

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Council



held on Wednesday 15 February 2023 at 7.00 pm
at The Ridgeway, The Beacon, Portway, Wantage, OX12 9BY

Open to the public, including the press

Present in the meeting room:

Members: Margaret Crick (Chair), Jerry Avery, Paul Barrow, Ron Batstone, Eric Batts, Nathan Boyd, Cheryl Briggs, Andy Cooke, Andy 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, Ben Mabbett, Sarah Medley, Patrick O'Leary, Helen Pighills, Mike Pighills, Sally Povolotsky, Judy Roberts, Janet Shelley, Emily Smith, Bethia Thomas, Max Thompson, Elaine Ware, Catherine Webber and Richard Webber

Officers: Patrick Arran, Head of Legal & Democratic and Monitoring Officer, Steven Corrigan, Democratic Services Manager, Simon Hewings, Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer and Mark Stone, Chief Executive

Prior to the consideration of the agenda items Margaret Crick, Chair of the council, thanked members and officers for their support during her time as Chair since May 2019. Bethia Thomas, Leader of the council, Nathan Boyd, Leader of the Conservative Group, and other members made statements in support of her role as Chair of council. On behalf of Council Bethia Thomas presented Margaret Crick with a bouquet of flowers.

54. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Samantha Bowring, Robert Maddison and Val Shaw.

55. Minutes

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the Council meeting held on 7 December 2022 as a correct record and agree that the Chair sign them as such.

56. Declarations of interest

None.

57. Urgent business and chair's announcements

The Chair provided general housekeeping advice.

58. Public participation

- A. Chris Henderson addressed Council on behalf of the residents of Woodlands and Pebble Hill mobile home parks to request no rent increase for the forthcoming year.

He stated that many residents have been struggling with the increase in the costs of essential such as energy and food. He alleged that the council makes a significant surplus from the parks. Rents have increased by RPI, the maximum permitted under the legislation, with the exception of last year when the CPI rate was used. During this time, the parks had experienced a reduction in service provision including the loss of the wardens.

Whilst appreciating local authority budgetary pressures, he considered it unreasonable that Mobile Home Park residents, many amongst the poorer residents in the Vale, should disproportionately subsidise services for richer residents.

Councillor Judy Roberts, Cabinet member for development and infrastructure, acknowledged the points raised. She stated that the council proposal in its budget for consideration at the meeting was to limit the increase to 5%, well below the current inflation figure of approximately 10%, recognising the cost-of-living pressures on residents.

- B. Philip Campbell made a statement on behalf of MEPC in support of the proposal to revise the Milton Park Local Development Order – agenda item 12.
- C. Councillor Bentley of Faringdon Town Council addressed Council. She asked how the Section 106 funds for the cancelled Wessex Leisure Centre would be allocated and what percentage of the funds would be allocated to Faringdon.

The Chair of council responded that officers would be in contact with the town clerk in due course.

59. Petitions

None.

60. Treasury Management Mid-Year Monitoring Report 2022/23

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations, made at its meeting on 3 February 2023, on the treasury management performance in the first six months of 2022/23.

Councillor Crawford, Cabinet member for finance, reported that income from cash investments was likely to be above budget by the financial year end due to increases in interest rates that were unexpected when the 2022/23 budget was set. The report set out performance against benchmarks for the first six months of the financial year. There had been no borrowing during the first half of the year and borrowing was unlikely for the remainder of the year also.

Both the Joint Audit and Governance Committee, at its meeting on 31 January and Cabinet, at its meeting on 3 February 2023, were content that the treasury management activities had been carried out in accordance with the treasury management strategy and policy.

RESOLVED: to

1. approve the head of finance's report to Cabinet on 3 February 2023;
2. note that Cabinet is satisfied that the treasury activities are carried out in accordance with the treasury management strategy and policy.

61. Treasury Management and Investment Strategy 2023/24

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations made at its meeting on 3 February 2023 on the council's treasury management and investment strategy for 2023/24. This set out how the council's treasury service would support the financing of capital investment decisions, and how treasury management operated day to day. The strategy also set out the prudential indicators, providing limits within which the treasury function must operate.

Councillor Crawford, Cabinet member for finance highlighted the changes proposed to the strategy for 2023/24 as set out in paragraphs 10 and 11 of the report:

- amend individual maximum counterparty limits for the higher credit rated counterparties, increasing the limits for LVNAV & VNAV Money Market Funds to £30 million
- increase specified instruments counterparty limit for banks and building societies with a minimum F1, A- credit rating from £10 million to £15 million
- increase non-specified instruments counterparty limit for institutions with a minimum credit rating of F1+, AA- from £10 million to £15 million
- amend the minimum lending criteria, increasing the minimum asset value criteria for non-rated building societies from assets over £1 billion to assets over £2 billion

Both Cabinet and the Joint Audit and Governance Committee had supported the strategy together with approving the prudential indicators and limits and approving the annual investment strategy and lending criteria.

RESOLVED: to

1. approve the head of finance's report to Cabinet on 3 February 2023;
2. approve the treasury management strategy 2023/24, as set out in appendix A to the report;
3. approve the prudential indicators and limits for 2023/24 to 2025/26, as set out in appendix A to the report; and
4. approve the annual investment strategy 2023/24, as set out in appendix A to the report, and the lending criteria detailed in table 6 in appendix A to the report.

62. Capital Strategy 2023/24 to 2032/33

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations made at its meeting on 3 February 2023 on the capital strategy for 2023/24 to 2032/33.

Councillor Crawford, Cabinet member for finance, reported that the strategy would provide the parameters within which capital expenditure and investment decisions would be made once the supporting requirements were in place. There were no substantive changes to the strategy.

RESOLVED: to

1. approve the capital strategy 2023/24 to 2032/33, as set out in appendix 1 of the head of finance's report to Cabinet on 3 February 2023; and
2. agree the strategy for flexible use of capital receipts, which is contained as annex 1 of the capital strategy.

63. Revenue Budget 2023/24 and Capital Programme to 2027/28

The chair referred to regulations that require councils to record the names of those members voting in favour, against or abstaining from any vote on the budget, including amendments, and the council tax. In accordance with the regulations, she would call for a named vote on each of these matters at this meeting.

Council noted the report of the chief finance officer on the robustness of the budget estimates and the adequacy of the reserves.

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations, made at its meeting held on 3 February 2023 on the revenue budget for 2023/24 and the capital programme to 2027/28.

Councillor Crawford, Cabinet member for finance, presented Cabinet's proposals for the revenue budget and capital programme. He moved and Councillor Fawcett, seconded a motion to approve Cabinet's recommendations as follows:

to

1. set the revenue budget for 2023/24, as set out in appendix A.1 to the head of finance's report to Cabinet on 3 February 2023;
2. approve the capital programme for 2023/24 to 2027/28, 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;
3. set the council's prudential limits, as listed in appendix E to the report;
4. approve the medium-term financial plan to 2027/28, as set out in appendix F to the report.

In moving the Cabinet recommendations, Councillor Crawford, the Cabinet member for finance introduced the draft budget, noting that the council's financial position had improved with this year's budget contributing £2.5 million to reserves. There were no service cuts in the budget. The budget allocated funds to continue supporting the community hub at a time when the government funding for this service was coming to an end. The medium term financial plan showed that the council was in a stable financial position for the next two years, but thereafter government funding was uncertain. Council tax would increase by £5 per Band D property, the maximum allowed before a referendum was required. The capital programme included a new learner pool at Wantage Leisure Centre, with funds provided from section 106 contributions. Capital was also allocated towards the Local Authority Housing Fund project, supported by government funding. Funds were also set aside for decarbonisation projects at Wantage Leisure Centre and the White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre, which had been supported by government grants.

Conservative Group amendment

Councillor Howell moved and Councillor Boyd seconded the following amendment:

- 1) That the Band D Council Tax for 2023/24 be increased by £3.20 instead of £5.00,
- 2) That two hours free car parking be reinstated. An indicative estimate of the cost of this measure is £75,000 per annum, but the service would be expected to be managed within the new budget envelope created,
- 3) That the climate emergency grant funding be increased from £50,000 to £100,000 per annum,
- 4) That the funding for the community hub for 2023/24 be increased by £100,000.

In moving the amendment Councillor Howell stated that the overall cost of the amendment was estimated to be £1.251 million over the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MFTP) period and could be funded from reserves. At the end of the five-year MFTP period reserves would not have fallen below the minimum balance of 10 per cent of net revenue expenditure. The amendment would support residents during the current cost of living crisis with a lower council tax bill, support both residents and traders with the reinstatement of the two hours free car parking, support the council's work on tackling the climate emergency with an increase in the climate emergency grant fund and provide further support for the district's most vulnerable residents with an increase in funding for the community hub.

A number of members spoke against the amendment. Increasing council tax by the maximum level permitted would provide a sustainable and financially sensible budget and not undermine the MFTP. Previous low levels of council tax had undermined the financial position of the council. In respect of the car park fees, the reduction in the free charging period had reduced the budget deficit and there was no evidence to suggest that there had been a reduction in the use of the car parks. The current level of climate emergency grant adequately met the level of demand for grants and there was therefore no need to increase the budget. Likewise, the community hub budget was sufficient to cover the needs of the service.

In accordance with regulations requiring councils to record the names of those members voting in favour, against or abstaining from any vote on the budget the chair called for a recorded vote which was not carried with the voting being as follows:

For	Against	Abstentions
Eric Batts	Jerry Avery	
Nathan Boyd	Paul Barrow	
Simon Howell	Ron Batstone	
Ben Mabbett	Cheryl Briggs	
Janet Shelley	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	

For	Against	Abstentions
	Bob Johnston	
	Diana Lugova	
	Sarah Medley	
	Patrick O’Leary	
	Helen Pighills	
	Mike Pighills	
	Sally Povolotsky	
	Judy Roberts	
	Emily Smith	
	Bethia Thomas	
	Max Thompson	
	Catherine Webber	
	Richard Webber	
Total: 6	Total: 29	Total: 0

Amendment

Councillor Gascoigne moved and Councillor Mabbett seconded the following motion:

To provide 100K per annum for the next five years of the Medium-Term Financial Plan for the climate emergency grant fund and ask officers to bring forward proposals to increase the scope of eligible projects.

In supporting the amendment, a number of members stated that the current grant criteria limited the number of projects coming forward. Amending the scope and increasing the budget would facilitate more projects coming forward for funding to help tackle the climate emergency. With the agreement of Council, both the mover and seconder of the original motion accepted the amendment.

A number of members welcomed the funding in the budget to continue the community hub, which had operated since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and had assisted residents during the cost-of-living crisis. The hub had also supported refugees and their host families in the district. Other members supported the investment in leisure facilities by providing funds for a new learner pool at Wantage whilst others expressed support for the allocation of funds towards the decarbonisation projects at two leisure centres, which put climate at the heart of decision-making and would reduce running costs.

In accordance with regulations requiring councils to record the names of those members voting in favour, against or abstaining from any vote on the budget the chair called for a recorded vote which was carried with the voting being as follows:

For	Against	Abstentions
Jerry Avery		
Paul Barrow		
Ron Batstone		
Eric Batts		
Nathan Boyd		
Cheryl Briggs		
Andy Cooke		
Andrew Crawford		

For	Against	Abstentions
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		
Ben Mabbett		
Sarah Medley		
Patrick O'Leary		
Helen Pighills		
Mike Pighills		
Sally Povolotsky		
Judy Roberts		
Janet Shelley		
Emily Smith		
Bethia Thomas		
Max Thompson		
Elaine Ware		
Catherine Webber		
Richard Webber		
Total: 35	Total: 0	Total: 0

RESOLVED: (unanimously) to

1. set the revenue budget for 2023/24, as set out in appendix A.1 to the head of finance's report to Cabinet on 3 February 2023 subject to an increase in the climate change grant scheme to £100k per annum for five years and a request that officers bring forward proposals to increase the scope of eligible projects;
2. approve the capital programme for 2023/24 to 2027/28, 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;
3. set the council's prudential limits, as listed in appendix E to the report;
4. approve the medium-term financial plan to 2027/28, as set out in appendix F to the report.

Members thanked the head of finance and his team for the work undertaken to prepare the budget.

64. Council Tax 2023/24

Council considered the report of the head of finance on the setting of the Council Tax for the 2023/24 financial year.

In accordance with regulations requiring councils to record the names of those members voting in favour, against or abstaining from any vote on the council tax the chair called for a recorded vote which was carried with the voting being as follows:

For	Against	Abstentions
Jerry Avery		
Paul Barrow		
Ron Batstone		
Eric Batts		
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		
Ben Mabbett		
Sarah Medley		
Patrick O'Leary		
Helen Pighills		
Mike Pighills		
Sally Povolotsky		
Judy Roberts		
Janet Shelley		
Emily Smith		
Bethia Thomas		
Max Thompson		
Elaine Ware		
Catherine Webber		
Richard Webber		
Total: 35	Total: 0	Total: 0

RESOLVED

1. To **note** that at its meeting on 7 December 2022 the council calculated the council tax base 2023/24:
 - (a) for the whole council area as 56,664.9 [Item T in the formula in Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended (the "Act")]; and
 - (b) for dwellings in those parts of its area to which a parish precept relates as in column 1 of appendix 1.
2. That the council tax requirement for the council's own purposes for 2023/24 (excluding parish precepts) is £8,595,499
3. That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2023/24 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act:

- (a) £84,770,721 being the aggregate of the amounts which the council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act taking into account all precepts issued to it by parish councils.
 - (b) £71,154,591 being the aggregate of the amounts which the council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) of the Act.
 - (c) £13,616,130 being the amount by which the aggregate at (3)(a) above exceeds the aggregate at (3)(b) above, calculated by the council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act as its council tax requirement for the year. (Item R in the formula in Section 31B) of the Act).
 - (d) £240.29 being the amount at (3)(c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (1(a) above), calculated by the council, in accordance with Section 31(B) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year (including parish precepts).
 - (e) £5,020,631 being the aggregate amount of all special items referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act, as set out in column 2 of appendix 1.
 - (f) £151.69 being the amount at (3)(d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at (3)(e) above by Item T (1(a) above), calculated by the council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no parish precept relates.
4. To **note** that for the year 2023/24 Oxfordshire County Council has stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Band A	£1,156.02
Band B	£1,348.69
Band C	£1,541.36
Band D	£1,734.03
Band E	£2,119.37
Band F	£2,504.71
Band G	£2,890.05
Band H	£3,468.06

5. To **note** that for the year 2023/24 the Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley has stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Band A	£170.85
Band B	£199.33
Band C	£227.80
Band D	£256.28
Band E	£313.23
Band F	£370.18
Band G	£427.13
Band H	£512.56

6. That, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the aggregate amounts shown in appendix 3 as the amounts of council tax for 2023/24 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings shown in appendix 3.
7. To determine that the council's basic amount of council tax for 2023/24 is not excessive in accordance with principles approved under Section 52ZB Local Government Finance Act 1992.

65. Milton Park - Proposed Revised Local Development Order

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations made at its meeting on 3 February 2023 on the proposed revised local development order for Milton Park.

Cabinet had welcomed the revised Local Development Order and the aims of the owners to further improve Milton Park.

RESOLVED: to adopt the Milton Park Local Development Order, as set out in Appendix 1 to the head of planning's report to Cabinet on 3 February 2023, subject to completion of a legal agreement securing the elements referred to in paragraph 24 of the report.

66. Progress on approved Council motions

Council noted the schedule showing the progress on approved motions.

67. Report of the Leader of the council

Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council, provided an update on a number of matters. The text of her address is available on the council's [website](#).

68. Questions on notice

A. Question from Councillor Bob Johnston to Councillor Debby Hallett – Cabinet member for Corporate Services and Transformation

Now that work on OxPlan50 has ceased, what are the council's priorities for the new Joint Local Plan 2041?

Written answer

Now that work has ceased on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, the Council is taking the 'Guiding Principles' for Good Growth from the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision to inspire and help shape the Joint Local Plan. Vale Council's priorities for the Joint Local Plan have been recently set out on the Council's website in a joint message from Cllrs Debby Hallett and Anne-Marie Simpson, Cabinet Members for Planning at the Vale and South Oxfordshire. This is available on the Vale of White Horse website (<https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/planning-and-development/local-plan-and-planning-policies/local-plan-2041/>). The message sets out that the focus of the Joint Local Plan will be different from the last local plan and states that:

- Working to these Good Growth principles means thinking radically about how much development we plan, where it is located and how it is done.
- Rather than more of the same kind of development we've seen in recent years, we will focus on delivering homes to meet the actual local need.
- We will look at the number of and types of homes, their affordability and the energy efficiency standards they need to meet.
- We will use the opportunities we have through the planning system to protect nature and increase nature recovery.
- We will help tackle climate change by reducing carbon emissions, recognising this as an emergency and in line with our ambition to become zero carbon districts.

- We will focus on community health and wellbeing and locate new homes near to work places and community facilities.
- We will work hard to secure new and improved social and physical infrastructure to support development, ensuring that developers contribute a fair share of the cost.

B. Question from Councillor Emily Smith to Councillor Bethia Thomas - Council Leader and Cabinet Member for Community Engagement

Our district is home to so many inspirational individuals, charities and community groups. Over the past three years as we have lived through COVID-19 and now a national cost of living crisis, it's been incredible how Vale residents have stepped up to help each other.

During COVID-19 the Chair's Community Awards were not able to go ahead, but it would be wonderful to recognise the contribution of some of the volunteers we work with in our communities in some way. Are there any plans to hold the community awards again, or something similar?

Written answer

I agree wholeheartedly with Councillor Smith that we are truly blessed in our district with so many individuals and organisations who show real community spirit.

Throughout the pandemic and subsequently, we have seen so many people stepping up to help people in their community and to offer support to people who are asylum seekers and refugees from countries around the world. This has built on the strong tradition we have in Vale of community resilience.

During the pandemic we could not bring people together physically to say 'thank you' to recognise and celebrate the true spirit of 'the Vale', but we would like to revive that tradition. The break has given us a good opportunity to have a fresh look at the format of the Chair's Community Awards to ensure they reflect the renewed focus on community since the pandemic, and so following the election, officers will work with the incumbent Chair to investigate creating a new, vibrant and fitting tribute to honour the Vale's community champions.

C. Question from Councillor Andy Cooke to Councillor Helen Pighills - Cabinet Member for Healthy Communities

I am aware that the Council has done much work to support refugees; I'm personally aware of support given to refugees from Ukraine and Afghanistan.

Residents of my ward have been very welcoming to refugees; it's something that gives me pride, so it does make the issue close to my heart. I'd like to take the opportunity to have the work done by officers behind the scenes highlighted, as it is something in which the entire Council can take pride.

Could you give Council an outline of the work done by the officers and the council to support refugees over the past year and more, and an overview of the schemes involved?

Written answer

We are immensely proud of the vital work this council has done alongside our partners, residents, community groups and voluntary sector organisations, to help provide safe shelter and support to refugees and asylum seekers. The council, as part of the Oxfordshire system which includes local authority, health and VCS partners working closely together, are supporting across a number of schemes. These are Homes for Ukraine, Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy scheme, Afghan

Citizens Resettlement scheme, UK Resettlement Schemes, the Hong Kong British National (Overseas) visa scheme and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. In addition, the Oxfordshire system is also supporting a range of Home Office contingency and dispersed accommodation pathways.

The work our officers have undertaken and continue to provide, co-ordinated through our Community Hub, includes a wraparound support offer to settle guests in the district, distribution of government grants, providing housing and homeless advice and assistance, community integration support and supporting access to schooling, language lessons, access to medical services, benefits and support into employment. Cabinet is pleased that the proposed budget for 2023/24 includes the allocation of funds to continue our vital support by extending our Community Hub for two more years initially.

D. Question from Councillor Hayleigh Gascoigne to Councillor Judy Roberts – Cabinet Member for Development, Infrastructure and Development Management

People living in the Didcot area have seen a great deal of growth in housing numbers and population in their town and the surrounding area over recent years. Local residents expect the infrastructure to be provided to support this and any future growth. I understand that the S106 agreement for Great Western Park included money allocated for a much needed GP surgery.

Can we have an update on progress of the healthcare facility? Additionally, can the role of the council in provision of healthcare services be explained?

Written answer

Members will be aware that the council has no statutory role in provision of healthcare services. It is the responsibility of the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to determine need to meet any growth in population as part of the planning consultation process.

It is the case that the S106 agreement for Great Western Park secured a part contribution towards the total cost of delivery by health partners of the healthcare facilities. It also directs that the land be transferred via the council for this purpose.

As part of this land ownership provision the council is positively supporting the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board and related stakeholders to procure the provision of the healthcare facilities on the site. Regular meetings are taking place between the various parties to move the project forward and the ICB/council is looking to share a joint update with local residents shortly.

Supplementary question and answer

In response to a supplementary regarding the timing of the update, Councillor Roberts responded that she hoped an update would be available by the end of March and that the delivery of the project was dependent on discussions with a number of partners.

E. Question from Councillor Nathan Boyd to Councillor Helen Pighills – Cabinet Member for Healthy Communities

We know that Vale of White Horse District Council has played an important role in the relocation and housing of refugees from Afghanistan and the upsurge in those arriving in the UK via small boats, and thanks should go to our officers who have played a significant role on this. Is the Cabinet Member for Healthy Communities able to say

how many refugees and asylum seekers this council has assisted since 2019 and what ongoing support is available to those seeking safety and asylum in our district?

Written answer

We are immensely proud of the vital work this council has done alongside our partners, residents, community groups and voluntary sector organisations, to help provide safe shelter and support to refugees and asylum seekers. Our officer teams, co-ordinated through our Community Hub, continue to provide a wraparound support offer to settle guests in the district, distribute government grants, provide housing and homeless advice and assistance, offer community integration support and support access to schooling, language lessons, access to medical services, benefits and support into employment.

Some specific examples of work undertaken to support the Homes for Ukraine scheme, where we currently have approximately 400 Ukrainian guests living with 230 different hosts within our district includes:

- Setting up the relevant processes to enable the necessary safeguarding and accommodation checks to be completed for hosts that have generously opened up their homes to guest.
- Ensuring that appropriate guest, host and community communication and support arrangements are in place.
- Establishing a local rematching approach.
- Developing and delivering a discretionary guest payment scheme.
- Providing housing and homeless advice and assistance.
- Developing approaches to support 'Moving On' options into independent accommodation for guests.

Under the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) scheme, Vale of White Horse District Council has successfully resettled four Afghan families. Under the United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), one refugee family has settled within the district and two further UKRS families are due to arrive in February.

All of the families receive two-weeks intensive support on arrival to help them settle into our district, and they continue to receive structured support for the first year and ongoing access to help thereafter.

Cabinet is pleased that the proposed budget for 2023/24 includes the allocation of funds to continue our vital support by extending our Community Hub for two more years initially.

F. Question from Councillor Ben Mabbett to Councillor Andy Crawford – Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Assets

The Beacon in Wantage is a vital hub for both the surrounding community and our wider District and an excellent events facility, providing a great location for public arts performances and as an excellent meeting venue. There have long been rumours of a possible closure and development of the site stretching back over several administrations.

Can the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Assets confirm that The Beacon is remaining open for the foreseeable future as a vital community asset?

Written answer

Can I thank Councillor Mabbett for his question as it allows me to put the right the rumours, which have also been brought to my attention, he refers to.

This administration has no plans to close The Beacon. In this evening's budget papers the revenue budget includes income and expenditure for The Beacon for the coming year and a revenue projection for the full five-year term of the Medium Term Financial Plan. He will also see that in the capital section of the budget we have committed to capital expenditure on The Beacon to make vital improvements to the structure of the building so as to improve the experience for users and enhance its viability.

The COVID 19 pandemic presented a major challenge to venues such as The Beacon, closed as it was for very many months, although members will recall the vital role that The Beacon served at that time where it operated as a Covid testing centre and hub. Last year, officers arranged a highly popular, well attended open day at The Beacon to promote and reinvigorate its usage to both existing and new users. We also continue to arrange and promote a schedule of events.

His question refers to "rumours over several administrations". I cannot comment on any plans of the two previous Conservative administrations may have had. Moreover, given that his party has not presented a budget tonight were his party again in administration can I assume that his party do not have plans to close The Beacon or redevelop it for other purposes?

In summary, no, this Liberal Democrat administration have no plans to close The Beacon but rather continue to invest in it and develop plans to further increase its popularity and long-term viability. If Councillor Mabbett knows the source of these rumours I would love to know.

Supplementary question and answer

In response to a supplementary question regarding what further investment could be made for the retention and ongoing and increase the use of the facility Councillor Crawford responded that the capital budget provided for a number of initiatives to support The Beacon. There were no plans to reopen the café which was not well used and would need to compete with better placed outlets with the town.

69. Motions on notice

No motions on notice were submitted for consideration by members.

70. Pay Policy Statement 2023/24

Council considered the report of the head of corporate services on the adoption of a pay policy statement to meet the requirements of the Localism Act.

RESOLVED: to approve the statement of pay policy for 2023/24 attached to the report of the head of corporate services to the Council meeting on 15 February 2023.

The meeting closed at 9.10pm

Chair:

Date: