

Cherwell District Council

Annual Council

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Council held at 39 Castle Quay,
Banbury, OX16 5FD, on 21 May 2025 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Dorothy Walker (Chair)
Councillor Nigel Simpson (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Fiaz Ahmed
Councillor Tom Beckett
Councillor Rebecca Biegel
Councillor Gordon Blakeway
Councillor Chris Brant
Councillor Besmira Brasha
Councillor John Broad
Councillor Mark Cherry
Councillor Becky Clarke MBE
Councillor Jean Conway
Councillor Gemma Coton
Councillor Dr Isabel Creed
Councillor Andrew Crichton
Councillor Dr Henry Elugwu
Councillor Donna Ford
Councillor Ian Harwood
Councillor David Hingley
Councillor Frank Ideh
Councillor Simon Lytton
Councillor Kieron Mallon
Councillor Nicholas Mawer
Councillor Fiona Mawson
Councillor Lesley McLean
Councillor Zoe McLernon
Councillor Ian Middleton
Councillor Julian Nedelcu
Councillor Dr Chukwudi Okeke
Councillor Robert Parkinson
Councillor Lynne Parsons
Councillor Rob Pattenden
Councillor Chris Pruden
Councillor Edward Fraser Reeves
Councillor David Rogers
Councillor Alisa Russell
Councillor Les Sibley
Councillor Dr Kerrie Thornhill
Councillor Dom Vaitkus
Councillor Linda Ward
Councillor Amanda Watkins
Councillor Douglas Webb

Councillor Barry Wood

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Phil Chapman
Councillor Grace Conway-Murray
Councillor Nick Cotter
Councillor Harry Knight
Councillor John Willett

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
Denzil Turbervill, Head of Legal Services
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager
Patrick Davis, Democratic and Elections Officer

1 **Bicester Motion Tribute**

The Chairman invited Members to reflect on the tragic fire at Bicester Motion which took the lives of firefighters Jennie Logan, Martyn Sadler and a member of the public, Dave Chester. On behalf of Council, the Chairman extended deepest condolences to their families, friends and colleagues. Two further firefighters sustained serious injuries and remained in hospital in a stable condition. On behalf of Council, the Chairman sent best wishes.

On behalf of Council and echoing the statement of the Leader earlier in the week, the Chairman expressed gratitude to Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue and out other emergency services for everything they did in responding to this tragic incident.

Council observed a minute's silence.

2 **Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed councillors, past Chairman, former councillors, the Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire, Sir Tony Baldry, Sally Scott and Surinder Dhesi, fellow Council Chairs, Funmi Durodola of Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust, Ian Nutt and Leanne Merritt of Oxfordshire Mind, guests and officers to the Annual Council meeting.

The Chairman welcomed and congratulated Councillor Fiaz Ahmed, Councillor Dr Henry Elugwu and Councillor Zoe McLernon, who had been

elected at the by-elections held on 1 May 2025. The newly elected councillors each introduced themselves to Council.

3 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

4 **Communications**

Former Councillor Billy Evans

Former Councillor Billy Evans passed away earlier this year. Former Councillor Evans was a Conservative councillor who represented the Launton ward from 1992 until 2002, serving as South Area Planning Committee Chairman for a number of years.

Councillor Wood paid tribute and shared anecdotes of former Councillor Evans.

On behalf of Council, the Chairman extended condolences to former Councillor Evan's family.

Council observed a minutes' silence.

Former Councillors

On behalf of Council, the Chairman paid tribute to former Councillors Andrew McHugh, Matt Hodgson and Sean Woodcock, who had stood down from the Council in March, and thanked them for their service to the council, their wards and the district.

Annual Council

By convention, the minutes of Committees, questions, petitions and motions were not considered at Annual Council. These would be included on the agenda of the next scheduled Council meeting on Monday 21 July.

Chairman's Engagements

A copy of the events the Chairman or Vice-Chair has attended was published as a supplement to the agenda.

The Chairman highlighted that the last two events he had attended were in Banbury. Last Friday, he had visited the Royal Voluntary Service at Cornhill Centre and learnt about the amazing services they provide and met wonderful volunteers and our residents who use their services. Last Saturday, he attended the unveiling of a blue plaque in honour of a former local councillor, Herbert Payne. The plaque, which was unveiled on a house in Queens Road, Banbury, recognised Herbert Payne as a chief campaigner for Banbury's first council housing.

Members' Pigeon Holes

Members were reminded to check their pigeon hole and take any post.

5 Election of Chairman for the Municipal Year 2025/2026

It was proposed by Councillor Hingley and seconded by Councillor Watkins, that Councillor Walker be appointed Chair of Cherwell District Council for the municipal year 2025/2026. There were no other nominations.

Resolved

- (1) That Councillor Dorothy Walker be appointed Chair of Cherwell District Council for the Municipal Year 2025/2026.

(Councillor Dr Okeke, outgoing Chairman, chaired the meeting until Councillor Walker was appointed)

6 Investiture of Chairman

Councillor Walker having made and signed the required Declaration of Acceptance of Office was invested with the Chair's Chain and took the Chair.

Councillor Walker addressed Council thanking Members for appointing her as Chair. It was an honour to accept this important role representing the council and our residents. It was a great privilege to take on the Chair's task, maintaining and building relationships with civic, charity and voluntary groups in Cherwell and wider Oxfordshire who did important and valuable work in our communities.

The Chair announced that the charities she would be supporting during her term of office were Homeless Oxfordshire and Asylum Welcome.

7 Vote of Thanks to Immediate Past Chairman

The Chair paid tribute to Councillor Dr Okeke for his term of office as Chairman. During his term of office, Cllr Dr Okeke had dedicated time, energy and enthusiasm to being the face of the council forging and maintaining strong connections and relationships with many of the leaders of community bodies, businesspeople, volunteers and charity works who were such an important part of the social fabric of Cherwell District and Oxfordshire.

Councillor Dr Okeke had put a lot of effort into raising money for his chosen charity, Oxfordshire Mind. The Chair had attended his two fundraising events, which were very enjoyable and at which spokespeople from Oxfordshire Mind and other contributors had spoken very powerfully about its work.

Cllr Dr Okeke had proficiently chaired Council meetings with calm and good humour. It had been a helpful and encouraging experience to be his Vice-Chair over the past year.

The Chair also paid tribute to Cllr Dr Okeke's consort, Dr Sandra Okeke, who had been a constant support to the former Chairman in fulfilling his role.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Hingley, and the Labour Group Leader, Councillor Watkins, paid tribute to Councillor Dr Okeke for his term as Chairman.

The Chair presented Councillor Dr Okeke with his past Chairman's badge and a gift as a token of appreciation for his term of office.

8 Immediate Past Chairman's Address

Councillor Dr Okeke thanked the Chair, Leader and Labour Group Leader for their kind words and addressed Council reflecting on his term of office. It had been an honour to serve the district and council as Chairman during and eventful year, which had started with the election of a new Leader and appointment of a new Executive and was ending with the first Council meeting in the new council office at Castle Quay.

Councillor Dr Okeke reported that he had attended many events within and outside the district he had attended over the year with his consort, at which they had met many people, including volunteers, who give their time to support the community. During the past year he had hosted two charity events, a dinner in November and a lunch earlier in the month to raise money for his chosen charity, Oxfordshire Mind. Councillor Dr Okeke thanked all those who had supported his events and made donations.

Councillor Dr Okeke presented a cheque of £6163 to representatives of Oxfordshire Mind, highlighting that there was money raised to date and there were still some outstanding funds to collect.

Councillor Dr Okeke thanked his consort, his wife, for the wonderful support she had given him in his role as Chairman and presented her with flowers as a token of his appreciation.

Councillor Dr Okeke also thanked the council's management and staff for their support and guidance and paid particular tribute to his PA.

9 Election of Vice-Chairman for the Municipal Year 2025/2026

It was proposed by Councillor Reeves and seconded by Councillor Watkins, that Councillor Simpson be appointed Vice-Chair of Cherwell District Council for the municipal year 2025/2026. There were no other nominations.

Resolved

- (1) That Councillor Nigel Simpson be appointed Vice-Chair of Cherwell District Council for the Municipal Year 2025/2026.

10 **Investiture of Vice-Chairman**

Councillor Simpson, having made and signed the required Declaration of Acceptance of Office was invested with the Vice-Chair's Chain.

Councillor Simpson addressed Council and thanked Members for his appointment.

11 **Minutes of Council**

The minutes of the meetings of Council held on 16 December 2024 and 24 February 2025 were agreed as correct records and signed by the Chair.

12 **Annual Business Report 2025/2026**

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report for Council to note the results of the by-elections held on 1 May 2025 and to consider the appointments and allocation of seats on Committees for the municipal year 2025/2026 in accordance with the duty under Section 15 Local Government Housing Act 1989, to ensure that this reflected the political make-up of the Council following the elections. The political representation of members on committees needed to be considered on an annual basis.

Resolved

- (1) That the results of the district by-elections held on 1 May 2025 be noted.

Ward	Elected	Party	Term of office
Banbury Cross and Neithrop	Fiaz Ahmed	Conservative	Three years
Banbury Grimsbury and Hightown	Henry Elugwu	Labour	Two years
Deddington	Zoe McLernon	Conservative	Two years

- (2) That the constitution of Political Groups and notification of Group Leaders which has been notified in accordance with Regulation 8 of the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990 be noted:
- Liberal Democrat (17 Members, all Liberal Democrat party members)

- Group Leader: Councillor David Hingley
 - Labour (12 Members, all Labour party and Labour & Co-operative party members)
 - Group Leader: Councillor Amanda Watkins
 - Cherwell Conservative and Independent Alliance (12 Members, all Conservative Group members and 1 Independent Member, Councillor Ford)
 - Group Leader: Councillor Eddie Reeves
 - Green and Independent Alliance (5 Members, comprising 4 Green members and 1 Independent Member, Councillor Broad)
 - Group Leader: Councillor Ian Middleton
 - Independent (2 Members, comprising 2 Independent Members)
 - Group Leader: Councillor Les Sibley
- (3) That the appointment of the Deputy Leader of the Council, the membership of the Executive and Executive portfolios for the municipal year 2025/2026 be noted:

Councillor	Portfolio
David Hingley (Leader)	Strategic Leadership
Chris Brant	Corporate Services
Lesley McLean (Deputy Leader)	Finance and Resources
Tom Beckett	Greener Communities
Jean Conway	Planning and Development Management
Ian Middleton	Neighbourhood Services
Robert Parkinson	Regulatory
Rob Pattenden	Healthy Communities
Chris Pruden	Housing

- (4) That the allocation of seats on committees that are subject to the political balance requirements be agreed (Annex to the Minutes, as set out in the Minute Book).
- (5) That it be agreed that the allocation of seats on the Licensing Acts Committee reflects the General Licensing Committee.
- (6) That members (and where required, substitute members) be appointed to serve on each of the committees in accordance with the nominations made by political groups ((Annex to the Minutes, as set out in the Minute Book).
- (7) That Councillor Dorothy Walker be appointed as Cherwell District Council's representative to the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2025/2026.

- (8) That Councillor Rob Pattenden be appointed as Cherwell District Council's representative and Councillor David Hingley be appointed as Cherwell District Council's named substitute to the Health and Wellbeing Board for the municipal year 2025/2026.
- (9) That Councillor Robert Parkinson be appointed as Cherwell District Council's appointed representative and Councillor David Hingley be appointed as Cherwell District Council's substitute to the Police and Crime Commissioner Scrutiny Panel for the municipal year 2025/2026.
- (10) That Councillor David Hingley be appointed at Cherwell District Council's representative and Councillor Lesley McLean be appointed as Cherwell District Council's substitute to the Oxfordshire Leaders Joint Committee.
- (11) That authority be delegated to the Monitoring Officer to make changes required to the Constitution as a result of the changes referred to in this report.

13 **Updates to the Constitution**

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report which sought approval of updates to the Constitution following meetings of the Constitution Review Group (CRG). The Constitution was the document by which, in accordance with the law, the Council exercises all its powers and duties. It is essential that it is reviewed to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

Resolved

- (1) That the changes to Part 20 Contract Procedure Rules be approved.
- (2) That the changes to the Motions Process, Part 4.18 of the Constitution, be approved.
- (3) That the changes to Part 4a Overview and Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules and the associated Overview and Scrutiny Reference Guide be approved.
- (4) That updated terminology for Committee "Chairs" whereby it will be up to the member elected as the Chairman to decide on whether they wish to be known as a Chairman, Chairwoman, Chairperson or Chair as their preference be approved.

14 **Member Development Framework and Programme 2025-2026**

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report which presented the Member Development Framework and Programme for 2025-2026 for consideration and agreement.

Resolved

- (1) That the Member Development Framework for 2025-2026 be approved.
- (2) That the Member Development Programme for 2025-2026 be approved.

15 **Annual Report of the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee 2024-25**

The Assistant Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report which presented the annual report of the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee for the year 2024/25. It had been prepared to enable the committee to demonstrate to Council how it has fulfilled its terms of reference.

Resolved

- (1) That the Annual Report of the Accounts, Audit & Risk Committee 2024/25 be noted.

16 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting ended at 7.35 pm

Chair:

Date: