

EXTRA-ORDINARY MEETING OF THE WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

Held on Monday 30 November 2015

At 7pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall

Present:

Councillor J S King (Chairman)

Councillors:	S E Bartington	H B Eaglestone
	AD Harvey	D S Enright
	C Brown	C Holliday
	H W Chirgwin	T J Morris
	B J Churchill	C E Reynolds
	LM Price	CK Woodward

Officers: Town Clerk
Responsible Finance Officer

Also present: Officers from Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) – Sarah Jelley and Owen Jenkins to deliver presentation
1 member of the public

589 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for their absence was received from Cllr PJ Dorward and Cllr J Doughty.

590 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr LM Price declared a non-pecuniary interest as a County Councillor.

591 **Oxfordshire Together**

Members received a presentation on the Oxfordshire County Council's 'Oxfordshire Together' Transitional offer of Highway Services. The overall premise of the project was to localise services and mitigate some of the loss of service delivery from OCC in consultation with Parish and Town Councils plus voluntary organisations. Following the presentation members questioned the officers from OCC.

WTC. How would services be funded?

A. 3 year contracts signed by 1st April 2016 would have agreed funding (if available) as part of and for the duration of the contract. There is no guarantee of funding levels, if any, after 1st April 2016. At the end of the contract period the service delivery responsibility reverts to OCC and any issues with the contract meaning it cannot be fulfilled then the service delivery will again revert to OCC.

WTC. If a service is taken on by another organisation does the legal responsibility transfer?

A. No – OCC Highway's legal responsibility stays with them but they can only afford to do the statutory minimum which is why OCC want to work with Town and Parish Councils though they would have to fund anything more than OCC fund.

WTC.: Theoretically if OCC wants to pay Witney Town Council (WTC) to provide services that is fine. However if WTC have to raise the precept to fund the services OCC statutorily/traditionally have done then the residents of Witney will not want to pay extra. OCC. will fund the base levels of statutory requirements and 100% of the safety requirements.

WTC. Members raised concerns about the financial implications as the economies of scale that OCC could achieve would not be available to WTC and the reputational damage to WTC if work not done to a good standard.

OCC. It has been shown that local services provided by local councils often are more cost effective and actually respond best to local need. OCC are also keen to enable local councils to cluster to provide services. However to do any of this there has to be the relevant legal agreements in place and OCC have to be confident the relevant management skill sets are in place for each service.

WTC. What are OCC's thoughts on sponsorship of roundabout for the purpose of upkeep?

OCC. This is an area that OCC are keen to promote but are aware there have been some issues with district planning officers in some areas and are talking to them in the hope of unlocking this as a source of income.

WTC. Highways, children centres and bus services are all areas that the council would be interested in providing. These services provided locally would enable a quicker response to need.

OCC. Children Centres would remain the responsibility of OCC but the council is keen to work with local communities to deliver the service. Transport and specifically local bus services are an area that local councils could fund and run.

WTC. What are the insurance liabilities/risk associated with other organisations taking on OCC services?

OCC. Highways activities such as pot hole repairs require liability insurance of £10 million so essentially the risk sits with OCC and the contract delivery.

OCC Officers left the meeting at 7.35pm.

Members debated the presentation talking through the concerns of cost shunting, capability and skills to deliver additional services, working in partnership, public engagement, service level agreements, safeguarding the services that are important to local people, raising the precept to pay for services previously provided by OCC and looking at working with West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC).

RESOLVED:

1. that the council would identify the services it could engage in and explore the delivery of these. In this the consideration that the council does not wish to raise the precept significantly to cover services taken on from OCC if that is what happens.
2. that this work be passed to the Budget Working Party to look at the organisational resources required to do the research and report back to Council.

592 **SNOWPLAN**

The Town Clerk gave a verbal report on her meeting with WODC and OCC on the plan for early notification and joint reaction to significant snowfall. She requested feedback from members on any areas they wanted to be specifically looked at. Members felt it was important that vulnerable people be identified and be part of the plan. The meeting was also advised that the utility companies and fire service are also doing work to identify vulnerable people.

One member suggested that village models of collaboration for storage and spreading of salt may be worth looking at.

RESOLVED:

1. that the verbal report be noted;
2. that Members pass on feedback on any areas they want specifically looking at to the Town Clerk.

The meeting closed at 8.10pm.
