

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet



held on Wednesday 17 March 2021 at 5.00 pm
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, Pat Connell, Steve Culliford, Andrew Down, Adrian Duffield, Steve May, Lucy Murfett, Margaret Reed, Melanie Smans and Bertie Smith

Also present: Councillors Ron Batstone, Eric Batts, Jenny Hannaby, Simon Howell, Alison Jenner, Janet Shelley and Elaine Ware

Number of members of the public: 2

Ca.85 Apologies for absence

None

Ca.86 Minutes

RESOLVED: to adopt as a correct record the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 5 February 2021 and agree that the Chair signs them as such.

Ca.87 Declarations of interest

Councillor Judy Roberts declared a personal interest in the item on funding the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust (minute Ca.95 refers).

Ca.88 Urgent business and chair's announcements

None

Ca.89 Public participation

Three members of the public had registered to speak at the meeting.

- (1) Tom Christophers, chairman of Cumnor Parish Council, was unable to attend the meeting. Instead he submitted a written statement in support of the Oxfordshire

Community Land Trust project. The statement was circulated to all Cabinet members.

- (2) Bob Colenutt, chair of the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust, spoke in support of the trust's project.
- (3) Jon Bloxsom, the development manager of the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust project, did not make a statement but made himself available to answer any questions.

The chair thanked the members of the public for their statements.

Ca.90 Recommendations from other committees

Cabinet noted that the Scrutiny Committee had met on 9 March 2021 to discuss a joint local plan in public session, and the Covid-19 leisure support package in exempt session. The committee had not made any formal recommendations to Cabinet but made comments to the Cabinet members present on these subjects.

Ca.91 A joint local plan

Cabinet considered the head of planning's report on a joint local plan. This proposed the development of a joint local plan with South Oxfordshire District Council, rather than the two councils working on separate plans.

The Cabinet member for planning saw many advantages of the proposal. It would allow the councils to work more closely together, share policies where appropriate, and share resources. There were many practical reasons for doing so. Both councils' geography was similar: rural areas with market towns. It would allow for better planning of Didcot Garden Town and the Science Vale area. Both councils' corporate ambitions were similar, and both had declared climate emergencies. A joint local plan would also save cost, for example the councils had a shared planning policy team.

Cabinet agreed, believing that there were sound planning and practical reasons to develop a joint local plan. Cabinet was reassured that, if necessary, local policies could be included in a joint plan to reflect local needs.

Legislation allowed the councils to prepare a joint plan. Cabinet discussed the two methods of doing this:

- Section 28 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 allowed two or more local planning authorities (district councils) to prepare a joint local plan. The county council in two-tier areas, such as Oxfordshire, could be part of the plan-preparation process but could not be part of the formal decision-making, as this remained the responsibility of the district councils. Under Section 28, the final, formal decisions at key local plan stages (consultations, publication, submission, adoption) were made either separately by each council or via a voluntary joint committee.
- Section 29 of the 2004 Act enabled the county council to continue to have a strategic planning role working with the district councils. This allowed for the decision-making on a joint local plan to be conferred on a joint committee. Under

section 29, the county council would be a formal partner in the joint committee and therefore would have equal membership on that committee.

Given the context of development plan making across Oxfordshire, with a strategic plan (the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan) already underway, and a shared management and policy team already in place for South Oxfordshire and the Vale, Cabinet considered that a joint local plan should be prepared in accordance with section 28 of the Act. This would involve either formal decisions at key local plan stages being made separately by each council or via a voluntary joint committee. Cabinet considered that this should be recommended to Council as the best method to develop a joint local plan. Scrutiny Committee had preferred the section 28 option also. Cabinet considered that officers should be authorised to prepare the detailed arrangements. Cabinet members asked officers to manage the risks by identifying them in the risk register and by preparing contingencies and mitigations should the risks materialise.

RECOMMENDED to Council on 24 March 2021 to:

- (a) agree, subject to the agreement of South Oxfordshire District Council, the preparation and production of a Joint Local Plan with South Oxfordshire District Council;
- (b) approve the Joint Local Development Scheme (March 2021), attached at appendix 1 to the head of planning's report to Cabinet on 17 March 2021, and authorise the head of planning in consultation with the Cabinet member for corporate services and transformation, to make any updates; and
- (c) agree the principle of governance to prepare and produce a Joint Local Plan under Section 28 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, and to authorise the head of legal and democratic, in consultation with the head of planning and the Cabinet members for corporate services and transformation and democratic services, to agree the detailed arrangements.

Ca.92 Budget monitoring

Cabinet considered the interim head of finance's budget monitoring report. This looked at the council's budget position for the period April 2020 to January 2021. This showed both a revenue and capital programme underspend, as detailed in the report's public and exempt appendices. During the period, the council's main priority had been to provide a strong local response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This had resulted in the diversion of resources and the consequent reduced work on other priorities.

Cabinet thanked officers for their work during these unprecedented times.

RESOLVED: to note the contents of the interim head of finance's report to Cabinet on 17 March 2021.

Ca.93 Exclusion of the public, including the press

RESOLVED: to exclude members of the press and public from the meeting for the following item of business under Part 1 of Schedule 12A Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 and as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 on the grounds that:

- (i) it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1-7 Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, and
- (ii) the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Ca.94 Covid-19 leisure support package

Cabinet made a recommendation to Council to approve a package of Covid-19 leisure support.

Ca.95 Oxfordshire Community Land Trust: affordable housing funding

Cabinet made a recommendation to Council to support the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust project to provide affordable homes in Cumnor.

Ca.96 Budget monitoring

Cabinet noted the exempt appendices to the interim head of finance's budget monitoring report.