

Cherwell District Council

Executive

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held at 39 Castle Quay, Banbury, OX16 5FD, on 2 September 2025 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor David Hingley (Leader of the Council & Portfolio Holder for Strategic Leadership) (Chair)
Councillor Lesley McLean (Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property & Regeneration) (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Chris Brant, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services
Councillor Ian Middleton, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services
Councillor Robert Parkinson, Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities
Councillor Rob Pattenden, Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Jean Conway, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management
Councillor Nick Cotter, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Also Present:

Councillor Amanda Watkins, Leader of the Labour Group
Councillor David Rogers, Deputy Group Leader, Cherwell Conservative and Independent Alliance
Councillor John Broad

Also Present Virtually:

Councillor Les Sibley, Leader of the Independent Group
Councillor Donna Ford

Officers:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive
Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities
Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance & S151 Officer
Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
Julia Harrington, Head of Regeneration and Growth
Tom Gubbins, Wellbeing Manager
Charlene Greenaway, Transformation Consultant
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

Officers Attending Virtually:

Stephen Hinds, Corporate Director Resources and Transformation

Ed Potter, Assistant Director Environmental Services
Richard Smith, Head of Housing
Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader

24 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Watkins, Leader of the Labour Group, Councillor Rogers, Deputy Leader of the Cherwell Conservative and Independent Alliance, who would be speaking in respect of item 10, Response to Motion: Government Review of Local Authority Funding; and Councillor Sibley, Leader of the Independent Group and Bicester West ward member, Councillor Broad, Bicester West ward member, and Councillor Ford, Bicester East ward member, who would each speak on item 9, Bicester Market Square Project.

26 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

27 **Chair's Announcements**

There were no Chair's announcements.

28 **HVO (Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil) Fuel**

The Assistant Director Environmental Services and Corporate Director Communities submitted a report which looked at the issues of cutting vehicle fleet emissions by the adoption of Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) fuel to replace standard diesel fuel. The report considered the reduction in emissions and the potential increase in revenue costs from moving to HVO.

Resolved

- (1) That the change from standard diesel to HVO diesel commencing from Autumn 2025 leading to a substantial reduction in emissions during 2025/26 & 2026/26 be supported.
- (2) That the small increase in fuel costs as a result of moving to HVO, which can be contained within the existing fuel budget, be noted.

Reasons

To move to HVO fuel with the implementation plan commencing from Autumn 2025 will reduce fleet emissions in 2025/26 with the full year effect in 2026/27.

Alternative options

Option 1: Continuing using diesel until either Battery Electric Vehicles or Hydrogen Vehicles are available at an affordable price. Fleet emissions will remain very high until the current Large Goods Vehicles are replaced. This may take a considerable number of years

29

Domestic Abuse Policy

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing submitted a report to seek approval for a new Domestic Abuse Policy.

Resolved

- (1) That the new Domestic Abuse Policy be approved.

Reasons

The new Domestic Abuse Policy outlines the Council's role and responsibilities and how residents receive advice and support.

It provides an overview of what residents can expect from the Council when they approach the Council for support with domestic abuse and how the Council will ensure that their circumstances are handled confidentially, sensitively and non-judgmentally.

It provides an overview of the housing support that is provided by the Council, particularly through the housing options team, housing register and through the Sanctuary Scheme, which provides additional security measures to properties.

It outlines the multi-agency role and multi-agency arrangements that the Council is part of and that are in place within Oxfordshire to coordinate responses, provide support and monitor perpetrators.

Alternative options

Option 1: Not to bring forward a Domestic Abuse Policy. The Council has statutory duties in delivering housing services and participating in multi-agency arrangements regarding victim and perpetrator management, however, there are no statutory duties to have a domestic abuse policy. The Council is aiming to achieve an accreditation in recognition of its practice and focus on this area, and a policy is an important part of achieving this. This option is therefore rejected.

Made in Banbury

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing submitted a report which presented a new cultural strategy for Banbury and an exploration of the economic impact of investment in the cultural sector offer a perspective on the importance of cultural organisations for the district. This report highlighted the connection between the council's wellbeing strategy, the Banbury Area Priority Plan and the development of coordinated investment.

Resolved

- (1) That Made in Banbury, a cultural strategy for the Town, be endorsed.
- (2) That the impact investment in arts and culture can have on the local economy be acknowledged.
- (3) That the Banbury Quays Consortium be supported in their coordination of marketing cultural offers to audiences under a shared 'Made in Banbury' approach across the district with a grant of £3000 from existing funding allocations for each of the next two years.
- (4) That the implementation and delivery of the action plan be monitored.
- (5) That, given the independent nature of the cultural strategy, the area oversight groups be asked to consider culture in their placemaking plans, ensuring the arts organisations of the district contribute to the cultural development of the district overall.

Reasons

Culture has an important role to play in the delivery of successful placemaking strategies and in the economic health of our Towns. In endorsing the work of the sector through these plans and providing an enabling and supportive policy context for the development of place, activity and employment, Cherwell District Council can effect change. The quality of life local residents enjoy is positively impacted by a vibrant cultural sector and the range of recommendations will help support the sectors efforts to provide a range of opportunities for audiences and residents wanting to pursue a career in the creative industries.

Alternative options

Option 1: Not endorse Made in Banbury and the consequent actions
This has been rejected as the strategy and action plan support the published policies of the Council and the small financial contribution can be achieved from existing funding over the next two years.

Bicester Market Square Project

The Corporate Director of Communities submitted a report to provide an update to the Executive on the progress of the Market Square, Bicester

regeneration and public realm improvement project and to seek approval to continue to the next stage of the project, and ultimately on to complete the project, subject to all of the required procurement processes being undertaken successfully. This report details the next steps of the design work required to the concept plan, seeking the required planning permissions, approval of the draft programme and budget approvals based on the estimated cost plans undertaken as part of stage 1 of the project.

Executive members commented that the project was positive for Bicester acknowledging it was a work in progress and compromises were necessary.

Councillor Sibley, Leader of the Independent Group and Bicester West ward member, Councillor Broad, Bicester West ward member, and Councillor Ford, Bicester East ward member, who would each speak on item 9, Bicester Market Square Project.

In addressing Executive, Councillor Broad commented on the importance of car parking, noted that bike racks were included but no motorcycle parking and expressed his support for opposition to traffic calming.

In response to Councillor Ford's comments regarding the public engagement, how the proposed concept design was chosen and the importance of the project being right, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property & Regeneration explained that there had been a high number of responses from the survey and it was considered the concept design was a true representation of the outcome of the public engagement. The comments regarding the public engagement exercise were noted and consideration would be given to using the Bicester Town Council publication, Garthe Gazette, on the future.

In response to Councillor Sibley's comments regarding the impact of the closure of London Road, the Chair confirmed a solution for the London Road crossing was being sought and he would provide an update when he could.

In response to Councillor Sibley's comments that the Market Square shouldn't be treated in isolation from the town centre, that retail outlets on the Bicester outskirts were booming due to free parking and he hoped for two-hour free parking in the centre of Bicester and that feedback as the project moved forward would be appreciated, the Chair confirmed that he was committed to keeping Members informed. The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property & Regeneration explained that whilst this was a standalone project, an holistic approach was being taken with regard to the impact on other parts of Bicester town centre.

Resolved

- (1) That the progress of the project to date, including the public engagement process and how the proposed concept design was developed, be noted.
- (2) That the concept design presented for development to the next stage be approved.

- (3) That it be approved that the £881,000 from Oxfordshire County Council town centre s106 funds be added to the currently approved £4.25m capital programme budget for this project to give a maximum total project budget of £5,131,000 to complete this project in full.
- (4) That authority be delegated to the Corporate Director Communities, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration and the Assistant Director of Finance, to agree the tranches of budget for each stage of the project as required, into the capital programme to enable completion of this project.
- (5) That authority be delegated to the Corporate Director Communities, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration and Assistant Director of Law and Governance, to approve the appointment of the preferred Consultant & Contractor and to work with the Councils project team to deliver this project following the required Council procurement processes.
- (6) That authority be delegated to the Corporate Director Communities, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration in conjunction with the and the Assistant Director of Law and Governance the decision on the specific contract options & construction route to deliver the project in full (which is currently proposed as a two-stage contract process) (NEC 4E x22) following the Councils required procurement processes.
- (7) That the current draft programme of works and estimated timescales of each stage of work, as provided by WSP, as part of their Stage 1 feasibility work be noted.
- (8) That authority be delegated to the Corporate Director Communities, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration to confirm approval to submit the planning application of the detailed design.

Reasons

The Bicester Market Square improvement project has been in the public domain for many years. A report to the Executive was presented on 4 September 2023: Bicester Garden Town Programme - Market Square Project Business Need & Next Stages.

This report follows the stages of the project over the last two years to date; specifically following an internal review in summer 2024 with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration in conjunction with the Corporate Director Communities, the project has progressed with a full public engagement process completing, as well as confirming project “why” and project priorities.

The outcome of the public engagement process has been a preferred concept design, together with a draft programme which outlines next steps, together

with estimated cost plans depending on choice of materials to deliver this project.

The cost plans are estimating the preferred plan can be delivered within a total maximum project budget of £5,131,000, (dependent on material choices) with £180,000 spent to date.

This report therefore sets out recommendations to take forward the next steps of this project onto successful delivery and completion.

Alternative options

Option one: To approve a previously available design from the one presented which does pedestrianise the Market Square. This is not an option for the local businesses and community of Bicester; during engagement this was a very clear message along with the request to retain some parking and if possible, at the current level.

Option two: To approve one of the other presented designs. This would not be the preferred design from the public and business engagement, but it is possible to deliver one of the other concept designs at this stage.

Option three: To pause or stop this project now and not continue to the next stage. This would save the project budget to be spent on other projects or Council priorities; however, this project has been discussed within the community for over 20 years and during the last year the team have been working very closely with our Portfolio Holder who has been supporting this project.

32 Response to Motion: Government Review of Local Authority Funding

The Assistant Director Finance (S151 Officer) submitted a report to respond to the motion raised at the Council meeting of 21 July 2025 by Councillor Edward Reeves in relation to Government Review of Local Authority Funding.

Councillor Rogers, seconder of the motion at the 21 July Council meeting, addressed Executive. Councillor Rogers thanked officers for their ongoing hard work, with the business rates reset always being included in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and expressed hope that the MPs representing the Cherwell district would help lobbying.

Councillor Watkins, Leader of the Labour Group, addressed Executive and echoed thanks to officers for their hard work in long term planning for the business rates reset. Councillor Watkins advised that Sean Woodcock, MP for Banbury had confirmed his support for Cherwell and that he had spoken with the Deputy Prime Minister and asked that she look at Cherwell's situation.

The Chair thanked Councillor Watkins for the positive update on the support of Sean Woodcock MP and confirmed that Calum Miller MP for Bicester and Woodstock was also supporting Cherwell.

Resolved

- (1) That the Executive's response to the motion be noted.

Reasons

The Leader and officers have taken opportunities to maximise the amount of influence on the Government to ensure that it is aware of the financial challenges that Cherwell would face if anticipated changes were implemented without any financial safeguards being put in place.

Alternative options

No alternative options have been identified.

33 Finance, Performance and Risk Monitoring Report Quarter 1 2025 - 2026

The Assistant Director Finance (S151 Officer) and Assistant Director Customer Focus submitted a report to report to Executive the council's forecast year-end financial, performance and risk position as of the end of Quarter 1 2025, further detail can be found in the report and its appendices.

Resolved

- (1) That the contents of the council's finance, performance and risk management report as at Quarter 1 2025/2026 be noted.
- (2) That the reprofiling of projects in the capital programme be approved.
- (3) That the release of £40k from Policy Contingency for pump priming The Hill be approved.

Reasons

The report updates Executive on the projected year-end financial position of the council for 2025/26, Quarter 1 performance position and updated Leadership Risk Register. 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 End of Year 2026, and a snapshot of our Performance and Risk positions for Quarter 1 2025-26, therefore there are no alternative options to consider.

34 Budget Process 2026/2027

The Assistant Director Finance (S151 Officer) submitted a report to inform the Executive of the proposed approach to the 2026/27 Budget Process and provides context and background information on the existing Medium-Term Financial Strategy and information on latest government announcements relevant to the Strategy.

Resolved

- (1) That the Budget Process for 2026/27 be approved.
- (2) That the base assumptions to be used for the 2026/27 budget be approved.
- (3) That a five-year period for the Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2030/31 and five-year period for the Capital Programme to 2030/31 be approved.

Reasons

The Council has a legal obligation to set a balanced budget and ensure it maintains a suitable level of reserves each year. The process laid out in this report will allow CDC to develop budget proposals that will allow it to meet these legal obligations.

Alternative options

The Council has a legal obligation to set a balanced budget and evaluate its level of reserves to ensure they are held at a suitable level. Therefore, there are no alternative options other than to carry out a budget process that reviews the levels of reserves and identifies a budget proposal that can be delivered within the overall level of resources available to the Council.

35 Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting ended at 8.08 pm

Chair:

Date: