

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Cabinet



held on Friday 11 November 2022 at 10.30 am
in Meeting Room 1, Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon, OX14 3JE

Open to the public, including the press

Present in the meeting room:

Cabinet members: Councillors Emily Smith (Chair), Bethia Thomas (Vice-Chair), Andy Crawford, Helen Pighills and Judy Roberts
Officers: Steve Culliford (Democratic Services Team Leader) and Mark Stone (Chief Executive)

Remote attendance:

Cabinet members: Councillors Neil Fawcett and Debby Hallett
Officers: Harry Barrington-Mountford (Head of Policy and Programmes), Jayne Bolton (Community Wellbeing Manager), Andrew Down (Deputy Chief Executive – Partnerships), Paul Fielding (Head of Housing and Environment), Simon Hewings (Head of Finance), Jeremy Lloyd (Broadcasting Officer) and Mark Minion (Head of Corporate Services)

33. Apologies for absence

Councillor Sally Povolotsky had sent her apologies for absence.

34. Minutes

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 30 September 2022 as a correct record and agree that the chair signs them as such.

35. Declarations of interests

None

36. Urgent business and chair's announcements

The chair advised of emergency evacuation arrangements. The chair also announced that at 11.00am the alarm would sound to allow the Cabinet meeting to pause to observe two minutes' silence for Remembrance Day.

37. Public participation

Two members of the public had registered to speak at the meeting.

- (1) Graham Beith, the chairman of the Wantage Independent Advice Centre, trading as Vale Community Impact, made a statement thanking the council for the financial support it had given over many years and highlighting the work of the organisation in helping those in need in Wantage, Grove and surrounding areas. He asked that if the council pursued a commissioning model for future funding and service provision, he wished to be involved in the model's design to allow both the council and his organisation to achieve their aims.
- (2) Debbie Watts, Chief Officer, Citizens Advice Oxfordshire South and Vale, based in Abingdon, made a statement echoing the points made by Mr Beith and also asked for involvement in the design of a new commissioned advice service.

The chair thanked both speakers for their contribution.

38. Recommendations and updates from other committees

Cabinet received and noted the recommendations and updates from the Joint Scrutiny Committee following its meetings held in October and November.

39. Housing Delivery Strategy and Action Plan

Cabinet considered the report of the head of housing and environment and the deputy chief executive – place. This presented a housing delivery strategy and action plan, which had been prepared jointly with South Oxfordshire District Council. This set out how the council aimed to deliver housing over the period 2022 to 2024 and ensure that homes were genuinely affordable by local people. The strategy brought together guidance and advice on policy and set out an action plan covering the short, medium and longer term.

The strategy included four strategic housing priorities:

- To provide homes to meet current and future local need
- To delivering housing that is truly affordable
- To value and support council and community-led housing initiatives
- To plan for well-designed net zero carbon housing

Cabinet supported the adoption of the housing delivery strategy and action plan as it would allow the council to pursue a range of options to provide housing, including bringing empty properties back into use. Members noted that the action plan would evolve to adapt to changing demands.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) adopt the joint Housing Delivery Strategy 2022-2024; and
- (b) adopt the associated Action Plan.

40. Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023/24

Cabinet considered the head of finance's report on a review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

The report proposed to reverse three amendments made to the scheme in 2014. This would provide greater support for low income working individuals and families that had previously been penalised financially and would provide a fairer council tax reduction for all residents on a low income. The calculation of working age council tax reduction was based on 91.5 per cent of their council tax liability, rather than 100 per cent. Council tax collection data indicated that the current minimum charge of 8.5 per cent and the Band E restriction had both caused hardship for working individuals and families.

The Cabinet member for finance reported that, considering the current cost-of-living crisis and the cost to collect the potential shortfall, this change should help reduce potential hardship. The proposals would enhance the current scheme to ensure it helped residents during the cost-of-living crisis and continued to be fair on all residents and protect the most vulnerable.

Cabinet supported the proposal, believing that the council must do all it could to help local residents during the current cost-of-living crisis and beyond. The proposal was a compassionate response and would help those most in need.

RECOMMENDED to Council on 7 December 2022:

that for the 2023/24 financial year onwards, the council continues to adopt the previous 2022/23 Council Tax Reduction Scheme but with the following amendments:

- to remove the 91.5 per cent limit (cap) when calculating the council tax bill,
- to remove the band E restriction for all residents, so that qualifying residents will have their Council Tax Reduction calculated at 100 per cent of their council tax bill, after any deductions and based on their property's actual council tax band, and
- to reintroduce the second adult rebate scheme to working age residents, in order to give a maximum 25 per cent reduction where they live with another adult on a low income.

41. Vale Partnership Grants

Cabinet considered the head of policy and programmes' report on partnership grants.

In October 2021, Cabinet had agreed to commission an organisation to provide information and advice services from 2023 onwards. However, this had proved to be complex to align with the partnership approach being delivered through the Covid-19 pandemic and more recently during the response to support refugees and asylum seekers being welcomed across the district, and providing support residents affected by the cost-of-living crisis.

The partnership organisations currently being funded and working in partnership with the council, had embraced a highly flexible approach to supporting our local residents and targeting their services to meet resident need and our agreed priorities.

The Cabinet member for community engagement believed that having flexibility within community partnership arrangements was essential in the current climate. The Cabinet member recommended that Cabinet reconsidered its previous decision to commission an organisation to provide information and advice services from 2023 onwards. The current flexible operating model was providing an efficient and effective route to allocate government funding and provide support to our most vulnerable residents at a time of challenge and uncertainty. The Cabinet member recommended continuing the existing

funding arrangements for until March 2024, subject to approval of the budget by Council in February 2023. This would allow a new partnership grant fund policy to be prepared and considered during 2023/24, with applications to be made and determined by Cabinet in readiness for approval of the budget by the Council for 2024/25.

Cabinet supported the proposal. It was important to support the partnership organisations at this time while the council considered new models for the future. Cabinet was content for the partnership organisations to be consulted on the draft proposals for 2024/25.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) cease the process to explore the commissioning of information and advice services from 2023 onwards (as previously agreed in October 2021);
- (b) extend the current Partnership Grants to Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizen's Advice Bureau and Wantage Independent Advice Centre (now known as Vale Community Impact) and Community First Oxfordshire towards the provision of services across the district to 31 March 2024, subject to approval of the 2023/24 budget by full Council; and
- (c) consider potential partnership models for the Partnership Grant fund with the intention to commence a new funding scheme from April 2024 onwards, subject to approval of the 2024/25 budget by full Council.

42. Five Councils Partnership Governance

Cabinet considered the report of the deputy chief executive – partnerships. This set out the financial and governance position of the Five Councils Partnership.

Since the inception of the partnership contract, the licensing, HR and payroll, finance services and procurement functions had been removed. The report set out how the contractual changes reflected the council's liabilities and its impact on the inter authority agreement. The baseline percentage that the council should now pay was 16.21 per cent, down from the original baseline of 17.12 per cent. As this baseline related to the changes which occurred in 2020/21, there was a need for a re-balancing payment to the Vale from Mendip, Hart, and Havant councils.

The report also highlighted a decreased need for member involvement in the governance of the partnership and the management of its contract. As such it was recommended that the partnership's joint committee should streamline the number of its meetings to a minimum of one per year.

Cabinet supported the proposals. The re-balancing of the amount paid by this council and the streamlining of the governance arrangements were both welcomed. Cabinet noted that there would not be any reduction in control as the contract was monitored closely by officers.

Cabinet noted that officers were working on the future provision of the services beyond the contract date. Members also asked officers to consider undertaking a cost-benefit analysis of the value of the contract as a whole to the council.

RESOLVED to:

- (a) note and endorse the minor alteration to the proportion of the size of Vale's contribution to the Five Councils' Partnership contract and agree the approach to the truing up mechanisms;
- (b) approve the streamlined governance approach, reflective of the current reduced size of the contract, to enable effective oversight and management of the contract, which includes all the changes set out in paragraph 22 of the deputy chief executive – partnership's report to Cabinet on 11 November 2022, including the annual meeting of the Five Councils' Partnership Joint Committee, providing budgetary and contractual oversight, and continuing the spirit of partnership working, whilst keeping members informed of contract performance; and
- (c) authorise the chief executive, in consultation with the Cabinet member for strategic partnerships and place, to finalise the terms on behalf of Vale of White Horse District Council and to enter into and complete the updated inter-authority agreement based on the principles set out in the report.

The meeting closed at 11.35 am

Chair:

Date: