

Cherwell District Council

Budget Planning Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Budget Planning Committee held at 39 Castle Quay, Banbury, OX16 5FD, on 9 December 2025 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Edward Fraser Reeves (Chair)
Councillor Dom Vaitkus (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Tom Beckett (also, Portfolio Holder for Greener Communities)
Councillor Gordon Blakeway
Councillor Frank Ideh
Councillor Zoe McLernon
Councillor Robert Parkinson (also, Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities)
Councillor Rob Pattenden (also, Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities)
Councillor Les Sibley
Councillor Barry Wood

Substitute Members:

Councillor Amanda Watkins (In place of Councillor Mark Cherry)

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Mark Cherry
Councillor Andrew Crichton

Also Present:

Councillor David Hingley, Leader of the Council
Councillor Lesley McLean, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Regeneration and Property
Councillor Chris Brant, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services
Councillor Jean Conway, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management
Councillor Nick Cotter, Portfolio Holder for Housing
Councillor Ian Middleton, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services
Councillor John Broad

Officers:

Nicola Riley, Interim Executive Director Neighbourhood Services
Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance & S151 Officer
David Peckford, Assistant Director Planning
Joanne Kaye, Head of Finance and Deputy S151 Officer

Matt Swinford, Democratic and Elections Officer
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

Officers Attending Virtually:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive
Stephen Hinds, Executive Director Resources
Ed Potter, Assistant Director Environmental Services
Mona Walsh, Assistant Director - Property
Tim Hughes, Head of Regulatory Services & Community Safety
Heidi Radcliffe Hill, Interim Head of Chief Executive's Office
Richard Smith, Head of Housing
Tom Darlington, Kidlington Area Lead Officer

20 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

21 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 September 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

22 Chair's Announcements

There were no Chair's announcements.

23 Requests to Address the Meeting

There were no requests to address the meeting.

24 Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

25 Budget Proposals 2026/27 - 2030/31

The Assistant Director of Finance (S151 Officer) submitted a report that set out the capital bids, investments, efficiencies and income charges for Cherwell District Council for the period 2026/27 to 2030/31.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Regeneration and Property explained that uncertainties around government funding (anticipated business rates reset and fair funding proposals that changed the core funding

that the Council receive), rising costs, and growing demands on services had made planning for the 2026/27 budget and updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) very challenging.

The Government's Policy Statement on local government funding for 2026/27 to 2028/29 had been published on 20 November 2025. Whilst it provided an outline of the policy settings that would be used, details of the provisional settlement would not be announced until the week commenced 15 December 2025. At the time of publishing the report, all funding forecasts were based on modelling provided by the council's funding advisors. To balance the budget, consultation on £1.8 million of new savings proposals and operational efficiencies for next year to help mitigate the impact of the funding changes, was underway.

In February 2026, as part of their proposed budget for 2026/27, the Executive would consider feedback from Budget Planning Committee on the budget proposals and consider feedback from the public on the budget consultation. In determining which of the budget proposals would be included in the proposed budget for 2026/27, the Executive would also consider the outcome of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement and other resources available through Council Tax and Business Rates.

The Assistant Director of Finance gave a presentation which provided an update on the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). When the current budget had been agreed in February 2025, there was an identified funding gap for 2026/27 of £5 million. Calculating over the MTFS period, the annual ongoing gap of the budget identified £16 million savings would need to be identified.

The Assistant Director of Finance advised that the Council had received confirmation that the grant for 2026/2027 would be of £1.7million, £300k more than was budgeted for in the previous. It was anticipated that this amount would be received on an ongoing basis and £1.7million would therefore be built into the budget and MTFS for future years.

Throughout the year, figures had been revised to reflect improvements, investment proposals and the efficiencies that were currently being consulted on, as well as confirmation in the Government Fairer Funding consultation that a number of grants the council previously received would be rolled into the overall funding to the council. There was a £1.8million improvement in 2026/27 compared to the position in February 2025 and an ongoing impact of £7million.

In response to a question regarding how the council would use any additional monies, if received, under the retained pooling income, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Regeneration and Property advised that not all information had yet been received. Once the Government had concluded its consultation and finalised and published all information, it would then be known what the financial position would look like for the council and a strategy would be made accordingly.

Executive Portfolio Holders, gave an overview of the pressures, proposed savings, and capital bids by service area within each directorate and answered questions from the Committee, supported by officers.

In response to a question in relation to the Housing capital bid of £3million (CAP2607) to acquire property to serve as temporary accommodation, the Interim Executive Director Neighbourhood Services explained confirmed that this accommodation would not count towards housing revenue account because it would be temporary and no occupancy rights given. Rather occupants would move on to social or private rented accommodation.

In considering Regulatory Services saving of £19k, ERG2061- Regulatory Services Resource Optimisation, which related to work the service had been undertaking to streamline processes and use digital solutions for efficiencies which would result in a saving without any reduction in the service provided to customers and the public, the Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities agreed that a written response with further information on the changes would be provided to Committee members.

In response to a Committee query on the proposed saving in Environmental Services (EEV12601) to explore moving to a three-weekly green bin (residual waste) collection, the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services confirmed that further benchmarking would be undertaken. The saving would arise from a reduced amount of waste passed to Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) as disposal authority. This would save OCC money on emissions trading and it was hoped that OCC would give CDC money back. Agreement had not yet been reached on this but other Oxfordshire authorities were also considering the same process.

In considering the saving proposal, Committee members noted that whilst it was included in the budget consultation, there should also be a standalone consultation. The Committee commented that it would be useful to have further information on £265k saving.

It was proposed by Councillor Reeves and seconded by Councillor McLernon that the Executive be requested to give consideration to carrying out a specific consultation on the proposed move to a three-weekly residual waste bin collection. On being put to the vote, the motion was carried.

It was proposed by Councillor Reeves and seconded by Councillor Vaitkus that the Executive provide further information to the Committee regarding how the £265k saving (EEV12601, Three-weekly residual waste collections) nets out and was profiled over the MTFS. On being put to the vote, the motion was carried.

In response to queries on the proposal to close the toilets at Pioneer Square, Bicester (EV12605) which were in a convenient location for persons visiting the town, the Assistant Director of Environmental Services advised that toilet facilities in Bicester Town Centre at Claremont car park would be retained and these met Changing Places standards.

In considering Environmental Services saving proposal EEV22601, Reduced frequency of OCC highway verge mowing in Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington, it was proposed by Councillor Wood and seconded by Councillor Sibley that the Executive be requested to give consideration to the amount contributed by Town/Parish Councils, which supplemented the funding provided by the OCC Agency Agreement Grant. On being put to the vote, the motion was carried.

Resolved

- (1) That, having given due consideration, the Budget Planning Committee provide the following feedback to Executive on the capital bids, investments, efficiencies and income changes in the 2026/27 budget proposal.
 - That the Executive be requested to give consideration to carrying out a specific consultation on the proposed move to a three weekly residual waste (green bin) collection (saving reference EEV12601, Three-weekly residual waste collections).
 - That the Budget Planning Committee be provided with further information on how the 265k saving (reference EEV12601, Three-weekly residual waste collections) nets out and is profiled over the MTFS.
 - That the Executive be requested to give consideration to the Town/Parish Council contribution in regard to the proposed saving of reduced frequency of Oxfordshire County Council highways verge mowing (saving reference EEV22601, reduced frequency of OCC highway verge mowing in Banbury, Bicester & Kidlington).

Fees and Charges Benchmarking 2026/27

The Assistant Director of Finance (S151 Officer) submitted a report to provide information to the Committee on proposed Fees and Charges as compared to some other districts to feed back to the Executive as part of the 2026/27 Budget and Business Planning Process.

In response to a question on the proposed percentage increase for table and chairs consent, the Head of Regulatory Services and Community Safety advised that a consultation was underway on the new Policy, including the fees. The Leader of the Council confirmed that he would ask the Portfolio Holder to investigate further with officers. The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Regeneration and Property subsequently clarified that the higher uplift was a result of calculating differently,

In response to a comment from the Committee that the proposed car parking fee increase was above inflation (CPI) and query if consideration could be given to providing free parking for up to two hours in council operated car parks, in particular in Bicester, potentially through money earmarked for the market square project, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration advised that the market square funding was fairly specific but undertook to look into the matter. The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property

and Regeneration highlighted that two hours free parking was already available at the Sainsburys car park for in Bicester. Executive would nonetheless consider consultation responses in respect of this, however should any action be taken, there would be an impact on other services as funds would need to be founds.

It was proposed by Councillor Sibley and seconded by Councillor Wood that the Executive be requested to give consideration to reducing the proposed increase in car parking fees. On being put to the vote, the motion was lost and subsequently fell.

27

October Monthly Performance Report 2025-2026

The Assistant Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report to update the Committee on the council's financial positions at the end of the financial year 2025/2026 as at 31 October 2025.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration advised that the year-end revenue position for 2025/26 at the end of October was a projected overspend of £0.400m.

Since September, the overall position had worsened by £0.292m, which was mainly due to increased pressures in Resources of £0.102m and Neighbourhood Services of £0.162m, which reflected rising operational costs and demand pressures. Offsetting these overspends were significant and stable underspends in Executive Matters (£1.269m), Policy Contingency (£1.100m), which together provided a strong mitigating effect against directorate-level increases.

Resolved

- (1) That the report be noted

28

Review of Committee Work Plan

The Committee considered its work plan. Following the discussion under agenda item 8 (Minute 26) on car parking fees Cherwell District Council (CDC) operated car parks, Councillor Sibley requested that an item detailing revenue from car parking fees in CDC operated car parks be submitted to the 10 March 2026 meeting. The Chair and Vice-Chair undertook to liaise with officers to agree the scope of the item.

Resolved

That, subject to a Committee request for an additional item, a report on the fee revenue from Cherwell District Council operated car parks to the 10 March 2026 meeting, the work programme be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.51 pm

Chair:

Date: