

# **Minutes**

of a meeting of the

## **Scrutiny Committee**

**held on Monday, 8 February 2021 at 6.00 pm**

**This was a virtual meeting.**

You can watch the recording here:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTj2pCic8vzucpzlaSWE3UQ>



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

### **Present:**

Members: Councillors Nathan Boyd (Chair), Jerry Avery, Ron Batstone, Cheryl Briggs, Hayleigh Gascoigne, David Grant, Robert Maddison and Max Thompson

Officers: Simon Hewings, Candida Mckelvey, Adrianna Partridge, Margaret Reed.

Also present: Cabinet member Councillor Andrew Crawford

### **Sc.94 Apologies for absence**

Samantha Bowring sent her apologies.

### **Sc.95 Minutes**

The public minutes of the meeting on 15 December 2020 were agreed as a correct record and the chair will sign them as such.

There was a confidential part of the meeting planned to discuss confidential minutes of 15 December and one finance appendix that contained some additional figures. The chair asked if the committee would be happy to agree these now, or whether a confidential session was deemed necessary.

Chair explained that further confidential details from the meeting on 15 December 2020 would be revealed at the appropriate time. At present, such details were still commercially sensitive.

The committee agreed that the confidential minutes of 15 December 2020 were a correct record, and the chair will sign them as such.

### **Sc.96 Declarations of interest**

None.

## **Sc.97      Urgent business and chair's announcements**

No urgent business, normal housekeeping rules apply.

Chair added that the confidential appendix A6 of the budget report would need discussing in private but would not be necessary if there were no questions.

## **Sc.98      Public participation**

None.

## **Sc.99      Budget 2021/22**

The budget 2021-22 Cabinet report was introduced by Cabinet member for Finance and Corporate assets, Councillor Andrew Crawford. The Interim Head of Finance, Simon Hewings, was present to answer questions.

He explained that the budget required a thorough review of all budget codes. Gratitude was expressed to officers who worked on this. There were no cuts to frontline services. Comments from Scrutiny were welcomed before presentation to Council.

The Interim Head of Finance added that budget setting was a statutory duty, and the council was required to set a council tax.

A question was asked on page ten of the report. The estimate of total capital expenditure was £12 million. Why were the estimates lower in later years? It was responded that the affordable homes commitment part of the growth deal is a large commitment with £8 million budgeted to contribute to affordable homes delivery. This was a one off. There were Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments also, to Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) for this year and next. These distort figures for this year and next.

What were the long-term plans to improve the budget?

The Cabinet Member for Finance said that a cautious approach was taken to determining what funding from government we would get. The council is going ahead with projects despite Covid-19, which will contribute positively to the budget. The corporate plan was now in place, and we will plan to tackle the unsustainability of the current council tax rate and the caps that were in place. We had not accounted for capital receipts that we do not have yet. There was opportunity to save money and make income from council property.

The Interim Head of Finance added that a raft of items across all services will be needed to balance the budget.

Councillor Avery had connection issues and had no questions on the paper because he was unable to hear the meeting until half an hour into the meeting.

On page 16, an explanation was sought regarding small staff increments, reduction in training, the Beacon. The Interim Head of Finance explained that items in Appendix A2 were previously agreed decisions in last year's budget.

Paragraph 16 – New Homes Bonus (NHB) – when will we have clarity on the figures?

The Interim Head of Finance answered that the final settlement figures were just published and will be debated in Parliament, so are unlikely to change.

It was clarified that in paragraph 25, we had made allowance in 2022/23 for NHB legacy payments. Core revenue spending power has been estimated forward over the life of the MTFP period. In reference to line 48 in the MTFP it was noted that there was uncertainty over what a future scheme will look like at this stage.

Vale of White Horse District Council – Scrutiny Committee minutes

Waste collection service on page 23 – increase in contract cost. What was the cost of garden waste collection to the council? Cabinet member answered that there was an indexation increase in the Biffa contract. Biffa collected from more properties. Brown bins collection was discretionary, and the council was charged by Biffa per bin and there was a small surplus.

On page 16 – regarding the climate emergency budget. Why was there no budget in future years? It was responded that in opening budget adjustments – this was a one-off budget last year, a one-off programme of work. There was new staffing for climate emergency. The corporate plan supported this area of work and it will be revisited in due course.

The chair summed up that there was no formal recommendation for scrutiny to make. The committee were informed that the Cabinet member for finance noted feedback from the committee.

Cabinet member and officers were thanked for their work and time.

## **Sc.100 Work schedule and dates for all South and Vale scrutiny meetings**

The GLL report had been moved to later in the year.

The GLL confidential item had been moved forward to a meeting on 9 March.

A34 diversion item had been moved as staff had been redeployed to Covid-19 work.

There may be a June 2021 report on office accommodation.

The corporate delivery plan and discretionary growth bid process may be looked at in May 2021. Chair is due to meet with officers to set further dates, and the chair encouraged committee members to get in touch if they had any other items to add.

## **Sc.101 Exclusion of the public**

The committee agreed that the confidential session was not required.

## **Sc.102 confidential minutes**

None.

## **Sc.103 Budget 21/22: confidential appendix A6**

None.

The meeting closed at 6.41 pm