

Cherwell District Council

Executive

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held at 39 Castle Quay, Banbury, OX16 5FD, on 7 October 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 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 Robert Parkinson, Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities
Councillor Rob Pattenden, Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Nick Cotter, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Also Present:

Councillor David Rogers, Deputy Leader, Cherwell Conservative and Independent Alliance

Also Present Virtually:

Councillor Phil Chapman, Vice-Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Officers:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive
Ian Boll, Executive Director Place & Regeneration
Stephen Hinds, Executive Director Resources
Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
David Peckford, Assistant Director Planning & Development
Nicola Riley, Interim Executive Director Neighbourhood Services
Joanne Kaye, Head of Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer
Charlene Greenaway, Transformation Consultant
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

Officers Attending Virtually:

Tim Hughes, Head of Regulatory Services & Community Safety

Emma Faulkner, Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead

36 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Chapman, Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and Councillor Rogers to the meeting. Councillor Chapman would speak on item 7, Notice of Recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Rogers would speak on item 10, as the proposer of the motion.

38 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

39 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair reported that there was no change to the timetable for Local Government Reform and work was on track. A Special Council was scheduled on Monday 10 November and a Special Executive would take place on Thursday 13 November. The deadline for submission to the Government was 28 November.

40 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

41 **Notice of Recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer submitted a report to notify the Executive of recommendations from the March 2025 meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC), and to request an Executive Response.

Councillor Chapman, Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, explained that four OSC working groups were constituted during the 2024-2025 Municipal Year, Food Insecurity, Climate Action, Planning Application Appeals, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (joint working group with Personnel Committee).

The Planning Application Appeals, Climate Action and Equality, Diversity & Inclusion working groups each produced a series of recommendations, that had been considered and endorsed by OSC. The Food Insecurity produced an end of inquiry report that provided commentary on their work but did not include any recommendations. In addition to the four working groups, following consideration of an item relating to the Cherwell Community Safety Partnership, OSC agreed a recommendation to Executive.

On behalf of Executive, the Chair thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the valuable work it undertook and confirmed that responses to the recommendations would be submitted to the December Executive meeting for consideration and agreement.

Resolved

- (1) That the reports and recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.
- (2) That it be agreed that an Executive Response be prepared for each set of recommendations, for consideration and agreement, within two months of this notice.

Reasons

The recommendations ensure both Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Executive comply with requirements as detailed in Section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000.

Alternative options

Option 1: Not to provide an Executive response. This is rejected, as it would be contrary to Section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000. Regardless of Executive's decision relating to the various recommendations, a response must be submitted to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

42 Bicester Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) Implementation Report

The Head of Regulatory Services and Community Safety submitted a report which sought consideration of the renewal of the current Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) for Bicester town centre. The report provided Executive with the background to the proposal, a summary of the consultation undertaken, the feedback from stakeholders and the details of the potential scope of the Order.

Resolved

- (1) That the Public Spaces Protection Order for Bicester town centre, taking into consideration the outcomes of the public consultation and the feedback received from stakeholders, be renewed.

- (2) That the basis of the order will be the following items and the order will apply to the area set within the red border in the annex to the Minutes (as set out in the Minute Book).
- a) No person shall loiter in the restricted area either as an individual or in a group if they are causing or likely to cause anti-social behaviour. If asked to disperse by a Police Constable, PCSO, or an authorised officer of the Council that person must not return to the restricted area for a period of 24 hours.
 - b) No person shall beg (using either active or passive methods of obtaining alms) or ask members of the public for money in the restricted area.
 - c) No person shall consume alcohol in the restricted area (other than premises specified in Section 62(1) of the Act) in a manner which causes nuisance or annoyance to other persons in the locality.
 - d) No person shall continue to consume alcohol when directed by an officer to stop in the restricted area.
 - e) No person shall fail to surrender alcohol or a container for alcohol when requested to do so by an officer in the restricted area.
- (3) That it be agreed the Order can remain in place for up to 3 years.

Reasons

The results of the consultation show overwhelming support for the introduction of a PSPO in Bicester Town Centre from the public and stakeholder organisations. The responses support including all three prohibitions that were included in the consultation.

Crime and incident data from the Police evidence supports the conclusion that prevalent and persistent problem of anti-social behaviour in and around Bicester town centre and that the legal requirements for the introduction of a PSPO are met. Therefore, the Executive is recommended to approve the renewal of the PSPO for Bicester town centre.

Alternative options

Option 1: Not renew the PSPO.

This option is not recommended. The information gathered to support the renewal of the PSPO for Bicester town centre demonstrates that there is a persistent problem with ASB occurring in and around Bicester town centre. The consultation outcomes show very strong support for the renewal of the PSPO to continue to tackle this problem and stakeholders, including Thames Valley Police, support the proposal.

Option 2: Introduce a PSPO with a more limited scope.

This option is not recommended. The consultation outcomes show support for all aspects of the proposed PSPO, and the information collected provides evidence that the prohibitions to be included are proportionate to the issues that the PSPO will look to address.

43

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

The Corporate Director Communities submitted a report to endorse the publication of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Greener Communities explained that the Environment Act 2021 established the requirement on Local Authorities to publish a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) was the Responsible Authority for Oxfordshire and had the duty to prepare the LNRS. Each of the District Councils, the City Council and Natural England were Supporting Authorities who played a key role in shaping the LNRS throughout its preparation. Whilst Supporting Authorities were required to confirm they “raised no objection” to the publication of the LNRS, OCC had requested they endorse the Strategy.

The Environment Act placed a duty on Local Authorities to have regard to the LNRS in exercising their functions and Supporting Authorities would be key users of the Strategy. It was intended that Local Plans would refer to the LNRS as a guiding document and it would be used to inform decisions within Planning and direct any council efforts for nature recovery. This would help the council deliver other organisational objectives and duties more effectively such as biodiversity net gain and the Biodiversity Duty but would not otherwise have direct implications for the council's processes and operations.

Resolved

- (1) That the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy be endorsed and its publication by Oxfordshire County Council be approved.

Reasons

The Environment Act 2021 establishes the requirement on Local Authorities to publish a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

Supporting Authorities are required to confirm in writing that they are content for the LNRS to be published within 28 days of the Responsible Authority providing them with the final draft of the LNRS. The council received the final draft of the LNRS on 22 July 2025 and the deadline for raising an objection or endorsing the LNRS is 15 October 2025.

The Council's Senior Ecologist has been closely involved in the preparation and drafting of the LNRS, and there has been a series of public and stakeholder engagement events and a full public consultation. Consultation comments have now been acted on and the final draft LNRS documents have now been prepared based on the feedback from the public consultation and

input from a wide variety of biodiversity experts as well as the Supporting Authorities. Officers are satisfied that the document is fit for publication and should be endorsed.

Alternative options

Option 1: Object to the publication of the LNRS and submit a PAN (publication advisory notice). Regulation 15 of the LNRS regulations provides that a Supporting Authority may submit a publication advisory notice to the Responsible Authority. It may do this if it considers that, either parts of a final local nature recovery strategy cannot be justified based on the results of the consultation undertaken or that the strategy is materially defective.

This option has been rejected because CDC Officers have been closely involved in all stages of the development, review and preparation of the LNRS and support the publication and endorsement of the LNRS.

44

Response to Motion: Primary Care Facilities in North Oxfordshire

The Corporate Director Communities submitted a report to agree the response to the motion raised by Councillor Rogers at the Council meeting on 21 July 2025 with regard to supporting the Integrated Care Board (ICB) in making provision for Primary Care Facilities.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities thanked Councillor Rogers for the motion and gave an overview of the current opportunities for engagement with the ICB in its planning of primary care facilities and the opportunities for the ICB's input into the planning of new development. It proposed more regular, mutually beneficial engagement.

As proposer of the motion, Councillor Rogers addressed Executive in respect of the response. Councillor Rogers thanked officers for the comprehensive report, highlighted the importance of dialogue between planners, developers and the ICB and requested consideration be given to the inclusion of relevant information in the performance of S106 delivery to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Resolved

- (1) That clear commitment to supporting the Integrated Care Board in meeting its responsibilities for the planning, commissioning and management of NHS services for the population of Cherwell be affirmed.
- (2) That officers be requested to offer regular, structured meetings with the Integrated Care Board to support this commitment.
- (3) That the important role the Council has in holding the Integrated Care Board to account for the appropriate and timely provision of Primary Care and its supporting infrastructure be noted.

Reasons

The motion referred to Executive seeks the expansion and improvement of Primary Care facilities across north Oxfordshire.

It is recommended that the Executive affirms its clear commitment to supporting the ICB in meeting its responsibilities for the planning commissioning and management of NHS services for the population of Cherwell. Officers proposed that regular, structured meetings with the ICB are offered to support this commitment. The Executive is also invited to note the important role the Council has in holding the ICB to account for the appropriate and timely provision of Primary Care and its supporting infrastructure.

Alternative options

It is proposed to seek engagement with the ICB on a more regular basis. However, it is an option not to deploy officer resource in this way. A more structured approach to meeting with the ICB should be mutually informative and support the common aims with regard to the provision of primary care. It is therefore recommended.

45

Award of Grant to Banbury Museum Trust

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing submitted a report which t sets out the reasoning for an award of grant funding until March 2027 to The Banbury Museum, of which Cherwell District Council was the principal funder.

In considering the report, Executive members noted that whilst some outreach work was already undertaken, they commented on the importance of Banbury Museum catering for the whole district.

Resolved

- (1) That Banbury Museum Trust be awarded a grant for their continued operation until 31 March 2027.

Reasons

The continued funding of Banbury Museum and Gallery is in line with approved budget plans and maintains the Councils commitment to providing high quality opportunities to participate in cultural activity locally for residents.

Alternative options

Option 1: To fund the museum at the previous level and not achieve budget savings as approved

Rejected; The Council must balance its budget and continue to drive efficiencies in its own and funded operations.

Option 2: To not fund the Museum

Rejected; This would result in immediate closure and run counter to the Councils current agreed policies.

46

Growth and Regeneration Funding 2025/26 - 2027/28

The Corporate Director Communities submitted a report to secure project funding to the Growth & Regeneration and Development Management Services within the Place and Regeneration Directorate to address capacity constraints and to support priority projects including the Housing Delivery Action Plan, Local Area Energy Planning, inputting into the Oxford Growth Commission and enabling infrastructure to support complex development sites.

Resolved

- (1) That an award of £300k funding from MHCLG be accepted to be spent in 2025/26 on investment in capacity funding to support the acceleration of infrastructure and housing delivery in Bicester as part of the Bicester Garden Town Programme.
- (2) That £600k be transferred from the projects reserve to a new earmarked "Growth and Regeneration Projects Reserve" and to allocate £100k of this in 2025/26, which will add capacity to the other two Area Oversight Group areas of Banbury and Kidlington (and the 4 surrounding parish areas of the Local Plan Partial Review 2020) to accelerate housing and employment delivery through specific projects.
- (3) That it be agreed to delegate to the Corporate Director Communities (post title will change to Executive Director Place and Regeneration effective 15 October 2025), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration, the programme management and change control of funding to meet the identified projects, and subject to approval of the project business plans by Executive.

Reasons

Investing in capacity to support sustainable growth is a priority for the council as set out in the plans and strategies outlined in the report. The allocation of grant funding to provide further capacity shows that this is a priority understood by government.

Alternative options

Option 1: Do nothing.

This would severely limit the ability of the Growth and Regeneration Service to continue to support the Area Oversight Groups and to progress actions within the Housing Delivery Action Plan 2025 and the ADP. The £300k grant to

MHCLG would be returned. S106 projects would not benefit from additional oversight or acceleration.

It is not recommended to select this option. Without progress on the key infrastructure projects to support allocated growth sites, the councils housing supply figures could worsen and growth across unallocated sites would likely be forthcoming at an increased rate.

Option 2: Only accept the MHCLG funding and await decision to invest council funding in continuation of the service for 2026/27 – 2027/28 until the Medium-Term Funding Strategy is set in February 2026.

This option would restrict investment in year to the MHCLG grant for Bicester only and would prevent the service from making early progress in recruiting and deploying resources until a decision is reached in February 2026 at the earliest.

This option is not recommended due to the urgency of the Housing Delivery Action Plan and the ongoing priorities associated with unlocking growth. With the government direction on Mayoral Strategic Authorities and strategic planning, it is anticipated that there will be a significant shortfall in resources to support priorities and waiting a further five months will compound this risk.

47

Cherwell Futures Programme

The Corporate Director Resources and Transformation submitted a report to seek approval for the next phase of Transformation to transition to the Cherwell Futures Programme. Following a comprehensive review by the Executive and analysis of progress made in 2024-25, the programme's focus had been strategically narrowed to focus on three priority areas: Planning, Environmental Services, and Customer Engagement (Single Front Door).

This approach would provide clear assurance on targeted savings and establish a definitive means of implementation. Depending on the full scope of the project agreed, it was anticipated to achieve between £3 million and £4 million in savings per annum over the medium term (6-18 months) from approval.

The report asked Executive to allocate an initial £400k in funding to enable work on the priority areas identified, and to agree that a further £1.1m could be accessed subject to strict governance and oversight procedures.

Resolved

- (1) That the Cherwell Futures Programme to prioritise the three key areas of Planning, Environmental Services, and Customer Engagement (Single Front Door), as the core focus for the next phase of work be approved.

- (2) That the allocation from the Projects Reserve of £0.4 million to fund initial support and preparatory work required for the three prioritised areas noted in resolution (1) above, together with transferring £1.1 million from the Projects Reserve to a new Cherwell Futures Reserve for implementation and resource costs, subject to Executive approval, as required by the Council's Reserves Policy, be approved.
- (3) That the proposed delivery model, which aims to bring more project management in-house to reduce risk and maximise cost-effectiveness, using external support only where necessary, be approved.

Reasons

The refined Cherwell Futures programme represents a strategic and forward-thinking approach to service excellence, efficiency, and readiness for organisational change. The council has demonstrated its ability to deliver tangible results, with £1.8 million in savings already secured and approved. The proposed Phase Two represents a deliberate, low-risk pathway to build on this success and provides a credible roadmap to achieving between £3 million and £4 million in additional savings over the medium term.

The proposed initial allocation of £400k plus an additional earmarked £1.1 million is a critical and prudent investment. It will enable the council to initiate and drive the delivery of three high-priority projects, each with a clear potential for significant savings and service improvements. The robust governance structure and phased delivery model will ensure that public funds are managed responsibly and that the Executive retains control over the programme's direction, safeguarding service delivery through the need for a business case at each appropriate stage.

By approving this report and funding the next phase of the Cherwell Futures Programme, the Executive will enable the council to proactively address its financial challenges, protect essential services for residents, and prepare for a sustainable future within the new unitary authority framework, as a result of Local Government Reorganisation.

Alternative options

Option 1: Do Nothing

This approach would involve taking no decisive action to address the council's financial and operational challenges. Maintaining the status quo would result in a projected cumulative deficit of around £46 million by 2029/30. This would inevitably lead to greater service provision cuts and compromise service effectiveness, statutory compliance, and public trust, while failing to address underlying operational inefficiencies. Savings will need to be delivered through traditional budget methods, likely leading to greater service provision cuts. The risks of inaction far outweigh the required initial investment.

Option 2: Minimal or 'In-House Only' Delivery

This model proposes that the council's internal teams lead and deliver the transformation programme without any external support. While the proposed

plan for Phase Two brings more delivery in-house, a purely in-house model is not considered feasible to deliver the required scale of change and pace of delivery. The current lean change capacity within the organisation is not sufficient to deliver the programme's ambitious objectives and realise the extent of savings identified. Given the urgent need to address the projected funding gap and meet government expectations for financial sustainability ahead of Local Government Reorganisation, a solely in-house approach would not be able to deliver the savings in the required timeframe.

Option 3: Full Partner Model

A single transformation partner model was initially considered to accelerate delivery and achieve "Speed to Value" across the Council's savings proposals. While this approach offered potential for rapid impact, concerns were raised during the Executive in July regarding risk exposure and assurance of return on investment (ROI).

Further refinements to the model were explored and presented in August, but feedback from the Executive indicated continued reservations. These discussions highlighted the need for a more prudent and targeted strategy.

The revised approach now focuses on strengthening internal delivery capability and engaging external partners only where there is a clear, evidence-based need. This ensures a lower-risk, cost-effective model with stronger ROI assurance, supported by internal readiness assessments and robust business cases. Future partner engagement will be highly selective, designed to maximise value and align with organisational priorities.

Option 4: Achieve Savings Through Service Cuts

This option, which involves directly reducing or eliminating council services to achieve the required financial savings, is not recommended as the primary strategy for achieving savings. A strategy based on widespread service cuts would be detrimental to the community, directly impacting frontline service delivery, potentially compromising the council's ability to meet its statutory duties and significantly harming public satisfaction. While some service consolidation may be necessary in the future, the recommended approach of transformation seeks to improve efficiency and generate new income, thereby protecting core services rather than cutting them.

Finance Monitoring Report August 2025

The Assistant Director Finance (S151 Officer) submitted a report to report to Executive the council's forecast year-end financial position as at the end of the August 2025.

There being no questions on the exempt appendix to the report, it was not necessary to exclude the press and public during this item.

Resolved

- (1) That the contents of the council's financial management report as at the end of August 2025 be noted.
- (2) That the Use of Reserve and Grant Funding Requests (Annex to the Minutes as set out in the Minute Book) be approved.
- (3) That the amendments to the capital programme (Annex to the Minutes as set out in the Minute Book) be approved.
- (4) That the proposed write offs be approved.

Reasons

The report updates Executive on the projected year-end financial position of the council for 2025/26. 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 revenue financial position up to the end of March 2026, therefore there are no alternative options to consider.

49 Exclusion of the Press and Public

There being no questions on the exempt appendix to the Finance Monitoring Report August 2025, it was not necessary to exclude the press and public.

50 Finance Monitoring Report August 2025 - Exempt Appendix

There being no questions on the exempt appendix, this item had been agreed as set out under Minute 48.

The meeting ended at 8.00 pm

Chair:

Date: