

# Minutes

## of a meeting of the

# Council



held on Wednesday 18 December 2024 at 7.00 pm  
at The Ridgeway, The Beacon, Portway, Wantage, OX12 9BY

### Open to the public, including the press

#### Present in the meeting room:

Councillors: Kiera Bentley (Chair), Oliver Forder (Vice-Chair), Paul Barrow, Ron Batstone, Cheryl Briggs, Sue Caul, Robert Clegg, Mark Coleman, Andy Cooke, Eric de la Harpe, Debra Dewhurst, Amos Duveen, 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, Peter Stevens, Bethia Thomas and Max Thompson

Officers: Nick Bennett, Head of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer, Steven Corrigan, Democratic Services Manager, Simon Hewings, Head of Finance and Mark Stone, Chief Executive

Prior to the start of the meeting Council observed a moments silence in memory of former Councillor and Vice-Chair of Council, Sheila Jones.

#### **49. Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cox, Crawford, Edwards, Fawcett, Hallett and Shaw.

#### **50. Minutes**

**RESOLVED:** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2024 as a correct record and agree that the Chair sign them as such.

#### **51. Declarations of interest**

None.

#### **52. Urgent business and chair's announcements**

The Chair provided general housekeeping information. She advised that details of her engagements were available on the council's website.

### **53. Public participation**

Cath Convery addressed Council on agenda item 13 – Councillors’ Allowances Scheme. She urged members not to support the proposed increase in the level of allowances at a time when many residents were still suffering from the cost-of-living crisis and the council was under financial pressure. The proposed increase could not be justified, allowances should not be seen as a full-time wage and only a small sample of councillors responded to the consultation as part of the review.

### **54. Petitions**

None.

### **55. Joint Audit and Governance Committee Annual Report**

Councillor Smith, Co-Chair of the Joint Audit and Governance Committee presented the annual report. She noted that this was the first time that the Joint Audit and Governance Committee had produced an annual report which addressed the recommendations of the external advisor engaged to provide training to the committee last year, and also that of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).

Se highlighted that the report set out the work of the committee:

- signing off the financial statements and receiving the reports of work undertaken by the councils’ auditors, EY;
- consideration of treasury management reports;
- consideration of reports on internal audit’s activity; and
- consideration of reports on governance and risk management, including code of conduct, complaints and Regulation of Investigatory Powers.

Council welcomed and noted the annual report as attached to the Council agenda for the meeting held on 18 December 2025.

### **56. Review of Joint Gambling Policy**

Councillor Batstone, Chair of the Licensing Acts Committee, introduced the report and recommendations. He advised that Council was recommended to adopt the revised version of the Joint Gambling Policy to meet the legal requirement to have a new policy ready to take effect from 31 January 2025.

The previous policy was reviewed with some minor changes made in respect of contact information, links and dates. A consultation ran for 4 weeks in August with just one blank response.

The Licensing Acts Committee met 21 November 2024 and resolved to recommend Council adopt and publish the proposed policy, subject to any minor editorial changes, and to authorise the head of communities to publish the policy in accordance with the regulations. In addition, the Committee recommended Council to retain the current ‘no casino’ resolution. The continuation of this resolution would mean that, if an opportunity to bid was added to the list of local authorities able to have a casino came up, the council would not be able to do this.

**RESOLVED:** to

1. adopt the proposed Joint Gambling Policy as attached to the Council agenda for the meeting held on 18 December 2024,
2. authorise the head of communities to make minor editorial changes to the Joint Gambling Policy,
3. authorise the head of communities to publish the Joint Gambling Policy in accordance with the Gambling Act 2005 (Licensing Authority Policy Statement) (England and Wales) Regulations 2006,
4. adopt a 'no casino' resolution under section 166 (1) of the Gambling Act 2005, meaning that any application for a casino would not be considered.

## **57. Council tax reduction scheme 2025/26**

Council considered the report of the head of finance on the proposed Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme for 2025/26. Cabinet had considered the report at its meeting on 29 November 2024 and recommended that Council adopt the scheme with an amendment to extend the period in which a new claim can be backdated from six months to 12 months.

In the absence of the cabinet member for finance and property assets, the Cabinet member for environmental services and waste, introduced the scheme, which aimed to help residents who apply late for a reduction in council tax. While the number of cases affected would be small, Cabinet had agreed that it was a worthwhile change to support those in greatest need.

Council supported the proposed amendment which would have a positive impact for vulnerable residents whilst having a minor financial impact for the council.

**RESOLVED:** that for the 2025/26 financial year onwards the council continues to adopt the previous 2024/25 Council Tax Reduction (CTR) Scheme but with the following amendment:

- a) Extend the period in which a new claim for CTR can be backdated from six months to twelve months, where good cause has been demonstrated.

## **58. Council tax base 2025/26**

Council considered the report of the head of finance on setting the council tax base for 2025/26. Cabinet had considered the report at its meeting on 29 November 2024 and had recommended Council adopt the recommendations.

The Cabinet member for environmental services and waste introduced the report in the absence of the Cabinet member for finance and property. He advised the Cabinet that the base was required before council tax rates could be set with a requirement to notify Oxfordshire County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner of the figure.

**RESOLVED** to:

1. 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 2025/2026,
2. 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 2025/26 be 59,151.5. and
3. 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 2025/26 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 Council on 18 December 2024.

## **59. Wantage Leisure Centre Salix Phase 3b Decarbonisation Projects**

Council considered the Cabinet recommendations, made at its meeting on 29 November 2024, to create the required budget from S106 funds and approve the expenditure for the Wantage Leisure Centre Salix Phase 3b decarbonisation project.

In the absence of the Cabinet member for finance, the Cabinet member for housing, leisure facilities and community buildings introduced the item. Stage 1 of the project had been successfully completed and the shortfall in funding sought was as a result of the need to repair three sections of the roof which had not been anticipated. It was more cost effective to carry out the works now in advance of the installation of solar panels than to continue and have to repair the roof at a later date.

**RESOLVED:** to

1. create a budget from S106 contributions and release the funds for the capital expenditure at Wantage Leisure Centre phase 3b decarbonisation project, in accordance with 75 (c) of the council's financial procedure rules,
2. approve the expenditure of over £100k.

## **60. S106 Funding Request - Drayton Parish Council - Towards sports pitches and a cricket wicket at Walnut Meadow, Drayton**

Council considered Cabinet's recommendation, made at its meeting on 29 November 2024, on a request for S106 funding of £278,860 from Drayton Parish Council towards sports pitches and a cricket wicket at Walnut Meadow, Drayton. Council was recommended to create the budget for the project.

The Cabinet member for planning introduced the item in the absence of the Cabinet member for finance and property.

**RESOLVED:** to create a budget of £278,860.00 towards sports pitches and a cricket wicket at Walnut Meadow, Drayton, from the section 106 contribution set out in the report of the head of finance to the Cabinet meeting held on 29 November 2024.

## **61. Councillors' Allowances Scheme**

Council considered the findings of the Independent Remuneration Panel, including recommendations for the basic allowance and the special responsibility allowances for members.

Councillor Thompson moved, and Councillor Coleman seconded the following motion:

That Council:

1. accepts the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel subject to a 40% Public Service Discount (PSD);

2. authorises the head of legal and democratic to finalise a councillors' allowances scheme based on the decision in 1) and to make any consequential amendments to the constitution; and
3. thanks the members of the Independent Remuneration Panel for their work in reviewing the councillors' allowance scheme.

In moving the recommendation Councillor Thompson stated that he recognised the cost-of-living crisis facing residents across the district. The current level of allowances acted as a significant barrier to attracting a diverse range of people to put themselves forward to become councillors, particularly those on low incomes or with any caring responsibilities. As councillors were motivated by a sense of public service there should be a significant public service discount applied to any allowance and therefore the motion proposed reducing the PSD from 40% to 33% which would reduce the Independent Remuneration Panel recommendation for the basic allowance from £8,391 to £7,514 and the increase in special responsibility allowances would raise by 4.78% as opposed to the 17% recommended by the IRP.

Councillor Povolotsky moved, and Councillor Dewhurst seconded the following amendment:

1. To recommend a 5% councillor allowance increase instead of the 34%.
2. Work with the Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services to deep dive a "Councillor Access Fund" to help elected members during their term where their personal circumstances may change, to prevent any barriers to their participation.
3. That all future allowance rises should be index linked unless otherwise stated by Central Government.

Those members who spoke in support of the amendment recognised that there were barriers to standing for election but that increasing allowances was not the way to address these. Part 2 of the amendment would seek to address those barriers and provide support to members. They expressed the view that the proposed increase in the level of allowances could not be justified especially during the cost of living crisis.

On being put to the vote the amendment was declared lost.

The majority of members spoke in support of the motion. The IRP, which comprised a local government expert, had undertaken a thorough review and recommended an increase in allowances. It was important that Council recognised the principle that an independent panel should guide its deliberations. A number of members expressed disquiet about the current legal provisions for setting their own allowances and expressed views that central government should change the current legislation so that allowances should be set centrally and applied across the country.

Greater diversity was required amongst those who wished to be councillors and the role should not be a role only open to those who are independently wealthy. An increase in allowances could help address this. The retention of the 40% PSD recognised the value of public service whilst not undermining the desire to remove barriers for those on low incomes from either standing or continuing as members.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 68, which provides for a recorded vote if three members request one, the chair called for a recorded vote on the motion which was declared carried with the voting as follows:

<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Abstentions</b>
		Paul Barrow
Ron Batstone		
Kiera Bentley		
Cheryl Briggs		
Sue Caul		
Robert Clegg		
Mark Coleman		
Andy Cooke		
Eric de la Harpe		
		Debra Dewhurst
Amos Duveen		
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		
		Sally Povolotsky
Judy Roberts		
Andrew Skinner		
Emily Smith		
Peter Stevens		
Bethia Thomas		
Max Thompson		
<b>Total: 27</b>	<b>Total: 0</b>	<b>Total: 3</b>

Councillors Mike Pighills and Rayner were not present in the meeting for the recorded vote.

**RESOLVED:** That Council:

1. accepts the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel subject to a 40% Public Service Discount (PSD);
2. authorises the head of legal and democratic to finalise a councillors' allowances scheme based on the decision in 1) and to make any consequential amendments to the constitution; and
3. thanks the members of the Independent Remuneration Panel for their work in reviewing the councillors' allowance scheme.

## **62. 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](#).

## **63. Future Oxfordshire Partnership - recent activity by Vale representatives update**

Council noted the Future Oxfordshire Partnership update report attached to the agenda for the Council meeting held on 18 December 2024.

## **64. Questions on notice**

### **A. Question from Councillor Katherine Foxhall to Councillor Lugova, Cabinet Member for Planning**

The Housebuilder Forum's *Unspent Developer Contributions Report* for 2024 has recently identified that Oxfordshire County Council holds £287.5m of unspent Section 106 money, the largest of any authority in the country. [1] While Vale of White Horse was not mentioned in this year's report, in 2023, the HBF identified Vale of White Horse as holding £18,223,919 in unspent contributions, at the time this was the 18<sup>th</sup> highest in England among the authorities who responded to the FOI request.

Allocating funding for infrastructure is extremely complicated and the fact of any particular pot of money being "unspent" is not necessarily an issue in itself. But I would like to ask the Cabinet member how much S106 money, where all instalments have been received by Vale, remains unallocated and within one and two years of the "spend by" deadline, and have we had to return any S106 money to developers in the last 5 years?

[1]

[https://www.hbf.co.uk/documents/14032/2024\\_Unspent\\_developer\\_contributions\\_report.pdf](https://www.hbf.co.uk/documents/14032/2024_Unspent_developer_contributions_report.pdf)

[2]

[https://www.hbf.co.uk/documents/12809/HBF\\_Unspent\\_Developer\\_Contributions\\_Report\\_2023.pdf](https://www.hbf.co.uk/documents/12809/HBF_Unspent_Developer_Contributions_Report_2023.pdf)

### **Written response**

The Vale has a successful track record of putting funding secured through S106 agreements to good use with over £8.6m of contributions spent within the past 5 years on the delivery of projects to support the growth of the district, either directly or through funding provided to other local organisations.

Funding secured through S106 agreements usually comes with a period in which contributions must be used. In most cases there are 10 years to spend the contributions from the point they are received but there are some instances where the window is shortened to 7 or 5 years.

In response to the question, Vale is holding £258,664 of S106 that is due to expire within one year or less that is secured for specific purposes but is not currently committed to specific projects. A further £929,888 of contributions, also secured for

specific purposes but not yet committed to specific projects, is held that will expire within one to two years. The majority of these balances, over £915,000, relate to leisure, which will be directed to support the recently approved leisure facilities and playing pitch strategies, and affordable housing, for which a council report is to be brought forward in the new year that will seek approval of S106 funding for that purpose.

In terms of prioritising the use of funds, this is done based on the identified spending criteria of the contributions and expiry dates so that we can ensure proper use of the funds and minimise the risk of expiry. In cases where the S106 is not available to Vale to spend directly, we ensure that all eligible recipients of contributions nearing expiry are notified and as far as possible, officers offer support to them to bring forward suitable projects that can benefit from the funding secured.

Vale has not been required to return any unspent S106 funding to developers. However, there are currently 9 contributions which have expired, and these total £63,225. Officers are currently in discussion with the relevant developers relating to these, so that the original S106 can be varied, and the funds spent.

Finally, whilst S106 contributions can only be secured if the need for funding can be demonstrated, the council seeks, wherever possible, to ensure that there is an element of flexibility built into the agreements to allow for changes in how that need can be met between the agreement being signed and the funding being received. The council has also adopted the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) under which most developer funding is now collected. A benefit of this is that unlike S106, CIL receipts are not subject to an expiry date.

### **Supplementary question and answer**

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet member responded that details of S106 expenditure were publicly available on the council's website. She undertook to provide details of those project where the S106 money had expired in a written response.

#### **B. Question from Councillor James to Councillor Edwards, Cabinet Member for Communications, Customer Services, Legal and Democratic**

We make publicly available a livestream and a recording of most of our meetings. We also enable members of the public to attend and speak to the meeting online. This is very welcome and reflects the Council's priority to work in an open and inclusive way.

However, this is not an option for meetings of the full Council, despite our constitution saying that participation at the meeting for members of the public may be remotely via Teams. Due to the size of the Council, we meet in The Beacon in its largest meeting room, and it is not equipped for sound or video recording. In time we expect that these meetings will be held in a new purpose built headquarters in Didcot where hopefully such technology can be provided. However, plans to move to Didcot Gateway were announced in October 2020, but this is not likely to be ready until 2027 at the earliest, so we are in the middle of a long period where that cannot help us to make Council available to the public online.

I would like to ask the Cabinet member how we can provide some form of online access to full Council meetings in advance of moving to Didcot Gateway?



### **Written response**

Establishing a short-term online meeting system.

The question comes from an understanding that there are significant differences between a fixed location meeting system and a remote system using a flexible space which is being used for other purposes for the majority of the time.

There are several technical hurdles which make a remote system challenging. Firstly the premises need to be able to deliver a sufficiently high capacity wi-fi system. Even if the system is capable, it also needs to have sufficient security and ensure that the system is secured from breach. The equipment needs to be capable of being moved and put back in place. Even small changes of camera and microphone location can significantly impact video systems or sound quality.

Costs of any system will need to include tracking cameras, microphones capable of being linked through a sound system, audio equipment. Meeting technology has moved significantly in the last 5 years and is likely to continue to do so – this means that there is a potential risk that the system might not be easily capable of connecting to a future market standard system.

Officers are aware that other Councils installing permanent systems have incurred six figure costs to do so, and that installation has taken over a year. No relevant budget covering sums of this level are established in the budget for 2025/26.

Officers therefore cannot recommend a temporary system at present.

### **Supplementary question and answer**

Councillor James requested that the option of recording the meetings for future public viewing could be investigated.

#### **C. Question from Councillor Patel to Councillor Foulsham, Cabinet Member for Policy and Programmes**

In relation to our leisure facilities strategy, our consultant STA had highlighted Shrivvenham as having “the most unmet demand” for pool facilities.

Looking through the consultation comments, I note that several responses have highlighted the general lack of leisure and sports facilities in the further Western region, with Shrivvenham pointed to as a suitable location given its size and connectivity. I also note a number of comments around the focus of the strategy on driving times as the default mode of transport to access facilities.

In May’s council I had asked whether a more detailed viability assessment could be carried out on how the unmet demand in Shrivvenham could be addressed. At the time the member in charge felt it inappropriate to comment while the consultation comments were being reviewed.

Can I ask the cabinet member to outline what weight was given to and considerations made towards addressing the unmet needs to Shrivvenham residents for pool facilities?

### **Written response**

Sport England Facility Planning Model (FPM) reports were produced for swimming pools and sports halls to support the Leisure Facilities Assessment and Strategies (LFAS). These use population projections and have modelled sport take up rates to determine the capacity of our facilities across the district. When assessing swimming pool capacity, the FPM report concludes that “*where the most unmet demand [for*

*swimming] can be met is in Shrivenham, at 32 sqm of water. This will include unmet demand from Swindon and is an insufficient amount to consider provision of a new swimming pool."*

*(To provide context, context, the minimum amount of reachable water space required to justify a new pool would be 160 sqm, which is a 20m x 8m four-lane pool).*

Unmet demand for swimming pool capacity in the district is very low. Nearly all the unmet demand is due to being too far from a facility, rather than existing facilities being over capacity or being forecast to be over capacity. The unmet demand from lack of swimming pool capacity generated by growth in our own district is less than 5 sqm of water. The demand is slightly higher in Shrivenham at 32m<sup>2</sup> due to demand imported from Swindon and residents being located too far from a facility rather than lack of pool capacity. Given that a new pool's size threshold is 160m<sup>2</sup>, we are significantly below the threshold for justifying a new swimming pool in the Shrivenham area in both circumstances.

In terms of travelling to facilities, the FPM do assess cycle times to facilities. They found, at the point in time of developing the reports, that *87% of our residents are within a 20-minute cycle ride (approximately four miles) of a swimming pool in both 2023 (the start date of the study) and 2041 (the end date)*. Furthermore, the emerging Joint Local Plan contains policy HP5 (New facilities for sport, physical activity, and recreation) which specifies that new facilities should be accessible by walking, cycling and public transport. Nevertheless, there will be some locations in within the district that are too far from a swimming pool (both by driving, and by sustainable and active travel) because it is not possible to achieve complete coverage.

The FPM report affirms that current and future demand for swimming pools can be met by the available supply of pools. The LFAS does however recommend a new learner pool at Wantage Leisure Centre and in Faringdon to help alleviate capacity issues for main pools.

### **Supplementary question and answer**

In response to a supplementary question in respect of the inclusion of cycling time data where no safe cycling routes existed, the Cabinet member appreciated that the data did not this into account and that better provision was required.

#### **D. Question from Councillor de la Harpe to Councillor Edwards, Cabinet Member for Communications, Customer Services, Legal and Democratic**

This Council has an active and effective Communications Team who communicate regularly with residents via several social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram and X (formerly Twitter). For obvious reasons, this Council does not publish on party-political channels, such as a Liberal Democrat newsletter to residents, and neither do Council members ask the Communications Team to publish party-political statements to voters.

In recent months, however, Elon Musk has transformed X and, in my opinion, used it to influence an election.

Does the cabinet member agree with me that X is now a party-political mouthpiece and that this Council should begin a process of withdrawing its presence on X and cease using it as a channel to communicate with our residents?

### **Written response**

It's very clear that X is a social media platform going through a significant amount of change, and in some respects, it is in a steep decline. However, the Communications

team and I have discussed the matter, and have concluded there is no way X could be considered an official mouthpiece for a British political party and the council will not be ceasing use of it at this time. When any given social media platform is used responsibly by members of our communities, we have a responsibility to communicate with them on their chosen channel if its effective to do so.

However, as the nature of social media is ever-changing, the communications team keep our use of the various platforms under constant review. Probably the most important and straightforward question they ask themselves is, do we reach enough people to justify the amount of time and effort that goes into it?

The amount of people we reach on X has been in decline for a while, partly due to residents leaving the platform, and partly because X is no longer prioritising content generated by UK local government accounts.

The team tell me that their counterparts at our neighbouring authorities are noticing similar trends and the team have been monitoring how other public and commercial organisations are changing their approach to the platform.

A few weeks ago, the team and I discussed that they've already significantly reduced the amount we are posting on X to align with the decrease in reach on the platform. In the meantime, they have been redirecting resources to creating bigger campaigns on our existing, more effective platforms like Facebook, Next Door, Instagram, Threads and LinkedIn. They are always trying out alternative platforms like WhatsApp and BlueSky – and the Beacon now even has a TikTok account to try and reach new audiences.

#### **E. Question from Councillor Smith to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council**

Network Rail have announced they will pause work on the Oxford Station project for 17 days over Christmas. This news only adds to the frustration of residents and business in my ward over the lack of information about how much longer the Botley Road will be closed for.

I note the Transport Secretary agreed to meet Layla Moran MP to discuss the 'unacceptable' delays to this project, but then resigned her post before the meeting could be arranged.

Has the Leader had any more luck in getting an update from Network Rail or national government about the timeline for the Oxford Station project that she can share?

#### **Written response**

In short, no.

Replacing the rail bridge across Botley Road needs the railway to be closed for several days and that has to be planned and booked a long way in advance. At the time of preparing this answer, the date for this has not yet been set.

The information from Network Rail is that they have recently met with the rail minister and are closely engaged with the Department for Transport. I am hoping for an opportunity to meet with the senior team from Network Rail in the new year when I can remind them of the impact on our communities.

I'd just like to clarify a point of detail on the Christmas break. It is specifically the work by Thames Water on the water main which will be paused on 20 December, in order to remove the parking suspension from residential streets and allow local residents to

park as normal during the holiday period. Network Rail themselves will be working up until 24 December.

Having said that, I am obviously not here to defend Network Rail. The prolonged delays to this project have caused huge disruption to our residents and businesses in the Botley area, and I will keep on pushing Network Rail very hard to give us a clear timetable to complete the project.

**F. Question from Councillor Gascoigne to Councillor Crawford, Cabinet Member for Finance and Property**

Getting appointments to see a GP continues to be difficult across the district and indeed the country. In Didcot and the surrounding villages, this has been particularly difficult due to the growth in housing numbers and BOB ICB not yet providing the promised GP surgery on Great Western Park.

I understand that the Vale officers have been working with the local NHS body, BOB ICB, to facilitate its delivery.

Can the cabinet member provide an update with where we are, a projected timeline for delivery and what the next steps are?

**Written response**

The council is currently working with key stakeholders to progress the GP surgery on Great Western Park. The next step in the project is for the medical centre's appointed developer to submit a planning application, which we are expecting before the end of January. The Local Planning Authority will then need to determine the application, which will take a few months. In line with the LPA's published timescales, we are anticipating a decision by mid-2025.

In the meantime, work is well underway to arrange transfer of the site from Taylor Wimpey to the council; all parties are finalising their due diligence before transfer can take place. Once the site is transferred, respective legal teams will work together to complete the various lease and funding agreements. Whilst these matters are already well progressed, timescales will depend on resolving some final matters and making sure the necessary steps are taken to complete the agreements in the right order.

Council officers meet regularly with the NHS Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB), medical practice and their appointed developer, to ensure things continue to progress.

**Supplementary question and answer**

In response to a supplementary question regarding how the council could hold BOB ICB to account, it was noted that the council had no such remit but a discussion between officers and the ward member would be advisable.

**65. Motions on notice**

In moving the motion as set out on the agenda, Councillor Maddison as the mover and Councillor Stevens as the seconder, accepted an amendment from Councillor Foxhall to add the following to the motion:

6. Ask officers to use council communication channels to draw attention to updated Environment Agency Local Flood Risk Assessments and the Flood Map for Planning.

Following debate and being put to the vote the motion was declared carried.

**RESOLVED:** That

Large parts of Oxfordshire have recently faced significant flooding for the third time this year, each following short periods of extremely heavy rainfall.

In some parts of the Vale, including South Abingdon and Wantage, some people have been flooded three times. Some of these incidents have been caused by flooding from surface water and some from streams and rivers overflowing. Flooding of homes and property in the Vale, including from the River Ock and the Thames downstream of Abingdon, hampers the lives and economies of local residential and working communities driving the Science Vale.

The County Council (as lead flood authority) is currently working on at least 28 Section 19 Reports as a result of the flooding in September and November.

Having previously proposed and then dropped two previous schemes to protect homes from the River Ock overflowing, the Environment Agency have now told residents that the Thames Valley Flood Scheme will not be going forward as it is not considered cost effective.

**Council agrees:**

1. To write to the Secretary of State asking for the government to review whether the level of resources spent on flood prevention and mitigation is high enough, and whether the formula used for allocating funds to the Vale of the White Horse District is adequate.
2. To write to the Environment Agency (EA) asking for urgent action to identify, publicise and implement viable schemes to reduce the growing issues of flooding of homes, businesses and infrastructure in the Vale, including from the River Ock and the Thames downstream of Abingdon.
3. That a copy of the above letters be sent to the three MPs whose constituencies include parts of the Vale.
4. To continue to work with the EA, the County Council and other organisations to prevent flooding and to mitigate its impact.
5. To promote the use of the Oxfordshire Flood Toolkit and support town and parish councils and community groups in creating more resilient communities.
6. To ask officers to use council communication channels to draw attention to updated Environment Agency Local Flood Risk Assessments and the Flood Map for Planning.

## **66. Exclusion of the public**

**RESOLVED:** to exclude members of the press and public from the meeting for the following item of business under Part 1 of Schedule 12A Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 and as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 on the grounds that:

- i. it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, and
- ii. the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

## **67. Land acquisition**

Council considered and supported Cabinet's recommendations, made at its meeting on 29 November 2024, on the acquisition of land and the provision of the necessary budget to deliver the site.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm

Chair:

Date: