

# Minutes

## of a meeting of the

# Council

held at 7pm on Wednesday 23 February 2011  
at the Guildhall, Abingdon



**Open to the public, including the press**

### **Present:**

Members: Councillor Beth Fleming (Chair), Val Shaw (Vice-Chair), Matthew Barber, Julia Bricknell, Paul Burton, Yvonne Constance, Roger Cox, Terry Cox, Mary de Vere, Tony de Vere, Gervase Duffield, Richard Farrell, Terry Fraser, Richard Gibson, Jim Halliday, Jane Hanna, Jenny Hannaby, Anthony Hayward, Dudley Hoddinott, Joyce Hutchinson, Gareth Jennings, Bob Johnston, Angela Lawrence, Pat Lonergan, Sue Marchant, Julie Mayhew-Archer, Janet Morgan, Mike Murray, Jerry Patterson, Terry Quinlan, Julia Reynolds, Judy Roberts, Alison Rooke, Peter Saunders, Robert Sharp, Jenny Shepherd, Laurel Symons, Melinda Tilley, Margaret Turner, Reg Waite, Elaine Ware, Richard Webber and John Woodford

Officers: Steve Bishop, David Buckle, Steven Corrigan, Steve Culliford, William Jacobs, Matt Prosser, Margaret Reed, and Bob Watson

Number of members of the public: 13

### **Co.65 Prayers**

The Reverend Paul Smith led the Council in prayer.

### **Co.66 Apologies for absence**

Councillors Samantha Bowring, Andrew Crawford, Bill Melotti, John Morgan, Zoe Patrick, Alison Thomson and Chris Wise had all sent their apologies for absence.

### **Co.67 Minutes**

**RESOLVED:** To adopt the Council minutes of the two meetings held on 8 December 2010 and agree that the chair signs them.

### **Co.68 Declarations of interest**

Councillors made the following declarations of interests:

<b>Councillor</b>	<b>Agenda item</b>	<b>Personal/ prejudicial interest</b>	<b>Reason</b>
Julia Bricknell	Guildhall, Abingdon	Personal and prejudicial	She was an Abingdon Town Councillor
Julia Bricknell	Budget	Personal	She was an Abingdon Town Councillor
Roger Cox	Joint Environmental Trusts	Personal	He was a Faringdon Town Councillor and member of the Faringdon Joint Environmental Trust
Terry Cox	Budget	Personal	Member of the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council
Mary de Vere	Budget	Personal	Member of the Friends of Abingdon Museum
Tony de Vere	Budget	Personal	Member of the Friends of Abingdon Museum
Richard Farrell	Budget	Personal	Member of Court Hill Trust
Beth Fleming	Budget	Personal	Member of the Friends of Abingdon Museum
Terry Fraser	Budget	Personal	Member of the Vale and Downland Museum, and Court Hill Trust
Jim Halliday	Guildhall, Abingdon	Personal and prejudicial	He was an Abingdon Town Councillor
Jim Halliday	Joint Environmental Trusts	Personal and prejudicial	Chairman of the Abingdon Joint Environmental Trust and member of Abingdon Town Council
Jim Halliday	Budget	Personal	He was an Abingdon Town Councillor and a Member of the Friends of Abingdon Museum
Jane Hanna	Budget	Personal	She was a Wantage Town Councillor
Jenny Hannaby	Joint Environmental Trusts	Personal	She was a Wantage Town Councillor, a member of the Wantage Joint Environmental Trust, and a member of the Letcombe Brook Project
Jenny Hannaby	Budget	Personal	She was a Wantage Town Councillor
Joyce Hutchinson	Joint Environmental Trusts	Personal	She was a member of the Wantage Joint Environmental Trust, and a member of the Letcombe Brook Project

<b>Councillor</b>	<b>Agenda item</b>	<b>Personal/ prejudicial interest</b>	<b>Reason</b>
Angela Lawrence	Guildhall, Abingdon	Personal and prejudicial	She was an Abingdon Town Councillor
Angela Lawrence	Budget	Personal	She was an Abingdon Town Councillor
Pat Lonergan	Guildhall, Abingdon	Personal and prejudicial	He was an Abingdon Town Councillor
Pat Lonergan	Budget	Personal	He was an Abingdon Town Councillor
Sue Marchant	Joint Environmental Trusts	Personal	Chairman of the Grove Joint Environmental Trust
Julie Mayhew-Archer	Guildhall, Abingdon	Personal and prejudicial	She was an Abingdon Town Councillor
Julie Mayhew-Archer	Joint Environmental Trusts	Personal	She was a member of the Abingdon Joint Environmental Trust
Julie Mayhew-Archer	Budget	Personal	She was an Abingdon Town Councillor and a member of the Friends of Abingdon Museum
Julia Reynolds	Budget	Personal	She was a Wantage Town Councillor
Alison Rooke	Guildhall, Abingdon	Personal and prejudicial	She was an Abingdon Town Councillor
Alison Rooke	Joint Environmental Trusts	Personal	She was an Abingdon Town Councillor
Alison Rooke	Budget	Personal	She was an Abingdon Town Councillor and a member of the Friends of Abingdon Museum. Her daughter was employed by the council
Peter Saunders	Budget	Personal	He was a Shrivenham Parish Councillor
Robert Sharp	Joint Environmental Trusts	Personal	He was a member of the Faringdon Joint Environmental Trust
Laurel Symons	Joint Environmental Trusts	Personal	She was a member of the Abingdon Joint Environmental Trust
Melinda Tilley	Budget	Personal	She was a member of Oxfordshire County Council

## **Co.69 Urgent business and chair's announcements**

### **(1) Chair's Announcements**

- (i) The chair reminded everyone of the evacuation procedure.
- (ii) The chair asked everyone to switch off their mobile telephones during the meeting.
- (iii) She reminded the public not to interrupt the meeting.
- (iv) The chair invited all councillors to a reception to celebrate the end of the council's four-year term.
- (v) The chair presented Councillor Jenny Hannaby, the portfolio holder for commercial services, with an award that the council had received for its waste recycling service.

### **(2) Urgent Business**

None

## **Co.70 Statements, petitions, and questions from the public relating to matters affecting Council**

Three members of the public made statements to the Council.

- (1) Dr Les Clyne made a statement about the proposed transfer of the Guildhall to Abingdon Town Council. The Council was about to decide on the capital expenditure of £1.2 million in relation to the transfer of the Guildhall to Abingdon Town Council. He considered that the town council was financially irresponsible and could not manage projects, especially large ones. It had increased its council tax by 24 per cent in the current year and was going to spend around half a million pounds of its money on the museum this year. The ongoing revenue cost of the museum after the development would jump from £120,000 to almost £180,000 a year. It was unable to spend its budget on enhancing and maintaining its children's play areas last year. He urged the council to develop the Guildhall as a Vale asset rather than transferring it to an organisation, which because of its size, lack of expertise in managing or overseeing large projects, and financial laxity, was not up to the job of managing the building and associated services.
- (2) Abingdon Town Councillor Lesley Legge made a statement about the proposed transfer of the Guildhall to Abingdon Town Council. The Guildhall complex included the old buildings around Roysse Court and the Bear Room, the Council Chamber and the Abbey Room, as well as the 1960s/1970s part, which housed the Abbey Hall. She thanked the staff from the district and town councils who had found a fair means of devolving this complex to the town council and ensuring that it remained open for the people of Abingdon and the wider community. This was a good example of the current move to devolve power nearer to the community as the Localism Bill intended.

The Guildhall complex was an Abingdon Borough Council building until 1974. The town's wonderful treasures had remained in the Roysse Room and the old Mayor's Parlour, as had the interesting paintings in the Council Chamber and on many of the walls of the original building. These treasures and paintings had always been under the care and responsibility of the town council. The town council had catalogued, insured, and cared for these treasures since 1974.

The town council was planning to set up a trust to run the facility; with £0.2 million of the capital funding to undertake a short-term refurbishment and work - mainly to the newer part of the building - and to market the refurbished facility. A full review with the community was planned during the first year to explore the needs and possibilities towards a long-term sustainable strategy. The larger £1 million capital funding would be earmarked for the future capital needs of the Guildhall complex over the next 10 years. She hoped the district council would continue to use these facilities.

As previous projects had shown, the town council had worked well to sustain and improve facilities in Abingdon with both the district council on for example, the open air swimming pool, and with support from the district council and Oxfordshire County Council on the Market Place refurbishment and the County Hall project. The town council was pleased that the latter project was running to time and within budget. This had been achieved with the help of experienced members of the project board, set up by the town council to support this large undertaking, alongside the heritage lottery funded professional team from Ridge, and the building contractors Leadbiters. Both of these were well respected local firms.

This year, the other major town council projects were the war memorial stabilisation and area upgrade, and the improvements at the cemetery. The Town Crier publication and town council's website kept residents informed on projects; feedback on all of these projects was positive.

Councillor Legge believed that the two councils would continue to work together well for the future benefit of their residents in both the town and the district and would secure the future of this building within the local community so that it remained open for community use.

- (3) Elizabeth Edgecombe made a statement on behalf of the Friends of the Abbey Meadows Outdoor Pool. She informed the Council that the Friends had made a statement to the Executive on 11 February, seeking a four-part partnership to look into the management and marketing of the open-air pool at the Abbey Meadows in Abingdon. She suggested the partnership should involve the town and district councils, the contractor and her group. She was pleased to report that the council's leader had agreed to this request, with meetings planned for May and September.

The Friends were also interested in improving the whole Abbey Meadows area and attracting external funding to assist. She had identified three possible funding sources. She urged the council to work together with the other partners to achieve more.

The chair thanked all three speakers for their statements.

## **Co.71 Urgent business**

None

## **Co.72 Petitions under standing order No.13**

Councillor Reg Waite presented a petition on behalf of Mrs Ann Lewis and Mr John Mackerness concerning the former grade 2 listed dwelling known as The Thatched Cottage

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King (also known as The Thatched Cottage), Reading Road, Harwell. He read the petition, which contained 651 signatories:

“We, the undersigned residents of Harwell village, hereby seek the immediate action of the chief executive and officers of the Vale of White Horse District Council in resolving the problems encountered by two nearby residents following the collapse of the above dwelling on Sunday 13 February 2005.

We, severally and jointly, are grossly concerned that after more than six years since the collapse of this grade 2 listed dwelling, no action to reinstate the cottage has been taken by the owner, Mr Keith Dawson. He has only recently made any attempt whatsoever to tidy up the unkempt site which has been the subject of vegetation and rodent problems.

The two neighbouring dwellings and their inhabitants have suffered throughout and despite correspondence with the Vale of White Horse District Council the site remains in a disgraceful state.

The end partition wall to the grade 2 listed Thatch Cottage, Reading Road, Harwell, owned by Mrs Ann Lewis, received some urgent remedial work following the collapse. Mrs Ann Lewis, a retired person, is unable to sell her property whilst the current situation continues. With the passage of time the whole affair has caused tremendous undue and increasing stress, and suffering for Mrs Lewis, who in the circumstances has been unable to enjoy her retirement. Her financial circumstances have suffered too.

During the past 18 to 24 months, some cracks have appeared in her property towards that end of the dwelling which was attached to the collapsed cottage. Her property appears to be further deteriorating and a recent professional inspection has been undertaken to establish the cause. The report will be available shortly.

The dwelling at the other end of the collapsed cottage is Elderfield Cottage, Reading Road, Harwell and owned by Mr John Mackerness. His internal wall shared with the collapsed cottage was covered by polythene which has become ripped and washed away, and parts of this partition wall are now back to bare wattle and daub. Daylight can be seen from his loft. The property is cracking and creaking regularly and in the circumstances Mr Mackerness has been afraid to sleep in his bedroom on the first floor for many months.

The properties are being gradually eroded and both Mrs Lewis and Mr Mackerness feared the latest winter weather could bring further devastation to their homes. The value of both dwellings has been dramatically affected by this disturbing occurrence.

We seek the Vale’s urgent formal attention to this matter and request that all possible legal proceedings, including prosecution and compulsory purchase order if necessary, are enforced with utmost speed for the benefit of the site and the neighbourhood.

We seek the Vale’s immediate legal action to ensure that –

- 1) The unsightly site of The Thatched Cottage is cleared of all rubbish and vegetation immediately and maintained in a tidy condition until building works commence.
- 2) The partition walls to the two dwellings formerly shared with The Thatched Cottage are safeguarded from further decay and deterioration during the forthcoming winter climate, but not at the expense of Mrs Ann Lewis and Mr John Mackerness.
- 3) Permission is granted for these partition walls to be converted to external walls as soon as possible in order to restore and preserve these dwellings, notwithstanding this may probably necessitate acquisition of two strips of land currently forming part of the collapsed cottage's site – again at no cost to Mrs Ann Lewis and Mr John Mackerness.
- 4) A thatched dwelling similar to the collapsed dwelling The Thatched Cottage is constructed to grade 2 listed standards in order to preserve the uniformity and tradition of the three properties in this historic village of Harwell.”

Mrs Lewis and Mr Mackerness handed the petition to the chair of the council. The chair suggested that this petition was referred to the head of planning for consideration and recommendation back to the Council. The Council agreed unanimously. The chair asked that the head of planning kept Councillor Waite informed of progress.

**RESOLVED: to**

- (1) refer the petition to the head of planning services for consideration and report back to the Council with recommendations; and
- (2) request that the head of planning keeps Councillor Waite informed of progress.

**Co.73 Questions under standing order 12**

There were two questions from councillors under Standing Order 12.

- (1) Question to Councillor Jenny Hannaby from Councillor Peter Saunders:

"During the severe weather conditions in December, why is that villages in the Vale were so poorly served with regards to the collection of rubbish?"

Councillor Hannaby replied that the council had cancelled waste collections on Monday 20 and Tuesday 21 December due to snow causing roads to be unsafe for use by large waste collection vehicles in residential roads. Collections resumed on Wednesday on roads deemed safe. However, on Thursday and Friday the waste crews collected some missed collections on the main safer routes. Due to bank holidays over the Christmas and New Year period, and in accordance with its pre-agreed waste winter plan, the council decided not to attempt to catch up on the missed collections, as doing so would cause more disruption for every household in the district. Collections returned to normal by 24 January.

Councillor Saunders asked a supplementary question. Why had the Vale been unable cope when West Oxfordshire suffered no missed collections in similar snow conditions?

Councillor Hannaby replied that the reason was as stated in her original reply.

(2) Question to Councillor Richard Webber from Councillor Robert Sharp:

“Is the reinstatement of the community grants budget this year, after last year’s cut of £100,000, and before the reduction in grants of £20,000 next year in any way connected with the date of the district council elections?”

Councillor Webber replied that the 2010/11 budget provided no community grant budget in 2010/11. The saving of £103,400 was for one year only and the medium term financial plan allowed for the reinstatement of the budget in 2011/12. The draft budget for consultation proposed to reduce the 2011/12 budget to £83,400 to help the council deal with the impact of the cut in government grant. However, he later rejected this, adding a further £20,000 as the fit for the future programme found further savings. The budget restored the funding for community grants for one year at least. This was another example of a caring council.

Councillor Sharp asked a supplementary question. Was there a connection between the timing of this decision and the forthcoming election, like other recent decisions on Abingdon town centre?

Councillor Webber reported that the council took decisions every year; the timing of these had nothing to do with the election.

## **Co.74 Recommendations from the Executive and committees**

Since the last meeting of the Council, there had been a number of Executive and committee meetings. The Executive and the Scrutiny Committee had made recommendations to the Council.

### **(1) Community grants**

The Executive, at its meeting on 7 January 2011, considered Scrutiny Committee’s recommendations on the community grants scheme. The Executive agreed the committee’s recommendation to amend the existing delegation to allow for a designated officer in consultation with the chair of the relevant area committee (or Executive) to determine grant applications up to £1,000. Previously this was £500.

The recommendation was included in the schedule of constitution amendments set out in agenda item 17. The Council noted this recommendation at this stage of the meeting.

### **(2) Guildhall, Abingdon**

Councillors Julia Bricknell, Jim Halliday, Angela Lawrence, Pat Lonergan, Julie Mayhew-Archer, and Alison Rooke all declared personal and prejudicial interests in this item and in accordance with standing order 34, they left the room during its consideration.



The Executive, at its meeting on 31 January 2011, considered the future of the Guildhall in Abingdon. It recommended the Council as part of its budget-making process, to add a capital sum of £1,200,000 to the 2011/12 capital programme and to allow a capital payment of the same amount to Abingdon Town Council on 1 April 2011, following completion of the necessary agreements.

The Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 22 February 2011, reviewed the activity of the Executive and this item in particular. It recommended the Council not to transfer the Guildhall to Abingdon Town Council, as it believed that this did not represent the best financial or social outcome for the residents of the Vale.

Tabled at the meeting was an officer briefing note advising the Council of the consequences of adopting the Scrutiny Committee's recommendation and the options open to the Council if it did. The Council noted that it could not adopt this recommendation, as this was an Executive decision, not a Council decision. The appropriate way to deal with this was to debate and vote on the Executive's recommendation. If the Council did not agree the Executive's recommendation, it could not set a budget at this meeting.

The Executive portfolio holder for the Guildhall, Councillor Richard Webber, reminded the Council that previously it had required the officers to find savings in the costs of the council's property portfolio, including the Guildhall. The revenue losses on this building were unsustainable. The town council came forward and negotiated with this council to take over the ownership and management of the facility, maintaining it for community use. He believed that the district council should not be subsidising this facility when the Guildhall's user base was predominantly Abingdon residents and community groups. Local people should run this facility for local people, supporting localism principles. The town council was in the best position to do this. He was aware of the contractual concerns raised by the Scrutiny Committee and would find answers to these. He had trust in the officers to draw up the contract.

The Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Matthew Barber, objected to the Executive's recommendations. The council would be handing over an asset valued at around £2 million but would not recover the £1.2 million "dowry" until 2023 and would be liable for some maintenance costs. In return, the council would have an unknown share in asset value if the town council later sold the Guildhall. He had no doubt about the town council's ability to manage the refurbishment and future operation but there was no guarantee of continued community use. Details of the deal were not included in the Executive's report and there were no answers to the Scrutiny Committee's questions. He believed the Executive should have explored other options properly. The hall would also be more expensive to run per head of Abingdon's population if transferred to the town council. He urged the Council to consider whether this was a good financial deal for the council and to vote against the Executive's recommendation.

The Council further debated the pros and cons of the Executive's recommendation. Some believed that the transfer would protect Wantage Civic Hall's future and would achieve ongoing community use of the Guildhall, at the same time as reducing the council's costs.

Other councillors believed this was a rushed decision. Not all Guildhall users were from Abingdon. It should not be for the town council to make all the decisions on the Guildhall's future. The £1.2 million was capital money, not for spending on revenue schemes by the town council. They considered that financially, this was not a good deal for the council.

In accordance with standing order 29(3), councillors requested a recorded vote on the Executive's recommendation. The voting was recorded as follows:

<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Abstentions</b>
Councillors:	Councillors:	Councillors:
Paul Burton	Matthew Barber	
Mary de Vere	Yvonne Constance	
Tony de Vere	Roger Cox	
Richard Farrell	Terry Cox	
Beth Fleming	Gervase Duffield	
Terry Fraser	Anthony Hayward	
Richard Gibson	Gareth Jennings	
Jane Hanna	Michael Murray	
Jenny Hannaby	Peter Saunders	
Dudley Hoddinott	Robert Sharp	
Joyce Hutchinson	Melinda Tilley	
Bob Johnston	Margaret Turner	
Sue Marchant	Reg Waite	
Janet Morgan	Elaine Ware	
Jerry Patterson		
Terry Quinlan		
Julia Reynolds		
Judy Roberts		
Val Shaw		
Jenny Shepherd		
Laurel Symons		
Richard Webber		
John Woodford		
Totals:		
<b>23</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>Nil</b>

The recommendation was carried.

**RESOLVED:** To agree that as part of its budget-making process to add a capital sum of £1,200,000 to the 2011/12 capital programme and to allow a capital payment of the same amount to Abingdon Town Council on 1 April 2011 following completion of the necessary agreements to transfer the Guildhall in Abingdon.

### (3) Joint Environmental Trusts

Councillor Jim Halliday declared a personal and prejudicial interest in this item and in accordance with standing order 34, he left the meeting during its consideration. Councillors Roger Cox, Jenny Hannaby, Joyce Hutchinson, Sue Marchant, Julie Mayhew-Archer, Alison Rooke, Robert Sharp, and Laurel Symons all declared

personal interests in this item and in accordance with Standing Order 34, they remained in the meeting during its consideration.

The Executive, at its meeting on 11 February 2011, considered report 99/10 on the future working arrangements of the Joint Environmental Trusts. The Executive resolved to close the trusts' bank accounts and offer any uncommitted trust funds to the relevant parish/town council for environmental improvements. It also recommended that the trusts were wound up.

The Executive portfolio holder for planning supported the recommendation but criticised the inaccurate report recently published in the Herald series newspapers.

By 25 votes to nil with 15 abstentions, it was

**RESOLVED:** To wind up the council's joint committees (the Joint Environmental Trusts) for Abingdon, Faringdon, Grove and Wantage.

**(4) Treasury management monitoring mid year report 2010/11**

The Executive, at its meeting on 11 February 2011, considered report 100/10 on the treasury activities for the first six months of 2010/11.

**RESOLVED:** To note that the council's treasury management activities in the first half of 2010/11 are within the treasury management strategy and policy.

**(5) Treasury management and investment strategy**

The Executive, at its meeting on 11 February, considered report 101/10 that reviewed the treasury management and investment strategy. The Executive considered recommendations from the Audit and Governance Committee on the wording of the investment counterparty selection criteria relating to 'Banks 4'.

**RESOLVED: to approve**

- (a) the treasury management strategy 2011/12 to 2013/14, including the following wording in the investment counterparty selection criteria:
  - Banks 4 – The council's own banker for transactional purposes if the bank falls below the criteria, although in this case balances will be minimised in both monetary size and time.
- (b) the treasury prudential indicators contained in paragraph 40 of the strategy;
- (c) the authorised limit Prudential Indicator, as shown in paragraph 6 of the strategy; and
- (d) the investment strategy 2011/12 contained in the treasury management strategy and the detailed criteria in Annex A1.

**(6) Ongoing provision of concessionary fares services**

The Executive, at its meeting on 11 February, considered report 102/10 on the ongoing provision of concessionary fares services.

At its meeting the Executive agreed, subject to the Council agreeing (a) below, to extend and award contracts to suppliers to enable the services to be delivered.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) To approve entering into an agency agreement on a full costs recovery basis to provide the customer element of the concessionary fares service on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council for the 2011/12 financial year; and
- (b) To authorise the chief finance officer to negotiate the detail of the agency agreement.

**(7) Budget 2011/12 and the medium term financial plan to 2015/16**

The Executive, at its meeting on 11 February 2011, considered report 104/10 of the head of finance and made recommendations to the Council to approve the budget.

The Council noted the recommendations at this stage of the meeting.

**Co.75 Local Government Act 1972 - restriction on voting on Council Tax**

The Council noted the voting restrictions placed on councillors by the Local Government Act 1972. Councillors were not entitled to vote on the council tax if they were over two months in arrears of council tax payments.

**Co.76 Setting the 2011/12 district budget**

The following councillors declared personal interests in this item and in accordance with standing order 34, they remained in the meeting during its consideration: Councillors Julia Bricknell, Terry Cox, Mary de Vere, Tony de Vere, Richard Farrell, Beth Fleming, Terry Fraser, Jim Halliday, Jane Hanna, Jenny Hannaby, Angela Lawrence, Pat Lonergan, Julia Mayhew-Archer, Julia Reynolds, Alison Rooke, Peter Saunders, and Melinda Tilley.

The Council considered report 112/10 being the draft budget for 2011/12 as recommended by the Executive. This set out the revenue and capital budgets for the year, together with an indicative capital programme to 2015/16, and the medium term financial plan to 2015/16. The Council noted that in appendix 1 to the report, the gross income figure was £39,259,450.

Contained within the budget proposal was a report from the chief finance officer on the robustness of the budget estimates and the adequacy of the reserves. The chief finance officer concluded that the budget estimates had been prepared in a properly controlled and professionally supported process, and had been subject to due consideration, and identifiable risks should be capable of management. Overall, he believed that the council had adequate reserves in relation to the proposed revenue budget and capital programme, the estimates were robust and the budgets were sustainable. The Council noted the chief finance officer's report.

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The chair proposed and with the agreement of the Council, it was:

**RESOLVED:** To suspend standing order 31(4) to allow one councillor from each political group to speak for 10 minutes to make their budget statements.

Councillor Tony de Vere, Chair of the Executive and Leader of the Council, moved the Executive's budget proposals. He looked back on the budget set by the council in 2007. At that time, he had viewed the sustainability of the council as delicate and vulnerable to economic knocks. Services were vulnerable without radical change. Four years ago the Liberal Democrat group predicted the council's service costs would reach £19 million by 2010/11, and external income would reach £11 million; future savings and council tax would fund the difference. In comparison, the budget before the Council showed costs of £16.2 million and income of £9.2 million. As costs had reduced by £3 million over the past four years, income had reduced by £2 million. Although the gap had narrowed, the council would have been in a much better position had it not been for reduced income. The costs had reduced because the Liberal Democrat group had taken the step to share its senior management with neighbouring South Oxfordshire District Council.

Looking forward, Councillor Tony de Vere reported that the costs would further reduce in 2011/12 to £13.7 million. He believed that the council was ahead of the pack in reducing the cost of services. However, since the last parliamentary election, the coalition government had had to make severe cuts to public spending. The government settlement to the council in 2011/12 was 16 per cent lower than in 2010/11 with further reductions to come. However, in 2011/12 there were practically no cuts in front-line services. He asked the Executive finance portfolio holder to provide more detail.

Councillor Richard Webber, the Executive portfolio holder for finance, reported that three years ago this council identified and acted on many of the problems now facing councils across the country. The officers and the Liberal Democrat councillors had the foresight and courage to take necessary, if painful, decisions quickly. That allowed the council to make substantial savings throughout the past three years; including savings from shared senior management, staff restructuring, and the fit for the future programme of lean management. Each year the Audit Commission assessed the council's financial performance and this year awarded top marks in nearly all categories.

The council had consulted South Oxfordshire District Council on the savings proposals where there was an impact on both councils. This applied to savings taken in the finance service area, where the Audit and Governance Committee was concerned that the council was taking undue risks. However, neither the Audit Commission nor the council's section 151 officer had any concerns about the Executive's budget proposals. The Conservative administration of South Oxfordshire District Council was taking the same savings.

The budget displayed competence and caution. There was a cautious prediction of the tax base increase and the budget assumed only a small proportion of the fit for the future potential savings. The medium term financial plan only showed a modest 2.5 per cent increase in council tax for years 2 to 5. There was also a modest assessment of what the government would allow the council to recoup in passing on a higher proportion of the true cost of planning applications. There was also a modest projected increase in investment

income. The budget was competent, courageous and cautious, a section 151 officer's dream.

The council could not deliver this without some pain, but there was very little. The budget proposed to cease the council's pest control service. Although this was a valuable service, there were many companies running a good service at no more cost to the public. Some of the council's 'superloos' were being removed in areas where there were alternatives.

Councillor Webber also believed that it was reasonable to ask those who made use of the council's planning advice to pay the true cost of receiving it. Once the government decided on the fees, the council intended to charge. This service had been subsidised by other residents in the past. This was neither reasonable nor fair.

The budget retained the Abingdon pitch and putt and crazy golf facility and retained the superloos at Hales Meadow in Abingdon and at Grove where there are no other facilities nearby. The recycling bring sites were retained also. With the council's new, environmentally friendly, and now national award-winning waste contract, the recycling bring facilities in the medium-term should not be necessary. However, with the proposed closures of recycling sites by Oxfordshire County Council, there was a strong case for continuing to offer such sites in the short-term.

The budget retained the dog warden service. The budget consultees agreed that it was hard that non-dog owners should have to subsidise the clean up operation caused by a minority, but Councillor Webber was persuaded that the service was appreciated by all, that the cost was justified.

Councillor Webber reported that the Liberal Democrat Group supported localism in the community. However, to work effectively, it needed finance to support and inspire it. In this spirit, the budget restored the community grants funding of £103,000 for next year at least.

The budget committed continued funding for the Choose Abingdon Partnership for the next five years. Councillor Webber hoped that Abingdon Town Council, the county council, and the chamber of commerce would follow suit.

The budget proposed using the council's capital resources to facilitate a number of major initiatives across the Vale, including: securing the future of the Guildhall in Abingdon, Wantage Civic Hall, and Manor Park at Wantage; exploiting the opportunity for a major refurbishment of the Abbey Shopping Centre and Charter area in Abingdon; providing grants for the County Hall renovation in Abingdon, the Vale and Downland Museum at Wantage, and the development of Wantage Market Place. The council's Economic Development team had worked with Wantage and Faringdon Town Councils to access large grants from the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) and the Leader Project. These assisted with the Folly renovations and with Faringdon's skate park.

Councillor Webber reminded the Council that this was a competent budget, but in the circumstances in which local government found itself, a fantastic achievement. However, he recognised that rationalisation, restructuring, and rapid change could be highly destabilising. A constant drive for ever-increasing efficiency could sap morale. The process presented a formidable challenge to the morale and team-working skills of all staff. Staff had faced this test with professionalism and integrity. He praised their efforts and the contribution that UNISON, the officer union, had made. UNISON had agreed to a pay increase of £250 per annum for staff earning less than £25,000 per annum, and to a pay freeze for everyone else.

UNISON had agreed that the council should phase out staff car allowances, and had agreed to reducing redundancy payments by 25 per cent.

Councillor Webber questioned whether the council would have been in this position if the opposition had been in control over the past few years and asked what services they might have cut, instead of sharing senior management and restructuring staff.

In a year in which the council's grant had been cut by 16 per cent, investment income had collapsed, and energy and other costs had increased, the Liberal Democrat Group had produced a budget with no council tax increase, and a minimal effect on frontline services. Councillor Webber believed that this was a confident budget, a courageous budget, and a resilient budget. He urged the Council to approve it.

Councillor Matthew Barber spoke on behalf of the opposition Conservative Group. He believed the Liberal Democrats had made deals to asset strip the council to help them through the election. Yet the Liberal Democrats were claiming credit for freezing the council tax when this was a Conservative proposal that the Liberal Democrat party had opposed a year ago. The Conservative government had blocked the Liberal Democrats' proposed council tax increase of 3.9 per cent.

He believed that this was a Vale fire sale. More than 70 per cent of the proposed capital programme was the capitalisation of revenue costs, such as handing over the Guildhall and Manor Park to town councils. He guessed that Wantage Civic Hall would be next. He criticised the portfolio holder for claiming that the council should charge for planning advice because few used this service and the majority of residents should not subsidise it. At the same time, the portfolio holder was claiming that the council should save the Abbey Meadows pitch and putt when so few people used it. Yet the budget proposed cuts to youth services, public toilets, environmental schemes, and pest control. At the same time, there were increases to planning charges and brown bins charges. He welcomed the officer-driven efficiency savings but believed that after years of prevarication, the ruling political group was trying to rush decisions to survive the election. This showed a lack of vision. The budget was all to do with the election and little to do with good administration. Past failings and financial mismanagement were coming back to haunt the ruling group. He urged councillors to vote against the Executive's budget proposals.

Some councillors supported the budget proposals, highlighting the good work to date and the on-going work to provide services. They believed the council provided good value for money, the council was building on its past success, and its council tax was the 13<sup>th</sup> lowest in the country. They also criticised the opposition for not producing a budget proposal of their own.

Other councillors criticised the budget proposals, including increasing the cost of using the brown bin service.

In answer to a question from a councillor, the Executive's planning portfolio holder, Councillor Mary de Vere, agreed to reassure Councillor Roger Cox outside of the meeting that the budget included funding to pay any costs relating to the Tesco planning appeal at Faringdon.

The leader of the council summed up. He hoped the opposition would not bring forward any financially unassessed proposals during the election period. The budget would keep the

council tax as the 13<sup>th</sup> lowest in the country. Increases to the brown bins service would not fully cover the costs—the service was still subsidised. The council had not spent money recklessly. The cost of providing services had come down from £19 million to £13.7 million over four years. He paid tribute to staff and management for adapting to major change over the past three years. Finally, he thanked the officers for their help in constructing the budget.

The chair put the Executive's recommendations to the vote. By 28 votes to 14 with no abstentions, it was

**RESOLVED: to**

- (a) set the revenue budget for 2011/12 at £11,393,150 as set out in appendix 1 to report 112/10;
- (b) approve the capital programme for 2011/12 to 2015/16, as set out in appendix 5 to report 112/10, together with the capital growth bids set out in appendix 6 of the report;
- (c) set the council's prudential limits, as listed in appendix 7 to report 112/10; and
- (d) approve the medium term financial plan to 2015/16, as set out in appendix 2 to report 112/10.

**Co.77 Council Tax 2011/12**

The Council considered report 113/10 of the head of finance regarding the need to set the Council Tax for 2011/12. As a correction to the report, councillors noted that in table 11, the overall average percentage increase of council tax in 2011/12 was 0.1 per cent.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) To note that at its meeting on 8 December 2010, the Council calculated the following amounts for the year 2011/12 in accordance with regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992 made under Section 33(5) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992:
  - (i) 48,426 being the amount calculated by the council, in accordance with regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992, as its council tax base for the year;
  - (ii) The amounts set out in column 1 of appendix 1 to report 113/10 for each parish being the amounts calculated by the council, in accordance with regulation 6 of the Regulations, as the amounts of its council tax base for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate.
- (b) That the following amounts now be calculated by the council for the year 2011/12, in accordance with Sections 32 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992:
  - (i) £53,581,727 being the aggregate of the amounts which the council estimates for the items set out in Section 32(2)(a) to (e) of the Act;
  - (ii) £39,259,450 being the aggregate of the amounts which the council estimates for the items set out in Section 32(3)(a) to (c) of the Act;



- (ii) £14,322,277 being the amount by which the aggregate at (2)(a) above exceeds the aggregate at (2)(b) above, calculated by the council, in accordance with Section 32(4) of the Act, as its budget requirement for the year;
  - (iv) £5,742,315 being the aggregate of the sums which the council estimates will be payable for the year into its general fund in respect of redistributed non-domestic rates and revenue support grant, increased by the amount of the sums which the council estimates will be transferred in the year from its collection fund to its general fund in accordance with Section 97(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988;
  - (v) £177.18 being the amount at (2)(c) above less the amount at (2)(d) above, all divided by the amount at (1)(a) above, calculated by the council, in accordance with Section 33(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year;
  - (vi) £2,929,127 being the aggregate amount of all special items referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act, as set out in column 2 of appendix 1 of report 113/10;
  - (vii) £116.69 being the amount at (2)(e) above less the result given by dividing the amount at (2)(f) above by the amount at (1)(a) above, calculated by the council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no special item relates;
  - (viii) The amounts set out in column 6 of appendix 1 for each parish being the amounts given by adding to the amount at (2)(g) above the amount of the special item relating to dwellings in those parts of the council's area mentioned in appendix 1 of report 113/10, divided in each case by the amount at (1)(b) above, calculated by the council, in accordance with Section 34(3) of the Act, as the basic amounts of its council tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate;
  - (ix) The amounts set out in columns 3 to 10 of appendix 2 of report 113/10 for each parish being the amounts given by multiplying the amounts at (2)(g) and (2)(h) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the council, in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands;
- (c) To note that for the year 2011/12, Oxfordshire County Council has stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Band A	£774.47
Band B	£903.55
Band C	£1,032.63
Band D	£1,161.71
Band E	£1,419.87
Band F	£1,678.03

Band G	£1,936.18
Band H	£2,323.42

- (d) To note that for the year 2011/12, the Thames Valley Police Authority has stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Band A	£102.87
Band B	£120.01
Band C	£137.16
Band D	£154.30
Band E	£188.59
Band F	£222.88
Band G	£257.17
Band H	£308.60

- (e) That, having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at (2)(i), (3) and (4) above, the council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the amounts shown in appendix 3 to report 113/10, as the amounts of council tax for the year 2011/12 for each of the categories of dwellings shown in appendix 3.

## **Co.78 Sexual entertainment venues**

At its meeting on 8 December 2010, the Council agreed to adopt Schedule 3 to the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, as amended by section 27 of the Policing and Crime Act 2009, so that the provisions for the control of sexual entertainment venues would apply. The Council resolved that the new powers should take effect from 1 March 2011. In order to allow for the publication of the required legal notices, the Council was asked to agree that the powers took effect instead on 1 April 2011. All the other resolutions remain unchanged.

**RESOLVED:** To agree that the adoption of Schedule 3 to the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 as amended by section 27 of the Policing and Crime Act 2009 agreed by Council at its meeting on 8 December 2010 shall take effect on 1 April 2011.

## **Co.79 Review of polling districts and places - interim proposals**

The Council considered report 106/10 of the head of legal and democratic services on interim changes to polling district and polling places for implementation at the forthcoming elections in May 2011.

Some concern was expressed about the proposal to remove the polling station at Goosey. However, the Council agreed the recommendations, believing that the cost of a mobile unit to house the polling station in Goosey each year was too high. However, councillors asked that where there were changes to polling stations, there was good publicity about the location of the alternative polling station and the postal vote option and that the officers write to all electors in Goosey and Chilton advising them of this change and the availability of a postal vote.

**RESOLVED: to**

- (a) agree no changes to the existing polling district boundaries;
- (b) agree the proposals described in paragraph six and appendix one to report 106/10;
- (c) authorise the head of legal and democratic services to implement (b) above;
- (d) publicise changes to polling stations and offer a postal vote alternative;
- (e) note that the review is ongoing and a further report will be brought to Council in due course; and
- (f) instruct officers to write to the electors of Goosey and Chilton advising them of their new voting arrangements and the procedure for obtaining a postal vote.

**Co.80 Continuation of meeting**

Due to the meeting having lasted two hours thirty minutes, the Council was asked to determine whether it should finish the meeting or continue for a further thirty minutes to complete its remaining business.

**RESOLVED:** To continue the meeting for a further thirty minutes to complete the remaining business, in accordance with standing order 27(5).

**Co.81 New executive arrangements**

At its meeting on 8 December 2010, the Council adopted its chosen form of executive arrangements for implementation following the May 2011 district elections. The report to Council set out the need to review the council's constitution to ensure it supported the new decision making arrangements.

Appended to the agenda were proposed changes to Article 4 and Article 7 of the council's constitution, with deleted words crossed through and additional words shown in bold text.

**RESOLVED:** to approve the amendments to Articles 4 and 7 of the council's constitution for implementation after the May 2011 elections.

**Co.82 Constitution amendments**

The Council considered several amendments to the council's constitution, as set out in an appendix to the agenda item.

**RESOLVED:** to approve the amendments to the council's constitution, as set out in the appendix to the agenda.

**Co.83 Appointment of independent members to the Standards Committee**

The Council considered report 107/10 of the head of legal and democratic services on the re-appointment of the independent members to the Standards Committee. The report

suggested re-appointing the existing independent members until the government disbanded the standards regime.

**RESOLVED:** To re-appoint Mr David Howard, Mr Jeffery Lemon, Mr Mike Roberts, and Mrs Vanessa Shenton as independent representatives to the Standards Committee until May 2015 or until the abolition of the Standards Committee, if this is sooner.

## **Co.84 Virements**

In accordance with the virement policy, the Council noted all virements of £10,000 and over, approved since its last meeting.

## **Co.85 Report of the leader of the council**

### **(1) Urgent Executive decisions**

There were no urgent Executive decisions to report.

### **(2) Delegation of Executive functions**

There was no change to the existing scheme of delegation since the last Council meeting.

### **(3) Matters affecting the authority arising from meetings of joint committees, partnerships and other meetings**

The Council noted the leader of the council's report.

## **Co.86 Notices of motion under standing order 11**

### **(1) Motion proposed by Councillor Tony de Vere, seconded by Councillor Alison Rooke:**

"That council requests the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to undertake a periodic electoral review of the district with a view to reducing the number of councillors from the current 51 to 34, such reduction to reflect the efficient working practices in place at the council and to achieve a significant saving in the costs of democracy."

Councillor Tony de Vere reported that in late 2010, the Local Government Boundary Commission had invited the council to indicate if it would like an electoral review of the district. As the council had carried out a number of recent efficiency savings to protect services, he believed the democratic process should replicate this. The council had more councillors than needed, and a reduction by a third could save around £65,000 per year. The motion was in line with others adopted by councils across the country, including neighbouring South Oxfordshire District Council. He recognised that the reduction would not take effect until 2015 but adopting this motion would start the review process.

Councillor Rooke, in seconding the motion, believed that it necessary to achieve savings in the cost of democracy.

Councillor Matthew Barber proposed an amendment, seconded by Councillor Roger Cox:

“That council agrees in principle to request the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to undertake a periodic electoral review of the district with a view to reducing the number of councillors. This Council further agrees to set up a cross-party working group to put recommendations to a future Council meeting on the size of that reduction.”

Whilst not objecting to the principle of the motion, Councillor Barber believed that the choice of 34 councillors seemed arbitrary and he called for a more scientific approach. He believed that a cross-party working group should look at this issue and come back to the Council with recommendations. Councillor Roger Cox supported the amendment.

Some councillors accused Councillor Barber of trying to delay this decision. However, other councillors pointed out that a cross-party group had made recommendations on the last review.

Councillor Tony de Vere, as mover of the original motion, had a right of reply. He offered to change his motion to read “around 34”. Councillor Barber stood by his amendment but did not object to the change suggested by Councillor de Vere.

The chair asked councillors to vote on the amendment; this was lost by 14 votes to 24.

Councillor Tony de Vere then offered to alter his original motion to read “around 34”. Councillor Alison Rooke, as seconder, supported this suggested change. This was put to the Council and was agreed. This became the substantive motion, which was agreed by the Council unanimously.

**RESOLVED:** That council requests the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to undertake a periodic electoral review of the district with a view to reducing the number of councillors from the current 51 to around 34, such reduction to reflect the efficient working practices in place at the council and to achieve a significant saving in the costs of democracy.

- (2) Motion proposed by Councillor Matthew Barber, seconded by Councillor Yvonne Constance:

“This Council instructs the Executive to investigate ways in which this authority can support the Sweatbox youth centre.”

Councillor Barber reminded the Council that under the Children Act 2004, all agencies had responsibilities, not just the county council. In the spirit of the Localism Bill, he asked the Council to embrace the motion. Councillor Constance reserved the right to speak later in the debate.

Councillor Jenny Hannaby moved an amendment; this was seconded by Councillor Joyce Hutchinson. The amendment read:

“This Council instructs the Executive to invite the county council to investigate ways in which the county council can support the Sweatbox Youth Centre and other youth centres threatened with closure.”

Councillor Hannaby, mover of the amendment, criticised the county council for its cuts to youth services. Councillor Hutchinson, seconder to the amendment, also expressed disappointment at the county’s decision and pointed to the support this council had given to young people.

The chair informed the Council, that the time allowed for the meeting in standing orders had expired. She deferred consideration of this motion to the next Council meeting.

**RESOLVED:** To defer consideration of this motion to the next Council meeting.

## **Exempt information under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972**

None

The meeting rose at 10pm