

# Minutes

## of a meeting of the

# Council



held on Wednesday, 10 February 2021 at 7.00 pm  
as a virtual meeting

### Open to the public, including the press

#### Present:

Members: Councillors Margaret Crick (Chair), Jerry Avery, Matthew Barber, Paul Barrow, Ron Batstone, Eric Batts, Samantha Bowering, Nathan Boyd, Cheryl Briggs, Andy Cooke, Andrew Crawford, Margaret Crick, Eric de la Harpe, Amos Duveen, Neil Fawcett, Andy Foulsham, Hayleigh Gascoigne, David Grant, Jenny Hannaby, Simon Howell, Alison Jenner, Bob Johnston, Diana Lugova, Robert Maddison, Sarah Medley, Patrick O'Leary, Helen Pighills, Mike Pighills, Judy Roberts, Val Shaw, Janet Shelley, Emily Smith, Bethia Thomas, Max Thompson, Elaine Ware, Catherine Webber and Richard Webber

Officers: Steven Corrigan, Steve Culliford, Simon Hewings, Margaret Reed and Mark Stone

#### **Co.135 Apologies for absence**

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Hallett.

#### **Co.136 Minutes**

**RESOLVED:** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2020 as a correct record and agree that the chair sign them as such.

#### **Co.137 Declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest**

None.

#### **Co.138 Urgent business and chair's announcements**

The chair provided general housekeeping information.

She advised she had agreed to take one item of urgent business in respect of a section 106 request from Shrivenham Sports Pavilion.

#### **Co.139 Public participation**

A. Richard Bartle, Chair of Shrivenham Parish Council, addressed Council on the Tuckmill Meadow SSSI. He expressed concern regarding the condition of the site

which had been handed back to Vale of White Horse District Council in late 2019 from the Berkshire Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust with a number of recommendations to preserve and enhance the area which, to date, had not been actioned. He stated that the council had a statutory duty to preserve the site and urged the council to halt the decline and return it to its previous condition. He referred to local farmers who would be willing to graze their cattle on the site and volunteers who would be willing to assist with the necessary clearance work.

- B. Jane Hanna, Oxfordshire County Councillor for the Grove & Wantage division, addressed Council on Motion C of agenda item 18. She welcomed and was encouraged by the motion to seek ways support the funding of leisure facilities in Grove and Wantage and the surrounding areas to meet the needs of a growing population. Such facilities were needed and would address the well-being of residents.
- C. Emma Brookes addressed council on the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill. She stressed the importance of the Bill to address climate change and in support of the main elements of it to oblige the UK government to reduce greenhouse emissions at a rate that would limit global heating to 1.5 degrees C, oblige the government to protect and restore the ecosystems in the UK and to involve the citizens of the UK in a citizens' assembly to inform decisions on how to achieve those aims. She welcomed the submission of the motion on the Council agenda and hoped it would be adopted.
- D. Alderman Joyce Hutchinson asked the following question to Councillor Helen Pighills, Cabinet member for healthy communities
- 1) When is Vale of White Horse District Council's new Leisure Strategy to be published?
  - 2) Can you confirm that the S106 and the CIL money reserved for leisure facilities for Wantage and Grove will be spent within walking distance of Wantage and Grove, so that the local community will obtain full use of all facilities?

In response Councillor Helen Pighills stated that the council's Corporate Plan committed the council to work with partners on the production of a leisure strategy. It was hoped this would be available by the end of March but was dependent on the availability of staff resources which had been assisting with the council's response to the Covid pandemic.

She confirmed that S106 funds previously allocated to the Wessex Leisure Centre project were being reviewed to determine how they could be re-allocated to alternative projects in the areas which generated the funds and what projects could be funded. She confirmed that there was no CIL money available for leisure projects in Grove and Wantage.

Whilst the council could not commit to ensure the leisure facilities would be in walking distance, the council was committed to ensure the funds would be used in the areas that generated them and to reduce reliance on cars to access facilities.

The Chair thanked the members of the public for their contribution to the meeting.

## **Co.140     Petitions**

No petitions were submitted to Council.  
Vale of White Horse District Council – Council minutes

## **Co.141 Urgent item - S106 Request - Shrivenham Sports Pavilion**

Council considered Cabinet's recommendation, made at its meeting on 5 February 2021, in respect of a request by Shrivenham Parish Council for section 106 funding towards a new sports pavilion in the village.

Cabinet agreed to support the project and recommend that Council create the budget to fund it.

### **RESOLVED:** to

1. approve funding to Shrivenham Parish Council on behalf of Viscountess Barrington Memorial Hall and Recreation Ground Trust in its capacity as the sole trustee of the Trust towards a new sports pavilion to be erected by the Trust on the Recreation Ground owned by the Trust and to create a budget of £378,537.80;
2. authorise the interim head of development and regeneration in consultation with the head of legal and democratic to:
  - agree a funding agreement with Shrivenham Parish Council in its capacity as the sole trustee of the Trust to govern the terms of use of the S106 funding; the instalments in which the funding is paid; the timing of instalments; the conditions subject to which instalments are paid and to otherwise protect the interests of Vale of White Horse District Council as the provider of the funding;
  - include Shrivenham Parish Council as a party to the funding agreement in its own right where necessary or desirable to facilitate the carrying out and completion of the new sports pavilion project by the Trust;
  - approve the payment to Shrivenham Parish Council of £361,423.96 towards the new sports pavilion project subject to and in accordance with the funding agreement; and
  - approve the payment to Shrivenham Parish Council of the portion of £17,113.84 recovered (minus legal costs) on completion of a Deed of Variation to repurpose a Changing Rooms Contribution received under Agreement 16V52 subject to and in accordance with the terms of the funding agreement;
3. approve the payment of instalments three and four of the Sports and Leisure Contribution (Shrivenham recreation ground pavilion) as defined in clause 1.1.33 of S106 Agreement 16V30 and the Cricket Facilities Contribution, as defined in clause one of the Second Schedule of S106 Agreement 17V14 to the Shrivenham Sports Pavilion project:
  - to Shrivenham Parish Council when received by the council subject to and in accordance with the funding agreement to whichever value is the lower of the amount received by the council and the value of forward funding that Shrivenham Parish Council has not recovered by any other means;
  - to Shrivenham Parish Council subject to and in accordance with the funding agreement, on creation of a budget to the value stated above, with no requirement for a further S106 Application, report and decision.

## **Co.142 Treasury management and investment strategy 2021/22**

Council considered Cabinet's recommendation, made at its meeting on 5 February 2021, on the council's treasury management and investment strategy for 2021/22.

The Joint Audit and Governance Committee had considered the report at its meeting on 26 January 2021 and had not recommended any adjustments to the strategy and resolved to recommend Cabinet to approve the treasury management strategy, the prudential indicators and limits for 2021/22 to 2023/24 and the annual investment strategy 2021/22 as set out in the report. Cabinet agreed to recommend Council approve the strategy.

In introducing Cabinet's recommendations, the Cabinet member for finance reported that there were no significant changes to the strategy. However, the report did reflect a significant fall in projections of investment income due to low interest rates that are likely to prevail for some time. As capacity permits, the council would be looking to progress a more proactive treasury management strategy during the coming year to address the budget shortfall.

### **RESOLVED to:**

1. approve the treasury management strategy 2021/22, as set out in appendix A to the interim head of finance's report to Cabinet on 5 February 2021;
2. approve the prudential indicators and limits for 2021/22 to 2023/24, as set out in appendix A to that report; and
3. approve the annual investment strategy 2021/22 set out in appendix A, and the lending criteria detailed in table 6 to that report.

## **Co.143 Capital strategy 2021/22 to 2030/31**

Council considered Cabinet's recommendation, made at its meeting on 5 February 2021, on the council's capital strategy for 2021/22 to 2030/31.

The Cabinet member for finance highlighted that this year's strategy included within it a strategy for the flexible use of capital receipts to fund transformation activity as agreed in last year's budget. Depending on progress in developing this, the capital strategy may require review during the year.

### **RESOLVED to:**

1. approve the capital strategy 2021/22 to 2030/31, contained in appendix one of the interim head of finance's report to Cabinet on 5 February 2021; and
2. agree the strategy for flexible use of capital receipts, contained as appendix 1 of the capital strategy.

## **Co.144 Revenue budget 2021/22 and capital programme to 2025/26**

The chair referred to regulations that require councils to record the names of those councillors voting in favour, against or abstaining from any vote on the budget,

including amendments, and the council tax. In accordance with the regulations she would call for a named vote on each of these matters at this meeting.

The chair reminded councillors that they were not entitled to vote on any issue affecting the level or administration of the council tax or other decisions which might affect the making of any such calculation such as the budget, if they were over two months in arrears with their council tax payments. Where such circumstances applied, councillors were under a statutory obligation to disclose the restriction placed on them and refrain from voting at the relevant meeting. No councillor made any such declaration.

Council noted the report of the chief finance officer on the robustness of the budget estimates and the adequacy of the reserves.

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations, made at its meeting held on 5 February 2021 on the revenue budget for 2021/22 and the capital programme to 2025/26. Scrutiny Committee had considered the report of the interim head of finance on 8 February and had made no recommendations.

Councillor Crawford, Cabinet member for finance, presented Cabinet's proposals for the revenue budget and capital programme. He moved and Councillor Emily Smith, Leader of the council, seconded a motion to approve Cabinet's recommendations as follows:

1. to set the revenue budget for 2021/22, as set out in appendix A.1 to the interim head of finance's report to Cabinet on 5 February 2021;
2. to approve the capital programme for 2021/22 to 2025/26 as set out in appendix D.1 to that report, together with the capital programme changes as set out in appendix D.2 to that report;
3. to set the council's prudential limits, as listed in appendix E to that report;
4. to approve the medium-term financial plan to 2025/26, as set out in appendix F to that report.

In introducing the budget, the Cabinet member highlighted that the budget would result in an increase in council tax of £5 for a Band D property for 2021/22 - the maximum increase allowed under the draft referendum rules outlined in the government's provisional settlement.

Coronavirus had played a central part in the budget and the council was likely to continue to see additional costs and income losses in the new financial year. The figures included in the budget for these were estimates only, as no-one could predict the future course of the pandemic. The government had provided support for some, but not all, council losses. The council was likely to achieve lower investment income for some time to come.

The prioritisation of staff resources had meant that, in this budget, Cabinet had not been able to bring forward additional budget proposals to support priorities in the new corporate plan. However, officers have identified where existing budgets could fund corporate plan delivery activity. Deliverability of those activities would be dependent on council resources being available to progress them.

The budget report also included the medium-term financial plan for the next five years. This continued to show an increasing draw on reserves over the period, based on current estimates of future local government funding. This increasing use of reserves was unsustainable, and officers and Cabinet would continue to review

budgets in the context of the corporate plan priorities to identify ways to improve the council's financial position.

The majority of councillors supported the budget recognising the challenging environment caused by the pandemic. The view was expressed that the council could not continue to rely on reserves to support a budget deficit. Those who spoke against the budget expressed the view that the projected budget deficit over the next five years was not sustainable and expressed concern regarding the potential measures, sale of council assets, to address this.

In accordance with regulations requiring councils to record the names of those councillors voting in favour, against or abstaining from any vote on the budget the chair called for a recorded vote which was carried with the voting being as follows:

<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Abstentions</b>
<b>Councillors</b>	<b>Councillors</b>	<b>Councillors</b>
Jerry Avery	Matthew Barber	
Paul Barrow	Eric Batts	
Ron Batstone	Nathan Boyd	
Samantha Bowring	Simon Howell	
Cheryl Briggs	Janet Shelley	
Andy Cooke	Elaine Ware	
Andrew Crawford		
Margaret Crick		
Eric de la Harpe		
Neil Fawcett		
Andy Foulsham		
Hayleigh Gascoigne		
David Grant		
Jenny Hannaby		
Alison Jenner		
Bob Johnston		
Diana Lugova		
Robert Maddison		
Sarah Medley		
Patrick O'Leary		
Helen Pighills		
Mike Pighills		
Judy Roberts		
Val Shaw		
Emily Smith		
Bethia Thomas		
Max Thompson		
Catherine Webber		
Richard Webber		
<b>Total: 29</b>	<b>Total: 6</b>	<b>Total: 0</b>

**RESOLVED:** to

1. set the revenue budget for 2021/22, as set out in appendix A.1 to the interim head of finance's report to Cabinet on 5 February 2021;

2. approve the capital programme for 2021/22 to 2025/26 as set out in appendix D.1 to that report, together with the capital programme changes as set out in appendix D.2 to that report;
3. set the council's prudential limits, as listed in appendix E to that report;
4. approve the medium-term financial plan to 2025/26, as set out in appendix F to that report.

## **Co.145 Council tax 2021/22**

Council considered the report of the interim head of finance on the setting of the Council Tax for the 2021/22 financial year.

In accordance with regulations requiring councils to record the names of those councillors voting in favour, against or abstaining from any vote on the council tax the chair called for a recorded vote which was carried with the voting being as follows:

<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Abstentions</b>
<b>Councillors</b>	<b>Councillors</b>	<b>Councillors</b>
Jerry Avery		
Matthew Barber		
Paul Barrow		
Ron Batstone		
Eric Batts		
Samantha Bowring		
Nathan Boyd		
Cheryl Briggs		
Andy Cooke		
Andrew Crawford		
Margaret Crick		
Eric de la Harpe		
Amos Duveen		
Neil Fawcett		
Andy Foulsham		
Hayleigh Gascoigne		
David Grant		
Jenny Hannaby		
Simon Howell		
Alison Jenner		
Bob Johnston		
Diana Lugova		
Robert Maddison		
Sarah Medley		
Patrick O'Leary		
Helen Pighills		
Mike Pighills		
Judy Roberts		
Val Shaw		
Janet Shelley		
Emily Smith		
Bethia Thomas		
Max Thompson		

<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Abstentions</b>
Elaine Ware		
Catherine Webber		
Richard Webber		
<b>Total: 36</b>	<b>Total: 0</b>	<b>Total: 0</b>

## **RESOLVED:**

1. To note that at its meeting on 9 December 2020 the council calculated the council tax base 2021/22:
  - (a) for the whole council area as 53,919.1 [Item T in the formula in Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended (the “Act”)]; and
  - (b) for dwellings in those parts of its area to which a parish precept relates as in column 1 of appendix 1.
2. That the council tax requirement for the council’s own purposes for 2021/22 (excluding parish precepts) is £7,639,797
3. That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2021/22 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
  - (a) £79,262,477 being the aggregate of the amounts which the council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act taking into account all precepts issued to it by parish councils.
  - (b) £67,166,194 being the aggregate of the amounts which the council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) of the Act.
  - (c) £12,096,283 being the amount by which the aggregate at (3)(a) above exceeds the aggregate at (3)(b) above, calculated by the council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act as its council tax requirement for the year. (Item R in the formula in Section 31B) of the Act).
  - (d) £224.34 being the amount at (3)(c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (1(a) above), calculated by the council, in accordance with Section 31(B) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year (including parish precepts).
  - (e) £4,456,486 being the aggregate amount of all special items referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act, as set out in column 2 of appendix 1.
  - (f) £141.69 being the amount at (3)(d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at (3)(e) above by Item T (1(a) above), calculated by the council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no parish precept relates.
4. To note that for the year 2021/22 Oxfordshire County Council has stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Band A	£1,048.74
Band B	£1,223.53
Band C	£1,398.32
Band D	£1,573.11
Band E	£1,922.69
Band F	£2,272.27
Band G	£2,621.85
Band H	£3,146.22

5. To note that for the year 2021/22 the Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley has stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Band A	£154.19
Band B	£179.88
Band C	£205.58
Band D	£231.28
Band E	£282.68
Band F	£334.07
Band G	£385.47
Band H	£462.56

6. That the council, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the aggregate amounts shown in appendix 3 as the amounts of council tax for 2021/22 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings shown in appendix 3.
7. To determine that the council's basic amount of council tax for 2021/22 is not excessive in accordance with principles approved under Section 52ZB Local Government Finance Act 1992.

## **Co.146      Review of Joint Statement of Licensing Policy**

Council considered the recommendations of the Licensing Acts Committee, made at its meeting on 28 January 2021, on a proposed a statement of licensing policy, jointly developed with South Oxfordshire District Council.

Councillor Jenner, Chair of the Licensing Acts Committee introduced the recommendations. She explained that under the Licensing Act 2003 there is statutory duty to review the statement of licensing policy every five years, and a draft policy is the response to this review. The amendments to the current policy set out in Appendix B, show that no significant changes have been proposed. The amendments align the policy with current guidance and clarify requirements for applicants and licence holders. In addition, the format of the policy has been amended to separate out different types of applications to assist applicants when reading the policy. No suggested amendments were proposed that would place additional burdens or restrictions on licence holders or applicants.

A public consultation took place from 23 November to 17 December 2020 and included consultation with the responsible authorities under the Licensing Act as well as our neighbouring authorities, district councillors, local town and parish councils and the relevant trade organisations. Whilst only a small number of responses were received, these have been incorporated into the draft policy at appendix C.

**RESOLVED:** to

1. authorise the Head of Housing and Environment to make minor editorial changes to the Joint Statement of Licensing Policy, and
2. adopt the proposed Joint Statement of Licensing Policy with effect from 12 February 2021.

**Co.147 Pay policy statement 2021/22**

Council considered the report of the interim head of corporate services on the adoption of a pay policy statement to meet the requirements of the Localism Act.

**RESOLVED:** to approve the pay policy statement for 2021/22 attached to the report of the interim head of corporate services to Council on 10 February 2021.

**Co.148 Councillors' allowances scheme**

Council considered the report of the head of legal and democratic and the recommendations of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel on a revised councillors' allowances scheme to run from 1 April 2021.

Councillor Smith moved and Councillor Thompson seconded the following motion:

That Council:

1. thanks the Independent Remuneration Panel for its work and its report;
2. retains for the financial year 2021/22 the existing councillors' allowances scheme agreed by Council at its meeting on 17 May 2017 subject to
  - a. the continuation of an increase in basic and special responsibility allowances from 1 April 2021 at the same rate as that applied to staff salaries;
  - b. the inclusion of a special responsibility allowance for the Chair of the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee at the same rate as the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee backdated to 1 April 2020;
3. defers consideration of the independent remuneration panel's other recommendations until later in 2021 but ahead of the budget setting process for 2022/23.

Councillor Howell moved and Councillor Boyd seconded the following amendment – deleted words shown by strikethrough and additional words shown in bold.

That Council:

1. thanks the Independent Remuneration Panel for its work and its report;
2. retains for the financial year 2021/22 the existing councillors' allowances scheme agreed by Council at its meeting on 17 May 2017 subject to
  - a. the continuation of an increase in basic and special responsibility allowances from 1 April 2021 at the same rate as that applied to staff salaries;
  - b. ~~the inclusion of a special responsibility allowance for the Chair of the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee at the same rate as the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee backdated to 1 April 2020;~~

3. defers consideration of the independent remuneration panel's other recommendations until later in 2021 but ahead of the budget setting process for 2022/23.

Those who supported the amendment expressed the view that a back dated allowance for the Chair of the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee (CEAC) was inappropriate for the level of responsibility and the number of committee meetings held. However, other councillors expressed the view that the Chair of CEAC had undertaken a responsible role during the past year which should be recognised.

On being put to the vote the amendment was declared lost.

The majority of councillors supported the continuation of the current scheme of allowances and deferral of consideration of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel's report and recommendations until later in the year and ahead of the budget setting process for 2022/23.

On being put to the vote the original motion was declared carried.

**RESOLVED:** to

1. thank the Independent Remuneration Panel for its work and its report;
2. retain for the financial year 2021/22 the existing councillors' allowances scheme agreed by Council at its meeting on 17 May 2017 subject to
  - a. the continuation of an increase in basic and special responsibility allowances from 1 April 2021 at the same rate as that applied to staff salaries;
  - b. the inclusion of a special responsibility allowance for the Chair of the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee at the same rate as the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee backdated to 1 April 2020;
3. defers consideration of the independent remuneration panel's other recommendations until later in 2021 but ahead of the budget setting process for 2022/23.

### **Co.149 Progress on approved council motions**

Council received and noted a progress report on motions approved by Council since May 2019.

### **Co.150 Update on Oxfordshire Growth Board**

Council received a written update report on the Oxfordshire Growth Board from Councillor Neil Fawcett, Cabinet member for strategic partnerships and place.

In response to a question regarding what the Oxfordshire Growth Board could do to action the delivery of low carbon affordable homes in Oxfordshire, Councillor Fawcett responded that the webinar, held by the Growth Board, was part of a process to achieve some developments being delivered on a zero carbon basis. It provided an opportunity for the Oxfordshire councils collectively to meet with developers to see how zero carbon houses could be progressed and an opportunity to provide those

companies who attended with the confidence that there is a market for such houses.

## **Co.151 Report of the leader of the council**

Councillor Emily Smith, Leader of the council, provided an update on a number of matters. The text of her address is available on the council's [website](#).

Council noted the details of an urgent decision taken by Councillor Bethia Thomas, Cabinet member for community engagement, to approve Vale of White Horse District Council's Additional Restrictions Grant Scheme – Round 2.

## **Co.152 Questions on notice**

### **1. Question from Councillor Eric Batts to Councillor Catherine Webber, Cabinet member for Climate Emergency and Environment.**

Whilst I am sure the cabinet member for Climate Emergency and the Environment will agree with me that the suspension of the garden collection service beyond the usual Christmas period due to staff sickness has been very unfortunate, we wish all the Biffa staff a speedy recovery. However, this a significant inconvenience to the residents of the Vale who avail themselves and may I add, pay for this service. Could the Cabinet member please advise how many households pay for this service and are impacted by the suspension, and what the income from this service has been for the first three quarters of the current financial year?

#### **ANSWER**

25,050 Vale households are signed up for the garden waste service and the income for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2020 equated to £1,153,406.

The decision to delay the restart of the garden waste collection service after the usual Christmas break was taken as a result of some staff sickness due to Covid-19 and others having to self-isolate. This allows the remaining staff to work on the core household waste services (food, recycling and rubbish).

Officers are working closely with Biffa and review the staffing levels weekly, last week there were 29 staff self-isolating and therefore they were not able to restart the service.

Households who choose to pay for the garden waste services are entitled to 20 collections a year. We are normally able to offer more collections than this with our extra-large garden waste collections in the Spring and Autumn, and don't envisage this year being any different, so nobody should be out of pocket.

I realise that this may cause inconvenience and we are genuinely sorry for this. However, the safety of our crews and residents must always be our number one priority.

In addition to her written response, Councillor Catherine Webber stated that the garden collection service will resume on 15 February 2021.

## Supplementary question and answer

In response to a supplementary question, Councillor Catherine Webber responded that Christmas Trees and outstanding green waste will be collected in the next cycle commencing 15 February. She confirmed that households purchased 20 collections per year but received in excess of this number.

### 2. Question from Councillor Nathan Boyd to Councillor Emily Smith, Leader of the council

We note with interest the flurry of letter writing to government and various local bodies to try and influence policies and represent our residents. With the push for transparency and the Corporate Plan focus on this matter, could the Leader please check and confirm by listing out these letters over the last three months to ensure that we have been made aware of all letters of influence and requests that have been sent by this administration either as Leader, Deputy Leader or by our Chief Executive on behalf of the Council that we should be aware of, and any responses received?

### ANSWER

We have created a [page](https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/about-the-council/official-correspondence/) on the council's website for capturing official letters sent on behalf of the council and any subsequent responses received. This will be maintained on a rolling 12 month basis. The full url is <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/about-the-council/official-correspondence/>

In the last three months, we have sent and received the correspondence below – the highlighted ones were either published in a councillor update or as a news item on our website, which councillors should have received a notification of.

2 February thank you letter from Matt Hancock and Robert Jenrick

1 February letter to DfT re: Local EV charging infrastructure from Mark Stone

29 January letter from Robert Jenrick about support for councils covid response to our letter on 3 November

27 January letter from Baroness Vere of Norbiton re Taxi and PHV licensing

20 January letter to Thames Water about sewerage overflows

22 January letter to Greencore construction re green business park letter 11/1

19 January letter from Housing minister re Local Plans

15 January letter to government from council in response to their Covid-19 consultation

11 January letter to Robert Jenrick re May elections

11 January letter from Greencore construction re green business park

7 January letter from Baroness Vere of Norbiton re Taxi and PHV licensing

4 Jan letter to Baroness Vere of Norbiton re Taxi and PHV licensing

31 December letter from Gavin Williamson to Cllr Emily Smith and Mark Stone re schools

30 December letter from Kelly Tolhurst MHCLG re rough sleeping

18 December letter from Robert Jenrick re LG finance settlement and covid-19 allocations

17 December Letter from Christopher Pincher re New Homes Bonus

16 December handwritten letter from Robert Jenrick thanking LAs

15 December letter from Emily Smith to MHCLG about self and custom building

11 December letter from Baroness Vere of Norbiton regarding taxi licensing

8 December letter from Treasury in response to our letter on 5 Nov

7 December letter from Kelly Tolhurst MHCLG re caravan park closures this winter

2 December letter from MHCLG re extended retail opening hours

2 December letter from Councillor Emily Smith to OCCG re North Abingdon development

27 November letter from Robert Jenrick re local government spending review

20 November letter from Robert Jenrick re new enforcement powers

18 November letter from North Kesteven DC on 18 Nov re environment strategy

15 November letter from Friends of Abingdon in response to letter 29.10.2020

13 November letter from Thames Water with an update to council leaders

11 November letter from Unite regarding professional drivers concerns

5 November letter to Rishi Sunak about providing support for businesses

5 November letter from Kelly Tolhurst re rough sleeping

3 November joint letter to Robert Jenrick about support for financial help re covid support

3 November letter to Robert Jenrick from council as part of consultation response to object to proposed reforms to current planning system

2 November letter to Cllr Emily Smith from Layla Moran MP re in support of our covid response

November (no date given) open letter to Vale councillors about Old Abbey House

### **Supplementary question and answer**

In response to a supplementary question, Councillor Smith confirmed that she agreed that it would be important and necessary for all political parties and candidates to adhere to the Covid guidance in place at the time for the elections in May.

### **3. Question from Councillor Matthew Barber to Councillor Emily Smith, Leader of the council**

Given the recent press coverage of the proposed merger of the Vale of White Horse with South Oxfordshire district councils, can the Leader confirm whether she supports such a move and if so how she considers such a merger would improve the financial position of the councils in Southern Oxfordshire?"

#### **ANSWER**

I am not aware of the press coverage Councillor Barber refers to, so cannot comment on the specific reports. Merging the councils has been suggested by officers as a possible way to reduce duplication of officer tasks to improve delivery to residents even further. I am open to exploring any ideas that will improve this council's financial situation and officer capacity. However, before supporting or opposing any merger I, and all councillors, would need more information about the cost savings, service improvements and other implications for this Council and Vale residents. Previously, officials from the MHCLG have indicated that any request to seek a merger with another district or wider structural change would not be supported until the Recovery and Devolution white paper is published. Without confirmation of Government support, this issue is not a priority for the administration at this time. Given the uncertainty regarding the timing of the white paper, our chief executive has made enquires of MHCLG officials as to what their current views would be on a potential merger of Vale with another district council but is yet to receive a reply.

In addition to her written response, Councillor Smith advised that the chief executive had received a verbal update from civil servants on the issue. The Government's position is that it is happy to receive merger proposals where they are locally led with wide stakeholder involvement. However, she reiterated that it was not currently a priority for the administration.

#### **Supplementary question and answer**

Councillor Barber asked whether the leader of council agreed that the only significant benefit of a merger would be to take advantage of a legal loophole which would allow a new authority to set a higher council tax without the need for a referendum. He asked whether she would rule out a merger in such circumstances.

Councillor Smith responded that she would not rule out anything and would need to assess the pros and cons of a merger at the appropriate time. Such a decision would be a matter for Council and was not currently a priority.

### **4. Question from Councillor Andy Foulsham, to Councillor Helen Pighills, Cabinet member for Healthy Communities**

Following the governments' mishandling of Free School Meals for children over Christmas, and then the national coverage of poor-quality Free Schools Meals being provided during lockdown, our communities, town and parish councils have responded generously. But what is being done by this council to ensure children and their families in the Vale of White Horse have enough food as the Covid pandemic continues?

## **ANSWER**

The council continues its own work to ensure that all residents and businesses are supported through the pandemic. Our community hub, working closely with Oxfordshire County Council and the other district councils, takes a system wide approach to ensure that all residents, particularly households with children, are fed and warm over this winter period by making the best use of government funds available.

The assistance made available by the council at present is as follows:

- A. The Winter Support Grant which launched in early January assists families to buy food and stay warm. Funds are being distributed through Citizens Advice and Wantage Independent Advice Centre who are offering a package of advice and support alongside the provision of supermarket vouchers, top up fuel vouchers or direct payment of fuel bills up to the value of £350 for families. Up to £73,430 is available between now and the end of March. We expect funds to be fully allocated and continue to encourage families to get in touch with our advice centres as soon as possible.
- B. As part of a system wide approach, the county council allocated a significant portion of the winter support grant to ensure that free school meals provision continues over the school holidays. We pushed for the county to ensure that this would be administered by the schools, who know the families best and that vouchers rather than food parcels would be distributed. Any child eligible for free school meals is entitled to a £15 voucher per week of the Christmas break, February half term and the Easter holidays. This is being administered by the county council through our schools and we remain in close contact with our schools.
- C. We continue to work closely with our community groups, food banks and larders to understand the overall picture of food poverty across our district and to support their work directly.
- D. Our community connectors and logistics team continue to be available from 8.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday to support any resident who is struggling due to the pandemic. They can assist by listening and then connecting the resident with the best form of help available, whether that's a food bank, advice agency or local support group. In circumstances where no other help is available, our community hub can arrange for the delivery of an emergency food parcel.

### **5. Question from Councillor David Grant to Councillor Judy Roberts, Cabinet member for Development and Infrastructure**

As a councillor in the Western Vale, I am aware of the consequences of the promises made by the previous administration to allocate S106 monies to the now defunct Wessex Leisure Centre Scheme. Funds that were generated from major developments in Faringdon, Great Coxwell, and other areas close by, were directed to help construct a facility in Grove that our residents would never realistically use.

Now we know there was never enough money to build the grandiose £18.8 million Wessex Leisure Centre at Grove proposed by the previous administration, what reassurance can the Cabinet member give to the town and parish councils in the Faringdon area that appropriate funds previously earmarked for the Wessex project will now be used for community infrastructure in the Faringdon area? And will ward Vale of White Horse District Council – Council minutes

members and key local stakeholders be consulted about what projects would benefit local communities best, giving them the facilities that they deserve?

## **ANSWER**

I appreciate the frustration of residents in your area that funds generated by developments in your community were allocated to a large and undeliverable project many miles away. I am very pleased that the S106 funds currently allocated to the Wessex Leisure Centre Scheme are now being reviewed to determine how they can be reallocated to alternative projects that will better serve the areas that generated them.

An independent review of leisure needs across the Wantage, Grove and Faringdon areas is underway to identify exactly what these alternative projects could be and the level of funding required to bring them forward.

To accelerate this process, engagement will be held with a variety of stakeholders and ward members, to inform the review, which is due to be completed by the end of March 2021. I can assure you that we want to see these funds spent in the areas that generated them and on facilities that the local communities want.

### **6. Question from Councillor Bob Johnston to Councillor Catherine Webber, Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and the Environment**

The Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE) Bill being proposed by cross Party Members of Parliament and supported by many Vale residents reminds us that as well as a climate crisis we also face an ecological crisis. Could the Cabinet member explain what action this council is taking to protect our local wildlife and increase biodiversity around the Vale? And how can we work with our neighbouring authorities and MPs to make sure that CEE Bill is supported and results in more urgent action at every level of government?

## **ANSWER**

### **1) What action is being taken to protect our local wildlife and increase biodiversity around the Vale?**

- A draft Nature Recovery Network map has been produced for Oxfordshire by a partnership of organisations including Officers from all Oxfordshire Local Authorities, wildlife charities and statutory bodies.
- A feasibility study into the potential for the Vale to get involved in Habitat Banking is underway.
- Officers are actively involved in ongoing work to re-establish a Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire.
- A Tree Opportunities Map is being prepared (joint funded by Vale and all Oxfordshire LPA's). This will be a resource available to all to help identify suitable tree planting opportunities. The project will develop maps showing not only where trees might be established but also where they would have the highest impact. They will cover the placement of trees in both rural and urban areas and in the widest variety of forms - as trees in or outside of woodlands; hedgerows; orchards; agroforestry; parks; and gardens.

- The Vale is delivering biodiversity net gain for all major developments. Each application is assessed for its impacts on biodiversity which are measured using a metric. All development proposals are then required to deliver more biodiversity than is lost when planning permission is granted.
- Work is underway to develop projects to be funded from s.106 money from the Grove Airfield development. This is being developed in partnership with the Freshwater Habitats Trust.
- *A Guide to Planting Trees for Community Groups* has been produced and is available on the Council's web site.
- The Council has a District Licence for Great Crested Newts which has delivered 14 new ponds and 74 Ha of high-quality terrestrial habitats in the last year.
- The Vale works in partnership with other Oxfordshire Councils on the Local Wildlife Sites project. The project aims to protect and enhance our most important wildlife habitats by working with the landowners, providing advice and practical help.
- The Council is working with the Letcombe Brook Project and the Environment Agency to deliver biodiversity enhancements at Willow Walk in Wantage.

**2) In addition, over the next 5 years the Council is planning to:**

- The Strategic Property Review will consider all the Vale's landholdings and will link in with the production of an Open Spaces Strategy to determine where there are opportunities for biodiversity enhancements and tree planting.
- The Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership will be formally established. The LNP will seek to:
  - Develop a Nature Recovery Strategy for Oxfordshire
  - Develop a biodiversity net gain targeting strategy.
- Develop and deliver a Tree Planting Programme on Council owned land to enhance biodiversity and sequester carbon

**3) And how can we work with our neighbouring authorities and MPs to make sure that CEE Bill is supported and results in more urgent action at every level of government?**

If the Council was to formally confirm its support for the CEE Bill it could undertake the following steps:

The Council could lobby HM Government and its local representatives to support the CEE Bill when it comes before Parliament. To this end, a letter could be sent by the leader of the Council to the following (requesting that they vote for this measure):

- The Rt Hon. George Eustice, M.P. – Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
- Layla Moran, M.P. – Member of Parliament for Oxford West and Abingdon (please note that Ms Moran is already a declared supporter of this Bill)
- David Johnston OBE, M.P. – Member of Parliament for Wantage

In addition, the leader of Vale of White Horse District Council could write, on behalf of the Council, to the leaders (and climate leads) of neighbouring local authorities (Cherwell District Council, West Oxfordshire District Council, Oxford City Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Oxfordshire County Council, West Berkshire

Council, Swindon Borough Council and Cotswold District Council) to suggest that they contact the Secretary of State and their Members of Parliament to support this Bill.

## **7. Question from Councillor Richard Webber to Councillor Andy Crawford, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Assets**

The budget before us tonight shows a further reduction in projected government financial support to this council accumulating to more than £14.5 million over the five years of our Medium Term Financial Plan, a fall of 62%. The Council is only allowed by Government to increase Council Tax by 2% per annum which if taken in full will see council tax revenue increase by only approximately £400,000 per annum over the five years.

Vale of White Horse District Council is clearly far from unique in finding itself in this financial quandary. What steps is this Council taking to explain to Government the consequences of their policy decisions and persuade them to both adequately and fairly fund local councils who not only deliver vital services all year round but which have played a major part in assisting the Government in dealing with the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic?

### **ANSWER**

Councillor Webber is right to raise this issue. Firstly, he identifies the reduction in government funding shown in the MTFP. These are estimates. And they are estimates because government has still not given any clarity over future local government funding. That means we have no clarity on:

- How the business rates retention scheme will work
- How we will be affected by the fair funding review
- What new homes bonus will look like going forward

Whilst we hope that government funding will be more generous than the numbers shown here, it may be less generous, not forgetting that this year we will be receiving less in core government funding than last year.

We continue to lobby via many routes. For example, through responding to government consultations on government funding, via letters from the Leader to Government Ministers and through on ongoing support and membership of the LGA, for clarity on future funding levels, and for those funding levels to be sufficient, not just for our council, but for all councils, so that they can continue to provide their key services and to support residents and businesses through the pandemic and beyond.

We also lobby for the freedom to set our own council tax levels. Government assumes that we will set our council tax at the maximum increase allowed. For Vale or 2021/22 this amounts to a £5 increase. But Vale, with the 15th lowest Band D council tax of all English shire districts in 2020/21, is subject to the same rules on council tax increases as all other shire districts. In 2020/21 the average Band D council tax for a shire district was over £190. More freedom to set a higher council tax would be fairer, and would allow us to provide even better services for our residents, and is something we will continue to lobby for as we do not believe it is in our residents interests that it is effectively determined for us in London.

It is particularly ironic that, whilst we battle to finance the delivery of our statutory services, constrained as we are by Government rules and their total absence of future clarity, Thames Valley Police are, by contrast, given carte blanche to increase their

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charge by an inflation busting 7% with scant regard to any local democratic input. We have amongst our members the unelected Conservative Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner, the District Councillor for Steventon and the Hanneys. Perhaps he should like to explain why he and his political masters treat the undoubtedly vital services of the Police so differently to those of this Authority.

#### **8. Question from Jenny Hannaby to Councillor Emily Smith, Leader of the council**

In July 2020, after the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, this council resolved to “ask the Chair of the Joint Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee of Oxfordshire County Council to convene a meeting with the aim of setting up a rapid and transparent Task Force to analyse and ascertain the reasons for the observed excess deaths and infection rates in Oxfordshire’s care homes during the previous three months”. What was the response to the Leader’s letter on our behalf and what action has been taken in response to our request?

#### **ANSWER**

In accordance with the motion agreed by Full Council in July 2020, I did write a letter to the Chair of the Joint Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee on 5 August 2020. A follow up letter was sent on 19 October 2020 asking for a response, and to date I am still waiting for a response.

#### **Co.153 Motions on notice**

Prior to consideration of this item, and prior to the expiry of two and a half hours, Council agreed, in accordance with council procedure rule 12, to extend the meeting by half an hour.

#### **A. Councillor Nathan Boyd moved, and Councillor Elaine Ware seconded the motion as set out in the agenda at agenda item 18.**

##### **Amendment**

Councillor Neil Fawcett moved and Councillor Bob Johnston seconded an amendment with additional words in bold and deleted words shown by a strikethrough

##### **“This Council notes:**

1. The recent endorsement of the "Twenty is Plenty" campaign by Oxfordshire County Council in its role as Highways Authority which means all new residential roads ~~will~~ **should** have a 20 mph speed limit.
2. The evidence that introduction of 20mph limits even without formal enforcement results in much safer speed profiles and this is particularly beneficial in the vicinity of schools, community hubs and care facilities.

This Council believes that as the Local Planning Authority we could look to facilitate the campaign by designing in a 20 mph speed limit policy for new developments via the ~~emerging~~ **next** Local Plan.

The Council further believes that there may be a role for a "best practice guide" and case studies for parish Councils to help them facilitate 20mph limits where there is local demand.

**Council asks the Leader to write to the County Council in support of swift implementation of the "Twenty is Plenty" campaign, asking the County Council to provide a "best practice guide" to help facilitate 20mph limits where there is local demand, asking that County Council officers promote 20mph limits in discussions with developers, that County Council officers base their responses to planning applications on this policy and asking for any further advice or guidance the County Council can provide to the Vale in how it can help support the implementation of this policy.**

~~Council requests officers to prepare a report for the Scrutiny Committee on the practical implications.~~

**Council would welcome any request by Scrutiny Committee to invite the County Council to discuss how this initiative is being implemented".**

With the agreement of Council, the mover and seconder of the original motion accepted the amendment.

After debate and on being put to the vote the motion was agreed.

**RESOLVED:** That Council notes;

1. The recent endorsement of the "Twenty is Plenty" campaign by Oxfordshire County Council in its role as Highways Authority which means all new residential roads should have a 20 mph speed limit.

2. The evidence that introduction of 20mph limits even without formal enforcement results in much safer speed profiles and this is particularly beneficial in the vicinity of schools, community hubs and care facilities.

This Council believes that as the Local Planning Authority we could look to facilitate the campaign by designing in a 20 mph speed limit policy for new developments via the next Local Plan.

The Council further believes that there may be a role for a "best practice guide" and case studies for parish Councils to help them facilitate 20mph limits where there is local demand.

Council asks the Leader to write to the County Council in support of swift implementation of the "Twenty is Plenty" campaign, asking the County Council to provide a "best practice guide" to help facilitate 20mph limits where there is local demand, asking that County Council officers promote 20mph limits in discussions with developers, that County Council officers base their responses to planning applications on this policy and asking for any further advice or guidance the County Council can provide to the Vale in how it can help support the implementation of this policy.

Council would welcome any request by Scrutiny Committee to invite the County Council to discuss how this initiative is being implemented.

**B. Councillor Paul Barrow moved, and Councillor Richard Webber seconded the motion as set out in the agenda at agenda item 18**

After debate and on being put to the vote the motion was agreed.

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## **RESOLVED:**

That the flooding in Oxfordshire over Christmas served as yet another reminder of the importance of flood defences and effective road-side drainage as climate change makes flood events more common and more extreme. As well as planning policy needed to take increasing flood risk seriously, it is vital that the Environment Agency are properly funded to help them protect communities and the local economy from the devastating impact of flooding.

Council notes:

- The excellent partnership work between this council, the Environment Agency and other partners on the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme which will protect South Hinksey, Kennington and North Hinksey as well as Oxford City once built.
- There is a Flood Alleviation Scheme designed to protect parts of Abingdon around the River Ock that the Environment Agency believe will protect the Town. This scheme is unfunded.
- That the likelihood and severity of flooding on the scale of what Abingdon experienced in 2007 and South Hinksey experienced in 2014 is increasingly likely.
- The impact of flooding on our communities can be devastating – for residents personally affected, financially in the damage caused to property, and the impact on our electricity and transport infrastructure which has a knock-on impact for businesses and the local economy.
- The financial constraints that limit infrastructure maintenance by Oxfordshire County Council, such as clearing gullies once every three years and adopting a reactive approach to flooding.

Council asks the Leader to:

- Write to the Secretary of State for DEFRA and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury asking for the Environment Agency funding for flood alleviation schemes to be increased significantly and for the Abingdon Flood Alleviation Scheme specifically to be funded as part of the government's next budget round.
- Continue to work through our partnerships, such as the Growth Board and OxLEP, to highlight the importance of flood alleviation in our district and action to protect residents and businesses.
- Write to Oxfordshire County Council to encourage the development of a rational, comprehensive and cost-effective management plan for maintenance of roadside gullies and drainage, liaising with landowners to clear important drainage ditches and involving increased funding.

### **C. Councillor Jenny Hannaby moved, and Councillor Ron Batstone seconded the motion as set out in the agenda at agenda item 18**

After debate and on being put to the vote the motion was agreed.

## **RESOLVED:**

That Council notes that the Wessex Leisure Centre project was put on hold in October 2018 at a point when it was clear that the total of Section 106 Developer contributions already collected and those to be received in the future fell very significantly short of the amount required to fund the project. Council is also aware that the current restrictions imposed by the COVID 19 pandemic and the unknown potential implications of the need to maintain social distancing and other measures may impact

the nature of leisure facilities for the foreseeable future. However, recognising that earmarked funds are and will become available this Council:

1. Asks officers to initiate early engagement with residents and stakeholders in the Grove and Wantage area to inform the best use of the S106 leisure funds generated locally that were previously allocated to the ill-fated Wessex Leisure Centre.
2. As part of this work, asks officers in its infrastructure, policy and legal teams to disentangle these S106 agreements and in doing so acknowledge that it may then be necessary to consult further with other local communities about what recreation and leisure facilities are required in the areas that generated some of those S106 contributions.
3. Notes that the new and more flexible CIL Spending Strategy adopted by Cabinet reinforces this Council's intention to use CIL developer contributions to pay for community infrastructure, including for leisure provision, in a way that assists the delivery of larger projects to the benefit of the whole community.
4. Enthusiastically supports the recent changes to the Vale's CIL Charging Strategy which will see a near doubling of CIL infrastructure funding to this District over the life of the Local Plan.
5. Supports the prioritisation work on the Vale's Active Communities Strategy to inform how best to use S106, CIL and other funding to provide recreation facilities and opportunities for communities across the district.

#### **Co.154 Revenue budget 2021/22 and capital programme to 2025/26**

Council noted the confidential appendix A6 to the interim head of finance's report to Cabinet on 5 February 2021.

The meeting closed at 9.58pm