

Cherwell District Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, OX15 4AA, on 5 January 2011 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Daniel Sames (Chairman)
Councillor Lynda Thirzie Smart (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Ann Bonner
Councillor Nick Cotter (Call-in Secunder)
Councillor John Donaldson
Councillor Andrew Fulljames
Councillor Alastair Milne Home
Councillor Leslie F Sibley (Call-in Proposer)
Councillor Chris Smithson
Councillor Trevor Stevens
Councillor Keith Strangwood
Councillor Lawrie Stratford

Also Present: Councillor Alaric Rose (Call-in Signatory)
Councillor Douglas Williamson (Call-in Signatory)
Councillor Barry Wood (Leader of the Council)
Councillor Nigel Morris (Portfolio Holder Safer Communities, Urban and Rural)
Councillor Nicholas Mawer
Councillor Tim Emptage
Councillor Tony Ilott
Councillor Colin Clarke
Councillor Rick Atkinson
Councillor Carol Steward
Councillor Russell Hurle

Apologies for absence: Councillor James Macnamara, Portfolio Holder Resources and Communication

Officers: Ian Davies, Interim Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service
Chris Rothwell, Head of Safer Communities, Urban & Rural Services
Karen Curtin, Head of Finance
James Doble, Democratic, Scrutiny and Elections Manager
Natasha Clark, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

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Declarations of Interest

Members declared interest in the following agenda item:

3. Call In: Car Parking.

Councillor Alaric Rose, Personal, as an employee of MidCounties Co-operative who may have contracts with the Council.

Councillor Daniel Sames, Personal, as a family member is a blue badge holder.

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Call In: Car Parking

The Chairman welcomed Members, Officers and members of the public to the meeting. He explained that three Executive decisions taken on 6 December 2010 were called in by Councillors Sibley, Cotter, Williamson and Rose taken. The decisions called-in were regarding:

Executive Minutes	Report to Executive
82	Pre Order Consultation - Car Parking Proposals
92 (4)	Value for Money Review of Urban and Rural Services
93 (13)	Budget 2011/12 Draft 1

The Call-in stated:

We the named Councillors and non-executive members of Cherwell District Council hereby give notice that we wish to call in for further scrutiny the Executive decision's of Monday 6th December 2010 regarding the proposals to increase Car Parking Fees, the extension of car parking hours, the introduction of parking fees for Blue Badge Holders and the decision to begin negotiations with regards to Watts Way, Kidlington.

*Cllr. Les Sibley – proposer
Cllr Nick Cotter – seconder
Cllr. Doug Williamson
Cllr Alaric Rose*

On the proposal of the Chairman, the meeting resolved to adjourn for 15 minutes to consider supplementary information that had been tabled at the meeting in response to advance questions submitted by members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The meeting adjourned at 6.45pm and reconvened at 7.00pm.

The call-in signatories explained their reasons for calling in the decisions. In particular the Councillors raised queries and concerns regarding the decision to increase charges in the current economic climate; what the income generated by parking charges was used for; the high number of Excess Charge Notices issued; the effect of increased charges, evening charges, the introduction of charges in Kidlington and charges for blue badge holders; the issue of charges deterring people from going to the urban centres in the district and the potential increase parking on private roads.

The Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities, Urban and Rural Services and the Leader of the Council responded to the Call-in signatories. They outlined the process to date and assured the meeting that due consideration had been given to all savings that were included in the proposed 2011/12 budget including the taking of professional advice from officers.

In response to questions from the Call-in signatories, the Leader advised the meeting that £369k of the Government grant for the eco-town project had been allocated to develop a travel change policy in Bicester which would seek to alter travel behaviour in light of the predicted increase in the Bicester population. In terms of Excess Charge Notices, the Portfolio Holder Safer Communities, Urban and Rural Services explained that they were only issued in line with the Council's policy that had been agreed by Members.

The Leader explained that the car parking fee proposals were part of a the budget setting process that included a review of all fees and charges to ensure the Council reached a balanced budget whilst maintaining a high level of service provision. He explained that were Cherwell District Council to offer free car parking in council operated car parks, the loss of income would result in a council tax increase of 22.5% to maintain a balanced budget.

The Committee discussed each of the elements of the call-in. Members of the Committee queried whether the income generated through the introduction of charges for blue badge holders and evening charges would represent value for money given the potential implementation and enforcement costs. Members of the Committee expressed concern that the additional charges would deter people from visiting Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington or car drivers would park in private streets rather than pay the additional charges. In response, the Leader and Portfolio Holder Safer Communities, Urban and Rural explained that some of the new proposals were new initiatives in the district and therefore based on estimated projections. The Leader explained that it was important that all policy changes were reviewed and if evidence suggested that the change had been detrimental to people, further changes could be made, however policy would not be amended on hearsay.

Members suggested the number of disabled bays across the district, the ratio of short to long stay spaces and motorcycle parking availability should be investigated.

In response to questions from other Members present at the meeting, the Portfolio Holder Safer Communities, Urban and Rural Services reported that to change the Council's pay and display car parks to pay on exit parking would require substantial capital expenditure and the practicalities of the option would need to be considered in detail.

In response to comments from other Members present at the meeting regarding the lack of consultation on the Watts Way proposals and concerns that introducing parking charges in Kidlington would have a detrimental effect on traders and discourage people from visiting Kidlington, the Leader and Portfolio Holder Safer Communities, Urban and Rural acknowledged that lessons could be learnt regarding the timing of consultations, particularly with regard to budget setting where there was the need for confidentiality. Members were reminded that it could be viewed inequitable that there were

parking charges in Banbury and Bicester whilst parking was free in Kidlington. It was noted the introduction of parking charges in Kidlington had first been considered in 1983 and revisited on a number of occasions since, however due to the restrictive covenant on the Watts Way car park the proposal had not been deemed feasible.

At the discretion of the Chairman, Mr Ben Jackson, Chairman of Bicester & District Chamber of Commerce and Mr Paul Jobling, Bicester & District Chamber of Commerce Executive Portfolio for Economic Development addressed the meeting. They expressed concerns about the timing of the proposals, the impact on Bicester of the proposals to increase car park fees, the introduction of evening charges and charges for blue badge holders.

On the proposal of the Chairman, the meeting resolved to adjourn for 5 minutes to allow the Call-in signatories to reflect on the evidence and consider any proposals they would wish the Committee to consider. The meeting adjourned at 9.35pm and reconvened at 9.40pm.

It was proposed and seconded that the decisions of the Executive to increase Car Parking Fees, the extension of car parking hours, the introduction of parking fees for Blue Badge Holders and the decision to begin negotiations with regards to Watts Way, Kidlington be referred back to the Executive and that in reconsidering the decision the Executive should take note of the concerns expressed at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting. By way of an amendment, it was proposed, seconded and subsequently agreed that the Executive consider five additional points: 1. Ensure proper consultation on Watts Way, Kidlington; 2. Request the Executive investigate alternative ways to find funds (e.g. £39k to offset the introduction of evening charges); 3. Investigate the feasibility of barrier parking/pay on exit; 4. Study the economic impact of parking charges; 5. Investigate the number of disabled bays across the district, the ratio of short to long stay spaces and motorcycle parking availability.

Resolved

- (1) That the proposals of the Executive to increase Car Parking Fees, the extension of car parking hours, the introduction of parking fees for Blue Badge Holders and the decision to begin negotiations with regards to Watts Way, Kidlington be referred back to the Executive and that in reconsidering the decision the Executive should take note of the concerns expressed at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting and the following 5 points:
 1. Ensure proper consultation on Watts Way, Kidlington
 2. Request the Executive investigate alternative ways to find funds (e.g. £39k to offset the introduction of evening charges)
 3. Investigate the feasibility of barrier parking/pay on exit
 4. Study the economic impact of parking charges
 5. Investigate the number of disabled bays across the district, the ratio of short to long stay spaces and motorcycle parking availability

The meeting ended at 10.04 pm

Chairman:

Date: