

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Cabinet

held on Friday 4 October 2013 at 2.00pm

in the Council Chamber, The Abbey House, Abingdon, OX14 3JE



Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Matthew Barber (Chairman), Roger Cox (Vice-Chairman), Mike Murray, Reg Waite and Elaine Ware

Non-participating members: Councillors Jim Halliday and Richard Webber

Officers: Steve Bishop, David Buckle, Steven Corrigan, Steve Culliford, Robert Draper, Graham Hawkins, Matt Prosser, Margaret Reed and Anna Robinson

By invitation: Jo Bakewell (DTZ)

Number of members of the public: Nil

Ca.10 Apologies for absence

None

Ca.11 Minutes

RESOLVED: to adopt as a correct record the Cabinet minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2013 and agree that the chairman signs them.

Ca.12 Declarations of interest

None

Ca.13 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

None

Ca.14 Statements, petitions, and questions relating to matters affecting the Cabinet

Non-Cabinet Councillors Jim Halliday and Richard Webber had both requested to speak at the meeting on office accommodation and The Charter, Abingdon.

Ca.15 Virements

Cabinet considered one request for a virement and noted others approved under delegated authority.

RESOLVED: to approve the virement from the waste team cost centre to the community grants cost centre to increase the budget for festival grants from £5,000 to £10,000 in 2013/14.

Ca.16 Office accommodation: proposed lettings of The Abbey House, Abingdon

Cabinet noted that Councillors Richard Webber and Yvonne Constance (both present at the meeting) were also county councillors.

Cabinet considered the report of the head of economy, leisure, and property on a proposal to let part of The Abbey House offices in Abingdon and relocate significant numbers of staff to South Oxfordshire District Council's offices at Crowmarsh Gifford. The proposal included letting part of the ground floor of The Abbey House and the whole of the first and second floors to Oxfordshire County Council, including shared use of the reception area. Also, part of The Abbey House might be let to the Citizens Advice Bureau. The report sought approval in principle to these proposals, and sought delegated authority for the strategic director to finalise the agreements, and appoint a consultant to manage the project, plan space requirements, and specify and oversee works at The Abbey House.

The report set out the benefits and the costs of the proposal. Cabinet noted that the costs could change as negotiations progressed; these would need to be kept under control. Other options included retaining The Abbey House for staff accommodation as at present, and letting a smaller area of The Abbey House.

The chairman invited non-Cabinet Councillors Richard Webber and Jim Halliday to address the meeting. Councillor Webber referred to the resolution at the last Council meeting where councillors agreed that when sharing accommodation with others, this council should continue to be based at Abbey House, Abingdon. He believed this proposal went against that decision. He urged Cabinet to be aware of the implications of agreeing this deal and asked for careful consideration and handling. He believed that there was no longer the need to make these savings. This move would give the perception of the council abandoning Abingdon, moving staff to a much less accessible location, and leaving only a skeleton staff presence. He questioned whether Cabinet had properly analysed the costs of the other options, as this was not evident in the report. He urged Cabinet not to be driven by the county council's urgency.

Councillor Jim Halliday spoke as chairman of the Scrutiny Committee. He believed this decision was too important to determine without knowing the detail. There had been minimal interaction with other councillors on this. He questioned whether a councillor could be a member of the project group, acting as a critical friend, and why had there been no serious consideration of the other options. The public perception of this proposal would be that the council was leaving Abingdon and moving to Crowmarsh. This would make services less accessible, as there was insufficient public transport link from Abingdon to Crowmarsh. As a Vale council taxpayer, he did not want to pay for improvements to the Crowmarsh offices. He urged caution as this decision would be difficult to reverse.

Cabinet considered that the proposal presented an opportunity to work with Oxfordshire County Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, and the Citizens Advice Bureau to provide several public services in one building and improve customer service. It would allow the council to make better use of its office accommodation, whilst saving public money, and would generate greater economic activity in Abingdon. The refurbishments planned for Abbey House to accommodate the county council would also improve the council's asset. Staff located at Crowmarsh would still be accessible by telephone and by email and would be able to meet customers and councillors at Abbey House by appointment. Vale Council, Cabinet and committee meetings would still be held in the Vale.

Cabinet believed that the project team should work further on the detail and bring the final proposal to Cabinet for approval.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) approve the principle of a letting of part of the ground floor and the whole of the first and second floors of The Abbey House in Abingdon to Oxfordshire County Council, including shared use of the reception area, and request the strategic director in consultation with the Cabinet member for property to bring the final agreement back to Cabinet for approval;
- (b) approve the principle of a letting of part of the ground floor of The Abbey House to the Citizens Advice Bureau and request the strategic director in consultation with the cabinet member for property to bring the final agreement back to Cabinet for approval; and
- (c) authorise the strategic director, in consultation with the head of legal and democratic services, as an exception to the Vale Council's contract procedure rules to appoint a consultant to undertake project management, detailed space planning, and specifying/overseeing proposed works to The Abbey House.

Ca.17 Gambling policy

Cabinet considered the head of legal and democratic services' report regarding a review of the gambling policy. The council had to review its policy every three years in line with the latest guidance. The council had consulted the public on a revised policy, prepared jointly with South Oxfordshire District Council. Taking into account the consultation responses, the Licensing Acts Committee had reviewed the policy and recommended its adoption. Cabinet was asked to consider the revised policy, excluding the 'no casinos' element, and recommend its adoption to Council. Cabinet noted that the 'no casinos' policy element was a matter for the Council, not Cabinet, as set out in the Gambling Act 2005. Cabinet supported the revised draft policy.

RESOLVED: to recommend Council to:

- (a) adopt the proposed Joint Gambling Policy, as set out in appendix 2 to the report;
- (b) authorise the head of legal and democratic services to make minor editorial changes to the Joint Gambling Policy; and

- (c) authorise the head of legal and democratic services to publish the Joint Gambling Policy in accordance with the Gambling Act 2005 (Licensing Authority Policy Statement)(England and Wales) Regulations 2006.

Ca.18 Treasury management outturn 2012/13

Cabinet considered the head of finance's report on the council's treasury management activities during 2012/13. Despite a fall in market interest rates during 2012/13, the council's investments generated income of £553,000. This was £136,000 above the original budget estimate and was above the industry average for 2012/13. Cabinet welcomed this news.

RESOLVED: to recommend Council to:

- (a) approve the treasury management outturn report 2012/13; and
(b) approve the actual 2012/13 prudential indicators within the report.

Ca.19 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, as amended, to the Act when the following item is considered:

The Charter, Abingdon

(Category 3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information.)

Ca.20 The Charter, Abingdon

Cabinet considered a proposal for the council to enter into a new agreement to redevelop The Charter area in Abingdon town centre. Cabinet agreed to proceed with the scheme.