

## **Cherwell District Council**

### **Executive**

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 4 November 2024 at 6.30 pm

#### Present:

Councillor David Hingley (Leader of the Council & Portfolio Holder for Strategic Leadership) (Chairman)

Councillor Tom Beckett, Portfolio Holder for Greener Communities

Councillor Chris Brant, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services

Councillor Jean Conway, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management

Councillor Nick Cotter, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Councillor Ian Middleton, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services

Councillor Rob Parkinson, Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities

Councillor Rob Pattenden, Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities

#### Present Virtually (no voting rights):

Councillor Lesley McLean, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Regeneration and Property

#### Also Present:

Councillor Amanda Watkins, Leader of the Opposition, Labour Group

Councillor Lynne Parsons, For item 7

#### Officers:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive

Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities

Stephen Hinds, Corporate Director Resources and Transformation

Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance & S151 Officer

Shahin Ismail, Interim Head of Legal Services & Deputy Monitoring Officer

Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

#### Officers Attending Virtually:

Robert Jolley, Assistant Director Growth & Economy

Nicola Riley, Assistant Director Housing and Wellbeing

Shona Ware, Assistant Director Customer Focus

David North, Housing Grants & Standards Team Leader

51 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no petitions.

The Chair advised that Councillor Parsons was in attendance to address the meeting on item 7, Mental Health Provision for Young People, as the proposer of the motion was it was agreed at Council.

53 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

54 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Cotter to his first Executive meeting as Portfolio Holder for Housing.

The Chairman advised that he and the Chief Executive had attended the Local Government Association (LGA) Conference the previous week, which had been very interesting. There had been no new information on devolution but it was expected there would be plans soon.

55 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

56 **Mental Health Provision for Young People**

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing submitted a report to provide options in response to the motion agreed at the 15 July 2024 Council meeting:

*“This council resolves to ask the Executive to increase spending on the mental health initiatives currently in place within the Chief Executive’s directorate to be funded by an allocation from the Policy Contingency budget.”*

Councillor Parsons, who had proposed the motion to Council, addressed Executive. Councillor Parsons commented that, having considered the report, she understood why options 1, 2 and 3 were not being recommended. Referring to option 4, Councillor Parsons noted research was important and that this option included an extension to the work currently underway

suggesting that as not all children enjoyed or were able to participate in physical activity, could consideration be given to including other activities.

On behalf of Executive, the Chairman thanked Councillor Parsons for bringing her motion to Council and her comments to Executive.

In considering the report, Executive Members indicated their support to Councillor Parsons' comment for alternatives to physical activity and agreed it was an important issue whilst noting it was a statutory function for the district council and important to work in partnership.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That an extension to the existing provision within current resourcing levels available through the Physical Activity and Mental Health provision the Wellbeing team currently deliver in schools and for families be endorsed.
- (2) That a fund of £3500 be agreed to support research and evidence gathering to assess what the needs are for increased mental health provision for young people in Cherwell, the role of partners and consider the funding routes to secure it.

### **Reasons**

The current Mental Health and Physical Activity programme is delivered by the Youth Activator programme in schools, combining physical activity with mental health themes.

The recommended option 4, increase the Physical Activity and Mental Health provision that the Youth Activators within the Wellbeing team currently deliver and research and stakeholder engagement (funded from the Policy contingency budget), would enable the council to conduct research through stakeholders and residents to better understand the needs around what mental health provision for young people in Cherwell is needed and investment required going forward and provide increased provision for young people and families through the Wellbeing team while the research was being conducted.

### **Alternative options**

Option 1: Children young people Supported Self-Help pilot for 7–11-year-olds attending Primary School Clusters for agreed terms in Banbury, Bicester or Kidlington

Option 2: Children Young People offer for Secondary Schools Banbury, Bicester or Kidlington

Option 3: Combination of Primary School Cluster and Secondary School offer in Banbury, Bicester or Kidlington

Commissioning specialist support as set out in options 1 – 3 was rejected due to currently not fully understanding what the needs and requirements are for young people around mental health in Cherwell and the investment required.

If the recommended Option 4 is approved, this would allow for an evidence base to be developed that looked at the needs of children ascertain what would be required and be sustainable in the longer term around Mental Health support, partner involvement and the scale of investment required. Option 4 would also provide increased provision for children and families while the research was being conducted.

## 57 **Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing Policy**

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing submitted a report to seek approval for the reviewed Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing Policy.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the reviewed Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing Policy be approved.

### **Reasons**

It is important that the Council has up to date policies and procedures for its statutory and key service areas and it is important that they are legislatively and operationally sound. A periodic review of policies is therefore appropriate.

### **Alternative options**

Option 1: Not bring forward a reviewed and amended policy. As there has not been any recent changes to legislation in this area, there is no imperative for the current policy to be changed or reviewed. However, it is important the Council policies are reviewed regularly to ensure that they are able to meet customer needs, service needs and are legislatively sound. This option is therefore rejected.

## 58 **Housing Grants and Assistance Policy**

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing submitted a report to seek approval for the reviewed Housing Grants and Assistance Policy.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the reviewed Housing Grants and Assistance Policy be approved.

### **Reasons**

It is important that the Council has up to date policies and procedures for its statutory and key service areas and it is important that they are legislatively and operationally sound. A periodic review of policies is therefore appropriate.

### **Alternative options**

Option 1: Not bring forward a reviewed and amended policy. As there has not been any recent changes to legislation in this area, there is no imperative for the current policy to be changed or reviewed. However, it is important the Council policies are reviewed regularly to ensure that they are able to meet customer needs, service needs and are legislatively sound. This option is therefore rejected.

Option 2: To keep two separate policies, one for mandatory grants and one for discretionary grants. As the policy areas are closely linked and intertwined, particularly when offering grants to disabled households, having a single policy provides simplification and clarity. This option is therefore rejected.

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### **Cost of Living 2023/2024 Review and 2024/2025 Activities**

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing submitted a report to provide an update on the additional activity described in the 2023/24 Cost of Living action plan and to note proposed future approaches and activity within the Household support grant aid.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the proposed plan which was endorsed and recommended by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which noted the review of the 2023/24 cost of living plan and supported the proposed range of activities planned for 2024/25 were considered, be agreed.

### **Reasons**

Following Covid and the subsequent Cost of Living crisis Cherwell District Council has provided additional support to low-income households, initially in 2022/23 with additional payments or food vouchers to those in receipt of housing benefit and last winter 2023/24 ran a programme of support and grant schemes to offer support to grass roots community groups and individuals.

Going forward the Wellbeing service wants to continue to work in partnership across the district with statutory and voluntary sector organisations, both strategically and on a hyperlocal basis, to ensure that Cherwell residents can access support through additional targeted interventions and secure help when needed.

The council recognises that the response to the cost-of-living crisis is changing and will need to continue to be flexible and adapt to best meet the changing needs of residents and the proposed activities will seek to continue to address this.

### **Alternative options**

Option 1: To not respond additionally to cost-of-living burdens felt by residents most impacted by economic pressures as there isn't a base budget for the additional spend.

This has been rejected because of the availability of further allocations of Household support grant aid, which allow the Council to support residents without budgetary impact.

Option 2: To concentrate on fewer activities in 2024/2025

This has been rejected because the spread of grant allows a greater number of issues to be relieved.

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### **Establishing Area Oversight Groups**

The Corporate Director Communities submitted a report to seek authority from the Executive to adopt an area-based approach with the objective to strengthen community and stakeholder engagement into major growth sites across the District in support of delivering more holistic and sustainably planned developments, aligned to Council priorities.

In response to a question from the Leader of the Opposition regarding cross-party district councillor representation on the Area Oversight Groups(AOGs), the Chairman explained that officers were working on the Terms of Reference for the AOGs, which would include district councillor representatives irrespective of political group.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the establishment of Area Oversight Groups (AOGs) for Bicester, Banbury and Kidlington as non-decision-making advisory groups be agreed.

### **Reasons**

Although not part of any formal decision-making process, setting up an Area Oversight Group (AOG) for each area (Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington) would provide the Council with a significant conduit to and from the local communities. It will help to manage increasing development and housing growth within some urban centres in Cherwell and help deliver an enabling and co-ordinated approach towards achieving Council priorities.

### **Alternative options**

Option 1: Do nothing (keep current arrangements in place) – this was rejected because there is a lack of consistency in each of the three areas and only Bicester has suitable arrangements in place and it is important that the other two urban centres, subjected to growth and development also benefit for local area based arrangements, aligned to local needs and aspirations.

61 **Performance, Risk and Finance Monitoring Report Quarter 2 2024 - 2025**

The Assistant Director of Finance and Assistant Director – Customer Focus submitted a report to the committee the council's performance, risk, and financial positions at the end of Quarter 2 2024-25.

At the discretion of the Chairman, the Leader of the Opposition addressed Executive. In response to the Leader of the Opposition's question regarding the low housing completion return, the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development explained that 6791 houses had been approved but not yet delivered by developers. In response to a question regarding bad debt write off, the Assistant Director Finance confirmed all debt write offs were funded by the debt contingency.

**Resolved**

- (1) That the council's performance, risk and finance Quarter 2 2024/2025 report be noted.
- (2) That the updated Corporate Debt Policy be approved.
- (3) That debt write offs totalling £43,660.32 be approved.
- (4) That the reprofiling of capital projects beyond 2024/25 and the subsequent update to the programme budget for this financial year 2024/25 be approved.
- (5) That it be noted that Cherwell District Council would be receiving £0.064m revenue grant funding from Oxfordshire County Council for the Household Support Fund round 6, which follows up on round 5 that was spent supporting residents through the cost-of-living crisis and this funding would support the work presented at the last Overview and Scrutiny meeting in Cherwell's Cost of Living plan.
- (6) That the use of £0.050m of S106 funding approved under S151 Officer delegated authority to deliver the remaining elements of the Outdoor Sports project at Whitelands Farm Sports Ground be noted.
- (7) That the additional information relating to capital overspends in respect of Bicester East Community Centre and the Sunshine Centre reported to Executive in the August (period 5) financial performance report be noted.
- (8) That the removal of following projects with budgets totalling £0.652m from the Capital Programme be approved.
  - iTrent HR System Upgrades
  - Housing & UT Asset System
  - Retained Land
  - Expiring Energy Performance Certificates plus Associated Works

- Energy Performance Certificates Government Implementation of target B – Strategic Plan
  - Car Park refurbishments
  - Car Parking Action Plan Delivery
- (9) That the increase in the building control fees and charges for 2024/25 with immediate effect as set out in the Annex to the Minutes (as set out in the Minute Book) be approved.

### **Reasons**

The council actively and regularly monitors its performance, risk, and financial positions to ensure it can deliver its corporate priorities and respond effectively to emerging issues.

This monitoring takes place monthly for finance, so the council can identify potential issues at the earliest opportunity and put measures in place to mitigate them.

These updates are consolidated into a single report given the implications and interdependencies between them, and this is the summary for the end of Quarter 2 2024-25.

### **Alternative options**

Option 1: This report summarises the council's financial position up to the end of Quarter 2 2024-2025, therefore there are no alternative options to consider. Regarding the recommendations to approve the updated Corporate Debt Policy, reprofiling of capital projects, removal of projects from the Capital Programme and increase in building control fees and charges, Members could choose not to reject these requests, however, the requests are in accordance with the councils' policies and financial procedure rules.

## **62 Exclusion of the Press and Public**

That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the ground that, if the public and press were present, it would be likely that exempt information falling under the provisions of Schedule 12A, Part 1, Paragraph 3 would be disclosed to them, and that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

## **63 Performance, Risk and Finance Monitoring Report Quarter 2 2024 - 2025 - Exempt Appendix**

There were no questions on the exempt appendix, which had been agreed as part of agenda item 12 (Minute 61 refers).



64 **Graven Hill Village Development Company (GHVDC) Dev Co – Request for S38 agreement Highways Act 1980 works bonds**

The Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted an exempt report to bring to the attention of the Executive the request from Graven Hill Village Development Company Ltd (Dev Co) for the Council to act as surety in three performance bonds for roadway infrastructure works to be undertaken by Dev Co under section 38 of the Highways Act 1980.

**Resolved**

- (1) That it be approved in principle that the Council act as surety for Dev Co in respect of two performance bonds (up to the sum referred to in the exempt Appendix to this report) relating to the construction of highway works by Dev Co pursuant to agreements between Dev Co and Oxfordshire County Council (as local highway authority) to be made under section 38 of the Highways Act 1980.
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Shareholder Representative to agree on the formal documentation in relation to the bonds in consultation with the s.151 Officer, the Monitoring Officer, the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property.
- (3) That it be agreed that Dev Co be requested to pay the council a market fee for the bond facility.

**Reasons**

The recommendations in this report have been subject to discussion between the Shareholder Representatives, CDC Finance Representatives and the Dev Co Managing Director and Finance Director.

By agreeing with the recommendations in this report, the council is ensuring that Dev Co can act swiftly to meet its aims and delivery objectives regarding the highway works and safeguard the council's investment and return on investment.

**Alternative options**

Option 1: Not to give a performance bond. This has been dismissed by officers on the grounds that OCC would not accept a bond from either Hold Co or Dev Co and, because performance bonds are prerequisites for entering section 38 adoption agreements with the county council, the company would have to go to the market. The additional time required for this at this stage would impact on the delivery of the agreement. Officers are in discussion with Dev Co about the company securing future bonds from the open market rather than from the council.

Executive - 4 November 2024

The meeting ended at 7.45 pm

Chairman:

Date: