

Cherwell District Council

Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Council held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 21 October 2024 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Dr Chukwudi Okeke (Chairman)
Councillor Dorothy Walker (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Tom Beckett
Councillor Rebecca Biegel
Councillor Gordon Blakeway
Councillor Chris Brant
Councillor Besmira Brasha
Councillor John Broad
Councillor Phil Chapman
Councillor Mark Cherry
Councillor Becky Clarke MBE
Councillor Jean Conway
Councillor Grace Conway-Murray
Councillor Gemma Coton
Councillor Nick Cotter
Councillor Andrew Crichton
Councillor Donna Ford
Councillor Ian Harwood
Councillor David Hingley, Leader of the Council
Councillor Matt Hodgson
Councillor Frank Ideh
Councillor Simon Lytton
Councillor Kieron Mallon
Councillor Fiona Mawson
Councillor Andrew McHugh
Councillor Lesley McLean
Councillor Ian Middleton
Councillor Julian Nedelcu
Councillor Rob Parkinson
Councillor Lynne Parsons
Councillor Rob Pattenden
Councillor Chris Pruden
Councillor Edward Fraser Reeves
Councillor David Rogers
Councillor Alisa Russell
Councillor Les Sibley
Councillor Nigel Simpson
Councillor Dr Kerrie Thornhill
Councillor Dom Vaitkus
Councillor Linda Ward
Councillor Amanda Watkins
Councillor John Willett

Councillor Douglas Webb
Councillor Barry Wood

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Dr Isabel Creed
Councillor Harry Knight
Councillor Nicholas Mawer
Councillor Sean Woodcock

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
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

26 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

27 **Communications**

Black History Month

The Chairman made the following statement: "This month, October is Black History Month, a time to recognise and celebrate the invaluable contributions of Black people to our society. It is also a time for institutions and organisations to reflect on their progress in addressing inequality. I am honoured to be celebrated by this council as its first black councillor and chairman. As a local council, we share huge responsibilities in building a healthy society – a society where everyone feels valued and represented irrespective of their identity. I am proud of this council for promoting such a society. I am sure we do acknowledge that there is more to do."

Members' Allowances Survey

The Chairman referred to the annual survey on Members' allowances. A paper copy had been given to all councillors and a link to complete the survey online would be emailed.

All councillors were encouraged to complete the survey as the feedback was valued by the Independent Remuneration Panel when considering its recommendations on Members' Allowances. The Panel's recommendations for the 2025/26 Scheme would be submitted to the 24 February 2025 Council meeting.

Polling Place Review

All Members would be sent a link to the polling place review consultation. The cross-party Polling Place and Boundary Review working group would consider all consultation responses and the final report and recommendations would be submitted to the 16 December Council meeting.

Cherwell Boundary Review – Briefing

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England would be holding a virtual briefing for all district councillors at 7pm on Wednesday 30 October.

Chairman's Engagements

A copy of the events attended by the Chairman was published with the agenda.

The Chairman reminded Members that invitations for his fundraising dinner to raise money for his charity, Oxfordshire Mind, had been sent and he hoped many Members would be able to attend or consider a donation if they were unable to attend.

The Chairman referred to the service of Thanksgiving and Remembrance of the Battle of Britain he had attended in September commenting that the event in Banbury had been very nice and well organised/

The Chairman referred to the Cherwell Business Awards he had attended commenting that the event was very impressive and demonstrated that Cherwell was a great place to live and do business. The Chairman congratulated all winners and commended the organisers.

Meeting Length

Due to the length of the agenda, out of courtesy to other Members, the Chairman asked Members to remain in their seat during items and advised, if needed, he would adjourn the meeting to allow for a comfort break at a suitable point.

Members' Pigeon Holes

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

Petitions and Requests to Address the Meeting

There were no petitions.

The Chairman advised Council that one request to address the meeting had been received in accordance with the Constitution. Local resident, Geoff Taylor, had requested to address the meeting on the Campsfield House Immigration Detention Centre, Kidlington motion. The Chairman explained he would invite Mr Taylor to address the meeting prior to Council considering the motion.

29 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

30 **Minutes of Council**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

31 **Minutes**

a) **Minutes of the Executive, Portfolio Holder Decisions and Executive Decisions made under Special Urgency**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting of the Executive and Portfolio Holder decisions as set out in the Minute Book be received and that it be noted that since the last meeting of Council at which this was reported on 15 July 2024, one key or exempt decision had been taken by the Executive which was not included in the 28 day notice and related to a Castle Quay lease.

b) **Minutes of Committees**

Resolved

That the minutes of Committees as set out in the Minute Book be received.

32 **Questions**

a) **Written Questions**

There were no written questions.

b) **Questions to the Leader of the Council**

Questions were asked and answers received on the following issues:

Councillor Cherry: Garages owned by Sanctuary Housing in Banbury Ruscote
Councillor Biegel: Flytipping, prevention and enforcement
Councillor Wood: Invitation to the new Housing Minister to visit Graven Hill
Councillor Hodgson: Further strengthening of Banbury flood defences
Councillor Clarke MBE: Black History Month
Councillor Mallon: Councillor diversity

c) Questions to Committee Chairmen on the Minutes

There were no questions to Committee Chairman on the minutes of meetings.

33 Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved

That, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business, on the grounds that they could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of that Act and that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

34 Relocation of CDC administrative headquarters from Bodicote House to Castle Quay

The Assistant Director Property submitted an exempt report which sought approval of additional budget to meet a project overspend on the Castle Quay Office project. The increased capital budget requested was £645,800.

Resolved

- (1) That the forecast overspend be noted and an increase in the Capital Programme of £645,800 towards the delivery of Castle Quay relocation of offices project be approved in order to authorise expenditure for the project.

35 Readmittance of the Press and Public

Resolved

- (1) That the press and public be readmitted to the meeting.

36 Amendment to Committee Membership

Resolved

- (1) That the following Conservative Group committee membership amendment be noted:

Budget Planning Committee

Remove: Councillor Kieron Mallon

Add: Councillor Barry Wood

Motions

The Chairman advised that five motions had been submitted. No amendments to any of the motions had been submitted. In line with the Constitution, no amendments were now permitted.

Motion One: Winter Fuel Payments

It was proposed by Councillor Reeves and seconded by Councillor Mallon that the following motion be adopted:

“This Council deplores the government’s precipitous decision to cut Winter Fuel Payments (WFPs) ahead of its budget on 30 October 2024.

Age UK estimates that the government’s changes to WFPs could adversely affect as many as two million pensioners across the country, many of whom need support to stay warm this winter. In the Banbury constituency alone, 17,638 pensioners are set to be affected by the decision.

This Council resolves to request that:

- (i) the Executive launch a countywide awareness campaign working with our fellow City and District Councils, Oxfordshire County Council, local NHS partners, and charitable, civic and religious groups, to encourage elderly residents who are eligible for means-tested benefits such as Pension Credit to register and claim them to ensure that they continue to receive WFPs this Winter;
- (ii) the Leader of the Council writes to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the government’s decision to means-test WFPs without public consultation and asking HM Treasury to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who are eligible for, but who do not – or cannot – claim, other benefits under current thresholds are protected from fuel poverty in her forthcoming budget; and
- (iii) the Executive builds on the Council’s notable successes in tackling food insecurity and providing community food grants by prioritising monies within its current and/or the 2025/6 budget to ensure that pensioners who are in genuine hardship, but who are not otherwise eligible for other government support, are helped through the Winter.”

No amendments to the motion having been proposed, the motion was debated as submitted. On being put to the vote the motion was carried unanimously.

Motion Two: Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023

It was proposed by Councillor McHugh and seconded by Councillor Mallon that the following motion be adopted:

“This Council proudly holds the silver level award for the Defence Employers’ Recognition Scheme, known as the Armed Forces Covenant.

In this year’s King’s Speech, the Prime Minister set out measures to repeal and replace the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023 (‘the Act’). The Act afforded members of British Armed Forces who served in Northern Ireland the same protection from prosecution as that given to convicted terrorists and those on the run.

Protection from prosecution was granted to convicted terrorists and 'on the run' terrorists by former Prime Minister Tony Blair and then-Director of Public Prosecutions Sir Keir Starmer under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement.

In interviews given by Sir Keir Starmer prior to the General Election, he made it clear that he does not believe British Service personnel should have immunity for prosecution and that convicted and 'on the run' paramilitaries should continue to enjoy this protection as the cost of a lasting peace.

The repeal of the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023 is a betrayal to British Armed Forces Veterans who saw active service during Operation Banner.

As a signatory to the Armed Forces Covenant, this Council calls on the Leader of the council to write to the Prime Minister asking him to reconsider his commitment to repealing the Act or to replace it with another that gives British Armed Forces veterans equal degree of protection from prosecution related to the Troubles as that enjoyed by their terrorist/paramilitary adversaries.”

In introducing the motion, Councillor McHugh proposed that a recorded vote be taken on the motion. The was duly seconded by Councillor Mallon.

No amendments to the motion having been proposed, the motion was debated as submitted

Having been proposed and seconded, a recorded vote was duly taken and Members voted as follows:

Councillor Tom Beckett	Against
Councillor Rebecca Biegel	Against
Councillor Gordon Blakeway	For
Councillor Chris Brant	Against
Councillor Besmira Brasha	Against
Councillor John Broad	For
Councillor Phil Chapman	For
Councillor Mark Cherry	Against
Councillor Becky Clarke MBE	Against
Councillor Jean Conway	Against
Councillor Grace Conway-Murray	Against
Councillor Gemma Coton	Against
Councillor Nick Cotter	Against

Councillor Andrew Crichton	Against
Councillor Donna Ford	For
Councillor Ian Harwood	For
Councillor David Hingley	Against
Councillor Matt Hodgson	Against
Councillor Frank Ideh	Against
Councillor Simon Lytton	Against
Councillor Kieron Mallon	For
Councillor Fiona Mawson	Against
Councillor Andrew McHugh	For
Councillor Lesley McLean	Against
Councillor Ian Middleton	Against
Councillor Julian Nedelcu	Against
Councillor Dr Chukwudi Okeke	Against
Councillor Rob Parkinson	Against
Councillor Lynne Parsons	Against
Councillor Rob Pattenden	For
Councillor Chris Pruden	Against
Councillor Eddie Reeves	For
Councillor David Rogers	For
Councillor Alisa Russell	Against
Councillor Les Sibley	For
Councillor Nigel Simpson	For
Councillor Dr Kerrie Thornhill	Against
Councillor Dom Vaitkus	Against
Councillor Dorothy Walker	Against
Councillor Linda Ward	Against
Councillor Amanda Watkins	Against
Councillor Douglas Webb	For
Councillor John Willett	Against
Councillor Barry Wood	For

The vote was lost, and the motion therefore fell.

Motion Three: 'Primary Care' health services across North Oxfordshire

It was proposed by Councillor Rogers and seconded by Councillor Conway that the following motion be adopted:

"This Council recognises the need to improve 'Primary Care' health services across North Oxfordshire.

Primary Care expansion is the remit of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System Board ('BOBICS') whose Primary Care Estates Strategy acknowledges the scale of developer contributions that are available to support such vital public services.

Regrettably, since the adoption of the Supplementary Planning Document in 2018, it is estimated that only 15% of funds available have been requested and secured within the Cherwell District Council area. This must improve.

Accordingly, this Council request that its Leader writes to the Chief Executive of BOBICS, copied to its Place Director for Oxfordshire and its Senior Primary Care Estate Manager, to request that it:

- (i) more consistently requests developer contributions on all planning applications of 10 or more dwellings;
- (ii) considers using this funding in part for ICT Infrastructure to support primary care expansion;
- (iii) work more closely with this Council to ensure the release the s.106 contributions currently allocated to, or held by, Cherwell District Council; and
- (iv) works with this Council on both its Local Plan review, the Community Infrastructure Levy consultation and its review of the Supplementary Planning Document to ensure better and more coordinated provision of vital health services.

This Council further calls on its Leader to request a meeting between BOBICS and Leaders of all political groups and Officers to discuss how we could improve the delivery of Primary Care across North Oxfordshire.”

No amendments to the motion having been proposed, the motion was debated as submitted. On being put to the vote the motion was carried unanimously.

Motion Four: Neurodiversity

It was proposed by Councillor Biegel and seconded by Councillor Pruden that the following motion be adopted:

“Around 1-in-7 people in the UK are neurodivergent, experiencing the world differently from others. Neurodivergence is associated with a range of conditions including, but not limited to ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia, Developmental Language Disorder, Dyspraxia, and Dyscalculia.

People with neurodivergent traits and conditions face a range of challenges across our society, including finding employment, increased likelihood of mental health diagnoses, and trouble accessing public services.

I hope Members will agree that we should act to reduce barriers faced by neurodivergent individuals to make Cherwell more neurodiversity friendly.

To meet this aim, this Council resolves to ask the Executive to:

- add neurodiversity within 12 months as part of EDI strategy/plan that ensures our organisation and services identify and meet the needs of the neurodiverse community.
- Promote acceptance and understanding of neurodiversity through celebrating awareness-raising campaigns.

- Look at training for all on neurodiversity so they may recognise the growing impact of neurodivergent conditions on the issues they deal with on behalf of service users / constituents.
- Ensure neurodiversity is considered within the Council's well-being goals and strategy.
- Encourage neurodivergent individuals to apply for employment with the council or participate in public life, for example by running to be a Councillor.
- Review and implement reasonable adjustments for elected members, to ensure the role of Councillor is accessible to people with neurodivergent traits and conditions so the skills and talents of all people can be harnessed for the benefit of the residents of Cherwell.
- And finally, for inclusivity, to extend any reasonable adjustments more widely.”

No amendments to the motion having been proposed, the motion was debated as submitted. On being put to the vote the motion was carried unanimously.

Motion Five: Campsfield House Immigration Detention Centre, Kidlington

Prior to Council considering the motion, Mr Geoff Taylor addressed the meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Middleton and seconded by Councillor Walker that the following motion be adopted:

“Campsfield House Immigration Detention Centre in Kidlington was closed in 2019 after decades of campaigning by refugee support groups and Cherwell residents, and the publication of two government commissioned reviews criticising the UK's migrant detention system. The leader of the reviews, the Prison Ombudsman, Sir Stephen Shaw, described the detention system as indiscriminate, inhumane and hugely wasteful.

In 2022 the Conservatives announced plans to re-open and double the size of Campsfield House to support its Rwanda Resettlement Scheme. The new Labour government have thankfully cancelled that scheme, removing the main rationale for the plans for Campsfield, but they have since announced their intention to continue with the re-opening. This has been criticised by migrants' rights groups including Asylum Welcome, Detention Action, The Refugee Council, Amnesty International UK and the Keep Campsfield Closed group.

Cherwell has a proud tradition of welcoming refugees and providing sanctuary from oppression and war. The re-opening of Campsfield House is a stain on our district and contradicts government recommendations into migrant detention in the UK.

Council therefore requests that the Leader of the Council writes to the Home Secretary calling on her to :

1. Abandon the re-opening of Campsfield House.
2. Outline plans to reduce, rather than increase, the number of people held in detention.
3. Focus on accelerating the processing of asylum claims to reduce the huge number of individuals trapped in the system.
4. Develop a more humane migration policy, including the establishment of safe and legal routes for people to claim asylum.”

No amendments to the motion having been proposed, the motion was debated as submitted. On being put to the vote the motion was carried.

Resolved

- (1) That the following motion be adopted:

Winter Fuel Payments

“This Council deplores the government’s precipitous decision to cut Winter Fuel Payments (WFPs) ahead of its budget on 30 October 2024.

Age UK estimates that the government’s changes to WFPs could adversely affect as many as two million pensioners across the country, many of whom need support to stay warm this winter. In the Banbury constituency alone, 17,638 pensioners are set to be affected by the decision.

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- (2) That the following motion be adopted:

‘Primary Care’ health services across North Oxfordshire

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- (3) That the following motion be adopted:

Neurodiversity

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- And finally, for inclusivity, to extend any reasonable adjustments more widely."

(4) That the following motion be adopted:

Campsfield House Immigration Detention Centre, Kidlington

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In 2022 the Conservatives announced plans to re-open and double the size of Campsfield House to support its Rwanda Resettlement Scheme. The new Labour government have thankfully cancelled that scheme, removing the main rationale for the plans for Campsfield, but they have since announced their intention to continue with the re-opening. This has been criticised by migrants' rights groups including Asylum Welcome, Detention Action, The Refugee Council, Amnesty International UK and the Keep Campsfield Closed group.

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4. Develop a more humane migration policy, including the establishment of safe and legal routes for people to claim asylum.”

The meeting ended at 8.55pm

Chairman:

Date: