

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Cabinet



held on Friday 4 February 2022 at 10.30 am
in the 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, OX14 4SB

Open to the public, including the press

Present in the meeting room:

Cabinet members: Councillors Emily Smith (Chair), Bethia Thomas (Vice-Chair), Andy Crawford, Neil Fawcett, Helen Pighills, Judy Roberts and Catherine Webber
Officers: Steve Culliford (Democratic Services Team Leader) and Mark Stone (Chief Executive)

Remote attendance:

Officers: Patrick Arran (Head of Legal and Democratic), John Backley (Technical Services Manager), James Carpenter (Head of Development and Corporate Landlord), David Cookson (Infrastructure Implementation Officer), Andrew Down (Deputy Chief Executive – Partnerships), Liz Hayden (Head of Environment and Housing), Mark Hower (Infrastructure and Development Team Leader), Simon Hewings (Head of Finance), Jeremy Lloyd (Broadcasting Officer), Suzanne Malcolm (Deputy Chief Executive – Place), William Maxwell (Waste and Recycling Project Manager), Adrianna Partridge (Deputy Chief Executive – Transformation and Operations), Donna Ross (Principal Accountant), Richard Spraggett (Chief Accountant), and Michelle Wells (Policy and Insight Manager).

74. Apologies for absence

Councillor Debby Hallett had sent her apologies for absence.

75. Minutes

RESOLVED: to adopt as correct records the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 3 December 2021 and the minutes of the informal meeting of Cabinet members held on 20 December 2021, and to agree that the chair signs them as such.

76. Declarations of interest

None

77. Urgent business and chair's announcements

None

78. Public participation

None

79. Recommendations and updates from other committees

Cabinet noted the recommendations and updates from other committees since Cabinet's meeting on 3 December 2021. The chair thanked the committees for their contributions.

80. Climate action plan

Cabinet considered the report of the head of policy and programmes, which recommended the approval of a climate action plan. The plan included suggestions made by the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee.

The Cabinet member for climate emergency and the environment reported that the plan was a key delivery vehicle to move the council forward in its climate work, with the overarching aim for the council to become a carbon neutral by 2030. The plan was a 'live' document and would be adapted to meet changing circumstances. A quarterly monitoring report would be produced and any further recommendations to update the plan would be made to Cabinet.

Cabinet supported the climate action plan and was pleased to see that many of the actions had already been planned for in the budget.

RESOLVED: to note the development of and approve the Climate Action Plan for adoption and implementation.

81. Climate action fund

Cabinet considered the head of policy and programmes' report on a climate action fund. The report set out the proposed policy, guidelines and desired outcomes for the fund within the wider context of the council's climate emergency work. The report also detailed the proposed decision-making process for funding applications and outlined the timeline for its launch.

Cabinet welcomed the introduction of the fund, which demonstrated the council's commitment to tackling the climate emergency. It was hoped that the fund's launch would inspire and enable community groups to meet the climate challenge.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) approve the Climate Action Fund policy and guidelines;
- (b) endorse the launch of the fund and the head of policy and programmes making final award decisions, in consultation with the relevant Cabinet and ward members; and
- (c) request members to promote the fund within their communities to help ensure a wide reach of applicants.

82. Section 106 request - Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor Parish Council - Replacement sports pavilion, The Sports Field, Kingston Bagpuize

Cabinet considered the head of finance's report on an application for section 106 funds from Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor Parish Council. The application was for £596,757.66 towards the replacement of the parish's existing sports pavilion.

The Cabinet member for development and infrastructure reported that the sum was proposed to be taken from eight contributions secured under section 106, from legal agreements linked to five developments. A funding agreement would specify the parish council's contribution and liabilities. Due to the amount, the council's constitution required Cabinet to recommend approval of the funding to Council.

Cabinet supported the proposal, it being a good use of section 106 funds to provide a much-needed replacement facility for the local community.

RECOMMENDED to Council to:

- (a) create a further budget for £596,757.66 towards a replacement sports pavilion at The Sports Field, Kingston Bagpuize from the accumulated section 106 contributions set out in the head of finance's report to Cabinet on 4 February 2022;

RESOLVED:

- (b) subject to Council agreeing (a) above, to authorise the head of finance, in consultation with the head of legal and democratic to:
 - (i) agree and enter into a funding agreement with Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor Parish Council regarding the terms of use of the Section 106 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 by undertaking legal and financial due diligence, including being satisfied that the funding is lawful and compliant with subsidy control provisions; and
 - (ii) approve the payment to Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor Parish Council of up to £596,757.66 towards a replacement sports pavilion at The Sports Field, Kingston Bagpuize, subject to and in accordance with the funding agreement.

83. Car park fees and charges

Cabinet considered the head of development and corporate landlord's report on the annual review of the council's car parking fees and charges. The report set out the position of the council's car parking account, with expenditure set against income. This showed that the service was running at a significant deficit.

The Cabinet member with responsibility for car parks set out the need to reduce the deficit by increasing fees and charges. Applying no change to the current fees and charges was unsustainable and therefore rejected as an option. The options to reduce the deficit were:

- A. To reduce free parking from two hours to one hour and introduce a charge of £1.50 for up to two hours
- B. Increase all current fees by 40 pence
- C. To make permits non-transferable between car parks

The Cabinet member recommended that Cabinet approved all three options, A, B and C. The estimated impact of these changes was that the deficit could be reduced significantly. The council's fees and charges would still be in line with neighbouring councils.

Cabinet agreed with the proposed options, believing that these represented a balance between the need to reduce the deficit in the cost of providing the car parking service, and the need to be fair to ensure continued viability of town centres. These changes would reduce the cost of the service to council tax payers also. The council would monitor usage of the car parks to inform future decisions.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) approve changes to the car parking fees in line with the proposals (options A, B and C) set out in paragraphs 15 to 27 of the head of development and corporate landlord's report to Cabinet on 4 February 2022;
- (b) if the changes to the fees and charges require a change in the car parking order, to:
 - (i) authorise the head of legal and democratic to prepare and publish a draft order under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984; and
 - (ii) authorise the head of development and corporate landlord to oversee necessary communications and consultations and report back to Cabinet.

84. Treasury management and investment strategy 2022/23

Cabinet considered the head of finance's report regarding a treasury management and investment strategy for 2022/23. The Cabinet member for finance reported that several changes were proposed to the strategy, including increases to counterparty limits and bonds, increases to local authority and government deposits, an increase to portfolio limits for short-term deposits, reducing maturity limits for local authority deposits, removing the non-treasury management property-related investment category, enabling deposits with foreign financial institutions, and increasing variable interest rate exposure prudential indicator limits.

The Joint Audit and Governance Committee had supported the revised strategy. Cabinet concurred as the revised strategy would allow the council greater flexibility with its treasury management investments.

RECOMMENDED to Council to:

- (a) approve the treasury management strategy 2022/23 set out in appendix A to the head of finance's report to Cabinet on 4 February 2022;
- (b) approve the prudential indicators and limits for 2022/23 to 2024/25 as set out in, appendix A to the report; and
- (c) approve the annual investment strategy 2022/23 set out in appendix A to the report, and the lending criteria detailed in table 6.

85. Capital strategy 2022/23 to 2031/32

Cabinet considered the head of finance's report on a capital strategy for the period 2022/23 to 2031/32. The report requested Cabinet to recommend Council to approve the capital strategy. The strategy provided a framework to the council's approach to capital spending, and was linked to the council's corporate objectives, its medium-term financial strategy, and the management of its projects and programmes. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy required the council to adopt a capital strategy.

The main changes to the strategy included:

- maximising the use and value of council-owned property assets to support council services, or for regeneration purposes to deliver a wider social or community benefit
- providing loans to companies and other organisations to support the delivery of the council's corporate objectives
- investing in renewable energy schemes to support delivery of the council's climate action plan priorities
- the flexible use of capital receipts to identify revenue activity, which could be funded using capital receipts rather than revenue resources

The Cabinet member for finance reported that in all cases investment would need to be within the council's legal powers, must be proportionate to the council's financial standing, and should support the council's corporate objectives. However, investment could not result in commercial gain.

Cabinet supported the strategy as it would allow the council greater investment opportunities to raise income.

RECOMMENDED to Council to:

- (a) approve the capital strategy 2022/23 to 2031/32, contained in appendix one of the head of finance's report to Cabinet on 4 February 2022; and
- (b) agree the strategy for flexible use of capital receipts which is contained as annex 1 of the capital strategy.

86. Revenue budget 2022/23 and capital programme 2022/23 to 2026/27

Cabinet considered the head of finance's report on the budget for 2022/23. The report included a draft revenue budget, a capital programme for the period 2022/23 to 2026/27, the prudential indicators, and a medium term financial plan covering 2022/23 to 2026/27. Cabinet was asked to recommend the report to the Council meeting on 16 February 2022.

The Cabinet member for finance began by thanking the head of finance and his team for the work undertaken to prepare the draft budget. He also thanked Cabinet members and other officers involved. He reported that the Scrutiny Committee had considered the draft budget and had made no recommendations or suggestions to Cabinet.

The council had faced significant financial issues in the preparation of this budget. Its council tax was the fifteenth lowest in the country for a shire district and well below the national average; the council was unable to increase its council tax significantly. The council had not benefitted from the business rates retention scheme. Whilst the council

had benefitted from the New Homes Bonus scheme, this was under review by the government and was expected to be less generous in future.

The revenue budget set for 2021/22 had been balanced through the use of reserves at a level that was unsustainable over the medium term. For 2022/23, Cabinet wished to set a more sustainable balanced budget. Officers had undertaken a review of all expenditure and income, which resulted in a significant reduction in the base budget. This allowed the council to set a balanced revenue budget for 2022/23 and beyond, with the use of reserves being significantly lower than previously forecast. The Cabinet member believed that this was the first time that the council could claim to be solvent across the five year medium term financial plan period, based on future estimates of government funding. The budget proposals included a sum to fund transformational activities to find efficiencies to further improve the council's services and financial position. The budget proposed no cuts to services but included revenue growth to support climate initiatives. The council tax for a Band D property would increase by £5, the maximum allowed under the draft referendum rules. The capital programme included several new schemes that would be funded from community infrastructure levy income.

Cabinet members thanked the Cabinet member for finance for his work and thanked the head of finance for his support to councillors throughout the budget preparation period. Cabinet supported the budget, which included several schemes to support the corporate objectives, funds to support climate schemes, improve leisure facilities and children's play facilities for local communities, and new technology to provide green solutions and save money. Cabinet welcomed the capital schemes funded by the community infrastructure levy, providing much-needed infrastructure. Cabinet was especially pleased that the base budget had been reduced, allowing the council to balance its budget over the five year medium term financial plan, and praised the work that had been put in to achieve this.

RECOMMENDED to Council to:

- (a) set the revenue budget for 2022/23, as set out in appendix A.1 to the head of finance's report to Cabinet on 4 February 2022;
- (b) approve the capital programme for 2022/23 to 2026/27, as set out in appendix D.1 to the report, together with the capital programme changes as set out in appendix D.2 and appendix D.3 to the report;
- (c) set the council's prudential limits, as listed in appendix E to the report;
- (d) approve the medium-term financial plan to 2026/27, as set out in appendix F to the report; and

RESOLVED: to

- (e) agree that the Cabinet member for finance, in conjunction with the head of finance, may make minor adjustments to the report and the prudential indicators, should they prove necessary prior to its submission to Council on 16 February 2022.

87. Future provision of external audit services

Cabinet considered the head of finance's report on the need to appoint external auditors for the five-year period starting with the 2023/24 financial year.

In 2018, the council had opted into the 'appointing person' national auditor appointment arrangements, established by the Public Sector Audit Appointments for the five year period ending with the 2022/23 financial year. The council had been invited to join the national procurement arrangements for the next appointing period, covering audits for 2023/24 to 2027/28, and had invited the council to opt into these procurement arrangements again. The options were for the council to:

1. arrange its own procurement and appointment of external auditors; or
2. join the national collective scheme administered by the Public Sector Audit Appointments, a decision needed by 11 March 2022.

The Cabinet member for finance recommended option 2, joining the national procurement scheme. The Joint Audit and Governance Committee, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, and the Local Government Association had all recommended the same option. Cabinet concurred, believing that this would bring clear advantages of economies of scale.

RECOMMENDED to Council to:

- (a) accept Public Sector Audit Appointments' invitation to opt into the sector-led option for the appointment of external auditors to principal local government and police bodies for five financial years from 1 April 2023; and
- (b) authorise the head of finance to opt into the national scheme for auditor appointments for the provision of external audit services, starting with the audit of the 2023/24 accounts.

88. 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 paragraph 3, 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.

89. Future waste services

Cabinet authorised officers to make arrangements for the future of waste services.