

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee

held on Monday, 14 November 2022 at 7.00 pm
at Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon OX14 3JE

Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Councillors: Nathan Boyd (Chair), Ron Batstone (Vice-Chair), Paul Barrow (Sub), Samantha Bowring (Sub), Eric de la Harpe, Ben Mabbett, Patrick O'Leary and Val Shaw (Sub)

Officers: Candida Basilio, Democratic Services Officer

Guests: Councillor Emily Smith, Council Leader.

Officers: Simon Hewings, Head of Finance, Eliot Ward, Interim Masterplanning Lead, Aileen David, Principal Place Officer, and Trevor Gaffney, Revenues and Benefits Manager

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies received from:

Councillor Jerry Avery, and Councillor Val Shaw was present as substitute.

Councillor Max Thompson, and Councillor Samantha Bowring was present as substitute.

Councillor Hayleigh Gascoigne, and Councillor Paul Barrow was present as substitute.

Councillor David Grant sent apologies but could not find a substitute for the meeting.

It was noted that Councillor Emily Smith (Council Leader) was present to introduce both papers this evening, as Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Assets, Councillor Andy Crawford, sent apologies.

2. Urgent business and chair's announcements

Chair ran through housekeeping matters.

3. Declaration of interests

In respect of agenda item 9, Councillors Bowring and De La Harpe declared interest, as members of Abingdon Town Council. Although they could take part in discussion, they would have to leave the room during debate and could not vote should a recommendation be put forward.

4. Notes of the last meeting

Resolved:

The minutes of the meeting on 22 September 2022 were noted as a correct record and will be signed as such by the chair.

5. Public participation

None.

6. Work schedule and dates for all Vale and Joint scrutiny meetings

No comments raised.

7. Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) Review

Leader of the Council introduced the report. The committee were invited to review the proposed council tax reduction scheme that will be adopted for the financial year 2023/24, until such time as members wish to change the scheme and make any recommendations to the Cabinet member for Finance.

The council was required by statute to adopt a scheme to help those on low incomes to meet their council tax liability. In accordance with the strategic objective “running an efficient council” by having a scheme we meet this objective whilst, at the same time, considering the views of residents, service users and other stakeholders.

It was proposed to reverse three of the amendments made to the scheme that were approved from April 2014 in light of the cost-of-living crisis and mounting debt risk.

In summary, it was proposed the changes will:

- i. provide greater support for low income working individuals and families that have previously been penalised financially and
- ii. Provide a fairer council tax reduction scheme for all residents on a low income.

It was suggested for 2023-24 onwards, that the same 2022-23 scheme be adopted but with the following amendments as detailed in the report:

1. to remove the 91.5 per cent limit when calculating the council tax bill, and remove the band E restriction for all applicants, so that their CTR is calculated at 100 per cent of their council tax bill after any deductions and based on their property’s actual council tax band.
2. to reinstate Second adult rebate

Cabinet had approved the changes, but scrutiny was welcomed to review and provide further comments to the Cabinet member for Finance.

Committee asked questions. A member asked how this affected Parishes. Officer responded that there would be a reduced tax base, but this would affect across all parishes and doesn’t affect Parish pre-set.

There was discussion about the history of legislation about CTRS and how councils set up their own schemes.

Council Leader explained that it benefitted 1,400 applications, but also created efficiencies for the council.

Officers were thanked for a clear and concise report on CTRS.

Resolved:

Committee noted the CTRS report and members considered it to be a good report and a good scheme to progress.

8. Exclusion of the public

Resolved:

Committee voted in favour of exclusion of the public for a confidential item.

9. Central Abingdon Regeneration Framework

Committee noted a report and provided their views to the Council Leader and officers.

The meeting closed at 20.30

Chair:

Date:

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