

CABINET

MINUTES of the meeting held on Tuesday, 23 February 2021 commencing at 2.00 pm and finishing at 3.00 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Ian Hudspeth – in the Chair
Councillor Mrs Judith Heathcoat
Councillor Lawrie Stratford
Councillor Steve Harrod
Councillor Ian Corkin
Councillor Lorraine Lindsay-Gale
Councillor Yvonne Constance OBE
Councillor David Bartholomew
Councillor Eddie Reeves
Councillor Mark Gray

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Liz Brighthouse (Agenda Item 6)
Councillor Glynis Phillips (Agenda Item 6)
Councillor Emma Turnbull (Agenda Item 7)
Councillor Sobia Afridi (Agenda Item 8)

Officers:

Whole of meeting Yvonne Rees, Chief Executive; Anita Bradley, Director for Law and Governance; Colm Ó Caomhánaigh, Committee Officer.

Part of the Meeting Gillian Douglas, Assistant Director Housing and Social Care Commissioning (Item 8)

The Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting, together with a schedule of addenda tabled at the meeting and decided as set out below. Except insofar as otherwise specified, the reasons for the decisions are contained in the agenda, reports and schedule, copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes.

12/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(Agenda Item. 1)

There were no apologies.

13/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(Agenda Item. 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

14/21 MINUTES

(Agenda Item. 3)

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2021 were approved.

15/21 QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

(Agenda Item. 4)

The questions and answers are attached as an Annex to the minutes.

16/21 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda Item. 5)

The following requests to address the meeting had been agreed by the Chairman:

Item 6 – Business Management and Monitoring Report: Councillor Liz Brighouse, Opposition Leader; Councillor Glynis Phillips, Shadow Cabinet Member for Finance.

Item 7 – Workforce Report and Staffing Data: Councillor Emma Turnbull, Shadow Cabinet Member for Education & Cultural Services

Item 8 – Recommissioning of Adult Homeless Pathway: Councillor Sobia Afridi, Shadow Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care.

17/21 BUSINESS MANAGEMENT & MONITORING REPORT - DECEMBER 2020

(Agenda Item. 6)

Cabinet had before them a report setting out Oxfordshire County Council's (OCC's) progress towards Corporate Plan priorities for 2020/21 at December 2020.

Councillor Liz Brighouse, Opposition Leader, thanked the administration for supporting amendments to the budget proposed by the Labour Party in relation to young people with mental health problems and added that she was very impressed with the work done by Children, Education and Families to support these young people.

Councillor Brighthouse advocated a more holistic approach to these issues. She noted that 50% of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) were not completed within 5 months and asked if the right children were getting access to EHCPs or if some might only be temporarily distressed for example.

Councillor Brighthouse also referred to long waiting times for access to CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) and stated that the outcomes were not clear to the Council. She accepted that it was a national problem but believed that Oxfordshire could set an exemplary standard.

Councillor Brighthouse asked that consideration be given to using funds for EHCPs and CAMHS differently – for example ensuring that there was a mental health professional in every secondary school to provide support there.

Councillor Glynis Phillips, Shadow Cabinet Member for Finance, noted that the highways public satisfaction survey had shown that 50% of people in Oxfordshire were not satisfied with the overall situation. The Performance Scrutiny Committee would need to examine where there was room for improvement.

Councillor Phillips welcomed the funding for youth services noting that the evidence showed that youth workers get to know families and can often provide advice before problems escalate. These issues were reflected in the Risk Register which showed the highest risks related to the demand for services for vulnerable children.

Councillor Phillips noted the in-year overspend of £11.5m in the High Needs Dedicated Schools Grant and asked for more detail on the plans to bring this into line with its operating budget. Increasing demand and reducing budgets were leading to an unsustainable situation – even given the innovative approaches being identified and implemented by staff.

Councillor Phillips welcomed the government's announcement of a comprehensive review of children's social care but noted that there was no completion date. She hoped that the Chancellor would announce an increase in the early intervention grant to provide sufficient resources while this review takes place.

Councillor Judith Heathcoat introduced the report which showed that the Council continued to perform strongly despite the challenges posed by COVID-19. There were 14 RAG rating indicators showing Green, 12 showing Amber and none showing Red. There were no score changes in the Leadership Risks. Along with the Workforce and Staffing report which was also on this agenda, this report highlighted the hard work that the Council's teams continue to undertake during these challenging times.

Councillor Heathcoat noted in particular a number of areas of work in her own portfolio including the work of the Trading Standards team in tackling

scams, the Safe and Well visits which continue in line with COVID safety requirements and the difficult work of first responders in attending road traffic accidents.

Councillor David Bartholomew noted that the Council had passed a revised budget for 2020/21, the budget for 2021/22 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy to 2025/26 all of which will ensure that the Council continued to manage the pandemic response in a balanced, responsible way.

Councillor Bartholomew stated that there were forecast underspends of £1.1m in business as usual and £0.3m in corporate measures. COVID-19 grants were expected to total £72.6m of which £25.7m had so far been passed on to schools, providers, the voluntary sector and the City and District Councils.

The current forecast for general balances at 31 March 2021 was £30.1m, compared to the position at 1 April 2020 of £28.7m. 84.6% of planned savings totalling £18.4m were on track to be delivered in 2020/21

Cabinet Members also highlighted the following points:

- The HIF1 (Housing Infrastructure Fund) project potentially could cost the Council £2m per month if not completed by November 2024.
- 95% of live iHub (OCC's Innovation Hub) projects were progressing on schedule and on budget, demonstrating the Council's commitment to the knowledge economy.
- The Council achieved an 8% reduction in carbon emissions in its own estate – above the target of 6% - and had also installed 17,500 LED lights, almost half of the target of 40,000 by 2025, despite the delays in work at the height of the pandemic.
- The percentages of household waste recycled and composted were close to target despite the centres being closed for a period during the pandemic, demonstrating how the centres were valued by the public.

Councillor Ian Corkin asked officers to check again the figure of 79,338 premises that have enabled access to superfast broadband listed on Agenda Page 30 as he felt that this under-reported progress.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) note this month's business management and monitoring report;
- (b) approve virement set out in Annex C-2b relating to the Rough Sleeping; Drugs and Alcohol Grant Scheme and note the virements set out in Annex C-2c;
- (c) approve the bad debt write-offs set out in Annex C;
- (d) note the allocations of the Contain Outbreak Management Fund as set out in Annex C-5c.

18/21 WORKFORCE REPORT AND STAFFING DATA - QUARTER 3 - OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2020

(Agenda Item. 7)

Cabinet considered a report that provided an update on key HR activities during Quarter 3 (1st October – 31st December 2020) along with a refreshed workforce profile and absence data including COVID related absence data.

Councillor Emma Turnbull, Shadow Cabinet Member for Education & Cultural Services welcomed the report and especially the provision of information on protected characteristics such as ethnicity and disability. She hoped that the growing numbers of agency staff being used reflected the short term pressures of the pandemic and not a longer term preference.

Councillor Turnbull called for the employment of more apprentices by the Council which should provide leadership as a major public sector employer. It was likely that the business community would have fewer opportunities for apprentices in the wake of the pandemic which risked locking school leavers out of employment opportunities – especially those from disadvantaged areas. She welcomed the fact that a strategy had been put in place with reports due in late spring/early summer.

Councillor Judith Heathcoat introduced the report commenting that it showed again how staff had responded to the challenges of the pandemic in working from home where possible and ensuring the continuation of services. Staff had been provided with whatever equipment was needed to work safely and comfortably from home. A new Display Screen Equipment self-assessment had been developed and staff were signposted to where assistance was available.

Councillor Heathcoat noted the commitment to an increased focus on apprenticeships in line with the Corporate Plan passed by Council earlier in the month.

Councillor Ian Corkin welcomed the provision on data related to equality, diversity and inclusion. He looked forward to seeing the first report on ethnicity pay gap, noting that it took time to extract the information from the data systems.

RESOLVED: to note the report.

19/21 RECOMMISSIONING OF ADULT HOMELESS PATHWAY

(Agenda Item. 8)

Cabinet considered a report setting out how the partnership of six Oxfordshire councils and the Clinical Commissioning Group intended to re-commission services to support people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness including rough sleepers.

Councillor Sobia Afridi, Shadow Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, welcomed the report and the partnership working involved in this process. She asked that the contract should ensure adequate high quality emergency and temporary accommodation for adults with mental health issues. She had received reports that the current provider had turned people away on the basis of being too high a risk.

Councillor Lawrie Stratford introduced the report and expressed concern that more people may become at risk of homelessness as a result of the pandemic. He emphasised the importance of the partnership with the district and city councils who had responsibility for housing, ensuring that this was linked with the County Council’s related responsibility for wellbeing. There was a determination that together they could resolve the challenge.

Councillor Stratford concurred with comments made earlier in the meeting by Councillors Afridi and Brighthouse about the importance of access to mental health professionals.

Gillian Douglas, Assistant Director Housing and Social Care Commissioning, added that a county-wide strategy for homelessness, that reflected the importance of health, social care and mental health, was currently out to consultation and she encouraged everyone to access it on the council’s website.

The Chairman noted that this alliance also included Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group and stressed the importance of getting people into a home of their own rather than temporary housing.

RESOLVED: to agree the proposed approach to commissioning services to support homeless adults and adults at risk of homelessness in Oxfordshire.

20/21 FORWARD PLAN AND FUTURE BUSINESS

(Agenda Item. 9)

The Cabinet considered a list of items for the immediately forthcoming meetings of the Cabinet together with changes and additions set out in the schedule of addenda.

RESOLVED: to note the items currently identified for forthcoming meetings.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing