

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Executive



held at 3pm on Friday 3 September 2010
at the Guildhall, Abingdon

Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillor Tony de Vere (Chair), Richard Webber (Vice-Chair), Mary de Vere, Richard Gibson, Angela Lawrence and Jerry Patterson

Officers: Steve Bishop, David Buckle, Steve Culliford, Andrew Down, Trudy Godfrey, Matt Prosser, Shona Ware and Bob Watson

Number of members of the public: Nil

Ex.26 Apologies for absence

Councillor Jenny Hannaby sent an apology for absence.

Ex.27 Minutes

RESOLVED

To approve as a correct record the Executive's minutes of 2 July 2010 and agree that the Chair signs them.

Ex.28 Declarations of interest

None

Ex.29 Urgent business and chair's announcements

None

Ex.30 Statements, petitions, and questions relating to matters affecting the Executive

None

Ex.31 Budget virement requests

The Executive considered an agenda report setting out ten requests for virements. Councillors approved the requests. However, in doing so, the Executive noted that it had to increase the council's budget for standards investigations to cover the cost of escalating parish council complaints. The council had a duty to carry out these standards hearings and was unable to recharge the parish councils for their costs.

Councillors also noted details of six virements approved by the Chief Finance Officer under delegated authority.

RESOLVED

To approve the virement requests set out in table 1 of the agenda report.

Ex.32 Faringdon and Wantage market towns strategy and action plan

The Executive considered report 41/10 of the Head of Economy, Leisure, and Property. The report set out how a strategy and action plan for Faringdon and Wantage would help sustain them as vibrant market towns. The report sought approval of the strategy and action plan.

The Scrutiny Committee had considered the draft strategy at its meeting on 19 August. The committee believed that the officers should consult local members on matters relating to their ward before presenting the report to a committee. The committee asked for consultation with all councillors on the draft strategy. The committee's suggestions and those received from other councillors had been included in the amended draft now placed before the Executive.

The portfolio holder reported that the aim was to improve the vitality of the town centres, working alongside the local development framework's core strategy. The market towns strategy contained a range of actions. The joint economic forums of Faringdon and Wantage, the town councils and the chambers of commerce had all contributed.

The Executive supported the proposed strategy, its principles, and range of actions. This showed the council's commitment to Faringdon and Wantage. Councillors asked for a media release to publicise this, highlighting some of the council's planned actions. Councillors also noted that many of the district's town centre shops were occupied again—the sign of an improving local economy. The Executive believed it was also important to monitor the effectiveness of the strategy and review it annually.

Councillors were also pleased to see the shopkeepers' initiative that allowed Faringdon town centre shoppers to claim back the cost of their car parking. The council would welcome any evidence-based proposals for improvements to the car parking service.

RESOLVED

- (a) To approve the Faringdon and Wantage market towns strategy and action plan; and
- (b) To authorise the Head of Economy, Leisure, and Property, in consultation with the strategic director and Executive portfolio holder, to review and amend the strategy and action plan annually.

Ex.33 IT strategy

The Executive considered report 40/10 of the Head of HR, IT, and Customer Services. This proposed an information technology (IT) strategy and investment plan for both the Vale and South Oxfordshire District Council. As staff at the two councils worked more closely, it had become clear for the need to find better ways of working. Separate IT systems were a hindrance. Together, councillors and staff from both councils developed the draft IT strategy to get the best value from IT investments, to obtain the best IT infrastructure, and to decide which systems to keep, which to manage in-house, and which to source externally.

An investment plan was prepared to implement the strategy. This identified priorities, the investment timetable, and a costs and savings plan for the harmonisation of major systems. The anticipated infrastructure cost to the council over five years was £370k; there would be additional costs for new software.

The Executive considered that the IT strategy provided a suitable framework for IT decision-making for the next five years, offering a consistent approach and convergence of systems with South Oxfordshire. Councillors welcomed the IT investment plan that set out a timetable for the majority of systems' harmonisation over the next two years and the investment in further IT over the five-year period. The Executive suggested that all councillors should have the opportunity to comment on the IT strategy.

The Executive considered that the council needed further IT investment. However, rollout of the strategy and investment plan would be dependent on finance. The Executive believed that the strategy was achievable within the timeframe and the anticipated cost.

Councillors requested that the risks of introducing new IT systems were minimised. The effect on service delivery should be contained. It was important to find IT solutions that met service needs and were easy to use. The choice of systems was important and needed both staff and councillors' input. The method for doing this needed further consideration but could involve a councillors' project group, joint with South Oxfordshire. The Executive considered that training for users on the new IT systems was essential too.

RESOLVED

- (a) To adopt the IT strategy, with the addition of a further principle that the councils will take decisions to minimise energy consumption;

- (b) To approve the IT investment plan, subject to the availability of funding in future years; and
- (c) To authorise the Head of HR, IT, and Customer Services, in consultation with the Executive portfolio holder, to procure a system to replace Ocella and/or UNI-form for both councils, following the councils' procurement policy and procedures.

Ex.34 Financial outturn 2009/10

The Executive considered report 38/10 of the Head of Finance, which detailed the council's revenue expenditure for 2009/10.

The medium term financial plan to 2011/12 had provided for gradually increasing service costs against a stable Council Tax increase. Funds and balances would smooth out financial pressures during 2009/10. Despite the economic downturn and a significant drop in income, the council's net revenue position for the year was an underspend of £1.168m against the working budget. Consequently, the council had reduced its expected use of funds and reserves from £1.75m to £0.49m. The council had also written off the anticipated loss of the Landsbanki investment one year earlier than expected.

Councillors were pleased with the management of the council's finances during the year in difficult economic circumstances. This was down to hard work by all council staff in containing expenditure, following the management team's early intervention. The Executive thanked all staff, including the management team.

Councillors questioned whether the budget set in February 2009 was correct but concluded that the budget was set with the best information available at that time and during the year, the economic climate had been even more unpredictable than usual. The Executive considered that the council was as protected as it could be against future challenges.

RESOLVED

- (a) To note the overall outturn position of the council's revenue budgets in 2009/10, as well as the outturn of individual service areas and cost centres; and
- (b) To take into account the impact of the outturn position in the integrated service and financial planning process when setting the 2011/12 original budget.

Ex.35 Revenue budget monitoring - first quarter 2010/11

The Executive then considered report 42/10 of the Head of Finance, which set out the revenue expenditure position for the first quarter of 2010/11. This showed a projected overspend of £12,535. However, the officer expected that this predicted overspend would be controlled by prudent budgeting during the remainder of the financial year. In the first quarter, the council had also absorbed the loss of £190K in

government grants. The report detailed income and expenditure variances by service area.

The Executive noted the report and looked forward to the second quarter outturn report. The Chair asked for continued careful budget monitoring.

RESOLVED

To note the current revenue budget monitoring position and forecast of outturn by services.

Ex.36 Website review

The Executive considered report 39/10 of the Head of Corporate Strategy. This asked for permission for a joint website review project with South Oxfordshire District Council. The intention was to make the councils' websites more customer-focused. The report also requested agreement for an exemption from the council's contract procedure rules to allow this council to appoint the same supplier as South Oxfordshire District Council. This could deliver a combined saving of £20,000.

The Executive supported the proposal as it would refresh the council's website, the costs would be contained within budget, and savings were projected. However, the Executive stressed the importance of the Vale brand in the website design.

RESOLVED

- (a) To agree to join a project with South Oxfordshire District Council to transform the councils' respective websites to be more customer-focused; and
- (b) To agree to an exemption to the contract procedure rules to allow the council to appoint the same supplier as South Oxfordshire District Council and deliver a combined saving of £20,000.

Ex.37 Health and safety policy

The Executive considered report 42/10 of the Head of HR, IT, and Customer Services. This sought the Executive's approval of a new health and safety policy, prepared jointly with South Oxfordshire District Council. The Executive supported the proposed new policy and recommended its adoption to the Council.

RECOMMENDED

To adopt the new health and safety policy.

Exempt information under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972

None

The meeting rose at 3.58 pm