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Cherwell District Council

Executive

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 3 February 2025 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Lesley McLean (Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property & Regeneration) (Vice-Chairman, in the 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 Rob Parkinson, Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities

Councillor Rob Pattenden, Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities

Apologies for absence:

Councillor David Hingley, Leader of the Council & Portfolio Holder for Strategic Leadership

Councillor Ian Middleton, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services

Also Present:

Councillor Phil Chapman

Councillor David Rogers

Also Present Virtually:

Councillor Amanda Watkins, Leader of the Opposition, Labour Group

Councillor Les Sibley, Leader of the Independent Group

Officers:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive

Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities

Stephen Hinds, Corporate Director Resources and Transformation

Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance & S151 Officer

Nicola Riley, Assistant Director Housing and Wellbeing

Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

David Peckford, Assistant Director Planning & Development

Christina Cherry, Planning Policy, Conservation & Design Manager

Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

Officers Attending Virtually:

Shona Ware, Assistant Director Customer Focus

Richard Smith, Head of Housing

91 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Watkins, Leader of the Opposition, Labour Group, Councillor Sibley, Leader of the Independent Group, Councillor Chapman and Councillor Roger to the meeting and invited them to indicate if they wished to speak on any item.

93 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 January 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

94 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

95 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

96 **Budget Setting for 2025/26 and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy up to 2029/30**

The Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report for Executive to consider and approve the Budget Setting for 2025/26 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2029/30 as per the recommendations.

Executive members thanked the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Regeneration and Property, Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) and the Finance team for their hard work in putting forward the proposed budget.

Resolved

- (1) That authority be delegated to the Section 151 Officer (S151), following consultation with the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Member for Finance, Regeneration and Property to complete the legal Council Tax

calculations once all the information required has been received and submit as appendices to the budget report to Council.

- (2) That authority be delegated to the S151 Officer, following consultation with the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Regeneration and Property to make appropriate changes to the Executive's proposed budget to Council including policies and plans.
- (3) That Council be recommended to approve the proposed Fees and Charges schedule for 2025/26 and statutory notices be placed where required.
- (4) That Council be recommended to consider and note the Equality Impact Assessments of the Budget.
- (5) That Council be recommended to approve the Corporate Plan and to note the Internal Perspectives.
- (6) That, in relation to the Revenue Budget Strategy and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), Council be recommended to approve:
 - i. The net revenue budget for the financial year commencing on 1 April 2025, as set out below, and further analysed in the Budget Book.

Directorate; Net budget 2025/26 £m
Communities: 12.120
Resources: 7.528
Service Sub-total: 19.648
Corporate Costs: 3.926
Policy Contingency: 2.620
Net Cost of Services: 26.194
 - ii. The MTFS and Revenue Budget 2025/26, including the Savings Proposals and Investments.
- (7) That, in relation to Council Tax, Council be recommended to approve:
 - i. An increase in the Basic Amount of Council Tax for Cherwell District Council for the financial year beginning on 1 April 2025 of £5, resulting in a Band D charge of £158.50 per annum.
 - ii. That for long term empty properties, from 1 April 2025 an additional council tax premium will be charged of 100 per cent for properties empty for one year or more, replacing the current 100 per cent premium that begins after 2 years of a property being empty. All other empty property premiums will remain.
- (8) That, in relation to the Capital Programme and related strategies, Council be recommended to approve:
 - i. The Capital Bid(s) and Capital Programme.

- ii. The Capital and Investment Strategy 2025/26, including the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy.
 - iii. The Treasury Management Strategy, including the Prudential Indicators, and Affordable Borrowing Limit for 2025/26.
- (9) That, in relation to reserves, Council be recommended to approve:
- i. A minimum level of General Balances of £7.8m.
 - ii. The Reserves Policy.
 - iii. The medium-term reserves plan.
- (10) That Council be recommended to approve The Pay Policy Statement, as required by the Localism Act 2010.

Reasons

This report provides information around the various building blocks that make up the proposed budget for 2025/26 and beyond, allowing members to consider and scrutinise the elements of the budget and provide advice and guidance to council to help further shape both budget setting for 2025/26 and the MTFS up to 2029/30.

Alternative options

It is a legal requirement to set a balanced budget and the recommendations as outlined set out a way to achieve this. The following alternative option has been identified and rejected for the reasons set out below.

Option 1: To reject the current proposals and make alternative recommendations. Members will not be aware of the medium-term financial forecast or implications of alternatives if they choose to take this option.

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New Cherwell District Council Housing Strategy 2025-2030

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing submitted a report to seek approval for the new Cherwell District Council Housing Strategy 2025-2030.

In response to a question from the Leader of the Independent regarding whether any sites in the district had been identified as suitable for keyworker housing, the Portfolio Holder for Housing explained that keyworker housing was important and the Strategy was broad enough to allow for future discussions on this.

Resolved

- (1) That the Cherwell District Council Housing Strategy 2025-2030 be approved.

Reasons

It is important that the Council has up to date policies for its key service areas and it is important that they are legislatively and operationally sound. A periodic review of policies is therefore appropriate.

Alternative options

Option 1: Not bring forward a new Housing Strategy. This is rejected as it is a best practice that the Council produces and reviews its housing strategy.

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Annual Monitoring Report 2024

The Assistant Director Planning and Development submitted a report to seek approval for publication the 2024 Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) which included a housing land supply update (December 2024). The report also sought approval of the accompanying updates to the Local Plan's Infrastructure Delivery Plan and Brownfield Land Register update (December 2024).

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development explained that the most significant conclusions were that Cherwell continued to deliver homes and employment land, albeit fewer homes than in recent years, and affordable housing completions had increased. The Council could not however, now demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing land and the preparation of an action plan to assist housing delivery was recommended.

In response to comments from Executive members, the Leader of the Opposition and Councillor Chapman, the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development explained that the increase in local housing need was due to the Government revising the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the standard method in December 2024 and confirmed the importance of the Local Plan being submitted to the Planning Inspectorate as soon as possible.

The Housing Delivery Action Plan work would include consideration of developments with planning permission that were not being progressed and infrastructure issues and there would be opportunity for all Members to have input. Additionally, at its 28 January 2025 meeting, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) had requested that the Action Plan be submitted to a future OSC meeting.

Resolved

- (1) That the 2024 Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) including a Housing Land Supply Statement and a 2023/24 Infrastructure Delivery Plan update be approved for publication.
- (2) That the 2023/24 Brownfield Land Register be approved for publication.

- (3) That the Assistant Director Planning and Development be instructed to prepare a Housing Delivery Action Plan in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management.
- (4) That the Assistant Director Planning and Development be authorised to approve the final presentation of the AMR and Brownfield Land Register and to make any necessary minor administrative amendments and corrections to them prior to formal publication and in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management.

Reasons

The Annual Monitoring Report provides important information to measure the effectiveness of planning policies and to assist policy making and development management decision making. It is the statutory mechanism for monitoring housing delivery.

Its most significant conclusions are that Cherwell continues to deliver homes and employment land, albeit fewer homes than in recent years. Affordable housing completions has increased. The Council cannot however, now demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing land and the preparation of an action plan to assist housing delivery is recommended.

It is recommended that the AMR and Brownfield Land Register be approved for publication.

Alternative options

Option 1: Deferment to seek significant amendment of the: 2024 Annual Monitoring Report, Infrastructure Delivery Plan or Brownfield Land Register Officers consider the documents to comprise robust factual reporting and updating against relevant indicators and requirements, supported by data and research. Members are therefore asked to consider amendment through delegation and consultation with the Portfolio Holder should they consider significant changes to be necessary.

Option 2: Not to approve the documents for publication
Production of an Authorities Monitoring Report is a statutory requirement and the AMR's wider information supports the Local Plan implementation and review. Updating the Brownfield Land Register is also a statutory requirement. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan is required to monitor and support delivery of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 and its Partial Review.

Finance, Performance and Risk Monitoring Report Quarter 3 2024-25

The Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Assistant Director Customer Focus submitted a report to report to Executive the council's forecast financial position, performance and risk as at the end of the Quarter 3 2024-25.

Resolved

- (1) That the council's financial, performance and risk report as at the end of Quarter 3 2024 -25 be noted.
- (2) That the reprofiling of capital projects beyond 2024/25 and the subsequent update to the programme budget for this financial year 2024/25 be approved.
- (3) That the Use of Reserve Requests (Annex to the Minutes as set out in the Minute Book) be approved.
- (4) That the proposed write offs (Exempt Annex to the Minutes as set out in the Minute Book) be approved.
- (5) That the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) underspend of (£1.600m) due to the reprofiling of capital projects within the programme be noted and the moving of this to the Projects Reserve (Annexes to the Minutes as set out in the Minute Book) be approved.

Reasons

The report updates Executive on the projected year-end financial position of the council for 2024/25, and performance and risk position as of the end of Quarter 3 2024-25. Regular reporting is key to good governance and demonstrates that the council is actively managing its resources sustainably.

Alternative options

Option 1: This report summarises the council's forecast financial position up to the end of March 2025, and performance and risk position as of the end of Quarter 3 2024-25, therefore there are no alternative options to consider.

100 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

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

101 **Finance, Performance and Risk Monitoring Report Quarter 3 2024-25 - Exempt Appendix**

There being no questions on the exempt appendix, it had been agreed under item 10 (Minute 99).

The meeting ended at 7.22 pm

Chairman:

Date:

Appendix 5 - Reserves and Grant Funding

Uses of/ (Contributions to) Reserves

Specific requests

Directorate	Type	Description	Reason	Amount £m
Resources	Earmarked	Transformation Reserve Request	To fund the transformation ongoing projects across the council.	0.120
Resources	Earmarked	Projects Reserve	To move unspent MRP to the Projects Reserve	(1.600)
Total Earmarked Reserves				(1.480)
Communities	Grant	Homelessness Prevention Grant	To fund the ongoing temporary accommodation costs and also the hardship prevention discretionary costs	0.164
Total Ringfenced Grants				0.164