

# Ex.35

## MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE

HELD AT THE GUILDHALL,  
ABINGDON ON FRIDAY, 5TH  
AUGUST, 2005 AT 2.30 PM

**Open to the Public, including the Press**

PRESENT:

MEMBERS: Councillor Jerry Patterson (Chair), Tony de-Vere (Vice-Chair), Mary de-Vere, Joyce Hutchinson and Tessa Ward

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Helen Bishop, Alison Blyth, Steve Culliford, Nick Garnett and Terry Stock

NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: Nil

### EX.52 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jim Moley and Roz Smith.

### EX.53 MINUTES

The public minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 1 July 2005 were adopted and signed as a correct record.

### EX.54 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Jerry Patterson declared a personal interest in item 15 'Assessing the Housing Needs of Gypsies and Travellers in the Thames Valley Region' as he was Chair of the Association of Councils of the Thames Valley Region (ACTVaR) for the year 2005/06 (minute Ex.60 refers).

### EX.55 REFERRALS FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES AND OTHER COMMITTEES

- (a) Scrutiny Committee  
(Time: 2.33pm to 2.39pm)

#### Waste Management Contract - Annual Presentation

The Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 14 July 2005, had considered the annual performance and continuous improvement report in respect of the Council's Waste Management Contract 2003-2009. In considering the report, the Committee had resolved to advise the Executive as follows:

- (i) that the Scrutiny Committee was generally content with progress on the Waste Management Contract 2003-09 but was disappointed that none of the performance targets relating to the contract have been met;
- (ii) that there was an expectation by the Scrutiny Committee that it would undertake the 2005/06 Annual Review of the Waste Management Contract;

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- (iii) that in respect of bulky waste collections, the Scrutiny Committee was willing to undertake a review of the current service with a view to providing a more customer focused service;
- (iv) that the Scrutiny Committee welcomed the work undertaken by the Oxfordshire Leaders' Group to promote partnership working on the removal of fly-posting and identification of fly-tipping across the County and asked the Executive to ensure that these arrangements were put in place as soon as possible.

The Executive welcomed Scrutiny Committee's review of the waste management contract and suggested that this should be an annual occurrence. Disappointment was expressed at the worsening trend of missed collections. The portfolio holder reported that he would monitor this on a monthly basis. The Executive also welcomed the Scrutiny Committee's willingness to undertake a review of bulky waste collections. It was noted that this service had become more popular due to the ability of residents to order collections by telephone using debt or credit cards for payment. It was also noted that where the targets for bulky waste collections within a certain number of days had been missed, this was due to the service arranging collections on dates requested by customers. Members welcomed this customer-focused approach.

## *RESOLVED*

- (a) *that the report of the Scrutiny Committee be noted: and*
- (b) *that the Scrutiny Committee be invited to carry out annual reviews of the waste management contract and to review the collection of bulky waste.*

- (b) Council  
(Time: 2.39pm to 2.42pm)

At the meeting of the Council held on 20 July 2005, it was reported that a petition had been received containing 73 signatures from the residents of St Katherine's House in Wantage, as follows:

"asking the Council to reconsider its decision to replace the travel tokens option with the offer of half-fare bus passes, at least for those over 80, most of whom need to have a taxi whenever they have to go to the Health Centre or visit the town and, even if one is available, many of them cannot physically board a bus."

The Council had resolved that the petition set out above was referred without discussion to the Executive for determination, in accordance with Standing Order 13(4)(b).

The Executive noted that the termination of the travel token scheme had delivered 40% of the savings necessary to balance the 2005/06 budget and consultation showed a preference for cutting the travel tokens scheme rather than other non-statutory services. It was proposed by the Chair that it was not affordable to reinstate all or part of the concessionary fares scheme. It was suggested that the petitioners should be advised of existing schemes.

## *RESOLVED*

*that Councillor Joyce Hutchinson be requested to advise the residents of St Katherine's House in Wantage that the Executive will not recommend to the Council to reinstate all*

*or part of the travel tokens scheme and to advise the petitioners of existing alternative travel schemes.*

EX.56 FORWARD PLAN

(Time: 2.42pm to 2.45pm)

The Executive received the Forward Plan containing Executive decisions to be taken from August to November 2005. Updating the plan, it was noted that reports on the Rural Towns Initiative and Business Rates Discretionary Relief Criteria Review were now expected to be put to the Executive in September 2005. It was also noted that the Review of Home Renewal Strategy and Housing Capital Grants Policy would be considered by the Strategic Review Committee in September and by the Executive thereafter. Councillor Joyce Hutchinson's name was also added as the consultee for community grants considered by the Area Committees.

*RESOLVED*

*that the Forward Plan for July to October 2005 be received and updates be made to the next Forward Plan.*

EX.57 SERVICE PLANS ANNUAL REPORTS 2004/05

(Time: 2.45pm to 3.03pm)

Copies of the Service Area Annual Reports had been circulated as a separate document to all Members of the Executive and the Leader of the Opposition. Portfolio Holders had examined them with the respective Assistant Director in their meetings to review 2004/05 performance. Portfolio holders were asked to report any significant issues arising from the Annual Reports together with any significant 2004/05 year-end budget variances. Reports were made by the portfolio holders present.

Planning

Best Value Performance Indicator results for BVPI 109a and 109b had fallen short of their targets in 2004/05 due to staff turnover. This resulted in a substantially lower than expected Planning Delivery Grant. The service area had been advised that these indicators were of the highest priority in 2005/06. It was noted that staffing numbers were now back to full complement. However, the £54,000 grant recently received for meeting the deadline in preparing the Local Development Scheme timetable was welcomed. Members applauded the work of the Local Plan team in moving the Local Plan through the public inquiry stage.

Housing and Community Safety

The choice-based lettings scheme had been introduced during the year and proved to be a success with 83 applicants being re-housed. The number of complaints had reduced due to the increased transparency of the new system. Disabled grants had helped 175 people and the number of closed circuit television cameras had increased.

Leisure, Innovation and Enterprise

The Thames Valley Youth Games had proved to be a great success and the partnership with J V Strong for grounds maintenance was working well. Sports Development had won £8,000 for a community sports coaching scheme and usage at Wantage Civic Hall was increasing. It had

been a very successful year. The portfolio holder reported that it was a pleasure working with such an enthusiastic team.

## Estates Management

The service had been involved in a number of property projects during the year, including the purchase and re-sale of mobile homes to bring homes back into use while making a surplus for the Council. The service had also re-aligned some of its work following the reduction in Technical services.

## ICT

The Executive noted the successful re-structuring of the ICT service.

## Contact Services

Contact Services had continued to receive positive feedback for the Local Services Points in Abingdon and Wantage.

## Finance

The Council Tax collection rate was the highest in the country. Members congratulated staff on this achievement. The 2004/05 out-turn had been very close to the budget set by Council but there was a need to further investigate and plan for fluctuations in benefits calculations. Members also welcomed clearer budget information introduced for 2005/06.

## Environmental Health

The staffing situation in Environmental Health was challenging. The number of inspections during the year was significantly lower than the target. This was due to low staff numbers following illness. However, the transfer of the waste management contract to Cleanaway had proved a success with the cost of collection now cheaper by 2 pence per household.

## *RESOLVED*

*that the Scrutiny Committee be invited to review the Service Area Annual Reports and recommend to the Executive whether any specific issue should be examined in more detail.*

### EX.58 INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2004/05 OUT-TURN

(Time: 3.03pm to 3.05pm)

The Executive received and considered report 57/05 of the Strategic Director which summarised the out-turn of the 2004/05 Internal Audit Plan. This showed significant improvement since progress was reported in December 2004. The report also summarised all assignments completed as part of the 2004/05 plan, and all unplanned assignments carried out during the year. Finally, the report highlighted any unactioned Internal Audit reports where the Action Plan containing the Internal Audit recommendations had not been returned to Audit with the proposed corrective actions.

The target for the out-turn (proportion of the audit plan achieved) in 2004/05 was 75%. The actual out-turn was 61%. However, it was noted that audits were carried out in ten months of the year, which over the course of twelve months would have given an out-turn of 73%.

## *RESOLVED*

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*that the improved performance of Internal Audit in 2004/05 be noted.*

## EX.59 THAMES WATERWAY PLAN

(Time: 3.05pm to 3.15pm)

The Executive received and considered report 58/05 of the Strategic Director. The Environment Agency had prepared a draft Thames Waterway Plan for consultation with key stakeholders, including the Vale. The Environment Agency was intending that the River Thames Alliance should adopt the Thames Waterway Plan and that Councils should modify their own plans and policy documents to reflect it.

At a meeting of the Executive in July 2004, the authority had agreed to join the River Thames Alliance and appointed Councillor Peter Green as its representative. Councillor Green had been consulted on draft plan and was content with the officer's suggested amendments to it. The purpose of the partnership was to bring together key stakeholders including the Environment Agency, local authorities, riparian landowners and river user groups to focus on strategic issues affecting the rejuvenation of the River. One of the objectives was to produce jointly agreed proposals for the development and management of the river and the preparation and implementation of a sustainable 'waterway plan' for the Thames.

The Vale was consulted on the draft policies and actions in October 2004 and Jayne Mills of the Environment Agency gave a presentation to relevant Members and officers at that time. A small working group of officers and Councillor Green replied, on the Council's behalf, to the draft policies and actions. Whilst many of the Council's comments on the draft plan had been taken account in the revised draft plan, there were still two main concerns:

- Greater weight should be given to balancing environmental issues with the desire to see greater use of the river
- Some policies were either inappropriate or too open ended to be adopted by the Council in the review of its Local Plan. The proposed vision, core objectives and policies contained in the Draft Plan were appended to the officer's report

The report set out a series of suggested amendments. The Executive agreed with the majority of these, except that with regard to policy 20, Members suggested that there should not be an objection to the policy per se, but rather there should be an objection to the creation of residential boat moorings in off-river basins in the Vale District. It was agreed that delegated authority could be given to agree the wording for the response to this policy.

### RESOLVED

*that the Environment Agency be thanked for the opportunity to comment on the Thames Waterway Plan, and that amendments to the plan be sought as set out below:*

- *In section 1 'Introduction', on page 4, add after Thames 'and its environs';*
- *In the 'Core Objective' on page 4, bullet point two after "improve and maintain" add "in a sustainable manner" and in bullet point four insert at the start "where appropriate";*
- *In section 3 'Underlying Principles', on page 6, at the start of this section of the plan it will be helpful to describe the diverse character of the Thames and some of the special policy areas through which it runs and that development which is appropriate to one stretch may not be suitable in another. An acknowledgement that conflict can occur between different users of the river, for example cyclists and walkers, or boaters and fishermen will also be helpful;*
- *In Principle 5 – Economic Principle on page 7, the Draft Plan currently states "We will optimise the assets of the River to help achieve a sustainable economy. To avoid any misinterpretation of what is meant by a sustainable economy this principle should be re-*

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- written and should make clear the need to balance sustainable economic growth with environmental considerations;
- In section 8 'Tourism', on page 15, policy 3 'Tourism', there is no objection to the policy but it should be noted that the Council has yet to decide the direction of its main tourism branding. If the Council does decide to work with, for example, Oxford it could still give support to the Thames Waterway Plan with links on its website and provide information locally;
  - In section 9 'Sport and Recreation' on page 17, policy 7 Sport and recreation policy – objection - bullet point 3 of the possible actions to achieve this policy refers to providing facilities for multi sport clubs. This action should be prefaced with “In appropriate locations”. New facilities for multi sports may not be acceptable in the Green Belt or areas of open countryside;
  - In policy 8 'Sport and recreation' policy – objection - same comment applies as to policy 7 above;
  - In policy 11 'Access' – objection - in environmentally sensitive locations along the Thames it may not be appropriate to encourage the creation of car parks. “Where appropriate” should be inserted in the policy itself and against bullet point one;
  - In policy 13 'Access' – objection - the third action under this policy refers to provide camp sites or budget accommodation at 16km intervals along the river. The provision of camp sites may again not be appropriate along certain stretches of the river, “where appropriate” should be inserted into the action;
  - In policy 15 'Boating' – objection - comment made to policy 13 applies to the second action under this policy;
  - In section 10 'Powered boating' on page 25, policy 17 'Boating' – objection - add resisting the loss of public slipways to bullet point one and insert “where appropriate” in front of support provision of facilities like dry docks and boat repair yards for the same reasons as set out above;
  - In policy 18 'Permanent mooring' – objection - as written this policy will allow permanent moorings to be created anywhere along The Thames. The current policy operated by the Council allows permanent moorings to be created only at or adjacent to settlements and by locks where they are most likely to be accessible and less likely to affect the character of the river sites environs. The policy should be amended to reflect this policy approach;
  - In policy 20 'Residential boats' – that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with Councillor Tessa Ward to agree the wording of an objection - this policy allows for residential boats that can be navigated but are lived on for all or most of the year, to be located in off-river basins with suitable facilities. Because the Vale is very rural there is unlikely to be any location where it will be appropriate to encourage residential boats. If residential boats were to use existing moorings this would take away spaces for those seeking to moor overnight. This policy should not apply the Vale of White Horse District due to its special rural character;
  - In policy 21 'Hire boat' – objection - the last bullet point of possible actions under this policy to support the creation of new hire boat bases is too open ended and needs to specify where new facilities may be appropriate;
  - In policy 22 'Passenger boat' – objection - the same comment under Policy 17 applies to the second bullet point under possible actions.

## EX.60 ASSESSING THE HOUSING NEEDS OF GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS IN THE THAMES VALLEY REGION

(Time: 3.15pm to 3.17pm)

(Councillor Jerry Patterson declared a personal interest in this item but in accordance with Standing Order 34 he remained in the meeting during its consideration.)

The Government Office of the South East required local authorities to review the housing needs of gypsies and travellers in their area and to match this against existing provision.

The Association of Councils of the Thames Valley Region (ACTVaR), covering Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, had agreed that a sub-regional assessment of the needs of gypsies and travellers would be a useful exercise that could inform housing and planning development strategies in this area. A working group of authorities was formed with Oxfordshire representation from Cherwell District Council and this group had drawn up a specification for a needs survey, together with indicative costs. It was proposed that external specialist consultants should be employed to carry out this piece of work at a cost per authority of approximately £5,000.

The Executive believed that there was value in taking part in this survey and that it represented good value.

*RESOLVED (by five votes to nil)*

*that the Vale takes part in the region-wide survey of the housing needs of gypsies and travellers and that a Supplementary Estimate from Contingency of £5,000 be approved to fund this Council's contribution towards the total cost.*

#### EX.61 SHARE OF RIGHT-TO-BUY SALES – DEFICIT RELATING TO 2004/05

(Time: 3.17pm to 3.418pm)

The Executive recalled that former tenants of the Council had retained their right to buy their homes when the housing stock was sold to the Vale Housing Association in February 1995. The sale agreement included a clause that for ten years the Council was entitled to the proceeds of these property sales above an agreed level and after adjustment for costs and loss of rent.

This arrangement had ended in 2004/05. The sums received over the term of the agreement had been in excess of £5.5 million over the ten years, detailed as follows:

Year	'Agreed' number	Actual sales	Excess	Net sum received* £
1995/96	21	81	60	486,175
1996/97	19	88	69	630,070
1997/98	18	126	108	1,222,950
1998/99	17	94	77	907,808
1999/00	17	112	95	1,829,998
2000/01	17	31	14	477,543
2001/02	17	18	1	28,887
2002/03	17	17	0	(21,433)
2003/04	15	14	0	(17,933)
2004/05	14	5	0	(6,623)
Total				5,537,442

If there were no excess sales, the Council still had to pay some of the Housing Association's costs in line with the agreement and the Executive had agreed supplementary estimates in 2003/04 and 2004/05 when there were no excess sales. Payments were made one year in arrears.

Members noted that when the 2005/06 budget was being drawn up it was not possible to predict the number of sales for 2004/05, so no provision had been made for any deficit, although it was borne in mind when setting the level of Contingency allocated to unforeseen items. The level of sales in 2004/05 meant that there was a payment due from the Council to the Housing Association of £6,623. This was the last such payment.

*RESOLVED (by five votes to nil)*

*that a supplementary estimate be agreed from Contingency of £6,623 in 2005/06 to meet the net cost of preserved Right-to-Buy sales that occurred in 2004/05.*

EX.62 OUTSIDE BODY APPOINTMENT - THAMES VALLEY WASTE FORUM

(Time: 3.18pm to 3.19pm)

The authority had been asked by the Association of Councils of the Thames Valley Region (ACTVaR) to appoint a Member representative to the Thames Valley Waste Forum. This was an Executive function and therefore the Executive was requested to appoint a representative.

*RESOLVED*

*that Councillor Tony de Vere be appointed to the Thames Valley Waste Forum for the 2005/06 Municipal Year.*

EX.63 ABINGDON OPEN AIR POOL - STOP BUSINESS PLAN

(Time: 3.19pm to 3.29pm)

A letter had been received from the STOP (Save the Outdoor Pool) campaign, complete with a business plan for the Open Air Pool in Abingdon. A copy of the letter and plan had been sent to every Member of the Council. The Executive was asked to consider the STOP's business plan.

The Chief Executive tabled a briefing note, which reported that Abingdon Town Council had written to confirm that it was not willing to become legally responsible for the operation of the pool but was willing to increase its financial contribution. This gave the Executive two options if it was minded to re-open the pool:

- To negotiate on the basis of the STOP business plan
- To negotiate a formal agreement with the Town Council

After a brief adjournment, it was reported that a Town Councillor had queried the accuracy of the Town Council's letter in properly reflecting that Council's decision. The Executive was advised that it must act on the basis that the letter accurately reflected the Town Council's decision, but bear in mind the concern raised.

The Chair proposed that the Executive agreed in principle to consider re-opening the pool next season, subject to the Town Council entering into a formal funding agreement for at least five years which maintained its increased financial contribution in real terms, and subject to a satisfactory and affordable offer from an operator to run the pool for a 100 day season. The Executive would consider responses at its next meeting.

Members supported the proposal on the proviso that any agreement must not cost Vale Council Tax payers any more money. It was imperative that the budget saving was still met and the Council's medium term financial plan was unaffected by any agreement.



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RESOLVED (by five votes to nil)

- (a) that consideration of re-opening the Abingdon Open Air Pool next season be agreed in principle, subject to:
- (i) Abingdon Town Council entering into a formal agreement for at least five years which maintains its increased financial contribution in real terms;
  - (ii) a satisfactory and affordable offer from an operator to run the pool for a 100 day season;
- (b) that the response from Abingdon Town Council be considered at the next meeting of the Executive on 2 September 2005.

## EX.64 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC, INCLUDING THE PRESS

RESOLVED

that in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public, including the press, be excluded from the remainder of the meeting to prevent the disclosure to them of exempt information, as defined in Section 100(l) and Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act when the following items are considered:

### Minutes

(Category 1 - Information relating to a particular employee, former employee or applicant to become an employee of, or a particular office-holder, former office-holder or applicant to become an office-holder under, the authority).

(Category 9 - Any terms proposed or to be proposed by or to the authority in the course of negotiations for a contract for the acquisition or disposal of property or the supply of goods or services).

### Property Matters

(Category 9)

### Mobile Home Parks

(Category 7 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (other than the authority)).

## **SUMMARY OF THE EXEMPT ITEMS CONSIDERED AT THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE HELD ON FRIDAY 5 AUGUST 2005 AT 2.30 P.M.**

### Minutes

The Exempt minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 1 July 2005 were adopted and signed as a correct record.

### Property Matters

The Executive noted progress on one property matter and agreed to pursue two others.

### Mobile Homes Parks

The Executive agreed to the purchase and re-sale of a mobile home plot.