

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
**West Oxfordshire District Council**  
held via video conferencing at 2:00pm on **Wednesday 24 June 2020**

### PRESENT

Councillors: Harry Eaglestone (Chairman), Jane Doughty (Vice-Chairman), Jake Acock, Joy Aitman, Alaa Al-Yousuf, Richard Bishop, Rosa Bolger, Jill Bull, Mike Cahill, Laetisia Carter, Louise Chapman, Nathalie Chapple, Andrew Coles, Owen Collins, Nigel Colston, Julian Cooper, Derek Cotterill, Suzi Coul, Maxine Crossland, Merilyn Davies, Duncan Enright, Hilary Fenton, Ted Fenton, Steve Good, Andy Graham, Jeff Haine, David Harvey, Gill Hill, David Jackson, Ed James, Nick Leverton, Dan Levy, Norman MacRae MBE, Martin McBride, Michele Mead, James Mills, Toby Morris, Kieran Mullins, Neil Owen, Alex Postan, Carl Rylett, Geoff Saul, Harry St John and Ben Woodruff.

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive); Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer); Frank Wilson (Executive Director Finance); Phil Martin (Group Manager Business Support Services); Will Barton (Business Development Officer); Heather McCulloch (Healthy Communities Manager); Sian Edwards (Waste and Recycling Officer); Keith Butler (Head of Democratic Services); and Amy Barnes (Senior Strategic Support Officer).

#### 11. MINUTES

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 13 May 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### 12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Luci Ashbourne, Andrew Beaney, Mike Cahill, Richard Langridge and Elizabeth Poskitt.

#### 13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Harvey declared an interest in Item 9 – Sealing of Documents because he was a tenant of Newman Court.

Councillor St John declared an interest in Item 9 – Sealing of Documents because he was a Trustee of the Wychwood Project.

#### 14. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS

##### 14.1 Former Councillor Arthur Goffe

The Chairman addressed Members with the sad news of the death of Arthur Goffe earlier in the month. Arthur was first elected to the Council for Bartons Ward in 1994, and served for 20 years, when he did not stand for re-election in 2014.

Arthur had served on a number of committees during his time on the Council, and was a member of the Uplands Area Planning Sub-Committee throughout. Away from his Council duties, Arthur was well known in the farming community, and was a trustee of the Oxfordshire Cricket Association.

Councillor Jackson spoke in his capacity as the current councillor for the Ward. He had not known Arthur well, but noted that he had always been spoken of with fondness and gratitude as a local farmer and Councillor. Arthur was known for his service and the legacy of an area of land in the east of Middle Barton which he had enabled to become a

rural exception site, ensuring affordable rent. Councillor Jackson concluded that Arthur's family must be very proud and passed on his sympathies to them.

Councillor Mills shared his memories of Arthur who had clearly loved West Oxfordshire, was passionate about the Bartons and knew every lane, tree and hedge. He stated that Arthur had been dedicated to serving his community and would be sadly missed.

#### 14.2 Paul Cracknell – Principal Democratic and Committee Services Officer

The Chairman advised that Paul Cracknell had taken the decision to retire at the end of the month. Paul was well known to all Members having served as a Democratic Services Officer for 32 years, since joining the Council in 1988, prior to which he had worked for Castle Point Borough Council in Essex.

The Chairman placed on record the Council's thanks to Paul for all he had done for existing and former Councillors during his time with the District Council. He stated that Paul's knowledge, experience, helpfulness and humour would be greatly missed and he offered him everyone's best wishes for the future.

Councillors Postan, Graham, Enright and Haine echoed the comments made and individually expressed their best wishes to him, thanking him for his help and support which had always been given with respect and kindness.

#### 14.3 Armed Forces week

Councillor Mills reminded the meeting that it was Armed Forces week, culminating in an Armed Forces Day on Saturday. Although it would be a slightly different celebration due to the restrictions of Coronavirus, this was the Council's opportunity to thank all those in the armed forces, particularly those based at RAF Brize Norton, serving locally and abroad. He also expressed his gratitude to the military for their support and assistance during the pandemic.

As the Armed Forces Champion, Councillor Leverton noted that the celebrations would be somewhat muted this year but advised that flag raising at town halls would still take place. He also mentioned the recent charity cycle ride from Chipping Norton to Ypres and thanked the Cabinet for its efforts in supporting charities.

#### 14.4 Black Lives Matter

Councillor Mills addressed Members following the recent outcry relating to the treatment and death of George Floyd. He stated that every person had a responsibility to treat others equally whilst understanding that all areas of history should be acknowledged.

He stated that one way in which West Oxfordshire could recognise the achievements and successes of past black councillors was with the naming of streets. He referred to two particular councillors, Joe Walcott and George Mason.

George had been a member of the RAF, serving in Egypt as well as various UK postings, before making his home in Carterton. He was a great character with a dry sense of humour. Councillor Mills encouraged Members to look at the records held at the Imperial War Museum because they would find a young, 21 year old George Mason being interviewed having arrived with the Windrush generation.

Joe Walcott had also served in the RAF for 30 years had been a local councillor for 18 years and Chairman of this Council and also Mayor of Carterton, and had been awarded an MBE in 2006. He had been a strong campaigner for black and ethnic minorities. Councillor Mills felt that both gentlemen had served their country, West Oxfordshire and Carterton with distinction, which should be recognised formally.

As a gesture of gratitude and thanks to both past Councillors, Councillor Mills stated that two new streets of significance would be named after them in the near future, once discussions had taken place with their families.

Councillor Crossland congratulated Councillor Mills for this announcement and she remembered Joe Walcott as being well loved and larger than life.

Councillor Acock also thanked Councillor Mills for his announcement and hoped that work would continue to encourage candidates from all ethnic backgrounds to stand for election. He also referenced the LGBT events that were taking place across the country and was assured that the 'Pride' flag was flying at the front of the Council offices.

#### 14.5 River Windrush works

Councillor MacRae addressed Members and advised that work was progressing on the breach in the riverbank. He stated that there had been some issues in establishing the temporary dams due to the nature of the riverbed but the work was being monitored on site. The Council had taken the decision to close off the bridge over the river at Jacobs Mill to ensure the safety of all.

#### 15. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

There was no participation of the public.

#### 16. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EXECUTIVE

The Council considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services setting out the recommendations made by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 17 June 2020.

Councillor Mills addressed Members and proposed the recommendations as written. With regard to the decision relating to Heylo Affordable Housing, Councillor Mills reminded Members that although there was no single solution to the housing crisis, this was an important addition for the Council to be able to offer.

This was seconded by Councillor Morris.

Councillor Enright supported the recommendations and was pleased that more shared ownership opportunities would be coming forward.

Councillor Morris endorsed the recommendations and highlighted the importance of securing a good growth Deal for West Oxfordshire. He also supported the decision to award the contract for the supply and installation of the sports hall floor at Chipping Norton Leisure Centre, which was particularly important to the health and well-being of local residents.

**RESOLVED:** That the recommendations made by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 17 June 2020 be approved in relation to:-

- a) Heylo Affordable Housing Funding Request. (Minute No. CT/14 (2020/2021))
- b) Local Development Scheme Update (Minute No CT/15 (2020/2021)) and
- c) Award of Contract for the Supply and Installation of Pulastic Sports Hall Floor at Chipping Norton Leisure Centre (Minute No. CT/18 (2020/2021)).

#### 17. REPORTS OF THE CABINET

The reports of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 27 May and 17 June 2020 were received.

17.1 Leisure Management Contractor Financial Support  
Minute No. CT/19 (2020/2021)

Councillor Acock asked Councillor Mead whether, in light of the Prime Minister's announcement the previous day, the Council would be prepared to change its position in relation to providing financial support to the Council's Leisure Management Contractor, GLL Better.

Councillor Mead advised that the Council would continue to support GLL as much as possible. She noted that the government was updating its advice on a daily basis and the financial assistance provided to GLL had covered the previous months' lost revenue. Any request to assist them with future losses would be considered if, or when, they were received.

Councillor Graham queried what conversations the S151 Officer and the relevant Cabinet Members had had regarding the impact on Leisure Centres nationwide.

In response Councillor Morris explained that the Council had adopted a safeguarding position and any financial impact had to be balanced with the need to look after the health and wellbeing of residents. The assistance provided had been in the form of deferred management charges to assist with the four month loss of income and had been taken on the advice that the amount of Business Rates GLL would be liable for was in the region of £300,000.

In response to a question from Councillor Levy, Councillor Mills advised that officers and Members were taking part in regular conference calls with the LGA as well as meeting with other local authorities. With regard to the specific issue of whether other authorities were adopting similar assistance packages, it entirely depended on the relationship that the authorities had with their leisure providers.

Councillor Acock queried the £300,000 business rates evidence and requested that any reports relating to bringing the service in house, be published. In response, Councillor Morris explained that he had asked officers for a Business Rates figure and he had received an answer. There were no reports relating to bringing the service in house.

Councillor Carter made reference to lobbying the government about opening outdoor swimming facilities and advised that Swim England were working hard to achieve this. She encouraged the Cabinet to support opening the lidos in Woodstock and Chipping Norton as soon as possible. Councillor Mead assured the meeting that this would be looked into.

(The Chairman announced a short comfort break and the meeting resumed at 15.00.)

18. COVID 19: COUNCIL RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

The Council received a report and presentation from officers regarding the work that had been taking place over the past three months in response to the pandemic.

The Chief Executive, Mr Hughes introduced the item and reminded the meeting that everyone was living and working in extraordinary times. He referred to the sadness and loss that many residents had endured during a time of great worry and he outlined the new roles and responsibilities that the Council had taken on.

A number of officers presented sections of the report including Heather McCulloch (Shared Healthy Communities Manager), Phil Martin (Group Manager – Business Support Services), Will Barton (Business Development Manager), Sian Edwards (Waste and Recycling Officer), Frank Wilson (Group Finance Director – Publica) and Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer / Deputy Chief Executive).

The report outlined the steps taken to respond to the Covid-19 emergency, working in partnership with other agencies and local groups. The report also detailed the next phase

of work as officers moved into the recovery stage. The intention was to prepare a Local Recovery Plan which would steer the Council's work. The plan would be submitted to Cabinet and Council in October 2020.

The report also laid out plans to establish a Cabinet Advisory Group, with an overall membership of nine members which would help inform the preparation of the plan. Member engagement would also be encouraged via a workshop session.

A framework for delivering the recovery phase was detailed in section 2 of the report along with details of other partners and agencies that the Council would be working with.

At the conclusion of the presentation the Leader, Councillor Mills thanked officers and stated that it had been sobering to see the details laid out. He recognised that there had been a massive effort by staff and Members at all levels and although not always seen, this had been hugely appreciated. Councillor Mills also thanked the Cabinet members for their contributions. He reminded the meeting that there were still reasons to be optimistic because this was a fantastic part of the country, with skilled people and numerous attractions. He therefore proposed the recommendations as laid out.

This was seconded by Councillor Morris who reserved his right to speak at this juncture.

Councillor Graham thanked officers for the report and referred to the challenges surrounding test and trace, whether Care Homes could be put at the forefront of recovery and if the timetable referred to would run concurrently.

In response, Mr Hughes acknowledged the strength of feeling and support for Care Homes and reminded Members that the Director of Public Health was working on Local Outbreak Plans. It was noted that the phases of recovery would need to be fluid.

Councillor MacRae echoed the comments made previously and noted that many residents had appreciated their help with prescriptions and food parcels being delivered. He applauded the volunteers that had come together across the District and recognised the work provided by officers in the waste team to keep the service continuing.

In response to a question from Councillor Davies, Mr Barton advised that it was not certain yet how premises would record data for test and tracing but common sense and simple solutions would work.

Councillor Carter thanked the officers for their assistance with a recent incident involving asbestos in Chipping Norton and for the funding provided to the Community Organisations. She requested that information relating to which organisations had been assisted with funding, be shared with Councillors. She was confident that officers and the Council could continue to work with the businesses in Chipping Norton to help them open and recover.

In response, Mrs McCulloch advised that funding (up to a maximum of £500) had been provided to five community organisations including West Oxfordshire Scouts, Witney Land Army, Charlbury Community Centre, Age Concern in Chipping Norton and Homestart. In addition, there was a pending request from the Chippy Larder.

Mrs McCulloch advised that an example of the work being supported centred on accessing mental health and domestic violence assistance and providing groups with the tools to support friends, family and neighbours. Newsletters to households and information on Covid support groups had also been helped.

Councillor Acock queried whether following the government's announcement, scrutiny meetings would be allowed to take place and asked if officers or the Leader had details on local lockdown measures.

In response, Councillor Mills advised that the Local Resilience Forum would be the group dealing with local lockdown measures and assured Councillor Acock that the Council was working with all authorities across Thames Valley to coordinate any necessary actions.

Mr Hughes also reminded Members that the Director of Public Health was drafting a document detailing Test and Trace measures and with regard to Council meetings, these needed to be dealt with in priority order bearing in mind the staff resources available to support any activity.

Councillor Coles highlighted the benefit that a reduction in vehicle movements had had on pollution levels and air quality and asked when the Witney Town Centre shop would re-open.

Mr Hughes acknowledged that the impact of the lockdown on the environment was very relevant and during the recovery stage it was hoped to be able to capture those benefits for the long term. In response to the query relating to the town centre shop, Mr Hughes advised that he would respond to Councillor Coles outside of the meeting.

Councillor Postan expressed his respect for the staff for their hard work and attitude during the recent lockdown and thanked officers for the presentation. He hoped that bearing in mind the £2 million shortfall in Council finances, the authority would look towards promoting the leisure, motorsport and tourism attractions with a view to raising the profile of the District. Mr Barton assured Councillor Postan that the Council was working with the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership to highlight these areas throughout the recovery work and into the future.

In seconding the recommendations, Councillor Morris highlighted the first round of grants that had been awarded to local businesses in West Oxfordshire, as detailed in section 2.4 of the report. He commended the dedication of staff who had committed many hours to process the applications.

In conclusion, the Leader reminded the meeting of the intention to establish a Cabinet Advisory Group, with relevant portfolio holders being brought in to cover different areas of work. He thanked the officers for their report and presentation and proposed the recommendations as laid out.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That the Chief Executive be requested to prepare a Local Recovery Plan for West Oxfordshire for consideration at Cabinet and then Council in October 2020; and
- (c) That a Cabinet Advisory Group be established to advise Cabinet on the development of the Recovery Plan, on the basis outlined in paragraph 2.9 of the report.

**19. SEALING OF DOCUMENTS**

The Council received and noted the report of the Head of Paid Service which gave details of documents numbered 11799 to 11812a sealed since its last meeting.

The meeting closed at 4.45 pm

CHAIRMAN