

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Cabinet



held on Monday 3 July 2023 at 2.30 pm
in Meeting Room 1, Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon, OX14 3JE

Open to the public, including the press

Present in the meeting room:

Cabinet members: Councillors Bethia Thomas (Chair), Neil Fawcett (Vice-Chair), Mark Coleman and Helen Pighills

Officers: Steve Culliford (Democratic Services Team Leader) and Simon Hewings (Head of Finance)

Remote attendance:

Cabinet members: Councillors Andy Crawford and Debby Hallett

Officers: Patrick Arran (Head of Legal and Democratic), Andrew Busby (Head of Development and Corporate Landlord), Ben Coleman (Programmes and Assurance Manager), Andrew Down (Deputy Chief Executive – Partnerships), Paul Fielding (Head of Housing and Environment), Jeremy Lloyd (Broadcasting Officer), Mark Minion (Head of Corporate Services), Adrianna Partridge (Deputy Chief Executive – Transformation and Operations),

Guests: Councillors Kiera Bentley, Lucy Edwards, Katherine Foxhall, and Judy Roberts

13. Apologies for absence

Councillors Sue Caul, Debra Dewhurst and Andy Foulsham had each sent their apologies for absence.

14. Declarations of interests

None

15. Urgent business and chair's announcements

Cabinet noted the emergency evacuation arrangements.

The chair announced that an additional report had been circulated and published regarding the Local Authority Housing Fund 2. This would be considered alongside item 6 on the agenda.

16. Public participation

None

17. Update on the council's Information Technology infrastructure

Cabinet considered the head of corporate services' report, which summarised the discussions relating to the council's information technology arrangements. The report sought support to progress with the implementation of the council's previously agreed approach to create a single tenancy for its Microsoft 365 infrastructure with South Oxfordshire District Council. This was part of the councils' joint Technology Strategy originally agreed in 2018 and re-affirmed in 2021.

Cabinet noted the options:

1. to agree to move forward with the segregation of the council's Microsoft 365 tenancy and create a stand-alone environment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district councils.
2. wait to the end of the Capita contract in 2025.

Cabinet considered that option 1 would allow the council to progress this work quickly and that the complex unpicking of our current information technology arrangements should not wait until the contract end.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) note the update set out in the head of corporate services' report to Cabinet on 3 July 2023;
- (b) reaffirm the council's intention to pursue a separate Microsoft 365 tenancy as part of the council's overall transformation programme and planned exit from the outsourced information technology arrangements; and
- (c) 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 Microsoft 365 tenancy.

RECOMMENDED to Council:

- (d) 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.

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

(1) Local Authority Housing Fund and Service Family Accommodation housing

Cabinet considered the report of the deputy chief executive – transformation and operations on work being undertaken in relation to providing homes under government schemes.

The report set out the proposed framework to deliver a target of 14 homes that met the eligibility criteria outlined within the Local Authority Housing Fund prospectus. This was in accordance with the signed Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and

Communities, which set out the basis for the use of the funding. The report sought approval to progress to the delivery phase.

The report also set out the proposed framework to lease approximately 48 Service Family Accommodation properties for up to three years. This would provide transitional accommodation for individuals and families under the government's Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy scheme. The report sought approval to enter into the respective arrangements with the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence.

The report outlined the projected capital and revenue implications and potential risks and benefits of proceeding with the schemes. Given the capital funding and potential borrowing requirement necessary for the Local Authority Housing Fund scheme, Cabinet would need to make recommendation to full Council so that agreement could be sought for financial allocations to be made to allow the Local Authority Housing Fund scheme to proceed.

Cabinet recognised that this was a significant undertaking for the council and thanked officers for their work in progressing the schemes in such a short timescale. There were daily changes to the arrangements and the council would have to adapt to these.

Cabinet supported progressing with the Local Authority Housing Fund and Service Family Accommodation property schemes as a matter of urgency and necessity to support those most in need of the council's help. The financial arrangements had been assessed in detail. The council would receive government grant funding of approximately 40 per cent of the cost but would have to fund the remainder. However, the homes would then belong to the council. Cabinet members supported the proposals.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) note the approach proposed for the delivery and management of the properties under the Local Authority Housing Fund scheme, noting the risks, and approve officers to proceed;
- (b) note the proposed phase one staffing structure for the delivery and management of these properties alongside those purchased or managed under other arrangements;
- (c) approve a virement from Contingency of up to £100,000 to cover potential unbudgeted revenue expenditure;
- (d) 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;
- (e) 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;

- (f) 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;
- (g) 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
- (h) 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 Service Family Accommodation scheme.

RECOMMENDED to Council on 12 July 2023:

- (i) 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.

(2) Local Authority Housing Fund 2

Cabinet then considered the supplementary report of the deputy chief executive - transformation and operations. This sought an additional decision to accept government grant funding made available under Local Authority Housing Fund 2, a second phase of the initial scheme. The report had been published after the Cabinet agenda as the details had only emerged from government in the preceding days. Cabinet noted that the second phase of this scheme would further support the provision of housing for the council's refugee accommodation programme.

Unlike the first phase, the Local Authority Housing Fund 2 allowed the council to utilise the accommodation for general homelessness use and would deliver a further four homes. This would bring in government funding of £680,000 and require a recommendation to Council to add £1.7 million to the capital programme.

For the same reasons as the first phase above, Cabinet supported the proposal to accept the government funding and authorise officers to sign a Memorandum of Understanding. Doing so would allow the council to provide additional homes to support those most in need.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) 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.

RECOMMENDED to Council to:

- (b) 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.

19. Exclusion of the public, including the press

RESOLVED: 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, Schedule 12A of the Act, and
- (ii) the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

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

Cabinet sought clarification on the financial arrangements for the Local Authority Housing Fund and Service Family Accommodation housing schemes.