

# Ex.75

## MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE

HELD AT THE GUILDHALL,  
ABINGDON ON FRIDAY, 3RD  
APRIL, 2009 AT 2.30PM

### Open to the Public, including the Press

PRESENT:

MEMBERS: Councillor Tony de Vere (Chair), Mary de Vere, Richard Farrell, Jenny Hannaby, Angela Lawrence and Richard Webber

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Steve Bishop, Alice Brander, David Buckle, Steve Culliford, Andrew Down, Lorna Edwards, Nikki Malin, Matt Prosser, Margaret Reed, Anna Robinson, Paul Staines and Toby Warren

NON-PARTICIPATING MEMBER: Councillor Melinda Tilley

NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: 5

### Ex.117 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Jerry Patterson (Vice-Chair).

### Ex.118 MINUTES

The minutes of the Executive meeting held on 6 February 2009 were adopted and signed as a correct record.

### Ex.119 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

### Ex.120 URGENT BUSINESS AND CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

### Ex.121 STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER 32

The Executive received two statements from members of the public.

- (1) Estelle Packwood made a statement on behalf of the Oxfordshire Chinese Community and Advice Centre in support of its grant application. She sought an additional grant of £7,500 towards the cost of running the centre. Approximately 900 Chinese people lived in the Vale, about half of whom used the centre's services. The resources at the centre were stretched but staff continued to work well beyond their hours due to dedication to the Chinese community. The centre helped the Council by providing a bi-lingual service to allow Chinese residents to gain access to services in the Vale. Voluntary financial contributions to the centre had reduced due to the current economic

downturn. She hoped the council would be able to support the centre further to allow the Chinese community to continue to gain access to services.

- (2) Colin Cure made a statement on behalf of the Oxfordshire Association for the Blind in support of its grant application. Rather than describe the services the Association provided as he had done to the Executive in April 2008, he gave an example of an individual who approached him seeking support and advice after losing his sight. With the support of the Royal National Institute of Blind People, counselling was provided and equipment was provided to allow the individual to continue to live his life independently. In return the individual had agreed to help the Association to run its services. Mr Cure asked the Executive to continue its support for the Association.

The Chair thanked the speakers for their statements.

## Ex.122 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER 32

None

## Ex.123 FINANCIAL MONITORING

(Time: 2.40pm to 2.47pm)

The Executive received and considered an agenda report setting out requests for virements and permanent budget adjustments. Some of these had been approved by the Strategic Director; others required the Executive's approval.

Although Members raised questions on several items, the Executive was content with the answers and approved all of the requests.

It was noted that one virement request related to £50k of Government grant that had been expected for 2008/09 for waste performance efficiency. However, this had not been received as expected but was included in the Council's overall Revenue Support Grant, which itself had not been increased. Members expressed disappointment that this grant had not been paid as expected. It was noted that the funds had already been committed, giving rise for the need for a virement from Contingency.

*RESOLVED*

*that the virements and permanent budget adjustments set out in the agenda report be approved.*

## Ex.124 COMMUNITY GRANTS

(Time 2.47pm to 3.05pm)

The Executive received and considered report 183/08 of the Head of Corporate Strategy which set out the budget position for the Executive in respect of community grants and set out details of six grant applications received.

Members agreed in principle to allocate grant funding to each applicant but, due to the level of funding available, were unable to support the applications in full. Members

considered that as this was the first of two meetings at which grants would be allocated in the 2009/10 financial year, approximately half of the budget should be allocated at this meeting. The Executive then awarded grants to each applicant.

The Executive was also asked to approve the carrying forward of any unspent grant budgets from the Area Committees in 2008/09 to 2009/10. Further to the report it was noted that the West Area Committee had spent all of its 2008/09 allocation. The Executive agreed to carry forward the unspent community grants budgets for the Abingdon Area Committee and the North East Area Committee.

*RESOLVED*

- (a) *that the Executive's budget for 2009/10 for Vale-wide community grants of £21,714 be noted;*
- (b) *that the following grant applications be approved (by six votes to nil):*

<u>Applicant</u>	<u>Scheme</u>	<u>Amount sought</u>	<u>Grant awarded</u>
<i>Oxfordshire Association for the Blind</i>	<i>Towards running costs</i>	<i>£5,000</i>	<i>£3,000</i>
<i>Oxfordshire Chinese Community and Advice Centre</i>	<i>Towards running costs and Chinese New Year celebrations</i>	<i>£7,500</i>	<i>£2,000</i>
<i>Wantage Counselling Service</i>	<i>Towards running costs</i>	<i>£1,800</i>	<i>£1,000</i>
<i>Ryder-Cheshire Volunteers</i>	<i>Towards running costs</i>	<i>£2,000</i>	<i>£1,500</i>
<i>Oxfordshire Rural Education Initiative</i>	<i>Towards cost of employing an Education Link Officer</i>	<i>£2,000</i>	<i>£500</i>
<i>Vitalise</i>	<i>Towards the provision of care breaks</i>	<i>£2,716.50</i>	<i>£2,250</i>

- (c) *that the requests from Area Committees to carry forward any unallocated grant budget from 2008/09 be agreed as follows:*

<i>Abingdon Area Committee</i>	<i>£1,764.72</i>
<i>North East Area Committee</i>	<i>£417.65</i>

Ex.125 OPTIONS FOR A SHARED CALENDAR AND E-MAIL SYSTEM

(Time 3.05pm to 3.10pm)

The Executive received and considered report 184/08 of the Head of HR, IT & Customer Services which reviewed the Council's e-mail and calendar system. This Council and South Oxfordshire District Council were operating different and incompatible systems. The consequence was a great deal of duplication and wasted effort. The report examined the options for moving to a shared system that would promote more efficient joint working. It proposed that the costs should be shared equally by the two councils. A consultant company had been appointed to review

needs at both councils and to recommend the best option. The two possible options were:

- Microsoft Exchange
- Novell GroupWise

The consultant had recommended that Novell's GroupWise was the best product for a short and medium term solution as its cost was significantly less than the Microsoft alternative. GroupWise would also have a shorter implementation time. The consultant's recommendation had received support from the Joint Senior Management Board at its meeting of 11 March.

Members considered that the Novell software option was the best short and medium term solution but asked that the officers consider options for the longer term. Members also asked that the Executive Members were given access to the new system from home and that consideration was given to interfaces with hand held computer diaries.

## *RESOLVED*

- (a) that the adoption of Novell GroupWise as the Council's e-mail and calendar system be approved;*
- (b) that, in accordance with Contract Standing Order 2C(3), an exemption to the requirement to obtain competitive quotations or tenders be approved;*
- (c) that authority be delegated to the Head of HR, IT and Customer Services, in consultation with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, to enter into a contract with Novell for the purchase of GroupWise until 31 March 2011 under Contract Standing Order 2C(3), taking advantage of the favourable terms made available by joining South Oxfordshire District Council's existing contract; and*
- (d) that officers propose options for the optimum long term solution in time for April 2011.*

## Ex.126 HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY: IMPLEMENTATION OF SUB-REGIONAL CHOICE-BASED LETTINGS SCHEME (Time 3.10pm to 3.20pm)

The Executive received and considered report 181/08 of the Head of Health and Housing which proposed a revision the Council's choice-based lettings scheme, which had been established in 2004. The Government had a target for housing authorities to establish choice based letting schemes by 2010. In 2008, Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council and South Oxfordshire District Council all implemented schemes as a means of allocating social housing.

The Government had also actively encouraged authorities to set up sub-regional choice-based lettings schemes across their borders, and had offered funding to local authorities to progress this initiative. Such a project had been ongoing in Oxfordshire since 2007, and was due for completion in the summer 2009. As part of that project, the four of Oxfordshire's five District Councils concerned had worked towards

harmonising their allocations policies to ensure a common basis for applicants who qualified for housing across the districts. The report summarised the proposed changes to the Council's Allocations Policy in order to implement a sub-regional choice-based lettings scheme. The report also described the common operational principles to be adopted by the four authorities.

It was noted that 10% of the housing stock would be available for non-Vale residents moving to the district. This would allow more choice for people to move around in the sub-region in local authority rented accommodation rather than being restricted to their own district. There would also be a re-categorisation of the bands to remove the sixth band relating to key workers, who would be moved to a new band. This would only have a minimal impact on others. The large majority of residents would remain in their current band.

Members supported the proposal to adopt an amended scheme in line with Cherwell, Oxford City and South Oxfordshire.

## *R E C O M M E N D E D*

- (a) *that the common Allocations Policy be adopted as a means of assessing applications for social housing. There will be five bands categorising housing need, rather than six, and for those properties allocated to the sub-regional scheme, an applicant's local connection will be to the sub-region, so an applicant in the Vale will be deemed to have a local connection to each of the three other districts;*
- (b) *that 10% of all general needs housing be made available for sub-regional allocations, subject to the excluding properties with four or more bedrooms, properties in locations which rarely become available, and properties developed as part of rural exception sites. Properties will be let on a reciprocal basis and be closely monitored to ensure that the district's population does not increase as a result of this scheme; and*
- (c) *that all nominations for sheltered and disabled housing that have had substantial adaptations be made available for sub-regional allocations, but where there is a high local need for a property this can be excluded.*

### Ex.127 REVENUE BUDGET CARRY FORWARDS REQUESTS 2008/09 (Time 3.20pm to 3.24pm)

The Executive received and considered report 182/08 of the Head of Finance which detailed a list of budget figures requested to be carried forward from the 2008/09 revenue budget into 2009/10. The projected outturn position for the 2008/09 budget was an overspend. Consequently the carry forward requests related only to unspent grant allocations and delayed projects.

Further to the report it was noted that another request had been received to carry forward unspent funds to be used for grants to community flood prevention groups. This request was in the sum of £110,900.

The Executive agreed that all of these unspent budgets should be carried forward to 2009/10 as not doing so would jeopardise these schemes. Members considered that it was important that these schemes should continue, in particular grants to flood groups.

*RESOLVED*

*that the revenue budget carry forward requests, totalling £173,145, be approved to be carried forward from 2008/09 to 2009/10.*

Ex.128 PROPERTY INVESTMENT  
(Time 3.24pm to 3.31pm)

The Executive received and considered report 185/08 of the Strategic Director which reviewed the Council's policy on property investment. The report proposed a change to the policy and an addition to the capital programme. The Executive also received and noted the confidential appendices relating to the report.

The policy had been adopted in March 2004. However, the current recession had prompted a review. It was suggested that the maximum percentage of the investment portfolio in property should be 80% of the total, up from 75%, and the cash funds invested (i.e. not held for cash-flow purposes) should not fall below £5 million, reduced from £10 million.

In order to allow the council to react quicker to property investment opportunities it was also suggested that a sum of £5.5 million should be included in the capital programme for 2009/10 for the possible purchase of an investment property up to the value of £5.2 million plus costs, the actual purchase to be agreed by the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for property.

The Chair invited the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Melinda Tilley, to speak. Councillor Tilley asked for confirmation that the decision to purchase property at this level of cost was a Key Decision, and would therefore be subject to notification to Scrutiny Committee Members in accordance with the Council's normal call-in procedure. The officers confirmed that this was the case. Councillor Tilley asked to be kept informed before any such decision was taken.

Members supported the amendment of this policy as suggested but noted that policy changes were ultimately a decision of the full Council. It was believed that the changes would bring a better return for the Council. £5 million cash funds were expected to be sufficient to cover unforeseen events in the period of the current medium term plan. However, other investments could be converted to cash funds in the unlikely event that £5 million proved to be insufficient.

*R E C O M M E N D E D*

- (a) *that the Property Investment Policy be amended so that the maximum percentage of the investment portfolio in property be 80% of the total (up from 75%) and the cash funds invested (i.e. not held for cash-flow purposes) should not fall below £5 million (down from £10 million); and*

- (b) *that a sum of £5.5 million be included in the capital programme for 2009/10 for the possible purchase of an investment property up to the value of £5.2 million plus costs, the actual purchase to be agreed by the Portfolio holder with responsibility for property.*

Ex.129 EXCEPTION TO STANDING ORDERS FOR A JOINT HOUSING VIABILITY STUDY  
(Time 3.31pm to 3.35pm)

The Executive received and considered report 186/08 of the Head of Planning. The Local Development Framework needed to be supported by a sound evidence base. As part of this process, officers had identified the need to commission a study of the viability of affordable housing in the Vale and South Oxfordshire. It was proposed to commission a study of housing viability jointly with South Oxfordshire District Council. An exception to the Council's Contract Standing Orders was needed to enable the study to be procured effectively and save funds.

It was reported that the study would be split to cover each district independently. This was essential to find the true picture for each council. Members supported the proposal and accepted the reasons for the need to grant an exception to Contract Standing Orders. Members looked forward to the study results.

RESOLVED

- (a) *that an exception to Contract Standing Orders be authorised under Standing Order 2C to commission a housing viability study jointly with South Oxfordshire District Council using the contract standing orders operated by South Oxfordshire rather than the Vale; and*
- (b) *that authority be delegated to the Head of Planning to enter into a contract for a Housing Viability Study jointly with South Oxfordshire District Council to support the preparation of the Council's Local Development Framework.*

Exempt Information Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972

None

The meeting rose at 3.35 pm