

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee  
held in Committee Room 1, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxon  
at 2.00pm on Thursday 5 December 2019

### PRESENT

**Councillors:** Alaa Al-Yousuf (Chairman), Martin McBride (Vice Chairman), Joy Aitman, Richard Bishop, Mike Cahill, Owen Collins, Harry Eaglestone, Ted Fenton, Liz Leffman, Nick Leverton, Kieran Mullins, Neil Owen, Elizabeth Poskitt and Alex Postan

### 32. MINUTES

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 10 October 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### 33. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

There were no apologies for absence. Councillor Owen attended for Councillor Bull, Councillor Joy Aitman attended for Councillor Andrew Coles and Councillor Leverton attended for Councillor Hill.

### 34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers in matters to be considered at the meeting.

### 35. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

No submissions were received from the public in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure.

### 36. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2019/2020

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services which gave an update on progress in relation to its Work Programme for 2019/2020.

#### 36.1 Single Use Plastics Working Party/Climate Action Working Group

Ness Scott, the Council's Climate Change Manager, advised Members that the Single Use Plastics Working Party had met earlier in the day and had endorsed the draft Single Use Plastics Statement of Principles, Communication Strategy and Action Plan. A final report would be prepared for consideration by the Committee on 6 February prior to its submission to the Cabinet on February 12.

Delivery of the Action Plan would be overseen by the Climate Action Working Group which would monitor and report on outcomes. A meeting of the Climate Change Action Group had been held during the previous week and the notes of that meeting, together with a copy of the presentation received by the Group, would be circulated to all Members of the Council in due course.

The Climate Action Working Group was to report back to the Council on 22 January, setting out the proposed way forward for the Council's climate action work and how it was intended to deliver on the Council's climate change commitment.

Councillor Al-Yousuf advised that, having approved the draft Single Use Plastics Statement of Principles, Communication Strategy and Action Plan, the Single Use Plastic Working Party had concluded its task, and the Members had agreed to its disestablishment.

Further work would now be taken forward by the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Climate Change and the Climate Action Working Group. The Climate Change Manager advised that this work would be monitored and the Committee advised of progress.

Whilst the work of the Single Use Plastic Working Party had been internally focussed, Councillor Leffman indicated that she had been led to believe that black plastic could not be recycled and questioned how the Council could communicate with local supermarkets to discourage its use. The Climate Change Manager indicated that whilst the Working Group had been primarily internally focussed, consideration had also been given to ways in which key messages could be communicated to local residents and community groups. The proposed communications strategy was also directed towards local residents and the Climate Change Manager confirmed that local supermarkets could be approached and the concerns outlined incorporated within the proposed social media campaign.

Councillor Ted Fenton indicated that black plastic could be recycled and Claire Locke, the Group Manager, Commissioning advised that, whilst the Council collected black plastic, it was a challenge to recycle such material as it was difficult to identify at the Materials Recovery Facility. Consequently, it would be preferable to try and minimise its use.

Councillor Owen suggested that the Council could broaden its approach and noted that some supermarkets were already opting to use more environmentally friendly packaging materials. The Climate Change Manager confirmed that a range of alternative materials were available.

Councillor Leverton welcomed the work carried out to date and noted that Central Government was now moving such initiatives forward. Many large supermarkets were already beginning to move towards reducing unnecessary packaging and utilising more environmentally friendly materials and Councillor Leverton suggested that the Council might be better doing something locally by concentrating more on independent retailers.

Councillor Poskitt questioned whether the Council was planning to do anything to encourage residents to recycle the increased volume of material generated over the Christmas period and the Climate Change Manager confirmed that the Communications Team had this in hand. Councillor Aitman noted that the Council's Facebook page had been putting out tips on recycling on a daily basis.

### 36.2 Scrutiny in Local Government

Councillor Al-Yousuf made reference to extracts from the Local Government's Association's publication "A councillor's workbook on scrutiny" which had been circulated at his request and commended its content to Members when considering items for inclusion on the Work Programme.

### 36.3 Flood Prevention, Drainage and Sewerage Infrastructure Issues

Councillor Al-Yousuf indicated that, whilst the Council had no direct control over those areas which were the responsibility of Thames Water and the Environment Agency, the recent 'Water Day' had been a useful opportunity to focus attention and public scrutiny on those service providers. In particular, the Environment Agency had been compelled to carry out additional monitoring to provide further data. Whilst not the direct responsibility of the Council. Councillor Al-Yousuf suggested that a similar event should be held in October 2020.

Councillor Postan indicated that, whilst he had found both of the previous events useful, he felt that the most recent had been somewhat unbalanced as the major part of the discussion had focussed on the River Windrush. He reminded Members that there were other water courses in the District including two within his own ward. Councillor Postan suggested that broader control over the papers presented would be helpful. It had also been interesting to learn that the developers of new housing estates were only responsible for the provision of infrastructure as far as the site boundary.

Councillor Postan suggested that it would be helpful to receive an interim report on what work had been carried out prior to October 2020.

Councillor Owen indicated that he had found it particularly helpful to be able to speak with those operational officers who had been present as they had a more intimate knowledge of the issues faced locally.

Councillor Al-Yousuf agreed that, whilst it had no direct responsibility, the Council should continue to hold such events and endeavour to improve and expand upon their content.

Councillor Leffman indicated that, whilst she had been unable to attend the most recent event, she had been disappointed by the absence of Thames Water operational officers on the previous occasion. She advised that she found it difficult to contact the relevant officers and asked Councillor Owen to provide her with the relevant details.

Councillor Leffman considered that the underlying issue was the lack of investment by Thames Water in smaller villages such as Finstock. Aged infrastructure had not been replaced and short term remedial measures were being employed to address localised issues rather than resolving more fundamental problems with the network. It was important for the Council to continue to lobby the service providers as the impact of such failings on local residents was significant. She agreed that Thames Water should be requested to provide an interim report.

Councillor Leverton suggested that Members be invited to raise any particular concerns prior to a future meeting in order that those present could obtain the necessary information to enable them to respond. The Group Manager, Commissioning, advised that this approach had been tried in the past but had elicited only limited response.

It was **AGREED** that Matt Kirby, the Business Manager, Environmental Services, be invited to attend the next meeting to discuss the format of the 2020 'Water Day'.

Councillor Postan made reference to the work of Joseph Bazalgette in designing the sewage network in London in the 1860's and indicated that it was difficult for Members to make comment without access to a fully comprehensive map of the local sewage network. Having requested that such a map be provided he was cautioned against seeking to carry out a technical assessment when such work was more properly the responsibility of other statutory bodies. Councillor Owen indicated that he had been provided with access by Thames Water to a map showing the sewage network and flows.

Councillor Poskitt suggested that, by including a wider range of participants at the 'Water Day' greater pressure could be brought to bear than by the Council acting alone.

Councillor Al-Yousuf considered that 'break out groups could form part of the next 'Water Day' and suggested the matter could be discussed further at the February meeting when Mr Kirby would be present.

#### 36.4 Implementation of Car Parking Strategy

Councillor Poskitt indicated that the results of the recent consultation on car parking in Woodstock were currently awaited but her view remained that there was insufficient parking provision in the town.

The Group Manager, Commissioning, advised that the consultation in Woodstock had been particularly challenging. Whilst the Council sought to carry out such consultation electronically as it was far easier to process the information received, resident member of the Town Council had circulated paper copies of the consultation. This would give rise to difficulties in processing the information received and a consequent increase in costs. Officers would endeavour to process the results of the consultation as soon as possible, drawing together the information provided and analysing the free text. This would include cross analysing individual responses to questions within the survey to build a picture of the perceived local issues and potential solutions

However, the consultation had demonstrated a widely held concern over coaches entering the central triangle of the town. Whilst a practical solution to addressing this could be identified, other issues would be far harder to deal with given the historic form of the settlement and the conflict of user needs between residents, visitors and businesses. It was important for any action to be fair and equitable and to avoid favouring the interests of any one group over another. Officers would continue to analyse the responses and seek to identify solutions. The Group Manager, Commissioning, stressed that, whilst it might be possible to resolve some issues that had been raised, it would not be possible to deal with them all, particularly as there were strongly held opposing views.

A further report outlining the results of the consultation and the Council's proposed response would be submitted to the Committee and the Cabinet in due course. The Cabinet would make recommendations to the County Council with regard to any changes that were felt appropriate and the Group Manager, Commissioning, reminded Members that it would be for the County Council as Highway Authority to make any necessary Traffic Regulation Orders to give effect to such recommendations.

#### 36.5 Low Carbon and Environmental Plan and Biodiversity

Members noted that this work would be incorporated within the report of the Climate Action Working Group to be submitted to the Cabinet and Council in January 2020. Councillor Postan suggested that, as developing countries would continue to pursue economic development at the expense of environmental protection, the United Kingdom should concentrate on applying positive measures to capture carbon.

#### 36.6 Environmental Regulations

Councillor Al-Yousuf advised that Officers would continue to maintain a watching brief and indicated that the Audit and General Purposes Committee would continue to monitor the risks associated with Brexit. Any specific risks arising from revised Regulations or Government Guidance would be drawn to Members' attention.

**RESOLVED:** That progress on the Committee's Work Programme for 2019/2020 be noted and that the additional item referred to above be included within the Committee's Work Programme.

## 37. CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services, which gave members the opportunity to comment on the Cabinet Work Programme published on 15 November 2019.

### 37.1 Electric Vehicle Charging Points

In response to a question from Councillor Leffman, the Group Manager, Commissioning, advised that tenders for site specific surveys were now being invited. Whilst these identified particular locations, they did not specify the exact location of charging points as costs would fluctuate greatly based upon the availability of a mains power supply. Equally, the Council wished to be guided in this respect by the suppliers' commercial and operational expertise.

Councillor Leffman questioned whether the locations were located solely in Carterton and Witney and the Group Manager, Commissioning, advised that the list of locations had been provided within the Exempt Information considered by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 16 October. Sites had been identified across the District within the Council's larger car parks and these only represented the first phase of installation. Additional sites could come forward at a later stage and it was also intended to provide sufficient infrastructure to allow additional points to be located at the initial locations as demand warranted. The plan was to increase provision incrementally as demand increased so as to avoid the sterilisation of parking spaces to no effect. Arrangements would have to be made to manage the use of charging bays through the revision of the Council's Car Parking Orders.

Councillor Poskitt questioned whether developers could be required to provide charging points through the planning process. The Group Manager, Commissioning, advised that this was a matter being addressed by the Climate Action Working Group and it was anticipated that this would be addressed at a national level. The Working group was looking to produce guidance as part of its wider work to reduce the carbon impact of development.

Councillor Ted Fenton enquired when it was likely that charging points would be in place. Mrs Locke advised that this was dependant to a certain extent upon the third party suppliers but she hoped that some points would be in operation by the spring of 2020.

Councillor Leverton suggested that, if possible and where known, the Council should seek to pre-empt changes to Building Regulations through planning policy guidance to ensure that developments such as the Garden Village benefited from the highest standards of design and construction. Councillor Al-Yousuf agreed that the Council should be forward thinking and noted that the intention was for the Garden Village to be an exemplar in these respects.

The Group Manager, Commissioning, explained that the Council was seeking to achieve the best possible outcomes but could not impose conditions that exceeded current policy requirements. The intention was to make the best use of the powers currently available, to consider any future policy changes that may be necessary and to maximise the opportunities offered by the Garden Village.

Councillor Postan indicated that it was essential that the Council kept abreast of technical developments in the field and applied the most up to date technology available. Appropriate publicity arrangements would also have to be put in place. Mrs Locke confirmed that an appropriate communication strategy would be put in place.

**RESOLVED:** That the content of the Cabinet Work Programme published on 15 November 2019 be noted.

38. BUDGET 2020/2021

The Committee received and considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer, which sought consideration of the initial draft base budgets for 2020/2021, draft fees and charges for 2020/2021, and the latest Capital Programme for 2019/2020 revised and future years. The views of each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees of the Council would be submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

The Chief Finance Officer apologised that she would have to leave the meeting shortly to attend another appointment. She advised that a number of variances had been identified by other committees and acknowledged that further clarification would be required to clarify these prior to consideration of the revised budget report by the Cabinet in January 2020.

Philip Alway, the Business Manager, Finance, introduced the report and explained that this invited comments upon the first draft of the budget to be fed back to the Cabinet in January. He drew attention to the cost pressures identified at paragraph 2.10 of the report and, in particular, to the pension fund contribution of £4 Million and the £36,000 for a recycling campaign.

In response to a question from Councillor Al-Yousuf, the Chief Finance Officer advised that detailed discussions had been taking place with Ubico over the past few months regarding proposals to secure savings by changes in staffing levels and operational processes. As a result, the contract sum was within the reduced budget and Officers were now content that the savings could be delivered.

Councillor Postan asked whether the pension fund lump sum contribution could be phased over the next three years and whether, should interest rates rise in the interim, there could be a surplus at the end of that period. The Chief Finance Officer expressed doubt that the pension fund actuary would support phased contributions as the fund was currently paying out more than the Council was putting in, eroding the fund's assets. The lump sum contribution was required now and, in addition, further increases to contributions of £120,000 each year would be required over the next three years. It was uncertain whether the next revaluation of the fund would be in three or five years' time and, whilst the Council's liability to the fund would reduce in the long term, it was unlikely that a rise in interest rates would generate a surplus.

Councillor Postan suggested that an explanatory note should be added to the text.

Councillor Al-Yousuf asked how the proposed provision for investment in the climate change action plan had been calculated and questioned whether, at £600,000 (over the next three years), it was adequate. The Group Manager, Commissioning, advised that this sum had been included within the financial strategy to support the climate change and carbon reduction agenda.

Whilst it had yet to be determined exactly how this provision was to be applied, the report of the Climate Action Working Group to be submitted to Council in January would set out the proposed way forward for the Council's climate action work and how it was intended to deliver on the Council's climate change commitment. As this work developed, specific projects would be identified and reports setting out a business case would be submitted through the usual democratic forum with recommendations being made to the Cabinet and/or Council to draw down funding from that budget provision. It may be that more or less funding would be required but this would be addressed as things moved forward.

Councillor Ted Fenton made reference to the funding set aside for a recycling campaign and suggested that advertisements could be placed on the refuse collection fleet. The Group Manager, Commissioning, undertook to look at options for advertising on the waste and recycling fleet. Councillor Postan noted that similar advertisements could be seen on buses and commercial vehicles and Councillor Fenton indicated that adverts were frequently changed on London taxis. The Group Manager, Commissioning, indicated that any methods used would have to be shown to be durable on these hard working vehicles.

Councillor Al-Yousuf expressed concern at the variances in revenue expenditure in relation to Environmental Health and Food Safety, Pollution and Markets as set out at page 1.1 of the report and sought further information as to the underlying reasons. It was explained that such variances were the result of the transfer of financial responsibilities between the Council and Publica. Councillor Al-Yousuf stated that this meant that the figures provided were not comparable year on year and the Business Manager, Finance, indicated that, whilst large variances were highlighted, minor items such as inflationary increases were not.

Councillor Poskitt questioned the significant variation in the operation of the Council's markets where an apparent £86,771 surplus in 2018/2019 was now forecast to give rise to an £80,700 cost to the Council. It was explained that this was a result of the cost of refuse collection being applied to the budget heading. Councillor Al-Yousuf expressed his concern over the accuracy of the budget figures, indicating that the Committee could not carry out its role in scrutinising the budget unless it could have confidence in the figures provided.

In response to a further question from Councillor Poskitt, it was confirmed that the savings shown on the Ubico contract sum remained accurate.

Councillor Fenton drew attention to a similar variation in respect of the Council's Licensing Service and sought an explanation.

Councillor Postan indicated that the objective of the Licensing Service was not the sale of permits but the maintenance of standards.

Councillor Leverton asked whether the figures for Markets included the revenue income and the Group Manager, Commissioning, confirmed that this was the case. Councillor Leverton stressed the need to explain such variances. Councillor Postan stressed that the Council's Markets were a boon to the local community and the vitality and viability of the market towns; their continued operation supported the community as a whole.

Members also drew attention to the variation under the heading of 'Chief Executive' at page 6.1 of the report which resulted from some unexplained change in accounting arrangements. Councillor Al-Yousuf indicated that, once again, this meant that the figures provided were not comparable.

**RESOLVED:** That the Cabinet be advised that the Committee expressed its concern at the significant, unexplained variances in the draft budget and stressed the importance of ensuring the accuracy of the figures provided prior to further consideration of the Budget for 2020/2021.

### 39. PARKING ENFORCEMENT ON COUNCIL OWNED LAND

The Committee received and considered the report of the Group Manager, Commissioning, which sought consideration of the renewal of the parking order to include plots of land at Langdale Gate, Marriotts Close and the Woolgate car park, Witney.

**RESOLVED:** That the Cabinet be recommended to:

- a) renew the Parking Order to include the locations at Langdale Gate, Marriotts Close and Woolgate, identified in Annex A.
- b) enter into a lease with Witney Town Council for the land at Langdale Gate and delegate agreement for the terms of that lease to the Group Manager Legal Services, Group Manager – Commissioning (Publica Group (Support) Limited and Cabinet Member for Resources.
- c) delegate the consideration of consultation responses on the parking order, to the Cabinet Member for Environment and the Group Manager for Commissioning (Publica Group (Support) Limited.

40. SERVICE PERFORMANCE 2019/2020 – QUARTER TWO

The Committee received and considered the report of the Group Manager, Strategic Support which provided information on the Council's service performance at the end of 2019/2020 Quarter Two.

Members noted that there was an error in the graph on page three of the report as the target for missed collections should be shown as static or reducing.

Councillor Postan suggested that Members would be better able to assess the impact of missed targets if they had further information on how such targets had been set. It was then clarified the information on targets was already contained within the report. The Group Manager, Commissioning, advised that if 'in-cab technology' could be introduced next year it would improve performance significantly.

Councillor Fenton raised concern over instances where the engines of refuse collection vehicles being left running whilst stationary and the Group Manager, Commissioning, undertook to raise the issue with Ubico.

In response to a question from Councillor Poskitt, regarding weights and ratios of food and garden waste the Group Manager, Commissioning, advised that vehicles were weighed full and empty when arriving and leaving a disposal site and the mix of garden waste or food was not an issue in calculating the percentage of waste recycled as both these materials contributed to the Councils overall percentage of waste recycled or composted.

The Group Manager, Commissioning, undertook to provide waste collection data at all future meetings.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

41. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

There were no questions from Members relating to the work of the Committee.

The meeting closed at 3.45pm

Chairman