm investment, evidenced by the transfer of high quality, traceable Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin (REGOs) from RVS in support of the Council's 2030 zero carbon target for its estate and operations; and

4. **Note** the update provided on the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme programme.

11. Statement of Community Involvement

The Head of Planning Services had submitted a report to ask Cabinet to formally adopt the updated version of the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) in Planning following public consultation.

Cllr Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery, introduced the report. The Statement of Community Involvement was a statutory document which set out how the Council should consult the public about planning policy documents and planning applications. This latest iteration placed increased emphasis on digital technology and included a greater emphasis on the importance of early consultation. He noted that the Statement reflected current planning practice not future planning practice. If the proposals in the current White Paper on planning are implemented as they stand, there will be very few matters in relation to which consultation will be required.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Adopt** this updated version of the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) as the formal document that sets out how the City Council will engage people in the planning process; and

2. **Authorise** the Head of Planning Services, after consultation with the Cabinet Lead Member, to make any necessary editorial corrections to the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) prior to final publication.

12. Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan

The Head of Planning Services had submitted a report to request Cabinet to recommend to Council that the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan be "made".

Cllr Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery, introduced the report which proposed the making of the third neighbourhood plan in the City. This plan had been within weeks of final approval when the pandemic caused the necessary referendum to endorse the plan to be postponed. The referendum had however now been held and resulted in overwhelming support for it.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Recommend** to Council that the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan be "made"; and
2. **Recommend** to Council that the Head of Planning Services after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery, be authorised to make any necessary editorial corrections to the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan prior to final

publication. This will include a final desktop published version of the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan.

13. The Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy – Homelessness Review and Evidence base

Cllr Hayes left the meeting at this point.

The Executive Director of Housing had submitted a report to present the findings of the homelessness review and strategy evidence base that will inform the drafting of the new Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, and to seek approval for the launch of a visioning consultation.

Cllr Diko Blackings, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security and Housing the Homeless, introduced the report which set out, among other things, the considerable achievements under the current strategy notwithstanding the challenges of the previous year. The proposals for the new strategy were bold and innovative.

Richard Wood, Strategy and Service Development Manager, emphasised that this was just the first stage in what would be a long process which would take place over the next year or so.

The Chair thanked officers for this important strand of work and in particular for the additional work occasioned by the pandemic.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the Homelessness Review and Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Evidence base;
2. **Approve** the launch of a visioning consultation to collect views on the review and evidence base and approve the draft vision and emerging priorities; and
3. **Note** the strategy development process and timeline described in the report.

14. Housing First programme

The Executive Director of Housing had submitted a report to seek project authorisation for a Housing First programme with the aim of supporting the Council's objective to end rough sleeping.

Cllr Diko Blackings, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security and Housing the Homeless, introduced the report. The importance of the Housing First intervention could not be underestimated, coming on the back of the Council's commendable record in the provision of emergency self-contained accommodation for rough sleepers and persons living in shared-space homelessness accommodation.

It was clear that addressing some of the fundamental problems often associated with homelessness such as mental health and drug addiction were much more effectively addressed given the security of a permanent home. The scheme would be a challenge but with the goodwill and support of Council partners across the County it had the potential to be transformative.

The Chair noted that this was something which the Council had been working towards for some time. The evidence base from elsewhere made it clear that this was the proper course to pursue. Partnership working would be essential for its success.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the procurement of a support service for the Council's Housing First programme.

15. County-Wide Transformation of Rough Sleeping

The Executive Director of Housing had submitted a report to update Cabinet on the county-wide transformation work and seek the necessary approvals to proceed. To also seek approval to retender and award the current outreach, engagement and assessment contract.

Cllr Blackings, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security and Housing the Homeless, introduced the report. The proposals sought to ensure that all relevant authorities and agencies across the county have a co-ordinated approach to rough sleeping and single homelessness, so avoiding a silo approach to dealing with those affected.

Cabinet welcomed the report which was a welcome development and as significant improvement on the position of a few years ago when, for example, significant County Council funding for this area of work was withdrawn.

This report, taken together with previous three housing related reports represented a transformation in the way the Council deals with people who are homeless and with homelessness prevention. The increasing levels of co-operation between all those involved in matters to do with homelessness was welcome and would be critical the success of this area of work as was the importance of putting lived experience at the centre of it, together with measures of success which take account of the outcomes for individuals. In this way the Council would, properly, be both a servant and champion of its people.

The Chair noted that the pandemic had increased and improved the level and quality of wider partnership working for the good of the City's residents and it was to be hoped that this improvement would not be lost.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the progress developing the County-Wide Single Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, attached in Appendix 1 of the report;
2. **Note** that work will be done to review the current decision making arrangements as described in the report. Any revised arrangements would be subject to a further report to Cabinet for Member consideration;
3. **Note** the ongoing development of an alliance approach to commissioning and the approved timetable for delivery;
4. **Approve** Oxford City Council's 5-year financial commitment from its base budget to the pooled budget arrangement of £4,842,900 in total;
5. **Approve** the re-procurement of the Outreach, Engagement and Assessment hub contract at a value of £1,420,507 and delegate the responsibility for the award of contract to the Executive Director for Housing;
6. **Approve** the procurement of a Navigator service, as a separate lot, at a value of £150k and delegate the responsibility for the award of contract to the Executive Director for Housing; and
7. **Note** the potential wider operational changes required to support the county-led transformation.

16. Minutes

Councillor Hayes re-joined the meeting at this point.

Cabinet resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 14 April 2021 as a true and accurate record.

17. Dates of Future Meetings

Meetings are scheduled for the following dates:

- 21 July
- 11 August
- 15 September
- 13 October
- 10 November
- 15 December

All meetings start at 6pm.

18. Matters Exempt from Publication

No matters were considered in Confidential session.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.30 pm

Chair

Date: Wednesday 21 July 2021