

# Minutes

## of a meeting of the

# Council



held on Wednesday 21 February 2024 at 7.00 pm  
in The Ridgeway, The Beacon, Portway, Wantage,  
OX12 9BY

**Open to the public, including the press**

### **Present in the meeting room:**

Councillors: Kiera Bentley (Vice-Chair), Paul Barrow, Ron Batstone, Cheryl Briggs, Mark Coleman, Andy Cooke, James Cox, Andy Crawford, Eric de la Harpe, Debra Dewhurst, Lucy Edwards, Oliver Forder, Andy Foulsham, Katherine Foxhall, Hayleigh Gascoigne, Debby Hallett, Jenny Hannaby, Scott Houghton, Sarah James, Diana Lugova, Robert Maddison, Patrick O'Leary, Viral Patel, Helen Pighills, Mike Pighills, Jill Rayner, Judy Roberts, Val Shaw, Andrew Skinner, Emily Smith, Bethia Thomas, Max Thompson and Richard Webber  
Officers: Steven Corrigan (Democratic Services Manager), Mark Stone (Chief Executive), Vivien Williams (Head of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer), Simon Hewings (Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer) and Emily Barry (Democratic Services Officer).

### **55 Election of Chair**

Councillor Kiera Bentley in the Chair, as the current Vice-Chair of council, in the absence of a Chair of council.

Councillor Bentley was nominated as chair for the remainder of the 2023/24 municipal year. Councillor Thomas as proposer and Councillor Rayner as seconder spoke in support of the nomination.

**RESOLVED:** to elect Councillor Bentley as Chair of the council for the remainder of the 2023/24 municipal year, until the next annual meeting of the council in May 2024.

The Democratic Services Manager presented Councillor Bentley with the chain of office.

Councillor Bentley signed her declaration of acceptance of office.

### **56 Appointment of Vice-Chair**

Councillor Forder was nominated as vice-chair for the remainder of the 2023/24 municipal year.

Councillor Thomas as proposer and Councillor Coleman as seconder spoke in support of the nomination.

**RESOLVED:** to appoint Councillor Forder as Vice-Chair of the council for the remainder of the 2023/24 municipal year, until the next annual meeting of the Council in May 2024.

Councillor Forder signed his declaration of acceptance of office and made an acceptance speech.

Councillor Bentley, Chair of council, presented Councillor Forder with the vice-chair chain of office.

## **57 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Caul, Clegg, Duveen, Fawcett and Shaw.

## **58 Minutes**

**RESOLVED:** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2023 as a correct record and agree that the Chair sign them as such.

## **59 Declarations of interest**

None.

## **60 Urgent business and chair's announcements**

There were no items of urgent business.

Councillor Bentley thanked Councillor Povolotsky for her guidance and duty as chair. She advised that she wished to carry on with the same approach to Chair's charities as Councillor Povolotsky had to generate funds via a number of Chair's charitable events towards a chair's community fund from which local charities could bid for funds.

## **61 Public participation**

None.

## **62 Petitions**

None.

## **63 Treasury management 2023/24 mid-year monitoring report**

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations, made at its meeting on 16 February 2024, on the treasury management performance in the first six months of 2023/24.

Councillor Crawford, Cabinet member for finance, reported that income from cash investments was likely to be above budget by the financial year end due to higher than forecast balances and above budgeted interest rates achieved on new deposits. The report set out performance against benchmarks for the first six months of the financial year. There had been no borrowing during the first half of the year and borrowing was unlikely for the remainder of the year also.

Both the Joint Audit and Governance Committee, at its meeting on 30 January and Cabinet, at its meeting on 16 February 2024, were content that the treasury management activities had been carried out in accordance with the treasury management strategy and policy.

Councillor Foxhall referred to paragraph 23 on page 30 of the agenda pack and whilst appreciating that borrowing was something the council should avoid asked if consideration had been given to borrowing for projects such a retrofitting The Beacon and Abbey House. Councillor Crawford advised that the report was looking back at activities which had been carried out. He advised that a commitment had been made to reviewing the future of all council owned buildings but that it was not the time to make the decision whether to borrow for this.

**RESOLVED:** to

1. approve the head of finance's report to Cabinet on 16 February 2024;
2. note that Cabinet is satisfied that the treasury activities are carried out in accordance with the treasury management strategy and policy.

## **64 Treasury Management and Investment Strategy 2024/25**

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations made at its meeting on 16 February 2024 on the council's treasury management and investment strategy for 2024/25. This set out how the council's treasury service would support the financing of capital investment decisions, and how treasury management operated day to day. The strategy also set out the prudential indicators, providing limits within which the treasury function must operate.

Councillor Crawford, Cabinet member for finance, highlighted there were no changes to the counterparty selection criteria in the proposed strategy for 2024/25, but a recommended change to the strategy this year was the inclusion of an Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) statement. He went on to advise that Cabinet had agreed an additional recommendation to note that the section 151 officer has confirmed that he will conduct a review of investment options with our treasury advisers Link and, in line with the Constitution, will report to the Joint Audit and Governance Committee, the review to include the latest analysis on environmental, social and governance investment options.

Both Cabinet and the Joint Audit and Governance Committee had supported the strategy together with approving the prudential indicators and limits and approving the annual investment strategy and lending criteria and the Environmental, Social and Governance Policy.

**RESOLVED:** to

1. approve the head of finance's report to Cabinet on 16 February 2024;
2. approve the treasury management strategy 2024/25, as set out in appendix A to the report;
3. approve the prudential indicators and limits for 2024/25 to 2026/27, as set out in appendix A to the report;
4. approve the annual investment strategy 2024/25, as set out in appendix A to the report, and the lending criteria detailed in table 6 in appendix A to the report; and
5. approve the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) policy in Appendix E.

## **65 Capital Strategy 2024/25-2033/34**

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations made at its meeting on 16 February 2024 on the capital strategy for 2024/25 to 2033/34.

Councillor Crawford, Cabinet member for finance, reported that the strategy would provide the parameters within which capital expenditure and investment decisions would be made once the supporting requirements were in place. Key changes to the strategy were:

- Amendments to the Investment strategy (Section 5), including removal of the commercial investments category, in line with the latest CIPFA Prudential code and Public Works Loans Board lending requirements.
- Capital expenditure de minimis level note added to section 4

**RESOLVED:** to

1. approve the capital strategy 2024/25 to 2033/34, as set out in appendix 1 of the head of finance's report to Cabinet on 16 February 2024; and
2. agree the strategy for flexible use of capital receipts, which is contained as annex 1 of the capital strategy.
3. authorise the head of finance, in consultation with the Cabinet member for finance, to make minor changes to the capital strategy

## **66 Revenue budget 2024/25 and capital programme 2024/25 - 2028/29**

The chair referred to regulations that require councils to record the names of those members 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.

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 16 February 2024 on the revenue budget for 2024/25 and the capital programme to 2028/29.

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

1. set the revenue budget for 2024/25, as set out in appendix A.1 to the head of finance's report to Cabinet on 16 February 2024;
2. approve the capital programme for 2024/25 to 2028/29, as set out in appendices D.1 and D.2 to the report, together with the capital programme changes as set out in appendix D.2 and appendices D.3 and D.4 to the report;
3. set the council's prudential limits, as listed in appendix e to the report;
4. approve the medium-term financial plan to 2028/29, as set out in appendix F to the report.

In moving the Cabinet recommendations, Councillor Crawford, the Cabinet member for finance introduced the draft budget, noting that the council's financial position had improved from that which was forecast in 2019. There were no service cuts in the budget. The budget contained significant additional spend on HR in order that the transformation project could be fully supported. The budget allocated funds to continue supporting the community hub. Council tax would increase by £5 per Band D property, the maximum allowed before a referendum was required.

A number of members welcomed the growth in staff numbers commenting on the importance of providing sufficient resources. Members were also pleased to see continued investment in community support namely Vale Community Impact and Citizen's Advice Bureau. Members also welcomed positive future funding for The Beacon. Some members

commented they wanted to see a commitment to decarbonisation in future as this had been made a clear priority in the corporate plan and should be funded.

In accordance with regulations requiring councils to record the names of those members 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>
Paul Barrow		
Ron Batstone		
Kiera Bentley		
Cheryl Briggs		
Mark Coleman		
Andy Cooke		
James Cox		
Andrew Crawford		
Eric de la Harpe		
Debra Dewhurst		
Lucy Edwards		
Oliver Forder		
Andy Foulsham		
Katherine Foxhall		
Hayleigh Gascoigne		
Debby Hallett		
Jenny Hannaby		
Scott Houghton		
Sarah James		
Diana Lugova		
Robert Maddison		
Patrick O'Leary		
Viral Patel		
Helen Pighills		
Mike Pighills		
Sally Povolotsky		
Jill Rayner		
Judy Roberts		
Andrew Skinner		
Emily Smith		
Bethia Thomas		
Max Thompson		
Richard Webber		
<b>Total: 33</b>	<b>Total: 0</b>	<b>Total: 0</b>

**RESOLVED:** (unanimously) to

1. set the revenue budget for 2024/25, as set out in appendix A.1 to the head of finance's report to Cabinet on 16 February 2024;

2. approve the capital programme for 2024/25 to 2028/29, as set out in appendices D.1 and D.2 to the report, together with the capital programme changes as set out in appendix D.2 and appendices D.3 and D.4 to the report;
3. set the council's prudential limits, as listed in appendix e to the report;
4. approve the medium-term financial plan to 2028/29, as set out in appendix F to the report.

Members thanked the head of finance and his team for the work undertaken to prepare the budget.

## 67 Council tax 2024/25

Council considered the report of the head of finance on the setting of the Council Tax for the 2024/25 financial year.

In accordance with regulations requiring councils to record the names of those members 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:

For	Against	Abstentions
Paul Barrow		
Ron Batstone		
Kiera Bentley		
Cheryl Briggs		
Mark Coleman		
Andy Cooke		
James Cox		
Andrew Crawford		
Eric de la Harpe		
Debra Dewhurst		
Lucy Edwards		
Oliver Forder		
Andy Foulsham		
Katherine Foxhall		
Hayleigh Gascoigne		
Jenny Hannaby		
Scott Houghton		
Sarah James		
Diana Lugova		
Robert Maddison		
Patrick O'Leary		
Viral Patel		
Helen Pighills		
Mike Pighills		
Sally Povolotsky		
Jill Rayner		
Judy Roberts		
Andrew Skinner		
Emily Smith		
Bethia Thomas		
Max Thompson		

Richard Webber		
<b>Total: 32</b>	<b>Total: 0</b>	<b>Total: 0</b>

**RESOLVED:**

1. To **note** that at its meeting on 13 December 2023 the council calculated the council tax base 2024/25:

(a) for the whole council area as 58,103.8 [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 2024/25 (excluding parish precepts) is £9,104,284

3. That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2024/25 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act:

(a) £91,031,780 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) £76,405,315 being the aggregate of the amounts which the council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) of the Act.

(c) £14,626,465 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) £251.73 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) £5,522,181 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) £156.69 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 2024/25 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 £1,213.71  
Band B £1,415.99  
Band C £1,618.28

Band D £1,820.56  
Band E £2,225.13  
Band F £2,629.70  
Band G £3,034.27  
Band H £3,641.12

5. To note that for the year 2024/25 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 £179.52  
Band B £209.44  
Band C £239.36  
Band D £269.28  
Band E £329.12  
Band F £388.96  
Band G £448.80  
Band H £538.56

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 2024/25 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 2024/25 is not excessive in accordance with principles approved under Section 52ZB Local Government Finance Act 1992.

## **68 Pay Policy Statement 2024/25**

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

**RESOLVED:** to approve the statement of pay policy for 2024/25 attached to the report of the head of corporate services to the Council meeting on 21 February 2024.

## **69 Local Government Boundary Commission for England Review of Vale of White Horse District Council Warding Arrangements**

Council considered the recommendations of the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee made at its meeting on 19 February 2024 on the council's warding arrangements submission to the Commission.

Councillor Forder, chair of the committee, informed Council that there would be further opportunity for comment on any proposals and this submission would not be the final arrangement. He highlighted that the suggestions made by members had not been included in the report and therefore the recommendations of the committee reflected a need to incorporate these whilst still adhering to the deadline set by the Commission.

Some members raised concerns about the suggestion of multi-member wards being a preferred option.



## **RESOLVED:** to

1. Request officers seek to address the comments raised by members on the draft proposals submitted to the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee when drafting revised proposals.
2. Request officers consult with relevant ward members where appropriate when drafting revised proposals
3. Request multi member wards are considered wherever practicable and community identity supports this.
4. Request officers circulate the redrafted proposals to all members for comments prior to further consideration by the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee.
5. Delegate authority to the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee to finalise the report to be submitted to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England by the deadline of 18 March 2024.

Councillors Foxhall, James and Povolotsky wished for it to be noted that they abstained from the vote on this item in accordance with provisions in council procedure rule 70.

## **70 Review of political balance and allocation of seats to committees**

Council considered the report of the head of legal and democratic to review the Council's political balance and reconsider the allocation of seats on those committees required to be politically balanced together with the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee and the Licensing Acts Committee following the resignation of Councillor Povolotsky from the Liberal Democrat Group.

Some members raised concerns about the political make up of the Joint Audit and Governance Committee stating that they did not feel effective overview and risk management could be achieved where the representatives on the committee were all taken from the majority party. Other members confirmed that the allocated seats was a result of the size of the committee and therefore an increase in the size of the committee would be required to allow seats for members from opposition groups.

Members also raised that it was possible for ungrouped members to be allocated seats provided leaders of the parties agreed and no member of council voted against this.

Members advised that legal advice had been sought on the calculation and that a strict formula had been applied. The change in group structure had required the recalculation to be carried out.

In line with Council procedure rules a recorded vote was requested by three members present in the room with the voting being as follows:

<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Abstentions</b>
Paul Barrow	Cheryl Briggs	Debra Dewhurst
Ron Batstone	Sarah James	Katherine Foxhall
Kiera Bentley	Viral Patel	Debby Hallett
Mark Coleman		Sally Povolotsky
Andy Cooke		Richard Webber
James Cox		

Andrew Crawford		
Eric de la Harpe		
Lucy Edwards		
Oliver Forder		
Andy Foulsham		
Hayleigh Gascoigne		
Jenny Hannaby		
Scott Houghton		
Diana Lugova		
Robert Maddison		
Patrick O'Leary		
Helen Pighills		
Mike Pighills		
Jill Rayner		
Judy Roberts		
Andrew Skinner		
Emily Smith		
Bethia Thomas		
Max Thompson		
<b>Total: 25</b>	<b>Total: 3</b>	<b>Total: 5</b>

**RESOLVED:** to

1. approve the revised political balance calculation set out in paragraphs 7 and 8 of the report;
2. approve the allocation of seats to committees set out in paragraphs 10-11 of the report;
3. approve the allocation of seats to the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee in accordance with paragraphs 14 and 15 of the report
4. approve the allocation of seats to the Licensing Acts Committee in accordance with paragraphs 16-18 of the report;
5. appoint members to the committees as set out in the schedule circulated prior to the meeting and attached to these minutes;
6. authorise the head of legal and democratic to make appointments to any vacant committee or panel seat and substitute positions in accordance with the wishes of the relevant group leader.

## **71 Report of the leader of the council**

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

## **72 Questions on notice**

### **1. Question from Councillor Povolotsky to Councillor Lugova, Cabinet member for planning and development management**

In the current winter 2023/24 season we have experienced record storm occurrences, record winter flooding in many places, and huge pressure on the flood plains, failures in the sewage systems and infrastructure. In Steventon & the Hanneys we had flooding in places never experienced before, with many residents seeing a correlation between new estate developments on flood plains, failures of Thames Waters Sewage Networks and floodwaters in our spring line village which have not been seen since 2007. Will the council ask, with urgency, the Environment Agency to review the flood plains / flood zones in effected areas and push for section 19 reports in heavily flooded areas where I still have households unable to return home in Steventon and East Hanney?

#### **Written response**

The Council does not grant planning permission for development within the flood plain without identified mitigation. Where mitigation is accepted, the statutory body tasked with assessing this mitigation, is the Environment Agency whose role it is to ensure that there is no loss in flood plain storage and that flood risk elsewhere does not increase.

To date, and from information from the Lead Local Flood Authority (Oxfordshire County Council) we are aware of two recent instances of flooding occurring on new development. From an initial investigation, it is understood that poor on-site management resulted in two new properties unfortunately being affected. The second incident is understood to be due to an adopted oversized foul sewer becoming overwhelmed with surface water / groundwater. Thames Water have been informed of the incident and we understand that they intend to undertake additional network modelling to assess the wider network in relation to this.

The flood maps which enable us to track these incidents easily, are based on hydraulic modelling and are updated regularly. The Environment Agency are responsible for updates on a quarterly basis. All modelling goes through a rigorous process by the Environment Agency before it is accepted and used in flood maps and flood zones. Records of flooding are used by the Environment Agency to assist with assessment of model accuracy

With evidence (photographs or videos of flood extents), we can request the Environment Agency to undertake a reassessment. Flood zone maps are intended to show areas that have flooded as a result of exceedance from watercourses and do not necessarily pick up areas flooded from other sources such as groundwater or surface water.

The Lead Local Flood Authority are collating flood record data from a range of stakeholders, including Vale, and reviewing against triggers for S19 flood investigations. We are aware of S19 investigations that have been triggered by the event in January which include Steventon and areas of Abingdon adjacent to the River Ock.

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

Councillor Povolotsky undertook to provide a copy of her supplementary question in writing.

The Cabinet member undertook to provide a written response.

## **2. Question from Councillor Povolotsky to Councillor Pighills, Cabinet member for Community health and wellbeing**

This council endorsed the Good Food Strategy in 2022, and a large part of that is around growing your own food, community allotments and community food resilience.

Is the council member aware of Thames Water guidance that no food should be consumed or grown in areas which have been subjected to contaminated flood water for 12 months. Given the widespread contamination of water we experienced in Steventon and the Hanneys, and continue to do so, what awareness has the council of this advice and how will this council hold Thames Water to account on sewage clean up and contamination identification and public advice, is this public health risk?

<https://www.thameswater.co.uk/help/water-and-waste-help/sewer-flooding/cleaningup-after-sewer-flooding>

### **Written response**

The significant flooding that we have experienced during the end of 2023 and start of 2024 is something that the council takes very seriously, and we worked very closely with our colleagues at the County Council, Environment Agency, Thames Valley Police and others to ensure that we work to protect lives and property as much as possible.

Public Health risks are generally the responsibility of the County Council. They already have this webpage which provides a flood toolkit -

<https://www.oxfordshirefloodtoolkit.com/emergency/report-flood/>

The term “contamination” or “contaminated land” has a specific meaning, and our Environmental Protection team would not consider this as ‘contaminated land’ as defined under Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Contaminated land is most commonly a result of historic land uses such as industrial activities and waste disposal. Although the working assumption would be that any flooded land has the potential to be ‘land that has been flooded containing sewer flooding’ and floodwaters are likely to be contaminated by disease producing bacteria and viruses, infection problems arising from floods in this country are rare.

The sun’s ultraviolet rays are very effective at naturally breaking down the bacteria left by flooding. The natural breakdown of bacteria is dependent upon climatic conditions (e.g. temperature, moisture, vegetation and soil type) although as a rough guide, bacteria will return back to normal background levels as follows:

- nine days during warm, dry summer conditions.
- twenty days during damper, cooler spring/autumnal conditions.
- twenty-five days during wet, cold winter conditions.

The Environmental Protection team are reactive to concerns from residents about specific pieces of land but are not resourced or required to consider every area of land that has been flooded for potential contamination.

The Environmental Protection team will, on a specific basis, also provide advice on clean up when residents make contact, but the primary regulatory response sits with the Environment Agency and Thames Water.

The number of queries received by council on this is very low (estimate 5-10 in the last five years) and the council mainly signposts residents to Thames Water directly.

Officers have updated the council's advice, available through our webpages, which will be available for commercial providers of food, as well as homeowners. Our main webpage on flooding as a result of recent storms is found [here](#). This webpage also includes links to Thames Waters flooding advice, Food Standards Agency advice on food that has been touched or covered by floodwater or sewage and the UK Health Security Agency advice for flooding and health: advice for the public.

Our Food and Workplace Safety team ensure that prepared food sold by food businesses is safe to eat.

The County Council's Trading Standards team have enforcement responsibility to ensure food grown on farms, including fruit and vegetable, complies with legislation and is grown hygienically.

Food produced for private or domestic use, including allotments and back gardens, is not governed by the food hygiene legislation provided they are not selling the food.

Regarding the performance of Thames Water, this is an issue for their regulator, Ofwat.

### **Supplementary question and answer**

Councillor Povolotsky undertook to provide a copy of her supplementary question in writing.

The Cabinet member undertook to provide a written response.

### **3. Question from Councillor Povolotsky to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council and Cabinet member for climate action and the environment, strategic partnerships and place**

Local groups and members, including myself, have written to the Secretary of State, the Rt Hon Stephen Barclay, to request he calls the proposed Thames Water Resource Plan for public scrutiny due to the significant public interest over performance, leak and leak management, sewage discharge, performance and locally the threat of the South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO).

Can I ask the leader of the council when she will also call for such a public review on behalf of the many residents in the Vale effected by Thames Water's failures and who could be adversely affected by the current designs proposed for (SESRO)?

### **Written response**

Thank you for your question.

I agree that the performance of Thames Water is wholly unacceptable and that the reservoir plans are alarming.

At its last meeting, Council resolved that we should write to the Secretary of State asking him to pause the decision-making process for SESRO, and I have done so, referring to other aspects of that motion at the same time. The letter is published on the correspondence page of our website and available at <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/about-thecouncil/official-correspondence/>

We await the secretary of state's response and, having written as requested by Council, it is only fair and reasonable that we consider any response that is forthcoming.

Whilst recognising the poor performance of Thames Water, water companies are subject to public scrutiny and regulation, which the question appears not to recognise – by OFWAT and DEFRA - and I have asked officers to consider how we can bring this vital role more readily to the attention of residents and members alike.

### **Supplementary question and answer**

Councillor Povolotsky undertook to provide a copy of her supplementary question in writing.

The Cabinet member undertook to provide a written response.

#### **4. Question from Councillor Povolotsky to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council and Cabinet member for climate action and the environment, strategic partnerships and place**

At the Council meeting of Wednesday 13 December 2023, Councillors Clegg and Cooke proposed a motion which was unanimously passed in which there was request for the Chief Executive to establish a Water Resource Officer-Member Liaison Group.

Can we get a progress update on this item, a timeframe and membership proposals of the group?

### **Written response**

In line with the wider motion, I have recently written to the secretary of state.

At this time, there is no active consultation on going in relation to SESRO and officers have been focused on responding to the impacts of recent flooding, as the Member will be aware, given the impacts in her own ward. Officers have been working extensively with partners to do all we can to support those directly affected by the recent flooding whilst at the same time engaging extensively with Cabinet on the budget proposal we considered tonight – an approach I hope all members would recognise must be our officers' priority. Information on the help available to those most impacted by the recent flooding events can be found here <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-districtcouncil/community-support/emergency-situations/flood-advice/flooding-financialsupport/>

I recently discussed with the chief executive how relevant members would be identified to support the liaison group, and it is my intention to discuss this matter further with the leader of the Green Group in the coming days. I would envisage the group, which will be informal in nature, meeting quarterly, with the first meeting in the next month or so and to a large degree its activity level will be determined by the stages of response to water related matters that the council is engaged in at the time. I would emphasise that planning related

matters relating to Water and indeed any other policy area, will wholly remain within the Joint Local Plan process.

### **Supplementary question and answer**

Councillor Povolotsky undertook to provide a copy of her supplementary question in writing.

The Cabinet member undertook to provide a written response.

#### **5. Question from Councillor Povolotsky to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council and Cabinet member for climate action and the environment, strategic partnerships and place**

On 21 September 2023: Councillor Thomas wrote to Thames Water regarding the draft Water Resources Management Plan 2024 (WRMP24). This is listed on the Vale of White Horse District Council's website alongside a copy and the Thames Water response.

As the ward member for Steventon & The Hanneys could I ask why there has been a lack of openness and transparency with me and other ward members the last two years over responses to consultations and lack of our input, or even consultation, on the list of bullet points of suggestions. Including a country park and water sports provision has not been consulted on with the local elected members or representatives of the communities in any way?

#### **Written response**

Thank you for your question.

I don't agree that there has been any lack of transparency.

The council has responded to several consultations over the past two years, and all of those responses are published on the website. They have also been circulated to members by the comms team as part of the regular cycle of updates.

Thames Water have conducted a number of briefing sessions for councillors and I know various members have attended these events.

I believe we are agreed in our opposition to the reservoir plans. However, we cannot escape the reality which is that Thames Water intends to bring forward its reservoir proposals for decision as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Proposal. Although the council will not be the decision maker, the land is therefore safeguarded in both our current and emerging local plans.

We are currently consulting on preferred options for the joint local plan with South Oxfordshire, which includes a draft policy for SESRO, IN7. This public consultation provides an ideal opportunity for members, community representatives and individual residents to make their comments and to help shape the final policy.

### **Supplementary question and answer**

Councillor Povolotsky undertook to provide a copy of her supplementary question in writing.

The Cabinet member undertook to provide a written response.

## **6. Question from Councillor Thompson to Councillor Foulsham, Cabinet member for corporate services, policy and programmes**

This month is LGBT+ History month. It coincides with the anniversary of the abolition of Section 28 in part to remind us of the vital role of education and teachers in ensuring LGBT+ persons are heard and respected. Since 2005, this initiative has aimed to raise awareness of, and combat prejudice against, LGBT+ people. Each year has a different theme, and this year highlights the LGBT+ community contributions to medicine and healthcare. It celebrates these contributions whilst also shining a light on the health inequalities that are still experienced by LGBT+ persons. Section 28 of the Local Government Act not only prevented the discussion of LGBT+ in schools but also prevented Council's from "promoting homosexuality." It contributed to a climate of hatred and fear and its lasting impact on LGBT+ persons and the community must not be forgotten. At a time when the LGBT+ community is experiencing a rise in hate crime, how is Council acknowledging LGBT+ history month, and what is Council doing now and over the next three years to ensure that LGBT+ persons' needs are considered and that they are welcome and included in the Vale of White Horse.

### **Written response**

I'd like to thank Councillor Thompson for this question, in which he raises an important topic. Section 28 feels like a piece of legislation from a bygone era, and I think anybody today who is unfamiliar with it would be shocked to learn how recently it was still in place.

As a public authority, our residents can and should expect us to show moral leadership on issues facing everybody in our communities, to be able to shine a light on injustices and to celebrate our diversity.

It's for those reasons we recently adopted our Equality and Diversity strategy, which includes an action plan to set out some of the things we will do to ensure that we provide strong and public support for staff, members, residents, businesses, and groups who belong to all of our diverse communities.

One of the first actions to take place, was the setting up of a network of staff Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Champions who have begun work, meeting every three months to set out their objectives and plan their actions.

We are looking at establishing deep-rooted cultural processes and mindsets within the council, and I'm sure Members can understand that it takes time to embed practices and I'm content that the actions underway are doing that rather than just ticking boxes and engaging in public displays of tokenism. The People and Culture team is resourced to ensure we meet our ambitious objectives, and Consultation and Engagement Officers have also created an equalities database to ensure we go the extra mile to engage with all our communities.

The council also has a Diversity and Social Campaigns Calendar published on the website that outlines the social campaigns and events we will support throughout the year. It's reviewed and updated annually.



This year's calendar sets out that the council has chosen to publicly support Pride month in June as the key focus for our celebration and support for our LGBTQ+ communities. The communications team tell me that this is a topic that generates excellent engagement from the public on social media.

So, while LGBTQ+ History Month in February isn't in this year's calendar, I can assure Council that we take seriously the important issues raised in Cllr Thompson's question, and we tackle them alongside the wider celebrations of our LGBTQ+ friends, family members and neighbours in June.

**7. Question from Councillor James to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council and Cabinet member for climate action and the environment, strategic partnerships and place**

Even since we last met as a Council there have been several power cuts in my rural ward. Speaking to councillors and residents in other parts of the district, power cuts are an irregular, but not uncommon, occurrence outside the towns. They often happen due to high winds but also on other more unexpected occasions. The electricity infrastructure is currently not adequately resilient to provide a supply with a high degree of confidence. We expect in the future to need to increase the electricity supply as the strategy for decarbonising heating and transport includes significantly electrifying these sectors so the impacts of this are only set to grow.

Power cuts are difficult for all, usually resulting in no heating as many households have some form of central heating that relies on electric pumps, whatever the fuel. Increasing numbers of us work from home, but not without broadband in a power cut. But they disproportionately affect those who are already vulnerable: the old, the very young, and those with health issues.

How are we engaging as a Council with our local network operator Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) on behalf of our residents to try and improve the quality of the infrastructure in the rural areas of our district and make sure that it will be fit for the future? As a Council, is there anything more that we can do, working with SSEN and other partners, to ensure that vulnerable residents are kept safe when power cuts occur?

**Written response**

Thank you for your question, and I share your concern about the quality of our electricity infrastructure.

Nationally there has been under-investment over many years and there is a shortage of capacity on the grid. This is not a problem confined to the Vale, and it is not something which we can solve on our own.

With our local partners in the Future Oxfordshire Partnership we provided evidence last summer to a parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee, and only last month our submission was used by the District Councils Network in their own evidence to this continuing inquiry into enabling sustainable electrification of the UK economy.

So, I am happy that we are already making our voice heard. I know that officers county-wide are working together with SSEN and other distributors on local area energy planning, and I wish to see us continue to support this work.

We should expect that demand for electrical power will continue to increase as we reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. We cannot ourselves provide the necessary resilient infrastructure, but we can and will continue to press for more to be done and to work through the wider Future Oxfordshire Partnership to amplify that voice.

### **Supplementary question and answer**

Councillor James undertook to provide a written copy of her supplementary question.

The Cabinet member undertook to provide a written response.

### **8. Question from Councillor Foxhall to Councillor Dewhurst, Cabinet Member for Leisure Centres and Community Buildings**

In the Development and Corporate Landlord fee proposals for 2024/5, we are intending to introduce a new 20p fee to use public toilets in the Charter and Portway car parks in Abingdon and Wantage, and to retain the existing fee in Hales Meadow and Millbrook Square (Grove).

Freely accessible public toilets are essential for public health, accessibility and inclusion – they make being in public spaces possible for many people including people with health conditions or who are pregnant, families with young children and the elderly. I appreciate that the costs involved have forced many local authorities to reduce their provision of public conveniences, but to charge for access does seem to go contrary to our corporate plan priorities of Building Healthy Communities and Working in an Open and Inclusive Way.

Could the cabinet member please explain the justification for why we are introducing charging for some toilets and not others in the district, and what format the charging will take?

### **Written response**

I recognise the importance of accessible public toilets for all, and I am pleased that we have been able to continue to provide such facilities across the Vale, at a time when many councils are being forced to close public toilets due to financial pressures.

We are introducing a new 20p charge for the facility at the Charter, Abingdon. Historically, the public toilets in the Charter have been vandalised/abused and have sadly attracted antisocial behaviours making it uncomfortable for the public/users and for our own the cleaning staff to undertake their work. We have recently spent £37,718 renovating one unisex toilet at this site and in order to try and reduce the amount of vandalism and gathering of groups in the area, the small charge has been introduced.

It is a similar situation at Abbey Meadow toilets where significant vandalism has been occurring and we are therefore introducing a 20p charge on this site too. For the new 'Changing Places' funded toilet and improvements at Portway WC, no charge has currently been introduced as vandalism in that facility has not been a problem in the past. During the recent refurbishment of the toilets (at a cost of £223,265) the ability to charge in future has been installed, should vandalism become an issue in the future.

The other toilets where we charge are in Hales Meadow car park, Abingdon and School Lane in Grove which are unisex 'superloo' toilets which are fitted with charging mechanisms to prevent vandalism.

Disabled users are able to access the toilets at Hales Meadow, Abingdon and School Lane, Grove, along with the one at the Charter, Abingdon, free of charge, using a RADAR key.

In summary, vandalism costs the council significant amounts. We plan to monitor the use of the facilities where we have introduced the 20p charge to see what effect the charge has on the use of the toilets and the level of vandalism.

In first six months of 2023/24, we spent £7,368 on vandalism repairs to toilets from a £9,100 budget for toilet repairs and maintenance. This is often from people blocking pans or ripping off the toilet roll holders or graffiti inside the toilet areas. Additional staff cleaning costs have also been incurred.

When toilets are vandalised, there is often a period of time when the toilets are then not operational and by introducing a small charge, we hope to ensure that the toilets are accessible more of the time.

Due to the issues with cash collection, banking and risk of theft, all charging is now processed using contactless payment cards, so no cash is stored in the facilities.

### **Supplementary question**

Thank you for the detailed answer to my question about proposed introductions of charging for public toilets. I am sure we are all disappointed that so much of our residents' money is being spent repairing vandalism, and that the result of that is the need to charge residents a second time to use our toilets.

The response to my question states that a charge will be introduced at Abbey Meadows. This is not surprising given the well-publicised vandalism experienced there. But the final spreadsheet of charges that I was sent as Scrutiny chair did not include a proposal for a charge at Abbey Meadows for 2024/25. On the other hand, the spreadsheet does show a definite charge at Portway in Wantage, which the answer to my question now says is only potentially to be introduced in the future. This may be a case of a single 20p in the wrong spreadsheet box but please could it be clarified which of these plans are correct?

I'm still very concerned that charging for toilets using a digital card access system will continue to particularly disadvantage elderly residents and visitors. Will the Cabinet member commit to communicating these charges with town and parish councils and ensure that the Vale website is updated to clearly identify which of our toilets charge a fee, and to direct residents to how they can apply for a RADAR key. For example, that these keys are available to purchase through AGE UK?

### **Answer**

Councillor Coleman, having only recently taken on the portfolio responsibility for public conveniences following Councillor Dewhurst's resignation from Cabinet, undertook to provide a written response to the supplementary question.

## **73 Motions on notice**

**With the agreement of Council, Councillor Smith moved, and Councillor Foxhall seconded amended wording to the motion set out in the agenda at item 19 to accommodate an amendment with additional words shown in bold below:**

“Council notes:

Thames Water Limited’s proposal to increase household water bills to an average of £735 by 2030, an increase of 60% in cash terms.

That amongst the main arguments for privatising the water companies in 1989 were:

- The private sector would be more efficient and make better use of investment funds.
- The private sector would not be held back by government limits on investment levels.
- The water regulator, OFWAT would prevent the new private monopolies from abusing their market power.

In the 35 years since privatisation, investment in infrastructure has stagnated while the debt held by water companies has increased significantly.

Thames Water has failed to deal with leaks and the amount of sewage being pumped into local rivers has rocketed.

Across the network, Thames Water spilled sewage for 6,500 hours in the last nine months of 2023. This pollutes our waterways, damages the natural environment, and poses serious health risks to wildlife, pets and humans.

Thames Water has continued to pay out huge dividends to shareholders, last year paying a £37.5m dividend to a parent company as the company’s debts rose to £14.7bn in the same period.

Thames Water has continued to pay out huge pay and benefits packages to senior executives, including a total of £1.6m paid to the Chief Executive in the 2022-23 financial year.

Council believes:

Thames Water has had 35 years to draw up and implement plans to provide the necessary infrastructure to run its business properly.

That it is for Thames Water Limited to fund and manage the infrastructure investment urgently needed to stop the leaks and reduce sewage outflows, in line with the basis upon which the water industry was privatised in 1989.

That the cost of this much needed infrastructure should not fall on consumers who have been paying Thames Water bills on the basis that it delivers on its responsibilities.

Council resolves:

To ask the Leader to write to the Chair and Chief Executive of Ofwat and to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, setting out this council’s opposition to the proposed Thames Water price hike.

**To ask officers to consider submitting an Environmental Information Request regarding Thames Water’s plans for AMP8 across Vale of White Horse, and to consider our own priorities in the light of their response.**

To send a copy of this letter to the MPs for Oxford West & Abingdon and Wantage constituencies.”

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

**RESOLVED:**

To note Thames Water Limited's proposal to increase household water bills to an average of £735 by 2030, an increase of 60% in cash terms.

That amongst the main arguments for privatising the water companies in 1989 were:

- The private sector would be more efficient and make better use of investment funds.
- The private sector would not be held back by government limits on investment levels.
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**Council believes:**

Thames Water has had 35 years to draw up and implement plans to provide the necessary infrastructure to run its business properly.

That it is for Thames Water Limited to fund and manage the infrastructure investment urgently needed to stop the leaks and reduce sewage outflows, in line with the basis upon which the water industry was privatised in 1989.

That the cost of this much needed infrastructure should not fall on consumers who have been paying Thames Water bills on the basis that it delivers on its responsibilities.

**RESOLVES:**

To ask the Leader to write to the Chair and Chief Executive of Ofwat and to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, setting out this council's opposition to the proposed Thames Water price hike.

To ask officers to consider submitting an Environmental Information Request regarding Thames Water's plans for AMP8 across Vale of White Horse, and to consider our own priorities in the light of their response.

To send a copy of this letter to the MPs for Oxford West & Abingdon and Wantage constituencies.

The meeting closed at 9.25 pm

<b>Planning Committee, 9 Members</b>	
<b>Liberal Democrat (8)</b>	<b>Green (1)</b>
Ron Batstone	Cheryl Briggs
Jenny Hannaby	
Scott Houghton	
Rob Maddison	
Mike Pighills	
Jill Rayner	
Val Shaw (Vice-Chair)	
Max Thompson (Chair)	
<b>Preferred substitutes</b>	
<b>Liberal Democrat (8)</b>	<b>Green (3)</b>
Paul Barrow	Katherine Foxhall
Robert Clegg	Sarah James
Andy Cooke	Viral Patel
Amos Duveen	
Oliver Forder	
Hayleigh Gascoigne	
Judy Roberts	
Emily Smith	

<b>Scrutiny Committee, 9 Members</b>	
<b>Liberal Democrat (8)</b>	<b>Green (1)</b>
Ron Batstone	Katherine Foxhall (Chair)
James Cox	
Eric de la Harpe	
Oliver Forder	
Hayleigh Gascoigne	
Debby Hallett	
Rob Maddison	
Judy Roberts (Vice-Chair)	

<b>Preferred substitutes</b>	
<b>Liberal Democrat (8)</b>	<b>Green (3)</b>
Paul Barrow	Viral Patel
Kiera Bentley	Sarah James
Robert Clegg	Cheryl Briggs
Andy Cooke	
Amos Duveen	
Jenny Hannaby	
Emily Smith	
Max Thompson	

<b>Joint Scrutiny Committee, 5 Members</b>	
<b>Liberal Democrat (4)</b>	<b>Green (1)</b>
Andy Cooke	Katherine Foxhall (Co-Chair)
Ron Batstone	
Judy Roberts	
Andrew Skinner	
<b>Preferred substitutes</b>	
<b>Liberal Democrat (4)</b>	<b>Green (3)</b>
Kiera Bentley	Sarah James
Mike Pighills	Viral Patel
Patrick O'Leary	Cheryl Briggs
Max Thompson	

<b>Joint Audit and Governance Committee, 4 Members</b>
<b>Liberal Democrat (4)</b>
Oliver Forder
Judy Roberts
Andrew Skinner
Emily Smith (Co-Chair)
<b>Preferred substitutes</b>

<b>Liberal Democrat (4)</b>	
Andy Cooke	
Eric de la Harpe	
Jenny Hannaby	
Mike Pighills	

### **Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee, 6 Members**

<b>Liberal Democrat (5)</b>	<b>Green (1)</b>
Eric de la Harpe	Cheryl Briggs
Oliver Forder (Chair)	
Diana Lugova	
Rob Maddison	
Max Thompson (Vice-Chair)	

#### **Preferred substitutes**

<b>Liberal Democrat (5)</b>	<b>Green (3)</b>
Ron Batstone	Katherine Foxhall
Neil Fawcett	Sarah James
Scott Houghton	Viral Patel
Patrick O'Leary	
Mike Pighills	

### **Joint Staff Committee, 5 Members**

<b>Liberal Democrat (4)</b>	<b>Green (1)</b>
Sue Caul	Viral Patel
Neil Fawcett	
Andy Foulsham	
Bethia Thomas	

#### **Substitutes**

The Leader may be substituted by another Cabinet member.  
Other members of the committee may be substituted by any other member of the council.



### **General Licensing Committee, 12 Members**

<b>Liberal Democrat (11)</b>	<b>Green (1)</b>
Paul Barrow	Cheryl Briggs
Ron Batstone (Chair)	
Kiera Bentley	
Lucy Edwards	
Neil Fawcett	
Oliver Forder	
Diana Lugova	
Patrick O'Leary (Vice-Chair)	
Val Shaw	
Andrew Skinner	
Bethia Thomas	
<b>NO SUBSTITUTES</b>	

### **Licensing Acts Committee, 12 Members**

<b>Liberal Democrat (11)</b>	<b>Green (1)</b>
Paul Barrow	Cheryl Briggs
Ron Batstone (Chair)	
Kiera Bentley	
Lucy Edwards	
Neil Fawcett	
Oliver Forder	
Diana Lugova	
Patrick O'Leary (Vice-Chair)	
Val Shaw	
Andrew Skinner	
Bethia Thomas	
<b>NO SUBSTITUTES</b>	

**Appeals Panel, 3 Members****Liberal Democrat (3)**

Paul Barrow

Rob Clegg (Chair)

Jill Rayner

**PREFERRED SUBSTITUTES****Liberal Democrat (3)**

Debby Hallett

Val Shaw

Richard Webber

**Climate Emergency Advisory Committee, 7 Members****Liberal Democrat (6)**

Kiera Bentley

Robert Clegg

James Cox

Eric de la Harpe (Vice Chair)

Hayleigh Gascoigne (Chair)

Scott Houghton

**Green (1)**

Sarah James

**Preferred substitutes****Liberal Democrat (6)**

Ron Batstone

Amos Duveen

Rob Maddison

Mike Pighills

Jill Rayner

Val Shaw

**Green (3)**

Viral Patel

Katherine Foxhall

Cheryl Briggs