

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Cabinet

held on Friday, 19 April 2024 at 10.30 am
in Meeting Room 1, Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon, OX14 3JE

Open to the public, including the press

Present in the meeting room:

Cabinet members: Councillors Bethia Thomas (Chair), Mark Coleman (Vice-Chair), Sue Caul, Andy Crawford, Lucy Edwards, Neil Fawcett and Andy Foulsham

Officers: Steve Culliford (Democratic Services Team Leader), and Mark Stone (Chief Executive) and Candida Basilio (Democratic Services Officer)

Remote attendance:

Cabinet members: Councillors Helen Pighills and Diana Lugova

Officers: Paul Fielding (Head of Housing and Environment), Nigel Bower (Housing Delivery Manager), Phil Ealey (Housing Needs Manager), Charlotte Cottingham (Didcot Garden Town Programme Manager), Nicola Wyer (Didcot Garden Town Team Leader), Laura Driscoll (Licensing Team Leader), Diane Foster (Legal, Licensing and Community Safety Manager), Vivien Williams (Head of Legal and Democratic), Mark Hewer (Infrastructure Development Team Leader), David Cookson (Infrastructure Implementation Officer), Simon Hewings (Head of Finance), Scott Williams (Environmental Services Manager), Suzanne Malcolm (Deputy Chief Executive – Place), Mark Minion (Head of Corporate Services), Andrew Busby (Head of Development and Corporate Landlord), Tim Oruye (Head of Policy and Programmes), and Emma Creed (Strategic Finance Manager).

Guests: Councillors Katherine Foxhall and Sarah James

9. Chair's announcements

Democratic services team leader explained evacuation procedures. Chair gave thanks to the Democratic Services Team Leader, Steve Culliford, who was retiring. This was his last cabinet meeting. He was thanked for his support and this was echoed by all members of cabinet.

10. Apologies for absence

None.

11. Minutes

Resolved:

The minutes of the meetings on 16 February and 8 March 2024 were agreed as a correct record. The chair would sign them as such.

12. Declarations of interests

Members were alerted to item 13 on the agenda, on Housing Enforcement Policy, and that if they had any rental properties in the district, they would need to declare this and would not be able to take part in the item.

13. Urgent business

None.

14. Public participation

Public speakers were given three minutes to speak.

Raleigh Hullock joined online and spoke to the item on Hackney Carriage Fares and questioned the consultation process on the tariff price cap.

Jason Atherton spoke to the Hackney Carriage Fares item. He was present in person. He was concerned about the consultation process and considered that it would not be viable to continue his business under the tariff. He considered that businesses should have more say in the tariff.

Councillor Katherine Foxhall spoke to Housing Enforcement Policy and on social housing quality standards. She spoke as ward member for Watchfield and Shrivvenham. She welcomed this policy, and felt the strategy needed to apply to housing associations and social housing registered providers as well as private landlords, in order to strengthen the policy. The largest source of her casework was issues with rented housing. Please can this strengthening be reflected by adding some wording to the policy?

Councillor Sarah James, as ward member, spoke to the S106 request for a new community hall with sporting facilities at Milton. She supported this request for a new community hall with sporting facilities, acknowledging the work of those involved to bring this together, noting the growing number of homes and residents in need of this facility. She was pleased to see this item and explained the vital need to bring communities together.

All speakers were thanked for their contribution and their comments would be discussed at the relevant agenda items.

15. Recommendations and updates from other committees

The 'recommendations and updates from other committees' report was received by Cabinet, and the recommendations would be considered at each agenda item. Chair thanked officers and scrutiny committees for their feedback. Cabinet also received a verbal update from the democratic services team leader on the outcome of the Joint Audit and Governance Committee and noted the resolutions from their meeting on the 15 April 2024.

16. Hackney Carriage Fares

Cabinet received the Hackney Carriage Fares report from the head of legal and democratic which outlined the results of the consultation. It was recommended that Cabinet adopted the new proposed fares in Appendix B and agree that the tariff be reviewed annually, using the Guildford model.

This item was presented by cabinet member for community health and wellbeing, who was responsible for the licensing portfolio. The licensing team leader and the legal, licensing and community safety manager were present to assist with questions and they highlighted that

Appendix C of the report detailed how the proposed tariff had been calculated as well as the details of the consultation that was carried out.

Members discussed the concerns raised by the two public speakers about the approach used for the consultation. Members felt that having around 80% recipients opening the email was an indication of a successful consultation.

Use of the Guildford method was discussed, and it was confirmed that the method was agreed in consultation with hackney carriage drivers at the time.

Consideration was given to the consequences on local taxi business. A member discussed the issue of the district being more expensive to live in but felt the tariff cap was not out of the ordinary especially when you consider the highest charges that follow are for London airport routes, with the proposed tariff being 13th highest in the country. It was confirmed by officers that four councils do not set a tariff, one of which did not licence hackney carriages.

A member considered that the cap was necessary to protect the elderly and vulnerable residents, who need to be able to afford taxis. A member asked if the Vale Taxi Association was encouraged to reply to the consultation. A member asked what percentage of Vale taxi drivers were members of Vale Taxi Association, and whether the association encouraged responses to the consultation. Public speaker confirmed that of 150 members, it was about 60/40 split towards South Oxfordshire. He suggested that private hire drivers do not respond to the consultation and it was difficult to encourage response.

Members felt that the Guildford method was a tested and fair method with no better alternate method being known. Another member questioned whether an impact assessment on businesses was done, but on balance members felt that consulting every business on how they run was not possible. It was felt that this was consulted on as best as possible, and the Guildford method was previously approved and was used by other authorities.

For next year, members asked whether drivers could respond to the annual review and provide evidence. Members were working to the evidence given via consultation, where 80% opened the email, and felt it was important not to stall when the evidence was in front of them. There was a responsibility to protect residents from price hikes. It was confirmed that if this tariff was not approved, the tariff would remain at the current lower rate. It was confirmed that of those who responded to the consultation, most were in agreement with it, and a number felt the cap was too high. There was not sufficient evidence given by consultees who viewed the cap as being too low.

In summary, members discussed the proposal outlined in the report and agreed with the adoption of the Guildford method of calculating tariffs as it was a widely used, robust method of calculating fares, and was previously approved. It was agreed that the consultation was conducted appropriately, and evidence showed that consultees had been made aware, with the majority of contacts opening the email, as well as officers reaching out in other ways, such as at taxi ranks.

Cabinet thanked the public speakers for their input but believed that the proposed tariff was a reasonable compromise between the interests of the public and the taxi drivers. For this reason, they agreed to approve the new tariff and for it to be reviewed annually.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) note the results of the consultation on hackney carriage fares, as set out at Appendix D to the head of legal and democratic's report to Cabinet on 19 April 2024;
- (b) adopt the proposed maximum hackney carriage fares, as set out at Appendix G to the report, with effect from 20 April 2024; and
- (c) agree that the tariff is reviewed annually using the Guildford model.

17. S106 Request - Milton (Abingdon) Community and Sports Limited (MCSL) - New Community Hall with Sporting Facilities, Potash Lane, Milton

Cabinet member for affordable housing, infrastructure, development and governance presented the report. Officers supporting the item were the infrastructure development team leader, the infrastructure implementation officer and the head of finance.

The report was provided to inform cabinet that the council had received an application for funds, from MCSL, for a total sum of £876,572.22. This would be spent towards a new community hall with sporting facilities in Milton Parish. The sum is to be taken from six contributions secured under S106, from legal agreements linked to four developments.

Due to the amount requested, Cabinet would need to make a recommendation to full Council to approve the funding application. It was confirmed that planning permission would need to be in place prior to the May Council decision. If the permission was not in place by then, the decision would go to the next Council meeting. However, it was seen as important to progress this as soon as possible. It was noted that Councillor James, as ward member, spoke to this item under public participation and was in full support, along with confirmed support from the parish council.

The infrastructure development team leader added an update that required an amendment to the recommendation. The parish council (as the landowner) was suggested to be awarded funds rather than the sports club. The options for cabinet to consider were to have alternative recommendations set up, stating to “release funds to the parish council” or to delegate to the relevant officer, in this case, the head of finance, in consultation with the cabinet member, who would make the recommendation to Council.

Members discussed, and felt this was a worthwhile project, and were in agreement that the facilities proposed were needed.

Members agreed that the details of where the funds would be released shall be delegated to the head of finance in consultation with the cabinet member. The head of finance was asked to make a recommendation to Council.

RECOMMENDED to Council to:

- a) create a budget for £876,572.22 towards a new community hall with sporting facilities, at Potash Lane in Milton Parish, from the accumulated section 106 contributions set out in the report to Vale Cabinet on 19 April 2024;

RESOLVED:

- b) that Cabinet delegates the head of finance, in consultation with the Cabinet member for affordable housing, infrastructure, development and governance to confirm where the funds will be released to.

18. Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan Update and Next Steps

Cabinet received the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan update and next steps report from the head of policy and programmes. This report updated cabinet on the progress of the delivery plan, sought approval for the Didcot Wayfinding Strategy and its budget allocation for signage, as well as seeking approval for the Didcot Green Infrastructure Strategy and its budget allocation for short-term green infrastructure enhancements.

The cabinet member for affordable housing, infrastructure, development and governance presented the report. Officers supporting the item were the Didcot garden town programme manager and the Didcot garden town team leader.

Members were pleased to see the item being brought forward and that the project had been revisited so that it was moving forward with practical and achievable steps, without making unrealistic commitments. Members felt confidence in the approach and that it was much more balanced than previously. They also considered the comments by the Joint Scrutiny Committee and welcomed their feedback, which officers confirmed had been integrated into the report and will be considered going forward.

Members noted that South Oxfordshire's Cabinet had approved funding to allow for the wayfinding and green infrastructure strategies to be implemented.

Members discussed the risks of needing to seek external funding – how was the council prioritising if it could not obtain added funding? It was confirmed that prioritisation was based on the resources available and would be flexible and part of the ongoing work. As part of the National Garden Communities Programme, officers can bid for specific funding to advance priorities, and officers will be looking for other sources of funding throughout the project, including through collecting CIL and S106 funds, as Didcot was an expanding community. Members were grateful for signage improvements. A member expressed that we should emphasise importance of green spaces to the public.

Cabinet were satisfied with the plan, noting that the wayfinding and green infrastructure would make a physical difference to the residents of Didcot with a practical delivery plan. They added that officers should be proud of their work.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) note the progress against the approved Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan, as set out in appendix 1 to the head of policy and programmes' report to Cabinet on 19 April 2024;
- (b) approve the Didcot Wayfinding Strategy set out at appendix 2 to the report;
- (c) approve the Didcot Green Infrastructure Strategy set out at appendix 3 to the report

19. Joint South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Waste and Street Cleansing Vehicle Procurement Strategy

Cabinet received the Joint South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Waste and Street Cleansing Vehicle Procurement Strategy report from the head of housing and environment. The report purpose was to inform cabinet about the process officers used for the procurement of new waste collection and street cleaning vehicles.

The cabinet member for environment and waste services presented the report, and he thanked officers for all of the detailed background work they carried out, as well as thanking the input of Joint Scrutiny Committee. Their comments had been incorporated into the report to make an even better strategy. The strategy was used to assess the market and would allow the council to select the best vehicle for the intended job, within budget, and producing the lowest possible carbon emissions. Officers present to support the item were head of housing and environment and the environmental services manager.

Cabinet noted that the policy set out the process by which refuse and street cleaning vehicles could be assessed for procurement but did not commit the council to buying any vehicle in particular, thus allowing the council to keep their procurement options open.

Cabinet considered and welcomed the comments from Joint Scrutiny Committee.

Members were informed of the Ministry of Transport's Transport Research and Innovation Grants programme for a 12-week electric vehicle (EV) collection vehicle trial, which the council had applied for. If successful, the council would use these funds to run a 12-week trial for EV refuse vehicles and new route tracking and optimising software, starting the operational trial this autumn. Members were pleased with the 12-week trial and welcomed

the report and strategy that allowed flexibility to review as technology changed, noting that the council priority was to the obligation to collect household waste. Members discussed factors influencing, such as position of the depot and how routes were planned – these would all form part of the strategy with the flexibility to consider all options and maximise use, particularly considering this district had rural locations to serve. Cabinet member added that we can share 12-week learnings with other authorities, encouraging a culture of sharing amongst authorities. Members saw the value of agreeing the process for making these decisions in a report such as this and felt pleased that the council was keeping up with the cutting edge of developments in this area.

Cabinet was pleased with the report and agreed that it shall be noted as follows;

RESOLVED:

Cabinet noted the contents of the head of housing and environment's report on 19 April 2024, on why the council needs to be procuring new waste vehicles, and the factors which influence the future carbon footprint of the fleet and the process that officers will use for the future procurement of waste and street cleansing vehicles.

20. Housing Delivery Strategy Update and Action Plan 2024/25

The report was introduced by cabinet member for affordable housing, infrastructure, development and governance. Officers supporting the housing related agenda items were the housing delivery manager, housing needs manager and the head of housing and environment. The report provided an update on the progress of the housing delivery strategy (formed in 2022) and its associated actions for 2022/23 and 2023/24 and to propose a new action plan for 2024/25 to continue the ongoing work to increase affordable and suitable housing for residents.

Member's comments included how this strategy and plan pushed forward corporate plan priorities and the officer team was congratulated on the work. A member raised the need to balance homelessness solutions with social and financial decisions, particularly in light of the cost-of-living crisis. Another member felt that the strategy was progressive and agreed that the council should look at not just providing homes, but good quality homes as well. Members of cabinet welcomed this report and agreed with the recommendations, thanking those involved in the work.

Resolved:

(a) That Cabinet noted the changes in the national housing guidelines (or legislation) since the housing delivery strategy, and action plan, was adopted in 2022 and the associated impact that this had on the housing delivery strategy.

(b) That Cabinet noted the latest progress against the action plan, as well as the significant efforts made in the leasing and purchasing of property under the Service Family Accommodation and Local Authority Housing Fund schemes.

(c) That Cabinet agreed to adopt the proposed new housing delivery strategy action plan for 2024/25 that was presented at the Cabinet meeting on 19 April 2024.

21. Housing Enforcement Policy

Prior to the start of this item, at 12:54pm, members voted to extend the meeting time by half an hour, as allowable in the constitution, as the meeting length was approaching two hours and 30 minutes.

Councillors Sue Caul and Andy Crawford left the meeting room, as they declared that they had rental property or lodgers. They were unable to participate in this item due to their disclosed interests.

The cabinet member for community health and wellbeing introduced the report. The policy explained in a clear and transparent manner the approach to housing enforcement by the council in relation to residential dwellings. It provided guidance to officers, landlords,

managing agents and tenants on the rental standards expected by the council, including Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). The policy laid out when and how the council may take enforcement action, including in exceptional cases through the courts or by issuing civil penalties. The council had a good track record of engagement with landlords, and this policy built on this.

In response to Councillor Foxhall's participation under public speaking, it was confirmed that the policy included socially rented property and included that enforcement was stated for all types and applied across all kinds of housing. The policy had focus on private housing in parts (such as HMO licensing), but officers provided assurance that the standards were for across the board for different housing categories. Recent news of a child's death due to poor standard of housing, damp and mould was highlighting these issues nationally.

A member asked how letting agencies would be involved in implementing this, and whether they would be aware. It was responded that this policy did not change legislation, but it brings it together in one document for enforcement and explained how our housing officers will deal with such situations and what to expect of them.

Members welcomed this report and agreed on the following recommendations.

Resolved:

- (a) That Cabinet approved the adoption of the Housing Enforcement Policy.
- (b) Cabinet agreed that subject to approval of the policy, to delegate authority to the Head of Housing and Environment to make minor amendments to the policy in the future

22. Budget Monitoring April 2023 - December 2023

Councillors Crawford and Caul returned to the meeting room for this item.

Cabinet member for finance introduced the report. Officers present were head of finance and the strategic finance manager. The purpose of the report was to report the revenue and capital expenditure against budget for the period April 2023 to December 2023 and the latest year end outturns forecast by heads of service.

Members considered the report showed good management by officers. A member noted that regarding the corporate plan, the council no longer had a theme for 'building stable finances', but for good reason, as this was part of and considered at every aspect of the council's business. Finances therefore being integral and did not need a separate theme.

Thanks were given to officers and the cabinet member.

Resolved:

Cabinet noted the contents of the Budget Monitoring Report for April 2023 – December 2023, received at Cabinet on 19 April 2024.

The meeting closed at 1.13 pm

Chair:

Date: