Minutes

of a meeting of the

Council

**held on Wednesday, 8 March 2017 at 7.00 pm
at the The Ridgeway, The Beacon, Portway, Wantage, OX12 9BY**

**Vale
of White Horse**
District Council

Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Mike Badcock (Chairman), Reg Waite (Vice-Chairman),
Alice Badcock, Eric Batts, Matthew Barber, Yvonne Constance, Roger Cox, Margaret Crick,
Stuart Davenport, Charlotte Dickson, St John Dickson, Katie Finch, Robert Hall,
Debby Hallett, Jenny Hannaby, Anthony Hayward, Dudley Hoddinott, Simon Howell,
Vicky Jenkins, Bob Johnston, Mohinder Kainth, Monica Lovatt, Ben Mabbett, Mike Murray,
Chris Palmer, Helen Pighills, Julia Reynolds, Judy Roberts, Robert Sharp, Janet Shelley,
Emily Smith, Elaine Ware and Catherine Webber

Officers: Mark Stone, David Hill, Steven Corrigan, Susan Harbour and Deidre Smith

Also present: Robin Rogers (Oxfordshire County Council)

Number of members of the public: 4

Co.75   Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from councillors Ed Blagrove, Sandy Lovatt, Chris McCarthy
and Henry Spencer.

Co.76   Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest.

Co.77   Chairman's announcements

The chairman provided housekeeping information. At the proposal of the chairman
Council agreed to suspend Council procedure rules 44 and 45 which restrict the length
of speeches and when a councillor may speak.

Co.78   Public participation

No members of the public had registered to speak at this meeting.

Co.79   Single unitary council for Oxfordshire

Council considered the report of the chief executive on proposals for a single unitary council for Oxfordshire. Council recalled that at its meeting on 15 February 2017, it had passed a motion supporting the principle of a single unitary council and authorised the chief executive and leader of the council to work with partner councils to develop the terms of a submission for local government change in Oxfordshire, and to submit a report to Council in due course.

Since that meeting, the chief executive and leader had worked with the leaders of Oxfordshire County Council and South Oxfordshire District Council to improve the county council's One Oxfordshire proposal to form a new submission 'A New Council for a Better Oxfordshire'. The Better Oxfordshire proposal was now presented to Council. The proposal would be put before South Oxfordshire District Council on 10 March 2017 and Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet on 14 March 2017.

The Scrutiny Committee met on 27 February 2017 and its recommendations were reported to Cabinet that, in turn, met on 6 March 2017. The recommendations of both the Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet were set out before councillors. In supporting the recommendations Cabinet agreed an amendment to recommendation 7 to read (additional words shown in **bold** type):

> "authorise the head of legal and democratic services, **in consultation with the leader and the chief executive,** to agree the terms of reference of the joint committee, which will include making recommendations regarding the initial functions of the implementation executive, and to make this council's appointments to the joint committee".

Tabled at the meeting were three additional documents to provide clarification:

1. A vision of a governance structure for the new unitary authority;
2. A model of council tax in Oxfordshire; and
3. A comparison of the Better Oxfordshire proposal with the One Oxfordshire proposal and the governance arrangements in Cornwall and Wiltshire.

Council noted that the council tax modelling was based on figures published in the Oxfordshire districts' and county council's medium term financial plans, and assumed council tax increases across these councils in the lead up to the new unitary council being established. The figures also assumed that there would be a new council for the city of Oxford, setting a precept of £150 in a new town council role. The model showed that it would be possible to achieve levels of council tax no higher than would be expected under the current two-tier principal council system in Oxfordshire.

The leader of the council introduced Cabinet's recommendations, explaining that he had worked with the leaders of South Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council to improve the One Oxfordshire proposal and develop the Better Oxfordshire proposal. This offered the opportunity for greater efficiencies and improved governance arrangements with some decisions being made by executive area boards and bespoke arrangements for Oxford city area. The powers of these boards would be significant, with representatives of towns and parishes in a non-voting capacity. In addition there would be five local planning committees and a strategic planning committee to reflect Local Plan areas. Getting the Area Executive Boards right is a significant factor in the excellent delivery of a unitary authority. He noted that it is not for the Council to make the decision to abolish the council and the other principal authorities in Oxfordshire, but to make a recommendation to the

Secretary of State. The detailed proposals would be developed by a new joint committee.

Council debated the proposal and welcomed the progress made since the last Council meeting. Councillors believed that this single unitary council bid presented the best opportunity for an efficient form of local government in Oxfordshire. A single unitary council would be easier for the public to understand and offered significant benefits, not just in terms of financial savings, but in joined-up decision making and strategic thinking. Councillors supported the proposal as an immeasurable improvement on the One Oxfordshire proposal but recognised that the detail would require careful consideration, especially around local decision-making. Council welcomed the establishment of a joint committee with all principal councils in Oxfordshire invited to participate on it. Council also welcomed the inclusion of the Implementation Board as preferable to a shadow authority.

Council welcomed the protection of the current Local Plans and, although it was recognised that in developing the detail the council would have to make concessions, Council hoped that the reserves of councils would be retained for use in their areas and not be used to support services across Oxfordshire.

A number of councillors expressed the view that the level of knowledge required and workload expected of unitary councillors would be very different to that of current councillors. The role could become fulltime to manage the workload and therefore impact on the diversity of councillors by excluding working people/those with young families. The positions would require a greater level of remuneration to reflect the increased role.

Councillors praised the work of officers in putting together the Better Oxfordshire proposal.

RESOLVED

1. To note and commend the approach taken by the Leaders of Vale, South Oxfordshire, and the County Council in putting the interests of residents, business and communities first in bringing forward these proposals;

2. To consider the proposals, in particular taking note that 70 percent of those responding to the County Council's representative household survey supported the proposal for a new unitary council for Oxfordshire;

3. To respond to the recent letter from the Secretary of State and submit proposals to Government subject to any amendments required provided that they are materially in accordance with the attached proposal;

4. To delegate the power to make such amendments to the chief executive in consultation with the leader and with South Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council;

5. To ask officers to seek local support from key stakeholders and the wider public to promote the proposals to government and respond to any subsequent consultation undertaken by the Secretary of State;

6. To support the further development of the Area Executive Board (AEB) model. A joint committee, open to all Districts and City Councils across Oxfordshire and the County Council, should be formed as early as possible. This joint committee

should work with the existing County Council advisory group, local communities, Town and Parish Councils, and key delivery partners to develop detailed proposals that articulate the role, powers, format, scale and responsibilities of the AEBs which will be submitted to the Implementation Executive for inclusion with the proposed constitution of the new council;

7. To authorise the head of legal and democratic services, in consultation with the leader and the chief executive, to agree the terms of reference of the joint committee, which will include making recommendations regarding the initial functions of the implementation executive, and to make this council's appointments to the joint committee;

8. To ask officers to take steps to establish the City Convention to work with residents and local stakeholders to design the new model of governance in Oxford;

9. In light of the above decisions, and the absence of unanimity among the current local authorities, to confirm that Council does not support the proposals for a Mayor and Combined Authority as being the best structure for Oxfordshire.

The meeting closed at 8.15 pm