

Cherwell District Council

Executive

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 5 December 2022 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Barry Wood (Chairman), Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Policy and Strategy
Councillor Ian Corkin (Vice-Chairman), Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Economy
Councillor Phil Chapman, Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities
Councillor Colin Clarke, Portfolio Holder for Planning
Councillor Nicholas Mawer, Portfolio for Housing
Councillor Richard Mould, Portfolio Holder for Performance
Councillor Adam Nell, Portfolio Holder for Finance
Councillor Lynn Pratt, Portfolio Holder for Property
Councillor Dan Sames, Portfolio Holder for Cleaner and Greener Communities

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Eddie Reeves, Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities

Also Present:

Councillor Sandy Dallimore, Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Officers:

Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities
Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance & S151 Officer
Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law, Governance & Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

Officers Attending Virtually:

Yvonne Rees, Chief Executive
Robert Jolley, Assistant Director Growth & Economy
Shona Ware, Assistant Director Customer Focus
Simon Hope, Interim Head of Communications and Marketing
Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance & Insight Team Leader

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

61 **Petitions and Requests to Address the Meeting**

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Dallimore, Chairman of Overview & Scrutiny Committee, to the meeting. Councillor Dallimore would be reporting the Committee's feedback on item 7, the performance aspects of the monthly monitoring report.

62 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

63 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman made the following announcement:

"Today's meeting is the last one of 2022. This has been an eventful year for the council and I just wanted to take a few moments to highlight the achievements we have made and the challenges we face as we approach 2023.

We have successfully decoupled from Oxfordshire County Council, ending our partnership which involved 24 services. This has been a major piece of work and I'd like to congratulate everyone involved, for the time, skill and effort that has gone into it and, most importantly, for ensuring that the council continued to deliver excellent services to residents and businesses during this period of great change.

However, this change has given the Council a great opportunity. For the first time in a decade, we are a standalone Council, free to fulfil our own ambitions, always putting our customers, the people of Cherwell, at the heart of our decisions.

With this in mind, we recently approved our first Annual Delivery Plan. This sets out the key priorities for our residents, businesses and communities based on four key pillars: Housing that meets their needs; Regeneration and investing in our communities; Environmental sustainability; and, Healthy and Resilient communities. Our Annual Delivery Plan also includes ten strategic priorities. I won't go through them all but I just wanted to mention a couple.

We should be very proud of the work we are doing to support residents during the cost of living crisis. In the last few weeks, we have introduced a warm space initiative and a food voucher scheme. The warm welcome initiative encourages community venues and spaces to open their doors and provide an activity, information point or a hot drink or meal this winter to help those struggling with the rising costs of heating bills. Participating venues will

display a sticker in their windows so residents can spot that are offering support.

I'm also really pleased that the £100 food vouchers we promised to households facing hardship are now reaching them in time for Christmas, which is always a challenging time of year. Over 3500 households, everyone in the district who is in receipt of housing benefit, will benefit from this support also.

Meeting the challenges of the climate emergency is another key priority for the Council. We are investing, and will continue to invest, in reducing the Council's carbon emissions, for example, we have already made great headway with our air source heat pumps at venues reducing our reliance on fossil fuels.

There are far too many examples to mention all of the great work the Council is carrying out on behalf of residents but just a few days ago, we were delighted that England's Chief Medical Officer, Professor Chris Whitty, visited Bicester to see the work we have been doing alongside other partner agencies in areas such as Elmsbook and at Kings Meadow School.

We will continue to pursue our commitment to building well designed, active communities in Bicester and across the district and I am delighted that we were able to showcase this important work to Professor Whitty.

As we approach the New Year, we face a number of challenges. Many of the long term uncertainties about the way Councils are funded remain. The amount of income we will get in future from business rates and New Homes Bonus are too, such areas. On top of this, the Council is facing a lot of the same pressures related to inflation that residents and business are themselves facing. This means we are looking to make savings of £0.5million from our budget next year.

Proposals for next year's budget are now well advanced and residents can have their say as part of our public consultation which runs until 23 December. These budget proposals have been carefully mapped out with a focus on back office efficiencies and generating more income in certain areas, so that we can protect frontline services such as waste and recycling for residents, and continue to give our residents the services they need.

Despite the need for savings, we are sticking by our ambition to be a Council with a positive vision for the district. Now that we are a standalone Council again, free to put our resources where residents and communities need them most, I am confident that this district's, and this Council's, futures are bright.

I'd like to thank Members of the Executive, other elected Members and the Council staff for your support during this year and I look forward to achieving great things again next year. And, just in case I don't get the chance to say so later, I'd like to wish all of you a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year."

64 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

65 **Monthly Performance, Risk and Finance Monitoring Report October 2022**

The Assistant Director of Finance and Assistant Director – Customer Focus submitted a report to update the Executive on the Council's Performance, Risk and Finance positions as at the end of October 2022.

Councillor Dallimore, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, presented the comments of the Committee who had details of the October Performance Monitoring at their 29 November 2022 meeting.

Councillor Dallimore advised that the Committee asked officers for clarification on a number of indicators, including the green electricity produced as a result of waste collected from the silver food caddies. The Committee had also queried if the indicator 'number of households living in temporary accommodation', which was reporting as red for October, would need to be reviewed for 2023/24 acknowledging possible financial implications of reducing the target.

Resolved

- (1) That the Performance, Risk and Finance Monitoring Report for October 2022 be noted.

Reasons

This report provides an update on the Council's progress during October 2022, to deliver its priorities, manage its budget and identify and mitigate any risks that could impact on their delivery

Alternative options

This report illustrates the Council's performance, risk and budget positions for the month of October. These monthly reports ensure the council stays on track to deliver its priorities for the year by taking any corrective action at the earliest opportunity to address any issues. Therefore there is no alternative option. However Members can ask officers to provide additional information they would consider helpful for including into these standard reports.

66 **Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023-2024**

The Assistant Director of Finance submitted a report to enable members to consider the banded scheme for Council Tax Reduction and to seek approval to recommend to Council a council Tax Reduction Scheme for the financial year 2023/24.

To note potential changes to Council Tax discounts and reliefs which are currently subject to consultation as part of the Council's budget consultation

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Finance advised that the Budget Planning Committee considered the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023/24 at its meeting on 26 July 2022 and recommended that the scheme remain unchanged for 2023/24

The Portfolio Holder for Housing highlighted that the banded scheme had been introduced whilst he had been Budget Planning Committee Chairman. The introduction of a banded scheme had cross-party support for the administrative simplicity for recipients and the council.

Resolved

- (1) That the contents of this report and the financial implications for the Council be noted.
- (2) That Council be recommended to agree:
 - The option of no change to the Council Tax Reduction Income Banded Scheme for Working Age Customers for 2023 -24.
 - To amend Working Age Regulations in line with annual uprating; and to amend the Council Tax Regulations for pensioners in line with uprating announced by Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.
- (3) That Council be recommended to agree that the levels of Council Tax discounts and premiums remain the same as previous years as follows:
 - Retain the discount for second homes at zero.
 - Retain the discount for empty homes (unoccupied and substantially unfurnished) at 25% for 6 months and thereafter zero.
 - Retain the empty homes premium of an additional 100% for properties that have remained empty for more than 2 years (total Council Tax payable 200%).
- (4) That it be noted and Council be recommended to note that the following Council Tax discounts and premiums were currently proposed to change as part of the Council's 2023/24 budget consultation:
 - Introduce an empty homes premium of an additional 200% for properties that have remained empty for more than 5 years (total Council Tax payable 300%).

- Introduce an empty homes premium of an additional 300% for properties that have remained empty for more than 10 years (total Council Tax payable 400%).
- Removal of the 25% discount for 12 months (zero thereafter) for dwellings which are vacant and undergoing major repair work to render them habitable.

Reasons

The current scheme is understood by customers and has enabled them to budget for their council tax payments. One of the main advantages of the banded scheme is that it reduces the number of changes that the customer will experience enabling more effective personal budgeting.

There is still a lot of financial uncertainty for many customers and in the current financial climate with the ongoing cost of living crisis it is therefore recommended that the existing scheme should be retained for 2023/24.

Alternative options

The alternative option is to undertake a review of the current CTRS. This option is rejected as the current scheme is understood by customers and has enabled them to budget for their council tax payments. One of the main advantages of the banded scheme is that it reduces the number of changes that the customer will experience enabling more effective personal budgeting.

67

Infrastructure Funding Statement 2021/22

The Assistant Director – Planning and Development submitted a report to seek approval of the Council's Infrastructure Funding Statement 2021/22 for publication and for an accompanying data submission to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Resolved

- (1) That the Infrastructure Funding Statement 2021/22 be approved for publication by 31 December 2022, subject to any final changes considered to be necessary by the Assistant Director – Planning and Development to secure accuracy in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning.
- (2) That the Assistant Director – Planning and Development be authorised to publish and submit the associated Infrastructure Funding Statement data as required by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Reasons

The publication of an Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) is a statutory requirement that provides transparency and accessibility of information about s.106 developer contributions required for the grant of planning permission. The proposed IFS encapsulates the data that officers propose to publish and submit for 2021/22 to DLUHC to meet that requirement. The information is considered to be the most robust available at this time. Officers will prepare a statement annually and continue to develop monitoring systems on an on-going basis.

Alternative options

Option 1: Not to bring forward an Infrastructure Funding Statement. This is not a lawful option as it would mean that the Council would be in breach of its statutory duty

Option 2: Seek review of the key statistics and proposed Infrastructure Funding Statement. Officers consider that this is not required as the information is the most robust available at this time.

68

Update on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Rural England Prosperity Fund

The Assistant Director - Growth and Economy submitted a report to provide Executive with a comprehensive update on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment plan (awaiting approval and imminent arrival of the first tranche of funding) and the development of an 'Addendum' to unlock the Rural England Prosperity Fund and to gain support for the proposed management of the two funds up to March 2025.

Resolved

- (1) That progress made on unlocking Cherwell's £1.255m allocation of UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) through the submission of an investment plan on 1 August 2022 be noted.
- (2) That the launch of the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) be noted and authority be delegated to the Corporate Director - Communities, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, to endorse an investment plan 'Addendum' to unlock Cherwell's £526,831 allocation.
- (3) That the approach in relation to external and internal governance structures, to manage the delivery of UKSPF and REPF projects, including the delegated authority to the Corporate Director, Communities to agree change requests.

Reasons

This report is the first of a series which will update Executive on UKSPF and REPF progress to March 2025, and likely beyond.

To make this programme work, there remain a number of things that need to be put in place. These include:

- External governance structure – The UKSPF and REPF guidance requires that each Authority establishes a Local Partnership Group
- Internal governance structure – Officers are working on a model which is simple but effective, probably based on existing corporate best practice. This will incorporate a mechanism to authorise change requests.

Reason for first Recommendation (1.1) to note progress made on unlocking Cherwell's £1.255m allocation of UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) through the submission of an investment plan on 1st August 2022 is to enable Members to be aware that officers have taken the necessary action to access the UKSPF.

Reason for second recommendation (1.2) to note the launch of Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) and delegate authority to the Corporate Director - Communities, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, to endorse an investment plan 'Addendum' to unlock Cherwell's £526,000 allocation is to ensure that the necessary delegations are in place to submit the Addendum.

Reason for third recommendation (1.3) to endorse the approach in relation to external and internal governance structures, to manage the delivery of UKSPF and REPF projects, including the delegated authority to the Corporate Director, Communities to agree change requests is to ensure that when the monies arrive, officers are able to progress the projects.

Alternative options

Option 1: Not engage with process and don't submit an investment plan and addendum within the required timescales. This was rejected because it would have meant the LA would have forfeited c£1.8m funding for the district.

Digital Infrastructure - East West Rail

The Assistant Director - Growth and Economy submitted a report to seek approval for a financial contribution of £133,000 to be made to install related digital infrastructure along the East West rail route, and for delegated authority to be given to officers to progress any necessary agreements.

Resolved

- (1) That investment of £133,000 in digital infrastructure along the East West Rail line be authorised.
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Corporate Director – Communities, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Economy, the S151 Officer and Monitoring Officer, to progress this workstream and to enter into any necessary agreement with partners to enable the works to proceed.

Reasons

By Summer 2024, East West Rail Phase 2 will provide the first direct rail link in more than 50 years between Oxford and Bletchley/Milton Keynes, transforming connectivity and journey times for people and businesses to, from and through Cherwell district and across the heart of the country. It is expected to:

- Boost economic growth and create opportunities for new housing and jobs
- Encourage people out of cars and onto public transport
- Provide a greener low carbon transport system

The Council has committed to assist the East West Rail project. Funding is, alongside partner local authorities, now being requested to enable digital fibre infrastructure to be installed. To expedite delivery, it is recommended that delegation of authority for officers to progress work streams and to enter into legal agreement with partners is granted.

Alternative options

Option 1: Not to proceed with investing £133,000 in digital infrastructure as part of the East West Rail project. This is not recommended as it would mean that the Council is not meeting its earlier agreement in principle to join with other Councils to contribute towards and to benefits from the investment in the related digital infrastructure.

Option 2: Not to delegate authority to the Corporate Director – Communities but to require the Council or its nominated committee to participate in negotiations and formation of the legal agreement. This is not recommended as it would cause delay, placing at risk the delivery of the East West Rail project. Furthermore, the Council has already committed to supporting the project in principle.

The meeting ended at 7.15 pm

Chairman:

Date: