

Written response to question – 12 February 2025

Council meeting

Question from Councillor James to Councillor Crawford, Cabinet Member for Finance and Property

Vale of White Horse District Council has had a plan in place for some time to move our offices to a new headquarters, Didcot Gateway, which was to be built and owned by South Oxfordshire District Council. This long-term plan is upended by the Government's move to require wholesale reorganisation of Local Government in much of England, including Oxfordshire.

Please can the Cabinet member update us on what this means for VWHDC and its staff and councillors, and for the buildings that we are currently using for offices and meetings: Abbey House and The Beacon.

Written response

At this stage we have no definite timeline for local government reform, beyond the confirmation of Government that they expect initial proposals by the middle of March and final ones no later than mid-November. Once we have clarity on the geography of the strategic mayoral authority and unitary council and the transition timeline, then the impact on future finances and programmes of work will be considered. For now, the budget provision in the capital programme of £950,000 to fund Vale's share of the fit out costs for the new office accommodation remains, and at the South Oxfordshire District Council's Cabinet meeting on 30 January 2025, the Leader of the Council confirmed that officers are proceeding to planning determination for their proposed office accommodation at the Didcot Gateway site. As with any major project, the programme is subject to regular progress reviews by officers. Abbey House continues to be our current main office and meeting space for this council, and officers continue to market the available space in Abbey House in accordance with effective management of the council's operational estate. With regards to the Beacon, it also continues to be an office and meeting space and our officers are implementing the 18-months action plan agreed by Cabinet on 16 February 2024, and an update report is being presented to Scrutiny on 20 March 2025 and Cabinet on 11 April 2025. The Beacon remains funded both within the proposed budget, and throughout the life of the MTFP.