



Council Minute Book

Monday 21 October 2024

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Cherwell District Council

Executive

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 8 July 2024 at 6.30 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 and Resources) (Vice-Chairman)

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 Ian Middleton, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services

Councillor Rob Parkinson, Portfolio Holder for Regulatory

Councillor Rob Pattenden, Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities

Councillor Chris Pruden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Officers:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive

Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities

Stephen Hinds, Corporate Director Resources and Transformation

Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance & S151 Officer

Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

Nicola Riley, Assistant Director Wellbeing & Housing

Mona Walsh, Assistant Director - Property

Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

Officers Attending Virtually:

Richard Smith, Head of Housing

14 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

15 Petitions and Requests to Address the Meeting

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

16 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

17 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman congratulated the two MPs elected in the Cherwell district at the 4 July General Election: Sean Woodcock MP in the Banbury constituency and Calum Miller MP in the Bicester and Woodstock constituency.

The Chairman thanked former MPs for their service to the district: Victoria Prentis who served as MP for the Banbury Constituency for 14 years; John Howell who, for 16 years, was MP for the Henley Constituency, which prior to constituency boundary changes incorporated areas of the Kirtlington and Otmoor wards; and Layla Moran, who remained MP for the Oxford West and Abingdon Constituency, which, prior to the constituency boundary changes, incorporated Kidlington, Begbroke and Yarnton.

18 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

19 **New Cherwell District Council Housing Allocations Scheme**

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing submitted a report to seek approval to consult on a new Housing Allocations Scheme.

In considering the report, Members expressed support for the Scheme noting it would be better for Cherwell District Council to allocate and administer applications.

Resolved

- (1) That the commencement of public consultation on the reviewed and amended Housing Allocations Scheme be approved.
- (2) That changes to the previously agreed approach of allocating properties that are delivered through Oxford's Unmet Housing Need, whereby Cherwell District Council would allocate properties and administer the applications, be approved to enable discussions and a potential agreement with Oxford City Council to progress and it be noted that the revised approach is reflected in the new draft policy.

Reasons

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

Alternative options

Option 1: Not bring forward a new Allocations Scheme. This is rejected as it is important that the Council has Policies that are up to date with legislation and can respond to current challenges.

Option 2: Continue discussions with Oxford City regarding the previously agreed approach to allocating the unmet need properties. Both Councils have been working to deliver the agreed solution, and delivery of this may be possible. However, this is rejected as there is a concern that the approach may not be legally sound, so to continue is not considered prudent, and thus an alternative has been suggested.

20

Council Tax Discretionary Relief policy (Section 13a)

The Assistant Director of Finance & Section 151 Officer submitted a report to inform Executive of the reviewed policy for Council Tax Section 13a (S13a) and proposed updates.

Resolved

- (1) That the contents of the reviewed policy for Section 13a Council Tax be noted.
- (2) That the policy for Council Tax Section 13a be approved.

Reasons

The Section 13a policy has not been reviewed for several years. It is good practice to review policies to ensure they remain relevant and in line with supporting the delivery of the Council's policies. It is recommended that the policy is endorsed by Executive to conform with legislation.

Alternative options

Option1: To not approve the Section 13a policy. In accordance with S13a (2) Local Government Finance Act 1992 each billing authority in England must make a scheme specifying the reductions which are to apply to amounts of council tax payable, in respect of dwellings situated in its area, by—

- (a) persons whom the authority considers to be in financial need, or
- (b) persons in classes consisting of persons whom the authority considers to be, in general, in financial need.

Therefore, the local authority must have a system in place to allow a person to make the request.

21

Non-Domestic Rate Discretionary Relief Policy

The Assistant Director for Finance & Section 151 Officer submitted a report to inform Executive of the reviewed policy for Non-Domestic Rate Discretionary Rate Relief policy and proposed updates and seek approval of the updated policy.

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.

Reasons

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

Alternative options

Option 1: Not bring forward a new Allocations Scheme. This is rejected as it is important that the Council has Policies that are up to date with legislation and can respond to current challenges.

Option 2: Continue discussions with Oxford City regarding the previously agreed approach to allocating the unmet need properties. Both Councils have been working to deliver the agreed solution, and delivery of this may be possible. However, this is rejected as there is a concern that the approach may not be legally sound, so to continue is not considered prudent, and thus an alternative has been suggested.

22

Local Government Productivity Plan

The Assistant Director of Finance & Section 151 Officer submitted a report which presented a draft Productivity Plan for the Executive to consider for submission to the Government. On 16 April 2024 the then Minister for Local Government, Simon Hoare, wrote to all councils explaining that they were required to prepare a Productivity Plan to submit to Government by 19 July 2024.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources explained that whilst the Productivity Plan had been requested by the previous Government, there had been no instruction from the new Government not to submit the Plan.

Resolved

- (1) That the Productivity Plan be approved for submission to the Government.

Reasons

The council is required to submit a Productivity Plan to Government which has been endorsed by Members. This Productivity Plan answers the questions raised by the Local Government Minister at the time the Productivity Plan was requested.

Alternative options

Option1: The alternative option is to not submit a Productivity Plan to the Government. This is not recommended as submission of a Productivity Plan is a requirement of the Government.

23

Internal Audit and Counter Fraud Provision

The Assistant Director of Finance & Section 151 Officer submitted a report on the council's internal audit and counter fraud provision. The council's Service Level Agreement with Oxfordshire County Council to provide internal audit and counter fraud Services came to an end on 30 April 2024. The council has entered into a temporary contract with Veritau Limited from 1 May 2024 to provide internal audit and counter fraud services for a period of 6 months. This report proposes an approach for the long-term provision of internal audit and counter fraud services by entering into a teckal company arrangement with Veritau Public Sector Limited.

Resolved

- (1) That it be agreed the council pay a £20k fee to join Veritau Public Sector Limited and become a member in the company and delegate authority to the Assistant Director of Finance (S151 Officer) to sign the members' agreement and service contract with Veritau Public Sector Limited and any subsequent paperwork required to become a member.
- (2) That the Assistant Director of Finance (S151 Officer) be appointed to the board of Veritau Public Sector Limited as a director of the company.

Reasons

There are very limited options available to a district council to provide a low-cost internal audit and counter fraud function. The option to join a LGWOC in the form of Veritau Public Sector Limited appears to be both the most cost effective, value for money approach whilst also providing significant levels of stability through having a significant level of skills and capacity across its workforce.

Alternative options

Option 1: In house

The in house option is not recommended for the following reasons:

- Significant additional cost compared to budget
- Significant difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff
- Overall lack of resilience in the service

Option 2: Other Local Authority Provider

The current arrangement with OCC is via an SLA and this could be replicated with another local authority via a section 113 arrangement. A number of LAs were approached and the majority indicated they would not be able to provide a service to the council. Of the two authorities initial discussion was had with, neither authority would be able to provide a full Internal Audit and Counter Fraud service immediately and the charge for the service would exceed the current budget.

Option 3: Open Market Procurement

An approach could be made to the open market but this is likely to cost significantly more than the current budget with no corresponding increase in service levels so is not anticipated to provide value for money and is also likely to cost significantly more than the proposed option.

24

Finance Monitoring Report May 2024

The Assistant Director Finance & Section 151 Officer submitted a report to update Executive on financial positions at the end of the May 2024.

There were no detailed questions on the exempt appendix to the report.

Resolved

- (1) That the contents of the council's financial management report as at the end of May 2024 be noted.
- (2) That the use of reserve requests as set out in the annex to the Minutes (as set out in the Minute Book) be approved.
- (3) That the write offs totalling £398,796.89 as set out in the exempt annex to the Minutes (as set out in the Minute Book) be approved.
- (4) That the reprofile of the following capital project beyond the 2024/25 financial year be approved:
 - 40296 – S106 Ambrosden Outdoor Sports - £0.130m
- (5) That the consolidation of the three projects relating to North Oxfordshire Academy (40309 – S106 NOA Improvements - £0.678m, 40010 – North Oxfordshire Academy Astro turf - £0.134m and 40323 – NOA 3G Pitch Development - £1.600m) be approved and it be noted

the total project cost was now expected to be £1.600m, and the reprofile of the project beyond the 2024/25 financial year be approved.

Reasons

This report provides an update on the council's financial positions as at May 2024 and seeks Executive agreement where required in accordance with the Constitution.

Alternative options

Option 1: This report summarises the council's forecast financial position up to the end of March 2025, therefore there are no alternative options to consider.

25 **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.

26 **Finance Monitoring Report May 2024 - Exempt Appendix 6**

There being no questions on the exempt appendix, it had been agreed under item 12.

27 **Castle Quay Relocation Project - Award of Tender**

The Corporate Director Resources submitted an exempt report to award the contract to undertake the strip-out and refurbishment works required to create the new office facilities at Castle Quay once the evaluation of tender submissions had been concluded

Resolved

- (1) That authority be delegated to the Assistant Director Property, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources, Monitoring Officer and S151 Officer, to award the contract to undertake the strip-out and refurbishment works required to create the new office facilities at Castle Quay once the evaluation of tender submissions has been concluded.

- (2) That authority be delegated to the Assistant Director Law and Governance to enter into the call off contract and associated agreements in this connection.

Reasons

Completion of the project works will enable the Council move to new offices at Castle Quay. The new offices, located in an easily accessible location, will be better suited to modern ways of working and service delivery and will help the Council reduce its carbon footprint.

The Scope of Works was developed following consultation with Council staff and an independent project team provided the resource and advice needed to develop and finalise the Scope of Works and prepare the tender documentation.

Delegating approval to the Assistant Director Property, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, Monitoring Officer and S151 Officer, to award the contract will enable the Council to meet its target move date.

Alternative options

Option 1: Not make the contract award has been rejected as an option because the Council has already made the decision to move to Castle Quay and the space identified needs to be altered and fitted out to make suitable for Council operations.

Option 2: Retender the works required with a lower specification has been rejected as an option because of the time needed to complete the exercise and which would mean the Council is not able to move to the new offices by its planned completion date.

The meeting ended at 7.10 pm

Chairman:

Date:

Cherwell District Council

Executive

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 9 September 2024 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor David Hingley, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategic Leadership, Chairman
Councillor Lesley McLean, Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property & Regeneration, Vice-Chairman
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
Councillor Ian Middleton, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services
Councillor Rob Parkinson, Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities
Councillor Rob Pattenden, Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities
Councillor Chris Pruden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Also Present:

Councillor Amanda Watkins, Leader of the Opposition, Leader of the Labour Group
Councillor John Broad

Officers:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive
Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities
Stephen Hinds, Corporate Director Resources and Transformation
Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance & S151 Officer
Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
Nicola Riley, Assistant Director Wellbeing & Housing
Shona Ware, Assistant Director Customer Focus
Tony Brummell, Building Control and Flood Risk Manager
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

Officers Attending Virtually:

Tim Hughes, Head of Regulatory Services & Community Safety
Mona Walsh, Assistant Director - Property
David Spilsbury, Head of Digital and Innovation

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest,

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

There were no petitions.

The Chair advised that Councillor Broad had requested to speak on exempt item 14, Cloud Support, Security Operation Centre and Managed Network Partner Tender.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Watkins, Leader of the Opposition Labour Group, to the meeting and invited Councillor Watkins to indicate if she wished to speak on any item.

30 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

31 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

32 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

33 **Policy for Selecting the Names of New Streets**

The Assistant Director - Planning and Development submitted a report to approve an updated street naming policy containing clarifications on the approach to be followed by officers in providing the service to developers and local communities.

Resolved

(1) That the Policy and guidance for street naming be approved.

Reasons

The recommendation is to reaffirm but update the policy we have had for many years which is consistent with the guidance and protocols we have to work under when naming new streets. It provides clarity on a point that was previously ambiguous and will protect the Council against having to accept inappropriate suggestions that come forward.

Alternative options

Option 1: Do nothing

The alternative option to the one proposed is to do nothing. That would not provide the clarity that is required in respect of naming streets after those who have evidently contributed significantly and positively to the community which they served. It might also open the door to requests for new street names over which we have no vetoing discretion.

34 **New Cherwell District Council Housing Strategy 2025-2030**

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing submitted a report to seek approval to consult on a new Housing Strategy 2025-30.

In response to questions from the Leader of the Opposition regarding whether there was an adequate supply of housing to address changes proposed in the Allocations Policy, the Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing undertook to respond to the questions at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting the following day when the Committee considered the draft Allocations Policy. A response would be provided to the leader of the Opposition.

Resolved

- (1) That the commencement of public consultation on the reviewed and amended Housing Strategy 2025-30 be approved.

Reasons

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

Alternative options

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

35 **Money Advice Contract**

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing submitted a report to propose an extension in the current Money Advice contract with Citizens Advice.

In considering the report, Executive members commented that in the current economic situation, the contract was excellent value for the service provided to residents.

Resolved

- (1) That the extension of the existing money advice contract by one year, until January 2026, be approved.

- (2) That officers be requested to bring a further report to Executive within six months to consider options beyond 2026, to allow sufficient time to reprocure such a contract, if necessary.

Reasons

The money advice service is well used and is used by residents facing financial hardship, who may not be able to access other forms of financial advice and support. It is therefore recommended that it is continued for a further year considering the current contextual factors affecting households and household budgets.

Alternative options

Option 1: To end the Money Advice Contract at the end of the contract period (January 2025)

This is an option in accordance with the contract end date. The option is rejected due to the continued cost of living issues being faced by clients and high demand for the money advice and related Council services.

Option 2: To extend the Money Advice Contract by 2 years (until January 2027)

This option is within the scope of the current contract. This option is rejected to ensure that a re-procurement exercise and/or a review of the current provision can take place sooner.

Option 3: To extend the Money Advice Contract by less than 1 year

There is scope to extend for less than two years, and the minimum term of extension is not defined within the contract. Within the contract is an annual cost of services, so a new contract could be required to make this adjustment and therefore we cannot extend the existing contract due to terms within it changing. Extending by a period of one year will also give more time to review and procure a future service, if necessary. This option is rejected.

36

CCTV Thames Valley Project

The Head of Regulatory Services and Community Safety submitted a report to seek approval to join the Thames Valley CCTV partnership, with an associated transfer of CCTV assets and operational responsibility to Thames Valley Police under a 'single owner' model; and moving monitoring arrangements to a shared Oxfordshire hub.

In response to a question from the Leader of the Opposition seeking assurance CCTV cameras in Banbury would remain operational following the transfer, the Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities confirmed this would be the case.

In response to Executive member comments, the Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities explained that work on the SLA had not yet commenced but it

was anticipated there would be standard terms with specific aspects for each authority in the partnership.

Resolved

- (1) That it be agreed to join the Thames Valley CCTV partnership, with an associated transfer of CCTV assets and operational responsibility to Thames Valley Police under a 'single owner' model; and moving monitoring arrangements to a shared Oxfordshire hub.
- (2) That capital funding of up to £250,000 in order to upgrade the public open space CCTV network and cameras to meet the necessary threshold to be included in the OPCC Thames Valley CCTV project be approved.
- (3) That authority be delegated to the Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to execute the formal agreements needed to join the Thames Valley Police CCTV Partnership.

Reasons

The benefits to formally joining the Thames Valley CCTV partnership are clear. The proposed changes of the project bring increased resilience, reduce the operational burden on CDC and ensure that the CCTV network is upgraded ensuring a sustainable system able to exploit technological advances.

Alternative options

Option 1: Executive could choose to cease provision of this discretionary service, however the case for continued provision of public space CCTV is clear. It assists the Council in meeting its duties under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and clearly has a role in the detection and prevention of crime.

Option 2: To retain the system as it currently is. The Thames Valley CCTV Partnership will go ahead without CDC - meaning there is real risk of the CCTV system in Cherwell becoming obsolete. If the existing CCTV system were to be retained, then there would still be a significant need for investment to bring the infrastructure up to a minimum standard to allow for its continued operation. The costs would be comparable to the £250,000 capital investment highlighted in the preferred option, although could be profiled over a long roll out period. The responsibility for long term resilience of CCTV monitoring would fall to CDC.

This has been rejected as it is likely to lead to an obsolete CCTV system and means the Council would be excluded from obtaining the benefits from being part of the Partnership.

The Assistant Director of Finance (S151 Officer) and Assistant Director – Customer Focus submitted a report to update Executive on the council's performance, risk, and financial positions at the end of Quarter 1 2024-25.

Resolved

- (1) That the council's performance, risk and finance 2024-2025 Quarter 1 report be noted.
- (2) That the use of reserve requests set out at the annex to the Minutes (as set out in the Minute Book) of the report be agreed.
- (3) That the reprofiling of capital projects beyond 2024/25 set out at the annex to the Minutes (as set out in the Minute Book) and the subsequent update to the programme budget for this financial year be approved.
- (4) That the virement between capital schemes agreed under officer delegation of £0.045m from 'Banbury Health Centre' to 'Community Centre – Works' be noted.
- (5) That the use of S106 funding amounting to £0.560m to deliver more self-contained units of temporary accommodation within Cherwell in partnership with South Oxfordshire Housing Association be approved.

Reasons

The council actively and regularly monitors its performance, risk, and financial positions to ensure it can deliver its corporate priorities and respond effectively to emerging issues.

This monitoring takes place at least monthly for the finance element and quarterly for performance and risk, so the council can identify potential issues at the earliest opportunity and put measures in place to mitigate them.

These updates are consolidated into a single report given the implications and interdependencies between them, and this is the summary for the end of Quarter 1 2024-25.

Alternative options

Option 1: This report summarises the council's financial position up to the end of Quarter 1 2024-2025, therefore there are no alternative options to consider. Regarding the recommendations to approve changes in use of reserves, reprofiling of capital projects and use of S106 funding, members could choose not to reject these requests, however, the requests are in accordance with the councils' policies and within existing budgets. If members chose not to approve the changes, resource would need to be found for these projects separately.

38 **Budget and Business Planning Process 2025-26**

The Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report to inform the Executive of the proposed approach to the 2025/26 Budget and Business Planning Process and provides context and background information on the existing Medium-Term Financial Strategy and information on latest government announcements relevant to the Strategy.

Resolved

- (1) That the Budget and Business Planning Process for 2025/26 be approved.
- (2) That the base assumptions to be used for the 2025/26 budget be approved.
- (3) That a five-year period for the Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2029/30 and five-year period for the Capital Programme to 2029/30 be approved.
- (4) That the revised Reserves Policy be approved.

Reasons

The Council has a legal obligation to set a balanced budget and ensure it maintains a suitable level of reserves each year. The process laid out in this report will allow CDC to develop budget proposals that will allow it to meet these legal obligations.

Alternative options

The Council has a legal obligation to set a balanced budget and evaluate its level of reserves to ensure they are held at a suitable level. Therefore, there are no alternative options other than to carry out a budget process that reviews the levels of reserves and identifies a budget proposal that can be delivered within the overall level of resources available to the Council.

39 **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 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.

40 **Cloud Support, Security Operation Centre and Managed Network Partner Tender**

The Head of Digital and Innovation submitted an exempt report in relation to the Cloud Support, Security Operation Centre and Managed Network Partner Tender. Due to the value of the contract, Executive approval was required.

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

41 **Lease for Castle Quay**

The Assistant Director Property submitted an exempt report in relation to a lease renewal at Castle Quay, Banbury.

Resolved

(1) As set out in the exempt Minutes.

(2) As set out in the exempt Minutes.

(3) 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 8.00 pm

Chairman:

Date:

Council

Record of Portfolio Holder Decisions for the period 5 July 2024 to 11 October 2024

Area of Responsibility	Decision Subject Matter
Portfolio Holder for Greener Communities	Draft Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy Consultation approval

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Cherwell District Council

Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 29 May 2024 at 7.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Nick Cotter (Chairman)
Councillor David Rogers (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Jean Conway
Councillor Ian Middleton
Councillor Alisa Russell
Councillor Dom Vaitkus
Harry Lawson (Independent Person, no voting rights)
Sarah Thompson (Independent Person, no voting rights)

Substitute Members:

Councillor Barry Wood (In place of Councillor Nicholas Mawer)

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Nicholas Mawer
Councillor Sean Woodcock

Also Present:

Councillor Lesley McLean, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Performance
Connor Munro, Internal Audit, Veritau

Also Present Virtually:

Mark Bartlett, External Audit Manager, Bishop Fleming

Officers:

Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance & S151 Officer
Joanne Kaye, Head of Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer
Shahin Ismail, Interim Head of Legal Services & Deputy Monitoring Officer
Jacey Scott, Head of Revenues and Benefits
Sandra Ganpot, Benefits Services and Performance Manager
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

Officers Attending Virtually:

Mona Walsh, Assistant Director - Property
Sarah Cox, Chief Internal Auditor

Katherine Kitashima, Audit Manager (Internal Audit)
Alex Rycroft, Strategic Finance Business Partner

3 **Welcome and Introductions**

The Chairman welcomed Members and officers to the first meeting of the Committee of the 2024/25 municipal year and invited all attendees to introduce themselves.

4 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

6 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 20 March 2024 and 22 May 2024 were agreed as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

7 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

8 **Annual Report of the Chief Internal Auditor 2023/24**

The Chief Internal Auditor submitted a report which presented the annual report of the Chief Internal Auditor, summarising the outcome of the Internal Audit work in 2023/24, and providing an opinion on the Council's System of Internal Control.

With regards the rating of "satisfactory", the Chief Internal Auditor explained that it was very rare to the top rating to be awarded. The response to reports was considered more important than the rating and the Internal Audit team had received strong Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer and response to reports and recommendations.

In response to Members' comments regarding the Utilities Management 23/24 audit, the Assistant Director Property confirmed that work was underway and on target to meet the actions arising from the audit.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked the Chief Internal Auditor and her team for their hard work and excellent service to Cherwell District Council.

Resolved

- (1) That, having given due consideration, the Annual Report of the Chief Internal Auditor 2023/24 be endorsed.

9 **Internal Audit Work Programme 2024/25**

The Assistant Director Finance submitted a report to present the programme of internal audit work to be undertaken in 2024/25, and sought the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee's approval of this programme.

The report also presented the council's proposed internal audit charter, which sets out the internal audit service's purpose, mandate, and position within the organisation, and sought approval of the charter.

In response to a question regarding the valuation of Castle Quay, the Assistant Director undertook to provide a response in due course.

Resolved

- (1) That the 2024/25 internal audit work programme be approved.
- (2) That the proposed internal audit charter be approved.

10 **Housing Benefit Subsidy Audit 2020/2021**

The Assistant Director Finance submitted a report to provide the final position of the Housing Benefit subsidy claim audit for the financial year 2020/21.

Resolved

- (1) That the report be noted.

11 **Treasury Management Report - Annual Performance Report 2023/24**

The Assistant Director Finance submitted a report to present information on treasury management performance and compliance with treasury management policy for 2023-24 as required by the Treasury Management Code of Practice. The report also demonstrated that all treasury management activities undertaken during the financial year 2023-24 complied with the CIPFA Code of Practice, the council's approved Treasury Management Strategy and that all Prudential Indicators were met during the reporting period.

Resolved

- (1) That the Treasury Management Annual Performance Report be noted.
- (2) That the report be recommended to Council to note.

12 **Annual Governance Statement 2023-24**

The Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer submitted a report which set out the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for the Council for 2023-24 for approval. The AGS summarised the key governance issues for the Council and the actions required to address these. The AGS was required to be approved by those charged with governance, the Accounts Audit & Risk Committee, under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

Resolved

- (1) That the Annual Governance Statement 2023-24 be approved.
- (2) That the Leader of the Council in 2023-24 and the Chief Executive be authorised to sign the Annual Governance Statement on behalf of Cherwell District Council.

13 **Audit Completion Certificates 2020/21 and 2021/22**

The Assistant Director Finance submitted a report which presented the audit completion certificates for the years 2020/21 and 2021/22.

Resolved

- (1) That the formal completion of the audits for the years ended 31 March 2021 and 31 March 2022 and the associated audit completion certificates be noted.

14 **External Audit Plan 2023/24 - Bishop Fleming**

The Assistant Director Finance submitted a report to present the External Audit Plan for 2023/24 from the Council's external auditors, Bishop Fleming LLP.

In response to Members' questions regarding the change of external auditor, the Assistant Director Finance explained that Bishop Fleming had been appointed as the Council's external auditor by Public Sector Audit Appointments for 2023/24 – 2027/28 replacing Ernst Young.

In introducing the plan, the External Audit Team Manager explained that that the timeline may slip due to the announcement last week that the General Election would take place on 4 July.

In response to Members' questions regarding the external audit fee, the External Audit Team Manager explained that this would be submitted to a future Committee meeting following discussions with the Assistant Director Finance and Head of Finance.

Resolved

- (1) That the External Audit Plan for 2023/24 be noted.

15 **Work Programme**

The Head of Finance updated the Committee on the work programme and confirmed that Treasury Management training would take place following the meeting on 17 July.

Resolved

- (1) That the work programme update be noted.

16 **Urgent Business - Whistleblowing Policy**

The Chairman advised that there was one item of urgent business, Whistleblowing Policy.

The Assistant Director Law and Governance submitted a report which sought approval of a Whistleblowing Policy and the mechanisms by which the policy and any complaints made under the policy would be managed and reported on.

In introducing the report, the Interim Head of Legal Services explained that it was proposed that the policy should sit with the Monitoring Officer, with reporting on numbers of complaints and any actions taken, to sit with the Accounts Audit and Risk Committee, as part of its overall remit for governance assurance.

In response to Members' questions regarding differences between the current and revised policies, the Interim Head of Legal Services explained that, as the law had not changed, there were no significant changes rather it had been made clearer.

Resolved

- (1) That the Whistleblowing Policy be approved.
- (2) That the ownership of the policy through the Monitoring Officer be approved.

- (3) That the publication of the policy on the intranet, with appropriate staff communications to raise awareness, be approved.
- (4) That the Monitoring Officer be requested to provide anonymised reports of any whistleblowing complaints once concluded and actions taken to resolve them to the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee.

The meeting ended at 9.20 pm

Chairman:

Date:

Cherwell District Council

Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 17 July 2024 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Nick Cotter (Chairman)
Councillor David Rogers (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Besmira Brasha
Councillor Jean Conway
Councillor Nicholas Mawer
Councillor Dom Vaitkus
Harry Lawson, Independent Person (no voting rights)

Substitute Members:

Councillor John Broad (In place of Councillor Ian Middleton)
Councillor Rob Pattenden (In place of Councillor Alisa Russell)

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Ian Middleton
Councillor Alisa Russell
Sarah Thompson, Independent Person (no voting rights)

Also Present:

Councillor Lesley McLean, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources
Jonathan Dodsworth, Internal Audit, Veritau

Officers:

Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance & S151 Officer
Joanne Kaye, Head of Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

Officers Attending Virtually:

Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader

17

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

19 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29 May 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

20 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman reminded the Committee that Treasury Management training facilitated by the Council' treasury advisors would take place at the conclusion of the meeting.

21 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

22 **Counter Fraud Work Programme 2024/25**

The Assistant Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report which presented the programme of counter work to be undertaken in 2024/25, and asked the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee to note this programme.

Resolved

- (1) That, having given due consideration, the 2024/25 counter fraud work programme be approved.

23 **Risk Monitoring Report End of Year 2023 - 2024**

The Assistant Director Customer Focus submitted a report to update the Committee on how well the council was managing its Strategic Risks, as part of our duty to remain compliant, and to be able to identify any improvements required. The report presented the risk monitoring report for the end of the financial year 2023-2024.

In considering the report, Members commented that the potential impact of "Elements of the COVID-19 response and recovery work may be compromised, delayed or not taken forwards" under risk L12 – Corporate Governance was no longer relevant and should be removed from the risk register.

In response to Members highlighting as a risk the potential cost to Cherwell District Council in relation to planning developments and delays in the transfer of assets to Town/Parish councils resulting in non-acceptance of assets and the potential future risk of the closure of Church of England graveyards and transfer of responsibility for maintenance to Town/Parish Councils via Cherwell District Council, the Performance Team Leader that work was underway to review risks and she would check with the relevant lead officer if these would be strategic or service risks for future monitoring.

In terms of general comments about the Risk Register, the Committee agreed to suggest to the Executive the inclusion of information about how risks can be added to the risk register and to consider improvements to the format and presentation of the Risk Register.

Resolved

- (1) That the Risk Monitoring Report for end of year 2023-24 be noted.
- (2) That, having given due consideration to the Council's current Risk Management Strategy 2023/24, the following comments and suggestions be made to Executive for consideration to be incorporated in the Risk Management Policy 2024/25:
 - Inclusion of information about how risks can be added to the risk register
 - Improvements to the format / presentation of the Risk Register
 - Remove from the risk register potential impact of "Elements of the COVID-19 response and recovery work may be compromised, delayed or not taken forwards" under risk L12 – Corporate Governance
 - Include in the risk register the potential cost to Cherwell District Council in relation to planning developments and delays in the transfer of assets to Town/Parish councils resulting in non-acceptance of assets
 - Potential future risk of the closure of Church of England graveyards and transfer of responsibility for maintenance to Town/Parish Councils via Cherwell District Council

24

Draft Statement of Accounts 2023-2024

The Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report to provide an opportunity for review of the draft 2023/24 Statement of Accounts which were published on the council's website on 31 May 2024.

Resolved

- (1) That the report and publication of the draft statement of accounts 2023/24 be noted.

25

Treasury Management Report - Q1 2024/25 (June 2023)

The Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report to provide information on treasury management performance and compliance with treasury management policy for 2024-25 as required by the Treasury Management Code of Practice. The report demonstrated that all treasury management activities undertaken during the first quarter of 2024-25 complied with the CIPFA Code of Practice and the council's approved Treasury Management Strategy.

Resolved

- (1) That the Treasury Management Performance Report for Quarter 1 2024/2025 be noted.

26 **Support to Subsidiaries**

The Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) to inform the Committee of the overall level of support provided to the council's subsidiaries and how this is considered as part of the external audit.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that there was an exempt appendix to the report and any questions on the exempt appendix would be taken in private session.

Resolved

- (1) That, having given due consideration, the report be noted.

27 **Exclusion of Press and Public**

Resolved

That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business on the grounds that, if the public and press were present, it would be likely that exempt information falling under the provisions of Schedule 12A, Part I, 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.

28 **Support to Subsidiaries - Exempt Appendix**

The Committee considered the exempt appendix to the report on Support to Subsidiaries.

Resolved

- (1) That, having given due consideration, the exempt appendix be noted.

29 **Readmittance of the Press and Public**

Resolved

That the press and public be readmitted to the meeting.

30 **Work Programme**

The Head of Finance provided an update on the Committee's work programme.

Resolved

(1) That the work programme update be noted.

The meeting ended at 7.32 pm

Chairman:

Date:

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Cherwell District Council

Budget Planning Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Budget Planning Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 5 March 2024 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Patrick Clarke (Chairman)
Councillor Douglas Webb (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Becky Clarke MBE
Councillor David Hingley
Councillor Matt Hodgson
Councillor Simon Lytton
Councillor Adam Nell
Councillor Dorothy Walker
Councillor Barry Wood
Councillor Sean Woodcock

Substitute Members: Councillor George Reynolds (In place of Councillor Donna Ford)

Apologies for absence: Councillor Tom Beckett
Councillor Donna Ford

Officers: Joanne Kaye, Head of Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer
Leanne Lock, Strategic Business Partner - Business Partnering & Controls
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

44 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

45 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 January 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

46 Chairman's Announcements

There were no Chairman's announcements.

At the discretion of the Chairman, the Portfolio Holder for Finance addressed the meeting. The Portfolio Holder for Finance explained that this was the

Chairman, Councillor Patrick Clarke's last meeting at Cherwell District Council as he was standing down as a councillor at the May elections. The Portfolio Holder for Finance thanked the Chairman for his diligence and hard work as Chairman of Budget Planning Committee over the past year.

47 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

48 **Monthly Finance Performance Report**

The Assistant Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report which summarised Cherwell District Council's forecast revenue and capital outturn for 2023/2024 as at 31 January 2024 to give the Committee the opportunity to consider the finance aspects of the report.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Finance advised that the Council's forecast outturn position for 2023/2024 was an underspend of (£0.059m). This was after an underspend within Policy contingency which would offset the lower than budgeted in-year income of S31 grant. The overall forecast position was an improvement of (£0.059m) over the previous month's forecast.

Resolved

- (1) That, having given due consideration, the finance performance update report be noted.

49 **Review of Committee Work Plan**

The Strategic Business Partner - Business Partnering & Controls gave an update on the Committee work plan.

The Strategic Business Partner - Business Partnering & Controls advised that the first meeting of the 2024/2025 municipal year was on 16 July. Prior to this, Local Government Finance training was scheduled on Tuesday 4 June.

Resolved

- (1) That the work programme update be noted.

The meeting ended at 6.50 pm

Chairman:

Date:

Cherwell District Council

Budget Planning Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Budget Planning Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 22 May 2024 at 7.50pm

Present:

Councillor Edward Fraser Reeves (Chairman)
Councillor Matt Hodgson (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Tom Beckett
Councillor Gordon Blakeway
Councillor Frank Ideh
Councillor Kieron Mallon
Councillor Rob Parkinson
Councillor Rob Pattenden
Councillor David Rogers
Councillor Les Sibley
Councillor Dom Vaitkus
Councillor Sean Woodcock

1 Appointment of Chairman for the municipal year 2024/2025

It was proposed by Councillor Mallon and seconded by Councillor Hodgson that Councillor Reeves be appointed Chairman of Budget Planning Committee for the municipal year 2024/2025.

There were no further nominations.

Resolved

- (1) That Councillor Reeves be elected Chairman of Budget Planning Committee for the municipal year 2024/2025.

2 Appointment of Vice-Chairman for the municipal year 2024/2025

It was proposed by Councillor Woodcock and seconded by Councillor Vaitkus that Councillor Hodgson be appointed Vice-Chairman of Budget Planning Committee for the municipal year 2024/2025.

There were no further nominations.

Resolved

- (1) That Councillor Hodgson be elected Vice-Chairman of Budget Planning Committee for the municipal year 2024/2025.

The meeting ended at 7.51 pm

Chairman:

Date:

Cherwell District Council

Budget Planning Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Budget Planning Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 16 July 2024 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Edward Fraser Reeves (Chairman)
Councillor Matt Hodgson (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Gordon Blakeway
Councillor Andrew Crichton
Councillor Rob Parkinson
Councillor Rob Pattenden
Councillor David Rogers
Councillor Les Sibley
Councillor Dom Vaitkus

Apologies
for
absence: Councillor Tom Beckett
Councillor Frank Ideh
Councillor Kieron Mallon

Also
Present: Councillor Lesley McLean, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder
for Finance and Resources

Officers: Joanne Kaye, Head of Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer
Jacey Scott, Head of Revenues and Benefits
Leanne Lock, Strategic Business Partner - Business Partnering
& Controls
Sandra Ganpot, Benefits Services and Performance Manager
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 5 March 2024 and 22 May 2024 were agreed as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

5 Chairman's Announcements

There were no Chairman's announcements.

6 Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

7 Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025 - 26

The Assistant Director of Finance submitted a report to enable Members to consider the proposed banded scheme for Council Tax Reduction (CTR) for 2025/26.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding promotion and awareness of the scheme, the Head of Revenues and Benefit Services and Benefit Services and Performance Manager explained that information was available online on the council website, leaflets were included in council tax bills and the Department for Work and Pensions, and the council's Customer Services team signposted and promoted the scheme. Customer Services advisors also assisted residents to fill in the application.

In response to Members' questions regarding how the scheme was funded, the Head of Revenues and Benefit Services advised that the scheme was not funded, rather there was less council tax income. The in-year Council Tax collection rate for the 2023/24 financial year was 98.02%, which was the highest rate within the Oxfordshire authorities.

Resolved

- (1) That the contents of the report and any financial implications for the council be noted.
- (2) That Executive be recommended to agree to retain the current scheme for 2025/26.

8 Finance Monitoring Report End of Year 2023 - 2024

The Assistant Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report on the council's financial position at the end of the financial year 2023-2024.

In response to Members' comments regarding reliance on agency staff resulting in overspends, the Strategic Business Partner – Business Partnering and Controls explained that there was an ongoing recruitment drive.

Resolved

- (1) That, having given due consideration, the contents of the council's outturn for the financial year ended 31 March 2024 report be noted.
- (2) That the use of reserve requests be noted.
- (3) That the reserves movements made under the Section 151 Officer's delegated powers as part of the audit of prior years' statement of accounts be noted.

- (4) That the reprofiled capital budget, including corresponding financing from capital reserves, and adjustments to the 2024/25 capital programme accordingly be noted.
- (5) That outturn for 2023/2024, which is a balanced position after a contribution to reserves of £4.461m, be noted.
- (6) That the use of £0.285m of the Commercial Risk element of Policy Contingency to mitigate the delay in forecast lettings for some properties within 2023/24 be noted.

9 **Review of Committee Work Plan**

The Head of Finance updated the Committee on the work plan.

Resolved

- (1) That the work plan update be noted.

The meeting ended at 6.50 pm

Chairman:

Date:

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Cherwell District Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 18 July 2024 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Dr Isabel Creed (Chairman)
Councillor Nigel Simpson (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Gordon Blakeway
Councillor John Broad
Councillor Phil Chapman
Councillor Grace Conway-Murray
Councillor Andrew Crichton
Councillor Frank Ideh
Councillor Harry Knight
Councillor Simon Lytton
Councillor Lynne Parsons
Councillor Barry Wood

Guest:

Councillor Chris Brant, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services

Officers:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive
Stephen Hinds, Corporate Director Resources and Transformation
Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities
Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader
Emma Faulkner, Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead
Matt Swinford, Democratic and Elections Officer

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Minutes

The Chairman advised that there was spelling mistake 12 March 2024 meeting minute 71, 2024-35 should read 2024-25. This had been corrected in the minute book. Subject to this correction, the minutes of the meetings of the

Committee held on 12 March 2024 and 13 June 2024 were agreed as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

6 Chairman's Announcements

There were no Chairman's announcements.

7 Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

8 Performance Monitoring Report End of year 2023 - 2024

The Committee considered a report from the Assistant Director – Customer Focus that detailed the council's performance position at the end of the financial year 2023-2024.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services advised that 26 of the 27 Business Plan measures had been achieved. The one measure not achieved was "Net Additional Housing Completions to meet Cherwell Needs" with a final figure of 792 completions, which was 70% of the set target. The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services advised that this measure had been heavily affected by the national context, circumstances such as inflation, high building costs, and high interest rates which resulted in the lower than expected number of completions.

Following a question from the Committee on how the Council's measured targets were set as and could the targets be more challenging as most targets had been met, the Performance Team Leader advised that the Council use national targets and benchmark from previous years and took into consideration local context to set ambitious targets.

In response to a question from the Committee asking why the number of housing completions target was missed by 30%, the Corporate Director of Communities advised that housing delivery had been good in respect of the requirements of the Cherwell Local Plan 2015 with an average of 1281 homes built a year. In 2023-2024, the number fell to 792 homes built however this was consistent with national figures linked to issues with house building across the country. The Corporate Director of Communities also advised that there 6000 homes had been granted planning permission within the district but had not yet been built.

Resolved

(1) That the Council's End of year performance report for 2023/24 be noted.

9 Work Programme Planning for 2024-2025

The Chairman referred to the three working groups that had been established in 2023-2024: Climate Action; Food Insecurity; and, Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (joint with Personnel Committee) and asked for Members' views on whether the working groups should continue. The Committee agreed that all working groups should continue and asked the Assistant Director Law and Governance, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to liaise with Group Leaders regarding membership of the working groups.

The Committee asked if it was possible for experts in the topic fields to attend working group meetings to give guidance to working group members. The Chairman advised that working groups should discuss in their meetings if experts in that field would be invited to attend the working group meetings.

The Assistant Director of Law and Governance advised the Committee that within the working group meetings, targets should be decided by the working group to focus discussion and not make to topic of discussion wide.

The Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead presented the list of suggested topics that Officers and Members had put forward for inclusion on the Overview and Scrutiny work programme. The Committee endorsed all topics and agreed that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman work with officers to bring forward a work programme incorporating the topics to the next meeting of the Committee.

As part of the work programme planning, the Committee requested that officers be advised that presentations be kept short and more interactive for the Committee.

Resolved

- (1) That the Chairman and Vice-Chairman work with officers to bring forward a work programme, incorporating the topics suggested, to the next Committee meeting.
- (2) That the following working groups continue into 2024/25, with authority being delegated to the Assistant Director Law and Governance, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to liaise with Group Leaders regarding nominations to each group:
 - Climate Action
 - Food Insecurity
 - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (joint group with Personnel Committee)

The meeting ended at 7.35 pm

Chairman:

Date:

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Cherwell District Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 10 September 2024 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Dr Isabel Creed (Chairman)
Councillor Nigel Simpson (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Gordon Blakeway
Councillor John Broad
Councillor Phil Chapman
Councillor Grace Conway-Murray
Councillor Andrew Crichton
Councillor Frank Ideh
Councillor Lynne Parsons
Councillor Barry Wood

Substitute Members:

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Harry Knight
Councillor Simon Lytton

Also Present:

Councillor David Hingley, Leader of The Council
Councillor Rob Pattenden, Portfolio Holder - Healthy Communities
Councillor Chris Brant, Portfolio Holder - Corporate Services

Also Present Virtually:

Councillor Jean Conway, Portfolio Holder - Planning and Development Management

Officers:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive
Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities
Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
David Peckford, Assistant Director Planning & Development
Nicola Riley, Assistant Director Wellbeing & Housing
Shona Ware, Assistant Director Customer Focus
Martyn Surfleet, Democratic and Elections Officer
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

Officers Attending Virtually:

Paul France, Strategic Housing Team Leader

10 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

11 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 18 July 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

12 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

13 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

14 **Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 1 2024 - 2025**

The Committee considered a report from the Assistant Director – Customer Focus that detailed the council's performance position at the end of quarter 1 2024-2025.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services advised that 50 of the 57 Business Plan measures had been achieved, 6 were operating slightly behind target and 1 being behind target. The one measure that was operating behind target related to temporary accommodation where 68 households were reported in temporary accommodation against the maximum target of 45. It was reported that the number of new placements was now comparable to the number of moving out into other housing options, therefore the reported increase had shown a slight slowing down.

In response to a question regarding how the council defined the term "vulnerable" the Assistant Director – Housing and Wellbeing alongside the Strategic Housing Team Leader advised that it was considered in the broadest possible sense, but Housing legislation included specific set of criteria that helped determine if a person or household was "Vulnerable" which ensured a consistent approach.

In response to a question regarding the relationship between the green rating for delivered affordable housing and the red rating of homeless households in temporary accommodation, and what the council was doing to reconcile the difference, the Assistant Director – Housing and Wellbeing alongside the

Strategic Housing Team Leader advised that the ratings related to annually set measurable targets and indicated the council's position on achieving said targets. With regards affordable housing, the Assistant Director Planning and Development that the overall housing target and qualifying target for affordable housing would be reviewed as part of the Local Plan process and would have regard to the Council motion to target 50%. It was important to balance the target with what was viable to ensure housing delivery occurred.

In response to a question regarding BP1.2.10, % of Major Applications overturned at appeal and the cost to the council, the Assistant Director Planning and Development advised that the national target of 10% was the indicator whilst the actual for quarter 1 was 18.8%. The council was also measured nationally over a two-year period and this figure was 11.2% as reported to Planning Committee. The Assistant Director Planning and Development explained that the number of appeals this year had been higher than previous years resulting in more appeals being allowed. This was being reviewed and Planning Officers would work with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management and Planning Committee to ensure recommendations were sound, grounds for refusal were as defensible as possible, and that the council's decision making process was robust. The cost of appeals varied greatly and were subject to many factors The Chairman reminded the Committee that Planning Application Appeals would be a substantive agenda item at a future meeting.

In response to a request that the red and amber indicators on the EDI Action Plan action plan be considered at the first meeting of the EDI working group, Committee endorsed the request.

Resolved

- (1) That having given due consideration, the Council's Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 1 2024 - 2025 performance be noted, and no recommendations be submitted for Executive consideration.
- (2) That it be delegated to officers to arrange the EDI performance indicators be added to the agenda of the first meeting of the EDI Working Group.

15

New Cherwell District Council Allocations Scheme

The Committee considered a report from the Assistant Director – Housing and Wellbeing which sought consideration of draft Cherwell District Council Allocations Scheme prior to the Scheme being submitted to Executive in December.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities explained that the Allocations Scheme was the Policy that ensured the fair allocation of social housing properties within district and was used for the administration of the waiting list for social housing, which was part of our statutory duties. It was good practice to regularly review the Scheme to

ensure it remained compliant and continued to meet the needs of applicants in the best way. At their July meeting, Executive had agreed the draft new Allocations Scheme for consultation. A public and stakeholder consultation on the new Scheme was currently under way.

The Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities explained that the policy is heavily informed by legislation, Council's had flexibility to be able to manage and administer their own schemes and prioritise certain applicant circumstances. The main changes proposed in the new Scheme were:

- An increase in the banding for statutory homeless house holds
- The creation of a domestic abuse category within Band 2 to comply with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Income threshold being capped at £80,000 for applications on larger properties
- Changes to how overcrowded households are managed through the waiting lists
- Additional preference for people leaving the armed forces and their families – consistent with the armed forces covenant within legislation

In response to a question relating to applicants with rent arrears the Assistant Director – Housing & Wellbeing advised that. Officers worked with applicants on a case by case basis. An applicant's rent record would be looked at the time of bidding and should have a cleared outstanding housing debt in full or evidence they have made a concerted effort to address their housing related debt.

In response to questions relating to the waiting list, available stock, how many providers the council worked with, the Assistant Director – Housing & Wellbeing advised that there were currently just over 2050 applicants on the waiting list and that stock availability varied from week to week> The council operated a choice based letting scheme with a weekly newsletter to those on the waiting list. With regards to current providers, the council worked with over 30 providers with Sanctuary being the largest. All registered providers signed up to the council's nominations agreement.

In the course of discussion, officers were requested to consider including in the report to Executive the relationship between the number of prospective applicants on the waiting list and those who don't meet the criteria but are supported by renting in the private sector with housing benefit support.

In response to questions regarding the changes and they would impact on supply and availability of properties, the Assistant Director – Housing & Wellbeing advised that the increase in supply was linked to the development. The Allocations Policy focused on the allocation of the limited stock available in line with the criteria and priority bands in the Policy rather than creating supply.

In response to a question regarding the Band 2 Categories: Domestic Abuse, and introduction for survivors of domestic abuse who wished to remain in their home, the Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing Services explained that

this was intended to ensure each person's circumstance was best met. Individuals applying in this category who were high risk could make be eligible for Band 1 or may wish/need to make a homeless application for temporary accommodation away from their current home. There was a Duty Team during office hours and an Emergency Out of Hours services to assist individuals at risk of homelessness.

Resolved

- (1) That having given due consideration, the New Cherwell District Council Allocations Scheme be recommended for adoption by Executive,
- (2) That it be recommended to Executive that they receive a summary of the consultation for consideration alongside the Scheme being recommended for adoption.

16

Cost of Living 2023/2024 Review and 2024/2025 Activities

The Committee considered a report from the Assistant Director – Housing and Wellbeing, that provided an update on additional activity described in the 2023/24 Cost of Living action and proposed approaches and activity for 2024/2025.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities, advised of the positive impact the councils' interventions has had on residents of the district, and that confirmation had been received of continued funding through HSF6 agreements with Oxfordshire County Council.

In response to clarification as to the report stating "Not Applicable" against "Climate and Environmental Impact" in the Implications section despite the report detailing activity relating to reduction in energy use and reduction of thermal loss, the Assistant Director – Housing and Wellbeing undertook to provide clarification to Members.

Resolved

- (1) That having given due consideration, the Cost of Living 2023/2024 review and proposed range of activities for 2024/2025 be noted and recommended to Executive to endorse.

17

Work Programme 2024 - 2025

The Chair provided an update on Committee's Work Programme 2024-25 advising that anticipated meeting dates for the majority of the suggested topics had been agreed and were as set out in the agenda. Planning Application Appeals and Infrastructure Funding and Delivery and S106 Contributions had subsequently been scheduled for the January meeting.

With regards the Local Plan, the Chair advised following discussion with officers, that due to the importance and complexity of the Local Plan, an extraordinary Overview and Scrutiny Committee be held to focus on the Local Plan. The extraordinary Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting would take place on Tuesday 12 November ahead of Executive consideration of the Local Plan on 2 December. Given the importance of this item, all Members would be invited to attend and a briefing ahead of the meeting would be scheduled.

The Chair advised that the Chief Constable and Police and Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley will join our March meeting to give their annual updates. As usual, all Members will be invited to attend this meeting. The Chair agreed to liaise with officers regarding a Committee suggestion that the Chair of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (BOB), Integrated Care System (BOBICB) also be invited to attend the March meeting as the Committee could get value in a feedback loop.

The Governance and Elections Manager provided an update on the nominations received for the Food Insecurity, Climate Action and EDI working groups and encouraged members to come forward should they wish to participate. The first working group meetings would be scheduled in due course. It was also advised that the Personnel Committee will be asked to agree the continuation of the EDI working group at its next meeting and to nominate members. Arrangements would then be made for the first EDI working group meeting.

Resolved

- (1) That having given due consideration, that the indicative Work Programme 2024 – 2025 be noted and endorsed.
- (2) That the update on the scrutiny working groups (Climate Action; Food Insecurity; and Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion) be noted.

The meeting ended at 7.50 pm

Chairman:

Date:

Cherwell District Council

Personnel Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Personnel Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, OX15 4AA, on 9 July 2024 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Amanda Watkins (Chairman)
Councillor Gemma Coton (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Rebecca Biegel
Councillor Chris Brant
Councillor Phil Chapman
Councillor David Hingley
Councillor Harry Knight
Councillor Nicholas Mawer
Councillor Lynne Parsons
Councillor Chris Pruden
Councillor Barry Wood

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Fiona Mawson

Officers:

Claire Cox, Assistant Director Human Resources
Susan Blunsden, HR Manager
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

3 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interests.

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

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

5 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

6 **Minutes**

Subject to a correction to the 22 May 2024 minutes, resolution to Minute 1 to read "That Councillor Amanada Watkins be appointed Chairman of the Personnel Committee for the municipal year 2024/2025, the Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 7 February 2024 and 22 May 2024 were agreed as correct records and signed by the Chairman. .

7 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

8 **Policy Review Updates**

The Assistant Director Human Resources submitted a report to seek approval from the Personnel Committee on proposed changes to four existing HR policies: Flexible Working Request Policy; Domestic Abuse Policy; Flexi scheme Policy; and, Employers LGPS Discretions Policy.

In response to Members' questions regarding the refusal of flexible working requests, the Assistant Director Human Resources explained that the policy sets out the acceptable grounds and that line manager should liaise with their HR Business Partner.

In response to Members' questions in relation to raising staff awareness of the Domestic Abuse Policy and support available, the Assistant Director Human Resources explained that she would be advising staff of the Policy at the monthly staff briefing as well as raising awareness of all updated policies via the weekly staff communications. New employees were made aware of all HR policies as part of their induction. Staff (and Members) had access to free support through the council's employee assistance programme.

In considering the Flexi Scheme Policy, Members raised questions about the permitted flexi banking amount and professional training for staff commenting the council should be proactive rather than reactive, the Assistant Director Human Resources explained that the hours related to three standard full time-working days (7 hours 24 minutes) and was pro-rata to hours worked for part time employees (60% of weekly contractual hours). With regards professional training, the Assistant Director Human Resources advised that training in skill sets the council was short of was encouraged and highlighted the pathways to planning.

Resolved

- (1) That, having given due consideration, the following policies be approved for implementation:
 - Flexible Working Request Policy
 - Domestic Abuse Policy
 - Flexi scheme Policy
 - Employers LGPS Discretions Policy

9

Workforce Profile Statistics - Quarter 4 2023-24

The Assistant Director Human Resources submitted a report to provide the Personnel Committee with an update on CDC's workforce including measuring staff well-being and to highlight the actions officers are taking to address any issues.

In response to Members' questions regarding the use of temporary agency staff, the Assistant Director Human Resources explained that some services were unable to recruit permanent staff. Agency staff were also used in some services, such as Environmental Services, to cover sickness or peaks in leave.

Resolved

- (1) That the workforce data for quarter 4 of 2023/24 (financial year dates) be noted.

The meeting ended at 7.05 pm

Chairman:

Date:

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