

Cherwell District Council

Executive

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 6 January 2025 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor David Hingley (Leader of the Council & Portfolio Holder for Strategic Leadership) (Chairman)
Councillor Lesley McLean (Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property & Regeneration) (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Tom Beckett, Portfolio Holder for Greener Communities
Councillor Chris Brant, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services
Councillor Jean Conway, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management
Councillor Ian Middleton, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services
Councillor Rob Parkinson, Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities
Councillor Rob Pattenden, Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities

Present virtually (no voting rights)

Councillor Nick Cotter, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Also Present:

Councillor Amanda Watkins, Leader of the Opposition, Labour Group

Officers:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive
Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities
Stephen Hinds, Corporate Director Resources and Transformation
Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance & S151 Officer
Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

Officers Attending Virtually:

Mona Walsh, Assistant Director - Property
Richard Smith, Head of Housing

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

82 **Petitions and Requests to Address the Meeting**

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Watkins, Leader of the Opposition, Labour Group to the meeting and invited her to indicate if she wished to speak on any item.

83 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2024 and the reconvened meeting held on 5 December 2024 were agreed as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

84 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman made the following statement in response to the Government's English Devolution White Paper, which had been published on 16 December 2024:

"The Cherwell Executive welcomes the English Devolution White Paper, which outlines the Government's ambition "to shift power away from Whitehall into the hands of those who know their communities best." We believe local government works best when it is close to the people it serves, champions important local issues and gives a democratic voice to the communities it represents.

As the Government progresses with its proposals to reorganise local government for two-tier areas such as Oxfordshire, engaging in open discussions and exploring how local councils can maintain strong connections with their communities will be vital, and this commitment to dialogue is the approach we seek to pursue here. As demonstrated by the work of district councils over the past several decades, the value of local connections cannot be overstated.

At the same time, we recognise the Government's focus on Mayoral Combined Authorities and the benefits of delivering at scale. Strong regional leadership, supported by a Combined Authority, has the potential to drive long-term vision, create integrated transport systems, and deliver economic benefits that support growth and prosperity across wider areas. These are opportunities that, if delivered effectively with the input of district councils to ensure local voices are heard, can directly benefit Cherwell and Oxfordshire.

While these proposals are still in the early stages, with many details yet to be clarified, it is clear they bring both opportunities and challenges. We are carefully considering what the proposals could mean for our communities, services, and decision-making in our local area and across Oxfordshire. As a modern and forward-thinking council, our goal at Cherwell is to work

effectively with our neighbouring councils to shape a future structure that will deliver meaningful benefits to residents.

We firmly believe in the power of local government to create positive change and improve places, lives, and opportunities for the people we serve. As devolution moves forward, local government must continue to act in the best interests of residents and deliver the quality public services they expect. What is crucial now is that we engage swiftly and meaningfully with this process, ensuring we get the future right for our communities in this time of significant change for local authorities.”

85

Transformation Contract Extension

The Corporate Director Resources and Transformation submitted a report to outline a fourth phase of work to progress the Councils transformation programme and obtain approval to extend the contract with our partner to deliver this next phase.

In considering the report, Executive Member commented on the importance of evaluating where interactive AI could be used to make the council more effective. In response to Executive Member comments regarding the feasibility of the transformation programme with current staffing levels and whether the proposals would be flexible enough for future devolution, the Chief Executive advised that the skills and resources needed to undertake the work properly would be reviewed and it may be necessary to bring skills in. The Corporate Director Resources and Transformation explained that the programme of work could be adapted to allow for shorter term gains.

On behalf of Executive, the Portfolio Holder for Resources thanked staff for their hard work on the project.

Resolved

- (1) That a short contract extension be awarded to PA Consulting for a fourth phase and final phase of work to the value of £116,090.
- (2) That the transfer of £116,090 from the reserves earmarked for transformation, to fund this additional phase of work be approved.
- (3) That it be agreed to receive the “Case for Change” and associated outputs, once delivered, to consider whether and how to take forward the proposed transformation programme.

Reasons

The council has identified the key activities required to drive forward transformation. Maintaining momentum is essential to delivering transformation and achieving long-term financial sustainability.

The council possesses a significant amount of capability and knowledge with regard to service delivery and this will be key to transformation. Supported by the expertise and capacity of a trusted partner will ensure that the council is best placed to drive this next phase of transformation forward whilst also achieving best value.

Alternative options

Option 1: Undertake a new competitive procurement exercise for the key deliverables outlined in the Case for Change. The council could undertake a new competitive procurement exercise.

Benefits

- Would give other suppliers an opportunity to tender for this work.

Dis-benefits

- A new partner would lack the tacit knowledge and understanding that the current partner has gained through the initial three phases of work.
- A competitive procurement exercise would take at least 4-weeks to undertake once Executive approval obtained on 6 January 2025, require more council resources and lead to a loss in momentum.
- A new procurement exercise is unlikely to attract much interest from suppliers as only two including our current partner tendered for the original contract and the other party (if interested) is unlikely to be happy to follow another suppliers approach and they would be required to pick up where they left.
- Opportunity for current partner to challenge this process (phase 4) as it was scoped as an option in their existing contract

This option was discounted due to the dis-benefits outweighing the benefits.

Option 2: Progress with existing resources and without external expertise

Benefits

- No immediate budget requirement

Dis-Benefits

- The council does not have the expertise and capacity to deliver this next phase so it is likely to take significantly longer as resources will need to develop the necessary capability and this would lead to a loss in momentum. Given this, the assurances on outputs could not be at a level that where the risk of potentially jeopardising the transformation outcomes is minimised, thereby increase the risk of reliance on reducing service levels to meet our financial requirements.
- Additional time would be required to mobilise resources without negatively impacting service delivery, which could include back filling posts to create the capacity needed. A budget would be needed for any back-fill arrangements

This option was discounted due to the need for the council to progress with delivery of the transformation as quickly as possible in order to deliver change with proper skills and resources to enable the transformation.

86

New Housing Allocations Scheme 2025

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing submitted a report to seek approval for a new Housing Allocations Scheme.

In considering the report, Executive members thanked officers for their work on the Scheme and commended the changes, highlighting the creation of a banding for survivors of domestic abuse and increased priority for armed forces personnel.

Resolved

- (1) That the new Housing Allocations Scheme be approved.

Reasons

It is important that the Council has up to date policies and procedures for its statutory and key service areas and it is important that they are legislatively and operationally sound. A periodic review of policies is therefore appropriate.

Alternative options

Option 1: Not bring forward a new Allocations Scheme. This is rejected as it is important that the Council has Policies that are up to date with legislation and can respond to current challenges.

87

Traffic Regulation Order in Pioneer Square

The Assistant Director Property submitted a report to promote an off-street Traffic Regulation Order on land the Council owns and has responsibility for outside the entrances to Franklin House including the Travelodge Hotel in order to mitigate the risks to the public at large and to the Council itself caused by unsafe parking and traffic movements in the area.

Resolved

- (1) That the promotion of an off-street Traffic Regulation Order on land the Council owns and has responsibility for outside the entrances to Franklin House including the Travelodge Hotel be approved in order to mitigate the risks to the public at large and to the Council itself caused by unsafe parking and traffic movements in the area.
- (2) That the Assistant Director – Property be authorised to start formal consultation on the proposed off-street Traffic Regulation Order, and, following due consideration of any representations received at the consultation stage and in consultation with the Monitoring Officer and the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services, to make any decisions and exercise all powers necessary in respect of whether or not to make and/or seal the proposed Order.

Reasons

Approval of the promotion of an off-street Traffic Regulation Order as described will remove obstructions caused by unregulated parking and obstructions to traffic needing to access service areas.

This will improve safety for pedestrians and ensure that the existing taxi drop offs and disabled parking space are accessible and available to use.

The costs associated with promoting and implementing the Traffic Regulation Order can be met from existing budgets. Enforcement of this Off-Street Traffic Regulation Order and issue of Penalty Charge Notices will be carried out by Oxfordshire County Council at no additional cost to the Council.

Alternative options

Option 1: Do nothing.

This option has been rejected. Not promoting the off-street Traffic Regulation Order means proper enforcement to manage parking will not be available and car users will continue to abuse parking. Furthermore, the Council runs the risk of possible claims from the public if an accident were to happen.

88

Finance Monitoring Report November 2024

The Assistant Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report to report to Executive the council's forecast financial position as at the end of the November 2024.

Resolved

- (1) That the contents of the council's financial management report as at the end of November 2024 be noted.
- (2) That the reprofiling of capital projects beyond 2024/25 and the subsequent update to the programme budget for this financial year 2024/25 be approved.
- (3) That the virement of £1.031m from Policy Contingency to services for the Cost of Living award for 2024/25 as agreed in November be approved.
- (4) That the allocation of £0.500m Policy Contingency to cover the cost of appeals be approved.

Reasons

The report updates Executive on the projected year-end financial position of the council for 2024/25. Regular reporting is key to good governance and demonstrates that the council is actively managing its financial resources sustainably.

Alternative options

Option 1: This report summarises the council's forecast financial position up to the end of March 2025, therefore there are no alternative options to consider.

89

Council Tax Base 2025/2026

The Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report to provide the Council tax Base for 2025/26.

Resolved

- (1) That the report of the Assistant Director of Finance for the calculation of the Council's Tax Base for 2025/26 be approved.
- (2) That it be agreed that, in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Cherwell District Council as its Council Tax Base for the year 2025/26 shall be **59,853.6**.
- (3) That it be agreed that for the parishes which form part of its area (as shown in the Annex to the Minutes as set out in the Minute Book), the amount calculated as the Council Tax Base for the year 2025/26 in respect of special items shall be as indicated in the column titled Tax Base 2025/26.
- (4) That it be agreed that for the Flood Defence Areas which form part of its area, the amount calculated as the Council Tax Base for the year 2025/26 for the purposes of levies on Oxfordshire County Council by River Authorities, shall be:

Thames Flood Defence Area	57,459.5
Anglian (Great Ouse) Flood Defence Area	1,941.6
Severn Region Flood Defence Area	452.5
TOTAL	59,853.6

Reasons

The Council must legally set a tax base for the following year by 31 January. This will allow the Council to notify its preceptors of the taxbase in order for them (and the Council) to set their budgets for 2025/26.

Alternative options

There are no alternative options. The Council has to set a tax base in order to set its council tax for 2025/26.

90 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting ended at 7.10 pm

Chairman:

Date: