

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Cabinet

held at 2pm on Friday 8 July 2011
at The Abbey House, Abingdon



Open to the Public, including the Press

Present:

Members: Councillor Matthew Barber (Chairman), Roger Cox (Vice-Chair), Yvonne Constance, Reg Waite and Elaine Ware

Non-participating members: Councillors Julia Bricknell, Jim Halliday, Jenny Hannaby, Dudley Hoddinott, Angela Lawrence, and Richard Webber

Officers: John Backley, Steve Bishop, David Buckle, Steve Culliford, Tom Deacon, Matt Prosser, Margaret Reed, Anna Robinson and Chris Tyson

Number of members of the public: None

Ca.1 Apologies for absence

None

Ca.2 Declarations of interest

None

Ca.3 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

None

Ca.4 Statements, petitions, and questions relating to matters affecting the Cabinet

None

Ca.5 Car parking policy

Cabinet considered report 10/11 of the head of economy, leisure, and property. This provided information to help the Cabinet decide whether and how to put in place a Conservative pre-election pledge to introduce free short-stay car parking in the three market towns. The Cabinet's proposals were to:

- introduce two hours free parking at all Vale car parks

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Ca.1

- increase parking charges over three hours
- increase permit costs
- require a ticket to be displayed at all times, including during the free parking period
- extend the charging period to 6pm on Monday to Saturday
- introduce a 'no return' for two hours for all car parks in a particular town

The report set out the officers' assessment of the impact on income and expenditure. The section 151 officer believed that the changes would cause a significant loss of income, estimated at £192,500 a year, with one-off costs of £10,000 for changes to signs, equipment, and advertising the proposals. This would have a significant impact on the medium term financial plan. The section 151 officer identified options to meet this cost:

- using the new homes bonus
- achieving further shared service efficiency savings, for example, co-locating the Vale's and South Oxfordshire District Council's offices in one building
- other reactive savings through lean working efficiency measures or service cuts
- raising income by creating a business improvement district

There were risks with each option—the section 151 officer did not believe that these options would be sufficient to meet the longer-term cost of the Cabinet's proposals. As no budget was available to fund the proposals in the current year, the Council would need to approve a supplementary revenue estimate to meet the cost.

Cabinet noted that the proposals would require a change to the council's policy, which stated that income from the service as a whole must cover the car parks' operating, maintenance and management costs. There would also need to be a new car park order. Following consultation on the order, the proposals were likely to be introduced in December 2011 at the earliest.

The report also identified other options such as introducing totally free parking, maintaining the existing service, or increasing charges.

The Cabinet member responsible for this service reported that the car parking service was not just a source of revenue; it was a service. Free parking worked in other parts of the country. The proposals would help attract more visitors to the Vale and would improve the economies in the market towns.

Three non-Cabinet councillors had requested to address the Cabinet on this matter:

- Councillor Jenny Hannaby questioned why free parking was necessary when it was already available in Wantage. How would the Cabinet monitor the effectiveness of the proposed changes? How would the Cabinet fund this in future years? The new homes bonus should be used for housing or youth facilities. Was the Cabinet going to consult the public on these changes?
- Councillor Richard Webber believed that from reading the report, the proposed course of action was unwise. He accepted that the Conservatives had promised this in their election pledge and now had to deliver it. He asked two questions. Would the Cabinet undertake research to check that the changes were working, and in the light of that research, would the Cabinet rescind its decision if the changes were not working?
- Councillor Angela Lawrence doubted whether two hours free parking would make much difference. There had been no outcry when Waitrose reduced its free parking from two hours to one and a half hours. She also expressed concern at the proposed

use of the new homes bonus to fund these changes. This should be used to assist people find homes. How would the Cabinet fund these changes long-term?

The chairman responded on behalf of the Cabinet. He and his Cabinet members believed that introducing free short-stay car parking would benefit the market towns. Not all towns had free parking. He recalled that in the past free parking had not been the desire solely of the Conservative Party; other political parties had wanted this too. This had occurred in Kidlington. A number of studies had found that free parking increased footfall in town centres. This had been the case in Chester, Bognor Regis, and Norfolk. He was aware of the scale of the financial decision but believed that car parking was an important service. The new homes bonus would fund this in the short-term. These changes would bring community benefit—one of the aims of the bonus. In addition, the council would not be able to put the entire bonus into reserves. The Cabinet would look at more sustainable funding for the future. However, he believed funding was covered for the period of this council.

The Cabinet supported the chairman's comments

RESOLVED: That Cabinet agrees to:

- (a) introduce two hours free parking in all car parks where there is currently a charge for parking;
- (b) increase parking charges for periods of three hours or more in accordance with the schedule set out in appendix 1 to report 10/11;
- (c) increase permit costs in accordance with the schedule set out in appendix 2 to report 10/11;
- (d) require a ticket to be displayed at all times, including during the free parking period;
- (e) extend the charging period to 6pm Monday to Saturday;
- (f) introduce a 'no return' for two hours policy for all car parks in a particular town;
- (g) use new homes bonus to fund free parking in the short term, with longer term proposals being brought forward as part of cabinet's 2012/13 budget;
- (h) authorise the head of legal and democratic services to prepare and publish a draft traffic order, consult in accordance with the regulations, and report consultation responses to Cabinet; and
- (i) agree a change in the council's parking policy by removing the requirement that income should at least cover the operating, maintenance and management costs of car parks.

RECOMMENDATION to Council:

- (j) recommend to Council that it approves a supplementary revenue estimate of £75,000 to fund these changes in the current financial year, with the money taken from the new homes bonus reserve.

Ca.6 Property system procurement

The Cabinet considered report 11/11 of the head of HR, IT, and customer services. This set out the detailed proposal to award a contract to replace the council's existing property system with a new joint system with South Oxfordshire District Council. The software would support core functions of planning, building control, land charges, environmental health, and licensing.

Cabinet noted that the officer project board concluded that it was not feasible to extend the contract in place at another council. Instead, the board considered that the councils should seek competitive tenders for a new joint contract. This was more likely to deliver best value for money and bring savings for both councils. This proved to be correct with the preferred tender resulting in £37,690 predicted savings per year for this council and £20,085 savings for South Oxfordshire. The councils would split the costs equally. The Cabinet member supported the proposal, believing that the councils had followed the proper procurement process.

The chairman invited Councillor Jenny Hannaby to address the meeting. She urged the Cabinet to ensure staff were adequately trained on the new system and that the money set aside for this was used for training and not other items.

Cabinet agreed to the proposals, believing that the council would secure significant savings and an improved property system. The officers assured the Cabinet that the post-procurement review would check the adequacy of training given.

RESOLVED:

- (a) To approve the award of a contract for property-based database systems to Ocella Software Systems Limited; and
- (b) To authorise the head of HR, IT, and customer services to arrange for officers to finalise terms and conditions and enter into a contract with Ocella.

Ca.7 Corporate equality policy

The Cabinet considered report 12/11 of the head of corporate strategy that sought approval to a new corporate equalities policy, developed as a joint policy with South Oxfordshire District Council. The policy was developed in response to the Equality Act 2010. This required public services to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation; to advance equality of opportunity; and the need to foster good relations between people who shared a protected characteristic and those who did not share it. A protected characteristic under the Act referred to colour, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, disability, age, sex, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, religion, belief, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity. The Act contained a power enabling the government minister to impose specific duties on public bodies to support better performance of the general duties. These regulations were out for consultation and could be brought into force in July 2011.

The draft policy ensured equality considerations were included in all council functions. It covered:

- assessing the impact of service and employment design
- collecting monitoring data to understand communities

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- consultation and engagement
- advancing equality of opportunity in contracts where relevant
- equalities training
- commitment to the Equality Framework for Local Government
- human resources policies
- monitoring complaints

The chairman invited Councillor Jenny Hannaby to address the meeting. She welcomed the policy.

Cabinet welcomed the new policy and noted that an action plan would develop the equality objectives.

RESOLVED:

- (a) To approve the corporate equality policy as set out in the appendix to report 12/11:
and
- (b) To authorise the head of corporate strategy, in consultation with the relevant cabinet member, to make any further changes to the policy to reflect any changes to the duties currently being consulted on, following final government approval.

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

None

The meeting rose at 2.25 pm