

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Cabinet



held on Friday 1 December 2023 at 10.30 am
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), Sue Caul, Andy Crawford, Debra Dewhurst, Neil Fawcett, Andy Foulsham and Diana Lugova

Officers: John Backley (Technical Services Manager), Steve Culliford (Democratic Services Team Leader), Ben Silverthorne (Trainee Democratic and Elections Officer), and Mark Stone (Chief Executive)

Remote attendance:

Cabinet members: Councillors Mark Coleman (Vice-Chair) and Lucy Edwards

Officers: Andrew Busby (Head of Development and Corporate Landlord), Trevor Gaffney (Revenues and Benefits Manager), Simon Hewings (Head of Finance), Andrew Lane (Planning Policy Team Leader), Jeremy Lloyd (Broadcasting Officer), Suzanne Malcolm (Deputy Chief Executive – Place), Mark Minion (Head of Corporate Services), Lucy Murfett (Policy Manager), Tom Rice (Planning Policy Officer), and Vivien Williams (Head of Legal and Democratic – Interim)

Guests: Councillors Katherine Foxhall and Hayleigh Gascoigne

45. Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Helen Pighills.

46. Declarations of interests

Councillor Debra Dewhurst declared an interest in item 8, the request by Chilton Parish Council for Section 106 funds towards play area and recreation ground improvements. Councillor Dewhurst had been involved in the task group working on this project.

47. Urgent business and chair's announcements

The chair read a statement in memory of two members of staff, Patrick Arran and Louise Franklin, who had passed away. Cabinet paused for a moment of silence.

48. Public participation

One member of the public and two district councillors had registered to speak at the meeting.

- (1) David Marsh, the secretary to the Vale branch of the CPRE, addressed Cabinet on the Joint Local Plan. He welcomed the local plan but reserved judgement on the detail of its policies until the consultation period had concluded. In particular, he welcomed the new policies to protect the countryside. He also urged the council to resist taking on further housing to meet Oxford's unmet need. He asked that policy CE5 was amended to strengthened to encourage rooftop solar on new buildings. He asked when the policy map would be updated to show areas suitable for solar farms and called for a land-use framework for Oxfordshire.
- (2) Councillor Katherine Foxhall, co-chair of the Joint Scrutiny Committee, acknowledged the reason for the postponement of the Joint Scrutiny Committee meeting and thanked officers for re-arranging it for 7 December. She also thanked officers for suggesting an amended recommendation (b) on the Joint Local Plan to allow the joint committee's comments to be taken into consideration.
- (3) Councillor Hayleigh Gascoigne addressed Cabinet as a district councillor on the subject of car park fees. She believed that the council tax payers should not subsidise the cost of car parking and urged Cabinet to charge a nominal fee for the first hour of parking. She also urged Cabinet not to reduce the cost of parking permits for electric vehicles.

49. Recommendations and updates from other committees

None

50. Joint Local Plan 2041 - Approval of Preferred Options Document for Public Consultation

Cabinet considered the head of policy and programmes' report on the Joint Local Plan. The report summarised the work that had taken place to prepare the draft local plan, the first joint local plan with South Oxfordshire District Council. The report also sought Cabinet's approval to progress the plan to the next stage: the Regulation 18 preferred options stage for public consultation early in 2024.

The Cabinet member for planning welcomed the draft joint local plan, which would replace the two councils' adopted local plans. The draft plan set out the preferred options and policies, including new policies on net-zero carbon, biodiversity net-gain, water efficiency, and dark skies. Due to the large amount of development already included in the councils' adopted local plans, in this local plan there was no need to allocate new strategic greenfield housing sites or new employment sites, beyond those already planned. The draft plan proposed just two new housing allocations, both brownfield sites, with just one in the Vale of White Horse, being an extension of the previously allocated site at Dalton Barracks.

The Cabinet member welcomed the innovative consultation methods proposed for this stage, which would be more engaging and accessible with the aim of reaching as many people as possible. One example was the 'Local Plan in a Nutshell', which contained the headlines of the joint local plan, allowing the public to give their views quickly, without going into the detail. There was also an interactive policies map to make it easier for everyone to find out which policies applied to any chosen site.

Cabinet noted that the Joint Scrutiny Committee had been due to consider the Joint Local Plan on 27 November but this meeting had been postponed at short notice due to the passing away of a senior officer. The committee would meet on 7 December instead. To allow the committee's comments to be considered before the consultation period commenced, the Cabinet member proposed an amended recommendation (b), in addition to recommendation (a) as set out in the report. Cabinet supported this amendment.

Cabinet welcomed and strongly supported the draft joint local plan, its new policies to protect the countryside, and no need for new strategic housing or employment sites on greenfield land. Working together with South Oxfordshire to produce a joint plan had also saved costs.

Cabinet also welcomed the proposed consultation arrangements, including the 'Local Plan in a Nutshell' and interactive policies map. The consultation was due to commence in January 2024 and run for six weeks into February. Cabinet encouraged as many people as possible to respond to the consultation.

Cabinet also thanked officers for their work on preparing the plan for consultation.

RESOLVED to:

- (a) approve the Preferred Options version of the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Joint Local Plan 2041 and supporting documents for a six-week period of public consultation in accordance with Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012; and
- (b) authorise the Head of Policy and Programmes, in consultation with the South Cabinet Member for Planning and the Vale Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Policy and Programmes, to make any necessary amendments, updates or corrections to the Joint Local Plan and supporting documents, mapping and appendices, including to consider any comments or suggestions from the Joint Scrutiny Committee, prior to commencement of the consultation period.

51. Car park fees for 2024/25

Cabinet considered the report of the head of development and corporate landlord. This set out how officers had undertaken the annual review of car park fees. Cabinet was asked to set fees for the 2024/25 financial year, commencing on 1 April 2024.

The report set out the projected costs over the next four years. Cabinet noted that the council's car parking function should be self-financing, with the aim for income to meet costs. Any surplus could be spent on car park resurfacing, the provision and maintenance of toilets in the car parks, and related infrastructure, such as signage and cycle racks.

Cabinet considered the following options:

- Option A – no change to the current parking fees;
- Option B - remove the one-hour free parking and charge a nominal amount of 50 pence;
- Option C – extend Sunday parking charges to all car parks;
- Option D – introduce a differential pricing structure using a higher tier of charging for town centre car parks and a lower tier of charging for car parks on the edge of town (maintaining one-hour free parking);

- Option E – charging for parking in the evenings;
- Option F – half price parking permits for zero emission vehicles;
- Option G – increase the cost of parking permits by 10 per cent (tabled at the meeting was a paper setting out the increase in the proposed permit fees);
- Option H – increase all parking fees by 10 per cent;
- Option I – increase overnight parking for campervans to £10 per overnight stay.

The Cabinet member for the environment suggested that Cabinet should consider adopting options that only required a notice of variation, rather than a full consultation on a new car park order.

Cabinet discussed the options, preferring to increase some fees to allow the council to cover expected increases in the cost of running the car parks. This removed option A. Members recognised that as the current contract with the car parks management contractor expired in 2025, it was difficult to estimate longer term costs accurately.

Members rejected options A, B, C, E, F, and H at this stage. Members believed that major changes should be avoided at the current time; the council could review the service when the current contract expired.

It was proposed and seconded that by adopting options D, G and I, this would help cover the projected service costs. Officers were asked to ensure that these changes could be legally and operationally implemented in the most efficient manner by using a notice of variation, rather than consulting on a new car park order, which could not be implemented by 1 April 2024. Members proposed a new, simplified parking fee structure for town centre car parks in Abingdon, Faringdon and Wantage, with free parking up to one-hour, £2 for two hours, and an additional £1 per hour thereafter, with a ceiling on 'over six hours'. Both Southampton Street and Gloucester Street car parks in Faringdon should be classified as town centre car parks, with Southampton Street car park having up to two hours free parking. Members also proposed a new parking fee structure for edge of town car parks in Abingdon and Wantage, at a lower level than town centre car parks. The Cabinet member for the environment supported these proposals, as did other Cabinet members. Cabinet also supported increasing the cost of parking permits by 10 per cent, and increasing overnight parking for campervans to £10.00 per overnight stay. Members also delegated authority to officers to prepare a notice of variation.

Members thanked officers for their review of the car park fees.

RESOLVED to:

- (a) authorise the head of development and corporate landlord, in consultation with the Cabinet member for environmental services and waste, to agree the car parking fees for the financial year 2024-25, and ensure that the following changes can be legally and operationally implemented in the most efficient manner by using a Notice of Variation:

- (i) a new car park fee structure for town centre car parks in Abingdon, Faringdon and Wantage:

Up to 1 hour Parking:	Free
Up to 2 hours:	£2
Up to 3 hours:	£3
Up to 4 hours:	£4
Up to 5 hours:	£5
Up to 6 hours:	£6

Over 6 hours: £7

- (ii) that both Southampton Street car park and Gloucester Street car park in Faringdon be classified as town centre car parks;
- (iii) confirm that for Southampton Street car park in Faringdon, up to two hours parking is free;
- (iv) a new car park fee structure for edge of town car parks in Abingdon and Wantage:

Up to 1 hour Parking:	Free
Up to 2 hours:	£1.50
Up to 3 hours:	£2
Up to 4 hours:	£3
Up to 5 hours:	£3.50
Up to 6 hours:	£4
Over 6 hours:	£5

- (v) increasing the cost of permits by 10 per cent;
- (vi) increasing overnight parking for campervans to £10.00 per overnight stay; and

- (b) authorise the head of legal and democratic to prepare a Notice of Variation under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 for publishing in the local newspaper and all affected car parks.

52. Request for Section 106 funds to Chilton Parish Council - Play area/recreation ground improvements

Councillor Debra Dewhurst declared an interest in this item and left the meeting room during its consideration.

Cabinet considered the head of finance's report on a request by Chilton Parish Council for section 106 funds towards play area and recreation ground improvements.

Cabinet supported the request as it would improve accessibility to the facilities in Chilton village.

RECOMMENDED to Council:

to create a budget for £116,000 towards new play area equipment and recreation ground improvement at Chilton parish village play area project, to be funded by the Section 106 contributions set out in the head of finance's report to Cabinet on 1 December 2023.

53. Council tax base 2024/25

Cabinet considered the head of finance's report on setting the council tax base for 2024/25. Each year an estimate was made of the taxable resources for the district as a whole and for each parish area. With Cabinet's support, this would be recommended to full Council for approval. The council tax base for the district would then be notified to Oxfordshire County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley, plus each parish and town council.

Cabinet welcomed the report and the detail it provided for each parish.

RECOMMENDED to Council to:

- (a) approve the report of the head of finance for the calculation of the council's tax base and the calculation of the tax base for each parish area for 2024/25;
- (b) agree that, in accordance with The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Vale of White Horse District Council as its council tax base for the year 2024/25 be 58,103.8; and
- (c) agree that, in accordance with The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Vale of White Horse District Council as the council tax base for the year 2024/25 for each parish be the amount shown against the name of that parish in Appendix A of the report of the head of finance to Cabinet on 1 December 2023.

54. Council tax reduction scheme

Cabinet considered the head of finance's report on a review of the council tax reduction scheme.

Following a change in practices by the Department of Work and Pensions, the report proposed a change to the council's scheme to require individuals to demonstrate that they had notified the government Department when they had a change in their circumstances.

Cabinet supported the proposed change for recommendation on to Council, noting that this would help protect the council from risk of fraud.

RECOMMENDED to Council:

- (a) that for the 2024/25 financial year onwards the council continues to adopt the previous 2023/24 Council Tax Reduction Scheme but with the following amendment:

"Where the council has identified that a taxpayer has failed to notify the Department of Work and Pensions of a relevant change in circumstances, affecting their legacy benefit or Universal Credit, then (where necessary) their entitlement to council tax reduction will be stopped, until that notification has taken place and revised Department of Work and Pensions benefit entitlement known."
- (b) that the above change be incorporated into the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the oncoming 2024/25 financial year onwards.

The meeting closed at 12.08 pm

Chair:

Date: