



Minutes of a meeting of Cabinet held on Thursday, 7 December 2023

Councillors present:

Joe Harris – Leader
Claire Bloomer
Tony Dale

Mike Evemy – Deputy Leader
Paul Hodgkinson
Juliet Layton

Mike McKeown
Lisa Spivey

Officers present:

Robert Weaver, Chief Executive
David Stanley, Deputy Chief Executive and
Chief Finance Officer
Angela Claridge, Director of Governance and
Development (Monitoring Officer)
Andrew Brown, Democratic Services Business
Manager
Caleb Harris, Senior Democratic Services
Officer
Alison Borrett, Senior Performance Analyst

James Brain, Forward Planning Manager
Mandy Fathers, Business Manager for
Environmental, Welfare and Revenue Service
Philip Measures
Gemma Moreing, Business Information Lead
Harry Brown, Housing & Infrastructure
Technician
Kira Thompson, Election and Democratic
Services Support Assistant

Observers:

Councillor Nikki Ind

194 Apologies

The Leader indicated that Councillor Layton would be late attending the meeting.

There were no apologies for absence

195 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

There were no declarations of interest from Officers.

196 Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting on 2 November 2023 were considered as presented within the document pack.

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The Senior Democratic Services Officer noted at Minute 189 (Para. 5, Point 5) that the following minute 'Peer Review recommendations agreed' should read 'Peer Review Action Plan agreed'. This change would be made following the meeting.

The minutes were proposed by Councillor Spivey and Councillor Dale.

RESOLVED that, subject to the amendment noted, the minutes of the meeting of the 2 November 2023 be approved as a correct record.

Record of Voting – For: 4, Against 0, Abstention 3, Absent: 0

For	Against	Abstain	Absent/Did not vote
Claire Bloomer		Joe Harris	
Juliet Layton		Mike Evey	
Lisa Spivey		Mike McKeown	
Paul Hodgkinson			
Tony Dale			

197 Leader's Announcements

The Leader paid tribute to the outgoing Executive Assistant to the Leader, Gemma Williams, who would be moving to the Tourism Team, and thanked for their work over the past two years.

The Leader also wished a Happy Christmas to the Cabinet and thanked them for the work done over the past year.

198 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

199 Member Questions

There were no Member questions.

200 Issue(s) Arising from Overview and Scrutiny and/or Audit and Governance

The Leader noted the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Draft Cotswold Housing Strategy and the Cabinet's response which had been circulated prior to the meeting.

201 Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/2025

The purpose of the report was to present the results of the public consultation on proposals for revising the current Council Tax Support Scheme with effect from 1 April 2024.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Evey, introduced the report.

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It was noted that this was an annual report for to consider the levels of financial support to provide residents with Council Tax payments.

The following points were outlined:

- The focus for the administration since 2019 was to ensure that those on low incomes did not have a low residual liability.
- Those on income band 1 would not be liable for Council Tax.
- It was noted that there was a consultation undertaken with proposed changes around increasing Income Band 1 by 6% due to the cost of living pressures being faced.
- It was highlighted that there were also increases in the maximum entitled relief for bands 4 and 5 to reflect the financial pressures faced.

The Deputy Leader thanked those who participated in the consultation for providing their views and for the support such as the Citizens Advice Bureau for their help in shaping the scheme with council officers.

It was also welcomed that those with more than two children could now apply for support under the changes for the scheme.

The Leader welcomed Mary Cobbett to the meeting as a public speaker to provide comment on the proposed scheme. It was noted that the scheme was welcomed generally, but that it was sometimes misunderstood that Council Tax Discounts were also available such as disability discount.

It was highlighted that there had been increases in demand for the Council Tax Support scheme.

The Deputy Leader in summing up also noted for Cabinet the table for paragraph 3.2 was incorrect in the print copies of the pack as it was from the previous year's scheme but that the figures were correct in paragraph 3.3. However, this had been updated on the website.

It was also noted that a Hardship Fund was set up for those struggling financially who wouldn't qualify otherwise, and that the outstanding balance would be carried over as part of recommendation 2.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Evemy and seconded by Councillor Bloomer.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet

1. **APPROVED** the increase in Council Tax Support as detailed in paragraph 3.4 from 1 April 2024.
2. **APPROVED** that any surplus in the Hardship Fund is transferred over to 2024/2025 for reasons detailed in paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7.
3. **APPROVED** the amendment to the Council Tax Support Policy as recommended in paragraph 3.8.

Record of Voting – For: 8, Against 0, Abstention 0, Absent: 0

For	Against	Abstain	Absent/Did not vote
Claire Bloomer			
Joe Harris			
Juliet Layton			
Lisa Spivey			
Mike Every			
Mike McKeown			
Paul Hodgkinson			
Tony Dale			

202 Increase in Fixed Penalty Notice fines for fly-tipping, duty of care, littering and graffiti

The purpose of the report was to set out the new maximum level fines proposed by Government to deter and punish the offences of littering, fly-tipping, householder duty of care, flyposting and the distribution of free printed matter, and to seek approval to introduce these new fine levels.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Regulatory Services, Councillor Layton, introduced the report.

The following points were presented to Cabinet:

- It was outlined that the predominant rural landscape of the Cotswolds made fly-tipping in particular an environmental and public safety issue.
- It was noted that the increase of the fine was welcomed as the costs for dealing with fly-tipping in particular had risen.
- It was outlined that the reduction would be reduced from 50% to 25% within 14 days.

The increase in the fine levels were welcomed by Cabinet Members as a penalty for these practices.

There were questions around timescales for the fines to be implemented. It was noted that these would be introduced as soon as possible after the decision-making processes had been completed.

It was reaffirmed that the householder has a duty of care for the management of their waste if had ended up being fly-tipped, and would face a fixed penalty notice if their address was linked.

There was also a clarification outlined by the Deputy Leader in regard to the discount levels in Table 1 (Para. 3.4) where an error within the report would be corrected so it should read 'New Fine (Payment within 28 days)' as opposed to 'New Fine (Payment within 14 days)' under column 4.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Layton and seconded by Councillor Every.

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RESOLVED: That Cabinet

1. NOTED the report.
2. AGREED to increase the fine levels to the maximum levels permissible as outlined in paragraph 3.4 as amended.
3. AGREED an early payment discount as outlined in paragraph 3.4.
4. AGREED to delegate authority to the Chief Executive to increase the fine levels as approved.

Record of Voting – For: 8, Against 0, Abstention 0, Absent: 0

For	Against	Abstain	Absent/Did not vote
Claire Bloomer			
Joe Harris			
Juliet Layton			
Lisa Spivey			
Mike Evey			
Mike McKeown			
Paul Hodgkinson			
Tony Dale			

203 Proactive Delivery of Affordable Housing

The purpose of the report was to outline the Council's aspiration for a more proactive approach to increasing the supply of affordable housing within the district, outline how this can be achieved, and the resources required.

The Leader Councillor Joe Harris introduced the report and outlined the following points:

- The Leader noted the ambition of the administration to deliver affordable housing and social rented homes within the District.
- It was noted that good progress is being made with a council site in Down Ampney for social rented homes schemes working in partnership with Bromford Housing.
- It was highlighted that whilst the Council did not have its own housing stock, the report was seeking other options to deliver upon the strategy to obtain high quality affordable homes.
- It was noted that the employment of a Strategic Housing and Development officer in partnership with West Oxfordshire District Council would help to deliver these aims in partnership with housing organisations.
- It was also noted the waiting lists for social housing show a need for housing within the District.

There were questions around the identification of empty homes and work with private landlords to deliver affordable homes. The Leader noted that the powers of the Council were limited, but that the Council would seek to work with private landlords to develop affordable housing in communities. On the issue of empty homes, it was noted that the new officer would work to develop an action plan on empty homes.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Joe Harris and seconded by Councillor Spivey.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet

I. AGREED to explore innovative and proactive models to enhance the council's ability to increase the supply of affordable homes within the district.

Record of Voting – For: 8, Against 0, Abstention 0, Absent: 0

For	Against	Abstain	Absent/Did not vote
Claire Bloomer			
Joe Harris			
Juliet Layton			
Lisa Spivey			
Mike Every			
Mike McKeown			
Paul Hodgkinson			
Tony Dale			

204 Draft Cotswold Housing Strategy

The purpose of the report was to seek approval to consult with partners and the public on a new five-year Cotswold Housing Strategy. The strategy directly responded to the Council's Corporate Plan that sought to address housing affordability and increase the supply of affordable housing.

The Leader introduced this item and outlined the following points:

- It was outlined that a safe and secure home was important to the wellbeing of residents, and the lack of affordable housing was a particular problem in the District.
- The Leader noted the cost of buying and renting a home had increased substantially in the last few years. It was outlined the average house price was £500,000, and the average rent was £1,100.
- It was outlined that the delivery of affordable homes was a priority for the Council and that partnership with all sectors was important, but particularly focussing on developing social rented homes.
- It was outlined that the strategy focussed around developing sustainable, high quality homes that met the needs of residents and delivering statutory priorities.
- It was noted that the document would go out for consultation to ensure it is comprehensive.

The document was welcomed by Cabinet as step forward in delivering affordable homes for the District.

It was highlighted that there were many Neighbourhood Development Plans in development, and this would help residents identify need as part of the strategy.

It was outlined that the strategy would help develop vibrant and sustainable communities for the Cotswold District.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet

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1. APPROVED the draft Cotswold Housing Strategy for public consultation as presented at Annex A and B; and
2. AGREED to delegate authority to the Forward Planning Manager, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to agree a questionnaire for the public consultation exercise and to make minor modifications to improve clarity.

Record of Voting – For: 8, Against 0, Abstention 0, Absent: 0

For	Against	Abstain	Absent/Did not vote
Claire Bloomer			
Joe Harris			
Juliet Layton			
Lisa Spivey			
Mike Evemy			
Mike McKeown			
Paul Hodgkinson			
Tony Dale			

205 Financial Performance Report - Q2 2023/24

The purpose of the report was to set out the latest budget monitoring position for the 2023/24 financial year.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report to Cabinet and highlighted the following points:

- It was outlined that the position of the finances had improved from the end of the previous quarter.
- It was noted that the report proposed a new Treasury Management Reserve of £150,000 to cover any capital losses that could occur in the future.
- It was outlined at paragraph 2.3 that there were potential shortfalls in savings targets from partners in Publica and Ubico, and other service variations of £354,000 which would need to be bridged.
- However, it was also outlined there was a positive variation of around £800,000 on the Treasury Management Returns due to higher interest rates.
- It was outlined that the projected net outturn variation was £263,000 over the original budget shortfall projection of £861,000 which Cabinet Members were working to reduce.

It was highlighted that officers were working to transform services to improve efficiency and to ensure that the budget gap can be reduced.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet

1. Reviewed and NOTED the financial position set out in this report.
2. AGREED to endorse the recommendation in paragraph 9.3 that Cabinet continue to review in-year opportunities with Publica and Ubico to mitigate the forecast financial position.
3. APPROVED the provisional transfer of £0.150m to the Treasury Management reserve.

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4. AGREED to establish a new earmarked reserve “Contract Smoothing” and APPROVED the provisional transfer of £0.255m from the General Fund Revenue Budget to the earmarked reserve.

Record of Voting – For: 8, Against 0, Abstention 0, Absent: 0

For	Against	Abstain	Absent/Did not vote
Claire Bloomer			
Joe Harris			
Juliet Layton			
Lisa Spivey			
Mike Evemy			
Mike McKeown			
Paul Hodgkinson			
Tony Dale			

206 Council Priority And Service Performance Report - 2023-24 Quarter Two

The purpose of the report was to provide an update on progress on the Council’s priorities and service performance.

The Chief Executive, Rob Weaver, introduced the report and outlined the following points:

- It was noted that the following services were above their targets: Council Tax collected, Non-domestic rates collected, processing times for Council Tax (change of events), Housing Benefit overpayment (due to local authority), Customer Satisfaction Rates and visits to leisure centres.
- Land Charge searches had improved significantly to 93% against a target of 90% since the previous quarter, which represented the work done to bring the service back to target.
- The following services were working back towards target: New Claims for Council Tax support, Missed bins per 100,000 and Affordable homes delivery targets.
- It was noted in some other highlights that the Crowdfund Cotswold scheme continued to perform well with 4 schemes seeking community funding and 3 seeking verification.
- In September that the Council’s partnership with MakeMyHouseGreen launched to encourage the installation of solar panels which was continuing to go well.

It was outlined that Overview and Scrutiny Committee had examined the report and some useful feedback had been received around the reporting of Council Tax from a quarterly basis to an annual basis. There were also comments around providing additional narrative for the Action Tracker at the end of the report which would be included.

It was welcomed by Cabinet that the visits to leisure centres and gym memberships have increased following the new provider Freedom Leisure taking over the contract.

It was outlined that the work being done to collect and support residents with Council Tax was welcomed during this difficult time.

It was reaffirmed that the report demonstrated some of the work being done beyond the statutory services being provided.

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The Cabinet wished to put on record the work being done within the waste collection services during some very difficult weather conditions. The Leader also asked the Chief Executive to pass on thanks to all staff across the Council and its partners.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

I. NOTED the overall progress on the Council priorities and service performance for 2023-24 Q2.

207 **Schedule of Decisions taken by the Leader of the Council and/or Individual Cabinet Members**

Cabinet noted the Schedule of Decisions as presented.

The Meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 7.22 pm

Chair

(END)