

# **MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF THE AYLESBURY VALE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**5 FEBRUARY 2020**

This meeting was webcast. To view the detailed discussions that took place please see the webcast which can be found at:

<http://www.aylesburyvaledc.publici.tv/core/portal/home>

**PRESENT:** Councillor J Brandis (Chairman); Councillors C Poll (Vice-Chairman), B Adams, C Adams, M Bateman, J Bloom, A Bond, S Bowles, C Branston, B Chapple OBE, S Chapple, J Chilver, A Christensen, A Cole, S Cole, M Collins, P Cooper, P Fealey, B Foster, N Glover, M Hawke, T Hunter-Watts, T Hussain, A Huxley, P Irwin, S Jarvis, S Jenkins, R Khan, R King, S Lambert, D Lyons, A Macpherson, T Mills, L Monger, G Moore, H Mordue, S Morgan, R Newcombe, C Paternoster, G Powell, W Raja, M Rand, S Raven, S Renshell, B Russel, M Smith, Sir Beville Stanier Bt, P Strachan, R Stuchbury, D Town, A Waite, W Whyte and M Winn.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors J Blake, N Blake, B Everitt, A Harrison, M Stamp and J Ward.

## **WEBCASTING**

Prior to the start of the meeting, the Chairman reminded everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the internet and be capable of repeated viewing.

Members of the audience who did not wish to be on camera were invited to move to a marked area at the side of the chamber.

### **1. MR DERRICK ISHAM**

Prior to the commencement of the formal business of the meeting, Members and officers present stood in silent tribute to the memory of Mr Derrick Isham, a former Chairman of the Council, who passed away recently. The Chairman read out a letter of thanks from Mrs Isham for the support of Members and officers at this difficult time.

### **2. MINUTES**

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of Council held on 23 October, 2019, be approved as a correct record.

### **3. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Chairman of the Council:**

#### **Aylesbury Town Council Events**

The Chairman advised Members of a number of events being promoted by the Aylesbury Town Mayor.

#### **Chairman's Quiz Night**

The Chairman reminded Members that her Charity quiz night would take place in the Oculus on 20 March, 2020.

## **Civic Service**

Members were also reminded that the Chairman's Civic Service would take place on 8 March, 2020 at St. Mary's Church, Haddenham.

## **Christmas Singalong**

The Chairman thanked all those Members and officers who had taken part in the singalong just before Christmas.

## **Holocaust Commemoration**

The Chairman also thanked those Members and officers who had been able to attend the ceremony to commemorate victims of the holocaust and all other forms of genocide that had occurred since the second world war.

## **Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure:**

### **Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP)**

It was reported that work on the VALP continued to progress. The Inspector had concluded that the Plan was capable of being made sound. At the end of December, 2019 a six week consultation on the main modifications recommended by the Inspector (to make the Plan sound) had been concluded successfully.

Approximately 850 individual representations had been received. However despite officers' best efforts to encourage the representations to be made on-line, a significantly large proportion of them were submitted either by e-mail or letter, thus increasing the time for these to be processed.

The Inspector had asked the Council to give a response to the issues raised in the representations. Accordingly officers had continued to engage with several external consultants, including Bucks County Council to ensure that appropriate responses were given. This stage could only be completed when all the responses had been received from the external consultants. The Forward Plans team were almost in a position to submit AVDC's response to the Inspector and it was anticipated that this would be sent by the first week in March.

The Council would then have to await the Inspector's response before further progress to the next stage could take place. It was hoped that the Inspector would accept the Council's response, but there was a possibility that he might ask for further information or decide to hold further hearings.

Accordingly, it was considered that the VALP would not be found to be sound before the new Buckinghamshire Council came into being. It was understood that the new authority would continue to prioritise the final stages leading to adoption.

However it was indicated that some of the VALP policies already had some weight in planning terms, and the proposed allocations were counted in the five year housing supply.

The arrangements previously notified to Members for adopting the Plan would not now go ahead.

The Cabinet Member expressed her thanks to the Forward Plans Team for their continued hard work and persistence in ensuring that the Plan continued to move forward towards formal adoption.

## **Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources:**

### **Aylesbury Vale Broadband (AVB)**

Members were reminded that AVB had been set up in June, 2015. A loan facility of £1.5m had been made available from the Council to support the roll out of superfast broadband. The Council had incurred costs on the creation and pilot phase of around £200,000. The loan had come from a £1.536m reserve which the Council had created for improving broadband provision, funded from New Homes Bonus (NHB) monies made available by Central Government. The money from the sale of AVB to Gigaclear, net of residual costs, would be returned to the NHB broadband pot. Therefore the sale of AVB did not impact upon the Council's revenue account.

As part of the sale of AVB in December, 2017, a non-disclosure agreement had been signed in relation to the sale price. This was in perpetuity and if disclosure occurred, damages would be sought from the Council, or its successor for up to twelve years.

The Council's accounts were subject to public scrutiny and although the purchase price paid by Gigaclear could not be revealed, the final cost to the Council of this venture could be. This could not happen categorically until after AVB's affairs had finally been wound up. However the current estimate, including the creation and pilot phase was £371,000.

All outstanding warranties concerning the sale of AVB had now expired and the balance of the sale price had been paid to AVB.

Before AVB could repay its loan to the Council, it had to resolve one outstanding claim of £14,000 for damages dating back to 2016. This matter was currently with AVB's insurers. It was anticipated that this matter would be settled before 31 March thereupon enabling AVB to be formally wound up.

## **Cabinet Member for Planning and Enforcement:**

### **Improvements to the Planning Service**

Members were aware that the planning service had been under significant scrutiny over the last 18 months due to a combination reasons, including a shortage of experienced planners, very high workloads and a very complex policy position whilst the adoption of VALP was awaited. All of these challenges had meant that performance, whilst still above Government targets, had fallen below the level expected by Members and Officers of the Council.

Accordingly, the approach had been to change the emphasis of management from technical delivery to customer service and at the same time introduce an element of rigour into planning process improvements.

It was reported that in order to ensure proper governance and to give clear oversight to the improvement process, a planning improvement board co-chaired by the Cabinet Member for Planning and Enforcement and a Director had been established. The board contained senior officers, technical staff, project management staff and HR support. Very importantly, the board also contained an external challenge in the form of an ex-chief planner who now worked for the Planning Advisory Service to give an independent oversight of the improvement process.

The Board had four distinct aims:-

- (1) To improve performance against Government Statistics.
- (2) To reduce complaints and handle them more effectively.
- (3) To reduce and eventually clear the backlog.
- (4) To reduce average number of days to process applications.

The board had also used a combination of process simplification, targeted additional resources, better management information and a revised complaints process to address each of the objectives in turn.

The Cabinet Member reported the following improvements to the planning service:-

Application Type	Government Target	August 2019	November 2019
Major Applications	70%	78%	86%
Minor Applications	70%	55%	82%
Other Applications	70%	84%	90%
Minor/Other Combined	70%	78%	88%

Complaints/Negative Comments	August 2019.	November 2019
Outstanding	60	10

Preparations were now well under way to hand the planning service to the new unitary authority and the service was now very much fit for purpose from the point of view of Government reporting and also the provision of an effective service for the public and means of generating authority income.

It had to be appreciated that there would always be complicated applications that would take longer to determine than the Council would ideally wish but work would continue on these on a case by case basis. This impressive improvement in the planning service had come about through the sustained and significant efforts of the Council's planning officers and Members concurred with the Cabinet Member that it would be appropriate to convey the Council's thanks to them of this authority for a job well done.

**Cabinet Member for Communities:**

### **Rough Sleeper Initiative**

Members were informed that AVDC had successfully secured funding for the third year from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to continue the delivery of its rough sleeper initiative, which had started in 2018.

Cross County, the total sum of £576,500 had been received. Of this sum, AVDC had been awarded £267,000 and £309,500 had been made available to the other District councils in the County. AVDC would use this funding to increase its work in the area of rough sleeping by increasing support and drug and alcohol workers.

The Cabinet member for Communities reported that the housing team had worked tirelessly over the last two years to identify gaps in services to direct the project, but also develop some really strong partnerships within Council services and external partners, including the Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust (VAHT, Oasis, Aylesbury Homeless Action and mental health services. Thus far, the team had managed to accommodate in excess of 90 clients who were either at high risk of rough sleeping or who were already

homeless. Effectively, 90 lives had been improved and positively affected by the work of the Council's team.

The new Buckinghamshire Council was well equipped to tackle the problem collectively, with some areas of funding covering services across the County, such as outreach and emergency bed contracts. Conversations were already taking place between all the teams and Public Health and some services had been commissioned to address a number of the outstanding areas of concern. In Aylesbury, this included the need for high needs supported accommodation, and a County-wide Housing First Type model for those clients with the most complex needs.

Members welcomed this funding and asked that their thanks be conveyed to the team for all the work they had done.

#### **4. PETITIONS/DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY)**

There were none.

#### **5. STAFF PAY AWARD 2020-21**

Council received a report on the proposed pay award for AVDC employees for 2020/2021. The offer made by the Council had yet to be approved by the trades unions and staff representatives.

The negotiation of the pay award was a matter for AVDC, but had to be considered within the context of the move to unitary local government in Buckinghamshire i.e. to a single employer. The draft budget for the new council included provision for a 2% uplift for all staff. It was expected that the pay award offers made in Chiltern and South Bucks District Councils (C&SBDC) and Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) (all of which had locally determined pay rates) would be in the order of 2%. At Wycombe District Council awards were determined nationally and this had not yet been agreed.

Whilst the pay award was an AVDC matter, Unison wished to consult with all its members in AVDC, C&SBDC and BCC at the same time. Consequently, formal acceptance was unlikely to take place until after this meeting, necessitating delegated authority being given to the Interim Head of the Paid Service, after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, to conclude the issue subject to it being consistent with the Council's wishes.

The Council report, available to view in full on the Council's website, included the following:-

- The timeline for the pay negotiations.
- Details of the Unison local pay claim (appended in full to the Council report).
- Details of previous awards.
- Information on the National Living Wage.
- Details of RPI and CPI for the years 2016 to 2019 inclusive.
- The position with other Buckinghamshire councils.
- Consultation arrangements.

- Financial details and the existing spinal column points and those if the award was approved as set out in the Council report.

Proposed by Councillor Mordue, seconded by Councillor C Adams, and

RESOLVED –

- (1) That approval be given to a 2% pay award with effect from 1 April, 2020 for all staff from Grades SG2 – SG12 who transfer to the new Buckinghamshire Council.
- (2) That approval be given to a 5% pay award with effect from 1 April, 2020 for all staff on Grade SG1 who transfer to the new Buckinghamshire Council or a minimum of £10 per hour, whichever is the greater.
- (3) That it be noted that the draft budget for the new Buckinghamshire Council incorporated a 2% uplift for all staff and that the cost for AVDC would be £450,000 inclusive of NI/Superannuation.
- (4) That the Interim Head of the Paid Service, after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources be authorised to conclude the pay award provided that it was consistent with the offer set out above.

## 6. WRITTEN QUESTIONS (IF ANY)

Members were informed that no written questions had been submitted during the period November, 2019 to January, 2020.

## 7. QUESTION TIME

Members had the opportunity to ask questions of individual Cabinet Members and Committee Chairmen about issues affecting their portfolios/Committee activities:-

- (a) **The Future Homes Standard (Councillor Foster)** – the Cabinet Member for Environment and Leisure informed Members that the Council was preparing a draft response to the Government's current consultation on changes of the Building Regulations.
- (b) **Councillor Everitt (Councillors C Adams and Lambert)** – on behalf of all Members, the Members asked for congratulations to be extended to Councillor Everitt who had been elected as the Member of Parliament for Milton Keynes North at the 2019 general election.
- (c) **HS2 (Councillor C Adams)** – the Leader of the Council informed Members that the Council was continuing to use all means possible to lobby and pressure the Government to stop HS2.
- (d) **Data Harvesting / AVDC Website (Councillor Lyons)** – the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources informed Members that he would respond to the Member on this matter although he did not believe that the Council harvested or passed any information to third parties.
- (e) **Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP) (Councillors Branston and Cooper)** – the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure informed Members that she believed that the Planning Policy team had sufficient Officer resource to work on the VALP. This situation was being regularly monitored by herself and the Cabinet.

The Cabinet Member also informed Members that she was meeting regularly with the Chief Executive of the new Buckinghamshire Council, who had agreed that continuity of Officers working on the VALP pre and post 1 April 2020 was important.

- (f) **Commercial Ventures (Councillor Christensen)** – the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources agreed to provide Members with a summary of the financial position for the various financial ventures / activities the Council had undertaken since 2015.
- (g) **Berryfields Medical Centre (Councillor Christensen)** – the Cabinet Member for Planning and Enforcement was thanked for his efforts in relation to supporting a new Berryfields Medical Centre.

The Leader of the Council informed the Member that she was happy to work with him, including lobbying the Department of Health, in order for the Medical Centre to be built as soon as possible and by April 2021.

- (h) **Gateway Offices Main Entrance (Councillor Monger)** – the Leader of the Council informed Members that while staff, Members and visitors to the Gateway would continue to be encouraged to enter/exit the building by using the revolving door, it would not be possible to lock the main doors to limit access due to fire safety and disability access reasons.
- (i) **Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP) (Councillor Monger)** – the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure informed Members that a call for an in-depth investigation into the VALP process was unnecessary. The Cabinet Member also stated that she would ask the Corporate Planner to provide information on a number of policies within the VALP that already had weight in planning terms.
- (j) **Kingsbrook Parish Council (Councillor B Chapple OBE)** – the Member asked that thanks be passed to Craig Saunders and the Democratic and Electoral Services team for the excellent work, within very tight timescales, they had done on community governance and which would allow a new Kingsbrook Parish Council to be established for the May 2020 local elections.
- (k) **MK Futures 2050 (Councillor Stuchbury)** – the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure both informed Members that AVDC and the County Council would be issuing a joint statement rebutting the plan, as well as responding firmly and negatively to the current consultation.
- (l) **Remembrance Day Ceremony 2020, Aylesbury (Councillor Lambert)** – the Chairman of the Council informed Member that arrangements for this event would be made by the unitary team for Communities. The Chairman stated she would pass on to the team that they should liaise with the Aylesbury Town Council when organising the event.
- (m) **East / West Rail (Councillor Lambert)** – the Leader of the Council informed Members that she would continue to press East / West Rail for information on the cumulative impact of that and other major infrastructure projects on local communities, as well as for information on the economic benefits for the communities.

- (n) **Aylesbury Vale Broadband (AVB) (Councillor Cooper)** – the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources informed Members that information on the operation of AVB was contained in the BDO report that had been submitted to the Audit Committee on 12 June 2018.
- (o) **Cricket grounds and facilities (Councillor Hussain)** – the Cabinet Member for Environment and Leisure stated that he was happy to speak with the Member following the meeting in relation to identifying additional cricket playing pitches around Aylesbury and about modernising the changing room facilities at Alfred Rose Park.
- (p) **MK Futures 2050 (Councillor Monger)** – the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure informed Members that AVDC, the County Council and the Central Bedfordshire Council had not been party to the David Lock Strategic Growth Strategy document or its conclusions, despite the document stating that AVDC had been one of the joint sponsors of it.