



Council Minute Book

Monday 16 December 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 7 October 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, 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 Management
Councillor Ian Middleton, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services
Councillor Rob Parkinson, Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities
Councillor Rob Pattenden, Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Nick Cotter, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Also Present:

Councillor Amanda Watkins, Leader of the Opposition, Labour Group

Officers:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive
Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities
Stephen Hinds, Corporate Director Resources and Transformation
Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance & S151 Officer
Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

Officers Attending Virtually:

Mona Walsh, Assistant Director - Property

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Declarations of Interest

10. Crown House Investment Review.

Councillor Rob Pattenden, Other Registerable Interest, as a CDC appointed Non-Executive Director on Crown House and would leave the meeting for the duration of the item.

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

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

44 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

45 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman advised that Councillor Chris Pruden had retired from Executive for personal reasons and thanked him for his hard work as Portfolio Holder for Housing, an area he would continue to be involved in.

Councillor Nick Cotter had replaced Councillor Pruden as Portfolio Holder for Housing.

46 **Finance Monitoring Report August 2024**

The Assistant Director of Finance & Section 151 Officer submitted a report to update Executive on the council's financial position at the end of the August 2024.

Resolved

- (1) That the council's financial management report as at the end of August 2024 be noted.
- (2) That the use of reserve requests, set out in the Annex to the Minutes as set out in the Minute Book, be approved.
- (3) That the reprofiling of capital projects beyond 2024/25 and the subsequent update to the programme budget for this financial year be approved.
- (4) That the reprofiling of £0.393m from future years budget into the 2024/25 capital project for Castle Quay (cost centre 40144) be approved.
- (5) That the use of £0.133m from the Digital Futures Programme capital budget (Cost Centre 40326) to progress work on the Robotic Process Automation Pilot be noted.
- (6) That the forecast overspend be noted and Council be recommended to agree an increase in the capital budget for CDC Office Relocation to Castle Quay project by £0.646m.

Reasons

The terms agreed are recommended for approval by the Council's appointed consultant Montagu Evans and will provide relevant evidence to support rent increases in relation to future lease events.

The terms of the new lease to Uniform Express Limited, have been benchmarked against other similar comparable agreements and reflect the best commercial terms available in the marketplace today.

The proposed letting will secure the tenant on a 5-year lease and reduce the risk of increasing the Council's exposure to void occupancy costs.

Alternative options

Option 1: Do nothing.

This option has been rejected. If the new lease is not completed the Council would forfeit the opportunity to receive additional income.

Option 2: Renegotiate the terms of the offer.

This option has been rejected as the terms agreed reflect current market value and are comparable with other similar lettings achieved at Tramway Industrial Estate and elsewhere.

47 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

48 **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.

49 **Grant of a New Lease at Unit 5, Tramway Industrial Estate, Banbury to Uniform Express Limited**

The Assistant Director Property submitted an exempt report to approve the proposed terms for the granting of a new lease to Uniform Express Limited for Unit 5, Tramway Industrial Estate, Banbury.

Resolved

- (1) As set out in the exempt minutes.
- (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

50 **Crown House Investment Review**

The Assistant Director Finance submitted an exempt report which proposed a restructure of the financing of the council's subsidiary Crown House Banbury Limited and proposes adjusting the interest rate of the loan to ensure that the company can continue to meet its liabilities as they fall due, minimising the likelihood of a significant financial impact to the council.

Resolved

- (1) As set out in the exempt Minutes.
- (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 6.57 pm

Chairman:

Date:

Cherwell District Council

Executive

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

Present:

Councillor David Hingley (Leader of the Council & Portfolio Holder for Strategic Leadership) (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 Nick Cotter, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Councillor Ian Middleton, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services

Councillor Rob Parkinson, Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities

Councillor Rob Pattenden, Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities

Present Virtually (no voting rights):

Councillor Lesley McLean, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Regeneration and Property

Also Present:

Councillor Amanda Watkins, Leader of the Opposition, Labour Group

Councillor Lynne Parsons, For item 7

Officers:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive

Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities

Stephen Hinds, Corporate Director Resources and Transformation

Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance & S151 Officer

Shahin Ismail, Interim Head of Legal Services & Deputy Monitoring Officer

Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

Officers Attending Virtually:

Robert Jolley, Assistant Director Growth & Economy

Nicola Riley, Assistant Director Housing and Wellbeing

Shona Ware, Assistant Director Customer Focus

David North, Housing Grants & Standards Team Leader

51 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no petitions.

The Chair advised that Councillor Parsons was in attendance to address the meeting on item 7, Mental Health Provision for Young People, as the proposer of the motion was it was agreed at Council.

53 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

54 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Cotter to his first Executive meeting as Portfolio Holder for Housing.

The Chairman advised that he and the Chief Executive had attended the Local Government Association (LGA) Conference the previous week, which had been very interesting. There had been no new information on devolution but it was expected there would be plans soon.

55 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

56 **Mental Health Provision for Young People**

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing submitted a report to provide options in response to the motion agreed at the 15 July 2024 Council meeting:

“This council resolves to ask the Executive to increase spending on the mental health initiatives currently in place within the Chief Executive’s directorate to be funded by an allocation from the Policy Contingency budget.”

Councillor Parsons, who had proposed the motion to Council, addressed Executive. Councillor Parsons commented that, having considered the report, she understood why options 1, 2 and 3 were not being recommended. Referring to option 4, Councillor Parsons noted research was important and that this option included an extension to the work currently underway

suggesting that as not all children enjoyed or were able to participate in physical activity, could consideration be given to including other activities.

On behalf of Executive, the Chairman thanked Councillor Parsons for bringing her motion to Council and her comments to Executive.

In considering the report, Executive Members indicated their support to Councillor Parsons' comment for alternatives to physical activity and agreed it was an important issue whilst noting it was a statutory function for the district council and important to work in partnership.

Resolved

- (1) That an extension to the existing provision within current resourcing levels available through the Physical Activity and Mental Health provision the Wellbeing team currently deliver in schools and for families be endorsed.
- (2) That a fund of £3500 be agreed to support research and evidence gathering to assess what the needs are for increased mental health provision for young people in Cherwell, the role of partners and consider the funding routes to secure it.

Reasons

The current Mental Health and Physical Activity programme is delivered by the Youth Activator programme in schools, combining physical activity with mental health themes.

The recommended option 4, increase the Physical Activity and Mental Health provision that the Youth Activators within the Wellbeing team currently deliver and research and stakeholder engagement (funded from the Policy contingency budget), would enable the council to conduct research through stakeholders and residents to better understand the needs around what mental health provision for young people in Cherwell is needed and investment required going forward and provide increased provision for young people and families through the Wellbeing team while the research was being conducted.

Alternative options

Option 1: Children young people Supported Self-Help pilot for 7–11-year-olds attending Primary School Clusters for agreed terms in Banbury, Bicester or Kidlington

Option 2: Children Young People offer for Secondary Schools Banbury, Bicester or Kidlington

Option 3: Combination of Primary School Cluster and Secondary School offer in Banbury, Bicester or Kidlington

Commissioning specialist support as set out in options 1 – 3 was rejected due to currently not fully understanding what the needs and requirements are for young people around mental health in Cherwell and the investment required.

If the recommended Option 4 is approved, this would allow for an evidence base to be developed that looked at the needs of children ascertain what would be required and be sustainable in the longer term around Mental Health support, partner involvement and the scale of investment required. Option 4 would also provide increased provision for children and families while the research was being conducted.

57 **Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing Policy**

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing submitted a report to seek approval for the reviewed Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing Policy.

Resolved

- (1) That the reviewed Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing Policy 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 reviewed and amended policy. As there has not been any recent changes to legislation in this area, there is no imperative for the current policy to be changed or reviewed. However, it is important the Council policies are reviewed regularly to ensure that they are able to meet customer needs, service needs and are legislatively sound. This option is therefore rejected.

58 **Housing Grants and Assistance Policy**

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing submitted a report to seek approval for the reviewed Housing Grants and Assistance Policy.

Resolved

- (1) That the reviewed Housing Grants and Assistance Policy 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 reviewed and amended policy. As there has not been any recent changes to legislation in this area, there is no imperative for the current policy to be changed or reviewed. However, it is important the Council policies are reviewed regularly to ensure that they are able to meet customer needs, service needs and are legislatively sound. This option is therefore rejected.

Option 2: To keep two separate policies, one for mandatory grants and one for discretionary grants. As the policy areas are closely linked and intertwined, particularly when offering grants to disabled households, having a single policy provides simplification and clarity. This option is therefore rejected.

59

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

The Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing submitted a report to provide an update on the additional activity described in the 2023/24 Cost of Living action plan and to note proposed future approaches and activity within the Household support grant aid.

Resolved

- (1) That the proposed plan which was endorsed and recommended by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which noted the review of the 2023/24 cost of living plan and supported the proposed range of activities planned for 2024/25 were considered, be agreed.

Reasons

Following Covid and the subsequent Cost of Living crisis Cherwell District Council has provided additional support to low-income households, initially in 2022/23 with additional payments or food vouchers to those in receipt of housing benefit and last winter 2023/24 ran a programme of support and grant schemes to offer support to grass roots community groups and individuals.

Going forward the Wellbeing service wants to continue to work in partnership across the district with statutory and voluntary sector organisations, both strategically and on a hyperlocal basis, to ensure that Cherwell residents can access support through additional targeted interventions and secure help when needed.

The council recognises that the response to the cost-of-living crisis is changing and will need to continue to be flexible and adapt to best meet the changing needs of residents and the proposed activities will seek to continue to address this.

Alternative options

Option 1: To not respond additionally to cost-of-living burdens felt by residents most impacted by economic pressures as there isn't a base budget for the additional spend.

This has been rejected because of the availability of further allocations of Household support grant aid, which allow the Council to support residents without budgetary impact.

Option 2: To concentrate on fewer activities in 2024/2025

This has been rejected because the spread of grant allows a greater number of issues to be relieved.

60

Establishing Area Oversight Groups

The Corporate Director Communities submitted a report to seek authority from the Executive to adopt an area-based approach with the objective to strengthen community and stakeholder engagement into major growth sites across the District in support of delivering more holistic and sustainably planned developments, aligned to Council priorities.

In response to a question from the Leader of the Opposition regarding cross-party district councillor representation on the Area Oversight Groups(AOGs), the Chairman explained that officers were working on the Terms of Reference for the AOGs, which would include district councillor representatives irrespective of political group.

Resolved

- (1) That the establishment of Area Oversight Groups (AOGs) for Bicester, Banbury and Kidlington as non-decision-making advisory groups be agreed.

Reasons

Although not part of any formal decision-making process, setting up an Area Oversight Group (AOG) for each area (Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington) would provide the Council with a significant conduit to and from the local communities. It will help to manage increasing development and housing growth within some urban centres in Cherwell and help deliver an enabling and co-ordinated approach towards achieving Council priorities.

Alternative options

Option 1: Do nothing (keep current arrangements in place) – this was rejected because there is a lack of consistency in each of the three areas and only Bicester has suitable arrangements in place and it is important that the other two urban centres, subjected to growth and development also benefit for local area based arrangements, aligned to local needs and aspirations.

61 **Performance, Risk and Finance Monitoring Report Quarter 2 2024 - 2025**

The Assistant Director of Finance and Assistant Director – Customer Focus submitted a report to the committee the council's performance, risk, and financial positions at the end of Quarter 2 2024-25.

At the discretion of the Chairman, the Leader of the Opposition addressed Executive. In response to the Leader of the Opposition's question regarding the low housing completion return, the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development explained that 6791 houses had been approved but not yet delivered by developers. In response to a question regarding bad debt write off, the Assistant Director Finance confirmed all debt write offs were funded by the debt contingency.

Resolved

- (1) That the council's performance, risk and finance Quarter 2 2024/2025 report be noted.
- (2) That the updated Corporate Debt Policy be approved.
- (3) That debt write offs totalling £43,660.32 be approved.
- (4) That the reprofiling of capital projects beyond 2024/25 and the subsequent update to the programme budget for this financial year 2024/25 be approved.
- (5) That it be noted that Cherwell District Council would be receiving £0.064m revenue grant funding from Oxfordshire County Council for the Household Support Fund round 6, which follows up on round 5 that was spent supporting residents through the cost-of-living crisis and this funding would support the work presented at the last Overview and Scrutiny meeting in Cherwell's Cost of Living plan.
- (6) That the use of £0.050m of S106 funding approved under S151 Officer delegated authority to deliver the remaining elements of the Outdoor Sports project at Whitelands Farm Sports Ground be noted.
- (7) That the additional information relating to capital overspends in respect of Bicester East Community Centre and the Sunshine Centre reported to Executive in the August (period 5) financial performance report be noted.
- (8) That the removal of following projects with budgets totalling £0.652m from the Capital Programme be approved.
 - iTrent HR System Upgrades
 - Housing & UT Asset System
 - Retained Land
 - Expiring Energy Performance Certificates plus Associated Works

- Energy Performance Certificates Government Implementation of target B – Strategic Plan
 - Car Park refurbishments
 - Car Parking Action Plan Delivery
- (9) That the increase in the building control fees and charges for 2024/25 with immediate effect as set out in the Annex to the Minutes (as set out in the Minute Book) 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 monthly for finance, 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 2 2024-25.

Alternative options

Option 1: This report summarises the council's financial position up to the end of Quarter 2 2024-2025, therefore there are no alternative options to consider. Regarding the recommendations to approve the updated Corporate Debt Policy, reprofiling of capital projects, removal of projects from the Capital Programme and increase in building control fees and charges, Members could choose not to reject these requests, however, the requests are in accordance with the councils' policies and financial procedure rules.

62 Exclusion of the Press and Public

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, 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.

63 Performance, Risk and Finance Monitoring Report Quarter 2 2024 - 2025 - Exempt Appendix

There were no questions on the exempt appendix, which had been agreed as part of agenda item 12 (Minute 61 refers).

64 **Graven Hill Village Development Company (GHVDC) Dev Co – Request for S38 agreement Highways Act 1980 works bonds**

The Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted an exempt report to bring to the attention of the Executive the request from Graven Hill Village Development Company Ltd (Dev Co) for the Council to act as surety in three performance bonds for roadway infrastructure works to be undertaken by Dev Co under section 38 of the Highways Act 1980.

Resolved

- (1) That it be approved in principle that the Council act as surety for Dev Co in respect of two performance bonds (up to the sum referred to in the exempt Appendix to this report) relating to the construction of highway works by Dev Co pursuant to agreements between Dev Co and Oxfordshire County Council (as local highway authority) to be made under section 38 of the Highways Act 1980.
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Shareholder Representative to agree on the formal documentation in relation to the bonds in consultation with the s.151 Officer, the Monitoring Officer, the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property.
- (3) That it be agreed that Dev Co be requested to pay the council a market fee for the bond facility.

Reasons

The recommendations in this report have been subject to discussion between the Shareholder Representatives, CDC Finance Representatives and the Dev Co Managing Director and Finance Director.

By agreeing with the recommendations in this report, the council is ensuring that Dev Co can act swiftly to meet its aims and delivery objectives regarding the highway works and safeguard the council's investment and return on investment.

Alternative options

Option 1: Not to give a performance bond. This has been dismissed by officers on the grounds that OCC would not accept a bond from either Hold Co or Dev Co and, because performance bonds are prerequisites for entering section 38 adoption agreements with the county council, the company would have to go to the market. The additional time required for this at this stage would impact on the delivery of the agreement. Officers are in discussion with Dev Co about the company securing future bonds from the open market rather than from the council.

The meeting ended at 7.45 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 25 September 2024 at 6.30 pm

Present:

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

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Besmira Brasha
Councillor Jean Conway
Councillor Nicholas Mawer

Also Present:

Councillor Lesley McLean, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Regeneration and Property

Officers:

Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
Joanne Kaye, Head of Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager
Patrick Davis, Democratic and Elections Officer

31 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

32 Petitions and Requests to Address the Meeting

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

33 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17 July 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

34 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

35 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

36 **Risk Monitoring Report - Q1 2024-2025**

The Assistant Director Customer Focus submitted a report to update the Committee on how well the Council was managing its Strategic Risks.

In introducing the report, the Head of Finance (Deputy Section 151 Officer) advised that there was only one change in the Leadership Risk Register, risk L13 Monitoring and management of Major Infrastructure Projects and Programmes as the residual risk level had decreased in rating from 12 (medium risk) to 9 (low risk). This was due to the mitigating actions that had been put in place such as an increase in the cycle of meetings between Oxfordshire County Council and the Cherwell District Council along with the completion or near completion of the some of the projects. This resulted in a new risk being added to the Risk Register that would cover wastewater treatment capacity, electricity supply at sites in Bicester and transport infrastructure across a number of sites.

Resolved

(1) That the Risk Monitoring Report for Quarter 1 2024-25 be noted.

37 **External Audit Update 2022-2023**

The Assistant Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report to update the Committee on developments in relation to the proposed audit backstop for the 2022/23 statement of accounts, to note the draft Letter of Representation, and to seek delegated authority to finalise the accounts with the auditors by the backstop date for the 2022/23 accounts.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration explained that the previous Government had consulted on a series of backstop dates for the completion for local authorities to address an audit backlog. The new Government had confirmed that it would continue with these proposals. The audits of the council's 2022/23 and 2023/24 statement of accounts would be required to be completed by 13 December 2024 and 28 February respectively.

The Committee was advised that the council's External Auditors for 2022/23, Ernst and Young, had indicated that they would issue a disclaimer opinion for the 2022-23 Statement of Accounts. The Head of Finance advised this did not

affect the value for money commentary work which had been completed and will be reported on alongside the audit opinion.

It was expected that the council's new external auditors, Bishop Fleming, would issue a disclaimer opinion on the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts as a result of the disclaimer on the 2022/23 accounts. Bishop Fleming would not have the assurance over the opening balances in the 2023/24 statement of accounts that they normally would following an unqualified opinion for the previous year. The Head of Finance explained that it was likely the auditors would review selected balances rather than all opening balances. This was an issue that was being addressed by various regulatory bodies in the sector with a view to simplifying the audit process for Local Authorities. The Head of Finance advised that the Council was doing its best to attain an unqualified opinion as soon as possible.

In response to Members' questions regarding the impact of Government changes to the way certain types of assets were accounted for and how this may have affected the delays to audits in the sector, the Head of Finance advised that this was not the main cause of the delays. The Committee were advised that other factors such as the level of detail that external auditors were required to undertake along with issues of recruitment were more significant factors.

Resolved

- (1) That the updated dates proposed by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government for the audit backstop and the impact of this proposal on the external audit of the council's financial statements be noted.
- (2) That the draft Letter of Representation for 2022/23 be noted.
- (3) That the Assistant Director Finance (S151 Officer), in consultation with the Chair of the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee (or Deputy Chair in their absence), be authorised to make any further changes to the accounts agreed with the auditors and sign the accounts and it be noted that any further changes would be brought to the Committee's attention at its next meeting following the signing.
- (4) That the Assistant Director of Finance, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee (or Deputy Chair in their absence), be authorised to make any further changes to the letter of representation agreed with the auditors that may arise during completion of the audit and it be noted that any further changes would be brought to the Committee's attention at its next meeting following the signing.

38 **External Audit Update 2023-2024**

The Head of Finance (Deputy Section 151 Officer) provided a verbal update on the External Audit for the 2023-24 accounts. The council's External Auditor, Bishop Fleming, would be on site for approximately eight weeks in mid-November. The Committee was advised that Bishop Fleming was actively working towards the backstop audit date of 28 February 2025 for the 2023-24 financial year.

Resolved

- (1) That the External Audit 2023-24 update be noted.

39 **Monitoring Officer Report including LGSCO Ombudsman Annual Report**

The Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer submitted a report to provide the Committee with an annual report on matters relating to standards and conduct of Members within the Cherwell District at District and Parish level, complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman and other matters for the municipal year of 2023/2024.

In introducing the report, the Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer explained that it was incumbent on the Monitoring Officer to report on the functions for which he was responsible, including Code of Conduct matters.

The Committee was advised that none of the complaints raised had led to detailed investigations as the complaints had been dealt with at the initial stage and that ethical standards across the district including Parish and Town councils remained good.

With regard to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report, the Committee was advised that one complaint had been upheld by the Ombudsman but overall there were no serious concerns raised by the report.

In response to a question regarding comparative data in the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report, the Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer advised that the figure of 100% complaints upheld was higher than the national average of 63% due to the fact there was only one complaint.

Resolved

- (1) That the Monitoring Officer report including the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report be noted and it be noted it would be circulated to all Town and Parish Councils in the district for information.

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 6.55 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 17 September 2024 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Edward Fraser Reeves (Chairman)
Councillor Tom Beckett
Councillor Gordon Blakeway
Councillor Andrew Crichton
Councillor Rob Parkinson
Councillor Rob Pattenden
Councillor David Rogers
Councillor Les Sibley
Councillor Dom Vaitkus

Substitute Members:

Councillor Barry Wood (In place of Councillor Kieron Mallon)
Councillor Dr Chukwudi Okeke (In place of Councillor Matt Hodgson)
Councillor Gemma Coton (In place of Councillor Frank Ideh)

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Matt Hodgson (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Frank Ideh
Councillor Kieron Mallon

Also Present:

Councillor Lesley McLean, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Regeneration and Property

Officers:

Joanne Kaye, Head of Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer
Leanne Lock, Strategic Business Partner - Business Partnering & Controls
Matt Swinford, Democratic and Elections Officer

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

11 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 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 **Budget and Business Planning Process 2025-26**

The Assistant Director of Finance submitted a report to inform the Budget Planning Committee 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.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding the Reserves Policy and the flexible use capital receipts, the Head of Finance advised that there is currently no intention to apply to use capital receipts to fund revenue costs.

In response to Members' questions to the Council adopting a transformational approach to service delivery to shape the thinking for the future design of the Council, the Head of Finance advised that the transformational approach had been looking at the shape and design of the organisation in anticipation of the significant pressures that the Council will face in the future with impact of the change of Business Rates on the net budget.

Resolved

(1) That the Budget and Business Planning Process 2025-26 be noted.

15 **Monthly Performance Report**

The Assistant Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report that's summarised Cherwell District Council's (CDC's) forecast revenue and capital outturn for 2024/2025 as at 30 June 2024 and gave the Committee the opportunity to consider the finance aspects of the report.

In response to Members' questions on the reported overspend on planning appeals and the contingency in place, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and

Resources advised that officers are happy with the contingency in place however the situation is being monitored by officers as additional planning appeals are being received.

Resolved

- (1) That the report be noted.

16 **Review of Committee Work Plan**

The Chairman asked the Committee if any Members had any queries or additional items for the Committee Work Plan to which no response was received.

Resolved

- (1) That the work plan be noted.

The meeting ended at 6.53 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 29 October 2024 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Edward Fraser Reeves (Chairman)
Councillor Matt Hodgson (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Gordon Blakeway
Councillor Andrew Crichton
Councillor Frank Ideh
Councillor Rob Pattenden
Councillor David Rogers
Councillor Les Sibley
Councillor Dom Vaitkus
Councillor Barry Wood

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Tom Beckett
Councillor Rob Parkinson

Also Present:

Councillor Lesley McLean, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Regeneration and Property

Officers:

Joanne Kaye, Head of Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer
Matt Swinford, Democratic and Elections Officer

17 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest

18 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

19 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

20 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

21 **Monthly Performance Report**

The Assistant Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report to on the council's and financial position at the end of the financial year 2024-2025.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration advised the Committee that there was a projected in year underspend of (£4.596m), of which £3.765m was recommended to be reprofiled into future years.

With regards the Castle Quay office relocation project, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration advised the Committee, it had been identified that the full cost of the project would need to be increased by £646k. This was due to the fit out works being higher than the estimate provided by the Council's independent costs consultants and the need to include a contingency element within the revised budget levels.

It was reported by the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration that in relation to revenue, the Council's forecast outturn position for 2024/25 was an overspend of £208k. This was primarily due to variations across Law and Governance, Planning and Development, Property and Environmental. All services had been requested to consider ways that the forecasted overspend could be mitigated to perform within their forecasted budget for 2024/25.

In response to a question regarding the overspend, Planning and Development and if this was due to the payment of costs after the Council had lost planning appeals, the Head of Finance directed the committee to Appendix 2 to the report and advised that the forecast is due to lower application income.

In response to a question about the re-profiling of the funding for the new depot in Bicester, the Head of Finance directed the Committee to section 4.2.4 of the report where officers have reported that a planning application been submitted however an ecological survey and protected species survey was required to be submitted with the application and the Council had been unable to obtain these services, due to high demand for Ecologists, until October. That had resulted in a delay of 4 months to the original programme and consequent reprofiling of the capital budget as the anticipated completion had been impacted by the delay to planning approval.

Following a question from the Committee regarding empty units within Castle Quay, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration advised that officers had been putting pressure on the marketing team for the site to make sure they were doing everything they can to fill the units.

Resolved

(1) That the report be noted.

22

Fees & Charges Benchmarking 2024/25

The Assistant Director of Finance (S151 Officer) submitted a report which provided information to the Committee on the council's proposed 2025/2026 Fees and Charges benchmarked against other districts within Oxfordshire. The Committee were invited to feed back to the Executive as part of the 2025/26 Budget and Business Planning Process.

In introducing the report, the Head of Finance advised that the planning assumption on the fees and charges in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy assumed that fees and charges would be rise by a minimum of 2%. Services of the Council had been asked to review the proposed fees and charges to investigate if any fees and charges could have been raised more than 2%.

Following a question from the Committee regarding the proposed increase in car parking charges, the Head of Finance advised that car parking charges had been treated separately to other fees and charges. Car parking fees would be raised by 10p. Members debated the need for the proposed changes to car parking charges and requested further information in relation to the trial of free parking that took place for a limited period in 2023 at some council operated Banbury Town Centre car parks and if that trial had resulted in an increased footfall within the town centre.

In response to a question from the Committee querying the proposed 50% increase of the charge to collect stray dogs, Officers advised that further information would be requested after the meeting including numbers of stray dogs collected by the Council, and this information would be distributed to Members after the meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Rogers and seconded by Councillor Reeves that Executive consider an increase of more than 2% for the fees and charges relating to planning application fees, dog bin emptying chargers and election charges.

Further to the Committee's discussions on car parking charges, it was proposed by Councillor Reeves and seconded by Councillor Rogers that, Executive be recommended to give consideration on an ongoing basis to increases to car parking charges.

Resolved

- (1) That the variances between the council's fees and charges and those of other Oxfordshire districts be noted.
- (2) That Executive be recommended to consider an increase of more than the 2% minimum which is the level already assume in the Council's planning assumptions to the following fees and charges.
 - Planning application fees
 - Dog bin emptying charges
 - Election charges
- (3) That Executive be recommended to give further consideration on an ongoing basis to proposed increases to car parking charges.

23 **Review of Committee Work Plan**

The Committee considered it's work plan and had no queries or additional items for the Committee Work Plan.

Resolved

- (1) That the work plan be noted.

The meeting ended at 7.24 pm

Chairman:

Date:

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 12 November 2024 at 6.30 pm

Present:

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

Substitute Members:

Councillor Dorothy Walker
Councillor Les Sibley

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Gordon Blakeway
Councillor Harry Knight

Also Present:

Councillor David Hingley, Leader of the Council
Councillor Rob Parkinson
Councillor David Rogers
Councillor Amanda Watkins
Councillor Douglas Webb

Also Present Virtually:

Councillor Rebecca Biegel
Councillor Dom Vaitkus
Councillor Donna Ford

Officers:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive
Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities
David Peckford, Assistant Director Planning & Development
Christina Cherry, Planning Policy, Conservation & Design Manager

Holly Jones, Planning Policy Officer
Maria Dopazo, Principal Planning Policy Officer
Heidi Antrobus, Principal Planning Policy Officer
Michael Carr, Interim Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead
Martyn Surfleet, Democratic and Elections Officer

Officers Attending Virtually:

Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
Karen Adams, Principal Planning Policy Officer

25 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

27 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

28 **Proposed Cherwell Local Plan 2042**

The Assistant Director for Planning and Development submitted a report which presented the Proposed Cherwell Local Plan 2042 for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee ahead of its presentation to the Executive on 2 December 2024.

The Assistant Director Planning and Development and Planning Policy, Conservation & Design Manager gave a short presentation covering timelines, key changes since 2023 as well as the key themes and policy areas, including Housing Need, Requirement and Supply and stipulations of affordable housing within proposed developments.

The Committee considered and asked questions on the proposed Cherwell Local Plan around key strategic themes: strategic options and considerations, timetable and governance, housing and economic needs assessments, climate change and sustainable development, infrastructure, and consultation and engagement. Answers to all questions were duly provided by officers from the Communities, Planning and Development department and the Executive Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management.

At the end of questions, the committee considered its conclusions, observations, and recommendations to the Executive.

In considering the report, the Committee noted that the following key supporting documents were listed in the Appendix to the draft report to the Executive but were not included in the committee papers for consideration at the meeting.

- a) Draft Sustainability Appraisal
- b) Draft WIP Habitats Regulation Assessment
- c) Health and Equalities Impact Assessment
- d) Interim Duty to Cooperate Statement
- e) Local Plan Appendix 5 - Strategic Gaps associated with Banbury, Bicester and Heyford Park: Key Characteristics and Recommendations

The Committee was advised that these documents were not yet available as they were not finalised in time for the meeting but would be available in time for the agenda publication for the Executive on 2 December 2024.

Members of the Committee commented they considered that these documents, in particular the Sustainability Appraisal, were integral to the plan making process and that it was therefore necessary for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review these documents before making a final assessment and observations on the draft proposed Local Plan to Executive.

It was proposed by Councillor Simpson and seconded by Councillor Creed that the supporting documents be submitted as exempt documents to the scheduled 26 November, which was ahead of Executive consideration of the draft proposed Local Plan on 2 December 2024. This would enable the Committee to review and make any comments to Executive on these documents.

Further to a question on Local Green Space Allocations for Bicester West by Councillor Sibley, it was proposed by Councillor Sibley and seconded by Councillor Broad that it be recommended to the Executive to agree that the land adjacent to Isis Avenue, Hambleside, Eden Way and boarding Middleton Stoney Road be designated a part of the Local Green Space Designation in Bicester West.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked officers for their in preparations of the report, presentation to the committee and answering questions and it was requested that the presentation slides from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting be circulated to all Members for information.

Resolved

- (1) That the following key supporting documents referenced in the Draft report to the Executive, but not available with the papers submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, be made available to Overview and Scrutiny Committee members at its next meeting, 26 November 2024:
 - a) Draft Sustainability Appraisal
 - b) Draft WIP Habitats Regulation Assessment

- c) Health and Equalities Impact Assessment
 - d) Interim Duty to Cooperate Statement
 - e) Local Plan Appendix 5 - Strategic Gaps associated with Banbury, Bicester and Heyford Park: Key Characteristics and Recommendations
- (2) That Executive be recommended to agree that the land adjacent to Isis Avenue, Hambleside, Eden Way and boarding Middleton Stoney Road be included as part of the Local Green Space Designation in Bicester West.
- (3) That the presentation slides from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting be circulated to all Members for information.

The meeting ended at 8.32 pm

Chairman:

Date:

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 15 October 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 Frank Ideh
Councillor Simon Lytton
Councillor Lynne Parsons
Councillor Barry Wood

Also Present:

Councillor David Hingley, Leader of the Council

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Andrew Crichton
Councillor Harry Knight

Officers:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive
Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities
Richard Smith, Head of Housing
Michael Carr, Interim Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead
Matt Swinford, Democratic and Elections Officer

18 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

19 Minutes

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

20 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

21 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

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

The Committee considered a report from the Assistant Director – Wellbeing and Housing that presented the new Cherwell District Council Housing Strategy 2025-2030 for the Committee to review ahead of submission to Executive for adoption.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Housing explained that the Council had developed and delivered a Housing Strategy in accordance with its statutory duties from 2019 to 2024. A review of the current strategy and development of a new strategy was required to reflect changing national and local context over recent years and develop new priorities and objectives to be delivered. The Executive had agreed a public and stakeholder consultation commence on the draft revised Strategy at their 9 September 2024 meeting. Following the conclusion of the consultation and consideration of all comments, a final version would be submitted to Executive for approval.

Members posed several questions to the Head of Housing and the Corporate Director - Communities relating to the consultation process, National Policy Framework and local policy context as well as the scope of the policy, the existing housing stock, types of development and the social and physical infrastructure and resulting environmental impact. The Head of Housing and Corporate Director Communities explained the new Housing Strategy had been formulated in conjunction with the NPPF and the emerging Local Plan, but the full impact was unknown as consultation was ongoing.

With regards to the number of vacant properties, according to the latest council tax data, approximately 17,000 properties within Cherwell were vacant and that there were enforcement policies within the Housing Strategy to help tackle vacant properties. Stipulations on types of new developments were included in the emerging Cherwell Local Plan as well as the Oxfordshire Homelessness and Rough Sleeper policy and that schemes to aid in affordability were available for first time buyers.

Members also questioned what targets, metrics and measures of success were in place to monitor and deliver the Housing Strategy. The Head of Housing and Corporate Director Communities explained that the measures for tracking progress were outlined within the strategy, that an action plan would be used to monitor the strategy alongside regular update reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In the course of the discussion, the Committee agreed to request officers to substitute the current climate and environmental impact implications assessment of “not applicable” with a more appropriate description in the report to the Executive, and that the reference to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 be removed from the final version of the Housing Strategy.

Resolved

- (1) That having given due consideration, the following comments and recommendations be referred to the Executive in respect of the draft Housing Strategy:
 - i) That the development of the new Local Plan be aligned with the new Housing Strategy, once adopted.
 - ii) To include in the Housing Strategy Action Plan a section to provide further details and emphasis on single people in insecure accommodation (e.g. “sofa surfing”).
 - iii) That the reference text stating “not applicable” in the climate and environmental impact implications assessment be substituted with a more appropriate description in the officer report to the Executive.
 - iv) The reference to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 be removed from the final version of the Housing Strategy.

- (2) That officers be recommended to submit a summary of consultation responses received as part of the report to Executive and Executive be recommended to give those responses due consideration.

23

Working Groups Update

The chair provided an update on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Food Insecurity and Climate Action Scrutiny Working Groups since the last Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 September 2024.

The Vice-Chair of the Food Insecurity Working Group, Councillor Phil Chapman, gave a brief update on the first meeting of the working group, advising the appointment of Councillor Rebecca Biegel as Chair and providing an update on the focus and scope of the Working Group for 2024 – 2025, which was set out in the terms of reference submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for agreement.

Resolved

- (1) That the Scrutiny Working Groups update be noted and that the updated membership of each of the Scrutiny Working Groups be agreed, (Climate Change Scrutiny Working Group, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Scrutiny Working Group and Food Insecurity Scrutiny Working Group).

- (2) That the terms of reference for the Food Insecurity Scrutiny Working Group be agreed.

24 **Work Programme 2024-25**

The Chair gave an update on the work programme 2024 – 2025. Further to discussion with officers regarding the Committee's consideration of the emerging Local Plan prior to Executive consideration on 2 December, an extraordinary meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be scheduled for 12 November. Given the importance of the Local Plan, all Members would be invited to attend.

Resolved

- (1) That the updated Scrutiny Work Programme 2024/2025 be agreed.

The meeting ended at 7.57 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 18 September 2024 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Amanda Watkins (Chairman)
Councillor Gemma Coton (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Rebecca Biegel
Councillor Phil Chapman
Councillor David Hingley
Councillor Nicholas Mawer
Councillor Fiona Mawson
Councillor Chris Pruden
Councillor Barry Wood
Councillor Alisa Russell

Substitute Members:

Councillor Sean Woodcock (In place of Councillor Lynne Parsons)

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Chris Brant
Councillor Harry Knight
Councillor Lynne Parsons

Officers:

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

10 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no petitions or request to address the meeting.

12 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

13 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9 July 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

14 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

15 **Policy Review Updates**

The Assistant Director Human Resources submitted a report to seek approval from the Personnel Committee on proposed changes to two existing HR policies: Travel and Subsistence Policy (incorporates and therefore supersedes Car User Policy); Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy.

In response to Members' questions regarding the revised subsistence levels, the Assistant Director Human Resources explained that the rates were aligned with comparable councils. The levels reflected the maximum amount that would be paid, subject to submission in accordance with the policy.

Resolved

(1) That, having given due consideration, the following policies be approved for implementation:

- Travel and Subsistence Policy (incorporates and therefore supersedes Car User Policy)
- Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy

16 **Workforce Profile Statistics - Quarter 1 of 2024/25**

The Assistant Director Human Resources submitted a report to update members on Cherwell District Council's workforce including measuring staff well-being and to highlight the actions officers are taking to address any issues.

Resolved

(1) That the workforce data for quarter 1 of 2024/25 (financial year dates) be noted.

17 **Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Working Group**

The Chairman explained that in autumn 2022, a joint Equalities Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Working Group was established comprising members of the Personnel Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) had agreed that the EDI Working Group should continue in 2024/2025 and nominated three OSC members to sit on the EDI Working Group at its 10 September meeting. The Personnel Committee was requested to also agree the continuation of the EDI Working Group and, subject to this agreement, to nominate three Personnel Committee members to join the EDI Working Group.

Resolved

- (1) That the continuation of the Equalities Diversity and Inclusion Working Group continue in 2024/2025.
- (2) That Councillor Coton and Councillor Biegel be nominated by the Personnel Committee to join the EDI Working Group.
- (3) That it be agreed the Personnel Committee Chair would consult with the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny and officers on the process for filling the final vacancy on the EDI Working Group.

The meeting ended at 6.55 pm

Chairman:

Date:

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