

## Cherwell District Council

### Executive

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, OX15 4AA, on 7 March 2011 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Barry Wood (Chairman)  
Councillor G A Reynolds (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Ken Atack  
Councillor Norman Bolster  
Councillor Michael Gibbard  
Councillor James Macnamara  
Councillor Nigel Morris  
Councillor D M Pickford  
Councillor Nicholas Turner

Also Present: Councillor Nick Cotter

Apologies for absence: Councillor Colin Clarke

Officers: Ian Davies, Interim Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service  
John Hoad, Strategic Director - Planning, Housing and Economy  
Philip Clarke, Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development  
Karen Curtin, Head of Finance  
Liz Howlett, Head of Legal & Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer  
David Marriott, Head of Regeneration & Estates  
Ed Potter, Head of Environmental Services  
Claire Taylor, Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager  
Bob Duxbury, Development Control Team Leader  
Jacqui Hurd, Customer Service Manager  
Natasha Clark, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

## 118 **Declarations of Interest**

Members declared interests in the following agenda items:

### **7. Cherwell District Council's Response to Heavy Snow.**

Councillor Nicholas Turner, Personal, as a member of an Oxfordshire County Council scrutiny committee which had considered the issue and as Chairman of Banbury, Bicester and Woodstock Farmers Union who had worked with Oxfordshire County Council on addressing the issue of heavy snow.

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

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

120 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

121 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2011 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

122 **Population and Household Projections for Cherwell and Key Implications for the Local Development Framework**

The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development submitted a report which outlined for members the updated population & household projections for Cherwell and to consider the implications in terms of proposed changes to the Local Development Framework procedures and the consideration of a locally determined level of growth for the district. The item had been deferred from the 7 February Executive meeting to enable Members to receive further information on the subject.

**Resolved**

- (1) That the information contained in this report and in the attached technical paper be noted.
- (2) That the emerging broad population and household figures for Cherwell District for the period up to 2026 set out in the annex to these minutes (as set out in the minute book) be agreed as a basis for further work on the Core Strategy.

**Reasons**

The preparation of the Local Development Framework is a statutory requirement. However, the Government has proposed that changes to the statutory procedures for the preparation of Local Development Frameworks will be introduced in April 2012. These changes are expected to include greater responsibility for local planning authorities in assessing their local housing needs. The population and household projections set out in this report, together with the options for taking forward this work, will provide a basis for the Council to undertake further work to refine the Draft Core Strategy.

**Options**

**Option One** To agree the recommendations as set out in the report.

**Option Two** To amend the recommendations

**Option Three** Not to agree the recommendations.

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### **Cherwell District Council's Response to Heavy Snow**

The Head of Environmental Services which sought consideration of the Council's response to the heavy snow in December 2010 and improvements to that response in similar circumstances in the future.

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That the problems and issues which arose from the heavy snow fall prior to Christmas be noted.
- (2) That the proposed actions to improve the Council's response to future severe winter weather events as set out in the annex to these minutes (as set out in the minute book) be approved.
- (3) That any proposed equipment purchased will be acquired within existing budgets during 2011/12 be noted.
- (4) That officers be requested to consider if the snow plan should be presented to a future Parish Liaison meeting.

#### **Reasons**

The heavy snowfall in December 2010 was the greatest for many years and caused disruption to services, more so due to the effect of Christmas. A number of possible improvements which would make services more resilient in the event of heavy snowfall have been investigated. Many of these are low cost or no cost improvements and involve procedural changes, better co-ordination or provision of better information.

A proposed priority of response and committing resources has been established. It is based on returning public services to normal operation as swiftly as practicable. By implementing the action plan services will be more resilient for any future heavy snowfall events.

#### **Options**

**Option One** To approve the proposed action plan as outlined in paragraph 2.29 to 2.30 of the report

**Option Two** To reject the proposed action plan

**Option Three** To ask officers to modify the proposed action plan

124 **Kidlington Pedestrianisation and Traffic Regulation Order**

The Head of Regeneration and Estates submitted a report which sought the Council's approval to enter into an agency agreement with Oxfordshire County Council, to formally promote a new Traffic Regulation Order for Kidlington High Street.

**Resolved**

- (1) That an agency agreement between Oxfordshire County Council, the Highway Authority, and Cherwell District Council to enable Cherwell District Council to formally promote a new Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) for Kidlington High Street be approved.

**Reasons**

This project is identified as a priority in the Regeneration and Estates Service Plan and is a key partnership project undertaken at the request of the Kidlington Village Centre Management Board and Kidlington Parish Council.

**Options**

**Option One**                      Approve the agency agreement for the scheme to move forward.

**Option Two**                      Reject the agency agreement. However this will result in the postponement of any further work on the scheme and a failure to meet Service Plan targets.

125 **Proposals for High Speed Rail - HS2**

The Strategic Director Planning, Housing and Economy submitted a report which provided information on the Government's intentions with regards to High Speed Rail and its impact upon the District, and to enable consideration of the need to co-operate with and financially contribute to an emergent group of Councils along the declared preferred route to contest the proposals.

Councillor Cotter, Leader of the Opposition, spoke in opposition to the recommendation to make up to £50,000 from Planning Control Reserves as a contribution towards the fund being formed to campaign against the proposals and to fund consultancy work required to assist in the detailed assessment of the impact upon individual properties and communities along the Cherwell section of the preferred route (notionally £20,000).

**Resolved**

- (1) That it be agreed to join with other Authorities along the preferred route to campaign against the proposals.

- (2) That it be agreed to make available up to £50,000 from Planning Control Reserve
  - a. as a contribution towards the fund being formed to campaign against the proposals and;
  - b. To fund consultancy work required to assist in the detailed assessment of the impact upon individual properties and communities along the Cherwell section of the preferred route (notionally £20,000).
  - c. delegate to the Strategic Director Planning, Housing and Economy in consultation with the Portfolio Holder the final distribution of this funding
- (3) That Planning Committee be asked to steer the detailed assessment of impact and to make the Council's representations thereon.
- (4) That the Strategic Director Planning, Housing and Economy be required to bring a further detailed report to the Executive towards the end of the consultation period to enable consideration of Council's formal response to the consultation.

### **Reasons**

The key issues considered in this report are the degree of involvement to be had with the emergent group of local authorities, and the extent of financial commitment to that grouping, and to the need to hire in consultancy support for the assessment of the strategic case and environmental impact.

### **Options**

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|---------------------|---|
| <b>Option One</b>   | Agree to co-operate with the emergent group of authorities, and our adjacent colleagues in South Northants, with a financial undertaking of £50,000 towards the campaign against the proposals, and for consultancy assistance. |
| <b>Option Two</b>   | Agree to the above co-operation with a greater or smaller, financial contribution   |
| <b>Option Three</b> | Be self contained in our assessment of the proposals within our own existing resources  |

### **Performance and Risk Management Framework 2011/12**

The Interim Chief Executive and Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager submitted a report which outlined the Council's performance and risk management arrangements for 2011-2012 reviewed in the context of significant changes to the national performance and inspection regime.

## **Resolved**

- (1) That the proposed approach to performance and risk management for 2011/12 be agreed and that these changes are reflected in the Council's Performance and Risk management Framework.
- (2) That the measures and risks that will make up the Council's performance and risk management framework for 2011/12 be agreed.
- (3) That officers report on any new performance requirements instigated by the government in the quarterly Executive reports throughout 2011/12 and work to identify and adopt examples of good practice nationally to ensure the Council's performance management remains robust and transparent.

## **Reasons**

This report presents the Council's proposed approach to performance management from 2011/12. It reflects changes in national policy and outlines a clear locally determined approach to ensure performance and risk management remains robust and focused on local priorities. The report also highlights areas where savings and efficiencies in relation to performance management have been found.

## **Options**

### **Option One**

The Executive is recommended:

To agree the proposed approach to performance and risk management for 2011/12 and request that these changes are reflected in the Council's Performance and Risk management Framework.

To agree the measures that will make up the performance management framework for 2011/12.

To request that officers report on any new performance requirements instigated by the government in the quarterly Executive reports throughout 2011/12 and work to identify and adopt examples of good practice nationally to ensure the Council's performance management remains robust and transparent.

### **Option Two**

To identify any additional issues for further consideration or review.

## **2011/12 Treasury Management Strategy and Treasury Management Practices**

The Head of Finance submitted a report which set out the strategy and policy framework for treasury operations for 2011/12 and outlines the Treasury

Management Practices for 2011/12 which fulfilled two key requirements of the Local Government Act 2003:-

- approval of the Treasury Management Policy in accordance with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management; and
- approval of the Investment Strategy in accordance with the CLG investment guidance.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the Treasury Management Policy and Investment Strategy 2011/12 be recommended to Council for approval.

### **Reasons**

The highest standard of stewardship of public funds remains of the utmost importance to the Council. The 2011/12 Treasury Management Strategy and Treasury Management Practices document sets out the Council's priorities and policies for making, and managing investments made by the Council in the course of undertaking treasury management activities during the 2011/12 financial year.

### **Options**

#### **Option One**

To review draft strategy and consider proposals arising.

#### **Option Two**

To approve or reject the recommendations above or request that Officers provide additional information.

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### **Customer Service Value for Money Review and Customer Intelligence Project**

The Interim Chief Executive submitted a report which sought consideration of the findings of the Value for Money (VFM) Review report and the Customer Intelligence Improvement report, and the recommendations arising from these.

The Executive expressed their thanks to all staff in the Customer Services Team for their ongoing hard work to date in improving the service and stressed the importance of continuing to improve and develop the service to maintain the high level of service.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the overall conclusions of the Customer Service VFM and Customer Intelligence reports be endorsed.
- (2) That a new vision for Customer Service to 2013/14 that seeks to reduce the cost of the service, retain or improve on existing levels of

satisfaction, reduce avoidable contact, manage demand and encourage greater use of online services be adopted.

- (3) That a customer service transformation programme, involving all service areas, that will drive improvement in Customer Service through adopting smarter working methods to reduce avoidable contact and transactions, and through managing demand to reduce peaks and troughs in levels of transactions be commenced.
- (4) That the key performance measures of speed of telephone response and call abandonment rate for the Council's corporate score card be adopted.
- (5) That a two-year cost savings target of £257,462 for Customer Service that addresses the high cost of the service but in a sustainable way, with minimal impact on overall service to the public, as follows, be established;
  1. Include the elimination of all vacant posts by 2012/13, to allow time for the new payment kiosks to reduce current workload, and seek to reduce the establishment by an additional 1 FTE per annum as the transformation programme reduces overall levels of contact
  2. Note savings of £125,654 built into the 2011/12 budget as follows;
    - a. Install payment kiosks (saving £65,000) as approved
    - b. Remove a vacant customer service specialist post (saving £17,000)
    - c. Remove vacant hours provision (saving £20,000)
    - d. Reduce the establishment by 1FTE (saving £23,654)
  3. Make further savings of £131,808 in 2012/13 as follows;
    - a. Eliminating all remaining vacant posts (saving £85,154)
    - b. Reducing the establishment by an additional 1 FTE as levels of contact decline through improved working (saving £23,654)
    - c. Reducing accommodation costs through plans to move out of Bicester Market Square in 2012/13 (saving £23,000) as part of the town centre project, with the service being required to find this saving by other means should the scheme not progress by this date.
- (6) That discussions on the nature and number of LinkPoint offices be included in the Council's forthcoming work on its Medium Term Financial Strategy.



## Reasons

The Council's current Customer Service function has high levels of customer satisfaction and multiple access routes, but is expensive to provide and does not utilise customer intelligence effectively.

Best practice shows that transformation projects can significantly reduce costs and improve customer service through reducing avoidable contact, migrating contact to less expensive channels and greater use of customer intelligence

The pace and scale of savings is critical to the ability of the service to implement them in a sustainable manner that does not impact on overall levels of customer satisfaction.

The scope of savings possible may be limited while maintaining current approaches to service provision. For example, maintaining four LinkPoint Offices is known to consume a set level of staff resource (£296,000). The decision to continue to take cash also has cost implications.

Further savings may be possible through the proposed Transformation Programme and/or through joint working with South Northants.

## Options

**Option One** To limit savings in the service to a single year reduction of £135,654 and not implement a transformation programme. While this will be less disruptive it will not drive out the potential savings within the service or improve the customer experience

**Option Two** To implement a transformation programme with a two-year savings target of £257,462.

**Option Three** To revisit the current policy of LinkPoint office provision as part of a wider consideration of service delivery. The following table illustrates the maximum possible financial savings of a change in policy ;

	Average Transactions (monthly)	Customer Service Staff (FTE)	Salaries (Annual)	"Savable" Premises Costs
Kidlington	890	2.5	£59,135	£5,538
Bicester	2,346	3	£70,962	£35,960
Bodicote	1,959	3	£70,962	No saving
Banbury	3,521	4	£94,616	No saving

Benefits of the current LinkPoint provision are;

- The council provides of preferred means of contact for some people and provides a local council presence in towns

- it ensures the ability to pay at the point of service;
- it allows the council to share its premises with other agencies (CAB, Job Centre Plus) to provide joined-up service delivery
- it provides a distributed contact centre resilience (i.e. calls answered at Link Point offices instead of Bodicote House)
- it offers the possibility of delivering new or enhanced services, such as visitor information
- some form of face to face presence will always be needed for document presentation/verification, reception services etc.
- meeting some contractual obligations, such as delivering concessionary fares services for Oxfordshire County Council

Other than financial savings, the advantages of a change in policy are:

- it provides an incentive for customers to move to telephone or online services rather than stay with face-to-face services;
- greater volumes of contact can be processed than at present due to the more efficient nature of alternative channels, and most (current) face to face services can be provided in this way;
- more efficient staff deployment will be possible as there will be no need to provide lone working/lunchtime cover, or the need to factor in as much staff travel time;
- closure of the Castle Quay LinkPoint would enable more flexibility of service provision/shop income for the Museum/TIC Trust;
- as a predominantly rural district it could be argued that town centre provision does not provide the most equitable of service. More equitable face to face provision can be provided on an outreach or surgery basis, and using other organisations' buildings. A programme of visits could cover a wider area than at present

### **Award of Contract for a Combined Insurance Programme for Cherwell District Council**

The Head of Finance submitted a report which sought approval for the award of a contract for a Combined Insurance Programme with the deletion of one policy and the increasing of excesses to those agreed in October 2009.

**Resolved**

- (1) That the insurance policy for money be discontinued and excesses on a range of continuing policies be increased.
- (2) That a contract for a Combined Insurance Programme be awarded to Zurich Municipal for a period of three years from 1 April 2011 with the allowance purely at the discretion of the Council to extend by up to a further four years in one year increments.

**Reasons**

The solution provided by Zurich Municipal will not only provide further premium savings of more than £33,000 to those already achieved over the last few years – the 2009/10 extension resulting in savings of more than £30,000 and the 2009 VfM exercise netting an additional £65,000 of savings in 2010/11 – resulting in insurance premium costs coming down £464,000 in 2003/4 to £209,718.58 in 2011/12, but will also provide a robust support system involving telephone, email and web based advise during a substantial change in contract management responsibilities.

130 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

That, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded form the meeting for the following item of business, on the grounds that they could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of that Act.

131 **Award of Contract for a Combined Insurance Programme for Cherwell District Council - Exempt Appendix 1**

The Committee considered the exempt annex to the report of the Head of Finance on the Award of Contract for a Combined Insurance Programme for Cherwell District Council.

**Resolved**

- (1) That the exempt annex be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.20 pm

Chairman:

Date: