

## **Cherwell District Council**

### **Executive**

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 19 March 2025 at 5.00 pm

#### Present:

Councillor David Hingley (Leader of the Council & Portfolio Holder for Strategic Leadership) (Chairman)  
Councillor Lesley McLean (Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property & Regeneration) (Vice-Chairman)  
Councillor Chris Brant, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services  
Councillor Jean Conway, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management  
Councillor Nick Cotter, Portfolio Holder for Housing  
Councillor Ian Middleton, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services  
Councillor Robert Parkinson, Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities

#### Apologies for absence:

Councillor Tom Beckett, Portfolio Holder for Greener Communities

#### Also Present:

Councillor Dr Isabel Creed, Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
Councillor John Broad

#### Also Present Virtually:

Councillor Barry Wood

#### Officers:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive  
Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance & S151 Officer  
Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer  
Alex Rycroft, Strategic Finance Business Partner  
Curtis Leung, NMT Graduate  
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

#### Officers Attending Virtually:

Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities

### **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

The Chairman welcomed non-Executive Councillors to the meeting and asked they indicate if they wished to speak.

115 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

116 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman advised that this was the last Executive meeting to be held at Bodicote House. The next Executive meeting on 7 April would take place in the council's new offices at Castle Quay.

117 **Local Government Reorganisation Options**

The Corporate Director Resources and Transformation submitted a report to provide an overview of the interim plan and each of the proposal for local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire, prior to submission to the Government on 21 March 2025.

In introducing the report, the Chairman advised that there were revised recommendations to those that had been published (revisions in italics):

"The Executive resolves to:

1.1 Note the receipt of the statutory invitation received from the Minister of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government on 5 February 2025.

1.2 *Approve the interim plan developed collaboratively by Oxfordshire councils (county, city and districts) as set out in Appendix 1 and the emerging options for local government reorganisation set out in Appendices 2-4 for submission to Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution.*

1.3 *Approve that the Leader of the Council write to the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution to express support for [preferred option once discussed]."*

The Chairman advised that all Oxfordshire councils (county, city and districts) had coordinated in producing the report and options set out in the appendices. This had included several meetings of Council Leaders and Chief Executives.

Each Cabinet / Executive was also meeting today or the following day to agree their response.

With regards to recommendation 1.2, the Chairman explained that he had no issues with the submission of the joint response as an interim report on progress and options for Oxfordshire as it was a reflection on the position at the present time.

With regards to recommendation 1.3 and submission of support for an option, the Chairman explained that he had given much consideration and, given the timescales, had been considering a draft a response in anticipation, subject to the views of Executive. The Chairman advised that he hoped the submitted response would be in coordination with West Oxfordshire District Council, with whom there had been close coordination given the proximity of the districts and that in each model Cherwell and West Oxfordshire would merge.

The Chairman explained that, at this point he did not consider a three unitary option was a desirable option for multiple reasons including it not being built on existing boundaries and it was not clear about the geography it would adopt. The one unitary option was possible, but it was quite large and risked losing the local connection to communities there currently was.

The Chairman advised that, in his view, a two unitary option was the most credible option for local government reorganisation in the area and highlighted positive considerations, including that the size of the proposed authority met the Government's guidelines for a population of half a million, greater focus on communities at the local level, a consequent ability to deliver services building on collaborative working to meet the financial challenges ahead and giving the area a greater voice in the new devolution framework helping harness local views and driving sustainable growth locally.

The Chairman advised that whilst the letter would be from the Executive, there had been cross party engagement, including the establishment of a Leaders' Advisory Group for Local Government Organisation and devolution, which had met earlier this month, and the approach was being informed by these discussions. It was important that cross-party engagement continued over the coming months.

In considering the options, Executive members endorsed the Chairman's comments and agreed that a two unitary option was the most credible option and support for this should be expressed in the letter from the Leader to the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the receipt of the statutory invitation received from the Minister of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government on 5 February 2025 be noted.
- (2) That the interim plan developed collaboratively by Oxfordshire councils (county, city and districts) and the emerging options for local

government reorganisation (Option one – single unitary council; Option two – two unitary councils; Option three – three unitary councils) be approved for submission to Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution.

- (3) That it be approved that the Leader of the Council write to the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution to express support for option two, two unitary councils.

### **Reasons**

This proposed option is in line with the guidance from central Government and identifies the submission and members are asked to both note the receipt of the statutory invitation received from the Minister of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government on 5 February 2025, and to note the interim plan update as set out in Appendix 1 to the report and the emerging options for local government reorganisation set out in the Appendices 2, 3 and 4 to the report.

### **Alternative options**

Option 1: The Council may not wish to submit any proposals to Government in which to reorganise local government. Given the Government's stated expectation that areas should submit proposals, this option is not recommended.

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### **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting ended at 5.22 pm

Chairman:

Date: