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Cherwell

DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Committee: Executive
Date: Tuesday 7 April 2026
Time: 6.30 pm
Venue: 39 Castle Quay, Banbury, OX16 5FD

Membership

**Councillor David Hingley
(Chair)**

Councillor Tom Beckett
Councillor Jean Conway
Councillor Ian Middleton

Councillor Lesley McLean (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Chris Brant
Councillor Nick Cotter
Councillor Rob Pattenden

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence

2. Declarations of Interest

Members are asked to declare any interest and the nature of that interest that they may have in any of the items under consideration at this meeting.

3. Petitions and Requests to Address the Meeting

The Chairman to report on any requests to submit petitions or to address the meeting.

4. Minutes (Pages 7 - 18)

To confirm as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2026.

5. Chair's Announcements

To receive communications from the Chair.

6. **Urgent Business**

The Chair to advise whether they have agreed to any item of urgent business being admitted to the agenda.

7. **Climate Action Plan 2026-27** (Pages 19 - 36)

Report of Head of Biodiversity and Climate Resilience

Purpose of report

To seek the Executive's approval of the Climate Action Plan for 2026-27, which is attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

Recommendations

The Executive resolves:

- 1.1 To adopt the Climate Action Plan (CAP) for the 2026-27 financial year.
- 1.2 To note that following the adoption Climate Action Plan, Executive will receive an annual update on delivery progress.

8. **Response to the Planning Advisory Service's Planning Committee Review** (Pages 37 - 90)

Report of Assistant Director Planning

Purpose of report

To advise the Executive on how the Council is responding to the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Review of Planning Committee Decision Making.

Recommendations

The Executive resolves:

- 1.1 To note the work in progress in responding to the PAS recommendations and advice.

9. **Corporate Performance and Insight Strategy 2026/27** (Pages 91 - 116)

Report of Head of Chief Executive's Officer

Purpose of report

The report provides an overview of the proposed Corporate Performance and Insight Strategy 2026/27, including proposed key performance indicators and annual delivery plan milestones to be reported across the new financial year.

Recommendations

The Executive resolves:

- 1.1 To review and approve the new Corporate Performance & Insight Strategy presented in Appendix 1, Key Performance Indicators as proposed in Appendix 2.
- 1.2 To note the Annual Delivery Plan (ADP) Milestones 2026/27 (as approved as part of the Budget) included in Appendix 3 for information.
- 1.3 To consider the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recommendation to incorporate additional performance measures for evaluating the Castle Quay investment, ensuring that social impact, environmental outcomes and growth potential are monitored alongside the existing financial and treasury management indicators.

10. Updated Procurement Strategy (Pages 117 - 154)

Report of Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

Purpose of report

This report seeks the approval of Executive for the new Procurement Strategy.

Recommendations

The Executive resolves:

- 1.1 To approve the new Procurement Strategy.

11. Acceptance of MHCLG Large-Scale Housing Development Grant Funding (Pages 155 - 168)

Report of Executive Director Place and Regeneration

Purpose of report

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has provided £500,000 of specific grant funding for non-statutory feasibility work to test the strategic case for large-scale housing development. This includes capacity funding, technical studies and financial modelling (see Appendix 1 MOU) This report seeks approval of associated budget virement, and to agree programme delivery and governance arrangements.

Recommendations

The Executive resolves:

- 1.1 To agree to increase both the Regeneration and Economy income budget in recognition of the grant income and the expenditure budget for associated works.
- 1.2 To delegate to the Executive Director for Place and Regeneration, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, the development of a programme in support of the grant objectives.
- 1.3 To note that procurement of specialist consultancy support and other external resources required to deliver the programme will be undertaken in accordance with the Council's constitution and procurement procedures and that further authorisations may be required as individual commissions are scoped.

12. Exclusion of the Press and Public

The following reports contain exempt information as defined in the following paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of Local Government Act 1972.

3 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

Members are reminded that whilst the following items have been marked as exempt, it is for the meeting to decide whether or not to consider them in private or in public. In making the decision, Members should balance the interests of individuals or the Council itself in having access to the information. In considering their discretion members should also be mindful of the advice of Council Officers.

No representations have been received from the public requesting that this item be considered in public.

Should Members decide not to make decisions in public, they are recommended to pass the following recommendation:

“That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the ground that, if the public and press were present, it would be likely that exempt information falling under the provision 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.”

13. Outline Business Case – Digital Planning Improvement Programme (Pages 169 - 220)

Exempt report of Executive Director Place and Regeneration

14. Environmental Services Operational Transformation and Improvement (Pages 221 - 246)

Exempt report of Executive Director Neighbourhood Services

15. **Outline Business Case: Customer Experience Strategy, Customer Front Door** (Pages 247 - 296)

Exempt report of Executive Director Resources

16. **Approval to Appoint a Contract for the Provision of a Responsive Repairs and Maintenance Service** (Pages 297 - 302)

Exempt report of Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing

17. **Property Management Contract, Castle Quay Centre, Banbury** (Pages 303 - 312)

Exempt report of Assistant Director Property

Councillors are requested to collect any post from their pigeon hole in the Members' Lounge before or at the end of the meeting.

Information about this Agenda

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence should be notified to democracy@cherwell-dc.gov.uk or 01295 221534 prior to the start of the meeting.

Declarations of Interest

Members are asked to declare interests at item 2 on the agenda or if arriving after the start of the meeting, at the start of the relevant agenda item.

Local Government and Finance Act 1992 – Budget Setting, Contracts & Supplementary Estimates

Members are reminded that any member who is two months in arrears with Council Tax must declare the fact and may speak but not vote on any decision which involves budget setting, extending or agreeing contracts or incurring expenditure not provided for in the agreed budget for a given year and could affect calculations on the level of Council Tax.

Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

This agenda constitutes the 5-day notice required by Regulation 5 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 in terms of the intention to consider an item of business in private.

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Queries Regarding this Agenda

Please contact Natasha Clark, Democratic and Elections democracy@cherwell-dc.gov.uk, 01295 221534

Shiraz Sheikh
Monitoring Officer

Published on Thursday 26 March 2026

Cherwell District Council

Executive

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held at 39 Castle Quay, Banbury, OX16 5FD, on 3 March 2026 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 Rob Pattenden, Portfolio Holder for Healthy and Safe Communities

In Attendance Virtually:

Councillor Les Sibley, Leader of the Independent Group
Councillor Donna Ford
Councillor Dr Chukwudi Okeke

Officers:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive
Ian Boll, Executive Director Place & Regeneration
Stephen Hinds, Executive Director Resources
Kristian Aspinall, Executive Director Neighbourhood Services
Nicola Riley, Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing (Interim Executive Director Neighbourhood Services, at the time of agenda publication)
Joanne Kaye, Head of Finance and Deputy S151 Officer
Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
David Peckford, Assistant Director Planning
Kaimi Ithia, Head of Chief Executive's Office
Jacey Scott, Head of Revenues and Benefits
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

Officers Attending Virtually:

Mona Walsh, Assistant Director - Property
Claire Cox, Assistant Director Human Resources

109 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Ford, who, as proposer of the motion, would be speaking in respect of item 7, Response to Motion: Free Parking on Remembrance Sunday; Councillor Dr Okeke, who as proposer of the motion, would be speaking in respect of item 8, Non-Domestic Rate Discretionary Relief Policy and Response to Motion: Supporting our High Streets”; and, Councillor Sibley, Leader of the Independent Group.

111 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2026 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

112 **Chair's Announcements**

There were no Chair's announcements.

113 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

114 **Response to Motion: Free Parking on Remembrance Sunday**

The Assistant Director Property submitted a report to respond to the motion raised at Full Council in December 2025 requesting Executive to consider providing free car parking each year in Council owned and managed car parks on Remembrance Sunday.

Councillor Ford, who had proposed the motion at Council, thanked Executive for the positive response agreeing to implement the motion.

In considering the report, Executive members thanked Councillor Ford for bringing the motion forward. The provision of free parking in Council owned and managed car parks on Remembrance Sunday, was, as the motion set out, a practical and meaningful gesture of support for the Armed Forces community.

Resolved

- (1) That free car parking be provided each year in Council owned and managed car parks, except those at Castle Quay, on Remembrance Sunday.

Reasons

Provision of free car parking in council owned car parks (excluding Castle Quay) supports Remembrance Sunday is a national day of remembrance to honour the service and sacrifice of the Armed Forces, veterans, and their families.

Alternative options

Option 1: Not supporting the motion could infer that the Council is not supportive of the wider purpose and aims of Remembrance Sunday.

115

Non-Domestic Rate Discretionary Relief Policy and Response to Motion, "Supporting our High Streets"

The Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report to inform Executive of the reviewed policy for Non-Domestic Rate Discretionary Rate Relief and seek approval of the updated policy and respond to the motion from Council on supporting our high streets.

Councillor Dr Okeke, who had proposed the motion at Council, addressed Executive, commenting on the importance of supporting local businesses and thanked Executive for the response.

Resolved

- (1) That the contents of the reviewed policy for Non-Domestic Rate Discretionary Rate Relief be noted.
- (2) That the policy for Non-Domestic Rate Discretionary Rate Relief be approved.
- (3) That the response to the motion "Supporting our High Streets" be noted.

Reasons

The Non-Domestic Rate Discretionary Rate Relief policy was last reviewed in 2024. It is good practice to review policies to ensure they remain relevant and in line with supporting the delivery of the Council's policies.

The report also sets out a response to the motion "Supporting our High Streets". Council supports the intent of the motion and acknowledges the ongoing challenges faced by high streets, including changes in consumer behaviour, rising costs, and the legacy of wider economic disruption. Cherwell District Council has already taken, and continues to take, a range of targeted

and place-based actions to support town centres and high streets, working closely with partners and stakeholders.

Alternative options

Option 1: To not approve the discretionary rate relief policy. Members could choose not to agree the proposed policy, but it would mean that we wouldn't be able to continue to support local businesses, charities and voluntary organisations and would also reduce our financial flexibility in the future. The local authority must have a system in place to allow a person to make the request.

116 **Housing Payments Policy**

The Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report to inform Executive of the reviewed policy for Housing Payment (HP), formally known as Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP), and proposed updates.

Resolved

- (1) That the contents of the reviewed policy for Housing Payments be noted.
- (2) That the policy for Housing Payments be approved.

Reasons

Housing Payments are vital for residents in the current economic climate and help to support our most vulnerable residents with housing costs. It is recommended that the policy is endorsed by Executive to continue delivering support to these customers.

Alternative options

Option 1: Returning the funds to Department for Works and Pensions has been rejected as this would not be in line with Cherwell's objectives of continuing to respond to the cost-of-living crisis and working to prevent homelessness.

117 **Biodiversity Duty Report 2024-2025**

The Executive Director Place and Regeneration submitted a report to consider and endorse the Biodiversity Duty Report 2024-25.

Resolved

- (1) That the Biodiversity Duty Report 2024-25 be endorsed.

- (2) That it be noted following the completion and adoption of a Community Biodiversity Plan, an annual update be presented to the Executive.

Reasons

The Biodiversity Duty Report is presented for the reporting year 2024-25 to demonstrate what the Council is doing to conserve and enhance biodiversity, to highlight the relevant policies and objectives that are contributing to meeting the biodiversity objective and where delivery is being achieved. It also identifies the future actions necessary for on-going statutory compliance and to demonstrably improve the variety of the living organisms and ecosystems that comprise Cherwell's natural environment. Members are invited to endorse the report and the proposal for an annual report following the completion of the Community Biodiversity Plan which will also be presented to the Executive.

Alternative options

Option 1: The Executive could decide not to endorse the Biodiversity Duty Report. This option is not recommended as the Report will assist in meeting statutory requirements notwithstanding the on-going commitment to produce the Community Biodiversity Plan within the new Biodiversity and Climate Resilience Service.

118

Whitelands Farm Sports Ground 3G

The Interim Executive Director Neighbourhood Services (at the time of agenda publication) submitted a report to obtain Executive Approval to commence next steps on the development of a new 3G Football Pitch at Whitelands Farm Sports Ground in Bicester. The report outlined any financial risks.

In considering the report, Executive members commended the hard work of officers to secure external funds.

In response to comments from Councillor Ford and Councillor Sibley who welcomed and were supportive of the additional facilities but sought clarification regarding the communication and engagement with Bicester Town Council, the Portfolio Holder for Healthy and Safe Communities explained he had spoken with the Bicester Town Council Policy Committee Chair regarding the signing of the lease agreement. The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing confirmed that CDC had answered all questions raised by Bicester Town Council and confirmed the lease arrangements had now been signed.

The Portfolio Holder for Healthy and Safe Communities confirmed that he, together with the Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing, would be happy to meet Bicester Town Councillors.

Resolved

- (1) That the next steps in developing a new 3G Football Pitch at Whitelands Farm Sports Ground in Bicester, accounting for any financial risk, be approved.

Reasons

An opportunity has been identified to increase and enhance the leisure facilities within Cherwell with the development of a new 3G Football Pitch at Whitelands Farm Sports Ground in Bicester which would add to the current provision. The funding for the proposed new 3G pitch is through identified S106 and partnership funding of up to 75% of project costs with the Football Foundation.

It is recommended that officers are to be instructed to continue to work in partnership with the Football Foundation to seek to secure grant funding. Whilst there is a risk that should the Council not wish to proceed with the project even after a grant offer from the Football Foundation the level of this risk is capped at circa £35,000.

Alternative options

Option 1: Not to apply for grant funding from the Football Foundation
This to be rejected on the basis that without Football Foundation/3rd Party Funding then the delivery of new facilities becomes unaffordable and the unmet demand for 3G pitches in Bicester remains. The ability to deliver on the actions within the Playing Pitch Strategy and provide excellent leisure facilities to residents is extremely important

119 **Finance Monitoring Report January 2026**

The Assistant Director of 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 January 2026.

Resolved

- (1) That the council's financial management report as at the end of January 2026 be noted.
- (2) That the Use of Reserves (Annex to the Minutes as set out in the Minute Book) be approved.
- (3) That Write Offs (exempt Annex to the Minutes as set out in the Minute Book) be approved.
- (4) That the Corporate Debt Policy 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.

120 **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 items 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, Paragraphs 1, 2 and 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.

121 **Finance Monitoring Report January 2026 - Exempt Appendix**

There being no questions on the exempt appendix, this had been agreed as set out under Minute 119.

122 **Thorpe Place Industrial Estate, Banbury – Roof Replacement**

The Assistant Director Property submitted an exempt report in respect of roof replacement at Thorpe Lane Industrial Estate Banbury.

Resolved

(1) As set out in the exempt Minutes.

Reasons

As set out in the exempt Minutes.

Alternative options

As set out in the exempt Minutes.

123 **Approval To Award a Contract for the Provision of the Council's HR and Payroll System and Managed Payroll Service**

The Assistant Director Human Resources submitted an exempt report to seek approval to award a contract for the provision of the Council's HR and Payroll System and Managed Payroll Service

Resolved

(2) As set out in the exempt Minutes.

Reasons

As set out in the exempt Minutes.

Alternative options

As set out in the exempt Minutes.

The meeting ended at 7.36 pm

Chair:

Date:

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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This report is public	
Climate Action Plan 2026-27	
Committee	Executive
Date of Committee	7 April 2026
Portfolio Holder presenting the report	Portfolio Holder for Greener Communities, Councillor Tom Beckett
Date Portfolio Holder agreed report	16 March 2026
Report of	Head of Biodiversity and Climate Resilience, Michael Suddens,

Purpose of report

To seek the Executive's approval of the Climate Action Plan for 2026-27, which is attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

1. Recommendations

The Executive resolves:

- 1.1 To adopt the Climate Action Plan (CAP) for the 2026-27 financial year.
- 1.2 To note that following the adoption Climate Action Plan, Executive will receive an annual update on delivery progress.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Climate Action Plan outlines the key activities of the Council for the 2026-27 financial year to contribute towards net zero commitments for both council operations and the district.
- 2.2 This CAP builds upon the January 2026 update to Executive on progress towards the Council's Climate Action Programme.
- 2.3 The Climate Action Plan 2026-27 has been produced in close collaboration with all Cherwell District Council service areas and is authored by the Biodiversity and Climate Resilience Service, with support from Bioregional. The plan builds on the previous Climate Action Plan 2024-26 and is guided by the Climate Change Framework (2020).
- 2.4 Actions identified align to several significant county-wide initiatives in which Cherwell District Council is an active partner. Most notably, this plan supports Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire (PaZCO), which is endorsed by the Council and was overseen by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.

- 2.5 A total of 37 actions have been identified, which will be managed and monitored through the Council’s Climate Action Programme and progress reported to Executive annually.

Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary			
Finance	<p>There are no finance implications arising directly from this report.</p> <p>Where actions identify measures required to deliver the Council’s net zero commitments and are unable to be funded from existing budgets or new external grants, a business case will need to be prepared for consideration by the Executive.</p> <p>Kimberley Digweed, Finance Business Partner, 11 March 2026</p>			
Legal	<p>There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.</p> <p>The Climate Change Act 2008 set a national target for the UK to reduce its emissions by 80% by 2050 compared to its 1990 levels. While there is no statutory duty placed on Local Authorities under this legislation it is generally understood that local government plays a critical role in achieving these targets.</p> <p>Cherwell declared a climate emergency in 2019 looking to do its part to support the district in becoming carbon net zero, and ensuring that its own operations and activities are carbon net zero by 2030.</p> <p>Climate emergency declarations hold a legally ambiguous position but it is important to note they are a potential mechanism to challenge decisions taken by a local authority who has made one.</p> <p>The Climate Action Plan will help to ensure that we comply with the Councils targets and the Climate Action Act 2008.</p> <p>Denzil John Turbervill, Head of Legal Services, 11 March 2026</p>			
Risk Management	<p>There are no risks arising from the proposed endorsement of the Climate Action Plan 2026-27.</p> <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance & Insight Team Leader, 11 March 2026</p>			
Impact Assessments	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equality Impact				
A Are there any aspects of the	X			The delivery of the Climate Action Plan 2026-27 has many co-benefits, beyond supporting the

proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?				Council's net zero ambitions. These benefits include making communities more resilient to the impacts of climate change and reducing fuel poverty through supporting home energy upgrades for example. Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance & Insight Team Leader, 11 March 2026
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		
Climate & Environmental Impact	X			This report supports the Council's biodiversity and climate resilience ambitions, including reducing carbon emissions and achieving net zero.
ICT & Digital Impact		X		There are no IT/Digital implications.
Data Impact	X			The Climate Action Plan 2026-27 proposes improvements to collection, monitoring and reporting of climate action activities and environmental data such as council greenhouse gas emissions.
Procurement & subsidy		X		N/A
Council Priorities	The report aligns with the Council's strategic priority of Environmental Stewardship and Economic Prosperity, supporting the vision of enabling positive, lasting change and building an inclusive and green economy.			
Human Resources	N/A			
Property	Council operational property is a key source of carbon emissions that this CAP aims to address to meet the Council's net zero commitments.			
Consultation & Engagement	The Climate Team has actively engaged with key internal and external stakeholders to advance actions under the Climate Action Plan.			

Supporting Information

3. Background

- 3.1 The Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and committed to transforming its own estate and operations to net zero by 2030. The Council further committed to doing its part to support the district to become net zero.

3.2 The Climate Action Plan is an internal operational plan for 2026-27 that sets out how the Council will contribute towards its ambition to become a net zero organisation and support climate resilience and decarbonisation across the district.

3.3 The CAP is informed by the following key Cherwell District Council documents:

- Climate Action Plan 2024-26
- Climate Action Framework 2020
- Carbon Management Plan 2022-2025
- District Carbon Pathways and Roadmap to Net Zero Report (2025)
- Commercial and Industrial Emissions Report (2025)
- Internal Emissions Pathway Report (2025)
- Fleet and Depot Decarbonisation Review (2025)

3.4 The CAP is monitored by the Council's Climate Action Programme and is informed by the cross-service Climate Change Programme Steering Group.

4. Details

4.1 The Climate Action Plan 2026-27 identifies actions and projects across a range of carbon emissions sources and enabling themes.

4.2 For Cherwell District Council, each action identifies the emissions area, the goals they would contribute towards, carbon saving potential and key performance indicators to monitor delivery progress. Council actions focus on carbon emissions from fleet, property, staff activities, procurement and enabling areas including funding, governance and monitoring.

4.3 For the district area, each action identifies the emissions area, the goals they would contribute towards and key performance indicators to monitor delivery progress. District actions focus on carbon emissions from transport, households, business, community and enabling areas including planning, evidence bases, communications and engagement.

5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

5.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option1: Do Nothing: This option is not recommended as the previous action plan covered up to the end of 2025-26 financial year only. A refreshed CAP enables stronger programme management and likelihood of realising new opportunities to deliver the Council's net zero ambitions.

Option 2: Delay Decision: This option is not recommended as this CAP covers the 2026-27 financial year only and a delay will reduce the potential impact and benefit of the plan.

Option 3: Do Not Adopt: This option is not recommended as this CAP supports the delivery of the Council's strategic priorities and covers the 2026-27 financial year only, where a delay will reduce the potential impact and benefit of the plan.

6. Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 The Climate Action Plan details the activities of the Council towards its net zero ambitions for the 2026-27 financial year. Members are invited to adopt the action plan and the proposal for Executive to be presented with an annual report on progress.

Decision Information

Key Decision	Yes
Subject to Call in	Yes
If not, why not subject to call in	N/A
Ward(s) Affected	All

Document Information

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Climate Action Plan 2026-27
Background Papers	None
Reference Papers	Climate Action Update, 6 January 2026
Report Author	Michael Suddens, Head of Biodiversity and Climate Resilience
Report Author contact details	Michael.Suddens@cherwell-dc.gov.uk
Executive Director Approval (unless Executive Director or Statutory Officer report)	Ian Boll, Executive Director Place & Regeneration

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Introduction

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Introduction

Climate change is already affecting communities across the world and the need to act has never been more important. While global progress is slow, it remains vital that the UK and Cherwell continue to transition to a net zero and more resilient future. The benefits of climate action go well beyond improving our resilience to climate change and reducing carbon emissions. It helps create warmer homes, cleaner and greener places, lower running costs for the Council and healthier, more resilient communities. The many benefits climate action can bring is why sustainability remains a core priority for Cherwell District Council and why it needs to be embedded across all our services and strategic decision making.

Since declaring a climate emergency in 2019, the Council has taken important steps, including developing a Climate Change Framework and commissioning detailed evidence bases to guide future priorities and activities.

The Climate Action Plan 2026-27 has been produced in close collaboration with all Cherwell District Council service areas and is authored by the Biodiversity and Climate Resilience Service, with support from Bioregional. The plan builds on the previous Climate Action Plan 2024-26 and is guided by the Climate Change Framework (2020).

This document is an internal operational plan that sets out how the council will deliver commitments towards its net zero ambitions. Actions identified align to several significant county-wide initiatives in which Cherwell District Council is an active partner. Most notably, this plan supports Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire (PaZCO), which is endorsed by the Council and overseen by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.

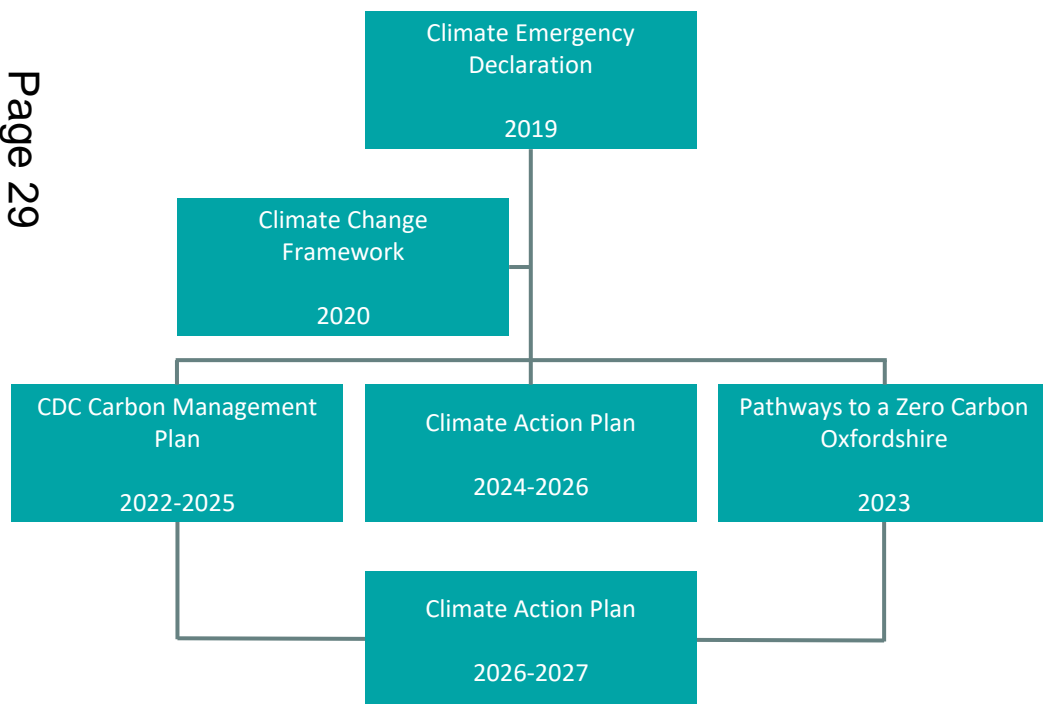


Introduction

The Climate Action Plan 2026-27 is informed by the following key Cherwell District Council documents:

- Climate Action Plan 2024-26
- Climate Action Framework 2020
- Carbon Management Plan 2022-2025
- District Carbon Pathways and Roadmap to Net-Zero Report (2025)
- Commercial and Industrial Emissions Report (2025)
- Internal Emissions Pathway Report (2025)
- Fleet and Depot Decarbonisation Review (2025)

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The Council’s ability to influence emissions varies across its activities. The diagram (below) illustrates the areas where the Council has strong, moderate or limited influence over carbon emission reduction, helping to guide priorities and deliver effective impact.

A wide range of actions across many sources of emissions are included within this plan. Some of the most important actions will not directly reduce emissions but are essential to enable future activity or access to funding.



Climate Action Plan

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Climate Action Plan

The Climate Action Plan 2026-27 is based on 14 goals which support the Council's net-zero ambitions:

Cherwell District Council

1.	Reduce emissions from council buildings to net zero by 2030
2.	Reduce emissions from council fleet to net zero by 2030
3.	Reduce emissions from staff business mileage to net zero by 2030
4.	Reduce the environmental impact of wider council activities (e.g. procurement and staff commuting)
5.	Ensure robust governance and monitoring

Cherwell District

6.	Ensure local planning supports biodiversity and climate resilience
7.	Support emissions reductions from transport
8.	Support emissions reductions from housing
9.	Support emissions reductions from businesses
10.	Support emissions reductions from waste and resource use
11.	Support the local, low-carbon energy transition
12.	Support climate resilience and adaptation
13.	Support biodiversity enhancement and nature recovery
14.	Work in collaboration with local partners and stakeholders

The following key defines 'carbon saving potential' classifications for Cherwell District Council actions.

- Enable = No direct emissions reduction but enables other or future activity.
- Low = Training and engagement that may lead to others to act.
- Medium = Activity which will lead to quantifiable emissions reduction but is limited to influencing overall council emissions.
- High = Significant opportunity to tackle a key source of emissions reported in the Council's annual Greenhouse Gas Report.

Cherwell District Council Actions

Area	Action ID	Action	Emissions Area	Goal Supported	Carbon Saving Potential	KPI
Council	1	Develop and implement a comprehensive EV charging management framework, covering maintenance, monitoring, management and use.	Fleet	2,7	Enable	Framework approved; training rolled out; kWh used in EVs
Council	2	Complete the roll out of Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) to replace diesel use in hard to electrify fleet vehicles.	Fleet	2	High	No. vehicles on HVO; Litres used
Council	3	Review and plan for infrastructure requirements for future EV transition, including fleet depots, network supply upgrade needs and innovative options to overcome grid constraints.	Fleet	2	Enable	Delivery plan agreed
Council	4	Evaluate opportunities for renewable energy across the Council's estate (land and property), including how community energy could support delivery.	Property	1,11	High	No. of opportunities being explored
Council	5	Improve council energy performance by appointing specialist support for utility bill management and contract procurement.	Property	1	Medium	Specialist appointed
Council	6	Identify opportunities to improve energy management through enhancing building management systems.	Property	1	Medium	No. opportunities identified
Council	7	Continue to transition council buildings and leisure facilities to low carbon operations, including delivery of the Capital Works Programme (e.g. Spiceball Leisure Centre Solar PV Wall), switch to low carbon heating sources (e.g. removal of radiant gas heaters), integrate energy-saving measures into routine maintenance and identify building level requirements to meet net zero operations.	Property	1	High	No. of new energy-saving measures/projects complete; Requirements identified
Council	8	Undertake a review to explore opportunities to enhance biodiversity and nature recovery across the Council's estate (land and property) to comply with Biodiversity Duty, support delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and offer potential for local carbon sequestration.	Property	13	Enable	Review complete
Council	9	Review cycling facilities/infrastructure at council owned/controlled properties to ensure adequacy and explore opportunities for funding where required.	Staff	3,4	Low	Review complete

Cherwell District Council Actions

Area	Action ID	Action	Emissions Area	Goal Supported	Carbon Saving Potential	KPI
Council	10	Complete an assessment of council business mileage and staff commuting emissions sources to explore options for decarbonisation.	Staff	3,4,7	High	Review complete
Council	11	Develop and deliver an internal staff awareness and behaviour change campaign that supports sustainable workplace behaviours (e.g. commuting, waste, energy). To include considerations for providing Environmental Awareness e-learning to all staff.	Staff	3,4	Low	No. Viva Engage posts; No. events/communications and reach
Council	12	Consider sustainability requirements (e.g. use of electric vehicles and tools) within the tender specification for the landscape maintenance contract (1st April 2027).	Procurement	4	Medium	New requirements in tender
Council	13	Undertake an assessment of selective procurement activities, including review of upcoming renewals/tenders, engagement with high emission contractors and options for decarbonisation.	Procurement	4	High	Review complete
Council	14	Explore options for reducing waste and improving circular resource management across council services, including operational, collection and construction activities.	Waste/Resources	4,10	High	Review complete
Council	15	Improve data collection for the Council's greenhouse gas reporting, including aligning to the GHG Protocol Standard and consider in-house delivery.	Governance & Monitoring	All	Enable	Review complete
Council	16	Begin to develop a Council Climate Resilience Risk Register to identify high-risk service areas and the actions required to mitigate risk now and in the future.	Governance & Monitoring	5,12	Enable	No. risks identified
Council	17	Embed climate resilience considerations into all service plans and routinely apply the Carbon Impact Assessment Tool to support informed decision making.	Governance & Monitoring	All	Enable	% of Service Plans with climate actions; No. of CIA completed
Council	18	Develop a multi-year strategy and delivery plan for future council climate action activities, to accompany the annual progress update to Executive.	Governance & Monitoring	All	Enable	Strategy and plan complete
Council	19	Identify and secure funding opportunities to support Cherwell's biodiversity and climate resilience ambitions, including innovative solutions and grant funding.	Funding	All	Enable	No. funding bids; funding secured

Cherwell District Actions

Area	Action ID	Action	Emissions Area	Goal Supported	KPI
District	20	Leverage existing partnerships to strengthen collaboration with neighbouring authorities and local partners to strengthen joint communication and engagement with residents and businesses on climate and biodiversity action e.g. Climate Action Oxfordshire, Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership.	Communications & Engagement	All	No. joint campaigns run, No. communications issued
District	21	Celebrate and promote climate and biodiversity projects delivered by the council and local partners, showcasing their positive impact and inspiring further action across the district.	Communications & Engagement	All	No. activities identified and promoted
District	22	Provide clear, ongoing support to residents and communities to reduce waste, recycle and use resources wisely, including water saving, home composting, food waste and low carbon diet advice and initiatives.	Communications & Engagement	10	No. of engagements e.g. No. posts, events and reach
District	23	Promote low carbon travel and energy advice and opportunities across the district by encouraging car sharing, active travel and energy-saving measures in homes and workplaces.	Communications & Engagement	7,8,11	No. of engagements e.g. No. posts, events and reach
District	24	Work with local partners to produce a Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) for Cherwell and the wider county.	Evidence	All	Plan complete
District	25	Work collaboratively with partners and internal service areas to identify opportunities to deliver local energy transition opportunities identified through the Local Area Energy Plan for Cherwell.	Evidence	All	No. opportunities identified/in development
District	26	Identify how local planning (e.g. supporting neighbourhood plans) can strengthen biodiversity and climate resilience using an evidence-led approach (e.g. Local Area Energy Planning), to enable low-carbon infrastructure and design, nature recovery and local renewable energy.	Planning	6	No. opportunities identified
District	27	Integrate climate resilience and nature positive approaches into key planning projects (e.g. NW Bicester Eco-Town and Banbury masterplan).	Planning	All	No. opportunities identified
District	28	Ensure Oxfordshire-wide transport and connectivity priorities are embedded into Cherwell's local strategy and plans, including integration of LCWIP into the Council's Infrastructure Schedule.	Transport	7	No. schemes integrated or supported

Cherwell District Actions

Area	Action ID	Action	Emissions Area	Goal Supported	KPI
District	29	Strengthen EV charging provision across Cherwell, including on council owned and controlled sites (e.g. LEVI), supporting partnership work (Oxfordshire EV infrastructure strategy) and ensuring new and re-developments enhance EV charging capacity.	Transport	7	No. EV chargers
District	30	Improve understanding of the Council's residential assets to identify opportunities for decarbonisation and funding.	Household	8	Review complete
District	31	Work with local partners to deliver existing and new opportunities to support household energy efficiency improvements (e.g. Warm Homes, Heat Pump Ready, Home Improvement Loans).	Household	8,14	No. of schemes supported
District	32	Continue to enforce Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) to encourage landlords to comply with minimum energy efficiency requirements.	Household	8	No. MEES enforcement interventions
District	33	Begin to work with local colleges, training providers and employers to grow the district's green skills pipeline (e.g. EV maintenance, heat pump installation), alongside create apprenticeship and training opportunities through s106 skills plans and social value commitments.	Business	9,14	Partners identified; No. training/apprenticeship opportunities
District	34	Explore opportunities for Cherwell focussed business support and networks to help organisations access resources, tools, grants and guidance (e.g. carbon assessments, action plans, energy efficiency).	Business	9	No. opportunities identified
District	35	Work with agricultural and rural stakeholders to identify opportunities that enhance biodiversity and climate resilience (e.g. sustainable land management, flood risk alleviation, carbon sequestration and nature recovery).	Agriculture	12,13,14	No. opportunities being explored
District	36	Support community groups and parish councils in best practice and advice, including council support for community energy projects across Cherwell to maximise incoming funding opportunities from GB Energy and the Local Power Plan.	Community	All	No. of groups/projects supported
District	37	Work with local partners to enhance biodiversity across Cherwell by supporting collaborative plans (e.g. Oxfordshire Nature Finance Strategy, Local Nature Recovery Strategy) and understand the Council's role in emerging opportunities.	Biodiversity	13,14	No. projects identified or underway

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This report is public	
Response to the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Review of Planning Committee Decision Making	
Committee	Executive
Date of Committee	7 April 2026
Portfolio Holder presenting the report	Portfolio Holder for Planning & Development Management, Councillor Jean Conway
Date Portfolio Holder agreed report	16 March 2026
Report of	Assistant Director Planning, David Peckford

Purpose of report

To advise the Executive on how the Council is responding to the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Review of Planning Committee Decision Making.

1. Recommendations

The Executive resolves:

- 1.1 To note the work in progress in responding to the PAS recommendations and advice.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 A review of the Council's decision-making on planning applications for major developments was undertaken in 2025 by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) which forms part of the Local Government Association (LGA). The context for the review was that for the period April 2022 to March 2024, the percentage of the Council's decisions overturned at appeal slightly exceeded the nationally prescribed threshold of 10%.
- 2.2 The review concluded that the Council had an effective planning committee with professional, knowledgeable officers and members who understand planning issues and the importance of following officer advice. However, a number of recommendations were made in the interest of improvement. This report explains the findings and how the Council has responded.

Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary
Finance	<p>There are no financial implications arising from this report providing that everything is within budget. The Council's response to the recommendations of the PAS review are being managed through service budgets.</p> <p>Kim Digweed, Finance Business Partner, 16 March 2026</p>
Legal	<p>The Legal and Democratic Services teams were engaged in the PAS review and were advised of the findings and recommendations.</p> <p>The solicitor support provided to Planning Committee has been resolved. A constitution review report presented to Council on 16 March recommended that the composition of the Planning Committee be amended to 11 members (with 11 named substitutes) effective from the Municipal Year 2026/2027. This recommendation was adopted by Council.</p> <p>PAS highlighted that there are no sections on equalities, human rights or financial considerations in the Council's reporting template Planning Committees. These sections will be incorporated and will improve transparency on how such considerations are addressed.</p> <p>It is important to consider the legal requirements around holding decision making meetings in public. Any meetings between Members and developers will need to be carried out in conjunction with a clear protocol agreed by the Monitoring Officer.</p> <p>Legal and Democratic Services will continue to provide advice and support to the ongoing work progressing the PAS recommendations as required.</p> <p>Denzil – John Turbervill, Head of Legal Services, 13 March 2026</p>
Risk Management	<p>The on-going response to the PAS recommendations is necessary in the interests of continuous improvement, to place the Council in as strong a position as possible in justifying and defending its planning decisions and to minimise the risk of its decisions being overturned at appeal. These risks are currently being managed and monitored through the service operational risk and the Leadership Risk register, the latter is reported to the Accounts, Audit and Risk and Executive Committees quarterly.</p> <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader, 13 March 2026</p>

Impact Assessments	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equality Impact		x		There is no impact to equality as a direct consequence of this report. Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance & Insight Team Leader, 13 March 2026
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		x		
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		N/A
Climate & Environmental Impact	X			The more action the Council takes to ensure that its planning decisions are as robust and defensible as possible, the more likely that this will result t in sustainable development.
ICT & Digital Impact				N/A
Data Impact				N/A
Procurement & subsidy				N/A
Council Priorities	Business plan priorities for 2025-2026: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing that meets your needs • Supporting environmental sustainability • An enterprising economy with strong and vibrant local centres • Healthy, resilient and engaged communities 			
Human Resources	N/A			
Property	N/A			
Consultation & Engagement	Councillor Jean Conway, Portfolio Holder – Planning & Development Management			

Supporting Information

3. Background

- 3.1. On 26 November 2024, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered a quarterly performance report which indicated that the percentage of the Council's planning decisions overturned at appeal, for major developments, was higher than tolerated threshold percentage. The Committee resolved that a scrutiny working group be established with terms of reference that included consideration of the main reasons for planning application refusals overturned at appeal and any lessons learned.
- 3.2. On 25 February 2025, the Planning and Appeals Scrutiny Working Group held a Spotlight Review with the Assistant Director – Planning and Development and Head of Development Management.
- 3.3. In January 2025, the LGA's Planning Advisory Service (PAS) contacted the Council to advise that Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) was finalising its review of local planning authority performance for the same indicator i.e. for the period April 2022 to March 2024 (and taking account of appeal decisions up until 31 December 2024).
- 3.4. In the period April 2022 to March 2024 the Council determined 115 major applications. Nineteen decisions were appealed, 12 were upheld by the Planning Inspectorate (with two remaining pending). Three were non-determination appeals. As 12 of 115 decisions had been the subject of successful appeals, the Council's overturn percentage was 10.43% which exceeded the government-set threshold of 10%.
- 3.5. PAS, which provides support and training to all authorities, and which liaises with MHCLG on performance, was invited to undertake a review of the Council's decision-making process for major developments. The review included spending a day at the Council's offices on 29 May 2025 to interview officers, Members and external stakeholders. It also entailed a desktop review of decisions and procedures and viewing three Planning Committee meetings.
- 3.6. Prior to the receipt of the PAS report, officers had submitted an exceptional circumstances case to MHCLG as to why the Council should not be 'designated' for exceeding the threshold by one appeal decision (0.43%). On 6 June 2025, confirmation was provided by MHCLG that the Council would not be designated.
- 3.7. The final PAS report was received on 27 August 2025 (available at <https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/18229/cherwell-district-council-planning-committee-review.pdf>) and is attached to this report at Appendix 1.
- 3.8. Appendix 2 to this report provides a tabular summary of the recommendations and advice provided by PAS and an update of the work undertaken and on-going in response.

4. Details

The Findings of the PAS Review

4.1 PAS's overall conclusions included:

1. the Council had an effective planning committee with professional, knowledgeable officers and members who understand planning issues and the importance of following officer advice;
2. the Council had dealt with a high number of contentious housing proposals that had led to a number of appeals where the Planning Inspectorate had not always agreed with the council's position;
3. the planning service was generally well respected by both the development industry and the local community;
4. there were areas for improvement relating to procedure, behaviours, training and communication but that none of these are critical to the council operating a planning committee;
5. the council should reflect on changes consulted upon by the Government with respect to planning committees (a limit of 11 members on a planning committee, a mandatory programme of member training and changes to the performance threshold for quality (from 10% to 5%).

4.2 The key findings were:

1. **Appeals:** of the 17 appeal decisions 11 were from officer delegated decisions of which five of which were allowed (45%). The remaining six were planning committee member overturns, of which four were allowed (67%)
2. **Site visits:** often conducted on an ad hoc basis and not in line with the council's own protocols. Poor attendance and inconsistent application of criteria were noted.
3. **Lack of pre-application engagement with members:** no formal procedures for member involvement in pre-application or pre-committee discussions. A missed opportunity for early resolution of issues with developers and community groups.
4. **Late submission of information:** excessive late information submitted shortly before meetings, undermining transparency and decision-making quality.
5. **Committee size and efficiency:** the current 18-member committee is larger than best practice (9–12 members). This may hinder efficient debate and decision-making. There was an average of five committee items per meeting (with significant variance). Committee time varied from 6 hours 20 minutes to 13 minutes.
6. **Officer reports and presentations:** Impressed by the quality of officer presentations. Reports were generally well-structured and clear, but lacking consistency in areas like equalities, human rights, and financial considerations.

7. **Training gaps among Members:** while training is provided, gaps remain in understanding appeals, conditions, and enforcement. Members sometimes lack clarity on how to support decisions at appeal.
8. **Legal support needs review:** re-consider the role of the legal officer either through an enhanced role of the existing representative presence from County Council, or the involvement of one of the Council's legal officers.
9. **Resource constraints:** PAS stress the importance of this planning committee review and the recommendations that need to be implemented to ensure the effective running of the planning committee. This may require a review of resources and should be tied together with any plans the council has to review resources more generally.
10. **Positive culture but room for improvement:** strong officer-member relationships and effective chairing observed. However, some members are overly influenced by local objections rather than evidence-based planning considerations.

4.3 The specific recommendations were:

1. **Enhance Member Engagement Pre-Committee:** Review member involvement in planning proposals at pre-application and committee stages using best practices and guidance.
2. **Improve Site Visit Awareness:** Increase awareness and consistent use of site visit procedures through member training integration.
3. **Implement Submission Cut-off:** Set a 24-hour cutoff for late information submissions to ensure transparency and adequate review before meetings.
4. **Boost Appeals Process Participation:** Encourage member engagement with appeals through training and participation in hearings.
5. **Strengthen Enforcement Awareness:** Enhance member knowledge of enforcement via agenda items and training for better oversight.
6. **Officer Reports Review:** reviewing officer reports to improve clarity, consistency, and include key considerations like equalities and financial impact.
7. **Member Training Enhancement:** Enhancing member training to cover site visits, appeals, and enforcement for improved committee effectiveness.
8. **Developers' Forum Reintroduction:** Re-establishing a developers' forum to encourage engagement and mutual understanding with the development community.
9. **Legal Representation Review:** Reviewing legal representation at committee meetings to ensure support in complex and contentious cases.

How has the Council responded?

4.4 Appendix 2 to this report provides a response to each of the PAS recommendations including the status of specific actions. The PAS review and the Council's nationally measured performance on the quality of decision-making have created discussion between senior officers, the Portfolio Holder, the Chair of Planning Committee and at the internal Members' Forum. There has been common understanding of the importance of monitoring performance and the potential implications of too many decisions being overturned at appeal. The importance of justifiable and defensible planning reasons for the refusal of planning permission is conveyed clearly in training and in discussion at committee meetings.

- 4.5 This has had a positive impact on the numbers of appeals allowed. At the time of writing there have been no appeals allowed against decisions on major developments taken since April 2025.
- 4.6 New practices and procedures are being implemented to provide clarity of process and to provide more opportunities for developers and councillors to engage in pre-application discussions; for developers to provide briefings to the Chair of Planning Committee and Portfolio Holder at application stage; and, following the publication of a Planning Committee agenda, for developers to present to Members of the Committee and to take questions. The existing area-based developer fora are to be utilised to provide for focused engagement on development management.
- 4.7 The size of the membership of the Planning Committee has been reviewed with a proposal to be presented to Council at its meeting on 16 March. The duration of Planning Committee meetings, the number of items presented, and the time management of the meetings is receiving particular attention in light of the PAS review but also more recent committee experience in dealing with a number of strategic development proposals. The Council's Head of Legal Services now provides senior solicitor representation at committee meetings.
- 4.8 Two separate training sessions were provided to Members of the committee at the start of the municipal year and the internal Members Forum used to examine topics such as planning appeals and more, recently, planning enforcement. Training on development viability is to be provided at the next meeting. The start of the next municipal year will see a forward plan for monthly meetings of the internal Members Forum accompanied by an on-going training schedule for Councillors. Recorded committee training (enabling future use) is to be arranged for officers including a focus on report writing.
- 4.9 More broadly, the planning service is one of the priority areas for the corporate transformation programme with an earlier focus on digitisation and the customer 'front door'. A third major development team has been created within Development Management since the PAS review and service improvement, including the delivery of actions plans for strategic planning applications and the section 106 legal agreement process, continues.
- 4.10 Further detail is provided at Appendix 2 and there is more work to do. The start of the next municipal year will see new induction training and further implementation of improvements.

Continuing Risk

- 4.11 Unfortunately however, the Council's nationally measured performance continues to be a concern for two reasons.
- 4.12 First, the Government measures performance for the quality of decision-making on a rolling two-year basis. The 'current' monitoring period is therefore April 2023 to March 2025 (allowing for appeal decisions to December 2025) and performance is affected by one year of the previous two-year period i.e. there is a legacy impact from the previous under-performing period.
- 4.13 Secondly, Cherwell is an area that attracts significant interest in growth and the Council deals with relatively high numbers of contentious applications. Although

these are often very significant locally, they must also be considered in the context of national policy and its growth agenda. Ultimately, when it comes to planning appeals, decisions that may be very challenging to take locally because of their long-lasting impact, may be ones that are less challenging to take when removed from the local context.

- 4.14 The Council remains in a difficult position in terms of meeting Government expectations. Appendix 3 provides the latest, albeit unconfirmed monitoring data. In summary, this shows:
1. the unconfirmed percentage for the number of decisions on major developments from April 2023- March 2025 (i.e. before the PAS review) and overturned at appeal by 31 December 2025 is 11.61% (13 out of 112 decisions).
 2. the current unconfirmed percentage for April 2024 to March 2026 is 5.32% which is in part reflective of the work undertaken over the course of the past year. However, the Council presently has three appeals pending following recently Planning Committee refusals which if lost would increase the percentage to 8.51%. There is some risk of further appeals being lodged.
 3. the current unconfirmed percentage for April 2025 onwards is 0% but this could be affected by the recent and possible appeals described above.
- 4.15 The figures for the 'current' monitoring period, April 2023 to March 2025, are the subject of review and confirmation. However, the implication of a potential return of 11.61% is that the Council is at risk of 'designation'.
- 4.16 Where an authority does not meet the required performance thresholds, the Secretary of State can 'designate' an authority as underperforming. If a local authority is designated, applicants to that authority may apply directly to the Planning Inspectorate (on behalf of the Secretary of State) for the category of applications (major, non-major or both) for which the authority has been designated. Designated authorities are also required to prepare an Action Plan demonstrating how the weaknesses that led to poor performance will be addressed. An authority remains designated until such time as the Secretary of State decides to de-designate the authority.
- 4.17 The Council can expect to be provided with an opportunity to set out its exceptional circumstances before a decision is taken by the Secretary of State.
- 4.18 Regardless of the outcome, it is vitally important that the Council does all that it reasonably can to reduce the risk of planning appeals and to ensure that when planning appeals are lodged, the Council is in a strong position to successfully defend its decisions.

5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 5.1 There are no alternatives to the recommendations presented.

6. Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 The PAS review of decision-making has put a constructive spotlight on the important work of the Planning Committee and the Development Management service. Significant changes have been made in response to the recommendations of PAS and work is continuing alongside corporate transformation and service improvement. The Council remains at risk of designation in significant part because of the legacy impact of the previous monitoring period. Close monitoring and management of decision making must continue in the interest of emerging from a position of risk and to avoid a similar position in the future. Very close working between officers and Members will be critical in supporting this.

Decision Information

Key Decision	Yes
Subject to Call in	N/A
If not, why not subject to call in	N/A
Ward(s) Affected	All

Document Information

Appendices	
Appendix 1	PAS Review of Decision Making, August 2025
Appendix 2	PAS Review of Planning Committee Decision Making: Key Recommendations/Advice and Response
Appendix 3	Indicative Performance – Quality of Decision Making
Appendix 4	Member Engagement Protocol
Background Papers	None
Reference Papers	Report to Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 26 November 2024 , Items 39 & 40 Report to Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 11 March 2025 , Item 62 Report to Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 27 January 2026 , Item 7 MHCLG Explanatory Memorandum to improving planning performance: criteria for designation (updated 2024)
Report Author	David Peckford, Assistant Director - Planning Paul Seckington, Head of Development Management
Report Author contact details	David.Peckford@Cherwell-dc.gov.uk Paul.Seckington@cherwell-dc.gov.uk
Executive Director Approval (unless	Ian Boll, Executive Director – Place & Regeneration, 16 March 2026

Executive Director or Statutory Officer report)	
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Cherwell District Council

Planning Committee Review

27th August 2025



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) has been supporting Cherwell District Council (CDC) over a number of months due to issues with the quality of decision-making for Major applications. In January 2025 CDC received a letter from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) providing the opportunity for CDC to outline any exceptional circumstances before the Minister considers whether CDC should be designated under section 62A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as a result of performance measured against the quality of Major applications decision-making indicator. On 6th June 2025, confirmation was given to CDC that it would not be designated.
- 1.2 This Planning Committee review was carried out against a backdrop of major Planning reform announcements by MHCLG. During the time of the review the Government was undertaking a [technical consultation on reforms to Planning Committees](#) that included the following key proposals that are relevant to the outcomes from this Planning Committee review:
- The introduction of a national scheme of delegation
 - A limit of 11 members to sit on a planning committee
 - A mandatory programme of member training
 - Changes to the performance threshold for quality of Majors
- 1.3 As the outcome of the technical consultation was unknown at the time of writing this report, the review team has not included any specific recommendations on the size of the committee or CDC's scheme of delegation, but has made reference to these matters in the text and the relevance to the likely nationally introduced changes.
- 1.4 During the review the PAS team was made to feel very welcome and was well supported. The team would like to thank all participants involved for their input.

2. The approach and scope of the review

- 2.1 The review was undertaken by Cllr Stuart Bray, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council and Martin Hutchings and Peter Ford, both Principal Consultants for the Planning Advisory Service (PAS). PAS is part of the Local Government Association (LGA) and provides high quality help, advice, support and training on planning and service delivery to councils in England.
- 2.2 The PAS team gained its evidence for the Planning Committee review from a number of different sources:
- carrying out a desktop study of committee minutes, officer reports, and the council's scheme of delegation and codes of conduct.
 - Viewing the following planning committee meetings 1st August 2024, 10th April 2025 and 15th May 2025
 - Interviewing planning managers who are involved in the operation and overseeing planning committee
 - Interviewing other officers who support the committee or provide specialist input

- Interviewing the chair and vice-chair of planning committee as well as the portfolio holder responsible for Planning
 - Interviewing town and parish councillors alongside other lobbying groups
 - Interviewing representatives from the development community
- 2.3 The majority of the interviews took place at the CDC offices on 29th May 2025 with supplementary online meeting for participants who were unavailable on the 29th May.
- 2.4 The review team compared the operation and decision-making at CDC's planning committee with best practice from throughout the country, as well as using the team's own experiences in running and managing Planning Committees.
- 2.5 The review follows a tried and tested approach to review planning committees that PAS has adopted for a number of councils throughout England. It is focused on the management and operation of CDC's planning committee rather than a wider review of its Planning function. However, the review team inevitably heard about other related matters that impact the performance of the Planning service and, where relevant, the review has identified such matters and explained to what extent these can be addressed through the review.

3. The context to the planning committee review

- 3.1 There is no political party with overall control and, at the time of writing this report, the political make-up was as follows:
- Liberal Democrats – 17
 - Labour – 12
 - Conservatives – 11
 - Green – 4
 - Independents – 4
- 3.2 In the period April 2022 to March 2024 CDC determined 115 Major applications. 19 of these decisions were appealed and 12 were upheld by the Planning Inspectorate (with 2 remaining pending), including 3 that were non-determination appeals. This means that 10.43% of Major decisions were upheld at appeal against a Government-set maximum threshold of 10%.
- 3.3. From the 17 appealed decisions 11 were from officer delegated decisions, 5 of which were allowed (45%). The remaining 6 were planning committee member overturns, of which 4 were allowed (67%). Appendix 1 provides a more detailed analysis of the appeals that were upheld at appeal and some lessons that can be learnt from those appeal decisions.
- 3.4 CDC has a single planning committee with 18 members on the committee alongside other named substitutes. Over the period 6th June 2024 and 10th April 2025 there were 11 meetings considering a total of 57 items.
- 3.5 There was on average of 5 items per meeting, but the number varied considerably with 15 items on one agenda and 2 on another agenda. The total length of each committee averaged at approximately 3 hours, but this also varied considerably with one committee meeting taking 6 hours 20 minutes, whilst another was completed in 13 minutes.

- 3.6 Over the time period that the review looked at there were a total of 8 decisions that overturned an officer recommendation and another 4 items that were deferred to a future planning committee.
- 3.7 CDC's Local Plan was adopted in July 2015 with a partial review of the Local Plan adopted in September 2020. The Local Plan is currently under review. The Regulation 19 consultation has been completed and the council will be considering submission on 21st July 2025. CDC does not have a 5-year housing land supply which currently stands at 2.3years (including for Oxford's unmet needs).

4. Key Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – Member and officer engagement prior to planning committee

Review the way that members are involved in planning proposals both at pre-application stage and in the build-up to planning committee. This should involve a review of best practice followed by councils who engage members in pre-application discussions, using the [PAS pre-application advice and Planning Performance Agreements \(PAS\)](#) guidance. Also, a review of the way councils allow pre-planning committee developer presentations, using the [PAS Modernising Planning Committees National Survey 2025](#) to identify councils who operate this practice.

Recommendation 2 – Site visits procedures

Improve awareness of the existing site visits procedure both for members and officers so that it is used consistently and effectively. The existing procedure should form part of a member training programme, along with a discussion on any further changes officers and members feel may be appropriate to ensure the efficient running of the planning committee.

Recommendation 3 – Managing late information received for planning committee

Introduce a cutoff time and date for allowing late information for the planning committee. This would normally be, at the latest, 24 hours before the meeting is due to be held. This cutoff time should be specified in the planning committee protocol at the earliest opportunity to avoid any ambiguities and clearly specified on the planning committee web pages.

Recommendation 4 – Member engagement with appeals

Increase member engagement with the appeals process, building upon the Informal Planning Forum meetings. This should take the form of discussing appeals during an early stage of a planning committee meeting (when appropriate), improving the training provided to members on appeals and actively encouraging members to be

involved in supporting the council position at planning appeal hearings and public inquiries.

Recommendation 5 – Member engagement with planning enforcement

Improve member awareness of planning enforcement by introducing a regular item on the planning committee agenda to report planning enforcement cases opened and closed, alongside reviews of the local enforcement plan. This greater awareness should be complemented by member training on planning enforcement matters.

Recommendation 6 - Review of planning committee officer reports

Review the content and structure of the officer reports that are used at planning committee. This review should reflect on the good practice currently taking place (see para. 6.7) and areas for improvement (see para. 6.8). CDC is also encouraged to use the [PAS best practice in report writing](#) guidance to assist with this review.

Recommendation 7 – Review the existing member training programme

Review the training opportunities available to members to address areas for improvement identified by both officers and members. This should include training on site visits (see recommendation 2), appeals (see recommendation 4) and planning enforcement (see recommendation 5) alongside other practical training on lessons that can be learnt from decisions, both in terms of good practice and reflecting on improvements that can be made in future.

Recommendation 8 - Re-introduce the developers' forum

Better engage the local development community by re-introducing the developers' forum. The council can learn from best practice from across the country on how a developer forum might work. This should also consider how members can be involved in the developer forums so that they can better understand what works and what does not from a developers' point of view when engaging with the planning service.

Recommendation 9 - Review the Legal representation at the planning committee meetings

Review the current arrangements whereby a representative of Oxfordshire County Council attends the planning committee meetings (as a representative of CDC). The review should consider the areas of support that officers and members best need to make sound decisions at planning committee, particularly prior to the formal meeting, alongside the capacity and expertise within the CDC and county legal teams.

5. Procedural matters

Pre committee arrangements

- 5.1 There is a comprehensive set of procedures in place for arrangements prior to committee to manage and plan for the agendas. Senior officers have an agenda setting meeting, followed by discussion on future items with relevant members and finally a meeting with the chair on the day before the meetings. All concerned seem happy with these arrangements and feel able to plan appropriately for the planning committee meetings.
- 5.2 One issue of concern identified by the review team was the amount of late information that was submitted for one of the planning committees. It was apparent that members had been given a very large amount of additional material only a few hours before the actual committee meeting and 5 minutes at the actual meeting to read the material. This would not give the viewing public confidence that the information had been fully considered. The review team identified that there is no deadline for the submission of late information, although it was also acknowledged that it was very unusual circumstances that resulted in so much late information being submitted.
- 5.3 It is normal for councils to include in their protocols a deadline for late submission of information, which is routinely 24 hours before the meeting at the latest. The review team recommends that CDC adopts a similar approach so that all participants are clear about the council's approach to receiving late information.

Member and public involvement in pre-application and pre-committee discussions

- 5.4 The review team was unable to find any procedures in place for either member involvement in pre-application or pre committee discussions. It is common for councils to have a clear procedure in place specifying how members can become engaged in discussions with developers before an item is brought to committee through a consultation protocol and / or arrangements for developers to hold information briefings with members prior to committee. The review team discussed this matter with members, officers, developers and community interest groups and all agreed that having better engagement prior to the formal planning committee meeting would be helpful. At one interview an interest group expressed frustration that it was forced to take an adversarial approach with applicants due to not being able to engage at an early stage with developers in finding mutually agreeable design solutions to issues of concern. Developers also expressed frustration at not being able to engage with members at an early stage to identify issues of local concern; issues that might be relatively easy to address at the early design stage, but much more difficult, time consuming and expensive if only identified close to decision-making stage.

- 5.5 Councils are often nervous about member involvement at pre-application stage or for developers to present schemes to members prior to the formal planning committee due to concerns about pre-determination. However, in reality, the danger of pre-determination does not need to be a major threat provided that there are clear protocols in place and members follow these protocols. For example, it is really important that members are guided by officers and always have an officer present when meeting developers. This ensures that the meetings are centred around information gathering and questioning rather than giving a pre-determined opinion. Also, developer briefings should be run under strict rules to ensure that members do not engage in debate on the merits of an application.
- 5.6 There is some excellent best practice from councils across the country who run pre-application engagement with members and also pre-committee briefings. PAS would be happy to put CDC officers and councillors in touch with councils who operate these arrangements.

Size of the planning committee

- 5.7 CDC currently has 18 members who sit on the planning committee. At the time of writing this planning committee review the Government is considering responses to its technical consultation exercise where it proposed to limit the size of planning committees to 11 members. If these proposals are adopted by Government through legislation then CDC will need to reduce the size of its planning committee. The review team is not including this in the recommendations as the Government proposal is subject to formal consultation. However, whilst the technical consultation response is awaited, it is important that members chosen to sit on the committee have the time and capacity to undertake the responsibilities of a planning committee member. This includes the training that the service prioritises to assist with efficient and effective debate. PAS, considers that a planning committee between 9 and 12 members is best practice for the following reasons:
- **An efficient use of time** – all members of the committee have a chance to speak without the meeting having to go on for an excessive amount of time;
 - **Better use of resources** – running, servicing and training committees takes up resources and the more members on committee, the more resources are required; and
 - **Greater flexibility and representation** – allows for a sufficient pool of councillors to focus on ward representation when needed (for example by ensuring that no more than one councillor from an individual ward is on the committee) and to provide cover as committee substitutes to reduce the chance of meeting cancellations, ensuring meetings remain quorate and decisions are made efficiently.

Scheme of delegation

- 5.8 CDC's current scheme of delegation relies largely on ward members referring items to planning committee with the Chair and Assistant Director making the final decision on whether a matter is called-in based on set criteria. There is also the option for items to be referred to Full Council, although the review team understands that this is very rarely enacted. At the time of writing this review the Government was consulting over proposals to limit the types of applications that can be referred to planning committee and also to introduce a triage system for the chair and head of Planning to make the final decision on referrals to planning committee. As CDC currently, in effect, operates a triage system, it will be the category of applications that are referred that will be most impacted by any changes in Government legislation.
- 5.9 As the rules regarding items to be considered at planning committee are likely to be mandated through legislation, no recommendation is included in this report regarding CDC's scheme of delegation.

Planning protocols

- 5.10 CDC has a very clear set of protocols that are set out for officers and members in the form of "golden rules" and a set of "dos" and "don'ts". There is also very clear guidance on public speaking and site visits that show clear best practice in their clarity and comprehensiveness.
- 5.11 However, it was clear from speaking to both officers and members that the written guidance on site visits is both poorly understood and rarely implemented in practice in the way that the protocol states. Officers told the review team that site visits were carried out in an ad hoc manner with items being deferred for a site visit at planning committee, even though the protocol states very clearly the very specific criteria that need to be met to warrant a site visit. Furthermore, the review team was advised that site visits are often poorly attended, even by members who have voted for a site visit. The review team considers that this is an area for improvement that could be undertaken through better training for both officers and members of the requirements for site visits as already stated in the council's constitution.
- 5.12 The protocols are also silent on member involvement in pre-application discussions and involvement in appeals. Some of the best performing councils provide clarity to members on how they should engage with officers on pre-application matters and also their responsibilities with regard to supporting officers in the defence of the council's position at appeals.

Layout of the room and accessibility for those viewing online

- 5.13 The layout for the planning committee is quite common to many committees with members clearly identified and the lead officer sitting close to the case

officer and committee chair. This arrangement appears to work well and the review team saw clear evidence of the chair being able to communicate with the officers and lead officer being able to communicate with the case officer and other specialist officers.

- 5.14 The review team found it straightforward to access the planning committee agendas on the council's website and the webpage that shows the meetings online. The camera positioning is good with the person speaking being clearly identified on screen. There is also clear signing on screen to identify to the viewer which item is being considered.

Speaking arrangements

- 5.15 There is a clear protocol in place for speaking at committee and this seems to be understood by all participants attending the planning committee meetings. It also largely follows best practice that the review team has found throughout the country. Speakers are allowed 5 minutes with one speaker for the objectors and supporters. Speakers need to have lodged a letter of representation or be the applicant to speak. Ward members are allowed 10 minutes to speak; it is not uncommon for ward members to be allowed longer to speak than other speakers (the [PAS modernising planning committees national survey 2025](#) found that 32% of councils allowed 5 minutes for speakers and approximately half allowed ward members additional time to speak). Speakers are not permitted to speak following a deferred item unless the chair considers that there are significant material changes. This approach appears to work well and avoids unnecessary repetition of previous issues when a matter is deferred.
- 5.16 Members are not permitted to ask questions directly to speakers, but can only ask questions to officers. This causes some frustration to speakers and members, but is quite a common approach taken by planning committees.

Length of meetings and number of items

- 5.17 The review team looked at agendas between June 2024 and April 2025 and during this time the average number of items on the agenda was 5, but it varied enormously with one committee having 15 items and another only 2. As the types of applications brought to committee also varied greatly it is probably more useful to consider the length of time each committee took. Again, this varied greatly (from 6 hours 20 minutes to 13 minutes), but averaged at approximately 3 hours. The [PAS modernising planning committees national survey 2025](#) found that 78% of planning committees considered 2-4 items per meeting and the majority averaged between 1 and 3 hours in length.

6. Officer and Member behaviours

Chairing skills

- 6.1 The Chair of the planning committee is very experienced in his role and carries out the chairing of the meetings very well, allowing members to voice their opinions, but also confident enough to avoid points being laboured and repeated. Similar to many other planning committees, the questioning of officers sometimes merge into debate and the chair is quick to remind members that questions should precede debate. Many councils have dispensed with the questions stage before a debate and CDC will need to consider whether it should do the same or continue with the current arrangements.
- 6.2 The chair is also very competent in ensuring that members clearly articulate any reasons to propose motions contrary to an officer recommendation and will ensure that a vote is not taken before the reasons are clear to all participants and officers have had an opportunity to comment on an alternative proposal.

Officer / member relations

- 6.3 The officer / member relationships appear very positive. No issues of note were raised by either members or officers in this regard and the review team found during the viewing of committees that members generally listened to officer advice and took it on board. Representatives from the development community were also, generally, very positive about their relations with officers and members with one developer saying that CDC was “a good council to do business with”.
- 6.4 The review team did note a few exceptions to this good relationship and this generally occurred during the discussion on very contentious applications. However, in these cases the review team felt that members were challenging the balance of the material considerations rather than the professionalism of the officers.
- 6.5 From the observations made by the review team, officers gave good, solid advice on planning matters with the lead officer playing an important role in backing up the advice given by case officers. Comments were made to the review team that officers could be more assertive in bringing members back to the key planning issues and the recommendation made by officers. Whilst the review team did not consider this a major issue, it could be an area of discussion between the chair and lead officer to help to reduce the length of the meetings and the tendency for some members to stray off the key issues of the application.

Officer reports and presentations

- 6.6 The review team was impressed by the quality of the presentations given by officers. They were, in general, very clear, not too long and well received by members. It was apparent to the review team that officers had thoroughly prepared for the meetings and focused on the key issues that they felt that were most relevant for members.
- 6.7 The officer reports are also very competently written with the following being their key strengths:
- There is a location plan, context plan and aerial photo at start of report that really helps members focus in on the site and its location;
 - The report gives clear reasons for referral and officer recommendation;
 - The reports are generally well laid out with paragraph numbers;
 - There is clear reference to policies and other material considerations;
 - The analysis follows a logical sequence and starts with the principle of development;
 - There is a good structure for each section – starting policy / legal context, then assessment and then a conclusion; and
 - The reports end with a section on the planning balance and conclusions so members are clear as to how the officer reached their recommendation.
- 6.8 The review team did identify some areas for improvement, none of which require urgent action. These are outlined below:
- There are no sections on equalities, human rights or financial considerations even though these matters must be considered as part of any planning decision. Councils have been legally challenged on these matters and so it is important that CDC is clear that these matters have been considered;
 - Pre-application discussions are sometimes referred to in reports, but not consistently. Pre-application discussions are relevant to the debate at planning committee and if there have been no discussions then it is important that members are aware of this;
 - Sometimes conditions are separated under pre-commencement, pre-occupation etc, but this discipline is not consistently used; and
 - A summary might be helpful for longer reports to help members digest very long reports.

Member questions and debate

- 6.9 At the meetings viewed by the review team Members, in the main, were disciplined to separate the questioning of officers from the debate on the merits of the case and, if they strayed into debate during questions, then the Chair was quick to correct this.

- 6.10 Members also appeared to have prepared well for the meetings and were ready to ask questions about issues they did not understand in the report or issues where they did not initially agree with the officer view.
- 6.11 Members appeared to the review team to understand the importance of material planning considerations and the weight to be given to the Local Plan and the absence of a 5-year housing land supply. Members are clearly frustrated by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requirement for a presumption in favour of sustainable development and, at times would “play to the gallery” in making their frustrations known. However, members appeared very aware of the importance of policy and 5-year housing supply.
- 6.12 The review team did observe that members were being swayed more strongly to local objections rather than evidence presented to them. For example, members were sceptical of advice given by transport officers without having evidence to the contrary given by objectors. Therefore, the review team would recommend that any further training considered the importance of looking for evidence to support issues raised by objectors.
- 6.13 The chair allowed officers to comment on members’ reasons to overturn an officer recommendation which demonstrates good practice. Officers were, in these cases, given the opportunity to suggest appropriate wording and references to policy.

Legal involvement in meetings

- 6.14 The review team understands that the legal support at planning committee comes from Oxfordshire County Council (OCC). The OCC legal representative attends committee meetings as a representative of CDC to ensure that the committee process and protocols are followed rather than provide a legal view on specific applications. This is welcomed by the council and provides an important legal backup to officers during the committee meetings. The review team is not clear on the process for ensuring that planning and CDC legal team liaise on upcoming applications. OCC mentioned that the CDC legal team does alert them to any issues with applications, however others involved in the process indicated that this did not always happen and that a more formal process might need establishing to ensure that reports get to the CDC legal team prior to the pre-agenda planning meeting so that issues can be resolved as soon as possible. It is also unclear how any potential legal issues are properly addressed or resolved, during and after the meetings. CDC may want to more formally set out a clear process for the legal involvement in the whole committee process and also reconsider the role of the legal officer either through an enhanced role of the existing representative presence from County Council, or the involvement of one of CDC’s legal officers directly.

7. Training and performance monitoring

Member training

- 7.1 The review team heard that CDC has a positive approach to member training and there is regular training being undertaken by officers, particularly for new members of the planning committee. In addition, CDC has asked PAS to undertake defensible decision-making training with members to allow an independent perspective to be given to members on the key skills they need to sit on the planning committee. However, the review team did still find evidence of members not fully understanding the options open to them in making decisions. For example, at one committee meeting the review team saw evidence that members were not fully aware of the options available to them to address harm through conditions.
- 7.2 The council has recently introduced the Informal Planning Forum. Only two meetings have so far been held, but the forum has proved very popular with officers and members and shows a proactive approach by the council to improve ongoing member training and member oversight on planning performance. The forum is an opportunity for members and officers to learn from appeal decisions as well as reflect upon planning performance, both to celebrate good performance and address performance issues. This forum shows great promise and is good practice and, therefore, PAS strongly encourages CDC to continue with the Informal Planning Forum and to encourage as many members and officers as possible to participate in these meetings.
- 7.3 The review team also notes that an Overview and Scrutiny Working Group has been established for planning appeals which demonstrates the seriousness that the council is taking with addressing poor performance in planning appeals. Again, this is good practice and is strongly supported by PAS.
- 7.4 Notwithstanding the good work CDC is undertaking in making members aware of decision-making issues through the Informal Planning Forum and Overview and Scrutiny Working Group, the review team was advised that members have little knowledge of the appeals process and in how they can become actively involved in an appeal hearing or public inquiry. It would be helpful that, as part of the member training programme, members are provided training on the appeals process and ways that they can engage to support the council's position. This is particularly relevant to CDC due to Government's concerns on its record on successfully defending appeals.

Performance monitoring

- 7.5 To assist with performance monitoring the review team heard about improvements that are being made to improvement performance management monitoring and the use of shared data.
- 7.6 The portfolio holder is keen that enough time and focus is given to performance management of the planning team and that all tasks and are recorded with specific timings agreed and acted upon before each performance review. The portfolio holder is also keen to see planning performance agreements more closely monitored in terms of time and outcomes and the performance of partners in contributing to the process.
- 7.7 The review team heard from officers that they felt well supported by managers throughout the planning committee process. There are weekly catchups where staff can discuss a range of issues affecting the planning teams and this includes a chance to reflect on the planning committee meetings, celebrating good performance and addressing any issues that might have arisen.
- 7.8 There is a regular item at planning committee meetings to report appeal decisions and this is good practice. However, the appeals item is at the end of the agenda and the review team noted that there is rarely a discussion on appeals, particularly after a long meeting. As appeals performance has brought the council to the attention of Government over potential designation, PAS would advise that CDC brings this appeals item to the front of the agenda, particularly if there are lessons to be learnt from an appeal that is upheld or costs have been awarded against the council. In this way, members will have a greater awareness of appeal decisions and can reflect on actions that might need to take place. Admittedly, the Informal Planning Forum and Overview and Scrutiny Working Group will be the places for detailed discussion, but the planning committee is the public forum for members and officers to acknowledge appeal performance.

8. Other matters

Officer resources

- 8.1 An issue raised from different sources during the review was the limited officer resources available that is causing a strain on the speed of decision-making, the robustness of monitoring and the ability for officers to resource the appeals process. The review team saw no direct evidence that lack of resources was impacting on the robustness of decision-making at planning committee and the

review is limited to the planning committee only rather than a wider planning service review. However, the review team was made aware of a wider corporate transformation programme that is being undertaken at CDC that would be looking at resourcing and processes across the council.

- 8.2 One of the indicators that PAS uses to indicate a potential crisis in resourcing is the number of non-determination appeals that are lodged. In CDC's case it is clear that the non-determination appeals were not a direct result of lack of resources within the planning team, but from actions that the developer chose to take as a result of negotiations with the planning team. However, the review team was told about issues with lack of business support to processes followed in the planning service and therefore there is concern amongst staff at the inefficient processes currently being used to administer the planning functions and to monitor performance. The review team has no evidence of this as it only looked at the planning committee processes and did not look at the processes used in the day-to-day operations within the planning service
- 8.3 There was not time to carry out a review into how well the service is resourced. It was suggested, anecdotally, that there are resource issues within the service and at a managerial level. PAS would stress the importance of this planning committee review and the recommendations that need to be implemented to ensure the effective running of the planning committee. To do this may require a review of resources and should be tied together with any plans the council has to review resources more generally.

Planning enforcement

- 8.4 The limitations of the planning committee review meant that the review team was not able to look in any detail into the way that CDC operates its planning enforcement service or how members engage with enforcement. Although planning enforcement is not normally a matter for planning committee to make decisions, it is an area of particular member interest and is likely to take up a considerable amount of members' time following up on enquiries.
- 8.5 Many councils will provide a regular report to their planning committee on planning enforcement cases that have been opened, closed and followed up with formal action. This gives members the opportunity to ask questions of officers when appropriate and to have a better understanding of workloads and the reasons for action taken. It is also common for the planning committee to scrutinise a local enforcement plan to help officers decide on what types of enforcement casework should be prioritised. The review team therefore recommends that CDC follows this practice so that members have a greater awareness of planning enforcement and can raise questions if appropriate. Planning committee, along with other councillors will also benefit from training as part of the annual member training programme.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1 CDC runs an effective planning committee with professional, knowledgeable officers and members who understand planning issues and the importance of following officer advice. However, the council does not have an up-to-date Local Plan or a 5-year housing land supply. It has also seen a recent change in political control with no political party having overall control. As Cherwell is in an area of high housing demand it has faced, in recent years, a high number of contentious housing proposals that have led to a number of appeals where the Planning Inspectorate has not always agreed with the council's position. As a consequence, the council is not performing to the minimum quality of decision-making standards set by Government.
- 9.2 There are many things that the council is doing well with regard to Planning Committee and it is generally well respected by both the development industry and the local community. However, there are areas of improvement that the review team has identified and these relate to issues of procedure, behaviours, training and communication. None of these are critical to the council operating a planning committee, but they are all important if CDC's planning committee is going to ensure that it makes robust and defensible decisions in the future.
- 9.3 Finally, the council should reflect on the current changes being consulted on by Government with respect to Planning Committees. These changes are likely to impose mandatory requirements on all councils on the scheme of delegation, size of planning committees and member training. Therefore, the council will need to make changes in its current operation of planning committee as a consequence of legislation that will be shortly passed through Parliament.

10. Next steps

- 10.1 PAS currently receives a grant from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to support councils under threat of designation. Whilst CDC is now not under immediate threat of designation PAS will be able to continue supporting CDC by monitoring performance and providing advice on how it implements the recommendations set out in this report.
- 10.2 PAS would also be happy to undertake a progress review in due course to assist the council in evaluating the progress being made on its planning committee performance. The main contact at PAS is Peter Ford, Principal Consultant, peter.ford@local.gov.uk.

Appendix 1 – appeals analysis

Address	Proposal	Member overturn?	Synopsis	PAS comment
Former Buzz Bingo, Bolton Road, Banbury	Redevelopment for 80 retirement apartments	Non determination	Inspector considered that the development impacted on the setting of a listed building and conservation area, but, on balance, the design acceptable.	Not tested at planning committee, but an avoidable overturn as a non-determination appeal.
Land NW of Station Road, Launton	Outline 65 dwellings	Yes	Inspector considered there was some limited harm to the character and appearance of the village and rural setting. The site was an inappropriate location due to limited access to facilities. There was also harm to the listed farmhouse. However, on balance the Inspector considered that the benefits of market and affordable housing and live-work units outweighed the harm.	The weight given by members on lack of 5 year housing land supply (5YHLS) was insufficient and officer judgement was correct.
Land at NW Bicester, Charlotte Ave	Outline for 530 dwellings as part of planned eco town	Non determination	Conditions and a legal agreement was secured between the council and the	Not tested at planning committee, but an avoidable overturn as

Address	Proposal	Member overturn?	Synopsis	PAS comment
			applicant to achieve zero carbon and affordable reduced to 10%. The Inspector considered that these benefits outweighed the harm on the heritage assets.	a non-determination appeal
West of Chilgrove Drive and North of Camp Road, Heyford Park	Outline for 230 dwellings	Yes	The proposal is outside the settlement boundary, but abutting the planned 1600 dwellings at a former RAF base. Changes to the NPPF (Dec 23) meant the council's housing calculations were incorrect due to unmet need in Oxford. The Inspector agreed with officers that the benefits of housing delivery outweighed the harm.	Officers found the development acceptable even with the council having a 5YHLS, which was found incorrect by Inspector. Therefore, the 5YHLS was not the issue for members but the issue of harm being outside the settlement boundary.
Land off Ploughley Road, Ambrosden	Outline for 120 dwellings	No	The Inspector considered that the development would not lead to significant impacts on the character and appearance of the area	Judgement on whether Inspector felt harm on character and appearance was sufficient to refuse.
Land East of Warwick	Outline for 170 dwellings	No	The Inspector considered that the need for housing,	Judgement on whether Inspector felt harm on character and

Address	Proposal	Member overturn?	Synopsis	PAS comment
Road, Banbury			particularly affordable housing outweighed impact on landscape, listed buildings / conservation area and loss of agricultural land. Changes to NPPF (Dec 23) meant council's housing calculations were incorrect due to unmet need in Oxford.	appearance was sufficient to refuse against a lack of 5YHLS.
Land West of Bloxham Road	Outline for 60 dwellings	No	The council could demonstrate a 5YHLS, but the Inspector felt the weight of housing need, particularly affordable, was greater than the visual intrusion into the countryside. The council removed its objection before the hearing, but the hearing still went ahead with 3rd party objections.	Even though the council withdrew the objections, the hearing still went ahead due to 3 rd party objections and the appeal went against council.
Land South of Green Lane, Cheserton	Outline for 147 dwellings	No	The Inspector considered that the edge of village development had good public transport and local facilities and didn't unduly harm the character and appearance of the area. The 5YHLS issue was	Inspector felt the development was in a sustainable location and not unduly impact on the village character regardless of the issues over the 5YHLS.

Address	Proposal	Member overturn?	Synopsis	PAS comment
			not relevant in this case.	
Land adjoining and West of 161 Rutten Lane, Yarnton	540 homes and up to 9,000 square metres of elderly extra care residential floorspace	Non-determination	<p>If the council had determined the application it would have been refused on 5 reasons: concerning the delivery of informal parkland; ecological mitigation and biodiversity gain; the provision of access to new playing fields for a primary school; affordable housing; and on-site infrastructure and infrastructure contributions.</p> <p>However, it withdrew reasons at the inquiry. The Inspector felt the development largely met the allocation requirements. Costs were awarded against the council and county council.</p>	There was significant damage to the council both in terms of decision-making and costs award (£400k)
Ells Lane, Bloxham	Outline for 30 dwellings	No	The Inspector considered the development was sustainable organic growth despite the high number of objections. It would not harm the	The judgement considered the impact on the rural / village setting. The Inspector awarded costs against the council (not have

Address	Proposal	Member overturn?	Synopsis	PAS comment
			housing strategy or rural character or village setting. There are accessible local facilities and it would not harm agricultural land.	information on reason for costs)
Land West of Howes Lane, Bicester	Employment land B2 and / or B8	Yes	The site is allocated for housing and green infrastructure in the SPD masterplan, but mixed use in Local Plan. The Inspector gave more weight to the Local Plan and housing was considered undeliverable.	Member misinterpretation of the weight given to the Local Plan against the SPD.

Lessons to learn from appeal decisions

1. Non-determination appeals are very damaging to the council in terms of performance and loss of decision-making powers. Greater attention is needed to avoid non-determination appeals.
2. Member overturns are partly to blame for poor performance, but a greater number of appeals have been allowed following officer decisions and therefore it is important that officers reflect particularly on their interpretation of the NPPF.
3. Changes in the 5YHLS calculations are partly responsible for overturns, but in some cases the council has misjudged the harm caused on the character and appearance of the development on existing settlements and rural setting. The council should reflect on whether sufficient weight is being given to the overriding need for housing, particularly affordable housing,
4. The council has been penalised both in terms of decision-making and costs as a result of withdrawing refusing reasons. Further work is needed in understanding why it has been necessary to withdraw refusal reasons and the timing of the withdrawal of refusal reasons.

5. The council is taking insufficient account of the sustainability of developments, particularly in respect to sustainable transport. It is important that proper consideration is being given to transport solutions, particularly in discussions with Oxfordshire CC.

6. The appeal at Land adjoining and West of 161 Rutten Lane, Yarnton was particularly damaging to the council and needs to be reviewed in detail. In particular the need to look at: could it have avoided a non-determination appeal?; relationships with Oxfordshire County Council; and the late withdrawal of refusal reasons.

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PAS Review of Planning Committee Decision Making

Key Recommendations/Advice and Response

PAS Recommendations or Action Needed	Problem / Issue	Response	Status / Actions
<p>Recommendation 1(a): Review the way that members are involved in planning proposals at pre-application stage.</p> <p>This should involve a review of best practice followed by councils who engage members in pre-application discussions, using the PAS pre-application advice and Planning Performance Agreements (PAS) guidance.</p>	<p>Unable to find any procedures in place for member involvement in pre-application discussions</p> <p>Interest group frustration in being forced to take an adversarial approach with applicants due to not being able to engage at an early stage with developers</p> <p>Developer frustration at not being able to engage with members at an early stage to identify issues of local concern</p> <p>Issues might be relatively easy to address at the early design stage (otherwise more difficult, time-consuming and expensive)</p>	<p>Ensure a protocol is established and made clear in the Council's guidance on seeking pre-application advice</p> <p>The Council's Statement of Community Involvement (2021) makes clear that the Council will encourage developers and promoters for large scale development to undertake their own consultation and engagement process with local people. Providing for member involvement in the pre-application process would assist local representation</p> <p>We will therefore encourage developers and promoters for large scale development to undertake their own consultation and engagement process with local people.</p>	<p>A protocol has been prepared to provide the opportunity for prospective applicants and applicants to seek engagement with relevant ward members and the Portfolio Holder in taking pre-application advice.</p> <p>The new approach to member / developer engagement will be reflected in the Council's charging schedule (existing hourly rates apply)</p> <p>The Council's pre-application guidance will be updated.</p> <p>DM staff have been reminded of the provisions of the SCI.</p>
<p>Recommendation 1(b) Review the way that members are</p>	<p>Lack of procedure for pre-committee discussion</p>	<p>Ensure a protocol is established for applicants and made clear in the Council's guidance and in</p>	<p>A protocol (part of the pre-application protocol above) has been prepared which provides</p>

PAS Recommendations or Action Needed	Problem / Issue	Response	Status / Actions
<p>involved in the build-up to planning committee.</p> <p>Also, a review of the way councils allow pre-planning committee developer presentations, using the PAS Modernising Planning Committees National Survey 2025 to identify councils who operate this practice.</p>	<p>Unable to find any procedures in place for either member involvement in pre-application or pre committee discussions</p> <p>Common for arrangements for developers to hold information briefings with members prior to committee.</p> <p>Danger of pre-determination does not need to be a major threat provided that there are clear protocols that are followed</p>	<p>PPA charging.</p>	<p>opportunities for developer briefings to Members before applications are presented to Planning Committee. The Council's advice for applicants and the charging schedule will be updated.</p> <p>Additionally, following the establishment of the new Planning Committee in May/June, regular pre-committee briefings are to be held with committee members to assist the smooth running of the committee and the readiness of both Councillors and Officers.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2a – Site visits procedures</p> <p>Improve awareness of the existing site visits procedure both for members and officers so that it is used consistently and effectively. The existing procedure should form part of</p>	<p>The written guidance on site visits is poorly understood and rarely implemented in practice</p> <p>Site visits carried out in an ad hoc manner</p> <p>Items being deferred even though the protocol states very clearly the very specific criteria that need to be met to warrant a site visit.</p> <p>Site visits are often poorly attended even by members who have voted for a site visit.</p> <p>Better training needed for both officers and members</p>	<p>Review site visit procedure in the constitution to ensure it remains fit for purpose</p> <p>https://modgov.cherwell.gov.uk/documents/s54142/Part%209%20-%20Planning%20Committee%20Procedure%20Rules%20-%20December%202020.pdf</p> <p>Ensure site visit training in a rolling officer training programme to be established (in addition to personal CPD)</p>	<p>A protocol (part of the pre-application protocol above) has been prepared</p>

PAS Recommendations or Action Needed	Problem / Issue	Response	Status / Actions
		<p>Ensure site visit training in rolling members training programme</p> <p>Prepare guidance for members in addition to constitutional procedure.</p> <p>Formal arrangement at committee for visit before meeting</p> <p>Ensure there is a regular day for site visits (ideally 2 days before meeting after agenda is published) and guidance on substitution</p> <p>Ensure guidance for being a member of committee emphasizes availability for site visits</p>	
<p>Recommendation 2b - Member training programme</p> <p>To help efficient running of the planning committee.</p>		<p>Need to be a rolling member training programme renewed each year for induction</p> <p>Also need a guide for being a member of planning committee of planning committee (beyond code of conduct)</p>	<p>Enhanced induction training is to be provided for Planning Committee Members following the 2026 local elections. A twelve-month on-going training programme will be presented to Members at that training session. Meetings of the internal members' forum are to be forward planned for twelve months. The next meeting is in April.</p> <p>A best practice committee training</p>

PAS Recommendations or Action Needed	Problem / Issue	Response	Status / Actions
			session is also to be arranged and recorded for officers.
Recommendation 3 – Managing late information received for planning committee	<p>All participants are clear about the approach</p> <p>Members can be given a very large amount of additional material only a few hours before the actual committee meeting and 5 minutes at the actual meeting to read the material</p> <p>Not giving the viewing public confidence that the information had been fully considered</p> <p>Should be 24 hours before the meeting at the latest</p>	<p>Ensure there is a written, published protocol for the submission of late material and a clear deadline of 4pm the day before committee for the publication of written updates.</p>	<p>Completed.</p>
Recommendation 4 – Member engagement with appeals <p>Increase member engagement with the appeals process, building upon the Informal Planning Forum meetings.</p> <p>Discussing appeals during an early stage of a planning committee meeting (when appropriate)</p>	<p>More member engagement needed on planning appeals</p> <p>More emphasis on planning appeal performance at committee.</p>	<p>Ensure there are regular meetings booked for the year for informal members forum</p> <p>At informal members forum have a standing item on appeals</p> <p>Bring forward appeals report earlier in the committee agenda</p> <p>Include appeals in training programme (above)</p> <p>Standing item for informal meeting</p> <p>Ensure that members of the planning committee are trained</p>	<p>As above. A forward plan of items for the internal Members' Forum is to be presented to Members which will include the standing item on appeals. Appeals are also to be included in the Members training programme for the new municipal year.</p> <p>Appeals are being brought forward on the agenda for planning committee (the next meeting is 19 March)</p>

PAS Recommendations or Action Needed	Problem / Issue	Response	Status / Actions
<p>Improving training for members on appeal</p> <p>Actively encouraging members to be involved in supporting the council position at planning appeal hearings and public inquiries</p>		<p>and ready to support planning appeals when appropriate</p>	
<p>Recommendation 5 – Member engagement with planning enforcement</p> <p>Improve member awareness of planning enforcement</p> <p>Have regular item on the planning committee agenda to report planning enforcement cases opened and closed, alongside reviews of the local enforcement plan.</p> <p>Member training on planning enforcement</p>	<p>More member engagement needed on planning enforcement</p>	<p>Include planning enforcement as standing item at the informal members forum</p> <p>Include enforcement in the members training programme</p> <p>Have a standing item on planning enforcement at planning committee. Liaise with legal services whether a part 1 or part 2 (confidential) item.</p> <p>Restart regular performance reports to planning committee. Include enforcement performance.</p>	<p>Implemented. A report on Planning Enforcement is to be presented to the March Planning Committee and thereafter on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>An overall item on Planning Enforcement was taken to the internal Members Forum on 12 February (practice and cases).</p>

PAS Recommendations or Action Needed	Problem / Issue	Response	Status / Actions
matters.			
<p>Recommendation 6 - Review of planning committee officer reports</p> <p>Review the content and structure of the officer reports that are used at planning committee.</p> <p>Reflect on the good practice currently taking place and areas for improvement. Use the PAS best practice in report writing guidance to assist with this review.</p>	<p>On the whole they are competently written reports.</p> <p>Potential areas of improvement:</p> <p>no sections on equalities, human rights or financial considerations (must be considered as part of any planning decision).</p> <p>Pre-application discussions are sometimes referred to in reports, but not consistently.</p> <p>Sometimes conditions are separated under pre-commencement, pre-occupation etc, but this discipline is not consistently used; and</p> <p>A summary might be helpful for longer reports to help members digest very long reports.</p>	<p>Review reporting consistency</p> <p>Ensure officer training</p> <p>Review reporting template</p> <p>Provide report exemplar</p> <p>Review sign-off process to improve standards and accuracy</p>	<p>Committee training is to be arranged and recorded for officers (as above). This will include an item on report writing.</p> <p>Head of DM and DM Team Leaders are reviewing best practice with a view to achieving consistency to set expectation standards for sign-off. The potential for technology to assist report writing and checking to be discussed with the Transformation and ICT services.</p>
<p>Recommendation 7 – Review the existing member training programme</p> <p>Review the training available to members to address areas for improvement</p> <p>Include training on site</p>	<p>Need to improve Councillor knowledge and skills</p>	<p>As above – establish regular and rolling training programme</p> <p>Include standing item at informal members forum</p> <p>Establish training contacts for Members, process for disseminating opportunities and recording of member training</p>	<p>As above. A rolling training programme is to be presented to Members in the new municipal year. Sessions on decision making and planning enforcement have been taken to the Members Forum. Development viability is scheduled next using an external viability consultant. Post induction barrister training is to include a Barrister led session.</p>

PAS Recommendations or Action Needed	Problem / Issue	Response	Status / Actions
visits Provide practical training on lessons learnt from decisions			
<p>Recommendation 8 - Re-introduce the developers' forum</p> <p>Better engage the local development community by re-introducing the developers' forum.</p> <p>Learn from best practice from across the country on how a developer forum might work.</p> <p>Consider how members can be involved in the developer forum</p>	Need a planning focused developer forum	<p>Establish forum and with dates in advance at least every 6 months and agenda circulated in advance</p> <p>Provide opportunities for developers to submit agenda items</p> <p>Portfolio Holder, Planning Committee Chair, Deputy Chair to attend. Other committee members invited</p>	Area based developer fora support the Council's Area Oversight structure (Kidlington, Bicester and Banbury). This is to be supplemented by development management focused sessions. Officers are also invited to a countywide developers forum and participate in a countywide s106 working group.
Recommendation 9 - Review the Legal representation at the planning committee	More support for members and officers	CDC Head of Legal Services now attends committee and agenda setting meeting. Confirm that Head of Legal Services attends	Completed. This Council's Head of Legal Services now provides legal representation.

PAS Recommendations or Action Needed	Problem / Issue	Response	Status / Actions
<p>meetings</p> <p>Review the current arrangements whereby a representative of Oxfordshire County Council attends the planning committee meetings (as a representative of CDC).</p> <p>Consider the areas of support that officers and members best need to make sound decisions at planning committee, particularly prior to the formal meeting.</p>		Chair's briefing	
<p>Advice: Consider size of the Planning Committee</p> <p>CDC currently has 18 members who sit on the planning committee. Government direction of travel is to limit planning committees</p>	<p>To help make more efficient use of time and resources</p> <p>All members of the committee need a chance to speak without the meeting being protracted</p> <p>Greater flexibility and representation – allows for a sufficient pool of councillors to focus on ward representation when needed</p> <p>Ensure no more than one councillor from an</p>	<p>Agreed in principle to have a committee of 11 members. To be pursued through governance procedures</p> <p>Review substitutes</p>	<p>Officer and member engagement has taken place. The decision is subject to an on-going governance process culminating in a report to Council (16 March).</p>

PAS Recommendations or Action Needed	Problem / Issue	Response	Status / Actions
<p>to 11 members.</p> <p>PAS considers that a planning committee between 9 and 12 members is best practice.</p>	<p>individual ward is on the committee</p> <p>Need to provide cover as committee substitutes from a greater pool of members reducing the chance of cancellations etc</p>		
Advice: Officer advice to members	<p>Officers give good, solid advice on planning matters with the lead officer playing an important role in backing up the advice given by case officers.</p> <p>Whether officers could be more assertive could be an area of discussion between the chair and lead officer to help to reduce the length of the meetings and the tendency for some members to stray off the key issues of the application.</p>	Discuss with Chair and at informal members forum	<p>Discussions have taken place with the Chair of Planning Committee and it has also been discussed at the internal Members' Forum.</p> <p>The provision of officer advice is also being discussed with Executive Members to help identify areas for continuous improvements and the smooth running of the committee.</p> <p>Officer training is also being arranged (see above)</p>
Advice: Member Questions and Debate	<p>Members were being swayed more strongly to local objections rather than evidence presented to them.</p> <p>For example, members were sceptical of advice given by transport officers without having evidence to the contrary given by objectors.</p> <p>Recommend that any further training considers</p>	Include evidential decision making and handing objections in member training programme.	To be included in the rolling 12 month training programme with attendance from OCC highway as appropriate to help build confidence in professionally guided and evidence-based decision making.

PAS Recommendations or Action Needed	Problem / Issue	Response	Status / Actions
	the importance of looking for evidence to support issues raised by objectors.		
Advice: Performance	<p>The portfolio holder is keen that enough time and focus is given to performance management of the planning team and that all tasks are recorded with specific timings agreed and acted upon before each performance review.</p> <p>The portfolio holder is also keen to see planning performance agreements more closely monitored in terms of time and outcomes and the performance of partners in contributing to the process.</p> <p>There is a regular item at planning committee meetings to report appeal decisions and this is good practice. Have this at the front of the agenda (see above), particularly if there are lessons to be learnt from an appeal that is upheld or costs have been awarded against the council.</p> <p>The Informal Planning Forum and Overview and Scrutiny Working Group will be the places for detailed discussion.</p>	<p>Review content of regular report on performance to meet Portfolio Holder expectations.</p> <p>See above on planning appeals.</p>	<p>A performance dashboard has been created and subject to on-going review. Planning is one of the priority areas in the Council's Transformation Programme, including a focus on digitalisation. Options for future planning 'back office' systems are being reviewed to support cross service improvement and workflow, 'the customer front door', process efficiency and performance.</p> <p>The national indicator for the quality of decision making (the % of decisions on major developments overturned at appeal) remains an area of focus, particularly considering the relatively high number of applications for major development the Council receives.</p> <p>A report on performance is to be presented more regularly to the Planning Committee.</p> <p>Service improvement is a standing item at Portfolio Holder</p>

PAS Recommendations or Action Needed	Problem / Issue	Response	Status / Actions
			Briefings. Updates are provided to the internal Members Forum but this needs to be more structured as the forum meets more regularly (see above)
Advice: Length of meetings and number of items	<p>Between June 2024 and April 2025 the average number of items on the agenda was 5, but it varied enormously with one committee having 15 items and another only 2.</p> <p>The length of the meeting varied greatly (from 6 hours 20 minutes to 13 minutes), but averaged at approximately 3 hours.</p> <p>The PAS modernising planning committees national survey 2025 found that 78% of planning committees considered 2-4 items per meeting and the majority averaged between 1 and 3 hours in length.</p>	Shorten length of busy meetings, review number of items presented and time management	Concerns have also been expressed by individual committee members. The issue has been discussed with senior management and legal and democratic services. Changes are ongoing, including a 9pm cut off time, mandatory breaks for long meetings and the holding of additional meetings when required.

Other Matters Arising from Officer Consideration	Problem / Issue	Response	Status / Actions
Consideration of the PAS report	Ensuring the report is socialised	The PAS report has been discussed with within the service, with the Corporate Leadership Team, with the Members of the Council's Executive, with the Portfolio	The Council's response to the report is being discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Meeting on

		Holder, with Committee Members (internal Members Forum), and with the Legal and Democratic Services team. The report is publicly available at https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/18229/cherwell-district-council-planning-committee-review.pdf	24 March 2026 and at a meeting of the Executive on 7 April 2026.
Culture	Ensuring evidence-based decision making	The importance of evidence-based decision making and the committee not being overly influenced by local objections has been discussed at briefings with Portfolio Holder and Committee Chair and through dialogue at the internal Members Forum. Message reinforcement, in the interest of ensuring decision making is as robust as possible, takes place through the Head of Development Management at committee meetings. Following the May 2025 local elections, two training sessions were arranged to support Members of the new Planning Committee .	Enhanced use of the internal Members Forum and structured training programme (above) to provide Member support and opportunity for officer and members to constructively review decision-making experience and performance on an on-going basis.
Running of Committee	Ensuring a quality of response to Members' questions at committee and supporting the efficiency of the meeting	The pre-committee briefings for Members are to be used to invite questions. This will assist officer preparation. It is entirely without prejudice to Members' lines of enquiry at the committee meeting. Officers had invited questions previously on an item by item basis for complex cases.	Being implemented so that any questions are received at least 2 working days before the meeting.
Time of day for the meeting	Ensuring an optimal time for Members.	The current start time of 4pm is still considered to be optimal.	No change
Drafting reasons for	Ensuring more efficiency in capturing	Without prejudice to their	Being Implemented

refusal	Members' reasons for refusal	recommendations, officers are being asked to consider the potential reasons that might arise from the issues and considerations presented in the officer reports	
Local Plan	Having an up to date local plan to inform decision making	A proposed local plan was submitted in July 2025. Initial hearings were held in February 2026.	The Inspectors' initial letter is awaited
Five Year Housing Land Supply	The absence of a five year housing land supply and the application of the 'tilted balance' in decision making.	An Annual Monitoring Report was approved by the Council's Executive in December 2025 which contains a comprehensive review of housing land supply.	At 31 March 2025, the district had 10,271 homes with outline or full planning permission. The AMR also shows that it has a total forward supply of 21,650 homes from 1 April 2025 (excluding additional supply from the new Local Plan). However, 6,123 homes presently meeting the Government's definition of 'deliverable' which produces a 3.1 year housing land supply when the requirements for Cherwell and Oxford's needs are combined.
Government Reforms	Readiness and Engagement	The Council is engaging on a countywide and Thames Valley basis in anticipation of SDS regulations and guidance in Summer 2026. Should the Council's new Plan be found sound at Examination, the Council will be well-placed for any new Local Plan process that tracks the SDS. A response to the NPPF consultation has	Continuance of preparation

		been prepared and officers are engaged with PAS, RTP1 and other events to support readiness.	
MHCLG/ Homes England / Atlas Engagement / OGC	Responding to the national planning agenda	The Council is engaged with the New Towns Programme, in responding to the OGC report and on delivery and infrastructure matters at Bicester. It is therefore liaising with MHCLG, Homes England and OGC. ATLAS is working on four projects with the Council including the provision of resource and expertise to support work on strategic applications and housing delivery.	Continuance of engagement and delivery of projects
Resource & Capability	Being well placed to support decision making and delivery	<p>A new Place and Regeneration Directorate has been created with additional Executive Director resource made available to support the oversight of Development Management.</p> <p>More support has been provided for the implementation and delivery functions of the Growth and Regeneration service. A new permanent Head of Service has been appointed. A new majors Development Management Team (a 3rd) has been created and a new team leader appointed. A new Biodiversity and Climate Resilience service has also been created with a new Head of Service. Additional planning resource has been approved through the budget process for 26/27 including resource for improvement. The planning service has a designated officer within the Transformation Team – an experienced</p>	Retain focus on performance and improvement.

		planner with digitilisation expertise.	
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Development Management Pre-Application Advice

Protocol for Member Engagement in Pre-Application Enquiries and Prior to a Meeting of the Planning Committee (February 2026)

Government guidance on pre-application advice is available at:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/before-submitting-an-application>

It makes clear, *'pre-application engagement is a collaborative process between a prospective applicant and other parties which may include:*

- *the local planning authority*
- *statutory and non-statutory consultees*
- *elected members*
- *local people*

It is recognised that the parties involved at the pre-application stage will vary on a case by case basis, and the level of engagement needs to be proportionate to the nature and scale of a proposed development. Each party involved has an important role to play in ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of pre-application engagement'

The Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) 2021 states,

'Government guidance encourages pre-application engagement with the community where it will add value to the process and the outcome. We will therefore encourage developers and promoters for large scale development to undertake their own consultation and engagement process with local people'

A Planning Advisory Service (PAS) review of decision making by the Council's Planning Committee (August 2025) recommended that the Council reviews the way that Councillors are involved in planning proposals both at pre-application stage and in the build-up to planning committee. PAS guidance highlights the advantages of involving Councillors to help convey local feelings about development and improve planning outcomes.

The Council's Development Management Service will therefore offer the following opportunities for 'major developments' as defined in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2010 (as amended).

Pre-Application Stage

1. one confidential meeting at pre-application stage with the relevant ward councillor (subject to agreement) supported by the case or supervising officer. An hourly rate will be added to the pre-application fee as set out in the



Council's published charges. The Councillor will not express their views on the proposals but will identify local issues that the promoter may wish to consider in preparing their application. A record of those issues will form part of the Council's pre-application response.

2. one confidential meeting at pre-application stage with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management (subject to agreement) supported by the case or supervising officer. An hourly rate will be added to the pre-application fee as set out in the Council's published charges. The Councillor will not express their views on the proposals but will identify strategic issues that the promoter may wish to consider in preparing their application. A record of those issues will form part of the Council's pre-application response.

Application Stage

3. following the submission of an application for planning permission, an on-line presentation about the development proposals to both the Chair of Planning Committee and the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management supported by the case and supervising officer. An hourly rate will be charged as set out in the Council's published charges. The Councillors will not express their views on the proposals but will ask questions of clarification. A record of the questions and answers will be appended to the officer report presented to the Planning Committee.
4. following the publication of an agenda for planning committee, a five minute on-line presentation to members of the Planning Committee or their substitutes, following by five minutes of questions from Councillors. A set fee will be charged as set out in the Council's published charges. The Councillors will not express their views on the proposals but will ask questions of clarification. A record of the questions and answers will be published not later than 4pm on the day before the committee meets.

This report is public	
Corporate Performance and Insight Strategy 2026/27	
Committee	Executive
Date of Committee	7 April 2026
Portfolio Holder presenting the report	Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, Councillor Chris Brant
Date Portfolio Holder agreed report	23 March 2026
Report of	Head of Chief Executive's Office, Kaimi Ithia

Purpose of report

The report provides an overview of the proposed Corporate Performance and Insight Strategy 2026/27, including proposed key performance indicators and annual delivery plan milestones to be reported across the new financial year.

1. Recommendations

The Executive resolves:

- 1.1 To review and approve the new Corporate Performance & Insight Strategy presented in Appendix 1, Key Performance Indicators as proposed in Appendix 2.
- 1.2 To note the Annual Delivery Plan (ADP) Milestones 2026/27 (as approved as part of the Budget) included in Appendix 3 for information.
- 1.3 To consider the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recommendation to incorporate additional performance measures for evaluating the Castle Quay investment, ensuring that social impact, environmental outcomes and growth potential are monitored alongside the existing financial and treasury management indicators.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Corporate Performance and Insight Strategy 2026/27 set out how Cherwell District Council will use performance management, data, and insight to support effective governance, informed decision-making, and improved outcomes for residents and acts as the 'golden thread' linking the Vision, Strategy, Annual Delivery Plan and Services Plans. It provides a clear and proportionate framework through a structured reporting cycle. By focusing not just on targets but on meaningful insight and impact, the strategy strengthens transparency, statutory compliance, and value for money, while supporting continuous improvement, public trust, and resilient delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan.
- 2.2 The strategy includes the proposed Corporate and Directorate Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2026/27 which are consistent with the prior year.

- 2.3. Please note that KPIs have been reviewed during the Service Planning Process. In addition, a benchmarking exercise to compare our indicators with those used by potential Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) partners, and best practice recommendations by the Local Government Association has been undertaken. Together these highlight opportunities to strengthen alignment and fill gaps within the current monitoring and reporting which will be considered for next year's Annual Planning Process.

Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary			
Finance	<p>There are no financial implications as a direct consequence of this report.</p> <p>Kelly Wheeler, Finance Business Partner, 26 February 2026</p>			
Legal	<p>There are no legal implications as a direct consequence of this report. However, where KPIs intersect with the Council's statutory or regulatory obligations (for example in relation to our homelessness duties), it is important to ensure that they do not inadvertently create obligations that conflict with our legal requirements.</p> <p>It is always best practice to regularly review performance metrics and KPIs.</p> <p>The report sets out how the proposals seek to address the recommendations within the audit.</p> <p>Denzil – John Turbervill, Head of Legal Services, 25 February 2026</p>			
Risk Management	<p>There are no risk implications as a direct consequence of this report. The proposal reinforces our commitment to transparency and auditability, mitigating related potential risks. For further details on potential risks please go to section 4.7.</p> <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance & Insight Team Leader, 28 January 2026</p>			
Impact Assessments	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equality Impact		x		N/A
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		x		N/A

B Will the proposed decision has an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		x		N/A
Climate & Environmental Impact		x		N/A
ICT & Digital Impact		x		N/A
Data Impact	x			The proposals will have a positive impact in the way we manage, monitor and present performance data. Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance & Insight Team Leader, 28 January 2026
Procurement & subsidy		x		N/A
Council Priorities	All			
Human Resources	N/A			
Property	N/A			
Consultation & Engagement	Considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting of 25 March 2026 . Recommendation 1.3 is a recommendation from the Committee.			

Supporting Information

3. Background

- 3.1 In 2025 the internal audit of Cherwell District Council's Performance Management Framework concluded that there is a generally sound system of governance and control in place, providing reasonable assurance overall regarding the Council's corporate performance. However, the audit identified a small number of significant and moderate weaknesses. Please find in the table a summary of the actions agreed during the audit to address weaknesses identified and how they are been addressed:

Finding	Agreed actions	Update
The performance management framework is not formally documented in a policy.	The development of the Performance Management Framework will be completed in quarter 2, as established in the Annual Delivery Plan 2025/26. The framework will set out the processes and expectations that form the golden thread between corporate, service and individual performance management, providing a consistent approach to the delivery of the council's priorities and objectives.	Delayed due to restructuring. The Corporate Performance & Insight Strategy (Appendix 1) will address this action.
The council does not optimise the functionality of the performance management system.	The Unity System is due for renewal in November 2026. The Performance & Insight Team will undertake an exercise to map out the technical needs for the organisation, in line with the new Performance Management Framework, to inform the decision on what system will be used going forward. This action will be supported and enabled by the Digital Innovation Team.	Work is underway to evaluate options; in the meantime, the Performance & Insight Team is working on optimising the system's functionality to support.
ADP Milestones could be more specific and include performance against allocated budgets.	As part of the development of the new Corporate Performance & Insight Strategy, clear expectations about target setting will be defined. There will be a requirement for milestones to be developed with a clear and precise plan on what actions will need to be taken for the achievement of each milestone.	This is an ongoing action. However, improvement has already been seen on making milestones and actions more specific in the 2026/27 Annual Delivery Plan.
	Budget allocations for Annual Delivery Plan targets will be considered for inclusion in the Performance Management Framework. Financial implications of the reported exceptional performance (amber and red) need to be added and monitor as part of quarterly reports.	The new Annual Planning Process will include better alignment between the ADP, service planning and budget planning. Also, this gap is addressed by the Corporate Performance & Insight Strategy. Additionally, financial implications of exceptional performance will be added to the 2026/27 reports.

3.2 Cherwell District Council approaches the 2026/27 financial year with a continued focus on its established corporate priorities: fostering economic prosperity across the district, strengthening community leadership and wellbeing, protecting, and enhancing the natural environment, and delivering high-quality place-making supported by secure, affordable, and sustainable housing. These priorities underpin the Council's strategic ambitions and set the context for how performance, progress, and service delivery are assessed throughout the year.

3.3 To ensure clear alignment with its strategic aims, the Council has carried out a comprehensive review of its Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2026/27. As part of the Service Planning Process, each team assessed whether current indicators remained fit for purpose, identified areas where adjustments were needed, and proposed new measures where these would add value. Targets for the forthcoming year were also set.

- 3.4 This internal work has been strengthened by a benchmarking exercise comparing Cherwell's KPIs with those used by potential Local Government Reorganisation partners, West Oxfordshire District Council, Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council, as well as reflecting recommendations from the Local Government Association (LGA). This comparison has helped to highlight opportunities for greater alignment, as well as any gaps in monitoring or reporting.
- 3.5 Taken together, these steps ensure that the refreshed KPI framework is both robust and future-focused, providing a reliable basis for tracking progress against the Council's priorities and supporting well-informed decision-making as preparations for LGR continue.

4. Details

4.1 Corporate Performance & Insight Strategy 2026/27

- 4.1.1 The new Corporate Performance & Insight Strategy sets out how Cherwell District Council will use performance management, data, and insight to support effective governance, sound decision-making, and improved outcomes for residents. It provides a clear and proportionate framework that links the Council's strategic priorities to service delivery, resource planning, and accountability, ensuring that performance management focuses not just on targets, but on what genuinely makes a difference to communities.
- 4.1.2 By integrating and understanding the connection between performance, risk, and financial management and presenting them within a structured reporting cycle, the strategy enables timely challenge, escalation, scrutiny and assurance through established leadership and democratic processes. It provides clear roles and responsibilities to reinforce ownership, transparency, and statutory compliance, while using public reporting to strengthen trust and accountability. Overall, the strategy supports continuous improvement, value for money, and resilient service delivery aligned to the Council's Vision and Strategy.

4.2 Corporate and Directorate Key Performance Indicators – Proposed by services

- 4.2.1 The Performance and Insight Team reviewed and challenged existing Corporate and Directorate KPIs as part of the 2026/27 Service Planning Process.
- 4.2.2 Key Performance indicators per priority proposed by services are as follows, it is proposed that there are no changes year on year to these Corporate measures:

Priority	Corporate	Directorate
Quality Housing and Place Making	8	14
Environmental Stewardship	5	3
Economic Prosperity	2	4
Community Leadership	0	6
Organisational	1	1
Total KPIs	16	28

Please note from the total 16 Corporate KPIs proposed, five are to be reported annually, one twice per year and 10 quarterly. For details, please go to Appendix 2.

4.2.3 For reference, the table below sets out the number of actions assigned to each priority area Annual Delivery Plan (ADP) for 2026/27 which complements the set of Key Performance Indicators that we report.

Priority	ADP Actions
Quality Housing and Place Making	8
Environmental Stewardship	4
Economic Prosperity	9
Community Leadership	4
Total Actions	25

4.3 Key Performance Indicators mapping ahead of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

4.3.1 In order to strengthen alignment with our potential LGR partners (for example Oxford City Council, West Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council), and ensure consistency in how performance is measured, monitored and reported, we have undertaken a comprehensive review of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), reported across the mentioned authorities. This analysis will inform recommendations for the 2027/28 Annual Business Planning process.

4.4 Local Government Association (LGA) Benchmarking

4.4.1 As part of this work, we have also reviewed guidance issued by the Local Government Association on Performance management and Key Performance Indicators development.

4.4.2 According to the guidance effective performance frameworks should be firmly anchored to the corporate plan and wider strategic priorities, using established models such as the Balanced Scorecard or Theory of Change to provide structure. Measures ought to be few in number, focused on outcomes, and shaped by SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely) or FABRIC (Focused, Appropriate, Balanced, Robust, Integrated, Cost-Effective) principles, with each indicator clearly specifying its measure, comparator and target. To support better insight and decision- making, authorities should look beyond simplistic RAG (Red, Amber, Green) ratings, instead drawing on trends, benchmarking and clear narrative context to properly reflect nuance and drive meaningful improvement.

4.4.3 The new Corporate Performance and Insight Strategy aligns well with these guidelines overall. However, there remains scope for further improvement, particularly around moving beyond simple RAG ratings and incorporating trends, benchmarking and clearer narrative context to reflect nuance more effectively. Advancing these elements forms a key part of our ambitions for the year ahead.

4.5 Local Outcomes Framework

4.5.1 In February 2026 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published the Local Outcomes Framework which sets out a clear set of national priorities for councils, focusing on tangible results rather than detailed central oversight. It aims to give local authorities greater stability and clarity, bringing key outcomes, such as safe housing, improved health, better early years support, and stronger neighbourhoods,

together in one place, so central and local government assess progress through the same lens. The full framework including final metrics is due to be published in April 2026, and a digital tool will be launching later this year.

4.5.2 It also sets out a defined list of priority outcomes, each supported by existing metrics, to help councils work with local partners to improve services and residents' quality of life. While some areas, like economic prosperity and child poverty, are shaped by wider forces, they provide important context for understanding local challenges. Overall, the framework is designed to support collaboration, transparency, and better decision-making across England.

4.5.3 Cherwell's KPIs have been initially reviewed against the KPIs proposed to date as part of the Local Outcomes Framework, some of our current ones align, however there is still further KPIs that can be added into our set to completely align, this is still a work in progress which the Performance and Insight team expects to conclude before the first reporting cycle of the new financial year

4.6 Summary of appendices

4.6.1 Below is a summary of the appendices included in this report:

- Appendix 1 – Corporate Performance and Insight Strategy 2026/27: outlines Cherwell District Council's approach to managing performance and insight, setting out how reliable data, clear governance, and structured reporting cycles support better decision-making and service delivery. It explains the principles, tools, and responsibilities that ensure accountability and continuous improvement, helping the Council translate its strategic priorities into meaningful outcomes for residents.
- Appendix 2 – Proposed Performance KPIs 2026/27: contains all Key performance indicators proposed by services for the next year including owner, targets and frequency of reporting.
- Appendix 3 – Annual Delivery Plan 2026/27 with milestones: contains all external Annual Delivery Plan actions for 2026/27 with correspondent quarterly milestones.

4.7 Potential risks

4.7.1 The table below reflects the potential risks associated to rejecting the proposals presented in this report:

Risk ID	Risk Description	Potential Impact	Likelihood	Severity	Mitigating Actions
R1	Absence of quarterly milestones for some ADP actions leads to perceived inactivity during reporting periods.	Misinterpretation of progress, reduced transparency, and potential reputational impact.	Low–Medium	Medium	Refine milestones' setting to ensure further clarity during 2027/28 Annual Planning process; public reports will ensure narrative updates reflect ongoing work

R2	Performance system functionality may not keep pace with the evolving framework ahead of system renewal.	Inefficient reporting, reduced data quality, and delays to performance analysis.	Medium	Medium–High	Optimise system; complete organisational needs analysis; work with Digital Innovation Team on improvements.
R3	Lack of publicly reported organisational-level actions creates an external gap in representing internal improvement activity.	Reduced transparency and incomplete external narrative of organisational performance.	Low	Medium	Capture organisational performance in Corporate KPIs for 2027/28; cover internal improvement work through performance cover reports during 2026/27
R4	Misalignment with peer authorities and potential LGR partners limits comparability of performance.	Reduced ability to benchmark, inconsistent reporting, and missed opportunities for harmonisation.	Medium	Medium	Integrate benchmarking findings; conduct annual KPI alignment exercise; reflect LGA guidance during the 2027/28 Annual Planning Process.

5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

5.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: To review and approve the proposed Corporate Performance and Insight Strategy 2026/27 with appendices.

Option 2: To do nothing or delay the decision(s). This option is not recommended, as democracy deadlines need to be met and systems need to be prepared with final approved Key Performance Indicators ahead of reporting cycle for the next financial year.

6. Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

6.1 The proposed Corporate Performance and Insight Strategy 2026/27 offers a clear and proportionate framework that strengthens governance, transparency and informed decision- making across the Council, ensuring that performance activity is firmly aligned with corporate priorities and future requirements.

6.2 Having addressed the recommendations from the internal audit, the strategy provides a robust foundation for delivering consistent, evidence- based insight in the year ahead.

6.3 Endorsing the strategy and associated appendices is therefore recommended, as doing so will safeguard continuity, reinforce statutory and democratic accountability, and

mitigate risks linked to delay, particularly in relation to planning cycles, system optimisation and preparation for potential Local Government Reorganisation.

Decision Information

Key Decision	No
Subject to Call in	Yes
If not, why not subject to call in	N/A
Ward(s) Affected	All

Document Information

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Corporate Performance and Insight Strategy 2026-27
Appendix 2	Proposed Performance KPIs 2026/27
Appendix 3	Annual Delivery Plan 2026/27 with milestones
Background Papers	None
Reference Papers	None
Report Author	Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance & Insight Team Leader
Report Author contact details	celia.prado-teeling@cherwell-dc.gov.uk
Executive Director Approval (unless Executive Director or Statutory Officer report)	Chief Executive, Gordon Stewart Head of Chief Executive's Office, Kaimi Ithia 25 March 2026

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Cherwell District Council Corporate Performance and Insight Strategy

**Performance Team Leader
Date Produced: February 2026
Date of Next Review: January 2027**

1. Introduction

For Cherwell District Council, integrating performance, finance and risk is essential to making sound, evidence-based decisions that protect services and deliver the best outcomes for local residents and businesses. By viewing these elements together, we can target our resources more wisely, address issues early and ensure plans and budgets genuinely reflect the council's priorities and risk appetite. To achieve this integration an Annual Business Planning process has been established, encompassing Budget and Service planning.

The strategy is a fundamental output of our Annual Business Planning process together with the Budget and the Corporate Risk Management Strategy, whilst these documents stand alone, joining the process of yearly reviewing and periodically reporting on them ensures an integrated view and analysis of all elements, allowing for informed decision making and effective scrutiny.

Performance and insight management is one of the foundations of a successful organisation, it goes beyond meeting targets, ensuring meaningful outcomes, align services with strategic and cost-effective plans, and creates a balanced, consistent, and community-focused organisation. Through this practice, we translate strategy into achievable goals, provide assurance, and evidence the outcomes being delivered to meet the ambition of the Vision and Strategy to 2030.

Our approach is to make data accessible, accurate, timely, and relevant, enabling continuous improvement. This means supporting staff, partners, and communities to feel informed and engaged, fostering trust, transparency, and participation. Performance management, together with data analysis, reinforces our commitments and guides cultural change, compliance, and accountability. It helps us to plan for the future, manage change, and create a resilient organisation aligned with people's needs, while cultivating pride in our district.

Performance and insight management is not just numbers and reports; it is about understanding what truly makes a difference to people. By gathering insight and benchmarking, we focus on service quality, track delivery against our commitments and priorities.

2. Purpose

The council's Corporate Performance and Insight strategy forms the foundation of strong governance, service innovation, and public trust. It provides clarity and direction, enabling teams to navigate uncertainty and achieve results.

Cherwell is committed to embedding a culture of awareness and compliance with policies and principles, ensuring ethical leadership and strategic agility. This approach promotes inclusive engagement and champions equality, diversity, and fairness—guided by honesty and clarity. Decisions are informed not only by data but by meaningful insight and robust performance management, ensuring outcomes that reflect real community needs.

Through this strategy, the council aims to anticipate challenges, adapt to change, and deliver services that build resilience and public confidence. It goes beyond numbers—focusing on impact, improvement, and trust—so that every action strengthens its ability to serve communities effectively.

In line with this ambition, the council's approach to performance reporting aims to place greater emphasis on outcomes rather than simply counting outputs. While outputs record the tasks completed or services delivered, outcomes demonstrate the real-world difference these activities make for our residents, communities, and the local economy. By prioritising outcome-focused reporting, Cherwell can better understand whether its interventions are achieving the intended impact, ensure that resources are directed where they add most value, and provide a more honest and meaningful account of progress. This shift strengthens transparency, supports improved decision-making, and reinforces the council's commitment to delivering tangible benefits for the people it serves.

3. Principles

Grounded in statutory duties (e.g., Local Government Act 1999), it implies simplicity, transparency, and accountability into everything it does. With this in mind, our strategy is designed to translate collective priorities into meaningful actions, with ongoing dialogue and feedback throughout the organisation's financial year.

Involving everyone in co-designing service standards and solutions, within each measure defined, we ensure that improvement is driven by insight, from live and participant voices, exposing shared responsibility, and presenting meaningful impact to our residents, not just dashboards.

Cherwell's strategy aims to help services identify issues early, supporting development through constructive feedback, and aligning resources with community organisation and community needs; all whilst maintaining compliance, reinforcing confidence, and fostering ethical, responsive governance.

Supporting and enabling services, and senior staff, to use appropriate, compliant, and well-structured dashboards, reports, insights, and challenging services performance through a central management tool, in turn enabling and optimising plans, consequently, helping everyone to come to better decisions. This includes:

- Strategic Direction: Establishing clear, long-term goals using frameworks like the golden thread from the Vision, Strategy, Annual Delivery Plans, and Service Plans.
- Collaboration & Governance: Preventing siloed working, aligning resources, and supporting ethical leadership, and enhanced transparency.
- Data-Driven Decisions: Leveraging data collaboration for evidence-based policy and resource allocation.
- Performance Management: Using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), a traffic light monitoring system and benchmarking, when possible, to drive efficiency and continuous improvement.
- Sustainability & Inclusion: Promoting environmental resilience, equality, diversity, and inclusion while fostering community engagement and legitimacy.
- Leadership Development: Equipping leaders with reliable data to navigate complexity and build strategic thinking and adaptability.

Corporate Performance and Insights' Management extends beyond measurement of key performance indicators, it shapes culture, drives collaboration, and strengthens governance; It acts as a proactive mitigation against risks, supports strategic agility, and ensures resources are used effectively. By embedding transparency and evidence-based decision-making, we enhance public trust and democratic legitimacy, fostering learning, innovation, and adaptability, enabling the organisation to respond confidently to changing priorities while demonstrating value for money and informed policy development.

4. Background

Our organisation's Corporate Plan (set for 2024–2026) is constituted of four strategic priorities:

- **Economic Prosperity**
 - Focus on creating vibrant economic centres and thriving rural villages by:
 - Revitalising town centres and supporting rural businesses.
 - Promoting green initiatives and sustainable growth.
 - Enhancing skills, attracting investment, and boosting tourism.
- **Community Leadership**
 - Strengthen community collaboration and resilience by:
 - Promoting health and wellbeing with an emphasis on reducing inequality.
 - Encouraging active lifestyles, cultural development, and crime reduction.
 - Advancing equality, diversity, and inclusion.
- **Environmental Stewardship**
 - Safeguard the environment and promote biodiversity by:
 - Committing to net-zero goals and improving air quality.
 - Driving circular economy principles: reduce, reuse, recycle.
 - Supporting green economy initiatives and partner-led sustainability projects.
- **Quality Housing and Place-Making**
 - Deliver sustainable and strategic development by:
 - Providing high-quality, secure, and affordable housing for diverse needs.
 - Enforcing standards, preventing homelessness, and supporting vulnerable residents.
 - Promoting green building practices and long-term community planning.

5. Methodology

The council sets annual priorities to guide resource allocation and strategic direction. Cherwell District Council's performance and insight strategy integrates planning, governance, and evidence-based analysis to ensure accountability, transparency, and effective service delivery. It is structured around four components: strategic alignment, governance and assurance, evidence-based analysis, and transparent reporting.

Cherwell District Council's performance management methodology is built on a structured, evidence-based approach, combining strategic planning, supportive governance, and robust quality assurance to maintain accountability, transparency, and effective service delivery. Acting as checks and balances, this framework enables informed decision-making and strong recommendations through rigorous analysis.

The methodology is organised into four key components:

1. Strategic Alignment – Linking objectives to corporate priorities and resource allocation – the ‘golden thread.’
2. Governance and Assurance – Applying quality checks and challenge mechanisms for accountability, through a two-fold approach: Service level management and monitoring and Corporate Leadership Team / Democracy monitoring and reporting quarterly.
3. Evidence-Based Analysis – Using data-driven insights to inform decisions and improve outcomes.
4. Transparent Reporting – Ensuring clarity and openness in performance results and recommendations.

5.1 Delivery & Performance Framework

To achieve successful performance management delivery, recommendations are made proficiently and accurately, to define and clarify processes which must be carried out by collecting, challenging and confirming data and the impact it brings to the organisation strategy table, in turn so that plans can be reviewed and re-framed, and this may occur monthly, quarterly, or yearly where input for reporting is agreed, with a view to:

- What happens: when KPIs (goals), feedback, and complaints performance data are collected, from diverse sources and tools within the organisation for each pre-determined period.
- Why: there is a need to give a quick view of each service goal (KPI/measure), and its alignment with the delivery of service priorities, determined by a RAG (Red/Amber/Green) status, helping leadership and members understand how each service is doing, what is working and what needs to be done to improve.
- Who sees it: depending on the stage of the cycle, monthly at service/director level, and quarterly presenting the relevant results to Corporate Leadership Team, Executive and Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Our performance monitoring structure is set into three levels of reporting:

- **Service and Directorate level:** this is when performance management happens at an individual service level with any issues being escalated as required. This monitoring includes operational and directorate level KPIs and projects.
- **Corporate level:** this is when performance management is reviewed at a strategic leadership level and through the democratic cycle. This review includes strategic level KPIs and Annual Delivery Plan Actions (ADP), and those escalated (performance exceptions) from the Directorate level. At this level Performance is reported and scrutinised quarterly by the following:
 - DLT (Departmental Leadership Team) – reviews operational performance at department level.
 - CLT (Corporate Leadership Team) – consolidates departmental reports for corporate oversight.
 - ELT (Extended Leadership Team) – aligns performance with the organisation’s four strategic priorities.
 - O&S (Overview & Scrutiny Committee) – Formal report where members conduct a deep-dive into performance outcomes, with call-in powers for decisions, and comments to the Executive.
 - Executive (Executive Committee) – Formal report including performance results, financial updates, and risk register status for the period, for executive to intake O&S comments and make final decisions or take note of the presented outcomes.

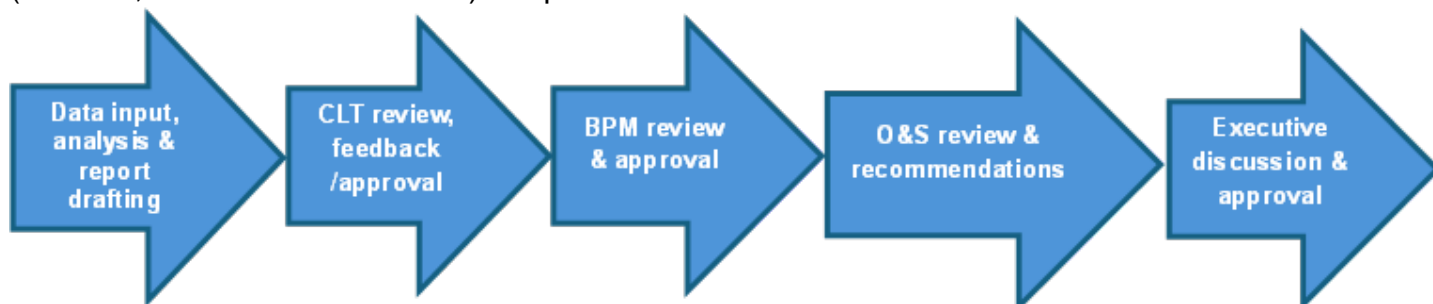
- **End of Year Report:** Additionally, an End of Year Performance Report is presented during the first quarter of the financial year, this is a report summarising not just the performance position for year-end, but also the achievements across the council during the year.

5.2 Performance Reporting Cycle

Cherwell District Council has a comprehensive performance reporting cycle that ensures accuracy and transparency throughout the organisation. This cycle progresses from operational monitoring to leadership oversight, then to governance review, and ultimately to public accountability through quarterly and annual reports, reinforcing compliance with transparency standards and providing a clear structure for reporting and decision-making.

The quarterly cycle begins with reminder emails prompting services to update their Corporate and Strategic KPIs, followed by data submission into the Performance system. The Performance and Insight Team analyses the data and drafts the report for the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT), who review, challenge, and approve it.

A combined performance monitoring report, including Finance and Risk, and reflecting CLT feedback, is then taken to the Private Executive Meeting (BPM) meeting for further review and recommendations ahead of the Performance element of the report being scrutinised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, who send comments, questions and recommendations to be ultimately discussed and answered by the Executive Committee who sees the full report (Finance, Performance and Risk). As per below:



5.3 Performance Management Tools

- **Performance Management System (currently Unity by Ideagen):** Repository for Key Performance Indicators' data. Performance indicators are reported quarterly (except for a small number reported annually); their status progression is scored using a RAG rating (Red, Amber, Green), by defining Green as on/above target or within the agreed tolerance, Amber as slightly behind target (as determined by the set tolerance, with an average of less than 10%); and Red very behind target (as determined by the set tolerance, with an average of more than 10%).
- **Annual Delivery Plan (ADP):** Cherwell's Annual Delivery Plan translates the council's long-term vision and corporate priorities into specific yearly key actions aligned with strategic goals such as economic growth, environmental sustainability, and community well-being. The plan provides clear direction, ensures accountability through quarterly monitoring and governance oversight, and enables the council to respond effectively to local and national challenges while maintaining transparency and progress tracking. The ADP yearly actions are broken down for reporting purposes into quarterly milestones, which are included in the Quarterly Performance Reports.
- **Dashboards:** Service, Directorate and Corporate level dashboards are currently under development, with the longer-term aspiration to compile all performance data with updates in

real time, aiming to support managers to monitor, manage and discuss their correspondent performance with their teams, portfolio holders, and/or line manager.

- **Benchmarking:** An annual benchmarking process is undertaken to compare the council's services, processes, and outcomes against other councils or recognised best practices to identify areas for improvement and ensure value for money. It helps set realistic service delivery targets, improve efficiency, and enhance community satisfaction by learning from high-performing councils. By analysing indicators such as waste collection rates, planning application turnaround times, or customer service responsiveness, benchmarking provides a clear reference point for continuous improvement and supports transparency and accountability in local government operations.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

Accountability is embedded through documented approvals, compliance checks, and audit trails to ensure all performance and engagement activities meet statutory and corporate standards as follows:

- **Service Leads:** Initiate, define and align performance objectives linked to the council's Vision and Strategy, Annual Delivery Plan, and Service Plans. They must ensure activities meet best value, equality, GDPR, and transparency requirements, and retain legal ownership or responsibility for consultations and engagement, even when delegated. This is also applicable for reporting, where services must submit outcomes to the performance management system, and integrate findings into monthly and quarterly performance reports, additionally to provide feedback to participants, where consultations were used. Ultimately, own their service performance end-to-end from creating proposing the service, and corporate and directorate KPIs to monitoring them through the service performance dashboard.
- **Performance & Insight Team:** Holds benchmarking, analysis and quality assurance roles. Providing advice to guide services on legal standards, best practice, and question or challenge design for performance, insight and consultations, using tools and support to provide approved platforms (e.g. Citizen Space, Unity, JADU), templates, and best use and application of strategies. The team owns the performance management system, developing tailor-made dashboards and reports, and providing training for services to manage their own dashboards. Overall, the team provides an internal challenge function, offering the checks and balances that strengthen decision-making and continuous improvement across the council.
- **Senior Officers, Assistant Directors and Executive Directors:** Are responsible for formal approvals, authorising plans, and ensuring alignment with strategic priorities, maintaining accountability, and retain ultimate responsibility for compliance and integrity of processes. Although able to delegate protocols, ultimately continue to hold responsibility for tasks while maintaining oversight, and ensure performance integration outcomes, of priorities informed through monthly dashboards, quarterly reports, and annual governance reviews.
- **Leadership Team:** Collectively the Leadership Team is responsible for championing and embedding the principles this strategy across their services from the top down.

Clear roles and responsibilities, are defined and established to:

- Strengthen Performance Reporting: Innovative tools (e.g., Unity dashboards, Citizen Space) allow better integration of non-data insights into monthly, quarterly, and annual cycles.
- Drive Continuous Improvement: Learning from past consultations and complaints ensures services adapt and improve, meeting Best Value Duty¹ and governance standards.
- Support Strategic Outcomes: Embedding lessons learned into the Annual Delivery Plan and risk reviews enhances decision-making and accountability.
- Build a Learning Culture: Encourages teams to challenge existing processes, adopt best practice, and benchmark against other councils via LG Inform².

7. Culture, Awareness and Training

To ensure Performance and Insight are effectively implemented, all Cherwell District Council members and officers, should have a clear understanding of this strategy. Performance management awareness should integrate into everyone's everyday thinking, behaviours, and actions.

Having developed a robust strategy with defined roles, responsibilities, and reporting lines, it is vital to equip members and officers with the knowledge and skills necessary to manage performance processes effectively. A training plan is being developed to meet organisational needs, including e-learning modules, workshops, and formal compliance training.

8. Strategy Review

The Corporate Performance and Insight Strategy will be reviewed annually as part of the council's Annual Business Planning Process. Each review will consider:

- The national and local context, including emerging trends and developments.
- Relevant policy and legislative changes that may influence our priorities or ways of working.
- The council's evolving business needs, ensuring the strategy continues to support effective decision-making and service delivery.

Once the review is completed it will be approved through the Democratic cycle ahead of the end of the Financial Year.

¹ Statutory guidance on the Best Value Duty for local authorities in England, issued under section 26 of the Local Government Act 1999. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/best-value-standards-and-intervention-a-statutory-guide-for-best-value-authorities>

² LG Inform is the local area benchmarking tool from the Local Government Association <https://lginform.local.gov.uk/>

Appendix 2 - Key Performance Indicators 2026-27

Quality housing and placemaking								
Measure Name	Corporate or Directorate monitoring	Portfolio Holder	AD/Director	Frequency	Targeted or Monitoring Only	Target 26/27	Bigger is better or Smaller is better (against target)	Continue/Stop/New (if no include reasons for stopping)
Number of homeless households living in nightly charged (hotel) temporary accommodation (TA).	Corporate	Cllr N Cotter	Nicola Riley Kristian Aspinall	Quarterly	Targeted	25	Smaller is better	Continue
% of Homelessness cases successfully prevented rather than relief/main duty being applied	Corporate	Cllr N Cotter	Nicola Riley Kristian Aspinall	Quarterly	Targeted	60%	Bigger is better	Continue
Average time taken to process Housing Benefit New Claims and council tax reduction	Directorate	Cllr L McLean	Michael Furness Stephen Hinds	Quarterly	Targeted	18 days	Smaller is better	Continue
Average time taken to process Housing Benefit Change Events and council tax reduction	Directorate	Cllr L McLean	Michael Furness Stephen Hinds	Quarterly	Targeted	8 days	Smaller is better	Continue
% of Major Planning Applications determined to National Indicator	Corporate	Cllr J Conway	David Peckford Ian Boll	Quarterly	Targeted	60%	Bigger is better	Continue
% of Non-Major Planning Applications determined to National Indicator	Corporate	Cllr J Conway	David Peckford Ian Boll	Quarterly	Targeted	70%	Bigger is better	Continue
% of Major Applications overturned at appeal	Corporate	Cllr J Conway	Paul Seckington Ian Boll	Quarterly	Targeted	10%	Smaller is better	Continue
% Non-Major Applications overturned at appeal	Corporate	Cllr J Conway	Paul Seckington Ian Boll	Quarterly	Targeted	10%	Smaller is better	Continue
Net Additional Housing Completions to meet Cherwell needs	Corporate	Cllr J Conway	David Peckford Ian Boll	Biannual Sept - March	Targeted	791 (half year)	Bigger is better	Continue
Number of Homeless Households living in Temporary Accommodation (TA)	Directorate	Cllr N Cotter	Nicola Riley Kristian Aspinall	Quarterly	Monitoring	N/A	N/A	Continue
Number of affordable homes delivered	Corporate	Cllr N Cotter Cllr J Conway	Nicola Riley Kristian Aspinall	Quarterly	Monitoring	N/A	N/A	Continue
Average time taken for new applications to be responded to with 15 working days	Directorate	Cllr N Cotter	Nicola Riley Kristian Aspinall	Quarterly	Targeted	15 days	Smaller is better	Continue
% of building control full plans assessed within 5 weeks (or longer with applicant's agreement)	Directorate	Cllr J Conway	David Peckford Ian Boll	Quarterly	Targeted	95%	Bigger is better	Continue
Building Safety Regulatory - Quarterly data - return all data by statutory date	Directorate	Cllr J Conway	David Peckford Ian Boll	Quarterly	Monitoring	N/A	N/A	New
Building Safety Regulatory - Annual data - return all data by statutory date	Directorate	Cllr J Conway	David Peckford Ian Boll	Annual	Monitoring	N/A	N/A	New
Speed of determining Non-Major Planning Applications (excluding extensions of time)	Directorate	Cllr J Conway	David Peckford Ian Boll	Quarterly	Targeted	TBA	Smaller is better	New
Speed of determining of discharge of condition applications	Directorate	Cllr J Conway	David Peckford Ian Boll	Quarterly	Targeted	48 days	Smaller is better	New
Speed of providing responding to pre-application enquiries within timescale set by pre-application service delivery	Directorate	Cllr J Conway	David Peckford Ian Boll	Quarterly	Targeted	TBA	Smaller is better	New
Average time taken to deal with major applications	Directorate	Cllr J Conway	David Peckford Ian Boll	Quarterly	Targeted	200 days	Smaller is better	New
Average time taken to deal with minor applications	Directorate	Cllr J Conway	David Peckford Ian Boll	Quarterly	Targeted	56 days	Smaller is better	New
Average time taken to deal with householder applications	Directorate	Cllr J Conway	David Peckford Ian Boll	Quarterly	Targeted	49 days	Smaller is better	New

Environmental Stewardship								
Measure Name	Corporate or Directorate monitoring	Portfolio Holder	AD/Director	Frequency	Targeted or Monitoring only	Target 26/27	Bigger is better or Smaller is better (against target)	Continue/Stop/New (if no include reasons for stopping)
% Waste Recycled & Composted	Corporate	Cllr I Middleton	Kristian Aspinall Ed Potter	Quarterly	Targeted	54%	Bigger is better	Continue
% Annual reduction in fuel consumption	Corporate	Cllr I Middleton	Kristian Aspinall Ed Potter	Annual	Targeted	1%	Bigger is better	Continue
% of Climate Action Plan delivering to target	Corporate	Cllr T. Beckett	Ian Boll Michael Suddens	Quarterly	Targeted	66%	Bigger is better	Continue
Total Greenhouse gas emissions for the year	Corporate	Cllr T. Beckett	Ian Boll Michael Suddens	Annual	Targeted	3900 tonnes of CO2e	Smaller is better	Continue
% of missed waste containers	Directorate	Cllr I Middleton	Kristian Aspinall Ed Potter	Quarterly	Monitoring only	N/A	N/A	Continue
Tonnes residual household waste collected	Corporate	Cllr I Middleton	Kristian Aspinall Ed Potter	Quarterly	Monitoring only	N/A	N/A	Continue
% of Recycling Contamination rate	Directorate	Cllr I Middleton	Kristian Aspinall Ed Potter	Quarterly	Monitoring only	N/A	N/A	Continue
Economic prosperity								
Measure Name	Corporate or Directorate monitoring	Portfolio Holder	AD/Director	Frequency	Targeted or Monitoring only	Target 26/27	Bigger is better or Smaller is better (against target)	Continue/Stop/New (if no include reasons for stopping)
% of Council Tax collected, increase Council Tax Base	Directorate	Cllr L McLean	Michael Furness Stephen Hinds	Quarterly	Targeted	Q1 29% Q2 56.30% Q3 83% Q4 97.75%	Bigger is better	Continue
% of Business Rates collected, increasing NNDR Base.	Directorate	Cllr L McLean	Michael Furness Stephen Hinds	Quarterly	Targeted	Q1 31% Q2 57.10% Q3 83.5% Q4 98%	Bigger is better	Continue
Number of enterprises in the district	Corporate	Cllr L McLean	Ian Boll Tom Dobrashian	Annual	Monitoring only	N/A	N/A	Continue
Secure non-retail-based key tenants	Corporate	Cllr L McLean	Mona Walsh Stephen Hinds	Annual	Targeted	2	Bigger is better	Continue
Number of businesses engaged through UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) funded programmes	Directorate	Cllr L McLean	Ian Boll Tom Dobrashian	Biannual Sept - March	Monitoring only	N/A	N/A	Continue
Number of residents engaged through UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) funded programmes	Directorate	Cllr L McLean	Ian Boll Tom Dobrashian	Biannual Sept - March	Monitoring only	N/A	N/A	Continue

Community leadership								
Measure Name	Corporate or Directorate monitoring	Portfolio Holder	AD/Director	Frequency	Targeted or Monitoring only	Target 2026/27	Bigger is better or Smaller is better (against target)	Continue/Stop/New (if no include reasons for stopping)
Number of Visits/Usage of all Leisure Facilities within the District	Directorate	Cllr R Pattenden	Kristian Aspinall Nicola Riley	Quarterly	Monitoring	N/A	N/A	Continue
Residents who have taken part in programmes contributing to reducing health inequalities	Directorate	Cllr R Pattenden	Kristian Aspinall Nicola Riley	Quarterly	Monitoring	N/A	N/A	Continue
Residents who have taken part in programmes contributing to reducing health inequalities	Directorate	Cllr R Pattenden	Nicola Riley Kristian Aspinall	Quarterly	Monitoring	N/A	N/A	Continue
% of due food hygiene inspections of premises rated A-D completed	Directorate	Cllr R Pattenden	Kristian Aspinall Tim Hughes	Quarterly	Targeted	95%	Bigger is better	Continue
Number of -Fly Tips Reported	Directorate	Cllr R Pattenden	Kristian Aspinall Tim Hughes	Quarterly	Monitoring	N/A	N/A	Continue
Implement Marmot principles across the district - Deliver 5 Community Insight profile	Directorate	Cllr R Pattenden	Kristian Aspinall Nicola Riley	Quarterly	Monitoring	N/A	N/A	New
Implement Marmot principles across the district - deliver 10 community-led projects to address Health inequalities	Directorate	Cllr R Pattenden	Kristian Aspinall Nicola Riley	Quarterly	Monitoring	N/A	N/A	New
Organisational								
Measure Name	Corporate or Directorate monitoring	Portfolio Holder	AD/Director	Frequency	Targeted or Monitoring only	Target 2026/27	Bigger is better or Smaller is better (against target)	Continue/Stop/New (if no include reasons for stopping)
Number of upheld complaints	Directorate	Cllr D Hingley	Natasha Barnes Stephen Hinds	Quarterly	Monitoring	N/A	N/A	Continue
Overall employee satisfaction	Corporate	Cllr C Brant	Claire Cox Stephen Hinds	Annual	Targeted	10% Increase	Bigger is better	New

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Priority	Goals	Aims	2026/27 Actions	Quarterly Milestones	Executive Director / AD Lead
Long-term economic prosperity	Create vibrant economic centres and thriving rural villages	To foster diverse economic centres and villages that support local businesses, attract investment, and enhance community life.	Develop and agree the Economic Prosperity Strategy, including the Economic Action Plan, in order to establish a long-term programme of regeneration and strategic actions	Q1 - Start Stakeholder Engagement to support EP Strategy Q2 - Stakeholder Engagement to support EP Strategy Q3 - Complete the Economic Prosperity Strategy including Action Plan Q4 - N/A	Ian Boll / Tom Dobrashian
			Build a new community sports facility with outdoor provision at Graven Hill.	Q1 - Develop Plans/Planning Permission for the Community Centre, Sports Pitches and Pavilion Q2 - N/A Q3 - Commence Construction for the new Community Centre, Sports Pitches and Pavilion Q4 - Monitor Progress	Kristian Aspinall
		To promote sustainable economic prosperity through innovation, resilience, and strategic growth.	Develop and agree capital programme to deliver the partner culture strategy for the District	Q1 - Options appraisal report covering design, cost plan and procurement strategy Q2 - Consider funding strategy Q3 - Begin detailed planning if activity in Q1 and Q2 positive Q4 - TBC	Kristian Aspinall / Mona Walsh
			Work with Oxfordshire Growth Commission to deliver economic development, infrastructure and housing growth	Q1- Complete technical review of delivery of LPPR sites Q2 - Seek further funding support for development of place narratives Q3 - TBC Q4 - TBC	Ian Boll / Tom Dobrashian / David Peckford
			Make best use of council owned assets, including Bodicote House to promote innovation and strategic growth	Q1 - Conduct financial appraisal and site surveys for the repurposing of lower bridge street. Complete license of occupation for Banbury Library, alongside completion of feasibility and surveys (completed by OCC) Q2 - Exchange of Contracts for Bodicote House. Conduct design and stakeholder engagement for Lower Bridge Street repurposing. Finalising scheme design and procurement with OCC for Banbury Library Q3 - Agreeing all other legal documentation with OCC in relation to Banbury Library. Q4 - Scope planning application for repurposing of Lower Bridge Street. Work on site for Banbury Library commence.	Ian Boll / Mona Walsh
	Build an inclusive and green economy	To build an economy that is both inclusive and environmentally sustainable, ensuring equitable opportunities for all while minimising environmental impact.	Continue to support the work of the Marmot Place Partnership for Oxfordshire	Q1 - Consider rural inequalities work outcomes Q2 - Share Partnership updates with Members Q3 - N/A Q4 - Seek endorsement for 2027/2028 plan	Kristian Aspinall

Priority	Goals	Aims	2026/27 Actions	Quarterly Milestones	Executive Director / AD Lead
Community Leadership	Strengthen community collaboration and resilience	To work closely with communities and partners to foster shared solutions to building safe, resilient, and empowered communities.	The council will look to automate the application of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for people that it is made aware of that are in receipt of Universal Credit. This will help to maximise the take up of this vital financial support to some of the most vulnerable members of our society	Q1 - Ensure the automation is applied to bills for 2026/27 Q2 - N/A Q3 - N/A Q4 - N/A	Stephen Hinds / Michael Furness
			To agree a strategic asset management policy that will promote innovation and best use of our resources	Q1 - Agree and approve the asset management approach, and establish a clear prioritisation order for all assets. Q2 - Commence delivery of the asset management approach, focusing first on the highest-priority assets. Q3 - Continue delivery of the asset management approach, guided by the established asset-priority information. Q4 - Continue delivery of the asset management approach, making ongoing use of priority asset information.	Ian Boll / Mona Walsh
			Identify barriers to accessing council services and agree an improvement plan	Q1 - Develop Audit for accessing services Q2 - Deliver Audit to assess accessibility of services Q3 - Review and develop improvement plan from audit Q4 - Deliver and review improvement plan	Kristian Aspinall
			Improve customer experience and reduce contact volumes by making information easily accessible and enabling effective self-service wherever possible	Q1 - Commence delivery of Single Front Door Programme of work Q2 - Continue delivery in line with programme timeline Q3 - Continue delivery in line with programme timeline Q4 - Continue delivery in line with programme timeline	Stephen Hinds / Ann Slavin
	Promote health and wellbeing with a focus on inequality	To enhance health, wellbeing, and social cohesion across the district and address inequalities through preventive initiatives and targeted interventions.	Expand youth programmes to promote better mental health	Q1 - Launch mental wellbeing report and deliver action plan Q2 - Develop DCMS funded Action Plan for delivery Q3 - Evaluate impact and review Mental Wellbeing programme Q4 - Evaluate and review DCMS youth programme and impact	Kristian Aspinall
			Work to reduce inequality in Banbury's most deprived wards (Grimsbury, Neithrop, Ruscote), with a specific focus on Health Prevention and Stronger Communities themes of Brighter Futures	Q1 - Deliver Community Insight Profile grant programme Q2 - Evaluate Community Insight Profile programme against IMD metrics Q3 - Evaluate Community Insight profiles 3 year review and impact to show change in inequalities Q4 - Develop Brighter Futures Annual Report	Kristian Aspinall

Priority	Goals	Aims	2026/27 Actions	Quarterly Milestones	Executive Director / AD Lead
Environmental stewardship and climate action	Safeguard the environment and promote biodiversity	To implement sustainable policies and practices, protect natural habitats, and support conservation initiatives that enhance ecosystem health and biodiversity while responding to the climate emergency.	Establish a new programme of asset decarbonisation projects, using Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme funding.	Q1 – Identify and explore available funding opportunities, and develop a schedule of assets that are suitable candidates for decarbonisation. Q2 – Review and assess the shortlisted assets for decarbonisation potential, and agree which schemes should be pursued in future funding rounds. Q3 – When suitable funding schemes open—and assuming the assets meet the required grant criteria—submit priority assets for decarbonisation funding. Q4- N/A	Ian Boll / Mona Walsh / Hitesh Mahawar
			Continue with fleet decarbonisation, utilising electric vehicles where possible.	Q1 - Review the introduction of HVO Q2 - Review the vehicle replacement programme Q3 - N/A Q4 - N/A	Kristian Aspinall / Ed Potter
			Encourage the creation of biodiversity sites / habitat banks / carbon sequestration, in line with local and national planning policy, engaging with developers and partners where appropriate.	Q1 - Initiating the Biodiversity and Climate Resilience Strategy Q2 - TBC Q3 - TBC Q4 - TBC	Ian Boll / Hitesh Mahawar
	Promote the circular economy of reduce, reuse and recycle to minimise waste	To encourage sustainable consumption, optimise the use of resources, and implement efficient recycling systems that support waste reduction and re-use initiatives.	Continue the district-wide rollout of Simpler Recycling and integrate the requirements of the Deposit Return Scheme in preparation for its implementation in 2027/28	Q1 - Review the introduction of kerbside glass & the removal of bring bank sites Q2 - Review the TEEP assessment for separate paper & cardboard Q3 - Consider Capital impact Q4 - N/A	Kristian Aspinall/ Ed Potter

Priority	Goals	Aims	2026/27 Actions	Quarterly Milestones	Executive Director / AD Lead
Quality housing and place making	Deliver sustainable and strategic development that meets Cherwell's needs now and in the future	To ensure the right mix of facilities, services and infrastructure for new developments, to create successful, well-designed communities.	Adopt & commence implementation of the new Local Plan	Programme determined by the Planning Inspectorate. Q1 - Examination of the local plan. Q2 - Examination of local plan Q3 - Examination continues Q4 - Estimated Plan Adoption	Ian Boll / David Peckford
			Continue with the programme for the review of Conservation Area Appraisals for the following villages: Hampton Gay, Shipton on Cherwell & Thrupp, Hook Norton and Chesterton	Q1 - N/A Q2 - Commence 3 CAAs Q3 - N/A Q4 - Complete 3 CAAs	Ian Boll / David Peckford
			Continue with implementation of housing delivery in accordance with housing delivery action plan	Q1 - Continue working with the Atlas/Homes England Team in Bicester to support housing delivery Q2 - Half year return on housing delivery Q3 - N/A Q4 - Full Year Return on Housing Delivery & Annual Monitoring Report to Executive	Ian Boll / David Peckford / Paul Seckington
			Implement 'section 106' process improvements	Q1 - Finalise the S106 templates Q2 - Create Practice Notes Q3 - Implement Improvements Q4 - Review	Ian Boll / Paul Seckington / Denzil Turbevill
			Commence delivery of the Bicester Market Square	Q1 - Procure technical consultants for detailed design for Market Square Q2 - N/A Q3 - Complete detailed design phase Q4 - Market Square Planning granted and contract awarded	Ian Boll
			Implement the National Building Safety Levy.	Q1 - Preparation for implementation - detail TBC Q2 - Preparation & Trial Implementation Q3 - Implementation by October 2026 Q4 - Review and refine process	Ian Boll / David Peckford
	Achieve more high-quality, secure, and affordable housing that caters for the diverse needs of our residents	To help all residents access safe places they can make/call their home, including housing that is affordable through direct ownership, private rental and social rent housing.	Embed requirements from Renters Rights Bill into service delivery to improve the standards of households on low incomes	Q1 - Hold tenant and landlord liaison events and launch communications strategy for new legislation, specifically end of S.21 evictions Q2 - Review, update and draft new policies affected by new legislation Q3 - Confirm new resource requirements following receipt of grant funding Q4 - Complete a fine income benchmarking exercise, to understand potential budget implications in future years	Kristian Aspinall/Nicola Riley
			Oversight of Phase 2 of the Graven Hill development	Q1 - Commence 39 Dwellings HZ 4 ~ Phase 3a Q2 - Commence 27 Dwellings HZ 4 ~ Phase 3a and Target Planning permission Stage 2 Hybrid Q3 - Commence Infrastructure Stage 2 ~ Phase 1, Commence 34 Dwellings Stage 2 ~ Phase 1 and First Deliveries 39 Dwellings HZ 4 ~ Phase 3a Q4 - First Deliveries 27 Dwellings HZ 4 ~ Phase 3a	Stephen Hinds

This report is public	
Updated Procurement Strategy	
Committee	Executive
Date of Committee	7 April 2026
Portfolio Holder presenting the report	Portfolio Holder for Finance, Regeneration and Property, Councillor Lesley Mclean
Date Portfolio Holder agreed report	7 February 2026
Report of	Assistant Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer, Shiraz Sheikh

Purpose of report

This report seeks the approval of Executive for the new Procurement Strategy.

1. Recommendations

The Executive resolves:

- 1.1 To approve the new Procurement Strategy.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This Procurement Strategy outlines how we will continue to strengthen professional standards and procurement processes across the Council, supporting the delivery of high-quality services that provide value for money for our community.
- 2.2 It sets out the objectives of the Procurement & Contracts Unit—part of the Law and Governance Department—for the coming years, ensuring alignment with the Council's priorities around achieving value for money and continuous improvement in procurement practice.
- 2.3 This also includes new Social Value initiatives delivered in close collaboration with the Environmental Services team.
- 2.4 Updating the Procurement Strategy is essential to ensure the Council's procurement activity remains fully aligned with current legislation, reflects evolving corporate priorities, and embeds modern best practice across all commissioning and purchasing activity.
- 2.5 A refreshed strategy strengthens governance, supports consistent standards across departments, and enables the Council to maximise value for money at a time of increasing financial pressures.

- 2.6 It ensures that Social Value, sustainability, and climate objectives are fully integrated into procurement processes, while also improving market engagement and promoting fair, transparent competition.
- 2.7 Updating the Strategy also allows the Council to respond to technological advancements, enhance contract management approaches, and ensure that procurement continues to deliver high-quality, community-focused outcomes.

Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary			
Finance	A new procurement strategy that aligns with the Procurement Act 2023 will mean better value for money when commissioning works on behalf of the Council and thereby provide value for money for the residents of Cherwell district. Kelly Wheeler, Finance Business Partner, 3 March 2026			
Legal	An updated procurement strategy reflecting the changes introduced by the Procurement Act 2023 is recommended to ensure compliance and maximise opportunities for the Council and in turn for residents. These include greater transparency, alignment with environmental standards and involvement of local service providers. Mubin Khan, Contracts Solicitor, 5 March 2026			
Risk Management	A new procurement strategy mitigates the risk of becoming not compliant with the Procurement Act 2023. Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance & Insight Team Leader, 5 March 2026			
Impact Assessments	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equality Impact				N/A
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?				N/A
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?				N/A

Climate & Environmental Impact				It is essential that the Climate and Environmental team are actively involved in procurement exercises and that the Procurement Strategy is updated whenever new guidelines or legislation are introduced.
ICT & Digital Impact				N/A
Data Impact				N/A
Procurement & subsidy				Procurement Strategy Report
Council Priorities	Updating the Procurement Strategy is essential to ensure the Council's procurement activity remains fully aligned with current legislation, reflects evolving corporate priorities, and embeds modern best practice across all commissioning and purchasing activity			
Human Resources	N/A			
Property	N/A			
Consultation & Engagement	Consultation via various committees			

Supporting Information

3. Background

- 3.1 The previous Procurement Strategy now requires updating to ensure full alignment with the Procurement Act 2023 (PA23), which introduces new legal duties, transparency requirements, and procedural changes that all contracting authorities must embed within their procurement practices.
- 3.2 An updated strategy will provide a clear framework for implementing these reforms, ensuring that the Council remains compliant and continues to operate in a fair, efficient, and commercially robust manner.
- 3.3 In addition, the revised strategy will reflect new and emerging initiatives expected to shape procurement activity over the next two years, including strengthened Social Value commitments, enhanced environmental and climate-related requirements, improved contract management standards, and greater focus on digital innovation.
- 3.4 Refreshing the strategy at this point ensures that procurement activity remains forward-looking, responsive to change, and aligned with the Council's wider corporate priorities.

4. Details

- 4.1 The Council's existing Procurement Strategy was developed prior to the introduction of the Procurement Act 2023 (PA23) and does not fully reflect the new statutory duties, transparency requirements, and procedural reforms now required of contracting authorities.
- 4.2 PA23 represents a significant shift in public procurement practice, placing greater emphasis on openness, competitive flexibility, supplier engagement, and the achievement of wider public benefits. A refreshed strategy is therefore essential to ensure continued compliance and alignment with national expectations.

Need for an Updated Strategy

- 4.3 The current strategy requires revision to incorporate the new legal obligations introduced under PA23, including the increased focus on transparency, publication requirements, and the need to demonstrate clear, proportionate, and well-evidenced decision-making in all procurement activity.
- 4.4 Updating the strategy will ensure the Council operates within a modernised framework that reflects best practice, reduces the risk of legal challenge, and supports improved commercial outcomes.
- 4.5 It also enables the Council to embed enhanced internal governance arrangements and ensure a consistent procurement approach across all departments.

Future Initiatives and Forward Planning

- 4.6 The updated strategy will look ahead over the next two years, taking into account emerging priorities such as strengthened Social Value commitments, climate and environmental requirements, and improved contract management standards.
- 4.7 Collaboration with the Climate and Environmental team will be essential to ensure procurement exercises incorporate new sustainability guidance, evolving legislation, and the Council's environmental commitments.
- 4.8 The revised strategy will also respond to operational changes, including digital improvements, enhanced market-engagement approaches, and opportunities to streamline internal processes.

Benefits of Updating the Strategy

- 4.9 A refreshed Procurement Strategy will provide a clear and modern framework to guide officers, support informed decision-making, and ensure procurement activity contributes to the Council's wider corporate objectives.
- 4.10 By aligning the Council's approach with PA23 and future initiatives, the strategy will strengthen value for money outcomes, promote innovation, and ensure procurement practices remain legally compliant, efficient, and resilient.
- 4.11 The Council recognises that its procurement activity has a significant influence on environmental outcomes and the Council's wider climate objectives. Through this Strategy, the Council will use its purchasing power to support the reduction of carbon emissions associated with the goods, services and works it procures, including emissions arising within supply chains. This will include where possible

asking suppliers to report on the emissions associated with the services provided to the council.

- 4.12 Procurement will therefore support the Council's commitment to addressing climate change by embedding proportionate and relevant low-carbon and sustainable procurement principles, while continuing to secure value for money and compliance with procurement legislation.
- 4.13 Officers undertaking procurement exercises must ensure that environmental and carbon-reduction considerations are addressed where relevant, taking account of contract value, risk, and market capacity, and ensuring consistency with the Council's Procurement Rules and applicable statutory guidance.

5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 5.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: Remain with current procurement strategy - Without updated guidance, officers may interpret PA23 reforms differently, leading to inconsistent approaches, delays, or poor-quality procurement documentation, which can undermine effectiveness and accountability. The existing strategy may not capture new corporate priorities around Social Value, sustainability, climate action, and carbon reduction. This limits the Council's ability to maximise community benefits and deliver on its environmental responsibilities.

Option 2: A longer-term Procurement Strategy would not be a viable option, as it would risk becoming outdated and misaligned with the rapidly changing procurement landscape, particularly in light of the new requirements introduced by the Procurement Act 2023 and the ongoing developments in Social Value, sustainability, and environmental obligations. Legislative, technological, and market conditions are evolving at pace, and a fixed five-year strategy would lack the flexibility needed to respond to these changes effectively. A shorter strategy period ensures the Council can remain agile, regularly update its priorities, and maintain a governance framework that reflects modern best practice, emerging initiatives, and the Council's evolving corporate objectives.

6 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 It is recommended that the Executive approves the development and adoption of a revised Procurement Strategy aligned with the Procurement Act 2023 and emerging priorities for the next two years. A shorter strategy period should be endorsed to allow for regular review and timely updates in response to legislative changes, market developments, and corporate priorities. The updated strategy should strengthen governance, support consistent practice across departments, and embed enhanced Social Value and environmental requirements, ensuring that procurement continues to deliver high-quality outcomes and value for money for our community.

Decision Information

Key Decision	Yes
Subject to Call in	Yes
If not, why not subject to call in	N/A
Ward(s) Affected	All

Document Information

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Procurement Strategy
Background Papers	None
Reference Papers	None
Report Author	Darren Jacobs, Senior Procurement Manager
Report Author contact details	darren.jacobs@cherwell-dc.gov.uk
Executive Director Approval (unless Executive Director or Statutory Officer report)	Report of Statutory Officer, Monitoring Officer

PROCUREMENT STRATEGY

INCORPORATING SOCIAL VALUE



CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL



Cherwell | DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

PROCUREMENT & CONTRACTS

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INTRODUCTION



Cherwell District Council as of May 2025 is still a standalone authority. It was heralded in an independent review as a leader of place, with big ambitions and a track record of delivering. The Council is a significant purchaser of goods, services and works in Cherwell. As all of public sector, It is subject to the public sector procurement rules and as such must purchase goods, services and works in compliance with the applicable law.

In March 2023, the Council:

- Approved new Contract Procedure Rules
- Commenced a programme of guidance and support for Council Officers
- Initiated new contract gateway procedures, leading to the establishment of a new Procurement & Contracts Group responsible for procurement governance

This Procurement Strategy explains how we will continue to develop professional standards and processes across the Council and support delivery of quality services that reflect value for money for our community.

It sets out the objectives of the Procurement & Contracts Unit – part of the Law and Governance department - over the next few years to support the Council’s aims for achieving value for money and continuous improvement in procurement.

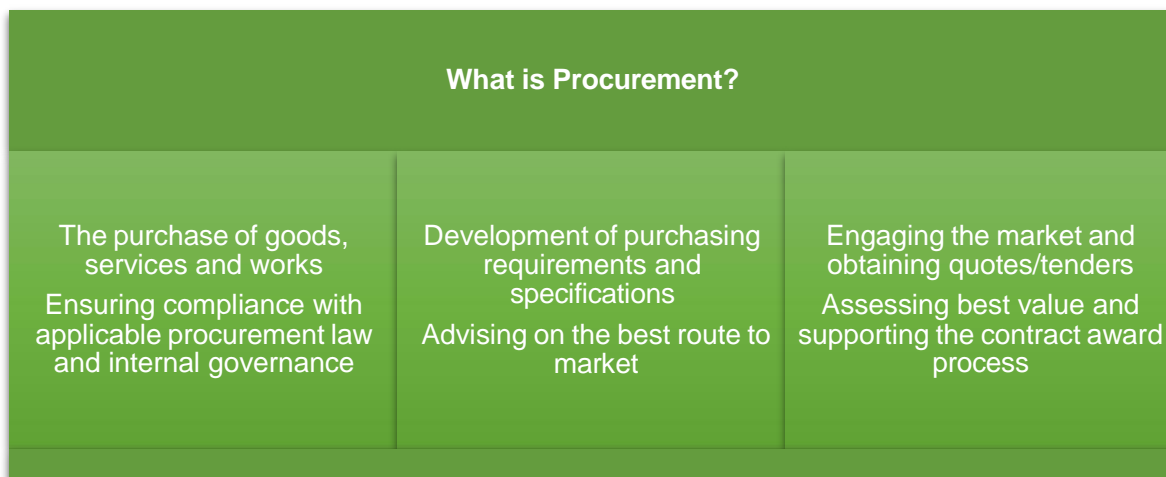
In addition, In 2026, Cherwell District Council will continue delivering its ambitious transformation agenda, building on the progress achieved through the Cherwell Futures Programme. Following a comprehensive review of activity in 2024–2025, the council has strategically refocused its transformation efforts on three priority areas: Planning, Environmental Services, and Customer Engagement, recognising these as the services with the greatest potential for improvement and modernisation.

The transformation approach for the year ahead combines detailed service-level reviews with a clear Target Operating Model to guide organisational change. This blended methodology ensures that improvements are insight-driven, operationally sound, and aligned with long-term strategic objectives. The programme is designed to modernise services, strengthen customer access through a more streamlined “single front door,” and support a more resilient and efficient organisation equipped to meet future challenges.

This work is fully aligned with the council’s broader vision to be a **modern, forward-thinking authority** that is digitally enabled, financially aware, and driven by a

values-led, high-performing workforce. The transformation underway supports the council's wider strategic priorities, including economic prosperity, environmental stewardship, quality housing, and stronger community leadership.

Throughout 2026, the council will continue to improve outcomes for residents while ensuring that the transformation delivers meaningful organisational benefits. As the programme progresses, significant savings will be achieved, enabling the council to reinvest in priority services and maintain long-term financial sustainability.



This Procurement Strategy aims to achieve the following objectives:



This document sets out how these objectives will be achieved through the Council's procurement and contract approach over the next few years 2025 to 2027.

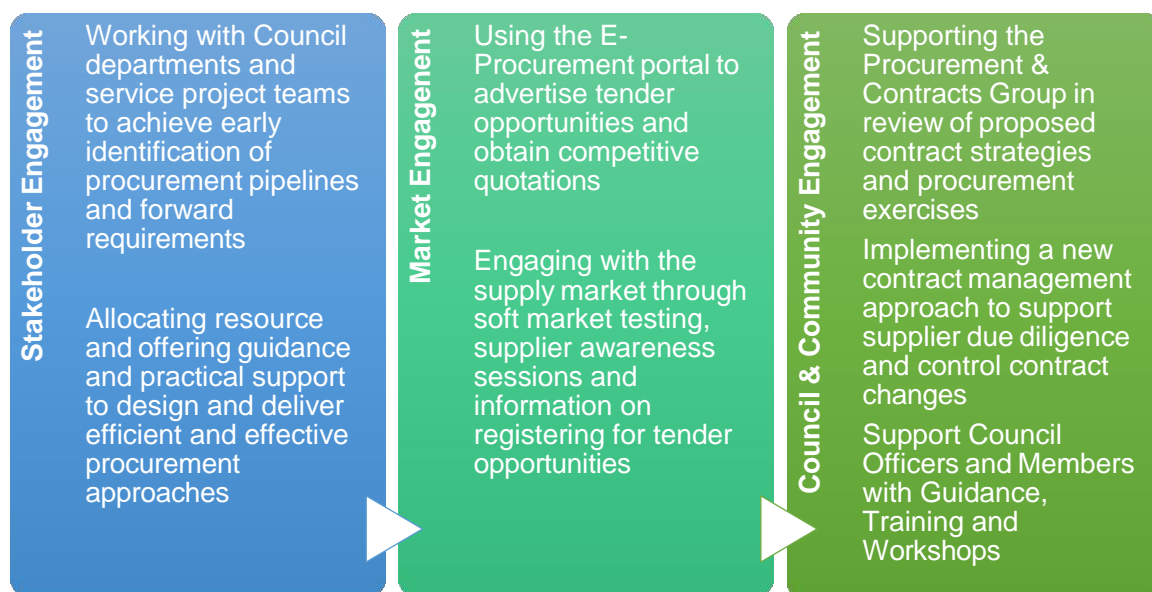
Delivery of these objectives will be measured and supported by an Action Plan, which forms part of this Strategy.

SUPPORTING CHERWELL



We will continue to develop the procurement and contracts service in alignment with Cherwell’s Delivery Themes set out in the Council’s Business Plan. In addition, we will offer practical support and commercial support for the Council’s Strategic Plans, such as Digital Futures which sets out the vision to make life easier for everyone in Cherwell by using technology to enhance their experiences whether receiving or providing council services.

Through dedicated guidance, support and professional processes the Procurement & Contracts Unit will help maximise the value delivered through the Council’s non-pay expenditure. This support will also assist the Council in management of strategic risk, through due diligence of suppliers and providing a framework for contract terms, specifications and key performance indicators. This approach mitigates risk, increases clarity on contract requirements and accountability of contractor performance.



GOVERNANCE



Public procurement is governed by a legal framework aimed at promoting the principles of economic competition, transparency and equality of treatment set out in public contracts legislation. Failure to comply with applicable law can lead to delays, costs and legal challenges. Good contract governance is also important to ensure supplies, services and works are delivered appropriately in accordance with contract requirements.

Appropriate compliance will be maintained through:

- Implementation of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules
- Monitoring of significant procurements by the Procurement & Contracts Group
- Continuation of guidance and training to Council colleagues
- Deployment of the E-Procurement system
- Promoting measures on Anti-Fraud, addressing Conflicts of Interest & Modern Slavery Act
- Utilising the new Procurement Act which went live in February 2025

The key gateway forum for review and approval of significant procurement exercises is the Procurement & Contracts Group. This group considers procurement spend within the Council for medium to high value contracts. As part of the **Gateway Process**, contract strategies are considered by a multi-disciplinary group of officers and representatives of elected members:



Relevant projects are reviewed in respect of legal compliance, budget, commercial risks and alignment with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and other policies. The Group can also be appraised with updates on how the procurement contract strategy has been delivered.

VALUE FOR MONEY

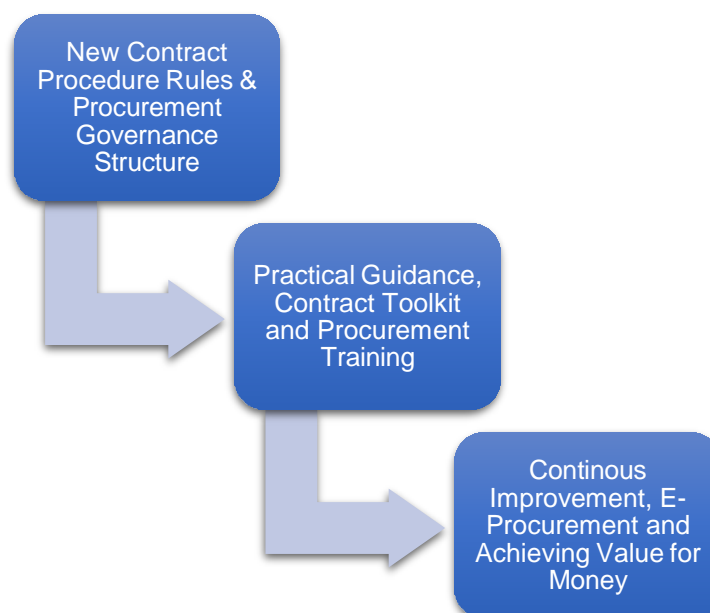


Council Procurement has a key function in delivering value for money and efficiency by ensuring the purchase of goods, services or works have been suitably market tested. This can be achieved by using processes such as requesting quotations, seeking tenders or calling off from Framework Agreements (where suppliers have been selected onto the framework following a publicly advertised procurement process).

Procurement criteria may address price and quality. By facilitating a compliant procurement process, offering practical advice and implementing continuous improvement measures (such as the E-procurement portal), the Procurement & Contracts Unit can help deliver significant savings and achieve added value for the Council and local community, by supporting:

- Pipeline Planning and Stakeholder Engagement
- Providing Support on Route to Market Options, Frameworks etc
- Guidance and Support on Developing Specifications
- Quality and Financial Criteria in Invitations to Tender
- Achieving Savings, Quality Service Deliverables and Added Value

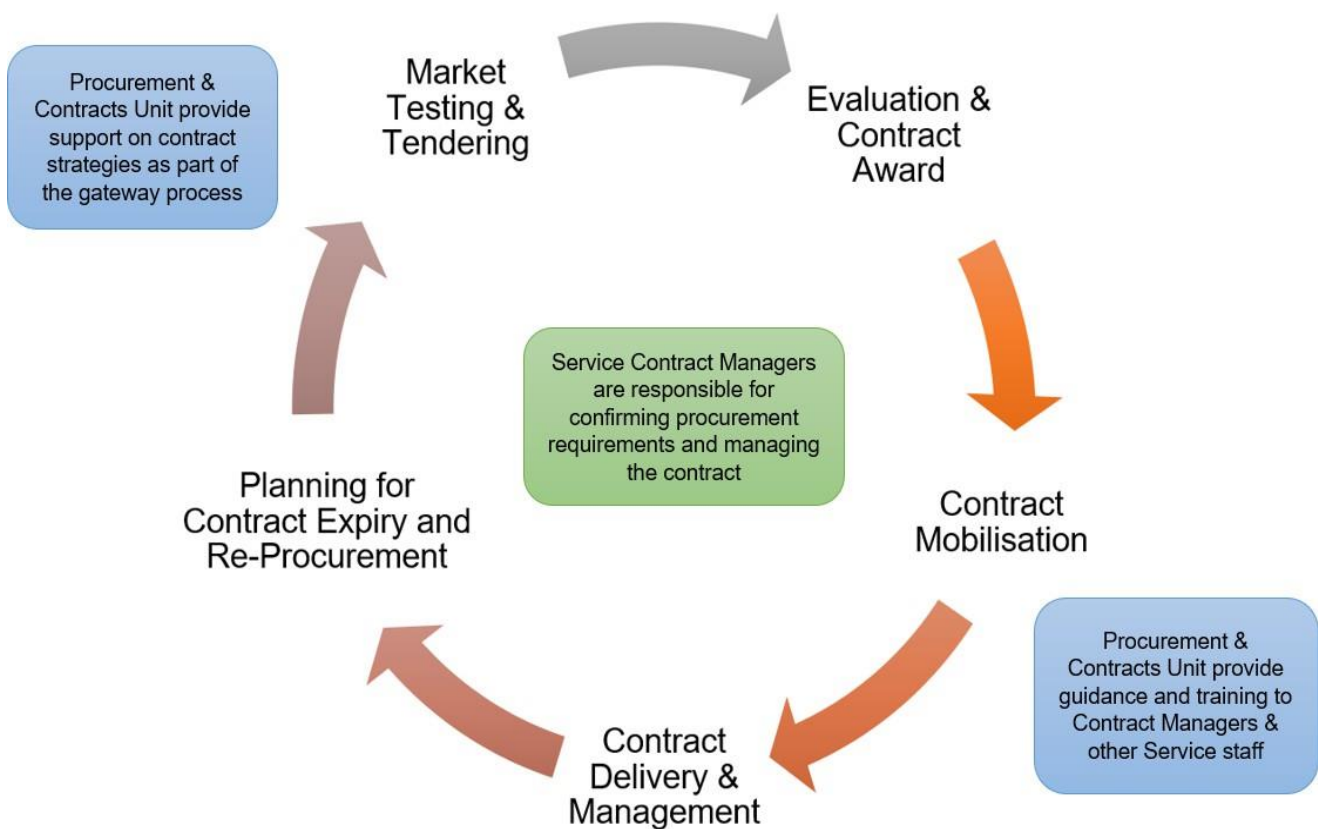
To ensure good governance – and value for money – it is important the Procurement & Contract Unit is appropriately resourced. Further details are set out in the Action Plan.



SUPPLIER & CONTRACT MANAGEMENT



Market testing and tender processes form just part of the overall contract lifecycle for long term and recurring procurement requirements. Contract Managers within the relevant service departments will be responsible for developing contract specifications and strategies, with support from the Procurement & Contracts Unit:



Once a supplier has been awarded a contract, good contract management is a vital step in the process to make sure what is promised will be delivered. Effective contract management involves the proactive monitoring of all activities necessary to ensure goods, services and works are provided in accordance with the contractual agreement.

Mobilisation happens after a supplier is selected, but before the contract goes live. The Contract Management approach will support information gathering to help run the contract and make sure that the right plans are in place.

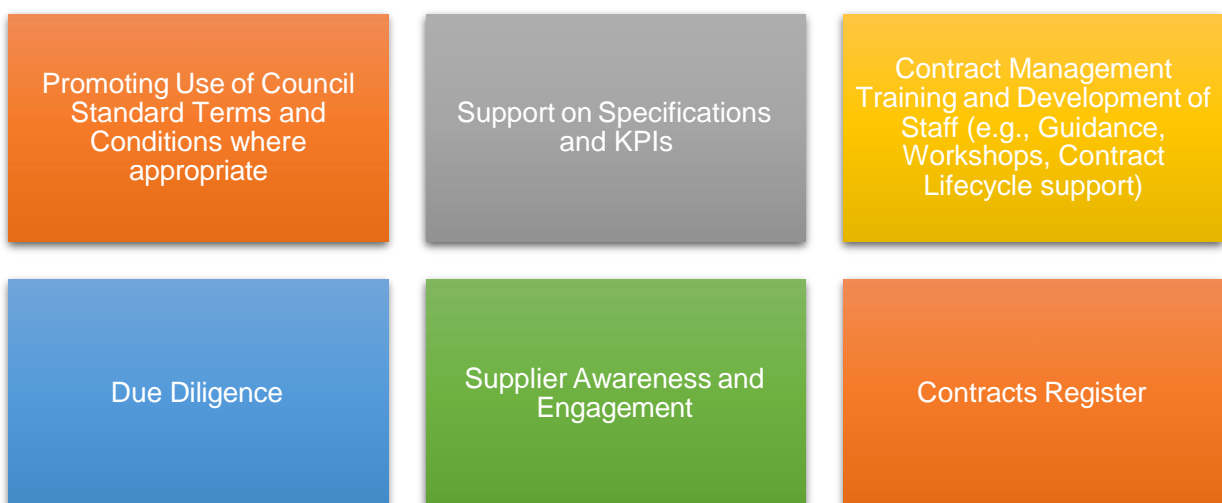
For some contracts, the Council may be committed to working with a supplier for some time. The success of the contract relies on good communication between both parties. On-going due diligence can identify and mitigate issues such as missed deadlines, compliance failures and inefficiency.

The Contract Management approach will promote review meetings to avoid drift and keep the relationship open and constructive, identifying and resolving issues early. It will also support risk management to identify, control and manage risks that might have an impact on the contract being performed effectively.

Procurement and Contracts Unit can support Contract Managers in service departments on the management of contract changes that may arise during the term of the contract - to ensure they accord with the Contract Procedure Rules and applicable terms and conditions. Examples include:

- Changes of key personnel
- Factors affecting supplier costs
- Changes to legislation
- Extraordinary events beyond the supplier's control

The contract documentation should include clear expectations and strategies for exit and transition. Procurement & Contracts Unit are in a unique position to support the full contract lifecycle:



DELIVERING SOCIAL VALUE

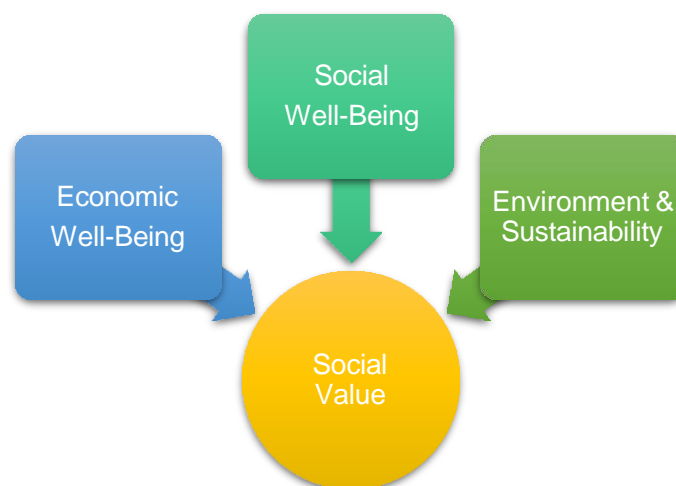


Climate Change and Net Zero

The Council recognises that its procurement activity has a significant influence on environmental outcomes and the Council's wider climate objectives. Through this Strategy, the Council will use its purchasing power to support the reduction of carbon emissions associated with the goods, services and works it procures, including emissions arising within supply chains. This will include where possible asking suppliers to report on the emissions associated with the services provided to the council.

Procurement will therefore support the Council's commitment to addressing climate change by embedding proportionate and relevant low-carbon and sustainable procurement principles, while continuing to secure value for money and compliance with procurement legislation.

Officers undertaking procurement exercises must ensure that environmental and carbon-reduction considerations are addressed where relevant, taking account of contract value, risk, and market capacity, and ensuring consistency with the Council's Procurement Rules and applicable statutory guidance.



Social value in procurement is a key component in promoting how the purchase of goods, services and works can create additional benefits for society.

Further to the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, the Council has established as part of its procurement gateway process and this Strategy:

- Consideration of how proposed purchase of services might improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the local area where applicable
- How Sustainability – such as carbon footprint and emissions reduction, recycling or energy efficiency - may be achieved
- Promotion of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the resourcing and delivery of contracted services and works

These issues may be connected in their positive social impact and can be enhanced by the approach set out in this Strategy for procurement opportunities, supplier engagement and partnerships.

Approaches to delivering social value include:

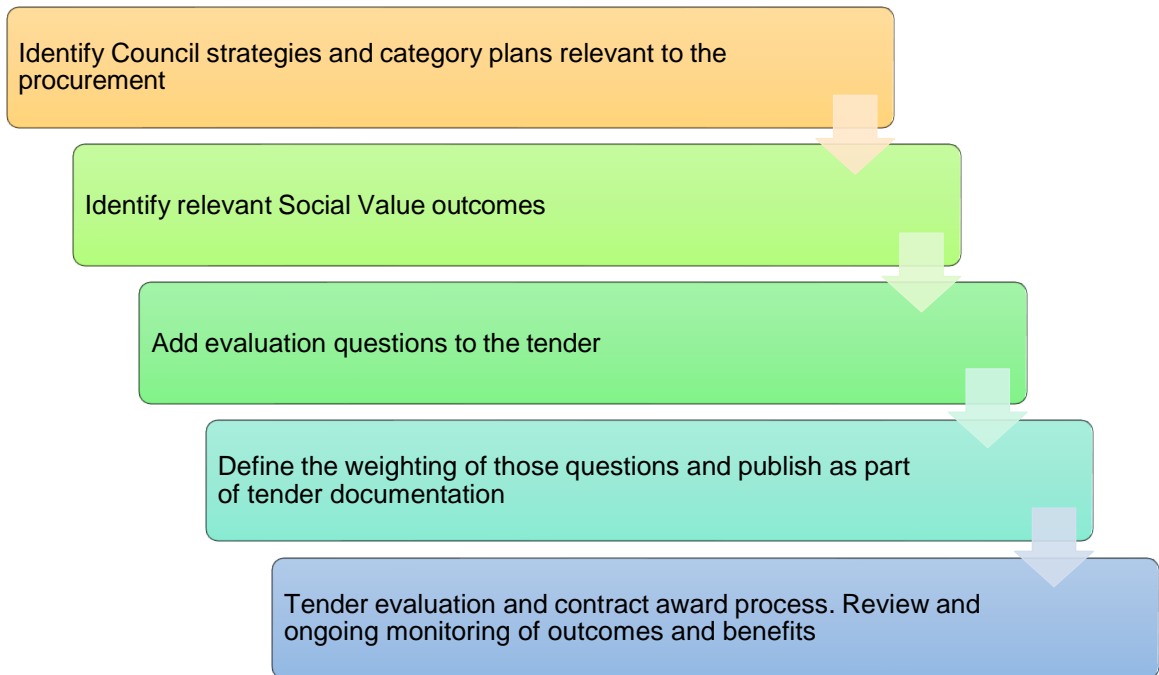
- Engagement with organisations with a focus on maximising the social, community, and environmental value delivered through the spending power of the Council
- Supporting the development and inclusion of social value related specifications and evaluation criteria in the planning and design of procurement processes and contract management approaches, for example:
 - Promoting Local Skills and Employment and an “Inclusive Economy”
 - Supporting Healthier, Safe and More Resilient Communities
 - Supporting Decarbonisation and Net Zero Commitments

Further details on achieving these aims, including addressing climate change and Scope 3 emissions, are set out in the Action Plan.

This work will contribute to the procurement and contract related aspects of Cherwell’s Themes, Outcomes and Measures (“TOMs”) originally set out in the CDC [Social Value Policy](#) prior to de-coupling:

THEME	OUTCOMES
PROMOTING DIVERSE LOCAL SKILLS & EMPLOYMENT	More local people in employment
	More opportunities for disadvantaged people
	New and improved skills for local people
	Improved employability of young people
SUPPORTING GROWTH OF SMEs, THE GREEN ECONOMY AND ATTRACTING RESPONSIBLE INVESTMENT	More investment and opportunities for local MSMEs and VCSEs
	Improving staff wellbeing and mental health
	Increase and promote fair and equal pay, and reduce pay gaps (gender, ethnicity, disability, etc.), by collaboration with suppliers
	Encourage best practice and ensure compliant, ethical procurement
	Social Value embedded in the supply chain
VIBRANT, SAFER & MORE CONNECTED COMMUNITIES	Addressing the causes of health inequalities
	Vulnerable people are helped to live independently
	Crime and anti-social behaviour is reduced
	Engage with our communities, develop strong ties and collaborate on projects to improve the local area together
TAKING CLIMATE ACTION FOR A ZERO-CARBON FUTURE	Carbon emissions are reduced
	Air pollution is reduced
	Safeguarding the natural environment
	Resource efficiency and circular economy solutions are promoted
ENCOURAGING SOCIAL INNOVATION	Sustainable procurement is prioritised
	Other measures (TBD)

- This Strategy builds on these TOMs and progresses forward, helping to achieve a Cherwell specific procurement and contract management approach across the planning, evaluation and contract award (and post-award) stages:



- We will also provide guidance to Council stakeholders and contract managers on considering how future requirements might be offered in smaller, multiple contracts – if practicable and aligned with appropriate contract management requirements
- In addition, we will engage with larger regional and national suppliers to enquire how they may utilise local suppliers in their supply chains – and/or invest into our local communities, through jobs, training or improving our environment

Social value criteria - in the context of procurement - should be relevant to the scope, specification and objectives of the contract. Council officers are prompted during the gateway process to consider how social value can be addressed as part of the contract strategy. They are also supported with guidance and training on developing social value requirements, criteria and related specifications.

By engaging with local suppliers and businesses we can increase interest and participation in procurement opportunities, supporting the local economy. Further details are set out in the Action Plan annex.

Sustainable Procurement and Carbon Accountability

As part of our commitment to reducing carbon emissions across our supply chain, we are embedding sustainability considerations into our procurement processes. This includes setting clear expectations for suppliers, ensuring accountability for emissions monitoring, and providing the necessary support to drive meaningful reductions. The following principles outline our approach to integrating carbon management into procurement:

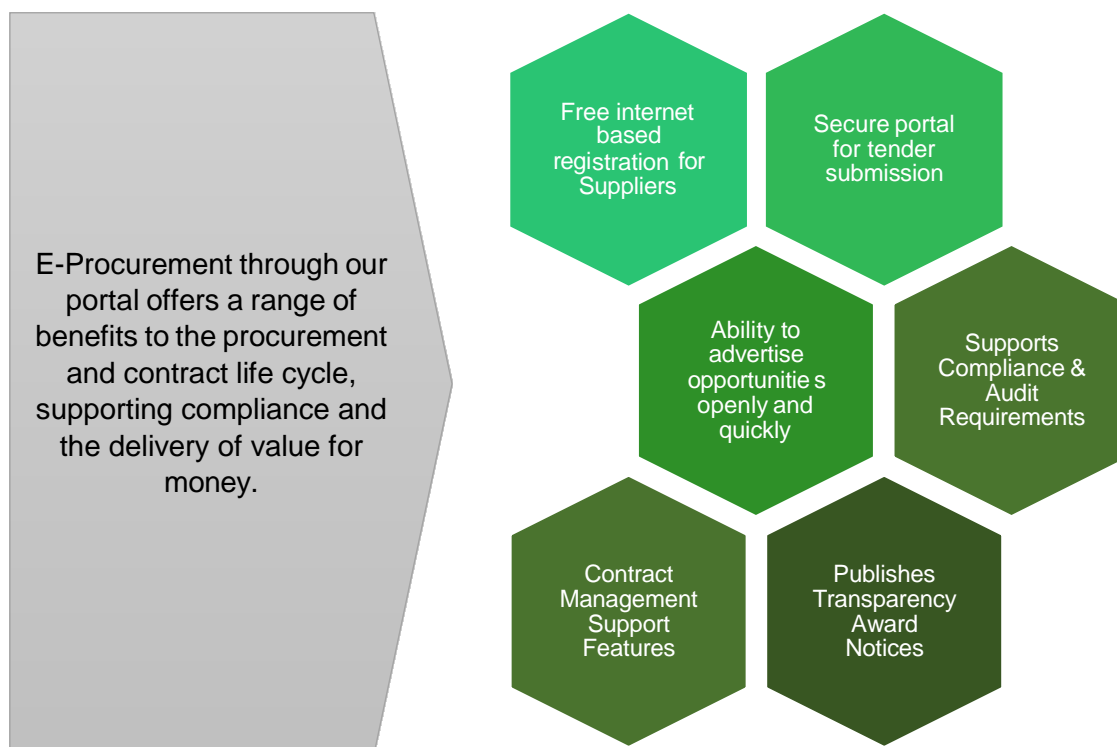
- **Moving Beyond a Spend-Based Approach:** To enhance the accuracy of our Scope 3 emissions data, we are committed to transitioning away from a purely spend-based methodology for assessing carbon impact.
- **Establishing Clear Thresholds for Action:** We will implement stricter sustainability policies for contracts above a specified expenditure threshold, which will be determined in consultation with our Legal and Finance teams.
- **Embedding Carbon Accountability in Contracts:** From the outset, suppliers bidding for relevant contracts will be required to estimate and monitor their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The approach for evaluating this requirement will be clearly defined to ensure fairness and transparency.
- **Supporting Suppliers in Emission Reduction:** We recognize that some suppliers may need guidance on measuring and reducing their emissions. To support them, we will provide relevant resources and advice, including best practice documents.
- **Defining Responsibilities in Carbon Monitoring:** Contract Managers will be responsible for monitoring carbon emissions throughout the contract lifecycle. The Climate Team will offer guidance during the tender stage, ensuring that appropriate questions are asked and that emissions reduction efforts are effectively evaluated.

This approach aligns with our commitment to reducing emissions across our supply chain and ensuring that sustainability remains a core consideration in our procurement process.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES



The Council will encourage officers to use legally compliant processes to open up tender opportunities for local Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs), and Voluntary, Community or Social Enterprise organisations (VCSEs) where practicable. This is supported by deployment of our new electronic procurement portal - used for registering suppliers, advertising tender opportunities and seeking quotations.



The Council can also promote opportunities for the local community and suppliers by:

- Including consideration of Added Value, Apprenticeships and other positive Community Impact in relevant procurement requirements
- Engagement with Local Business & Organisations through supplier awareness sessions and developing procurement information on our website and portal
- Promoting Collaboration & Partnerships in public procurement with local organisations and public sector partners

ANNEX

Outcomes Achieved



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Efficient & Effective Procurement

Procurement Objective	Action	Successfully Achieved	Monitoring
	Ensuring the Procurement & Contract Unit is appropriately resourced with relevant governance and commercial skill sets	The Procurement & Contract Unit is now fully resourced with the necessary governance and commercial expertise, ensuring contract management, compliance, and strategic procurement support.	Ongoing
	Reviewing opportunities for improved ways of working, actively seeking involvement in projects at an early stage to help deliver efficiencies where possible	Reviewed opportunities for improved ways of working and proactively engaged in projects at an early stage, enabling efficiencies to be identified and delivered wherever possible.	Ongoing
	Supporting contract managers and stakeholders with guidance and training to know where and how they can achieve best value	Provided contract managers and stakeholders with clear guidance and targeted training, ensuring they understand where and how to achieve best value in their contracts and procurement activity.	Ongoing
	Advising colleagues on developments in applicable regulations or other factors affecting Procurement, where there is likely to be a significant impact on the Council's operations, financial sustainability or reputation	Advised colleagues on key regulatory and procurement developments, ensuring they understood potential impacts on the Council's operations, financial sustainability, and reputation.	Ongoing

Governance & Compliance

Procurement Objective	Action	Successfully Achieved	Monitoring
	Contract and supply risks are noted and reduced / managed where appropriate	Contract and supply risks have been clearly identified and effectively reduced or managed wherever appropriate, ensuring stronger resilience and continuity across services.	Ongoing
	Training of staff is appropriate to understand the legal aspects of procurement and encourage dissemination of knowledge and good practice	Ensured staff received appropriate training on the legal aspects of procurement, promoting the sharing of knowledge and embedding good practice across the organisation.	Ongoing
	Working in conjunction with Finance, Audit and Contract Managers to monitor areas of Expenditure where there may be a higher risk of fraud, supplier failure, or other related negative impacts	Worked collaboratively with Finance, Audit, and Contract Managers to monitor areas of high expenditure (£1m+) with a higher risk of Financial, Value, and Risk Assessment (FVRA) concerns, helping to identify and mitigate potential supplier failure or other negative impacts.	Ongoing
	Review of new Procurement Legislation, related Government Guidance and Procurement Policy Notes	Completed a thorough review of new procurement legislation, associated Government guidance, and Procurement Policy Notes, ensuring the Council remains compliant and up to date with national requirements.	Ongoing
	Continuous improvement: Launch procurement feedback loops and adjust strategy as needed.	Improvement in the overall performance and communication of procurement providing a service to the Council and the community	Ongoing

Value For Money

Procurement Objective	Action	Successfully Achieved	Monitoring
Value For Money	Review historical procurement data to identify major spending contracts, suppliers, and trends	Reviewed historical procurement data to identify major contracts, key suppliers, and emerging trends, supporting more informed decision-making and improved strategic planning.	Ongoing
	Audit existing agreements for opportunities to consolidate or renegotiate.	Audited existing agreements to identify opportunities for consolidation or renegotiation, strengthening commercial outcomes and improving overall contract value.	Ongoing
	Potential contract strategies or alternative procurement approaches to be designed, evaluated and where appropriate	Developed and evaluated potential contract strategies and alternative procurement approaches, implementing them where appropriate and excluding contracts where they were not required or did not add value.	Ongoing
	Prudent management of demand, including reducing or delaying specific contract activity, number of purchases, and consolidating multiple purchases to obtain maximum supply outcome for minimum expenditure where practicable	Applied prudent demand management by reducing or delaying specific contract activity, minimising purchase volumes, and consolidating requirements where practicable to achieve maximum supply outcomes at minimum expenditure.	Ongoing

Achieving Social Value

Procurement Objective	Action	Successfully Achieved	Monitoring
Achieving Social Value	Deploying the principles of sustainable procurement into the contract lifecycle with consideration to socio-economic and environmental factors (inc. Cherwell TOMs)	Used established frameworks that embed sustainability principles and ensured the Social Value team was involved in all tenders, effectively integrating sustainable procurement throughout the contract lifecycle with full consideration of socio-economic and environmental factors.	Ongoing
	Participating in sustainability workshops and addressing waste, energy efficiency & climate change measures (inc. Scope 3 emissions)	Actively attended and engaged in sustainability workshops, working closely with the team and contributing to the Council's wider environmental strategy. This included addressing waste reduction, energy efficiency, and climate-change measures, with full consideration of Scope 3 emissions.	Ongoing
	Reviewing contracts or areas most salient to Modern Slavery and promoting enforcement of the Modern Slavery Act in relevant procurement processes	Reviewed contracts and areas most susceptible to Modern Slavery and ensured that, while we use frameworks that already embed strong Modern Slavery safeguards, we also actively strive to reinforce and promote enforcement of the Modern Slavery Act within all relevant procurement processes, strengthening ethical compliance across the supply chain.	Ongoing

Promoting Opportunities

Jointly tendering and / or using other public sector partners to either collaborate or use frameworks

Worked with other public sector partners to jointly tender where appropriate and made effective use of collaborative frameworks, strengthening procurement outcomes through shared expertise and economies of scale.

Ongoing

NEW ACTION PLAN



Actions for 2026 to 2028

Procurement Objective	Action	Expected Outcome	Timeline
Efficient & Effective Procurement	Assessment of top 5 spend areas	Optimised sourcing strategies, reduced duplication, and cost savings of 5–10%	2026-2028
	Introduce outcome-based specifications in all major tenders	Improved service delivery and innovation from suppliers	2026-2028
	Standardise procurement templates and evaluation models	Faster tender cycle times and consistent compliance	2026-2028
	Embed whole-life costing in evaluation criteria	Better value for money and sustainability over contract lifecycle	2026-2028

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Procurement Objective	Action	Expected Outcome	Timeline
Governance & Compliance	Implement conflicts of interest register for all procurement projects	Transparent decision-making and audit readiness	2026-2028
	Publish all required notices (pipeline, tender, award, contract changes) via new e-procurement system	Compliance with transparency requirements and improved supplier trust	2026-2028
	Introduce a procurement assurance checklist for all tenders	Consistent governance and reduced errors in documentation	2026-2028
	Conduct internal review of procurement activities	Early identification of compliance gaps and corrective actions	2026-2028

Procurement Objective	Action	Expected Outcome	Timeline
Value For Money	Adopt whole-life costing (WLC) in all relevant tenders	Contracts selected on total cost of ownership (not headline price), delivering lower lifetime cost and better service quality.	2026-2028
	Introduce structured demand management (challenge spend before buy)	Elimination of non-essential demand; 3–5% addressable savings without service impact.	2026-2028
	Set category-specific savings targets with baselines and benefit profiles	Transparent savings tracking: monthly benefits reports agreed with Finance.	2026-2028
	Apply proportionate competition/lotting to increase SME/VCSE participation	More competitive markets; improved prices and innovation at the Category level.	2026-2028
	Negotiate indexation clauses aligned to credible market indices	Predictable price adjustments; protection against unjustified inflationary uplifts.	2026-2028
	Leverage collaborative routes (frameworks, shared procurement) where advantageous	Access to better pricing and terms; reduced procurement cycle time and resource effort.	2026-2028

Procurement Objective	Action	Expected Outcome	Timeline
Achieving Social Value	Publish guidance for SMEs/VCSEs on bidding and delivering Social Value	Reduced barriers to entry and improved participation from local suppliers	2026-2028
	Embed Social Value KPIs in contract management plans	Ongoing monitoring and enforcement of commitments throughout contract lifecycle	2026-2028
	Require bidders to submit detailed Social Value Delivery Plans	Transparent commitments with quantifiable outcomes and timelines	2026-2028
	Publish guidance for SMEs/VCSEs on bidding and delivering Social Value	Reduced barriers to entry and improved participation from local suppliers	2026-2028
Promoting Opportunities	Run regular 'Meet the Buyer' and pre-market engagement sessions	Better specifications; wider market participation; reduced risk of failed procurements	2026-2028
	Track and report SME/VCSE participation and award rates quarterly	Evidence of opportunity creation; data-led improvements to approach	2026-2028
	Create a supplier portal page with plain-English guidance and FAQs	Lower barriers for new entrants; improved bid quality and compliance	2026-2028

ONGOING ACTION PLAN



Procurement Objective	Action	Expected Outcome	Timeline
Efficient & Effective Procurement	Ensuring the Procurement & Contract Unit is appropriately resourced with relevant governance and commercial skill sets	Procurement & Contracts is seen as an enabling function supporting innovation, quality service provision and value for money	2026-2028
	Reviewing opportunities for improved ways of working, actively seeking involvement in projects at an early stage to help deliver efficiencies where possible	Buyers, contract managers and decision makers are provided with clear guidance, and resources are available to assist them.	2026-2028
	Supporting contract managers and stakeholders with guidance and training to know where and how they can achieve best value	Buyers, contract managers and decision makers have the knowledge to make the right purchasing and contract management decisions	2026-2028
	Advising colleagues on developments in applicable regulations or other factors affecting Procurement, where there is likely to be a significant impact on the Council's operations, financial sustainability or reputation	Prevention or mitigation of commercial or financial risks arising from procurement of goods, services and works	2026-2028

Governance & Compliance

Procurement Objective	Action	Expected Outcome	Timeline
Governance & Compliance	Contract and supply risks are noted and reduced / managed where appropriate	Prevention or mitigation of legal or strategic risks arising from procurement of goods, services and works	2026-2028
	Training of staff is appropriate to understand the legal aspects of procurement and encourage dissemination of knowledge and good practice	Prevention or mitigation of legal or strategic risks arising from procurement of goods, services and works	2026-2028
	Working in conjunction with Finance, Audit and Contract Managers to monitor areas of Expenditure where there may be a higher risk of fraud, supplier failure, or other related negative impacts	Prevention or mitigation of fraud related risks	2026-2028
	Review of new Procurement Legislation, related Government Guidance and Procurement Policy Notes	Ensure compliance with applicable law (such as the new procurement Act 2023 or any subsequent procurement legislation as may be in force) to avoid potential challenges, delays or costs	2026-2028
	Continuous improvement: Launch procurement feedback loops and adjust strategy as needed.	Improvement in the overall performance and communication of procurement providing a service to the Council and the community	2026-2028

Procurement Objective	Action	Expected Outcome	Timeline
Value For Money	Review historical procurement data to identify major spending contracts, suppliers, and trends	Savings opportunities identified and delivered	2026-2028
	Audit existing agreements for opportunities to consolidate or renegotiate.	Savings opportunities identified and delivered	2026-2028
	Potential Contract strategies or alternative procurement approaches to be designed, evaluated and where appropriate	Supplier and contract consolidation: Reduce supplier base to improve volume leverage and streamline operations	2026-2028
	Prudent management of demand, including reducing or delaying specific contract activity, number of purchases, and consolidating multiple purchases to obtain maximum supply outcome for minimum expenditure where practicable	Consolidation of contracts and savings opportunities identified and delivered	2026-2028

Achieving Social Value

Procurement Objective	Action	Expected Outcome	Timeline
Achieving Social Value	Deploying the principles of sustainable procurement into the contract lifecycle with consideration to socio-economic and environmental factors (inc. Cherwell TOMs)	Opportunities to deliver social value and positive community impact identified and delivered	2026-2028
	Participating in sustainability workshops and addressing waste, energy efficiency & climate change measures (inc. Scope 3 emissions)	Opportunities to deliver sustainability and meet carbon targets identified and delivered	2026-2028
	Promoting Equality, Diversity, Inclusion in the key stages of the procurement and contract lifecycle including in respect of protected characteristics	Opportunities to promote inclusive social values identified and delivered	2026-2028
	Reviewing categories or areas most salient to Modern Slavery and promoting enforcement of the Modern Slavery Act in relevant procurement processes	Increased staff and supplier awareness of Modern Slavery Act issues and responsibilities in the supply chain	2026-2028

Procurement Objective	Action	Expected Outcome	Timeline
Promoting Opportunities	Undertake market engagement with local suppliers to promote the Council's intention to source locally.	Create a framework with various Lots that offers local suppliers the opportunity to supply goods and services.	2026-2028
	Actively encourage new entrants to supply market through supplier engagement events – including local SME and local suppliers	Positive engagement with the supply market. Increased supplier awareness of Council procurement opportunities & enhanced competitiveness.	2026-2028
	Jointly tendering and / or using other public sector partners to either collaborate or use frameworks	Increased co-ordination and engagement with community and public sector partners.	2026-2028

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This report is public	
Acceptance of MHCLG Large-Scale Housing Development Grant Funding	
Committee	Executive
Date of Committee	7 April 2026
Portfolio Holder presenting the report	Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development, Councillor Jean Conway
Date Portfolio Holder agreed report	23 March 2026
Report of	Executive Director Place & Regeneration, Ian Boll

Purpose of report

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has provided £500,000 of specific grant funding for non-statutory feasibility work to test the strategic case for large-scale housing development. This includes capacity funding, technical studies and financial modelling (see Appendix 1 MOU) This report seeks approval of associated budget virement, and to agree programme delivery and governance arrangements.

1. Recommendations

The Executive resolves:

- 1.1 To agree to increase both the Regeneration and Economy income budget in recognition of the grant income and the expenditure budget for associated works.
- 1.2 To delegate to the Executive Director for Place and Regeneration, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, the development of a programme in support of the grant objectives.
- 1.3 To note that procurement of specialist consultancy support and other external resources required to deliver the programme will be undertaken in accordance with the Council's constitution and procurement procedures and that further authorisations may be required as individual commissions are scoped.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Heyford Park is a large-scale development site in Cherwell, centred on the former RAF Upper Heyford airbase. It is one of a small number of locations nationally being considered by MHCLG as a potential candidate for a new town or large-scale new settlement under the Government's housing growth agenda.

- 2.2 MHCLG has awarded Cherwell District Council £500,000 of specific grant funding under a Memorandum of Understanding signed on 12-13 March 2026 by the Council's S151 Officer and MHCLG's Director. The funding is a Section 31 revenue grant for the financial year 2025-26, with the MoU applying until 31 March 2027 to cover both the delivery and evaluation periods.
- 2.3 The funding supports Phase 1 feasibility work to test the strategic case for Heyford Park as a large-scale development, including transport feasibility, technical infrastructure studies, and the development of a gateway package with recommendations on delivery and governance. This is non-statutory work and does not commit the Council to any particular planning outcome.
- 2.4 The programme is being delivered in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council (transport and highways), the developer Dorchester Living, and MHCLG's New Towns Unit. A live hybrid planning application (ref. 25/02190/HYBRID) for approximately 9,000 units has been submitted by Dorchester Living and is being considered through the normal planning process separately from this feasibility programme.
- 2.5 The budget virement to recognise the grant income and associated expenditure requires Executive approval. This report seeks approval to formally accept the grant, approve the budget adjustment, authorise the programme of work, delegate programme management to the Executive Director, and note that procurement activity will follow the Council's standard procedures.

Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary
Finance	<p>The £500,000 is fully funded by MHCLG specific grant under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003. There is no call on Council resources. Executive approval is required for the budget virement to increase both the Regeneration and Economy income budget in recognition of the grant income and the expenditure budget for associated works.</p> <p>The grant is revenue expenditure for the funding period between signing of the MoU and 31 March 2026, with the MoU applying until 31 March 2027 to cover the evaluation period. The Council is expected to make reasonable endeavours to spend the grant in a timely manner and to keep a record of expenditure. MHCLG requires full transparency open book working, mid-year and end-of-year reporting, and an end-of-grant evaluation by March 2027.</p> <p>Michael Furness, Assistant Director of Finance (S151 Officer), 24 March 2026</p>
Legal	<p>The MoU between MHCLG and Cherwell District Council is not legally binding (clause 13.1) but describes the understanding between both parties for the use of the funding. The Council is responsible for ensuring all procurement activity complies with Procurement Law including the Procurement Act 2023 and the</p>

	Council's own procurement procedures (clause 10). The Council must also ensure compliance with state aid/subsidy control, equalities duties, health and safety, and fraud prevention requirements (clause 8). Legal services will review terms of individual commissions as they are procured.			
	Denzil Turberville, Head of Legal, 24 March 2026			
Risk Management	The key risk is delay in deploying resources and commencing feasibility work within the funding period. This is mitigated by the programme structure already developed with MHCLG and OCC, and by the delegation of programme management to the Executive Director to enable responsive decision-making. A further risk relates to the outcome of the feasibility work: the MoU is clear that funding supports policy development for large housing settlements even if locations are not ultimately taken forward as New Towns. Programme risks will be managed through the project risk register.			
	Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader, 24 March 2026			
Impact Assessments	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equality Impact		x		Neutral. This report concerns acceptance of feasibility funding. No direct impact on service delivery or access at this stage.
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		x		Neutral. No aspects of the proposed decision could impact on inequality at this stage.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		x		Neutral. No direct impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics at this stage. Equality considerations will be addressed as part of any future planning and development proposals and project EqIA.
Climate & Environmental Impact	x			Positive. The feasibility programme includes assessment of infrastructure capacity including energy and sustainable transport options, which will inform the environmental sustainability of any future development.
ICT & Digital Impact		x		N/A
Data Impact		x		N/A
Procurement & subsidy		x		Neutral. No procurement is approved by this report. Individual commissions will be procured in

				accordance with the Council’s procurement procedures and Procurement Law. Subsidy control considerations are noted in the MoU and will be assessed as relevant.
Council Priorities	Priority 4: Quality housing and place making — “Cherwell will be a place where people feel at home in areas that improve their health, happiness and wellbeing today and in the future.” This programme directly supports the Council’s role in shaping the future of one of the largest potential new settlement sites in the district, ensuring that growth is evidence-based and properly planned.			
Human Resources	N/A			
Property	N/A			
Consultation & Engagement	The feasibility programme involves ongoing engagement with Oxfordshire County Council, MHCLG’s New Towns Unit, Dorchester Living as the principal landowner/developer, and other stakeholders. Community engagement will be considered as part of any future phases of work. There is a budget line approved with MHCLG in the agreed programme to be supported by the £500k grant funding which is the subject of this report.			

Supporting Information

3. Background

- 3.1 Heyford Park is centred on the former RAF Upper Heyford airbase, located approximately 6 miles north-west of Bicester in Cherwell District. The site has an extensive planning history and is already subject to significant development activity, with existing residential, commercial and community uses established on the former base.
- 3.2 In 2025, the Government announced its intention to identify locations for new towns and large-scale settlements as part of its housing growth strategy. MHCLG’s New Towns Taskforce and subsequently the New Towns Unit have been engaging with local authorities across England to identify and assess candidate sites
- 3.3 Heyford Park was identified as one of a small number of sites nationally with the potential to deliver a large-scale new settlement. Cherwell District Council has been in dialogue with MHCLG’s New Towns Unit since 2025, and a programme of preparatory feasibility work was developed to test the strategic case for the site.
- 3.4 In parallel, Dorchester Living (the principal landowner and developer) submitted a hybrid planning application (ref. 25/02190/HYBRID) for approximately 9,000 residential units and associated infrastructure, employment and community facilities. This application is being considered through the Council’s normal planning processes and is separate from the feasibility programme covered by this report.

3.5 MHCLG agreed to provide £500,000 of preparatory funding to support Phase 1 feasibility work. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed on 12 March 2026 by Cathy Francis (Director, MHCLG) and on 13 March 2026 by Michael Furness (Assistant Director of Finance and S151 Officer, Cherwell District Council).

4. Details

4.1 The MoU sets out three principal workstreams for the funded programme:

- Transport feasibility work, to be progressed in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council covering rail, bus and highways connectivity;
- Parallel technical studies to test infrastructure capacity across utilities, education, health and other key services, building an evidence base for the strategic case;
- Development of a gateway package recommending a delivery and governance approach for any future phases of work.

4.2 The funding is non-statutory in nature. It supports policy development and feasibility testing and does not commit the Council to any particular planning decision or development outcome. The MoU is explicit that the funding can be used even if the location is not ultimately taken forward as a New Town (clause 1.1).

4.3 The grant is £500,000 of revenue funding, paid as a single lump sum under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003. The maximum amount payable is for the funding period between signing of the MoU and 31 March 2026. The MoU applies until 31 March 2027, covering both the delivery period (2025-26) and the evaluation period (2026-27).

4.4 The Council is expected to make reasonable endeavours to spend the grant in a timely manner and to maintain a record of expenditure. MHCLG requires open book working, mid-year and end-of-year reporting, and an end-of-grant evaluation by March 2027.

4.5 There is no match-funding requirement and no call on Council resources beyond existing officer time for programme management and governance. Executive approval is required for the budget virement to recognise the grant income and associated expenditure within the Regeneration and Economy budgets.

Programme delivery

4.6 The programme is being led by the Place and Regeneration directorate, with a dedicated Programme Director and Project Manager being recruited to manage delivery. The Senior Responsible Officer is the Executive Director Place and Regeneration.

4.7 Key delivery partners are Oxfordshire County Council (transport feasibility across rail, bus and highways), MHCLG's New Towns Unit (policy alignment and monitoring), and Dorchester Living (site-specific technical input). The programme operates through established governance structures including regular programme board meetings.

- 4.8 Procurement of specialist consultancy support for technical studies will be required and will be undertaken in accordance with the Council's procurement procedures and Procurement Law, as required by the MoU (clause 10). Individual commissions will be scoped within the programme and may require further authorisations depending on value.

Monitoring and reporting

- 4.9 MHCLG requires full transparency open book working on all matters relating to the programme, including project activities, expenditure, and mid- and end-of-year reporting. The Council has agreed to complete an end-of-grant evaluation in March 2027.
- 4.10 Programme performance will also be reported through the Council's internal governance arrangements and will contribute to reporting under the Annual Delivery Plan.

5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 5.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: Do not accept the MHCLG funding.

This would mean the Council would not participate in the feasibility programme for Heyford Park as a potential new settlement. The £500,000 grant would not be drawn down. The Council would lose the opportunity to shape the evidence base and strategic case for one of the largest development sites in the district. Given the scale of the planning application already submitted, there is a strong case for the Council to be actively engaged in understanding the infrastructure implications and delivery options. This option is not recommended.

Option 2: Accept the funding but defer programme commencement until later in the financial year.

This would delay the start of feasibility work, creating a risk of not meeting MHCLG's delivery timetable and the reasonable endeavours requirement to spend in a timely manner. Given the MoU was only signed on 12-13 March 2026, the programme timeline is already compressed. This option is not recommended.

6. Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 The £500,000 MHCLG preparatory funding provides an important opportunity for the Council to lead the feasibility assessment of Heyford Park as a potential large-scale new settlement. The programme is fully externally funded with no call on Council resources, and the MoU provides a clear framework for delivery, monitoring and evaluation.
- 6.2 The budget virement to recognise the grant income and associated expenditure requires Executive approval. Accepting the grant and establishing the delegation and governance arrangements sought in this report will enable the programme to

be delivered efficiently within the required timescales, while ensuring that procurement and other internal governance requirements are met.

- 6.3 It is recommended that Executive notes the grant, approves the budget virement, delegates programme management to the Executive Director, and notes that procurement will follow standard Council procedures.

Decision Information

Key Decision	Yes — financial threshold met (£500,000 grant acceptance and budget virement)
Subject to Call in	Yes
If not, why not subject to call in	N/A
Ward(s) Affected	All

Document Information

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Memorandum of Understanding between MHCLG and Cherwell District Council
Background Papers	None
Reference Papers	None
Report Author	Kassandra Polyzoides, Programme Manager Tom Dobrashian, Interim Head of Regeneration & Growth
Report Author contact details	Kassandra.Polyzoides@Cherwell-DC.gov.uk Tom.Dobrashian@Cherwell-DC.gov.uk
Executive Director Approval (unless Executive Director or Statutory Officer report)	Report of Executive Director Place and Regeneration

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MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
between
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government
and
Cherwell District Council

1. Background

1.1. The preparatory funding for a large-scale development will be used to fund activity in places to support policy development for large housing settlements.

1.2. This funding will be used to help progress plans for such developments, even if locations are not ultimately taken forward as New Towns. It can be used for technical studies, financial modelling, and as capacity funding.

2. Purpose of the MOU

2.1. This Memorandum of Understanding ('MOU') sets out the terms, principles and practices that will apply to the working relationship between the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government ('MHCLG') and Cherwell District Council ('the Council') (collectively 'the Parties') regarding the administration and delivery of the funding.

2.2. This MOU is not legally binding, and no legal obligations or legal rights shall arise between the Parties from the provisions of the MOU. The Parties enter into the MOU intending to honour all their obligations.

3. Purpose of funding

3.1. MHCLG will allocate funding of £500,000 to the Cherwell District Council as part of the funding to support activities such as technical studies and financial modelling.

3.2. The goals of the funding are to:

- I. Support non-statutory feasibility work to test the strategic case for Heyford Park as a large-scale development, including sequencing, milestones, staffing and cost profiling for large housing settlements.

3.3. The project/s delivered will work to:

- I. Progress transport feasibility work,
- II. Progress parallel workstreams for other key technical studies to test infrastructure capacity to build an evidence base,
- III. Develop a gateway package and recommending a delivery and governance approach.

4. Financial arrangements

4.1. The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government has determined under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 that a grant of £500,000 should be paid to Cherwell District Council. (Grant Determination Reference: RDELXXX).

4.2. The maximum amount of grant payable for the funding period between date of agreeing this MOU and 31 March 2026 is £500,000. MHCLG expects the Council to make reasonable endeavours to spend the grant in a timely manner.

4.3. The grant covers revenue expenditure relating to the delivery of projects that aim to meet the objectives of the funding.

4.4. The funding will be paid in a single lump sum and consists of:

- i. £500,000 revenue to be used to support the programme objectives.

4.5. Cherwell District Council should endeavour to keep a record of expenditure.

4.6. Upon completion of this MOU, MHCLG will send Cherwell District Council a Grant Determination letter which sets out the financial terms and conditions under Section 31 grants.

5. Duration

5.1. This MOU applies until 31 March 2027. This covers both the funding period financial year 2025-26 and the evaluation period (financial year 2026-27).

5.2. This MOU will come into effect upon signature by the Parties. It may be extended by the written agreement of the Parties.

6. Monitoring and evaluation

6.1. MHCLG will provide grant funding subject to Cherwell District Council hereby agreeing to full transparency open book working on all matters relating to the projects delivered, including project activities undertaken, project expenditure, mid- and end-of-year reporting and evaluation forms.

6.2. Cherwell District Council agrees to keep a record of project expenditure.

6.3. Cherwell District Council agrees to collaborate with MHCLG over monitoring and evaluation requirements, which will involve reporting at the midway point and the end of the delivery period on project progress, milestones and any problems they may be facing and what support can be offered.

6.4. Cherwell District Council also agrees to complete an end of grant evaluation form in March 2027 which will include overall project expenditure and overall progress. MHCLG reserves the right to quality assure data.

6.6. MHCLG may publish relevant data and use it to inform public statements.

6.7. MHCLG will ensure that any information published will be processed in accordance with the requirements of the data protection legislation.

7. Wider evaluation

7.1. Participating local authorities may be asked by MHCLG to participate in a wider programme evaluation to help MHCLG better understand whether the programme was able to achieve its stated aims. This will be for the purpose of understanding the impact of the Fund and the identification of any best practice or learning to inform future policy making.

8. Assurance and risk management

8.1. Cherwell District Council is expected to have the necessary governance and assurance arrangements in place and that all legal and other statutory obligations and consents will be adhered to, which may include, but not solely, state aid/subsidy control, equalities duties, procurement, health and safety and fraud.

8.2. Ownership of risk will be transferred to Cherwell District Council. Councils will be responsible for mitigation of any risks that arise throughout the delivery of the Fund.

8.3. Cherwell District Council will complete their own Fraud Risk Assessment to ensure the safe administration of grants and that appropriate measures are put in place to mitigate against the risk of both fraud and payment error. We have provided a template, but the Council may use their own version.

8.4. Cherwell District Council will inform MHCLG should there be any changes to their project delivery.

8.5. Cherwell District Council will undertake corrective action if the quality of work does not meet expected standards.

9. Marketing and branding

9.1. Cherwell District Council agrees that UK Government should be acknowledged in all marketing and promotional material as the funding source.

10. Procurement

10.1. Cherwell District Council will be responsible for ensuring that any third-party partnership arrangements or procurement activities related to delivery of the Fund comply with Procurement Law and any relevant Council procurement procedures.

10.3. "Procurement Law" includes but is not restricted to, The Procurement Act 2023, The Concession Contracts Regulations 2016, Defence Security Public Contracts Regulations 2011 and The Utilities and Contracts Regulations 2016, together with their amendments, updates and replacements from time to time.

11. Due Diligence

11.1. Cherwell District Council will be responsible for undertaking due diligence checks on all third-party organisations, including community groups, suppliers and subcontractors, receiving funding and/or involved in delivery of the Fund. Evidence may be required of due diligence on community groups chosen to work with.

12. Resolution of Disputes

12.1. Any dispute that may arise as to the interpretation or application of this MOU will be settled by consultation between the Parties.

13. Legal Enforcement

13.1. This MOU is not legally enforceable. It describes the understanding between both Parties for the use of the funding.

14. Amendment of this Memorandum of Understanding

14.1. The arrangements under this MOU will be kept under review by MHCLG and Cherwell District Council and can be amended upon securing written agreement between both parties.



Signed on behalf of Cherwell District Council:

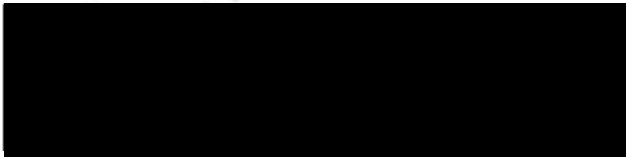
Name: Michael Furness

Dated: 13/03/26

Designation: Assistant Director of Finance (S151 Officer)

Duly authorised to sign for Cherwell District Council (by Chief Executive/Section 151 Officer)

Signed on behalf of MHCLG by:



Name: Cathy Francis

Designation: Director

Dated: 12/3/26

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of the Local Government Act 1972.

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