

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Council



held on **Wednesday 18 December 2019 at 7.00 pm**
at **The Ridgeway, The Beacon, Portway, Wantage, OX12 9BY**

Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Margaret Crick (Chair), Jerry Avery, Matthew Barber, Ron Batstone, Eric Batts, Samantha Bowring, Nathan Boyd, Cheryl Briggs, Andy Cooke, Andrew Crawford, Eric de la Harpe, Amos Duveen, Neil Fawcett, Andy Foulsham, Hayleigh Gascoigne, David Grant, Debby Hallett, Jenny Hannaby, Simon Howell, Alison Jenner, Bob Johnston, Diana Lugova, Robert Maddison, Sarah Medley, Ruth Molyneaux, Patrick O'Leary, Helen Pighills, Mike Pighills, Judy Roberts, Emily Smith, Max Thompson, Elaine Ware, Catherine Webber and Richard Webber

Officers: Steven Corrigan, Simon Hewings and Margaret Reed

Number of members of the public: 1

Co.40 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Val Shaw and Janet Shelley.

Co.41 Minutes

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 9 October 2019 as a correct record and agree that the chair sign these as such.

Co.42 Declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest

Councillor Catherine Webber made a statement that, as the local ward councillor for Marcham, which includes the parishes Wootton and St Helen Without, she would not vote on agenda item 7 – making the Wootton and St Helen Without Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Co.43 Urgent business and chair's announcements

The chair provided general housekeeping information and advised there were no items of urgent business.

Co.44 Public participation

None.

Co.45 Petitions

None.

Co.46 Making the Wootton and St Helen Without Neighbourhood Development Plan

Council considered the recommendations of Cabinet, made at its meeting on 6 December 2019, on making the Wootton and St Helen Without Neighbourhood Development Plan part of the development plan for Vale.

The Cabinet member for planning, Councillor Catherine Webber, had not taken part in the preparation of the neighbourhood plan but, as local ward member, had encouraged the two parishes to do so. Instead, the Leader of the Council, Councillor Emily Smith, proposed Council approve the Cabinet recommendations noting that the plan safeguarded the character of the two parishes and provided for a new development at Dalton Barracks, together with a green buffer.

The plan was compatible with the European Union obligations and complied with the Habitats Regulations Assessment. The independent planning inspector has supported the plan and agreed that it should proceed to referendum.

The referendum, held on 24 October 2019, had resulted in 89.3 per cent, of those who voted, support for the plan.

RESOLVED to:

1. make the Wootton and St Helen Without Neighbourhood Development Plan so that it continues to be part of the council's development plan; and
2. authorise the head of planning, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, and in agreement with the Qualifying Body, to correct any spelling, grammatical, typographical or factual errors together with any improvements from a presentational perspective.

Co.47 Treasury Management Outturn 2018/19

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations, made at its meeting on 6 December 2019, on the outturn performance of the treasury management function for the financial year 2018/19.

The Joint Audit and Governance Committee and Cabinet had considered the head of finance's report and were satisfied that the treasury activities had been carried out in accordance with the treasury management strategy and policy.

RESOLVED: to

1. approve the treasury management outturn report 2018/19; and
2. approve the actual 2018/19 prudential indicators within the report.

Co.48 Council Tax Base 2020/21

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations, made at its meeting on 6 December 2019, on the council tax base for 2020/21.

RESOLVED:

1. to approve the report of the head of finance to Cabinet on 6 December 2019 for the calculation of the council's tax base and the calculation of the tax base for each parish area for 2020/21;
2. that, in accordance with The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Vale of White Horse District Council as its council tax base for the year 2020/21 be 52,686.4; and
3. that, in accordance with The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Vale of White Horse District Council as the council tax base for the year 2020/21 for each parish be the amount shown against the name of that parish in Appendix 1 of the report of the head of finance to Cabinet on 6 December 2019.

Co.49 Designating the council's section 151 chief finance officer

Simon Hewings left the room during the consideration of this item.

Council considered the report of the chief executive on the designation of Simon Hewings, interim head of finance, as the council's section 151 chief finance officer.

Council congratulated Simon Hewings on his appointment and thanked William Jacobs, the previous postholder, for his work with the council as head of finance and section 151 officer.

RESOLVED: to

1. designate Simon Hewings, the interim Head of Finance, as the council's section 151 chief finance officer from 23 December 2019;
2. authorise the head of legal and democratic to make any consequential changes required to the council's constitution to reflect this change.

Co.50 Report of the leader of the council

Councillor Emily Smith, Leader of the council, addressed Council. The text of her report is available on the council's [website](#).

Co.51 Questions on notice

Question from Councillor Simon Howell to Councillor Andrew Crawford, Cabinet Member for finance

“The Leader of the council highlighted, at the annual meeting of the council, the need to produce a sustainable budget and improve income generation, including a line by line review.

Could the Cabinet member update Council on progress made over the last 6 months and the current financial health of the council as we approach the timeframe for the preparation of budgets”.

ANSWER

The budget setting report of February 2019 set out the significant financial challenge that lays ahead for our Council. The ending of the New Homes Bonus scheme has left a significant hole in our Medium Term Financial Plan that has to be addressed. The government has failed to inform councils of what will replace New Homes Bonus resulting in great uncertainty around what funding streams will be available to councils in the future.

New Homes Bonus was projected to generate over £7.4 million pounds by 2022/23 nearly 50 percent of the council’s net revenue spend. Adjusting for a loss of funding of this scale will take careful planning and cannot be done overnight. My budget report in February 2020 will set out the first steps we have taken along with future actions that will have to be seriously considered.

My work may have been further progressed if my Group’s proposed amendment to the Conservative 2019/20 budget had been approved. Unfortunately, our proposal to create a £50,000 Commercial Investment Projects Fund to be drawn down during the year to pay for resource and expertise to explore how to maximise the council’s investments and identify appropriate revenue generating schemes was rejected by the previous administration. Similarly, if the Five Councils Contract had delivered the savings the previous administration budgeted for my challenge would not be as great.

As we progress budget setting, I can advise Council that Heads of Service are in the process of review fees and charges to ensure the council is maximising its income where it can. Both finance officers and portfolio holders have carried out detailed budget challenges which have been welcomed by Heads of Service. I am currently involved in a number of other initiatives to help close the funding gap left by the previous administration and I will report on these when I bring my budget report to Council in February.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

Councillor Howell thanked Councillor Crawford for his response which set out details of the historic events but did not address the current financial health of the council and the current funding situation as it stands.

As a supplementary question Councillor Howell asked what specific actions are being taken to manage the finances given that at the latest Cabinet meeting it was reported that various line by line overspends result in an expected overspend for the current
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financial year of around £200,000? Can the promised review of line by line management of budget be relied on, given this forecast, and given that this information considered by Cabinet was three months out of date?

Councillor Crawford undertook to provide a written response.

Co.52 Motions on notice

1. Councillor Richard Webber moved, and Councillor David Grant seconded the motion as set out in the agenda at agenda item 13(1).

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 67, which provides for a recorded vote if three members request one, the chair called for a recorded vote on the motion which was declared carried with the voting as follows:

For	Against	Abstentions
Councillors	Councillors	Councillors
Jerry Avery		
Ron Batstone		
Eric Batts		
Samantha Bowring		
Nathan Boyd		
Cheryl Briggs		
Andy Cooke		
Andrew Crawford		
Margaret Crick		
Eric de la Harpe		
Amos Duveen		
Neil Fawcett		
Andy Foulsham		
Hayleigh Gascoigne		
David Grant		
Debby Hallett		
Jenny Hannaby		
Simon Howell		
Alison Jenner		
Bob Johnston		
Diana Lugova		
Robert Maddison		
Sarah Medley		
Ruth Molyneaux		
Patrick O'Leary		
Helen Pighils		
Mike Pighills		
Judy Roberts		
Emily Smith		
Max Thompson		
Elaine Ware		
Catherine Webber		
Richard Webber		
Total: 33	Total: 0	Total: 0

RESOLVED:

That in the context of the Climate Emergency, this Council welcomes the Government's review of fracking and its potential environmental impacts. Council urges Government to move towards a position of banning fracking altogether. Quite apart from the many environmental concerns, developing yet one more carbon-based fuel flies in the face of our ambition to strive for carbon neutrality.

Council notes that onshore wind is the lowest cost low-carbon technology currently available, yet the Westmill Wind Farm at Watchfield remains the only onshore wind farm in the whole of the Vale of White Horse. This situation is being exacerbated by the Government making their 'Contracts for Difference' funding available for offshore wind farms but excluding onshore.

Council notes that, while Government has looked on solar energy production more favorably, there remains huge untapped potential within the Vale to generate energy through Solar PV.

Council therefore commits to exploring planning policies which positively encourage all renewable sources of energy including onshore wind farms as part of the next Vale Local Plan and Oxfordshire Plan 2050.

2. Councillor Max Thompson moved, and Councillor Amos Duveen seconded the motion as set out in the agenda at agenda item 13(2).

After debate and on being put to the vote the motion was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That Council notes the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism is the most widely accepted and recognized definition of anti-Jewish racism. It states that: Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.

Council notes the All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims (APPG) definition of Islamophobia: Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.

Council notes that by using these definitions it helps understand, identify, and tackle antisemitism and Islamophobia.

Council holds the right to freedom of speech and freedom of religion are fundamental but freedom of speech is not freedom to demonise, scapegoat and discriminate.

Council resolved to:

- condemn all hate crimes and deplores the rise in hate crimes against members of the Jewish and Muslim communities in Britain
- condemn all inflammatory rhetoric in political discourse: including antisemitic and Islamophobic tropes used by politicians and public servants.
- adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism in full and without amendment
- adopt the APPG definition of Islamophobia in full and without amendment.
- ask officers to update this council's equality policies to this effect

3. Councillor Hayleigh Gascoigne moved, and Councillor Alison Jenner seconded the motion as set out in the agenda at agenda item 13(3).

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 67, which provides for a recorded vote if three members request one, the chair called for a recorded vote on the motion which was declared carried with the voting as follows:

For	Against	Abstentions
Councillors	Councillors	Councillors
Jerry Avery	Eric Batts	Simon Howell
Ron Batstone	Elaine Ware	Ruth Molyneaux
Samantha Bowring		
Nathan Boyd		
Cheryl Briggs		
Andy Cooke		
Andrew Crawford		
Margaret Crick		
Eric de la Harpe		
Amos Duveen		
Neil Fawcett		
Andy Foulsham		
Hayleigh Gascoigne		
David Grant		
Debby Hallett		
Jenny Hannaby		
Alison Jenner		
Bob Johnston		
Diana Lugova		
Robert Maddison		
Sarah Medley		
Patrick O'Leary		
Helen Pighils		
Mike Pighills		
Judy Roberts		
Emily Smith		
Max Thompson		
Catherine Webber		
Richard Webber		
Total: 29	Total: 2	Total: 2

Council:

1. Believes that young people should be allowed a say over their future.
2. Recognises that 16 and 17 year olds are knowledgeable and passionate about the world in which they live and are as capable of engaging in the democratic system as any other citizen.
3. Notes that there is currently an unequal situation across the United Kingdom, with 16 and 17 year olds having voting rights in Scotland and Wales that are not available to them in England and Northern Ireland.
4. Supports the need for greater engagement with young people, leading to greater involvement of young people in the decisions that affect their community.

5. Believes that lowering the voting age to 16, combined with strong citizenship education, would empower young people to better engage in society and influence decisions that will define their future.
6. Believes that people aged 16 and 17, who can consent to medical treatment, work full-time, pay taxes, get married or enter a civil partnership and join the armed forces, should also have the right to vote.
7. Recognises and supports the ongoing 'Votes at 16' campaign by the British Youth Council, the UK Youth Parliament and other youth organisations, supported by thousands of young people across the UK.
8. Calls for 16 and 17 year olds to have the right in all elections and referendums across the UK.

Council therefore:

- Requests that the Leader write to relevant Ministers and local MPs: expressing this Council's support for the Votes at 16 campaign; calling for the extension of the franchise to 16- and 17-year olds in all elections and referendums across the UK;
- and asks the Electoral Registration Officer/ Returning Officer to consider participating in any pilot scheme.

4. Councillor Andy Cooke moved, and Councillor Amos Duveen seconded the motion as set out in the agenda at agenda item 13(4).

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 67, which provides for a recorded vote if three members request one, the chair called for a recorded vote on the motion which was declared carried with the voting as follows:

For	Against	Abstentions
Councillors	Councillors	Councillors
Jerry Avery	Eric Batts	
Ron Batstone	Nathan Boyd	
Samantha Bowring	Simon Howell	
Cheryl Briggs	Ruth Molyneaux	
Andy Cooke	Elaine Ware	
Andrew Crawford		
Margaret Crick		
Eric de la Harpe		
Amos Duveen		
Neil Fawcett		
Andy Foulsham		
Hayleigh Gascoigne		
David Grant		
Debby Hallett		
Jenny Hannaby		
Alison Jenner		
Bob Johnston		
Diana Lugova		
Robert Maddison		
Sarah Medley		
Patrick O'Leary		
Helen Pighills		
Mike Pighills		
Judy Roberts		
Emily Smith		

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For	Against	Abstentions
Max Thompson		
Catherine Webber		
Richard Webber		
Total: 28	Total: 5	Total: 0

RESOLVED: That

Council notes:

- that confidence and trust in both Parliament, the UK’s democratic system and politicians has been falling for some time.
- that the House of Commons and council chambers have long been unrepresentative of the votes cast by the electorate of the United Kingdom.
- that the UK’s First Past the Post voting system curtails voter choice, makes millions of votes ineffective, and leaves millions feeling unrepresented.

Council believes:

- that these factors have contributed to dangerous levels of distrust and disillusionment with our democratic process
- that democracy is distorted and failed by the fact that, due to this system, barely half of voters now feel able to cast their vote for their preferred candidate or Party.
- that it is essential that faith is restored in our democratic system and that the public see Parliament as fairly reflecting their views.
- that our First Past the Post voting system is a significant barrier to restoring this faith and all but guarantees that the balance of opinion among the electorate is not reflected in Parliament and our council chambers.
- that a system of Proportional Representation in which seats match votes at all levels, including councils, and in which all votes count equally, would help to rebuild public trust by ensuring that political views are represented.

Therefore:

Council requests that the leader write to the relevant government minister and our two local MPs setting out our position and requesting that all elections be run using a form of Proportional Representation in which all votes count equally and seats match votes.

5. Councillor Emily Smith moved, and Councillor Simon Howell seconded the motion as set out in the agenda at agenda item 13(5).

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 67, which provides for a recorded vote if three members request one, the chair called for a recorded vote on the motion which was declared carried with the voting as follows:

For	Against	Abstentions
Councillors	Councillors	Councillors
Jerry Avery		
Ron Batstone		
Eric Batts		
Samantha Bowring		
Nathan Boyd		
Cheryl Briggs		
Andy Cooke		
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Diana Lugova		
Robert Maddison		
Sarah Medley		
Ruth Molyneaux		
Patrick O'Leary		
Helen Pighills		
Mike Pighills		
Judy Roberts		
Emily Smith		
Max Thompson		
Elaine Ware		
Catherine Webber		
Richard Webber		
Total: 33	Total: 0	Total: 0

RESOLVED: That

In March 2017 this council voted to support 'Better Oxfordshire'; a proposal to create a unitary authority.

The unitary authority outlined in the 'Better Oxfordshire' submission was for a single authority based on the current County Council boundary. Oxfordshire County Council
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and South Oxfordshire District Council also took formal decisions to support the submission of this proposal.

The proposal was sent to the Secretary of State for approval, however, no further action has been taken. The proposal was submitted under legislative provisions containing a sunset clause, which expired in March 2019, meaning that at this time the proposal is not under active consideration.

However, over the past six months, Robert Jenrick MP, in his role as Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, has spoken publicly about an approach that could mean the end of smaller District Councils. He has also committed to a new push for devolution and raised the potential for further local government reorganisation. Additionally, these themes feature in all the main political parties' General Election manifestos.

In light of the above, with a new Council administration, and the significant financial uncertainty this council faces due to the delayed spending review, Council now wishes to clarify its position in relation to local governance models for Oxfordshire.

Council therefore confirms that it:

- Recognises that much of the financial and economic data and analysis that underpinned the 'Better Oxfordshire' submission is now out of date;
- Remains open to considering a new unitary proposal in principle, assuming it is able to secure appropriate local public support. A new unitary proposal may be based on a whole Oxfordshire basis as with the original unitary proposal or may differ, i.e. comprising different boundaries better representing local communities; and
- Restates its opposition to a "combined authority" based on the Oxfordshire County boundary or a Mayoral lead authority model of devolution.

Council asks officers to ensure that any future unitary proposal impacting the Vale of White Horse:

- addresses the significant financial challenge faced by local government, as evidenced within in our Medium Term Financial Plan and those of other Oxfordshire Councils;
- reflects a logical geography,
- delivers increased value for money; and
- creates a Council of an appropriate size, that can think and act strategically whilst ensuring meaningful decision making is brought closer to communities

Council requests that:

- officers make contact with the MHCLG to explore the approach the new Secretary of State will take to any proposals for unitary based reorganisation;
- a report on this matter is brought to full council, by the Chief Executive and Leader, outlining their understanding of the new Government's intentions by Summer 2020; and
- officers bring forward proposals for the Vale of White Horse to consider a formal merger with South Oxfordshire District Council, with the same total number of District Councillors, creating a single district council based on their combined geography with increased financial resilience.

The meeting closed at 8:40pm