

# Minutes

of the annual meeting of the

## Council

held on the rising of the preceding special meeting of Council on  
Wednesday 11 May 2016

at The Ridgeway, The Beacon, Portway, Wantage, OX12 9BY



### Open to the public, including the press

#### Present:

Members: Councillors Mike Badcock (Chairman), Reg Waite (Vice-Chairman), Alice Badcock, Matthew Barber, Eric Batts, Ed Blagrove, Roger Cox, Margaret Crick, Katie Finch, Robert Hall, Debby Hallett, Jenny Hannaby, Anthony Hayward, Dudley Hoddinott, Simon Howell, Vicky Jenkins, Bob Johnston, Mohinder Kainth, Monica Lovatt, Sandy Lovatt, Ben Mabbett, Chris McCarthy, Chris Palmer, Helen Pighills, Julia Reynolds, Judy Roberts, Janet Shelley, Emily Smith, Henry Spencer, Elaine Ware and Catherine Webber

Officers: David Buckle, Steven Corrigan, Andrew Down, Jeremy Lloyd and Margaret Reed

Number of members of the public: 0

#### Co.1 Election of chairman

**RESOLVED:** to appoint Councillor Mike Badcock as Chairman of the council for the ensuing year.

Councillor Badcock read out the oath of office, signed his declaration of acceptance of office and made an acceptance speech.

He thanked his escort, Marilyn Badcock, and Councillor Reg Waite, his Vice-Chairman, for their support.

#### Co.2 Appointment of vice chairman

**RESOLVED:** to appoint Councillor Reg Waite as Vice-Chairman of the council for the ensuing year.

Councillor Reg Waite read out the oath of office, signed his declaration of acceptance of office and made an acceptance speech.

#### Co.3 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of councillors Yvonne Constance, Charlotte Dickson, St John Dickson, Stuart Davenport, Gervase Duffield, Mike Murray and Robert Sharp.

## **Co.4 Minutes**

**RESOLVED:** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 17 February 2016 as a correct record and agree that the Chairman sign them as such.

## **Co.5 Declarations of interest**

None.

## **Co.6 Chairman's announcements**

The chairman provided housekeeping information and gave details of his charities for the forthcoming year – Riding for the Disabled Association and the Amber Phillpott Trust.

## **Co.7 Urgent business**

None.

## **Co.8 Petitions under standing order 13**

None.

## **Co.9 Questions under standing order 12**

### **A. Question from Councillor Judy Roberts to Councillor Charlotte Dickson, Cabinet member for leisure.**

“Could the Cabinet member please explain the reasons for the delay in publication of the Village and Community Halls Survey, which was due in July 2015?”

In the absence of Councillor Charlotte Dickson the chairman confirmed that a written response would be provided in accordance with Standing Order 12(7) (c).

### **B. Question from Councillor Helen Pighills to Councillor Charlotte Dickson, Cabinet member for leisure.**

“In the consultation on Abbey Meadows the public were overwhelmingly in support of Scenario A: ‘A place to swim and play’

The consultation leaflet stated ‘We would aim to carry out essential repairs to the swimming pool and changing rooms’.

Furthermore under ‘Improvements we can make’, the leaflet listed ‘Repair the outdoor swimming pool’ with ‘refurbish the changing rooms’ appearing in the ‘Additional improvements we will consider’.

Why then does the recently issued cabinet decision include refurbishment of the changing rooms with no mention of essential repairs to and upgrading of the pool including its ageing pool tank and heating/filtration system?”

In the absence of Councillor Charlotte Dickson the chairman confirmed that a written response would be provided in accordance with Standing Order 12(7) (c).

### **C. Question from Councillor Dudley Hoddinott to Councillor Roger Cox, Cabinet member for planning (development management and enforcement)**

“Objectors to planning applications often raise the issue of cumulative harm. There may be many applications in one area that together cause significant harm. Or there

may be many harms from a single application where each one alone is not reason enough to refuse but cumulatively they might be. How do we consider the impact of cumulative harm and what can the council do to prevent it?"

Councillor Roger Cox responded as follows:

"Any change to the built form will impact the environment whether it is a single dwelling or a large development – the difference would be the scale. In each case a wide range of issues would be assessed and qualified by specialist officers and measures or conditions would be recommended to help mitigate the potential harm identified.

With large applications an 'environmental impact assessment' may be required. However, where a proposal does not exceed 150 dwellings and the site is under five hectares it falls beneath the threshold set in schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 and there would be no requirement under it to provide a screening opinion.

When it or the combination of sites exceeds these parameters it is likely that the cumulative impact would have a significant effect then the applicant would apply for a screening opinion to verify whether an environmental impact assessment was required.

Where a development needs an environmental impact assessment we would consider the cumulative impact of a proposal in relation to other committed or emerging developments within the area as required by regulations. For example, the impact on traffic and highways (water supply, waste water treatment and potential flooding) could all be considered and measures identified to mitigate the potential harm caused by the effects of development. If the council was minded to grant permission subject to conditions these would relate only to the specific development of developments under consideration and the measures identified would have to be agreed and met before permission was granted. When doing so it would be vital that conditions were realistic and enforceable. The council would then monitor the development as it progressed and enforce the conditions imposed. This process is amply demonstrated in reports brought to the Planning Committee."

**D. Question from Councillor Emily Smith to Councillor Mike Murray, Cabinet member for planning policy**

"The planning department's Statement of Community Involvement defines what the public can expect in term of communications and consultations from planning. It's so out of date it lists Dr Evan Harris as our MP to be consulted. Why hasn't this important policy document been kept up to date?"

In the absence of Councillor Mike Murray the chairman confirmed that a written response would be provided in accordance with Standing Order 12(7) (c).

**E. Question from Councillor Debby Hallett to Councillor Mike Murray, Cabinet member for planning policy**

"The Cabinet has promised to take care of my interests across the Vale with enterprise, energy and efficiency. I don't know what they mean by 'enterprise'. 'Energy' isn't enough if it doesn't produce a good result. Tonight I'm interested in 'efficiency'. Could the Cabinet member please report the total costs so far to create the emerging Local Plan? Please include all costs: officers, consultants, travel & food,

phone calls, consultation, printing and distribution, and everything else that we have invested so far in producing our emerging Local Plan?”

In the absence of Councillor Mike Murray the chairman confirmed that a written response would be provided in accordance with Standing Order 12(7) (c).

### **Co.10 Corporate plan review**

Council considered Cabinet’s recommendation, made at its meeting on 15 April 2016, on the council’s corporate plan for the period 2016 – 2020.

**RECOMMENDATION:** to adopt the Corporate Plan 2016 – 2020 as attached to the agenda for the annual meeting of Council on 11 May 2016.

### **Co.11 Appointment of chief executive**

Council considered the report of the head of HR, IT and technical services and the recommendation of the Joint Staff Committee on the appointment of a chief executive.

Councillor Matthew Barber, Leader of the council, advised that 25 applications were received for the post of chief executive. Eight of these were selected for initial interviews with council leaders and four were then shortlisted for final interview. The final assessment took place on Tuesday 10 May with candidates seeing three different panels in the morning and having their final interviews in the afternoon. All four candidates gave a strong performance and the Joint Staff Committee reached a unanimous conclusion to offer the position to David Hill.

He thanked Andrew Down, Head of HR, IT and technical services, and Penna (HR consultants) for their work during the recruitment process.

**RESOLVED:** subject to South Oxfordshire District Council agreeing the appointment of the shared chief executive: to

1. appoint David Hill shared chief executive of South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council on a salary of £140,000 per annum;
2. agree that the chief executive will be employed by South Oxfordshire District Council and placed at the disposal of Vale of White Horse District Council in accordance with the existing agreement between the two councils under section 113 of the Local Government Act 1972;
3. appoint the chief executive as each council’s head of paid service with effect from the commencement of his employment;
4. authorise the head of HR, IT & technical services to finalise the terms and conditions of the contract of employment of the chief executive in accordance with the recommendations of the Joint Staff Committee;
5. authorise the head of HR, IT & technical services to make any necessary amendments to the councils’ published pay policy statement arising from the agreed terms and conditions of appointment of the chief executive.

### **Co.12 Appointments to committees, panels and joint committees for 2016/17**

Council considered the report of the head of legal and democratic services on the appointment of those committees and joint committees which are required to be politically balanced together with the Licensing Acts Committee, area committees and appointments to joint bodies.

**RESOLVED:** to

1. appoint the following committees and panels for the 2016/17 year and to appoint the membership, substitutes and chairmen and vice-chairmen as indicated to sit on them:

<b>Names</b>	<b>Planning Committee, 11 Members</b>
<b>Conservative (8)</b>	<b>Liberal Democrat (3)</b>
Eric Batts	Jenny Hannaby
Roger Cox	Bob Johnston
Stuart Davenport	Catherine Webber
Anthony Hayward	
Sandy Lovatt (Vice-Chairman)	
Chris McCarthy	
Robert Sharp (Chairman)	
Janet Shelley	
<b>SUBSTITUTES: All other councillors from the relevant political group provided they have received the appropriate training.</b>	

<b>Names</b>	<b>Scrutiny Committee, 9 Members</b>
<b>Conservative (7)</b>	<b>Liberal Democrat (2)</b>
Alice Badcock (Vice-Chairman)	Debby Hallett (Chairman)
Ed Blagrove	Judy Roberts
Katie Finch	
Vicky Jenkins	
Monica Lovatt	
Ben Mabbett	
Chris Palmer	
<b>SUBSTITUTES: All other councillors from the relevant political group (not Cabinet members).</b>	

<b>Names</b>	<b>Joint Scrutiny Committee, 5 Members</b>
<b>Conservative (4)</b>	<b>Liberal Democrat (1)</b>
Alice Badcock	Debby Hallett (Co-Chairman)
Katie Finch	
Monica Lovatt	
Ben Mabbett	
<b>SUBSTITUTES: All other councillors from the relevant political group (not Cabinet members).</b>	

<b>Names</b>	<b>Corporate Services Joint Scrutiny Committee, 2 Members</b>
<b>Conservative (1)</b>	<b>Liberal Democrat Group (1)</b>
Ed Blagrove	Debby Hallett
<b>SUBSTITUTES: All other councillors from the relevant political group (not Cabinet members).</b>	

<b>Names</b>	<b>Joint Audit and Governance Committee, 4 Members</b>
<b>Conservative (3)</b>	<b>Liberal Democrat (1)</b>
Simon Howell (Co-Chairman)	Dudley Hoddinott
Chris Palmer	
Henry Spencer	
<b>SUBSTITUTES: All other councillors from the relevant political group.</b>	

<b>Names</b>	<b>Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee, 6 Members</b>
<b>Conservative (5)</b>	<b>Liberal Democrat Group (1)</b>
Ed Blagrove	Debby Hallett
Yvonne Constance (Chairman)	
Charlotte Dickson	
Gervase Duffield	
Ben Mabbett	
<b>SUBSTITUTES: All other councillors from the relevant political group.</b>	

<b>Names</b>	<b>General Licensing Committee, 12 Members</b>
<b>Conservative (9)</b>	<b>Liberal Democrat Group (3)</b>
Mike Badcock (Vice-Chairman)	Margaret Crick
Eric Batts	Jenny Hannaby
Charlotte Dickson (Chairman)	Dudley Hoddinott
St John Dickson	
Robert Hall	
Ben Mabbett	
Chris McCarthy	
Julia Reynolds	
Reg Waite	
<b>SUBSTITUTES: All other councillors from the relevant political group provided they have received the appropriate training.</b>	

<b>Names</b>	<b>Licensing Acts Committee, 12 Members</b>
<b>Conservative (9)</b>	<b>Liberal Democrat Group (3)</b>
Mike Badcock (Vice-Chairman)	Margaret Crick
Eric Batts	Jenny Hannaby
Charlotte Dickson (Chairman)	Dudley Hoddinott
St John Dickson	
Robert Hall	
Ben Mabbett	
Chris McCarthy	
Julia Reynolds	
Reg Waite	
<b>NO SUBSTITUTES</b>	

<b>Names</b>	<b>Appeals Panel, 3 Members</b>
<b>Conservative (2)</b>	<b>Liberal Democrat Group (1)</b>
Matthew Barber	Debby Hallett
Roger Cox	
<b>SUBSTITUTES: All other councillors from the relevant political group.</b>	

2. (with no councillor voting against) allocate one of the Conservative Group's seats on the Corporate Services Joint Committee to the Liberal Democrat Group;
3. appoint all local members representing the wards covered by the relevant area committees to those committees for the 2016/17 municipal year with the following chairmen:
  - Abingdon and North East – Ed Blagrove
  - Faringdon – Simon Howell
  - Wantage – St John Dickson
4. appoint Monica Lovatt as the council's representative on the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Gervase Duffield as substitute;
5. appoint Sandy Lovatt as the council's representative and Chris McCarthy as an observer substitute on the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel;
6. authorise the head of legal and democratic services to make appointments to any vacant committee or panel seat and substitute positions in accordance with the wishes of the relevant group leader;
7. authorise the head of legal and democratic services to amend the constitution as necessary to reflect the arrangements set out in the report of the head of legal and democratic services to the Council meeting on 11 May 2016.

### **Co.13 Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 - proposal to appoint a joint Independent Remuneration Panel**

Council considered the report of the head of legal and democratic services on a proposal to appoint a joint independent remuneration panel.

**RESOLVED:** Subject to the agreement of South Oxfordshire District Council, to:

1. dissolve the existing independent remuneration panel with effect from the appointment of a joint independent remuneration panel;
2. appoint a joint independent remuneration panel with South Oxfordshire District Council to carry out reviews of the councillors' allowances schemes at both councils and make recommendations on any changes to the schemes to the relevant Council;
3. make the appointment of the joint independent remuneration panel effective until May 2020, one year after the 2019 district council elections;
4. authorise the head of legal and democratic services to make appointments to the joint independent remuneration panel, and advise councillors in due course of the outcome of the appointments process.

#### **Co.14 Report of the leader of the council**

Matthew Barber, Leader of the council, provided an update on the progress towards a devolution deal for Oxfordshire since the joint announcement by the seven district council leaders of the intention to seek a series of new local unitary councils for Oxfordshire as part of the Government's current devolution agenda. A copy of the report is attached to these minutes.

He also provided an update on progress with the Local Plan. The council has submitted proposed modifications to the plan to the planning inspector. The inspector will publish interim findings in due course indicating whether he considers the Local Plan is likely to be capable of being found sound. ~~Once finalised, the Local Plan will be subject to statutory consultation.~~

#### **Co.15 Notices of motion under standing order 11**

- (1) Councillor Matthew Barber moved and Councillor Roger Cox seconded the following motion:

This Council supports the proposal by district council leaders for the abolition of existing councils and the creation of new local unitary councils for Oxfordshire. Furthermore this Council welcomes the appointment of Pricewaterhouse Coopers to examine all options ahead of a public consultation this summer.

Those councillors in support of the motion expressed the view that the current two tier system of local government was expensive, not the most effective method for the delivery of local services and confusing for the public. The creation of new local unitary councils would save money and build on the quality of district councils, some of which had a track record of joint working. The creation of one unitary council for Oxfordshire was not feasible due to its large geographical area and significant population.

However, other councillors, whilst supporting the need for change, expressed the view that the motion was premature. Council should await the outcome of the options study before supporting a particular approach.

The chairman called for a recorded vote on the motion which was carried with the votes recorded as follows:

<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Abstentions</b>
Councillors	Councillors	Councillors
Alice Badcock	Margaret Crick	
Mike Badcock	Debby Hallett	
Matthew Barber	Jenny Hannaby	
Eric Batts	Dudley Hoddinott	

Vale of White Horse District Council – Council minutes



For	Against	Abstentions
Edward Blagrove	Bob Johnston	
Roger Cox	Helen Pighills	
Katie Finch	Judy Roberts	
Robert Hall	Emily Smith	
Anthony Hayward	Catherine Webber	
Simon Howell		
Vicky Jenkins		
Mohinder Kainth		
Monica Lovatt		
Sandy Lovatt		
Ben Mabbett		
Chris McCarthy		
Chris Palmer		
Julia Reynolds		
Janet Shelley		
Henry Spencer		
Reg Waite		
Elaine Ware		
Total: 22	Total: 9	Total: 0

- (2) Councillor Jenny Hannaby moved and Councillor Dudley Hoddinott seconded the following motion:

This Council calls for our officers to work with Oxfordshire County Council (and other relevant local authorities, Network Rail and Great Western Railway) to produce a business case for an express rail link from Bristol to Milton Keynes via a new station at Grove/Wantage. It must include new track and signalling so as not to obstruct present and future high speed services from Paddington and link with the current electrification scheme.

In supporting the motion councillors expressed the view that the scheme would provide a valuable transport link to Milton Park and Oxford, provide the infrastructure necessary to support the growing number of houses and jobs in the area and alleviate pressure on Didcot Parkway station. The proposal had the support of both Network Rail and Great Western Railways but required a business case.

**RESOLVED:** That Council calls for officers to work with Oxfordshire County Council (and other relevant local authorities, Network Rail and Great Western Railway) to produce a business case for an express rail link from Bristol to Milton Keynes via a new station at Grove/Wantage. It must include new track and signalling so as not to obstruct present and future high speed services from Paddington and link with the current electrification scheme.

- (3) Councillor Bob Johnston moved and Councillor Catherine Webber seconded the following motion:

Air quality in the Vale is deteriorating. Therefore, this Council calls on HM Government to tighten the regulations on diesel engine vehicles especially in respect of particulates and oxides of nitrogen to address this. Any such regulations should ensure that the new limits are rigorously enforced and they should make the removal of the particle filter from diesel engines a criminal offence.

Those councillors in support of the motion expressed the view that diesel vehicles had a detrimental impact on the health of local residents and the resources of the National Vale of White Horse District Council – Council minutes

Health Service. Although solutions were not within the control of the council it could call upon the government to tighten regulations. Other councillors expressed the view that air quality in the Vale was not deteriorating but broadly the same as five years ago with reductions in some areas. Air pollution had many causes and required a broad approach rather than merely blaming diesel vehicles.

The chairman called for a recorded vote on the motion which was lost with the votes recorded as follows:

<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Abstentions</b>
Councillors	Councillors	Councillors
Margaret Crick	Alice Badcock	Edward Blagrove
Debby Hallett	Mike Badcock	Robert Hall
Jenny Hannaby	Matthew Barber	Vicky Jenkins
Anthony Hayward	Eric Batts	Chris Palmer
Dudley Hoddinott	Roger Cox	Henry Spencer
Bob Johnston	Katie Finch	
Chris McCarthy	Simon Howell	
Helen Pighills	Mohinder Kainth	
Julia Reynolds	Monica Lovatt	
Judy Roberts	Sandy Lovatt	
Emily Smith	Ben Mabbett	
Catherine Webber	Janet Shelley	
	Reg Waite	
	Elaine Ware	
Total: 12	Total: 14	Total: 5

## **Co.16 Application for voluntary redundancy**

Council considered the confidential report of the chief executive on a request for voluntary redundancy. The report and recommendation of the Joint Staff Committee were circulated to all councillors on 11 May.

Matthew Barber, Leader of the council, advised that in light of plans to implement a slimmer and flatter management structure and in the expectation that the role of strategic director is highly unlikely to remain in the revised structure, Anna Robinson had asked that she be made redundant as of 30 September. As required by the council's officer employment procedure rules, all Cabinet members had been consulted about the recommendation. No objection was received.

At the request of the chairman Council formally put on record its thanks to Anna Robinson for her hard work over the last eight years and wished her well for the future. She had made an important contribution to the Vale in her time with the council, particularly in promoting economic growth and securing the two enterprise zones covering Harwell, Milton Park and the Didcot power station site.

### **RESOLVED:**

To agree to the voluntary redundancy of Anna Robinson effective from 30 September 2016.

The meeting closed at 9.00pm

**Questions and written answers for Vale council on 11 May 2016**

**A. Question from Councillor Judy Roberts to Councillor Charlotte Dickson, Cabinet member for leisure.**

Could the Cabinet member please explain the reasons for the delay in publication of the Village and Community Halls Survey, which was due in July 2015?

**Written answer**

The surveys of community and village halls formed part of the work that consultants carried out on the joint playing pitch strategy and associated work. We have received draft reports from the consultants and, as reported to Council in July 2015, we were on track to complete by the end of 2015. However, due to the demands of the Local Plan Examination, both in preparation and participation, during last autumn and winter/spring this year, a review of the work has been delayed. This work is now re-programmed for late spring/summer.

**B. Question from Councillor Helen Pighills to Councillor Charlotte Dickson, Cabinet member for leisure.**

In the consultation on Abbey Meadows the public were overwhelmingly in support of Scenario A: 'A place to swim and play'

The consultation leaflet stated 'We would aim to carry out essential repairs to the swimming pool and changing rooms'.

Furthermore under 'Improvements we can make', the leaflet listed 'Repair the outdoor swimming pool' with 'refurbish the changing rooms' appearing in the 'Additional improvements we will consider'.

Why then does the recently issued cabinet decision include refurbishment of the changing rooms with no mention of essential repairs to and upgrading of the pool including its ageing pool tank and heating/filtration system?

**Written answer**

We listened to the consultation feedback and are working to deliver Scenario A – a place to swim and play. The outdoor pool is opening to the public on Saturday 28 May and officers worked with GLL over the winter to improve the heating system, undertake an industrial clean and paint the pool tanks. We have an ongoing maintenance budget to carry out any other essential works – as we committed to in the consultation leaflet.

The pool is clearly important to residents, which is why we are keeping it open. The changing rooms are an integral part of the pool complex and, therefore, need to meet health and safety standards. As the changing rooms are often the first area that people use and last area they leave, it is vital that they provide a pleasant environment. A refurbished changing facility will also provide a much more attractive approach to the complex, which in turn will enhance the whole area.

Refurbishing the changing rooms was ranked as the second most popular

improvement by people taking part in the consultation, so there is clearly public support for this to happen, which is why we've selected it as a priority.

As well as doing what we can to refurbish the pool over the past winter, officers are working to procure contractors for the play area and building work improvements in order for these works to take place next winter in an attempt to minimise the disruption caused to residents and visitors.

However, we are also aware that there are thousands of visitors to Abbey Meadow every year who do not use the pool, and we have taken them into account. One of the key aspirations of the project is to improve the wider Abbey Meadow area so that it attracts more visitors throughout the year. To completely refurbish the pool would cost in excess of £520,000, not including costs associated with survey work and professional design fees. This would not leave any funding for changes elsewhere in Abbey Meadow, which will be key to bringing more people to the area throughout the year. Given the available budget, we believe that it is fairer, along with keeping the pool open and refurbishing the changing rooms, to carry out as many of the other top ten improvements throughout Abbey Meadow as possible for the thousands of visitors who spend time in this area.

We are actively seeking additional funding so that we can achieve some of the other suggestions. We have already built into the budget some £45,000 of section 106 money from the Old Goal development earmarked for play equipment and this will allow the available budget to go further.

**D. Question from Councillor Emily Smith to Councillor Mike Murray,  
Cabinet member for planning policy**

The planning department's Statement of Community Involvement defines what the public can expect in term of communications and consultations from planning. It's so out of date it lists Dr Evan Harris as our MP to be consulted. Why hasn't this important policy document been kept up to date?

**Written answer**

The Vale Local Development Scheme which was published in January 2016 and has since that time been available to view on the Vale's website identifies the timetable for production of the updated Statement of Community Involvement.

**E. Question from Councillor Debby Hallett to Councillor Mike Murray,  
Cabinet member for planning policy**

The Cabinet has promised to take care of my interests across the Vale with enterprise, energy and efficiency. I don't know what they mean by 'enterprise'. 'Energy' isn't enough if it doesn't produce a good result. Tonight I'm interested in 'efficiency'. Could the Cabinet member please report the total costs so far to create the emerging Local Plan? Please include all costs: officers, consultants, travel & food, phone calls, consultation, printing and distribution, and everything else that we have invested so far in producing our emerging Local Plan.

**Written answer**

The cost of production of the Local Plan consumes almost all of the Vale's diligent and hardworking planning policy team's financial budget, and for the last three years this has been £3,214,174 in total.

# Leader's Report



Author: Cllr Matthew Barber

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To: Council

DATE: 11 May 2016

## Devolution update

### Purpose of Report

1. This report briefly updates Members on the progress towards a devolution deal for Oxfordshire since the joint announcement by seven District Council Leaders of the intention to seek a series of new Local Unitary Councils for Oxfordshire as part of HM Government's current devolution agenda.

### Strategic Objectives

2. The proposal seeks the devolution of powers from Whitehall to a new, more efficient and effective system of local government within Oxfordshire with the objectives of delivering better, sustainable and more efficient public services for the public.

### Background

3. HM Government has announced a series of devolution deals around the country that seek to devolve powers from central government to local government with improved governance arrangements in order to seek better and more efficient public services.
4. HM Government has invited bids from local government for these deals with no prescriptive requirement for the form which they take.
5. Primary legislation has been enacted, in the form of the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016, that gives powers to the Secretary of State to create Combined Authorities and transfer the functions of public bodies to local government.
6. In late 2015 and early 2016 a draft devolution deal was proposed by the Oxfordshire Growth Board (involving the five Oxfordshire district councils, Oxfordshire County Council, the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group). This proposal include a Combined Authority that would sit alongside the existing system of two-tier local government in order to coordinate local services.

7. Initial feedback from central government was not supportive of this proposal and sought, amongst other things, stronger governance and improved proposals on Health & Social Care.
8. In February 2016 the leaders of seven district councils (Vale of White Horse, South Oxfordshire, Oxford City, West Oxfordshire, Cherwell, Cotswold and South Northants) published draft plans for a revised devolution deal that included the creation of new Local Unitary Councils to replace the existing two tier arrangements.
9. The leaders proposed either three or four new Local Unitary Councils and the abolition of the existing authorities.

## **Progress since February**

10. Following the initial announcement discussions have taken place with HM Government and between the district councils and Oxfordshire County Council.
11. We have also engaged with stakeholders including parish councils, the Local Enterprise Partnership, the NHS, major local businesses and representatives of other community organisations.
12. Attempts have been made to encourage Oxfordshire County Council to join with the districts in supporting a single study. This has been done informally and formally through the Oxfordshire Growth Board in response to an item tabled by Cllr Hudspeth himself.
13. As no agreement for a single study could be reached the districts proceeded with the appointment of PricewaterhouseCoopers to look at the following:
  - Testing the four options for unitary authorities against four tests
  - Service transformation and redesign
  - Operation of the Combined Authority
  - Delivery of health and social care integration and childrens' and families' services
14. Following the appointment of PwC another offer was made to OCC to allow them to join our study on equal terms with other district partners. No formal response has been received to this offer. It has since emerged that the County Council are to commission their own study by Grant Thornton LLP. The duplication in public expense is regrettable but the County Council cannot be forced to join in the study that has been jointly commissioned by the other seven councils if it wishes to stand apart from it.

## **Current situation**

15. PwC have begun their work on evaluation the options for unitary authorities. Their final report is expected to be received by the councils by the end of June.
16. Four options are being considered as part of the proposal. In summary they are 1, 2, 3 or 4 unitary councils.

17. It is important to note that there is no proposal or suggestion of doing anything other than using the existing local authority areas as building blocks. The demographics of these areas lend themselves to successful local administration as well as simplifying the process of achieving new authorities.

18. The options under consideration are:

- Four councils that cover the existing administrative areas of:
  - Vale of White Horse & South Oxfordshire
  - Oxford City
  - West Oxfordshire & Costswolds
  - Cherwell and South Northants
- Three councils that cover the existing administrative areas of:
  - Vale of White Horse & South Oxfordshire
  - Oxford City
  - West Oxfordshire & Cherwell
- Two councils that cover the existing administrative areas of:
  - Oxford City
  - The current rural districts
- One council that cover the existing administrative areas of:
  - Oxfordshire County Council

19. The study will consider how these options will:

- Deliver better public services.
- Provide value for money.
- Ensure strong and accountable local leadership and governance.
- Deliver efficiency savings
- Help to deal with the demographic pressures on adult social care and improve outcomes through integration with health services
- Ensure a system for children's services that delivers a robust approach to child protection and safeguarding.
- Help support economic and housing growth and secure the necessary infrastructure identified in our Devolution Deal proposals
- Benefit from potential service synergies from unitary authorities having responsibility for planning and delivering services such as spatial planning, economic development, housing, transport infrastructure, social care and health

20. At the same time we continue dialogue with partner councils, the NHS and HM Government about details of any potential devolution settlement that we would seek alongside the reorganisation of local government.

## **The way forward**

21. Following the publication of the final report at the end of June or early July the district council leaders have committed to a full public consultation process over the summer.

22. Following the collation of the results of the public consultation we hope to make any necessary adjustments to our proposals and make a final submission to HM Government as soon as possible.



23. It is not clear whether the County Council's proposals will progress to the stage of a formal proposal to government.
24. Our initial and ongoing conversations with HM Government have been encouraging and we expect that with correct proposals laid out in detail and a successful consultation that our proposal would be supported.
25. The timetable for the implementation of any new unitary authorities is not clear, but would take a few years to put in place.
26. If the proposals are given the go ahead then it would be beneficial to begin the transformation of services and the transfer of functions as early as possible in order to minimise disruption to services and maximise improvements to services.

## **Financial Implications**

27. £50,000 has been vired from the corporate contingency work in order to support work on devolution proposals. The report by PwC is costing around £15,000 per council.

## **Conclusion**

28. At the Council meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> May Council is invited to support the motion backing the principle of creating a single tier of new Local Unitary Councils and the work to bring this about.
29. The offer has been made to all parish councils to have further discussions with them either ahead of or as part of the consultation process. There are ongoing discussions with other partners and the offer of additional briefings is always open to individual members or groups from this Council as well as an ongoing commitment to keep Council informed.
30. It is my firm belief that our current system needs to change and after much consideration our proposal is the best for accountability, the long term sustainability of high quality services and above all is in the interests of the residents that we are here to serve.