

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Council



held on Wednesday 11 October 2017 at 7.00 pm
at the The Ridgeway, The Beacon, Portway, Wantage, OX12 9BY

Open to the public, including the press

Present:

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

Officers: Steven Corrigan, William Jacobs and Margaret Reed

Number of members of the public: 3

Co.24 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Edward Blagrove, Stuart Davenport and Dudley Hoddinott.

Co.25 Minutes

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the annual meeting of Council held on 17 May 2017 and the special Council meeting held on 29 June 2017 as correct records and agree that the Chairman sign them as such.

Co.26 Declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest

None.

Co.27 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

The chairman provided housekeeping information.

Co.28 Public participation

1. Ms Naomi Richardson made a statement in support of a petition in respect of Abbey Meadows and particularly the perceived lack of toilet facilities suitable for disabled children which could restrict equality of access. She welcomed the

investment in Abbey Meadows and the children's playground. However, she stated that no consideration had been given to the needs of disabled children. She made the following points:

- Visits to the playground are time limited due to the lack of adequate toilet facilities.
- The toilets are not accessible for electric chairs or the larger, specialised chairs used by most disabled children.
- There is no room for any kind of carer assistance.
- There are too few toilets - a reduction from six toilets in traditional stalls and a disabled toilet to four individual cubicles is a massive downgrade.
- The proposed provision poses a threat to child safeguarding and safety.

The chairman thanked Ms Richardson for her statement and advised that officers would contact her about how the petition would be dealt with.

2. Honorary Alderman Joyce Hutchinson made a statement in respect of the Wantage and Grove Leisure Centre. She questioned the size of the proposed facility which will be just over half the size of the Abingdon Tennis and Leisure Centre for a similar population size. There would also be a disparity in the facilities provided with no badminton, sauna, squash or tennis provision and a lack of a crèche. She stated that there is an opportunity to provide a 50-metre swimming pool to make the Vale a centre for competitive swimming and address the current situation where swimmers need to practise out of the county.

She asked the following questions of Councillor Charlotte Dickson, the Cabinet member for leisure, who undertook to provide a written response.

- A. Is the size of the proposed leisure centre restricted by the available finance?
- B. What financial or other compensation is Vale Academy offering for the takeover of the existing leisure centre? and
- C. Why isn't the council applying for any grant for the new leisure centre when the White Horse Tennis and Leisure Centre in Abingdon attracted a grant.

Co.29 Temporary housing accommodation provision to 2022

Council considered Cabinet's recommendation, made at its meeting on 4 August 2017, on temporary housing accommodation provision to 2022.

Cabinet had agreed an approach which required Council's approval to amend the capital programme allocation.

Council expressed its thanks to officers in the housing team for their work on this project. The Leader of the council agreed to write to the team on behalf of Council.

RESOLVED:

1. delete the current capital budget provision of £920,000 for the estimated costs of purchasing four two-bedroom houses in Abingdon;
2. create a capital budget of £885,000 to convert the council's two hostels into self-contained units; and
3. note that by approving recommendation 2 above, this will result in a reduction in the revenue budget of £25,000 per annum.

Co.30 Treasury management outturn 2016/17

Council considered Cabinet's recommendation, made at its meeting on 6 October 2017, on the outturn performance of the treasury management function for the financial year 2016/17.

The Joint Audit and Governance Committee and Cabinet had considered the head of finance's report and were satisfied that the treasury activities had been carried out in accordance with the treasury management strategy and policy.

RESOLVED: to

1. approve the head of finance's treasury management outturn report for 2016/17;
2. approve the actual 2016/17 prudential indicators within the head of finance's report.

Co.31 Vale of White Horse Scrutiny Committee Annual Report

Councillor Hallett, Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, presented her annual report and thanked democratic services officers for their support.

On behalf of Council the chairman thanked Councillor Hallett for her report.

Co.32 Report of the leader of the council

The Leader of the council provided updates on the following:

- Didcot Garden Town had been put forward as the county's first choice bid to the Government's Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) as part of a package of investment to deliver the transport infrastructure necessary to allow for housing development. If successful, the bid would bring significant benefits to Vale residents and support the delivery of the Local Plan.
- Vale had submitted a bid for funding to accelerate the delivery of the Wantage Eastern Link Road.
- The intention for the council to move back to the previous site at Crowmarsh Gifford. The option of redeveloping Crowmarsh is the most cost-effective solution and Crowmarsh remains a suitable location for the council's headquarters, as it was before the fire. Council meetings would be held at venues within the Vale.
- The work of the Oxfordshire Growth Board including consideration of the Oxford to Cambridge Express Way and the Joint Spatial Plan. Reports on both issues will be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee.

Co.33 Questions on notice

1. Question from Councillor Catherine Webber to Councillor Roger Cox, Cabinet member for Planning.

Please can the Cabinet member for planning tell us how many electrical car charging points have been in planning applications that were approved in the last two years? Of those, how many have been delivered? If there's a gap, please can you tell us what action Enforcement are taking to remedy it?

Answer

Councillor Cox responded that the current adopted Local Plan and saved policies do not include for the provision of electric charging points. As there is no current policy basis for electric car charging points, this is not something the council currently monitors. However, the following sites have, through conditions, secured electric charging points on the market units:

- P16/V3224/FUL – Land off Sheepstead Road Marcham – 47 new houses in total – 31 market units.
- P16/V1705/FUL – Land at Manor Farm, Drayton – 57 dwellings – 38 market units.
- P15/V0612/FUL – Land West of Hyde Copse Marcham – 61 dwellings – 40 market units.
- P14/V1976/O – Land off Packhorse Lane, Marcham – 37 dwellings – 25 market units.
- P17/V0050/O – Land at North Abingdon – resolution to grant planning permission subject to the signing of the S106 (aiming to complete by end of the month) – 950 new houses in total. 618 market units.

As electric charging points are not something the council monitors no checks are undertaken as to whether these are being delivered on sites. Therefore, in relation to enforcement action, this is not something the enforcement team has investigated.

Supplementary question

In response to a supplementary question asking why Vale of White Horse did not follow the example of South Oxfordshire, which requires the provision of electrical car charging points, Councillor Cox referred to the LPP2 Supplementary Papers issued for Council on Wednesday 27 September 2017 at page 8 which positively addressed this point.

2. Question from Councillor Debby Hallett to Councillor Charlotte Dickson, Cabinet member for Waste.

Over the past several months, service from Biffa in my ward has been reliably poor. Repeated instances of missed service have brought in complaints from residents to me, to Biffa, to the Vale and to our local MP. In 2016, I was told the poor service in my ward was due to staff shortages. In 2017, I've been told it is due to old lorry stock. Please can the Cabinet member tell us how many complaints have been received so far this year (since 1 May 2017) in my ward of Botley and Sunningwell. What is the penalty to our contractor for such poor service? If we received such poor service from a private company, most of us would ask for our money back. How do residents apply for a refund for services paid for but not delivered?

Answer

In response Councillor Dickson stated that the council had received six formal complaints relating to the waste service across the district one of which relates to Councillor Hallett's ward of Botley and Sunningwell.

The penalty to the contractor arises where there is a failure in service provision and Biffa fail to rectify the problem. In such circumstances the contract allows for a Service Failure Deduction. The cause of the disrupted service in recent months is due to significant mechanical faults with Biffa's collection fleet as they reach the end of their operational life. The council and Biffa acknowledge the frustration of residents caused by the delayed bin collections. Biffa has continued to provide a weekly collection service by hiring additional vehicles and undertaking collections at weekends. Therefore, the service has been delivered although on some occasions delayed. The payment of council tax is not a payment for services. Although money from the council tax funds services such as the refuse collection it is a statutory tax and legislation does not allow for refunds to be issued to customers who are dissatisfied with the level of service provided.

Supplementary question

In response to a supplementary question Councillor Dickson undertook to check whether any of the continued missed collections were due to the breakdown of new vehicles.

3. Question from Councillor Catherine Webber to Councillor Elaine Ware, Cabinet member for Environmental Protection.

It was widely reported in September 2015 that nearly 200 councils in England and Wales exceeded the NO₂ limits in 2013; Vale is sadly one of them. Approximately 50 Vale residents die prematurely each year due to air pollution. We've heard before that solutions are difficult and take cross-boundary cooperation. What actions are Vale taking and how is council actively working with other authorities to improve our air quality? What is Vale's current position with respect to any moral obligation to do all we can to reduce the impact of our poor air quality on the mortality rate of our residents?

Answer

In response Councillor Ware stated that the council has an Air Quality Action Plan and that generally air quality in the district is very good but with areas where, usually due to traffic issues, air pollution can exceed the levels set by European and UK Regulations. In such circumstances, and where there is a risk to the public, the council can create an Air Quality Management Area. The council works closely with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), Highways England, the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, Thames Valley Police alongside other key stakeholders and the public to improve air quality. The council is also part of the Oxfordshire Air Quality Group, a multi agency body with Public Health England in attendance. Work to date has included a successful joint funding bid which led to the creation of a new joint air quality website for Oxfordshire. Air quality has been included in the joint strategic needs assessment and on the health and wellbeing board as well as being an addendum to OCC's local transport plan. The group continues to work together to share best practice and accelerate where possible improvements in air quality.

The council works within DEFRA and Central Government guidelines to minimise the impact of air pollution to Vale residents. The council has a statutory duty under the Environment Act 1995 to review and assess air quality in order to establish if air

quality objectives are being, or are likely to be, exceeded. Where exceeded the council has a duty to produce an action plan with measures to help improve air pollution within these areas.

An Annual Status Report is produced and submitted to DEFRA for ratification. The Cabinet member referred to the 2017 report which she would pass to Councillor Webber after the meeting. Once ratified by DEFRA the report will be published on the council's website.

Supplementary question

In response to a supplementary question as to whether local residents had to ask for diffusion tubes or whether the council undertook checks Councillor Ware suggested that Councillor Webber reads the report and then discusses any issues with her.

4. Question from Councillor Debby Hallett to Councillor Eric Batts, Cabinet member for Facilities.

Does the Cabinet member for Facilities agree with me that the front door to our council offices building sets the tone of the districts' professionalism for people who come to call on us? Paper signs are blu-tacked up telling people the doors don't work and to close them behind you, which contradict the other signs saying 'automatic doors'. Council staff working nearby suffer by having to repeatedly get up and close the doors. This has been going on since we moved into the building. Is this Vale's responsibility or Vinci's? Please can the Cabinet member tell us when will these doors be properly functional?

Answer

Councillor Batts responded that officers are aware that the doors to the main reception are not fit for purpose. The doors met the original specification when Milton Park was being fitted out for the council's use. However, this specification has proven not to be suitable for the volume of footfall the council reception area receives. The motors open and close the doors relatively slowly and this has resulted, on occasion, in the outer and inner doors being pushed / pulled by visitors and officers which causes the motors to go into fault mode, effectively disengaging the motors and returning the doors to manual operation.

Officers have identified a solution to the issues and are working with the contractor who fitted the doors originally to replace the motors with spring return motors which will allow the doors to open and close more efficiently by using the push to open button DDA compliant radar button or by pushing or pulling the doors by hand. The new motors will not go into a fault mode when pushed or pulled manually, thus overcoming the existing issues raised in the question.

Supplementary question

In response to a supplementary question regarding the difficulty of addressing this issue Councillor Batts confirmed that on a scale of 1 to 10 it would score a 9.

5. Question from Councillor Emily Smith to Councillor Mike Murray, Cabinet member for Property.

Old Abbey House in Abingdon has been empty for some time, and concern is growing for the future of this historic building. Please can you tell council how long Old Abbey House has been vacant. In that time, how much has this council spent on maintenance, security and other costs? In that time, what offers of use has council received? What are your plans now for the sale or rent of the building?

Answer

In the absence of Councillor Murray, Councillor Barber, Leader of the council, responded. He stated that the council had explored options for the use of Old Abbey House which has been empty for 15 months at a cost of £20,000 in security and maintenance costs. The council has published its intention to redevelop the site for affordable housing.

Supplementary question

In response to a supplementary question regarding the suitability of the site for housing and feedback from local historical societies Councillor Barber stated that the building is not listed or listed as an asset of community value and that financial contributions from other housing developments including the nearby Old Gaol would be used to redevelop the former town council offices at Old Abbey House.

6. Question from Councillor Judy Roberts to Councillor Elaine Ware, Cabinet member for Grants.

Children's centres in the Vale are trying to fund themselves now that their county council funding has been cut. At our February 2017 Vale budget council meeting, the Leader of the Council said, "the centres could access the existing grant schemes for funding". But in fact, recent applications by children's centres for Vale grants have been refused. Applicants were told they didn't qualify as our current grant system cannot provide funds for services previously provided by the County Council. At that February 2017 council meeting, a motion to form a grants pot for these children's centres was voted down after the Leader assured members that our current grants system could help. Now we learn that it doesn't help, and that in fact it denies the organisations the right to apply and be considered. Please can the Cabinet member explain what has happened, and how these children's services charities can apply for Vale grants? The deadline for applications is 15 October?

Answer

Councillor Ware responded that the council had not received or refused any applications for funding of children's centres in the Vale.

The council's current policy cannot fund projects or services that usually fall to another public sector body to provide. However, if an organisation can show they are independently set up with their own constitution, premises, bank accounts and financial business case to show the service being provided is different to the statutory responsibility then it could be eligible for a single one off New Homes Bonus Grant.

For start-up costs the council requires a financial forecast showing how the service will be funded. The council can only fund a specific service once. Any revenue funding that the council provides would only be a short-term solution for children's centres. A number of grants have been offered to organisations who have met the criteria including Abingdon Bridge Youth Worker provision, Branches Youth Services and Faringdon Town Council.

In 2016 Oxfordshire County Council set up a transition fund of £1,000,000 to support community led solutions to deliver open access services for children and families. Details of the funds available and dates for future rounds of applications are available on the county council's website. The funding is one off pump priming and any proposals need to demonstrate sustainability and the ability to self-fund in the long

term. In addition, match funding is strongly encouraged and all applicants need to submit a robust business case showing how the project will self-fund in the long term.

Supplementary question

In response to a supplementary question which asked whether there would be a change in the rules and an increase in available funds to allow groups to apply for funding Councillor Ware stated that there would not because funds were already available.

Co.34 Motions on notice

Motion proposed by Councillor Bob Johnston and seconded by Councillor Jenny Hannaby.

“Council requests Cabinet as part of the 2018/19 budget-setting process to bring forward to Council a new scheme for councillors’ community grants, giving each member £4000 to spend as they see fit on not-for-profit community improvements in their ward”.

A number of councillors spoke in support of the motion. Such a scheme would allow ward councillors to support small projects and allow those projects to benefit from further sources of funding. The current grant scheme funds schemes over £1000 and therefore does not cover many of the smaller projects which would benefit from the proposed scheme.

However, the majority of councillors opposed the motion on the grounds that the current area committee arrangements worked well and allowed each ward councillor to be fully involved in the debate and consideration of grants submitted by voluntary groups. There would be additional costs associated with such a scheme including the need to appoint an additional officer to administer the scheme.

On being put to the vote the motion was declared lost.

Co.35 Exclusion of the public

RESOLVED: to exclude members of the press and public from the meeting for the following item of business under 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, 2, 3 and 4 of 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.

Co.36 Minutes

RESOLVED: to approve the confidential minutes of the special Council meeting held on 29 June 2017 as a correct record and agree that the Chairman sign them as such.

The meeting closed at 8.20pm