

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Cabinet

held on Friday 10 July 2020 at 10.30 am

This was a virtual, online meeting.

Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Emily Smith (Chair), Debby Hallett (Vice-Chair), Andrew Crawford, Neil Fawcett, Jenny Hannaby, Helen Pighills, Judy Roberts, Bethia Thomas and Catherine Webber

Officers: Shaun Berry, Steve Culliford, Andrew Down, Phil Ealey, Michael Flowers, Simon Hewings, Suzanne Malcolm, Adrianna Partridge, Margaret Reed, Mark Stone, Shona Ware and Michelle Wells

Ca.1 Apologies for absence

None

Ca.2 Minutes

RESOLVED: to adopt as a correct record the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 3 February 2020 and agree that the Chair signs them as such.

Ca.3 Declarations of interest

Councillor Jenny Hannaby declared a personal interest in the partnership grants agenda item (minute Ca.10 refers) as she was a member of the Wantage Independent Advice Centre.

Ca.4 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

None

Ca.5 Public participation

Cabinet received a written statement from Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizens Advice in support of its grant allocation.

Ca.6 Recommendations from other committees

Cabinet considered recommendations from other committees.

(1) **Climate Emergency Advisory Committee 1 June 2020**
Active travel and traffic restriction measures

Following the receipt of a public statement, the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee discussed the government announcement that it was making funds available to create and improve infrastructure for cycling. It was noted that Oxfordshire County Council was working on the promotion of active travel and considering traffic restriction measures. The committee had welcomed this move and asked its chair to write to the county council to show support of the active travel and traffic restriction measures being developed and support these to become a permanent measure. The committee had also asked Cabinet to recommend to Council that it writes to the county council in support of these measures also.

RESOLVED: to agree that Cabinet writes to Oxfordshire County Council to support the active travel principles.

(2) **Climate Emergency Advisory Committee 1 July 2020 and Scrutiny Committee 6 July 2020**
Corporate plan 2020 to 2024

The Climate Emergency Advisory Committee discussed the corporate plan on 1 July and made suggestions to the Cabinet member to clarifying the wording in the draft plan as follows:

- In the Vision statement, amend the second sentence to read: “We will do all we can to contribute to making that a reality in the Vale, **within the scientific (or ecological) constraints of our physical environment on planet earth.**”
- In all themes, consider emphasising sustainability
- In theme 1, providing the homes people need, amend paragraph 1.2 to read: “We will aim to provide a mix of tenures in each development **to build sustainable homes in balanced and sustainable communities.**”
- In theme 2, tackling the climate emergency, the committee supports this theme but suggests that paragraph 2.1 is amended to read: “A climate emergency programme, focussed on what the council has control over, **such as our own buildings, vehicles, leisure and arts centres, working towards our targets.**”
- In theme 4, building stable finances, paragraph 4.2, clarify the term ‘financially sensible’ to reflect the need to protect finances for the long-term benefit of residents
- In theme 6, working in an open and inclusive way, the committee supports the example project on a youth council and would like to see equalities mentioned also

The Scrutiny Committee had also welcomed the draft corporate plan at its meeting on 6 July, agreeing with its themes and programmes. The committee also supported the suggestions made by the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee. In addition, the Scrutiny Committee made the following suggestions:

- There should be meaningful and targeted key performance indicators
- In theme one, providing the homes people need, support the addition of 'sustainability' in this theme
- There should be a workable definition of 'genuinely affordable housing'

- Support for theme two, tackling the climate emergency, but questioned whether the 75 per cent reduction in council emissions was by 2025 was achievable and how did the council measure its emissions?
- Support for theme three, building healthy communities—no changes recommended
- In theme four, building stable finances, endorse the change made to the phrase 'financially sensible' and encourage the example project of adopting the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) code of practice
- Support for theme five, working in partnership—no changes recommended
- Support for theme six, working in an open and inclusive way—no changes recommended

The Cabinet member for corporate services thanked the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee and the Scrutiny Committee for their comments, which would be taken into account in building the final draft plan.

(3) Climate Emergency Advisory Committee 1 July 2020 Carbon emissions baseline

The Climate Emergency Advisory Committee had also discussed the draft report from consultants, Aether, into the council's carbon emissions baseline. The committee supported the conclusions and the scope of Aether's draft report but considered that the council should aim to reduce all emissions, whether they were measurable or not. However, the committee raised questions over which year the baseline figures were being taken from. The committee accepted the baseline figure provided by Aether in its report and recommended their adoption to Cabinet.

Cabinet supported this recommendation.

RESOLVED: to accept the consultant's report from Aether on the council's carbon emissions baseline but the council should aim to reduce all emissions, whether they are measurable or not.

Ca.7 Corporate Plan 2020 to 2024

Cabinet considered the report of the acting deputy chief executive – transformation and operations. This set out the draft corporate plan for 2020 to 2024 and sought Cabinet's approval to allow consultation to take place during the summer.

Cabinet welcomed the feedback received from the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee and the Scrutiny Committee. The Cabinet member reported that these would be taken into account in the final draft.

Cabinet also agreed to commence wider engagement on the corporate plan with the release of an online survey and promotional video on 16 July 2020. The engagement would run until 13 August 2020. The consultation results would be reviewed ahead of Cabinet discussion on 2 October and recommendations to Council to approve the corporate plan on 7 October 2020.

RESOLVED to approve the draft corporate plan 2020 to 2024 for consultation, subject to changes made by the Cabinet member for corporate services.

Ca.8 Homelessness and rough sleeping strategy

Cabinet considered the head of housing and environment's report on the homelessness and rough sleeping strategy. The strategy was reviewed periodically. This year, the strategy included reducing rough sleeping, a government requirement.

The Cabinet member for housing reported on the work undertaken to develop the document. The strategy had three aims, to:

- prevent homelessness whenever possible
- end incidents of homelessness at the earliest opportunity
- end the need for rough sleeping

To achieve these aims the strategy had five objectives, to:

- improve county-wide partnership working to prevent and reduce homelessness
- minimise the use of temporary accommodation
- further develop the housing needs service to prevent and relieve homelessness at the earliest opportunity
- improve access to emergency accommodation and increase support for rough sleepers
- improve access to sustainable accommodation for households who were homeless or at risk of homelessness

The Cabinet member pointed to the consultation results; 83 per cent of respondents supported the strategy. Scrutiny Committee had also considered the draft strategy and given its support.

Cabinet welcomed the strategy, thanked officers for their work. The council already had a strong track record in preventing and reducing homelessness. The strategy would build upon this success by continuing to drive down homelessness and rough sleeping in the district. Many elements of the new strategy were already in place and had stood up well during the council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The latest homelessness and rough sleeping figures for the district were low. The benefits of working with other councils and agencies across Oxfordshire during the past few months had proven that strategy was effective.

RESOLVED: to adopt the homelessness and rough sleeping strategy, as set out in the head of housing and environment's report to Cabinet on 10 July 2020.

Ca.9 Housing assistance grants and loans policy

Cabinet considered the head of housing and environment's report on the draft housing assistance grants and loans policy.

The Cabinet member for housing reported that the aim of the policy was to:

- provide a fair and transparent policy for the administration and management of housing related grants and loans
- provide a clear framework for the delivery of grants and loans
- ensure the council met its statutory duties and exercised its powers in accordance with relevant legislation and regulations
- increase the range of grants and loans available to better reflect the needs of residents

- increase the delivery of grants and loans subject to available funding
- accelerate the delivery of grants

The policy included new measures designed to deliver its aims by:

- introducing new grants and services to benefit residents, including a grant for persons living with dementia
- increasing the maximum disabled facilities grant entitlement from £30,000 to £50,000 to help fund more expensive adaptations
- removing the means test for disabled facilities grant adaptations under £8,000 that would accelerate delivery and reduce waiting times for residents
- using flexible funding arrangements to improve service delivery, such as the secondment of an occupational therapist to accelerate and increase the delivery of grants and reduce waiting times for residents
- in certain circumstances, recovering part of the cost of a disabled facilities grant from owner-occupiers to re-invest the funding in order to maximise the number of grants delivered

Cabinet supported the policy as it would provide a transparent framework for increasing the range of grants available and introduce new measures to enhance service delivery. More importantly it would improve the lives of people with housing support needs by enabling them to live safely and comfortably in their own homes. It also offered good value for money and could help bring empty homes back into use.

Cabinet noted that officers were working on a communications strategy tailored to those in need of the service. Cabinet welcomed this and suggested that publicity material was provided to Citizens Advice and community support groups.

Cabinet thanked the officers for their work.

RESOLVED to:

- adopt the housing assistance grants and loans policy, as set out in the head of housing and environment's report to Cabinet on 10 July 2020; and
- authorise the head of housing and environment to make minor amendments to the policy.

Ca.10 Partnership grants

Councillor Jenny Hannaby declared a personal interest in this item as she was a member of the Wantage Independent Advice Centre and took no part in the debate or decision.

Cabinet considered the head of corporate services' report regarding the partnership grants awarded by the council.

The Cabinet member for community services reported that the council had awarded partnership grants to organisations in the district towards their running costs for many years. As there was no formal policy in place, the council had reduced these grants to reflect the council's own ongoing commitments. In 2019/20, the council had funded four organisations:

- Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizens Advice
- Wantage Independent Advice Centre

- The Albert Memorial Abingdon Trust
- Community First Oxfordshire

The Cabinet member reported that the options open to Cabinet were to extend the partnership grant scheme by one to two years to the current recipients or to close the partnership grants scheme as originally planned, while a review of the council's grant service took place.

The Cabinet member proposed a one-year extension to the partnership grants for Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizens Advice and Wantage Independent Advice Centre, and a two-year extension of the partnership grant for Community First Oxfordshire. By offering these three organisations grant term extensions, communities would benefit from the support and advice they offered as the long-term implications of the Covid-19 pandemic became clear. The cost of these extensions was built into the council's medium-term financial plan.

However, the Cabinet member did not recommend a grant extension to the Albert Memorial Abingdon Trust as 2020/21 was the last year of the council's charitable trust agreement and commitment to contributing to the memorial's maintenance fund.

Cabinet supported the proposal as this would continue support the three organisations. It was also considered important to build upon the work undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic and link up charities with community groups during the recovery.

RESOLVED to:

- (a) approve a one-year extension to the partnership grants for Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizen's Advice Bureau and Wantage Independent Advice Centre at the same level of funding as this year (2020/21) towards the provision of services across the district in 2021/22; and
- (b) approve a two-year extension of the partnership grant for Community First Oxfordshire at the same level of funding as last year (2019/20) towards the provision of services across the district in 2020/21 and 2021/22.

The meeting closed at 12 noon.