

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

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Committee members present:

Councillor Brown (Chair)	Councillor Turner
Councillor Hayes	Councillor Arshad
Councillor Aziz	Councillor Blackings
Councillor Clarkson	Councillor Hollingsworth
Councillor Rowley	Councillor Upton

Also present:

Councillor Elizabeth Wade, Councillor James Fry

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Caroline Green, Chief Executive
Paul Leo, Interim Director of Housing
Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy
Susan Sale, Monitoring Officer and Head of Law & Governance
Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services
Tanya Bandekar, Service Manager Revenue & Benefits
Laura Bessell, Benefits Manager
John Mitchell, Committee and Member Services Officer

Apologies:

None.

31. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Tom Hayes declared a non-pecuniary interest as the Chief Executive of a charity which worked with a Homelessness Partnership Alliance. He had had no involvement with preparatory work for the report at item 11 (Bid for Government funding to support the Council's Homelessness Strategy).

32. Addresses and questions by members of the public

None.

33. Councillor addresses on any item for decision on the Cabinet agenda

None.

34. Councillor addresses on neighbourhood issues

None.

35. Items raised by Cabinet Members

None.

36. Scrutiny Committee reports

Response to Domestic Abuse Review Group

Cllr Wade, speaking as Chair of Scrutiny Committee, was grateful for the broadly positive response to the Review Group's recommendations.

Cllr Upton, Cabinet Member for a Safer, Healthy Oxford, said it had been a thorough and welcome report. Some recommendations had not been agreed pending the outcome of a local strategy informed by a countywide needs assessment commissioned by the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategic Group. There was confidence that there was capacity to implement those which had been agreed.

Urban Forest Strategy

Cllr Wade was grateful for the almost complete support for the Committee's three recommendations

Cllr Arshad, Cabinet Member for Parks and Waste Reduction, was grateful for the Committee's recommendations and had been pleased to support them

Electric Vehicle Strategy

Cllr Wade reminded Cabinet that recommendations on the Strategy had been discussed at the previous Cabinet meeting. Because of uncertainty about the mandate for those recommendations from the Committee it had been agreed that the Committee should be asked to reconsider them. The recommendations before the Committee were the result of that further consideration.

Cllr Hayes, Cabinet Member for Green Transport and Zero Carbon Oxford, regretted that he was not yet able to respond to the revised recommendations. In his view the intent behind them was not yet clear and it would be important to have that clarity before coming to a view.

OL Implementation

Cllr Fry, speaking as Chair of the Finance & Performance Panel, said the Panel had been keen to ensure that the lessons learned from OL implementation addressed both its direct and indirect consequences as well as those for Oxford Direct Services and not just the Council. The Panel was also keen to ensure that the significant additional workload for many colleagues caused by the delayed implementation was properly acknowledged.

Cllr Rowley, Cabinet Member for Customer Focused Services, said he had been pleased to agree to the two recommendations. He met regularly with representatives of Unison and Unite and had thanked ODS and other staff for their contributions. He placed on record his gratitude for all those who had worked with dedication in support of the Council's public services.

Social Value in Procurement

Cllr Fry said the Panel had benefitted from a very helpful report and contributions from the Procurement Manager. It had been good to see that the Council performed well compared with similar authorities and was keen that comparisons should be expanded to include a wider group of authorities.

Cllr Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, said before coming to a firm view about the Panel's two recommendations he would want to discuss them with the relevant officers (something which hadn't been possible until now because of leave arrangements) he was however optimistic that he would be able to provide a positive response in time for the next Cabinet meeting.

37. Integrated Performance Report for Q1

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

Cllr Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, introduced the report which rehearsed some well worn themes. He noted that the Council had had to draw on just over £11m of reserves earlier in the year to balance the budget over the medium term. There were some underlying concerns such as the loss of car park income, reduced commercial rents and uncertainty about a dividend from Oxford Direct Services attributable to difficulties with OL implementation. The Housing Revenue Account on the other hand was still predicting a significant underspend. An updated position in relation to anticipated capital spend would be given in the next report.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the projected financial outturn as well as the current position on risk and performance as at 30 June 2021; and
2. **Recommend** to Council the addition of £10.0 million into the Capital programme as per paragraph 12.

38. Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2022/23

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report to seek approval for proposals for consultation on changes to the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2022/23.

Cllr Aziz, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Communities, was pleased to introduce the report which provided important protection to some vulnerable members of the community while, at the same time, seeking to respond to the Council's budget pressures. Scrutiny Committee, while not making any formal recommendations, had made some helpful suggestions about the consultation which were being taken on board.

It was noted that the working age caseload might well be affected as furlough arrangements come to an end. The importance of ensuring high levels of engagement with the consultation was recognised, particularly for those who may struggle to do so digitally. The use of posters in doctors' surgeries and libraries, for example, would simply capitalise on the presence of people at those locations for other reasons and not, of itself, contribute to unnecessary gathering of people from a Covid point of view. The use of the term "White British" in the consultation document sat uncomfortably

alongside other descriptors where “British” might also be appropriate but was absent. The current wording was based on that used in the Census but officers agreed to see how it might be improved.

The Chair thanked the officers and their colleagues for their work in this important area.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Agree** that the proposals for the 2022/23 Council Tax Reduction Scheme outlined in the report be subject to consultation for an 8 week period from 20th September 2021; and
2. **Note** the intention of the Head of Financial Services to bring a further report to Cabinet in January 2022 to outline the outcome of the consultation process and make proposals for the 2022/23 Council Tax Reduction Scheme

39. A report to set out the Council's Treasury Management activity and performance for the financial year 2020/2021

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report setting out the Council’s Treasury Management activity and performance for the financial year 2020/21.

Cllr Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, introduced the report which described reasonable performance in the context of continuing low interest rates. He noted that steps were being taken to develop a separate Environmental Social and Governance policy within the 2022/23 Treasury Strategy.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the report

40. A bid for government RSAP funding to support the Council's Homelessness Strategy

The Executive Director of Housing had submitted a report to seek approval to proceed with the bid to MHCLG for funding from the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP) and to agree to include the required capital match funding in the Council’s budget.

Cllr Diko Blackings, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security and Housing the Homeless, introduced the report. The proposal before Cabinet would provide another welcome contribution to Council’s efforts to tackle homelessness. The scheme was considered to represent excellent value for money not least because of the Government’s matched funding element.

Officers noted a correction in paragraph 14 of the report “completion” should read “competition”.

It was recognised that there was a fine balance to be struck in wanting to take advantage of the investment opportunity while not wanting to be in unnecessary competition with third sector providers. Officers said there was monitoring of the housing market to avoid paying in excess of the market valuation but this was constrained to some extent by the very tight timescale for this (and other) schemes.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Agree** the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme bid and the further £2m investment in the National Homelessness Property Fund by the Council;
2. **Recommend** to Council that budget provision is agreed for the required match funding of £2m; and
3. **Delegate** to the Executive Director of Housing the entering into of supporting agreements.

41. Urban Forest Strategy

The Head of Corporate Strategy had submitted a report to seek approval for the Urban Forest Strategy.

Councillor Lubna Arshad, Cabinet Member for Parks and Waste Reduction, introduced the report which built upon some of the findings of the Council's 2019 Citizen's Assembly on Climate Change. The Strategy was ambitious, for the whole city, and set out a framework for action to 2050. The involvement of stakeholders was essential, this was not something which could be achieved by the Council on its own. It had become apparent that areas of deprivation in the City had less canopy cover than others; the Strategy would seek to address this. At the heart of the Strategy was the importance of the "right tree in the right place".

The Head of Corporate Strategy emphasised the importance of wide stakeholder and community engagement with the Strategy. While the Council would of course respond to the Strategy where it was able to do so, the majority of land was not owned by it.

It was agreed that every effort should be made to provide additional tree cover in shared outdoor spaces close to flats and homes without their own gardens.

While there was general support for trees and tree planting in the wider community it was also recognised that trees were perceived by some and in some circumstances to be a nuisance. It would be helpful if damage to pavements caused by tree roots was always remedied as a priority. Similarly there would be occasions when the removal of a tree (obstructing a cycle lane for example) would, on balance, be preferable to letting it remain.

The removal of trees from front gardens (to facilitate off-street EV charging) was agreed to be a challenge.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the Oxford Urban Forest Strategy – A Master Plan to 2050, which sets out the strategic direction for how we, as a city, protect, manage and expand our urban forest to help tackle the climate and ecological emergencies. Officers will take opportunities to seek external funding opportunities to facilitate the implementation of the strategy; and
2. **Authorise** the Head of Corporate Strategy to make minor editorial amendments to the strategy document.

42. Minutes

Cabinet resolved to **approve** the minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2021 as a true and accurate record, subject to the replacement of "Councillor Tom Hughes" in minute 26 with "Councillor Tom Hayes".

43. Decisions taken under Part 9.3 (b) of the Constitution

The Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive) had submitted a report asking Cabinet and Council to note the decision taken by the Head of Paid Service using the urgency powers delegated in Part 9.3(b) of the Constitution.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the decision taken as set out in the report and **recommend to Council** to note the decision.

44. Dates of Future Meetings

Meetings are scheduled for the following dates:

13 October 2021	26 January 2022
10 November 2021	9 February 2022
15 December 2021	16 March 2022
	13 April 2022
	26 May 2022

All meetings start at 6.00pm.

45. Matters Exempt From Publication

Cabinet passed a resolution in accordance with the provisions of Paragraph 4(2)(b) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 to exclude members of the public from discussion of the following item on the grounds that their presence could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

46. Decarbonisation programme update

The Head of Corporate Strategy had submitted a report to provide an update on the decarbonisation programme and seek approval for the de-scoping of the programme to remain within budget and issue contracts for construction works.

The Head of Corporate Strategy updated Cabinet with the latest position on the decarbonisation programme at the conclusion of which Cabinet agreed the following updated recommendations.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the de-scoping of the Decarbonisation Programme through the removal of the Ice Rink and Rose Hill Community Centre;
2. **Note** that the full costs of decarbonisation works will utilise 100% of the Salix grant funding available, so there will no longer be any grant contribution available towards the enabling works, contrary to the earlier report to Cabinet, but will be funded instead from capital reserves;

3. **Note** that the Head of Corporate Strategy will shortly execute the contract for both enabling and decarbonisation construction work on behalf of the Council, as previously delegated by Cabinet;
4. **Note** the update provided on the Decarbonisation Programme and solar farm investment; and
5. **Delegate** to the Chief Executive authority to authorise additional spend or agree such variations to the project as may be necessary, in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Finance & Asset Management; Green Transport & Zero Carbon Oxford; and Culture, Leisure & Tourism, to enable the project to progress in a timely manner.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.20 pm

Chair

Date: Wednesday 13 October 2021

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