

## CABINET

**MINUTES** of the meeting held on Tuesday, 26 May 2020 commencing at 2.00 pm and finishing at 3.21 pm

**Present:**

**Voting Members:** Councillor Ian Hudspeth – in the Chair  
Councillor Mrs Judith Heathcoat  
Councillor Steve Harrod  
Councillor Ian Corkin  
Councillor Lorraine Lindsay-Gale  
Councillor Yvonne Constance OBE  
Councillor David Bartholomew  
Councillor Liam Walker  
Councillor Mark Gray

**Other Members in Attendance:** Councillor Liz Brighthouse (Agenda Item 6)  
Councillor Glynis Phillips (Agenda Items 6 & 7)  
Councillor Susanna Pressel (Agenda Item 5)  
Councillor Laura Price (Agenda Item 11)  
Councillor John Sanders (Agenda Item 8)

**Officers:**

Whole of meeting Yvonne Rees, Chief Executive; Lorna Baxter, Director of Finance; Nick Graham, Director of Law & Governance; Steve Jorden, Corporate Director of Commercial Development Assets and Investment

Part of Meeting Item	Name
6	Robin Rogers, Head of Strategy; Steven Jones, Senior Policy Officer
8	Paul Feehily, Corporate Director, Place & Growth; Jason Russell, Director Community Operations; Joanne Fellows, Infrastructure Locality Lead Central
11	Karen Edwards, Director Human Resources

*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.*

**34/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

(Agenda Item. 1)

An apology was received from Councillor Lawrie Stratford.

**35/20 MINUTES**

(Agenda Item. 3)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2020 were approved and signed as a correct record subject to an amendment to the third paragraph of Minute 27/20 to reflect that the Business Management & Monitoring report is a joint responsibility. Councillor Bartholomew presented the finance element as Cabinet Member for Finance and the performance and risk elements of the report on behalf of Councillor Heathcoat.

**36/20 QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS**

(Agenda Item. 4)

There were no written questions from County Councillors but in response to a question from the Leader of the Council, Lorna Baxter, Director of Finance advised that there had been no notification on the Oxfordshire allocation of the £250m Active Travel funding from Central Government.

**37/20 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS**

(Agenda Item. 5)

The Chairman had agreed the following requests to speak:

Item	Speaker
Item 5 – Petitions and Public Address	Petition – Ms McAllister, Jericho Connections Councillor Susanna Pressel, local councillor for Jericho & Osney
Item 6 – Business Management & Monitoring Report	Dr Liz Sawyer, Oxfordshire Liveable Streets Councillor Glynis Phillips, Shadow Cabinet Member for Finance Councillor Liz Brighthouse, Chairman of Performance Scrutiny Committee
Item 7 – provisional Capital Outturn	Councillor Glynis Phillips, Shadow Cabinet Member for Finance
Item 8 – Better Deal for Bus Users – Funding Opportunities	Councillor John Sanders, Shadow Cabinet Member for Environment
Item 11 – Staffing Report	Councillor Laura Price, Opposition Deputy Leader

Ms McAllister, Jericho Connections submitted a petition with 671 electronic signatures and a further 252 paper signatures, requesting that Oxfordshire County Council carries out due diligence by re-opening Walton Street for 6 months whilst baseline data is collected prior to a formal consultation. Ms McAllister commented that Jericho Connections did not disagree with the aims of the Council to improve air quality, improve conditions for cyclists and pedestrians, and to reduce congestion and rat-running. However, they disagreed with the way in which OCC had gone about shutting Walton Street. They believed that baseline data had not been collected prior to the closure to provide comparison and that the closure failed to address the stated aims.

Councillor Pressel, local councillor for Jericho & Osney, spoke on the closure to Walton Street. Whilst recognising the difficulties experienced by local traders and the inconvenience to some local residents commented that most local people were delighted by the improvement to air quality and the quieter streets. Councillor Pressel hoped that officers would work with local people to make Walton Street a "Low Traffic Neighbourhood". She noted that in other areas outside Oxfordshire this had led to footfall in local businesses going up and vacancies in retail premises falling. The measures to ease congestion for cyclists were particularly important at the current time in view of the need for social distancing but were also essential for the safety of local residents going forward.

In response Councillor Hudspeth, Leader of the Council, indicated that the Council would work with the community to get the right result for the area. Councillor Constance, Cabinet Member for Environment (Including Transport) acknowledged the contributions of both speakers which illustrated the challenge of reaching the best decision in the interests of everyone..

**RESOLVED:** The petition was received and referred to the Director Community Operations.

## **38/20 BUSINESS MANAGEMENT & MONITORING REPORT - MARCH 2020**

(Agenda Item. 6)

Cabinet considered a report that set out Oxfordshire County Council's (OCC's) progress towards Corporate Plan priorities and provided an update on the delivery of the Medium-Term Financial Plan, at 31 March 2020. A summary of overall performance and description of change is contained within the report. The report additionally provided a note of the expected costs and loss of income expected relating to Covid-19 in the first quarter of 2020/21.

Dr Liz Sawyers, speaking on behalf of Oxfordshire Liveable Streets, spoke on the challenges presented by the end of lockdown. She referred to government advice to avoid public transport and to drive where walking and

cycling were not possible. The upswing in private car usage would present a challenge. Dr Sawyers commented that the Council had the power to protect Oxford business and futures by creating an environment that put people first by protecting public space for social distancing and protecting air quality to prevent exacerbating the impact of covid-19. Dr Sawyers urged the bringing forward of a 'plus' version of Connecting Oxford so that it was in place by 1 July. Dr Sawyers added that the 'Plus' version was only two bus gates away from the original agreed at Cabinet on 21 January 2020.

Whilst commending the work being undertaken and recognising the pressures the Council were under, Dr Sawyers further urged the Council to work closely with Oxford City and the District Councils to provide public space for city business to restart; to fast track 'liveable neighbourhood schemes' and to commit to segregated and continuous cycle lanes along the City's main arterial routes.

Councillor Glynis Phillips, Shadow Cabinet Member for Finance began by thanking staff for going above and beyond their day to day duties: not just all those frontline staff but also other staff still answering casework queries by councillors.

Councillor Phillips commented that she understood there was agreement to move the information about the process of writing the report into a separate annex.

Referring to paragraph 6, which advised of the return to quarterly reporting Councillor Phillips commented that she would welcome a streamlined, slimmed down report just focussing on key issues on a monthly basis. For good governance there was a need to maintain a monthly focus in order to understand how the Council's response to the virus is impacting on Council services and finance. She commended Annex D as an excellent summary of the effects thus far.

Referring to the risk LR8 at page 21 Councillor Phillips suggested that this be increased to reflect the interim appointment of a non-legally trained Monitoring Officer. The appointment had been made unanimously at Council, but it was right to be aware of the increased risk of issues not being identified because of a lack of legal training. She suggested that a timetable for the appointment of a Director of Legal Services, or the appointment of an existing solicitor into the interim position would mitigate the risk.

Councillor Phillips also sought assurances on the following: firstly whether the Council was contemplating using the Care Act easements which are part of the Coronavirus Act 2020; secondly how the Council responded to the question in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government about the impact if a council was forced to use reserves including those specifically earmarked for particular projects to cover the impact of additional spending and finally whether the Council was in danger of issuing a Section 114 notice..

Councillor Judith Heathcoat, Deputy Leader of the Council, indicated that monthly reporting would resume from the start of Quarter 2. Quarter 1 would be reported to the September Cabinet meeting. Councillor David Bartholomew, Cabinet Member for Finance added that in terms of finance there would be monthly reporting from July Cabinet.

With regard to the Interim Monitoring position Councillor Heathcoat replied that there was full legal support for the Interim Monitoring Officer position.

Councillor Heathcoat added that Councillor Phillips would receive a written answer on her query on the use of Care Act easements.

Councillor Bartholomew responding to the point raised about the use of reserves stated that the question from government was on deployable reserves and so earmarked reserves were not available and that was the response to government. In terms of general balances, a figure of £4.8m was deployable as identified in the final accounts.

Councillor Bartholomew responding to the question on a S114 Notice stated that the key point was that the government had committed to meeting local authority needs and costs related to coronavirus. The County Council had sufficient reserves and balances to manage cashflow so there was no question of an S114 Notice being issued at the moment.

Councillor Liz Brighouse, speaking as Labour Group and Opposition Leader thanked all staff for the work they were doing during this awful time.

As Chairman of the Performance Scrutiny Committee Councillor Brighouse referred to ongoing work by the Committee on delayed discharges of care and looked forward to work currently being undertaken on this aspect of the response to the coronavirus coming to the Committee.

Councillor Brighouse noted that the Committee had also considered the attainment gap in education. Many of those struggling most were children who should have been in school during lockdown but failed to attend. Despite valiant efforts by school staff to support the children and families, including the provision of foodbanks there were vulnerable children that should be in school who were not. She hoped that so as not to increase the attainment gap children, entitled to be in school would return before consideration was given to specific year groups returning which may have an impact on families with several children in one school, would impact on staff support to vulnerable children at home and virtual learning for Years 2 – 5. Councillor Brighouse hoped that these points would be made to central government before they stretch our schools further.

Councillor Brighouse referred to assurances made to her that there would be a performance report to the July meeting of the Committee. If not, there would have been no scrutiny in 2020 and it was important to have scrutiny by ordinary members of the council. Councillor Heathcoat confirmed that

monthly reporting would begin from the second quarter. She recognised the frustration at the situation and understood that officers were meeting with Councillor Brighthouse to determine what it would be possible to bring. However, it was necessary to acknowledge the workload pressures and use of staff resources at this time.

Councillor Heathcoat added her thanks to staff to those already expressed. Councillor Heathcoat introduced the performance and risk elements of the report. She gave a snapshot of the performance stories within the report, including:

- 97% of the councillor priority fund (£1.87m) had been spent on projects supporting local communities.
- Adult Social care and Public health had met or exceeded most public health targets.
- 90% of children had been given their first preference of primary school.
- OFRS continued to exceed their response targets and targets for supporting vulnerable residents.

Councillor Heathcoat explained that the targets for reablement and delayed discharge of care both rated as grey. This was because reporting on these had been suspended as part of the coronavirus response by the council and government.

Councillor Bartholomew, introduced the finance elements of the report noting that it included information on the provisional revenue outturn for 2019/20 along with the year-end position on general balances and earmarked reserves. In response to a question from Councillor Hudspeth on the use of general balances for government to address the impact of coronavirus Councillor Bartholomew confirmed that it was about deployable reserves but that further information was awaited.

During discussion Councillor Liam Walker, Cabinet Member for Highways Operations and Delivery paid tribute to the work of the Highways Teams during this time. The work made more difficult due the social distancing requirements. 110miles of roads had been resurfaced including on the A40 and 6506 potholes had been dealt with. This reflected the decision to invest more in our road network and he would continue to ensure the money was spent wisely.

**RESOLVED:** to:

- (a) note the contents of this report;
- (b) note the virements set out in Annex C – 2b;
- (c) note the provisional revenue outturn for 2019/20 along with the yearend position on general balances and earmarked reserves as set out in Annex C;
- (d) approve the remaining directorate overspend £0.3m after using the unused corporate contingency should be transferred to balances

- along with the Strategic Measures underspend of £2.8m as set out in paragraph 29;
- (e) agree that the surplus on the On-Street Parking Account at the end of the 2019/20 financial year, so far as not applied to particular eligible purposes in accordance with Section 55(4) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, be carried forward in the account to the 2020/21 financial year as set out in Annex C-4;
  - (f) To note the expected costs and loss of income expected relating to Covid-19 in the first quarter of 2020/21 as set out in Annex D.

### **39/20 PROVISIONAL CAPITAL OUTTURN 2019/20**

(Agenda Item. 7)

Cabinet had before them a report on the provisional capital programme outturn position for the 2019/20 financial year that focused on the capital spending against budget allocations within 2019/20 and the financing of this capital investment.

Councillor Glynis Phillips, Shadow Cabinet Member for Finance commented that it was unusual see an underspent budget and highlighted that the majority of the underspend was because of shortfalls in meeting the Housing & Growth Deal programme and OxLEP related schemes. She referred to confidence expressed in the report that the later years of the Housing & Growth deal would see a significant increase in spend levels and queried on what that confidence was based. In particular as the delivery of this programme rested with the districts Councillor Phillips questioned why there was a belief that house building numbers would increase in future years.

Councillor Phillips went on to query the slippage in the Highways Asset Management Plan most of which related to the Street Lighting LED Replacement Programme. She queried whether actions outlined in previous reports to provide additional capacity were in place in order to deliver within the original timeframe? This was important not just because of the financial savings but because of the reduced carbon emissions from LED streetlights.

Councillor Phillips sought an example of the type of works referred to in relation to the slippage on a number of bridge works to allow delivery of emerging higher priority schemes.

On broad band provision in paragraph 24 of the report Councillor Phillips found it shocking to read that there was no spend on the Businesses in Rural Oxfordshire Programme in the last financial year and queried whether this had been a conscious decision.

In relation to Paragraph 27 of the report on slippage against the original programme relating to Fire Protective Equipment and the additional capitalisation on Fire and Rescue replacement services Councillor Phillips

expressed worry that savings had been made on Fire Protective Equipment and sought more detail.

As the local member Councillor Phillips queried when the school in Barton Park, was to be opened.

Finally, Councillor Phillips highlighted paragraph 4 of the report advising that previous reports had reflected expected programme spend as opposed to individually agreed schemes which explained why the expected programme spend of £218.5m is an over estimate. She asked that future reports make it clear which schemes are expected programme spend and which are agreed programme spend? This would explain any differences in the year end position.

Councillor Bartholomew, moved the recommendations.

Cabinet Members responded to the points raised:

- Councillor Corkin, Cabinet Member for Council Business & Partnerships, on the Businesses in Rural Oxfordshire Programme advised that this was fully external funding and that it had taken time to get the governance in place. There were two selected suppliers, the programme was up and running and on track to finish by June 2021. They were confident of meeting the expected targets and the only unknown was the impact of coronavirus.
- Councillor Lindsay-Gale, Cabinet member for Education & Cultural Services confirmed that Barton Park School would be ready to open in September 2020.
- Councillor Heathcoat, Deputy Leader of the Council referring to the query on protective equipment explained that economies of scale had been possible through Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berks joining together in their purchasing. Councillor Heathcoat gave an assurance that there was sufficient fire protection equipment for OFRS needs.
- Councillor Walker, Cabinet Member for Highways Operations and Delivery, indicated that on street lighting they were in the process of sourcing an additional contractor and that energy saving schemes would be prioritised.
- Councillor Constance responded to specific questions relating to the Growth Deal and slippage on the Highways Asset Management Scheme

**RESOLVED:** to note the provisional capital outturn for 2019/20 as set out in the report.

#### **40/20 BETTER DEAL FOR BUS USERS - FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES**

(Agenda Item. 8)

Cabinet had before them a report detailing two new funds for the provision of bus services under the heading of 'Better Deal for Bus Users', to provide an update on the financial support available to bus operators as a result of the



impact of Covid-19 along with updating members on other funding opportunities to support public transport.

Councillor John Sanders, Shadow Cabinet member for Environment noted that the council would be asking for funding for 4 expressions of interest for rural services funding. He expressed his happiness with this because rural services had been badly hit by government cuts. However, he queried whether this would be balanced by the "All-electric funding initiative" that would improve air quality in the city and major towns?

Councillor Sanders queried what plans were in place to mitigate the effect of Covid-19 on bus use and the government's suggestion that commuters should consider private car journeys in preference to public transport?

Councillor Constance, Cabinet Member for Environment (including Transport) responded to the points made by Councillor Sanders, acknowledging the need to plan for the current impacts of coronavirus but to plan beyond that for the aspiration to reduce private car use. There were two parts to the bid and both were equally important.

In introducing the report Councillor Constance stated that in the last few days officers had been made aware of technical information relating to the way in which costs have been apportioned by the bus operators that could affect the bid for Oxford to become the UK's first all-electric bus city. Any increase in the funding required to convert the city's bus fleet would influence the DfT's affordability criteria and the potential success of the Bid.

Officers were working closely with the bus operators to address this as quickly as possible although it may be after the deadline for the submission of the Expression of Interest on June 4<sup>th</sup>. While it was believed there may be a positive solution in time for submission of the EoI to be made on 4 June, if not, (and as the report indicated), should affordability become an issue as the business case developed requiring us to withdraw the EoI then Cabinet would receive a further report at that time.

Councillor Gray, Cabinet Member for Local Communities in supporting the bid as a strong supporter of direct response transport expressed concern over the long term funding of the project. He referred to the Pick Me UP service that was to end at the end of June.

**RESOLVED:** to agree for Officers to

- (a) submit an Expression of Interest to the Government's 'All-Electric Bus City' funding initiative; and
- (b) submit up to four Expressions of Interest to the Government's Rural Mobility Funding initiative.

**41/20 APPOINTMENTS 2020/21**

(Agenda Item. 9)

Cabinet considered member appointments to a variety of bodies which in different ways support the discharge of the Council's Executive function.

Councillor Hudspeth, Leader of the Council, highlighted the following appointments to fill vacancies set out in the annex.

Adoption & Permanency Panels – Councillor Hillary Hibbert-Biles  
Member Champion for Veterans– Councillor Hillary Hibbert-Biles

**RESOLVED:** to confirm the existing appointments with the above change as set out in the Annex to these minutes.

**42/20 FORWARD PLAN AND FUTURE BUSINESS**

(Agenda Item. 10)

The Cabinet considered a list of items for the immediately forthcoming meetings of the Cabinet.

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

**43/20 WORKFORCE REPORT AND STAFFING DATA - QUARTER 4 - JANUARY - MARCH 2020**

(Agenda Item. 11)

Cabinet considered a report that provided a summary of HR activity and a snapshot of the workforce profile including headcount and full time equivalent comparison, ethnicity, age, apprenticeships, sickness, turnover and agency spend for the quarter ending 31 March 2020.

Councillor Laura Price, Opposition Deputy Leader paid tribute to our staff across all directorates for their phenomenal work during this period of crisis.

Councillor Price also thanked the HR team and their exemplary work alongside Oxfordshire's Trade Unions and in particular County Unison and the wonderful Janie.

Councillor Price commented that the report began to illustrate the impact of Covid on our workforce, but also showed how staff and HR have combined emergency response with ongoing work and service redesign vital to our ability to operate. It will now be important to find ways to build back stronger from our experiences. The effectiveness of the new Occupational Health contract and Employee Assistance Programme will be key. There was still work to do in the area of sickness absence and she hoped that this challenge formed part of the criteria for the commissioning process.

Councillor Price welcomed the increased focus on leavers' data and in particular the recognised need for more rigour in the exit interview process.

Councillor Price expressed concern that the Council still relied heavily on agency staff in key areas where an increase in permanent staff would have significant benefits for residents - such as social workers.

She looked forward to the next Quarter that would paint a picture of our organisation as we move out of the peak and into the "new normal" which is likely to bring even more complex challenges. It would be necessary to learn and grow particularly in how to nurture the health and wellbeing of staff and enable them to work more flexibly - not only in times of crisis, but periods of stability.

Councillor Judith Heathcoat, Deputy Leader of the Council, introduced the contents of the report stressing that the services provided by the Council were people intensive and that the workforce were our most valuable asset. Councillor Heathcoat thanked Karen Edwards and the HR Team for the richness of the report, working effectively from home. Councillor Heathcoat highlighted that the retendering of the occupational health and the employee assistance services was completed and would enable the Council to support a healthy workforce. Services offered included counselling, debt and legal advice and health and wellbeing support. Councillor Heathcoat detailed the analytical work that was taking place particularly on sickness absence figures and that work was ongoing looking at the HR data set. More detail was available on the web site.

**RESOLVED:** to note the report.

**44/20 VOTE OF THANKS**

Councillor Hudspeth, Leader of the Council, noted that it was Nick Graham's last meeting at Cabinet, and he thanked him for his efforts over the years and that he had enjoyed working with him. Cabinet associated themselves with the vote of thanks.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing .....