

Council Agenda



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Summons to attend a meeting of Council

to be held on Wednesday 12 July 2023 at 7.00 pm
The Ridgeway, The Beacon, Portway, Wantage, OX12 9BY

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. Arran".

Patrick Arran
Head of Legal and Democratic

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Agenda

Open to the public including the press

1. Apologies for absence

To record apologies for absence.

2. Minutes

(Pages 9 - 18)

To adopt and sign as a correct record the Council minutes of the annual meeting held on 17 May and the special meeting held on 13 June 2023.

3. Declarations of interest

To receive declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests, other registrable interests and non-registrable interests or any conflicts of interest in respect of items on the agenda for this meeting.

4. Urgent business and chair's announcements

To receive notification of any matters which the chair determines should be considered as urgent business and the special circumstances which have made the matters urgent, and to receive any announcements from the chair.

5. Public participation

To receive any questions or statements from members of the public that have registered to speak.

6. Petitions

To receive any petitions from the public.

7. Update on the council's Information Technology infrastructure

Cabinet, at its meeting on 3 July 2023, considered a report on the current discussions relating to the councils' Information Technology arrangements.

The Cabinet [agenda](#) circulated to all members includes the relevant report.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. note the update set out in the head of corporate services' report to Cabinet on 3 July 2023;
2. reaffirm the council's intention to pursue a separate Microsoft Office 365 tenancy as part of the council's overall transformation programme and planned exit from the outsourced IT arrangements; and
3. authorise the deputy chief executive - transformation and operations, in consultation with the Cabinet member for corporate services, to take all necessary steps to implement the council's withdrawal from the shared M365 tenancy.

CABINET RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL:

That a supplementary estimate of £326,000 be added to the 2023/24 revenue budget, funded as set out in the head of corporate services' report to Cabinet on 3 July 2023.

8. Delivery and management arrangements for council-provided Local Authority Housing Fund and Service Family Accommodation housing

Cabinet, at its meeting on 3 July 2023, considered a report on the work being undertaken in relation to providing homes under Government schemes.

The Cabinet [agenda](#) circulated to all members includes the relevant report.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. note the approach proposed for the delivery and management of the properties under the Local Authority Housing Fund scheme, noting the risks, and approves officers to proceed;
2. note the proposed phase one staffing structure for the delivery and management of these properties alongside those purchased or managed under other arrangements;
3. approve a virement from Contingency of up to £100,000 to cover potential unbudgeted revenue expenditure;
4. authorise the head of development and corporate landlord, in consultation with the heads of finance, legal and democratic, and housing and environment, to approve the freehold or leasehold acquisition of property under the Local Authority Housing Fund scheme following appropriate due diligence;
5. note the financial and other risks presented by the decisions above, as set out in the report of the deputy chief executive – transformation and operations to Cabinet on 3 July 2023;
6. approve the approach proposed for the leasing and management of properties under the Service Family Accommodation scheme, noting the risks, and approve officers to proceed;

7. authorise the head of development and corporate landlord to agree terms and enter into the lease with the Ministry of Defence for Service Family Accommodation properties; and
8. authorise the deputy chief executive - transformation and operations to enter into a funding agreement with the Home Office, should the opportunity arise, to support delivery of the scheme.

CABINET RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL:

To proceed the allocation of a capital budget envelope of £2.5 million, being the council's share of the purchase costs of properties bought under the Local Authority Housing Fund scheme.

9. Local Authority Housing Fund 2

Cabinet, at its meeting on 3 July 2023, considered a report on the additional grant funding made available under Local Authority Housing Fund 2 (LAHF 2) to support the provision of housing for the council's refugee accommodation programme and for accommodation for general homelessness use.

The Cabinet [agenda](#) circulated to all members includes the relevant report.

Cabinet resolved to accept the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' grant of £680,000 (indicative Local Authority Housing Fund 2 allocation) to deliver four homes that meet the eligibility criteria outlined within the Local Authority Housing Fund 2 prospectus, and to authorise the deputy chief executive – transformation and operations to sign the Memorandum of Understanding with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, which sets out the understanding between both parties for the use of funding.

CABINET RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL:

To add £1.7 million to the capital programme, part funded by Local Authority Housing Fund 2 funding of £680,000, to purchase 4 homes under this scheme.

10. Report of the leader of the council

To receive the report of the leader.

11. Questions on notice

To receive questions from councillors in accordance with Council procedure rule 33.

A. Question from Councillor Emily Smith to Councillor Sue Caul, Cabinet member for affordable housing, development and infrastructure

Oxfordshire Community Land Trust (CLT) have worked with our council for around 15

years to bring forward Oxfordshire's first CLT housing scheme in Dean Court, Cumnor. Councillor Roberts, who worked for many years to push this scheme forward, and I were at the groundbreaking and in June at the opening. It is incredibly exciting to see the building almost finished and people from the Vale's housing register able to move into this truly affordable and low carbon housing. But it took such a long time to get to this point.

The Local Government Association is working with the national Community Land Trust and Localis on some research on how we can speed up the process and make it easier for CLT schemes, like the one in Dean Court easier to achieve, but local action and commitment is also required.

Could the Cabinet member confirm that Community Land Trust schemes will be supported by this administration, and what is being done locally to ensure more schemes like the wonderful Crofts Court can come forward more quickly in the Vale?

B. Question from Councillor Debby Hallett to Councillor Neil Fawcett, Cabinet member for strategic partnerships and place

This council became a partner to the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme in 2014, under a different administration, when it was just an idea. Now, 8+ years later, when the details are clear, affected parishes in Vale have formally objected to the current plan. Thousands of objectors have signed a local petition (Save Hinksey Meadows) calling for a public inquiry on the scheme. Now that much more is known about the costs/benefits, environmental damage and transport disruption, what is council actively doing to protect our district's irreplaceable habitats in Hinksey Meadow and the quality of life of our residents?

C. Question from Councillor Hayleigh Gascoigne to Councillor Andy Crawford, Cabinet member for finance and property

I note that on 23 June, there was an agenda item on the Great Western Park GP surgery at the meeting of Vale's Cabinet. I'm glad the item was brought to Cabinet, but it was made confidential. This topic is important to the local public. What updates can be shared publicly as to the progress on the plans to provide a GP surgery on Great Western Park?

D. Question from Councillor Mark Coleman to Councillor Helen Pighills, Cabinet member for community health and wellbeing

I was recently invited to a meeting which was focused on housing and the military; what the military provided, and what the district council's responsibilities were to families of serving personnel and those who have left the service at the end of their enlistment.

I would like to understand our responsibilities as a district council to residents, including their families, who have served in the armed forces and are leaving for other reasons, for example medical, administrative and disciplinary discharge. At the meeting, a spouse described her distress when her then husband was subject to disciplinary action, which resulted in his discharge from the service. She did not know where to turn for advice, or support, to find housing for her young family. Can you explain our position in these circumstances?

E. Question from Councillor Katherine Foxhall to the Councillor Bethia Thomas, Leader of the council

In December 2022, Oxfordshire County Council paused the HIF2 road scheme between Witney and Oxford in response to escalating costs. Since then, inflation has remained high, and interest rates have risen five times, from 3% to 5%, with 6% an increasingly likely scenario. Moreover, in its report released on 28 June 2023 the government's Climate Change Committee urged a systematic review of all current and future road-building projects, and to allow only schemes that "meaningfully support cost-effective delivery of Net Zero and climate adaptation to go ahead."

Does the Leader believe that the HIF1 scheme around Didcot meets these criteria, and can she confirm that our District Council is being kept informed of any proposed major changes or re-scoping related to the delivery of the HIF1 roads scheme?

Given current financial pressures has she sought – or will she seek – assurances from OCC that elements of the plans to deliver active travel, public transport and environmental mitigation will be prioritised and their delivery guaranteed, and that serious contingency plans are being developed, and independent advice sought, in the best short and long-term interests of Vale's residents and businesses?

F. Question from Councillor Cheryl Briggs to Councillor Bethia Thomas, Leader of the council

As the Bank of England raised interest rates again, widespread concerns have been aired about the "mortgage time bomb" which is anticipated as homeowners and landlords face very significant increases in their mortgage costs as fixed rate mortgage deals come to an end. How is the council planning ahead for the expected increased housing need from district residents struggling with big rises in mortgage or private rental costs over the next couple of years?

G. Question from Councillor Sarah James to Councillor Bethia Thomas, Leader of the council

Our Corporate Plan and our Climate Action Plan quite rightly commit us to strong and rapid action to tackle Climate Change and I know that this is an important priority for the administration. They include a target to reduce the council's own carbon emissions by 75% by 2025.

Can you update us please on what percentage of carbon emissions reductions have been achieved to date, and on the plans in place to achieve the targeted 75% reduction?

12. Motions on notice

To consider motions from councillors in accordance with Council procedure rule 38.

A. Motion to be proposed by Councillor James Cox, seconder to be notified:

Council Notes:

- In the latest available figures published by the ONS, The Vale of White Horse had the highest number of recorded deaths by suicide in Oxfordshire and with a rate higher than the national average.
- 2021 (the last available data year) had the highest number of deaths by suicide since records began in 2001.
- Suicide is a public health matter and every death should be considered preventable.
- The cost of living crisis is already taking a huge toll on people's mental health. Research by the Money and Mental Health Policy Institute says that people are already feeling the crisis
- In August 2022, CEOs of multiple mental health organisations, including Mind and Samaritans, wrote to the Prime Minister noting an increase in calls and enquiries related to financial concerns and proposed a national suicide prevention strategy.

Council resolves to:

1. Join the Zero Suicide Alliance network.
2. Promote existing safeguarding and suicide prevention training and resources to all council workers and signpost to the councils wellbeing pages and Mental Health First Aiders,
3. Include appropriate signposting to suicide prevention and/or mental health support in cost of living material, on the online community hub, and in arrears letters.
4. For the Council Leader to write to local MPs informing them of the situation and asking them to lobby for the implementation of a national suicide prevention strategy.

- B. Motion to be proposed by Councillor Ron Batstone, seconded by Councillor Andy Cooke:

This council is alarmed at the significant numbers of sewage flooding incidents affecting local foul and surface water systems and notes that investment does not appear to have been forthcoming from Thames Water to resolve capacity or maintenance issues to ensure that adequate sewerage systems are provided within a reasonable timeframe.

The impact of this lack of investment in the sewerage system has ranged from pipe bursts, blockages and backing up, affecting local households and buildings through to the significant (and rising) levels of raw sewage in chalk streams and local rivers. In some cases, raw sewage has been measured and monitored to be flowing into local rivers in the Vale for days on end.

This situation has now been exacerbated and brought into sharp focus in light of the recent news surrounding Thames Water in terms of its debt, financial instability and the sudden resignation of their CEO,

Council believes:

The sewerage system should have adequate capacity to ensure that local rivers and watercourses have a high water quality, minimal pollution and enhance our natural environment. They should meet the minimum standards 24/7 with accurate monitoring to demonstrate that this is being achieved.

Thames Water Limited, or in the event it has to take the company into public ownership, the Government should urgently invest in new capacity to stop sewage outflows into our water courses.

The planning system should ensure that new houses can only be occupied once sufficient capacity in the local sewerage network is in place.

Council resolves to:

1. Consider options, as part of the current Local Plan review, to ensure that adequate sewerage capacity is in place to avoid the discharge of raw sewage into rivers and watercourses before new homes are occupied and that this should be made a condition of planning consent.
2. Ask the Scrutiny Committee to consider this issue and seek to identify ways to hold Thames Water Limited to account for their infrastructure maintenance, development, progress, leak and progress against their Management Plan and planning responses
3. Ask the Leader of the Council to continue to meet with and lobby Thames Water Limited to improve their performance.
4. Ask local MPs to support national legislation to significantly speed up investment in sewerage capacity and to hold water companies to account when they fail.
5. Ask the newly appointed Nature Recovery Champion to continue to monitor local sewage discharges and related data and report on it regularly to the Leader.

13. Exclusion of the public, including the press

To consider whether to exclude members of the press and public from the meeting for the following item of business under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended on the grounds that:

- (i) it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 and 5 of Schedule 12A of the Act, and
- (ii) the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

14. Delivery and management arrangements for council-provided Local Authority Housing Fund and Service Family Accommodation housing - exempt appendices

Appendices 2, 2A and 3 of the report of the deputy chief executive – transformation contain exempt information. Prior to any questions or discussion on the content of these appendices, Council will be invited to consider the exclusion of any public or press in attendance at the meeting as set out at agenda item 13.