



**Minutes of a meeting of Council held on Wednesday, 16 March 2022.**

**Councillors present:**

Nikki Ind– Chair

Stephen Andrews

Tony Berry

Gina Blomefield

Claire Bloomer

Patrick Coleman

David Cunningham

Tony Dale

Andrew Doherty

Rachel Coxcoon,

Mike Evemy

Jenny Forde

Mark Harris

Stephen Hirst

Robin Hughes

Roly Hughes

Sue Jepson

Julia Judd

Ray Theodoulou

Juliet Layton

Nick Maunder

Richard Morgan

Richard Norris

Nigel Robbins

Gary Selwyn

Lisa Spivey

Tom Stowe

Steve Trotter

Joe Harris

**Officers present:**

Angela Claridge – Director of Governance and Development

Caleb Harris, Strategic Support Officer

Ben Patel-Sadler, Democratic Services Manager

Michelle Burge, Chief Accountant

Rob Weaver, Chief Executive

**59 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dilys Neill, Ray Brassington, Richard Keeling, Clive Webster

Councillor Richard Morgan indicated prior to the meeting that he would be attending but would be late.

**60 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**61 Minutes**

The Chair stated that the minutes did not capture that, 'prior to the vote for the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Budget, Councillor Berry had stated the Conservative group would not be able to support the budget as it was being taken as a block of items from A to I. He also stated that there may have been areas that could have been supported, had the vote been individual'. It was recommended the minutes would be amended to include these comments.

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Councillor Judd stated that the public question challenging the Chair's use of a particular term when referring to a secretary of state should be included in the minutes. The Chair stated the recording of the meeting showed the full dialogue and the minutes were not a verbatim record of this.

Councillor Cunningham stated that the Deputy Chief Executives comment that the secretary of state can put a limit on the amount of precepts of Town and Parish Councils should be included in the minutes. This was agreed by the Monitoring Officer

Councillor Andrews stated he supported Councillor's Judd's statement that the neutral terms used in the minutes did not reflect the strength of feeling expressed by the Chair and should be amended accordingly. The Monitoring Officer suggested the minutes would be amended to direct readers to listen to that part of the recording.

**RESOLVED:** The minutes of the meeting held on 16 February 2022 were agreed as a true record subject to the amendments:

#### **Record of Voting**

**For 28, Against 0, Abstentions: 0, absent: 6.**

#### **62 Announcements from the Chair, Leader or Chief Executive (if any)**

The Vice Chair of the Council, Councillor Nikki Ind welcomed Members, Officers and those public present and watching the meeting online to the meeting.

The Vice-Chair introduced the Chief Executive and Council Officers and wished to place on record her thanks to Democratic Services Manager Ben Patel-Sadler for his work, as he would soon be leaving.

The Vice-Chair invited Councillor Jenny Forde to update the Council on the Armed Forces Covenant.

Councillor Jenny Forde stated that she had the honour of resigning the Armed Forces Covenant on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its original signing to confirm the Council's continuing commitment to working with the Armed Forces.

The Vice-Chair asked that the Council reflects send and their thoughts and feelings to the family and friends of local residents Clive and Valerie Warrington and internationally to the people of Ukraine who continue to battle for their freedom and democracy.

The Leader of the Council Councillor Joe Harris addressed the Council with an update on Council's response to the Ukraine crisis stating by offering the Council's solidarity with the plight of the country and outlining the measures taken to demonstrate that support.

The Leader confirmed that Cotswold District Council would continue its long history of offering safety and sanctuary whether it was to Polish refugees during World War 2 or those fleeing Syria or Afghanistan. The Leader also highlighted potential implications of providing this support as Russian retaliation, through cyber and other attacks, become more common.

The Chief Executive confirmed the Council's commitment to supporting refugees through the various government schemes.

## **63 Public Questions**

Mr Fowles attended the meeting to pose two questions to Councillor Every that had not been submitted in advance of the meeting.

The first question related to a previous request for the number of employees that had left Cotswold District Council, the number of new posts created since the Liberal Democrats had taken over in 2019, and the total costs of this to Council Tax payers. Mr Fowles stated he had received the information on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2022 which showed 82 people had left the Council (other than retirement) and 12 new posts had been created. Mr Fowles stated he considered the number of leavers was high and was caused by poor morale in the Council, and he did not understand the requirement for several of the new appointments.

Councillor Every replied that officers left for a variety of reasons and without a suitable comparator, 82 could not be described as high. Councillor Every also explained that the new appointments had been made to support the manifesto priorities and commitments, particularly those affecting climate change.

The second question referred to the requirement for the Council to develop a meaningful Parking Strategy for the area, and specifically Cirencester. Mr Fowles stated that there did not appear to be a strategy in place and a number of parking initiatives had been stopped and parking income had reduced by £400k. Mr Fowles also asked if detailed income (by car park) details could be made available.

Councillor Every replied that the detailed figures would be made available on the Council's website, but the recent pandemic had drastically effected lives and works and this had an effect on carpark usage. Councillor Every also stated that it was too soon to see how carpark usage would change in the longer term and large scale initiatives (e.g the multi-story car park) had been put on hold until this becomes clear, and in the meantime changes had been made to the pricing of the season-ticket rugby club car park to make it more attractive.

A question was submitted by Bella Heathcote referring to the Bid Process and the cost of surveys being conducted in the centre of town and at Ludd Lane. With the increased costs being faced by businesses, are these costs and the associated cost of consultants justified?

Councillor Dale responded that he will refer the question to officers for a written response of the specific costs. In the wider context there have been around 300 bids made across the country and these are invariably submitted on behalf of and in support of the community and businesses

## **64 Member Questions**

A record of Member questions and answers are available in the schedule attached to these minutes.

Questions were asked by:

Councillor Nick Maunder to Councillor Mike Every, Cabinet Member for Finance.

Councillor Claire Bloomer to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council.

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Councillor Stephen Andrews to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council.

Councillor Stephen Andrews to Councillor Lisa Spivey, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness.

Councillor Julia Judd to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council.

Councillor Tony Berry to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council.

Councillor Stephen Hirst to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council.

Councillor Stephen Hirst to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council.

Councillor Dylis Neill to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council.

## **65 Changes to Cotswold District Council's Offices at Trinity Road, Cirencester to Facilitate Agile Working and Increase Commercial Income**

The Deputy Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Finance presented the report summarising the proposed changes to the use of the Council's Trinity Road offices after the Council has reduced its usage of the offices by 35% through agile working.

Councillor Stowe commented that the projected return on investment from the income provided by new tenants assumed no void periods. With the changes to agile working being adopted everywhere, how confident was the council that the building would remain consistently occupied?

Councillor Every stated that officers had already been in contact with organisations and there was interest from other public sector organisations and associated benefits with co-location however there was still a risk. Councillor Every added that the 12% projected return on investment for full occupancy but lower occupancy (50%) would still exceed the recovery investment strategy of around 4%.

Councillor Cunningham commented on the 25% increase in carbon reduction costs between December and January review and details of the larger line items. Councillor Every stated that the December figure did not include the contingency, which was included in the January figure. The Chief Accountant stated that the costs reflected solar PV, insulation, changes to lighting etc.

Councillor Blomefield commented on the organisations likely to be interested in sharing the building and asked if commercial lease lengths would be offered and how car parking for staff and visitors would be allocated between the two organisations. Councillor Every confirmed that any agreement with new tenants would be on commercial terms and include the number of parking spaces available to them.

Councillor Andrews commented that some teams work better when located together and provision needs to be met this requirement. The Council Officer responded that there had been 3 rounds of consultation and this had reduced the final amount of space that has now been allocated for other tenants, and all Council teams are now happy with their allocation of space.

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Councillor Theodoulou commented that shared car parking could become a problem unless the allocation of parking spaces is clearly defined at the start of any co-location. Councillor Theodoulou added that careful consideration should be given to the benefit gained by younger officers working alongside more experienced colleagues learning the job as they go.

The Council Officer stated that 'learning from peers' had been a recognised and important training method for certain services and this had been addressed throughout the consultations, and added that online training had improved significantly. Councillor Evemy confirmed car parking will be considered as part of negotiating with future tenants.

Councillor Berry commented this was a large project with implications for the Council and asked if a cross party working board would be established to work with officers to deliver successful outcome to the changes. Councillor Evemy agreed to consider this and identify where Members can be brought into the project as it moves forward.

Councillor Coxcoon commented that the future parking provision needed to reflect a move towards sustainable transport and not assume that everyone will continue to drive to the offices. The offices needed to be a place that Officers, Members and new tenants feel able to cycle and walk to the office wherever possible.

**RESOLVED:** The Council agreed to:

- Support the to support the proposed changes to the office layout,
- Seek tenants to occupy space that will be created in the West wing of the building,
- Delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive to agree lease arrangements in consultation with the Interim Head of Legal Services and the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance,
- Allocate funding of up to £975,000 from the Recovery Investment Strategy budget in the Capital Programme to facilitate the changes to the Trinity Road offices and fund structure repairs identified in the building condition survey, the detailed costs to be agreed by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive and the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance
- Note that the gross revenue savings of £202,000 will contribute towards the savings from the Recovery Investment Strategy

### **Record of Voting**

**For 23, Against 0, Abstentions 5, Absent 6,**

## **66 Review of Licensing Fees**

Councillor Layton, the Cabinet member for Development Management and Licensing presented the report that the proposed a small increase to the fees in order that the Licensing service continues to cover its operational costs.

**RESOLVED:** To adopt the fees as set out in Annex A of this report

### **Record of Voting**

**For 28, Against 0, Abstentions 0, Absent 4,**

## **67 Appointment and Remuneration of Independent Persons**

The Leader, Councillor Harris presented a proposal to re-appoint the 3 independent persons for standards matter for a further year, and authorise the Director of Governance and

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Development to commence a recruitment campaign to enable future appointments to be made. Council Members asked a number of questions about the appointment, accountability and work of the independent persons. The Director of Governance & Development and the Leader provided responses to each of these.

**RESOLVED:** The Council agreed that:

- Phyllida Pyper, John Acton and Michael Paget-Wilkes are re-appointed as Independent Persons, effective from 01.04.2022,
- All appointments to be a maximum of one year,
- The Independent Persons are paid an annual allowance of £1000 per annum on a monthly basis, plus a mileage allowance equivalent to the rate paid to elected Members,
- The Director of Governance and Development is authorised to commence a recruitment campaign prior to the expiration of current appointments and to enable reports to be presented on future appointments

**Record of Voting**

**For 28, Against 0, Abstentions 0, Absent 6,**

**68 Report of Decision Taken by the Chief Executive Using Urgency Powers Under the Council's Constitution**

Councillor Tony Dale presented the report on the decision to enable the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee to continue to support businesses to grow in a green, sustainable manner and provide high value jobs. The Council noted the decision made by the Chief Executive.

**RESOLVED:** The Council noted the decision taken by the Chief Executive using urgency powers.

**69 Notice of Motion 1 – Sewage in Rivers**

Councillor Andrew Doherty and Councillor Lisa Spivey addressed the Council on the problem of sewage in rivers across the Cotswolds. Councillors supported the notice with many expressing personal experiences of the issue.

**RESOLVED:** The Council instructed the Leader and Chief Executive to write to the relevant Government Ministers, requesting an acceleration in the capital programme to lower risks of untreated sewage discharges into our rivers, and an assurance that local housing developers will be expected to fund water infrastructure to meet the needs of new housing.

The Leader and Chief Executive were also instructed to work with other local authorities to call on the Government to provide guidance and funding to local planning authorities to challenge water companies to deliver the urgent upgrades required to water infrastructure.

It was also agreed that the Leader and Chief Executive will set up a working group, with neighbouring Local Planning Authorities, that will develop appropriate policy to guide planning application determination and enforcement in those areas where sewage treatment is insufficient. Incorporating legislative frameworks and the five principles recently outlined in legislation: integration, prevention, precautionary, rectification at source, and the polluter pays principle.

**70 Notice of Motion 2 – Parliamentary Boundary Proposals**

The Leader Councillor Harris and Councillor Jenny Forde addressed the Council on the Boundary Commission's proposals to create two new Parliamentary constituencies covering the Cotswold District to ensure electoral equality in new parliamentary constituencies. Cotswold District Council's initially supported the Commission's proposals and proposed the names of the constituencies should be changed from 'The Cotswolds' to 'North Cotswolds' and from 'Cirencester & North Wiltshire' to 'South Cotswolds'. Baunton Parish Council submitted a request to the Boundary Commission in the initial consultation requesting that Chedworth and Churn Valley ward be included in the proposed Cirencester and North Wiltshire seat as residents in the villages that make up the Chedworth and Churn Valley ward look to Cirencester as their main centre for shopping, healthcare and education.

RESOLVED: The Council authorises the Chief Executive to submit a written response to the Boundary Commission outlining the Council's position as set out in this motion and asks the Leader of the Council to speak at the Boundary Commission's public hearing in Gloucester later this month in support of the Council's position.

## **71 Notice of Motion 3 – Ukrainian Refugees**

Councillor Patrick Coleman and Councillor Nigel Robbins stated on behalf of residents in the area, the Council wished to express its solidarity with the people of Ukraine and noted that, in recent years, refugees from Syria and Afghanistan have been welcomed to the area. The Council welcomes the steps being taken to resettle Afghan refugees from their temporary hotel residences within the UK, which is still ongoing, and notes and applauds the record of Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (GARAS) in supporting refugees and asylum seekers within our District and County. The Council also records its thanks and appreciation for the many generous actions taken by residents of our District in support of refugees and asylum seekers.

RESOLVED: The Council requests that the Chief Executive brings forward proposals and options for further appropriate support by this Council, at the earliest practicable date, particularly in light of the appalling events currently unfolding in Ukraine and requests that the Leader of the Council writes to the Ukrainian ambassador to the UK offering the District's support for the people of Ukraine in these difficult times.

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**69**      **Next meeting**

Next Meeting 25<sup>th</sup> May 2022 2.00pm

Chair

(END)