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Cherwell District Council

Executive

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held at 39 Castle Quay, Banbury, OX16 5FD, on 2 December 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 Nick Cotter, Portfolio Holder for Housing
Councillor Ian Middleton, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services
Councillor Robert Parkinson, Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities
Councillor Rob Pattenden, Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities

Also Present:

Councillor David Rogers, Deputy Leader Cherwell Independent and Alliance;
and, Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Also Present Virtually:

Councillor Amanda Watkins, Leader of the Labour Group
Councillor Les Sibley, Leader of the Independent Group

Officers:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive
Ian Boll, Executive Director Place & Regeneration
Stephen Hinds, Executive Director Resources
Nicola Riley, Interim Executive Director Neighbourhood Services
Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance & S151 Officer
Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
David Peckford, Assistant Director Planning
Heidi Radcliffe Hill, Interim Head of Chief Executive's Office
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

Officers Attending Virtually:

Mona Walsh, Assistant Director - Property
Richard Smith, Head of Housing
Christina Cherry, Planning Policy, Conservation & Design Manager
Emma Faulkner, Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead

66 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Rogers, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Deputy Leader of the Cherwell Conservative and Independent Alliance, who, as proposer of the motion, would be speaking in respect of item 7, Response to Motion: Planning Support for Town and Parish Councils; Councillor Watkins, Leader of the Labour Group; and, Councillor Sibley, Leader of the Independent Group.

68 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2025 and the special meeting held on 13 November 2025 were agreed as correct records and signed by the Chair.

69 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair referred to the illegal landfill in Kidlington and advised that the previous week a joint letter from himself and the Leader of Oxfordshire County Council had been sent to the Prime Minister making it clear on behalf of the Councils that it was very important that the site was cleared as soon as possible. The Councils could not for the criminal investigation. It was very important that it was dealt with, as residents expect, so the Environment Agency and partners were being encouraged to move forward quickly. The Government was being called on to release forward funding to enable the clearance to take place.

The Chair confirmed that the council's proposal for local government reorganisation had been submitted to the Government last Thursday ahead of the deadline. The proposal had been submitted jointly with South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, West Oxfordshire and West Berkshire Councils. Feedback from the Government on the proposal was expected next year.

70 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

71 **Response to Motion: Planning Support for Town and Parish Councils**

Executive Director for Place and Regeneration to agree the response to the motion raised at the Council meeting on 20 October with regard to planning support for Town and Parish Councils. To seek approval for the allocation of £15,000 to provide targeted support to parish and town councils (PCs/TCs) in responding effectively to large-scale planning applications.

Councillor Rogers, proposer of the motion, addressed Executive and commented that he was very pleased with the response, which acknowledged the importance of engaging and working with Town and Parish Councils.

Resolved

- (1) That the in-year funding of up to £15,000 for the funding of a support package to Town and Parish Councils to respond to planning applications be approved.
- (2) That the virement of £15,000 from Health and Wellbeing (this budget was originally intended for the heating hardship fund, however the Government reinstated the winter fuel allowance national scheme, so this is no longer required) to Planning and Development Management be approved.

Reasons

That Executive approves the allocation of £15,000 to deliver the above support package, enabling parish councils to engage more effectively with large-scale planning applications and contribute meaningfully to the planning process.

Alternative options

Option 1: Do Nothing. With a number of significant applications including nationally significant infrastructure projects, this option is not recommended as parish councils will not have access to make appropriate representations.

72 **Executive Response to Overview and Scrutiny Recommendations**

The Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Office submitted a report to present the draft Executive responses to four sets of recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny Committee, following the presentation of the scrutiny reports to the Executive on 7 October 2025.

The Chair congratulated Councillor Rogers on his recent appointment as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Resolved

- (1) That the Executive Responses to the Overview and Scrutiny Recommendations in respect of Planning Application Appeals, Climate Action, Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and the Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership be agreed.

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 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

73

Infrastructure Funding Statement 2024-2025

The Head of Development Management submitted a report to seek approval of the Council's Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) 2024-25 for publication by 31 December 2025.

In considering the report, Executive members sought clarification as to why there were no funds in 2024/25 for green infrastructure and, in respect of s106 obligations delivered, the annual variation between funds received and funds spent.

The Assistant Director Planning explained that the IFS gave a picture over a period of time. In particular for larger strategic developments, there were trigger points which may kick in over a period of years. It could therefore be some years before some of the triggers were reached and funds received and then a further period of time before funds were spent. The Assistant Director Planning undertook to liaise with the Head of Development Management who would provide a more response incorporating more detail behind the figures.

Resolved

- (1) That approve the Infrastructure Funding Statement 24-25 be approved for publication by 31 December 2025, subject to any final changes considered to be necessary by the Head of Development Management to secure accuracy in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management.

Reasons

The publication of an Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) is a statutory requirement that provides transparency and accessibility to information about

developer contributions secured by the Council through Section 106 Agreements.

The report has been produced in collaboration with Financial Services and the information contained within it is considered to represent the most robust data available at this time.

Alternative options

Option 1: Not to bring forward and Infrastructure Funding Statement. This is not a lawful option and would leave the Council in breach of its statutory duty.

Option 2: Seek review of the key statistics and proposed Infrastructure Funding Statement. Officers consider that this is not required as the information is the most accurate and available at this time.

74

Annual Monitoring Report (Planning) 2025

The Assistant Director Planning submitted a report to seek approval for publication of the 2025 Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) which included a five-year housing land supply update (as at 31 October 2025). The report also sought approval of the accompanying updates to the Local Plan's Infrastructure Delivery Plan and Brownfield Land Register update (December 2025) and the Regulation 10A review of the adopted policies in the Cherwell Local Plan 2011 – 2031 (Part 1) Partial Review – Oxford's Unmet Housing Need. (The Partial Review).

In considering the report, Executive members noted that 11,000 homes had been granted permission but were, as yet, unbuilt and these figures were not taken into account by the Government when assessing housing delivery, which resulted in an inaccurate picture of local performance and put pressure on the council to approve planning developments.

In response to a query regarding what the council could do to hold developers accountable and put pressure on developers to bring developments forward, the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management explained that the Area Oversight Groups (AOGs) played an important role, Developer Forums were being organised, PR8 was coming forward and the Oxford Growth Commission was also doing work on this.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Regeneration and Property reminded Members that Executive had agreed funding for the AOGs, that would allow them to identify issues with housing land supply and housing delivery. This had resulted in some additional support and external funding from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government in relation to the delivery of housing locally and finding the barriers to ensuring developments could be delivered.

Whilst noting the action the council was taking, at the request of Executive, the Chair, as Leader of the Council, undertook to write to Minister for Housing

setting out the predicament and put pressure on the Government to recognise the situation as well as request that they speed up their infrastructure, including Highways England as appropriate infrastructure was essential alongside any housing development.

Resolved

- (1) That the 2025 Annual Monitoring Report (AMR), including a Housing Land Supply Statement and 2024/25 Infrastructure Delivery Plan update be approved for publication.
- (2) That the 2024/25 Brownfield Land Register be approved for publication.
- (3) That the review of the adopted policies in the Cherwell Local Plan 2011 – 2031 (Part 1) Partial Review – Oxford's Unmet Housing Need under Regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 be approved.
- (4) That the Assistant Director Planning 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 its land supply position continues to be challenging following the outcome of a planning appeal requiring combined assessment of the positions for Cherwell's and Oxford's needs and also due to the dependency on the rate of housebuilding. Affordable housing completions have decreased slightly although significantly more social rented homes were provided. Although the district has a high level of planning permission, officers will continue to pursue the objectives of the Housing Delivery Action Plan previously approved by the Executive.

Alternative options

Option 1: Deferment to seek significant amendment of the: 2025 Annual Monitoring Report, Infrastructure Delivery Plan, Brownfield Land Register or Regulation 10A Review.

The documents presented comprise technical documents which would support future decision making. They have been prepared to comply with planning legislation and guidance. Professional planning judgement and legal advice has informed the policy review. Monitoring is informed by factual

reporting and updating against relevant indicators and requirements, supported by data and research.

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. The Regulation 10A review is also a statutory requirement as the Partial Review Plan is now five years' old.

75

Flexible Home Improvement Loans Limited - Future of Company

The Interim Executive Director Neighbourhood Services submitted a report to update the Executive on Flexible Home Improvement Loans Limited (FHIL) and its status, the alternative governance structures proposed for the company and to agree the preferred model as stated within the recommendations.

In response to a question regarding the benefits of the scheme to the council, the Head of Housing explained that numerous councils in England were involved in similar projects. Following the receipt of grant funding, FHIL had been established in 2008 as a not-for-profit company, limited by guarantee, to administer home improvement loans on behalf of its local authority members. FHIL currently had twelve members, including Cherwell District Council. Local authorities assisted residents to apply for the scheme but did not provide the loans.

The Head of Housing confirmed that all twelve partners were considering a similar report, and it was anticipated that all would agree the recommendations. The Interim Executive Director Neighbourhood Services confirmed that two thirds of the

If response to a query regarding how Cherwell residents had benefited from the scheme and how many legacy loans there were in the district, the Head of Housing undertook to provide the information to Executive members after the meeting.

Resolved

- (1) That authority be delegated to the Executive Director Neighbourhood Services to enter into negotiations to form a consortium with other Local Authority members.
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Executive Director Neighbourhood Services to engage with the procurement of a Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) regulated provider to undertake loan administration services on behalf of the consortium.

- (3) That the Executive Director Neighbourhood Services be authorised to engage with the winding up of Flexible Home Improvement Loans Limited once the net assets have been transferred with the appropriate safeguards.
- (4) That authority be delegated to the Executive Director Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer, to negotiate and agree new contracts pertaining to the future of Flexible Home Improvement Loans Limited on behalf of the Council.

Reasons

The future of Flexible Home Improvement Loans Limited needs to be decided given the intentions of the host authority, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The decisions made need to give account to our legal obligations. Both within the Memorandum of Association and in accordance with Companies Act, due to Flexible Home Improvement Loans Limited being a Limited Company of which the Council has an appointed Director.

Alternative options

Option 1: Another member council, including Cherwell DC, takes over the role of managing Flexible Home Improvement Loans Limited (FHIL). This option is not considered viable as there are no other authorities willing to host FHIL. Cherwell DC does not have the capacity or expertise to host the limited company.

Option 2: Each Council administers its own loans. This option is not considered viable as if a local authority ceases to be a member, it is not permitted to take any funds out of the available fund for its own benefit. When borrowers pay back a loan, councils must ensure that the loan is paid back to the central lending fund.

Option 3: Do nothing. This option is not viable due to Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) signalling its intentions in not being willing to be the host authority. RBWM considers the hosting of FHIL an unnecessary burden in time, effort and resource. This is stated in its Cabinet report.

Thames Valley Devolution Expression of Interest Endorsement

The Executive Director Place and Regeneration submitted a report which sought endorsement of an Expression of Interest (EOI) to be made by Oxfordshire County Council to Government. This was in response to the Government's devolution policy and sought to position our region in the next round of devolution for the purpose of creating a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA).

Resolved

- (1) That the benefits from the proposed devolution of powers and functions be endorsed and it be agreed to continue building on the collaborative approach across the region to date.
- (2) That the Expression of Interest (EOI) to be submitted by Oxfordshire County Council as the upper-tier authority to Government be endorsed, noting that the EOI is designed to proactively position our region for early consideration in the next wave of the Devolution Programme.
- (3) That the Expression of Interest be acknowledged as an initial invitation to Government, opening further dialogue and engagement, and not a decision to establish a Strategic Authority.
- (4) That it be agreed that a further report will be brought to Executive prior to any final decision by the County Council as upper-tier authority on the creation of a Strategic Authority.
- (5) That it be noted that the informal Devolution Programme Board will oversee discussions with Government, ensuring robust governance and stakeholder engagement by elected members throughout this process.

Reasons

Opting to begin further discussions with Government on devolution would allow the Council to lead the definition of the strategic authority for our region. This will provide choice over the geography and the ability to determine the key priorities for our area.

Should this Council endorse a Mayoral Strategic Authority at a future meeting, it would have a seat at the Council of Nations and the Regions influencing government policy and ensuring local community voice is heard.

Alternative options

The White Paper is clear that the Government intends that all of England be devolved by default and is committed to ending the deals-based approach. The Government will also legislate for a ministerial directive, which will enable it to directly create Strategic Authorities in any places where local leaders in that region have not been able to agree how to access devolved powers. Therefore the “do nothing” option could mean Government legislating on our behalf for devolution.

Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2026-2027

The Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report to enable Executive to consider the proposed banded scheme for Council Tax Reduction (CTR) for 2026/2027.

In response to a query if pension credit was also applicable as a passported benefit as was not listed, the Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) understood to clarify after the meeting.

Resolved

- (1) That the report and any financial implications for the Council be noted.
- (2) That the comments of Budget Planning Committee, who considered the report at their 8 July 2025 meeting and recommended that the current scheme (adjusted for inflationary purposes be retained for 2026/27, be noted.
- (3) That Council be recommended to retain the current scheme for 2026/27.

Reasons

The current scheme is understood by customers and has enabled them to budget for their council tax payments. One of the main advantages of the banded scheme is that it reduces the number of changes that the customer will experience enabling more effective personal budgeting. There is still a lot of financial uncertainty for many customers and in the current financial climate with the ongoing cost of living crisis it is therefore recommended that the existing scheme should be retained for 2026/27.

Budget Planning Committee considered the proposed CTRS scheme for 2026/27 at its meeting on 8 July 2025 and resolved that the Executive be recommended to agree that the current scheme (adjusted for inflationary purposes) be retained for 2026/27.

Alternative options

The alternative option is to undertake a review of the current CTRS scheme but the rationale for not taking this course of action is set out under "reasons".

Finance Monitoring Report October 2025

The Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report to report to the Executive the council's forecast year-end financial position as at the end of the October 2025.

Resolved

- (1) That the council's financial management report as at the end of October 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 Council be recommended approve the allocation of £1.65m capital budget to undertake roof replacement works at Castle Quay.

Reasons

The report updates the Committee 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.

79 Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved

That, under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the ground that, if the public and press were present, it would be likely that exempt information falling under the provisions of Schedule 12A, Part 1, Paragraph 3 would be disclosed to them, and that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

80 Approval to Appoint a Contract for the Provision of the Council's External Print and Mail (Hybrid Mail)

The Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted an exempt report which sought approval to award a contract for the provision of the Council's external printing and postage, also referred to as Hybrid Mail Solution to Financial Data Management following a competitive procurement process.

Resolved

- (1) That the contract for external print and mail contract be awarded to the successful bidder, as set out in the exempt decisions.
- (2) That authority be delegated to Assistant Director Law & Governance & Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer, to enter into a contract with the successful bidder.

Reasons

Hybrid Mail is an effective cost saving and efficient solutions to manage both digital and physical mail, it offers significant benefits, such as reducing operational costs, saving time, improving quality and consistency, enhancing security and compliance and providing detailed tracking and reporting.

Alternative options

Option 1: The current revenues and benefits mail contract has expired, and we are in standard terms and conditions. The Council could decide to do nothing and continue to use the more traditional services for external print and posting. However, by doing so, it would not realise the potential cost savings of using a hybrid mail solution.

The meeting ended at 7.55 pm

Chair:

Date:

Annex to Minutes - Reserves and Grant Funding

Uses of/ (Contributions to) Reserves

Specific requests

Directorate	Type	Description	Reason	Amount £m
Place & Regeneration	Reserve	Climate Action Reserve	To extend the pathways study expanding on the current net zero study to further develop mitigation measures and develop our net zero strategy.	0.005
Total Earmarked Reserves				0.005
Total Grants				0.000