

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Council



held on Wednesday, 8 December 2021 at 7.00 pm
in First floor, 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park,
Milton, OX14 4SB

Open to the public, including the press

Present in the meeting room:

Councillors: Margaret Crick (Chair), Jerry Avery, Paul Barrow, Ron Batstone, Eric Batts, Nathan Boyd, Cheryl Briggs, Andy Cooke, Andy Crawford, Amos Duveen, Neil Fawcett, Andy Foulsham, Hayleigh Gascoigne, David Grant, Alison Jenner, Diana Lugova, Ben Mabbett, Sarah Medley, Patrick O'Leary, Helen Pighills, Mike Pighills, Judy Roberts, Val Shaw, Janet Shelley, Emily Smith, Bethia Thomas, Max Thompson, Catherine Webber and Richard Webber

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

Remote attendance:

Councillors: Matthew Barber, Samantha Bowring, Jenny Hannaby,
Councillor Simon Howell, Bob Johnston and Councillor Elaine Ware

68 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Eric de la Harpe, Debby Hallett and Robert Maddison.

69 Minutes

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 21 September 2021 and the meeting held on 6 October (both the public and confidential minutes) as correct records and agree that the Chair sign them as such.

70 Declarations of interest

The Chair provided advice that the Monitoring Officer had advised that there was no requirement for councillors to declare an interest in agenda item 13, Parental Leave Policy.

Councillor David Grant Cooke made a statement that he would not participate or vote on item 13 as a potential beneficiary of the policy, if adopted, in the near future.

71 Urgent business and chair's announcements

The Chair provided general housekeeping advice. She reported her attendance at the Remembrance Day Service in Abingdon and at the Pantomime at the Play House.

72 Public participation

Chris Wilding, Chair of Steventon Parish Council, Sally Povolotsky, Oxfordshire County Councillor for Hendreds & Harwell Division and Derek Stork, Honorary Chair of the Group Against Reservoir Development, addressed Council in support of motion 2 “Concerns raised about Thames Water’s proposed reservoir south of Abingdon” of agenda item 17.

Kate Oldridge addressed Council in support of motion 3 “to support the principles of the climate and ecological emergency bill” of agenda item 17.

Hannah Massie addressed Council in support of motion 4 “Becoming a trans inclusive Council” of agenda item 17.

Martin Egglestone, Beverley Pagan and Anni Byard addressed Council in opposition to motion 4 “Becoming a trans inclusive Council” of agenda item 17.

73 Petitions

None.

74 Review of Joint Gambling policy

Council considered Cabinet’s recommendation, made at its meeting on 3 December 2021, on a review of the Joint Gambling Policy.

RESOLVED to:

1. adopt the proposed joint gambling policy attached to the report of the head of housing and environment to Cabinet on 3 December 2021;
2. authorise the head of housing and environment to make minor editorial changes to the joint gambling policy; and
3. authorise the head of housing and environment to publish the joint gambling policy in accordance with the Gambling Act 2005 (Licensing Authority Policy Statement) (England and Wales) Regulations 2006.

75 Treasury management mid-year monitoring report 2021/22

Council considered Cabinet’s recommendations, made at its meeting on 3 December 2021, on the treasury management performance in the first six months of 2021/22.

Councillor Andy Crawford, Cabinet member for finance, reported that the income from treasury activities was under the budget forecast; this was largely due to the lower than expected interest rates during that period. The council had met its benchmark performance and there had been no need to borrow funds during the first six months of the financial year, nor was there any expectation to borrow during the remainder of the year.

He reported a correction that in paragraph 25 of the report; the interest rates quoted should be amended from 10 per cent and 25 per cent to read 0.1 per cent and 0.25 per cent respectively.

Both the Joint Audit and Governance Committee at its meeting on 30 November and Cabinet at its meeting on 3 December 2021 were content that the treasury management activities had been carried out in accordance with the treasury management strategy and policy.

RESOLVED to:

1. note the treasury management mid-year monitoring report 2021/22; and
2. note that Cabinet is satisfied that the treasury activities are carried out in accordance with the treasury management strategy and policy.

76 Council tax base 2022/23

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations, made at its meeting on 3 December 2021, on the council tax base for 2022/23.

RESOLVED to:

1. approve the report of the head of finance for the calculation of the council's tax base and the calculation of the tax base for each parish area for 2022/23;
2. agree that, in accordance with The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Vale of White Horse District Council as its council tax base for the year 2022/23 is 55,362.8; and
3. agree that, in accordance with The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Vale of White Horse District Council as the council tax base for the year 2022/23 for each parish be the amount shown against the name of that parish in Appendix A of the report of the head of finance to Cabinet on 3 December 2021.

77 War and War Widow(er)s Pension Disregard top up in Housing Benefit

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations, made at its meeting on 3 December 2021, to continue to disregard war pensions and war widow(er)'s pensions in calculating housing benefit entitlement.

RESOLVED to re-affirm its decision to approve the disregard of War Pensions and War Widow(er)'s pensions:

1. in full as income above the statutory £10.00 per week disregard in the calculation of Housing Benefit entitlement; and

2. in full as income in relation to the means tested assessment of Council Tax Reduction Scheme discount.

78 Constitution Review Task Group

Council considered a proposal to establish a Joint Constitution Review Task Group with South Oxfordshire Horse District Council to undertake a review of the constitution and make recommendations to Council.

Council considered the officer's recommendation to establish a task group of six councillors with three from South Oxfordshire District Council and three from Vale of White Horse District Council. Whilst there was support for the officer's recommendation, noting that a larger membership would be unwieldy, Council noted that South Oxfordshire District Council would consider the matter at its Council meeting on Thursday 9 December. In light of this, Councillor Smith moved and Councillor Boyd seconded a motion to ensure Vale of White Horse District Council secured the same representation as that to be agreed by South Oxfordshire District Council. On being put the motion was declared carried.

RESOLVED: to

1. establish a joint Constitution Review Task Group with South Oxfordshire District Council comprising an equal number of councillors from each council with the number of members to match that agreed at South Oxfordshire District Council's meeting on 9 December 2021;
2. authorise the head of legal and democratic to make appointments to the task group in consultation with group leaders;
3. agree that councillors from the same political group may substitute for an appointed representative(s).

79 Arrangements for investigating allegations under the member code of conduct

Council considered the Joint Audit and Governance Committee's recommendation, made at its meeting on 30 November 2021, on revised arrangements for dealing with complaints under the code of conduct.

Councillor Andy Foulsham, Co-Chair of the Joint Audit and Governance Committee introduced the recommendations of the committee, which if adopted would come into effect immediately.

He advised that the Monitoring Officer had reviewed the existing process since coming into post and formed the view that the process needed to be updated given the manner in which complaints were made and dealt with. The new arrangements provide for an informal resolution of complaints and implement a public interest test to ensure that resources are focussed on those complaints which involve a serious breach of the Nolan Principles. The review was undertaken against the backdrop of the best practice recommendations set out in the Committee on Standards in Public Life report called "Local Government Ethical Standards" dated 30 January 2019.

RESOLVED: to agree the arrangements for investigating complaints appended to the report of the monitoring officer to the Joint Audit and Governance Committee on 30 November 2021.

80 Councillors' Parental Leave Policy

Council considered the report of the head of legal and democratic on the adoption of a Parental Leave Policy for councillors.

Council supported the policy in contributing towards increasing the diversity of experience, age and background of councillors, the retention of experienced councillors and making public office more accessible. Council noted that the policy was based on the Local Government Association Labour Group model and welcomed the gender neutral aspect of the provisions in the Vale's policy.

RESOLVED: to adopt the Parental Leave Policy attached at appendix 1 to the report of the head of legal and democratic to the Council meeting on 8 December 2021.

81 Progress on approved Council motions

Council received and noted a progress report on motions approved by Council since May 2019.

82 Report of the leader of the council

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

83 Questions on notice

No questions were submitted from councillors under Council procedure rule 33.

84 Motions on notice

Council considered the following motions from councillors in accordance with Council Procedure rule 38.

Prior to the expiry of two and a half hours, Council agreed, in accordance with council procedure rule 12, to extend the meeting by half an hour to allow Council to complete the consideration of the agenda items.

1. Councillor David Grant moved, and Councillor Andy Cooke seconded the motion as set out in the agenda at agenda item 16:

After debate and on being put to the vote the motion was agreed.

RESOLVED: that

Council notes that:

- The Climate Emergency is a clear and present issue globally, and nationally we have committed to reaching net carbon zero by 2050. Locally, the Vale of White Horse District Council has set its ambition to reduce the whole district's carbon emissions by 75% by 2030 and for them to reach net carbon zero by 2045.

- Home energy demand accounts for 20% of greenhouse gas emissions nationally. To reduce these the Institute of Engineering and Technology (IET) has stated that there are 26 million homes in the UK that need retrofitting between now and 2050 – at a rate of nearly 1 million homes per year.
- In Oxfordshire, around 25% of greenhouse gas emissions are residential. Following consultation with local retrofit expert organisations, educational establishments and relevant business groups, a Task and Finish Group of the Joint Scrutiny Committee between this council and South Oxfordshire District Council has published a report which concluded that to achieve our 2030 target, 2,250 properties would have to be deep retrofitted every year. The cost of such retrofitting, although it significantly reduces energy bills, requires one-off up-front capital investment and is therefore beyond the reach of most homeowners.
- The recent government subsidy announced of £5,000 for households to switch to heat pumps only covers 90,000 homes over three years, representing small fraction of housing stock, and does not account for the whole cost of transition. Previously, the Green Homes Grant was made available for 6 months but was difficult to claim, accreditation times were long and complex, and the amount wholly inadequate for the task and withdrawn quickly.

Council believes that:

- This issue should be given a high priority and that government support nationally needs to be long term, reliable and as simple as possible.
- A coordinated whole house retrofit approach or one-off deep retrofitting, as made clear by the IET, is required to get homes ready for net carbon zero, rather than sporadic one-off upgrades.
- There is an ongoing lack of funding support for householders to carry out these retrofits and that Nationally, there is a lack of relevant skills, which is reflected locally, and there is a need for upskilling and training to fill this gap.

Council resolves to request:

- The Leader of the Council writes to government to urge them to set up a long-term national funding programme for retrofitting homes that would support a rate of deep retrofits to at least 2,250 homes per year for the Vale of White Horse (and a million homes per year nationwide), and that this programme to be simple and straightforward to administer and claim.
- Write to the Minister of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Rt Hon Kwasi Kwarteng MP, the Minister of State for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP and the president of COP26, Rt Hon Alok Sharma, urging them to:
 - address this issue as a priority, recognising its importance in achieving our national and international carbon emission targets;
 - suggest that ministers use the Construction Leadership Council's Retrofit Strategy as a basis for a government policy and plan;
 - include adequate funding for all Local Authorities in any retrofit strategy as they are perfectly placed to lead local Retrofit partnerships and strategies alongside LEPs;
 - develop long term support for householders including changes in relevant laws, guidance and tax regulations and to encourage businesses and skills development in this area;
 - recognise the benefits to society in better health and wellbeing from energy efficient homes;
 - recognise the industrial and employment opportunities that a countrywide retrofit plan could present to the British economy

- Officers investigate membership of the Construction Leadership Council.
 - Officers work with local partners through the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and the Environment Sub-Group to seek to establish a way to progress an Oxfordshire wide approach to retrofitting.
- 2. With the consent of Council, Councillor Andy Cooke moved, and Councillor Richard Webber seconded, the motion as set out in the agenda at agenda item 16 subject to changes to the wording in the first bullet point after “Council therefore resolves” - deleted words shown by strikethrough additional words shown in bold.**
- To reaffirm its position from the previous public enquiry that it opposes the reservoir proposal **unless or until the case** ~~at least or until, the case~~ for need for this specific solution (over and above the other potential cheaper, less disruptive, and less environmentally impactful solutions) has been clearly tested, demonstrated and agreed by independent scientific experts.

After debate and on being put to the vote the motion was agreed.

RESOLVED: that

Council notes:

- That Thames Water is once again submitting their plans for a large reservoir to be built on an area of farmland and woodland in the Vale of White Horse, south of Abingdon, and continues to receive public funds to press for this reservoir.
- Further, that the environmental impact information that was originally supplied by Thames Water on the proposed reservoir under the RAPID Gate 1 process was heavily redacted and was thus not available with sufficient time for proper scrutiny.
- That the environmental impact of this reservoir would be significant. Including the substantial carbon cost during construction and embodied carbon, as well as, during operation, significant methane outgassing from drowned vegetation, made worse with repeated drawdowns, and that the carbon impact claimed by Thames Water is not currently supported by any openly presented calculations.
- As a consequence, that the figures for carbon impact presented by Thames Water would seriously jeopardise, or make impossible, this Council’s target for the district’s greenhouse gas emissions to be cut by 75% by 2030.
- That alternative water sources, including the Severn-Thames Transfer link, that would bring new water into the water-stressed South East, and would avoid much of the environmental impact and huge local disruption, are now under active consideration.

Council therefore resolves:

- To reaffirm its position from the previous public enquiry that it opposes the reservoir proposal unless or until the case for need for this specific solution (over and above the other potential cheaper, less disruptive, and less environmentally impactful solutions) has been clearly tested, demonstrated and agreed by independent scientific experts.
- To recommend to OFWAT that a detailed and independently scrutinised carbon calculation be made, including all sources of embedded carbon, carbon used during

construction, and ongoing carbon including methane outgassing. This should include more detailed carbon calculations as to the proposed mitigations, including the timescale on which these intended mitigations would be reached.

- That failing the need being demonstrated as requested above or an independently scrutinised carbon calculation produced, the ongoing waste of public funds given to Thames Water for continued attempts to push for their reservoir should be questioned, and that we make representations to the Water Resources South East Plan and then share these with the Environment Agency and the Member of Parliament for the area.

3. Councillor Bethia Thomas moved, and Councillor Cheryl Briggs seconded the motion as set out in the agenda at agenda item 16

After debate and on being put to the vote the motion was agreed.

RESOLVED: that

Vale of White Horse District Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 recognising the human cause of irreversible climate change, the impacts of which are being felt in the UK and around the world.

At the same time humans have caused an ecological crisis with significant proportions of species currently threatened with extinction. The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world with more than one in seven of our plants and animals facing extinction and more than 40% in decline.

The council sees the ecological emergency as intrinsically linked to the climate emergency. We recognise that the UK needs a legally-enforceable nature target so that by 2030 nature is visibly and measurably on the path of recovery, and we acknowledge the role of a national Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE) Bill in making this happen.

Council notes that:

- Parliament declared an Environment and Climate Emergency in May 2019, and that since then the CEE Bill has been tabled, which, if it became law, would require the government to develop a strategy to address the emergency that would ensure:
 - The Ecological Emergency is tackled alongside the Climate Crisis in a joined-up approach;
 - The Paris Agreement is enshrined into law to ensure that UK does its real fair share to limit global temperature rise to the most stringent end of the Paris agreement -1.5°C.
- Our council has a role to play in reducing the impact we have on our ecosystems locally, protecting wildlife and improving the ecology of the natural environment and that this work goes hand in hand with our work on the climate emergency under the climate action work programme.
- That the final wording of the COP26 Declaration para. 55 specifically recognises the role of "...local and regional governments... in contributing to progress towards the objective of the Convention and the goals of the Paris Agreement"
- Local Government budgets are strained and that we could take faster action if government allowed great policy flexibility and funding to address the climate and ecological emergencies.

Council resolves to:

- Ask the Leader to write to all our Oxfordshire MPs urging them to support the principles of CEE Bill as a matter of urgency, to encourage their colleagues of all parties to do the same and to amplify our calls for national government to provide sufficient resources to local councils to support our efforts.
- To show support for local groups who are campaigning for the principles of the CEE Bill including Zero Hour Oxford.

4. Councillor Sarah Medley moved, and Councillor Amos Duveen seconded the motion as set out in the agenda at agenda item 16

Councillor Shelley moved, and Councillor Mabbett seconded, a deferral motion to allow for councillors to gather further information on the subject matter, provide the opportunity for public consultation and to assess the impact and consequences of the motion on council services and contractors. Whilst a number of councillors supported the deferral motion, others expressed the view that the purpose of the motion was to highlight the council's commitment to being an inclusive council and commit the council to a number of actions to work with relevant organisations to establish how to ensure services are accessible. It did not commit the council to specific measures at this stage.

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

After debate and on being put to the vote the motion was agreed.

RESOLVED: that**Council notes that:**

1. Transgender and non-binary people face significant disadvantage in society, being highly vulnerable to violence, homelessness, and lack of access to suitable healthcare provision.
2. There is currently a concerning rise in transphobia in the UK, from individuals, politicians and the media.
3. Transphobia has a hugely detrimental impact on the mental health and well-being of trans individuals.

Council believes that:

1. All UK law should clearly recognise that trans men are men, trans women are women, and non-binary people are non-binary.
2. Transgender and non-binary people deserve respect and autonomy.
3. It is therefore our duty as community leaders who seek to create an open and tolerant society to speak out against transphobia and discrimination in all its forms.

Council therefore resolves to:

1. State publicly that trans rights are human rights and affirm the legal rights of all protected groups under the 2010 Equality Act.
2. Consult with local trans support organisations when developing the Vale of White Horse District Council's new Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, to ensure services, forms and buildings this council has control of are inclusive of the trans community.

3. Work with LGBTQ+ groups to provide training for councillors to raise awareness of the difficulties transgender and non-binary people face.
4. Include International Trans Day of Visibility (March 31st) and Trans Day of Remembrance (November 20th) in our Council's Corporate and Diversity Calendar.
5. Encourage an informal network of LGBTQ+ allies across the council.
6. Continue working with partner organisations to ensure transgender and non-binary people are not discriminated against whilst accessing services such as domestic violence and homelessness support.

The meeting closed at 10:00pm