

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Cabinet

held on Thursday 28 November 2013 at 7.45pm

in the Council Chamber, The Abbey House, Abingdon, OX14 3JE



Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Matthew Barber (Chairman), Roger Cox (Vice-Chairman), Mike Murray, Reg Waite and Elaine Ware

In attendance: Councillor Richard Webber

Officers: Steve Bishop, David Buckle, Susan Harbour and Margaret Reed

Number of members of the public: Nil

Ca.21 Apologies for absence

None

Ca.22 Declarations of interest

None

Ca.23 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

None

Ca.24 Statements, petitions, and questions relating to matters affecting the Cabinet

None

Ca.25 Office accommodation

Councillor Richard Webber addressed the meeting, as follows:

“I want to make a statement on behalf of all 23 opposition Vale Councillors and to request that this is formally recorded in the minutes of the meeting:

“All of us are behind the general principle of sharing unused space in new Abby House and saving the council money. However, for the following reasons we believe that the current proposal leaves much to be desired.

1. Little more than half the ground floor of Abbey House will be available to Vale of White Horse District Council. This is not “sharing accommodation” it is, in effect, moving the Vale out of its home and giving it to others;
2. There has been no proper consultation with the people most affected by the consultation – Vale staff below senior management level, residents of the Abingdon area (representing almost half of all Vale residents), and councillors;
3. The decision is being taken in haste as a result of the needs, not of this council, but the timescales of other councils;
4. Financial and other information has been drip-fed and is still not complete, making it very difficult to scrutinise the proposal properly. Such information as has been made available, has been hastily put together, lacking detail and often full of inaccuracies, vagaries (sic) and omissions;
5. In spite of a last minute flurry of papers trying to argue to the contrary, alternative proposals have been too easily dismissed with little, or no, hard data on capital/revenue implications.

If this proposal goes ahead, we believe that this council will be perceived as having no obvious home and will become little more than an adjunct service to other bodies. The proposal is not so much a “sharing” as a “cash in and sell out”.

As the proposal is almost certainly irrevocable, we urgently request that Cabinet gives itself more time, gets more hard data on this proposal and alternatives before making a final decision”

The Cabinet then discussed the issues as follows:

- The Vale Council will retain the freehold of the building;
- The arrangement brings significant financial benefits;
- The building will be occupied by a high quality lessee;
- The lease will be subject to a full maintenance agreement;
- There will be a guaranteed tenure of South Oxfordshire’s offices for the duration of the lease;
- Financial savings created by the office share have helped to protect frontline services;
- A significant amount of officer and committee time has been dedicated to considering this matter.

RESOLVED

1. To approve the proposed terms as detailed in the report for the proposed occupation by Oxfordshire County Council of part of Abbey House;
2. To authorise the Strategic Director in consultation with the Leader of the council to agree any variation to the terms outlined in this report and to enter into the agreement for lease, lease, licence to alter and facilities management agreement and any other related or ancillary agreements or documents;
3. To note that a further report will be presented for approval to the Leader, setting out the necessary arrangements between the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire district councils regarding the use of office space at Crowmarsh Gifford.

The meeting closed at 7.55 pm

Vale of White Horse District Council – Cabinet minutes

Thursday, 28 November 2013