

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Cabinet

held on Friday 5 February 2021 at 10.30 am

This was a virtual, online meeting.

Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Emily Smith (Chair), Debby Hallett (Vice-Chair), Andrew Crawford, Neil Fawcett, Helen Pighills, Judy Roberts, Bethia Thomas and Catherine Webber

Officers: Jayne Bolton, Emily Cockle, Pat Connell, Steve Culliford, Andrew Down, Beth Elkins, Liz Hayden, Mark Hewer, Simon Hewings, Jeremy Lloyd, Suzanne Malcolm, Margaret Reed and Mark Stone

Number of members of the public: 1

Ca.74 Apologies for absence

None

Ca.75 Minutes

RESOLVED: to adopt as correct records the minutes of the Cabinet meetings held on 4 and 18 December 2020 and agree that the chair signs them as such.

Ca.76 Declarations of interest

None

Ca.77 Urgent business and chair's announcements

None

Ca.78 Public participation

Hester Hand addressed Cabinet on the Old Abbey House, Abingdon.

“Question to the Leader or Cabinet member for Finance and Corporate Assets

The public minutes of the Cabinet meeting on 5 December record that “Cabinet agreed to dispose of Old Abbey House and offer it to a bidder, subject to contract”.

The public minutes of the 18 December meeting record that this decision was confirmed and “Resolved to address future communication with the public, supporting complete transparency where possible...”

In the course of discussions leading up to the decision we were frequently told that it was vital that action was taken quickly on Old Abbey House, partly to save it from further deterioration and partly because it was costing £20k per month while nothing was being done. The timetable set for the disposal allowed for 6 weeks (including the Christmas period) from the decision to completion of the sale.

Given that supposed urgency, please can you explain why, as of 10 January, the agent still hadn't been instructed on how to proceed and why, nearly 4 weeks later, some bidders have still not heard anything, not even an indication of when they might hear? Have you now exchanged contracts with the successful bidder? If not, please can you give an indication of when you expect that to happen.

Finally, given the level of public interest in the matter and the commitment to improve transparency, why has nothing been said to the public since 23 December when you said you had taken a decision “to secure the future of Old Abbey House” and “expect to be able to announce the full details of the decision in the new year”. While I realise that that could mean any time this year, I think most of us could be forgiven for assuming it would be in January. Please can you now give us an indication of a likely timescale for that information being made available?”

The leader thanked Hester Hand for her question. The leader replied, reporting that Cabinet members were also anxious for this process to be completed as soon as practically possible, so that Cabinet could share more information with the bidders and the wider public. Like with any property purchase, there was much work that needed to happen behind the scenes between accepting an offer and the sale being completed. However, the leader confirmed that the necessary searches and due diligence work had been completed and exchange of contracts was expected imminently. As soon as this happened further information would be shared widely.

Ca.79 Recommendations from other committees

Cabinet noted that the Scrutiny Committee had commented on the draft car park order; its suggestions were set out in the report.

Cabinet also noted that the Joint Audit and Governance Committee had met on 26 January 2021 to discuss the treasury management and investment strategy for 2021/22. The committee recommended to Cabinet that it recommended to Council the adoption of the strategy, the prudential indicators and limits, and the annual investment strategy. These recommendations were set out in the interim head of finance's report to Cabinet.

Cabinet also noted that the Scrutiny Committee would consider the budget report at its meeting on 8 February 2021.

Ca.80 Car park orders 2021 - consultation results

Cabinet considered the head of housing and environment's report on the consultation results of the draft car park orders.

The consultation results revealed that all aspects of the 2021 car park orders Nos.1 and 2 were supported, apart from the Road Haulage Association's objection to the proposed removal of the lorry park at Rye Farm car park, Abingdon. Some members of the public had also expressed concern at the proposed phasing out of the residents' parking permits and bringing them in line with the cost of general parking permits.

Cabinet supported the removal of the lorry park at Rye Farm car park in Abingdon. Most vehicles parking there turned off the A34 and drove through the town centre to reach the lorry park. This added to pollution in the town centre. Cabinet considered that this was an inappropriate location for a lorry park now that the lorry park facilities at the A34 Milton interchange had been improved.

Cabinet looked at options for increasing residents' parking permits. One option was to increase the residents' permits over the next three years to 75 per cent of the cost of a standard parking permit. The other option was to increase the cost more gradually, by 10 per cent each year. Cabinet concluded that a more gradual increase would provide a better balance, allowing residents to plan ahead for increases. This was a fairer way to move towards residents' permits and standard permits being brought into line.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) note the comments received on the Vale of White Horse District Council proposed car parking orders 2021 (No. 1 and No. 2) and make the amendments set out in the head of housing and environment's report to Cabinet on 5 February 2021;
- (b) approve option B set out in that report to increase the cost of residents' parking permits by 10 per cent per year over the next three years (for existing holders only); and
- (c) authorise the head of legal and democratic services to make the new orders No.1 and No.2 and to determine the date they will come into effect.

Ca.81 S106 Request - Shrivenham Sports Pavilion

Cabinet considered the interim head of development and regeneration's report on a request by Shrivenham Parish Council for section 106 funding towards a new sports pavilion in the village.

The report highlighted that while Shrivenham's Memorial Hall was of insufficient size and structure to cater for the needs of an expanding village, the building was not able to provide additional space for changing and showering facilities due to its listed status. A new sports pavilion would provide accessible sporting and community facilities needed for the local community.

Cabinet was satisfied that this was a worthwhile project and the risks identified in the report could be mitigated. Cabinet supported the creation of a budget of £378,537.80 for this project.

RECOMMENDED to Council on 10 February 2021 to:

- (a) approve funding to Shrivenham Parish Council on behalf of Viscountess Barrington Memorial Hall and Recreation Ground Trust in its capacity as the sole trustee of the

Trust towards a new sports pavilion to be erected by the Trust on the Recreation Ground owned by the Trust and to create a budget of £378,537.80;

- (b) authorise the interim head of development and regeneration in consultation with the head of legal and democratic to:
- agree a funding agreement with Shrivenham Parish Council in its capacity as the sole trustee of the Trust to govern the terms of use of the S106 funding; the instalments in which the funding is paid; the timing of instalments; the conditions subject to which instalments are paid and to otherwise protect the interests of Vale of White Horse District Council as the provider of the funding;
 - include Shrivenham Parish Council as a party to the funding agreement in its own right where necessary or desirable to facilitate the carrying out and completion of the new sports pavilion project by the Trust;
 - approve the payment to Shrivenham Parish Council of £361,423.96 towards the new sports pavilion project subject to and in accordance with the funding agreement; and
 - approve the payment to Shrivenham Parish Council of the portion of £17,113.84 recovered (minus legal costs) on completion of a Deed of Variation to repurpose a Changing Rooms Contribution received under Agreement 16V52 subject to and in accordance with the terms of the funding agreement;
- (c) approve the payment of instalments three and four of the Sports and Leisure Contribution (Shrivenham recreation ground pavilion) as defined in clause 1.1.33 of S106 Agreement 16V30 and the Cricket Facilities Contribution, as defined in clause one of the Second Schedule of S106 Agreement 17V14 to the Shrivenham Sports Pavilion project:
- to Shrivenham Parish Council when received by the council subject to and in accordance with the funding agreement to whichever value is the lower of the amount received by the council and the value of forward funding that Shrivenham Parish Council has not recovered by any other means;
 - to Shrivenham Parish Council subject to and in accordance with the funding agreement, on creation of a budget to the value stated above, with no requirement for a further S106 Application, report and decision.

Ca.82 Treasury management and investment strategy 2021/22

Cabinet considered the interim head of finance's report on the treasury management and investment strategy for 2021/22.

The report had been considered by the Joint Audit and Governance Committee on 26 January 2021. The committee supported the recommendations to approve the strategy, the prudential indicators and limits, and the annual investment strategy, and recommended this to Cabinet.

Cabinet agreed, noting that the strategy set boundaries for the council's borrowing, investments and exposure to loss, as well as setting the prudential indicators. The strategy prioritised security, then liquidity and finally yield. There were no significant changes to the strategy. However, as income was likely to fall due to low interest rates, the council would be looking to progress a more proactive treasury management strategy during the coming year, working together with the capital strategy and the investment strategy.

RECOMMENDED to Council on 10 February 2021 to:

- (a) approve the treasury management strategy 2021/22, as set out in appendix A to the interim head of finance's report to Cabinet on 5 February 2021;
- (b) approve the prudential indicators and limits for 2021/22 to 2023/24, as set out in appendix A to that report; and
- (c) approve the annual investment strategy 2021/22 set out in appendix A, and the lending criteria detailed in table 6 to that report.

Ca.83 Budget 2021/22

Cabinet considered the interim head of finance's report on the budget 2021/22. The report set out the revenue budget for 2021/22, and the capital programme to 2025/26, that Cabinet was asked to recommend to Council on 10 February to approve. The report would be considered by the Scrutiny Committee on 8 February also.

The report recommended an increase in council tax of £5 for a Band D property for 2021/22. This was the maximum increase allowed under the draft referendum rules outlined in the government's provisional settlement.

Covid-19 had played a central part in the budget. The council was likely to continue to see additional costs, and income losses in the new financial year. The figures included in the budget for these were estimates only, as no-one could predict the future course of the pandemic. The government had provided support for some, but not all, council losses.

The prioritisation of staff resources had meant that, in this budget, Cabinet had not been able to bring forward additional budget proposals to support our priorities in the new corporate plan. The report had, however, identified where existing budgets could fund corporate plan delivery activity. Deliverability of those activities would be dependent on council resources being available to progress them.

The budget report also included the medium-term financial plan for the next five years. This continued to show an increasing draw on reserves over the five year period, based on current estimates of future local government funding. This increasing use of reserves was unsustainable and officers and Cabinet would continue to review budgets in the context of the corporate plan priorities to identify ways to improve the council's financial position.

Cabinet noted that there was a confidential appendix A.6 to the budget report, which provided background information to councillors of the breakdown of the contingency sum in the public appendix A.6.

Cabinet supported the budget proposal and thanked the Cabinet member for finance and all officers involved in producing the budget. Cabinet members were proud that they had managed to produce a budget in such difficult times without the need for budget cuts, but still allowing the council to progress its corporate plan. The budget protected residents, retained services, supported local businesses, and supported the council's finances.

Given the uncertainty surrounding the budget, it was noted that it was possible that Cabinet might need to revisit the budget during the year, if circumstances changed.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) to Council on 10 February 2021 that it:
 - (i) sets the revenue budget for 2021/22, as set out in appendix A.1 to the interim head of finance's report to Cabinet on 5 February 2021;
 - (ii) approves the capital programme for 2021/22 to 2025/26 as set out in appendix D.1 to that report, together with the capital programme changes as set out in appendix D.2 to that report;
 - (iii) sets the council's prudential limits, as listed in appendix E to that report;
 - (iv) approves the medium-term financial plan to 2025/26, as set out in appendix F to that report.

RESOLVED: to

- (b) agree that the Cabinet member for finance, in conjunction with the interim head of finance, may make minor adjustments to the interim head of finance's report and the prudential indicators, should they prove necessary prior to its submission to Council on 10 February 2021.

Ca.84 Capital strategy 2021/22 to 2030/31

Cabinet considered the interim head of finance's report on the capital strategy for 2021/22 to 2030/31. This outlined the council's approach to capital spending, based on the council's corporate strategy, and was linked to the council's corporate objectives, medium term financial strategy, and management of projects and programmes. The strategy determined how capital schemes could be progressed from initial idea through to conclusion.

The Cabinet member for finance reported that there were a number of key "building blocks" that were essential to underpin the strategy that were currently being developed. These included an asset management strategy and maintenance plan, and medium-term service planning.

Cabinet noted that the capital strategy would be a key document for the council going forward. It would provide a high-level overview of how capital expenditure; capital financing and treasury management activity contributed to the provision of services. It would also provide an overview of how associated risk was managed and the implications for future financial sustainability. It would increase transparency in the planning, approval and monitoring of capital expenditure.

Cabinet noted that this year the strategy included within it a strategy for the flexible use of capital receipts. This identified revenue activity which, under guidance issued by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in 2016, was eligible to be funded using capital receipts rather than revenue resources.

Cabinet welcomed the capital strategy and recommended its adoption to Council. If circumstances changed, Cabinet might need to revisit the capital strategy during the year.

RECOMMENDED to Council on 10 February 2021 to:

- (a) approve the capital strategy 2021/22 to 2030/31, contained in appendix one of the interim head of finance's report to Cabinet on 5 February 2021; and

- (b) agree the strategy for flexible use of capital receipts, contained as appendix 1 of the capital strategy.

The meeting closed at 11.10 am