

Cherwell District Council

Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Council held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 24 February 2025 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Dr Chukwudi Okeke (Chairman)

Councillor Dorothy Walker (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Tom Beckett

Councillor Rebecca Biegel

Councillor Gordon Blakeway

Councillor Chris Brant

Councillor Besmira Brasha

Councillor John Broad

Councillor Phil Chapman

Councillor Mark Cherry

Councillor Becky Clarke MBE

Councillor Jean Conway

Councillor Gemma Coton

Councillor Donna Ford

Councillor Ian Harwood

Councillor David Hingley

Councillor Matt Hodgson

Councillor Frank Ideh

Councillor Harry Knight

Councillor Simon Lytton

Councillor Kieron Mallon

Councillor Fiona Mawson

Councillor Andrew McHugh

Councillor Lesley McLean

Councillor Ian Middleton

Councillor Robert Parkinson

Councillor Lynne Parsons

Councillor Rob Pattenden

Councillor Chris Pruden

Councillor Edward Fraser Reeves

Councillor David Rogers

Councillor Alisa Russell

Councillor Les Sibley

Councillor Nigel Simpson

Councillor Dr Kerrie Thornhill

Councillor Dom Vaitkus

Councillor Linda Ward

Councillor Amanda Watkins

Councillor John Willett

Councillor Douglas Webb

Councillor Barry Wood

Councillor Sean Woodcock

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Grace Conway-Murray
Councillor Nick Cotter
Councillor Dr Isabel Creed
Councillor Andrew Crichton
Councillor Nicholas Mawer
Councillor Julian Nedelcu

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
Joanne Kaye, Head of Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer
Nicola Riley, Assistant Director Housing and Wellbeing
Lynsey Parkinson, Strategic Business Partner – Corporate
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

52 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

53 **Communications**

Meeting Length and Etiquette

The Chairman referred to the email sent by the Monitoring Officer to all Members regarding budget setting at the Council meeting. It was the responsibility of all Members to ensure that the district council set a lawful budget at the meeting this evening.

The Chairman asked Councillors to be respectful of each other when addressing the meeting and out of courtesy, to remain in their seat during items. If necessary, the Chairman would adjourn the meeting to allow for a comfort break at a suitable point.

17 March Council meeting

The Chairman advised that the next scheduled Council meeting was on Monday 17 March. This meeting would include questions and motions. The submission deadlines were set out in the agenda.

All Member Briefing – Local Government Reform update

The Chairman reminded Members that a briefing on Local Government Reform was taking place the following day at 5.30pm.

Members' Pigeon Holes

Members were reminded to check their pigeon hole and take any post.

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

There were no petitions or requests to address the meeting.

55 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

56 **Members' Allowance Scheme 2025/2026**

The Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer for Council to determine the levels of the allowances to be paid to Members for the forthcoming 2025/2026 financial year and proposed changes to the Members Allowance Scheme, following the consideration of the report of the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel.

Resolved

- (1) That, having given due consideration, the following levels of allowance be included in the 2025/2026 Members' Allowances Scheme:
 - That the Basic Allowance be increased in in line with the 2025/2026 staff pay award (3.5%), rounded up to give 12 equal payments from 1 April 2025.
 - That all Special Responsibility Allowances be increased in in line with the 2025/2026 staff pay award (3.5%), rounded up to give 12 equal payments from 1 April 2025.
 - That the co-optees allowance be increased in in line with the 2025/2026 staff pay award (3.5%), rounded up to give 12 equal payments from 1 April 2025.
 - That the Independent Persons allowance be increased in in line with the 2025/2026 staff pay award (3.5%), rounded up to give 12 equal payments from 1 April 2025.
 - That Dependents' Carers' and Childcare Allowances remain at the current level, are paid on the basis of the actual costs incurred up to the maximum hourly rate set out below and to a maximum cap of 40 hours per month, subject to production of receipts and cannot be paid to a member of the claimant's household:
 - Childcare: £10 per hour
 - Dependent Relative care - £20 per hour
 - That mileage remain at the current level in line with HMRC approved mileage rates, and if any adjustments are implemented by

HMRC then the revised rates should be applied to Members' travel allowances effective from the date of implementation by HMRC.

- That, having regard to the detailed review of staff subsistence, the rates for subsistence allowance be aligned with the revised maximum staff subsistence levels, with claims permitted on approved duties of over 5 hours outside the district* subject to the submission of receipts (*subsistence allowances cannot be claimed for any duties within the district as the basic allowance is deemed to cover all within district expenses).
 - Breakfast: £7.50
 - Lunch: £10.50
 - Tea / coffee: £4.00
 - Evening Meal: £12.50
 - That Democratic Services continue to book overnight accommodation if required.
 - That there be no change to the list of approved duties for which claims may be made.
 - That Non-Executive Director allowances be increased in line with the 2025/2026 staff pay award (3.5%), rounded up to give 12 equal payments from 1 April 2025 and costs recharged to the relevant company.
 - That an in-depth "root and branches" review of the Members' Allowance Scheme be undertaken with implementation to be determined when further information on local government reorganisation, devolution and the Cherwell boundary review is known.
- (2) That the Assistant Director Law and Governance be authorised to prepare an amended Members' Allowances Scheme, in accordance with the decisions of Council for implementation with effect from 1 April 2025.
- (3) That the Assistant Director of Law and Governance be authorised to take all necessary action to revoke the current (2024/2025) Scheme and to publicise the revised Scheme pursuant to The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances)(England) Regulations 2003 (as amended).
- (4) That the Independent Remuneration Panel be thanked for its report and a fee of £300 be set for each Panel Member for the work carried out on this review and it be agreed the level of fee be applied for any reviews carried out in 2025/2026 capped at a maximum of £1200 per person, which can be funded from existing budgets.

Budget 2025/2026 and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

Prior to consideration of the item, the Chairman advised that the Conservative Group had proposed amendments to the budget which had been published as a supplement to the agenda. There were no amendments proposed by any other Political Group.

The Chairman explained that once the budget had been proposed and seconded, the Leader of the Conservative Group, Councillor Reeves, would respond to the budget and propose the Group's amendment. Once seconded, the amendment would be debated and voted on.

The Chairman reminded Members that the arrangements for debating the budget were set out in the meeting procedure rules. The proposer, when presenting the budget, and Group Leaders, when responding to the budget, may speak for up to 10 minutes. All other speakers had a three-minute time limit.

The Chairman further reminded Members that it was required in legislation that the vote on any motion on or amendment to the budget and council tax setting reports must be a recorded vote. This would be taken at the appropriate time.

The Assistant Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report for Council to consider and approve the Budget Setting for 2025/26 and MTFS 2029/30 as per the recommendations.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration, Councillor McLean, explained that the report was the culmination of the Budget and Business Planning process for 2025/26 to 2029/30 and sets out the Executive's proposed Corporate Plan and related revenue budget for 2025/26, medium term financial strategy to 2029/30, capital programme to 2029/30 and all supporting policies, strategies, and information being recommended to Council.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration, Councillor McLean, paid tribute to the Assistant Director of Finance and the finance team for their hard work on the budget process.

Having presented the report, Councillor McLean proposed the recommendations. Councillor Hingley seconded the proposal.

Councillor Reeves, Leader of the Conservative Group, addressed Council in response to the budget and proposed the Group's amendments to the budget. Councillor Simpson seconded the amendment.

The amendment having been proposed and seconded was debated by Council. As required in legislation, a recorded vote on the amendment was taken. Members voted as follows:

Councillor Tom Beckett	For
Councillor Rebecca Biegel	For
Councillor Gordon Blakeway	For
Councillor Chris Brant	For
Councillor Besmira Brasha	For
Councillor John Broad	Against
Councillor Phil Chapman	For
Councillor Mark Cherry	For

Councillor Becky Clarke MBE	For
Councillor Jean Conway	For
Councillor Gemma Coton	For
Councillor Donna Ford	For
Councillor Ian Harwood	For
Councillor David Hingley	For
Councillor Matt Hodgson	For
Councillor Frank Ideh	For
Councillor Harry Knight	Abstain
Councillor Simon Lytton	For
Councillor Kieron Mallon	For
Councillor Fiona Mawson	For
Councillor Andrew McHugh	For
Councillor Lesley McLean	For
Councillor Ian Middleton	For
Councillor Dr Chukwudi Okeke	For
Councillor Rob Parkinson	For
Councillor Lynne Parsons	For
Councillor Rob Pattenden	For
Councillor Chris Pruden	For
Councillor Edward F Reeves	For
Councillor David Rogers	For
Councillor Alisa Russell	For
Councillor Les Sibley	For
Councillor Nigel Simpson	For
Councillor Dr Kerrie Thornhill	For
Councillor Dom Vaitkus	For
Councillor Dorothy Walker	For
Councillor Linda Ward	For
Councillor Amanda Watkins	For
Councillor Douglas Webb	For
Councillor John Willett	For
Councillor Barry Wood	For
Councillor Sean Woodcock	For

The vote on the amendment was carried with 40 votes in favour, 1 vote against and 1 abstention.

The Chairman reminded Members that the amendment having been agreed, it became the substantive motion and Council was debating the recommendations as amended.

Councillor Watkins, on behalf of the Labour Group, addressed Council in response to the budget.

Councillor Middleton, on behalf of the Green and Independent Alliance Group, address Council in response to the budget.

Councillor Sibley, on of behalf of the Independent Group, addressed Council in response to the budget.

The substantive motion having been debated, as required in legislation, a recorded vote was taken, and Members voted as follows

Councillor Tom Beckett	For
Councillor Rebecca Biegel	For
Councillor Gordon Blakeway	For
Councillor Chris Brant	For
Councillor Besmira Brasha	For
Councillor John Broad	For
Councillor Phil Chapman	For
Councillor Mark Cherry	For
Councillor Becky Clarke MBE	For
Councillor Jean Conway	For
Councillor Gemma Coton	For
Councillor Donna Ford	For
Councillor Ian Harwood	For
Councillor David Hingley	For
Councillor Matt Hodgson	For
Councillor Frank Ideh	For
Councillor Harry Knight	For
Councillor Simon Lytton	For
Councillor Kieron Mallon	For
Councillor Fiona Mawson	For
Councillor Andrew McHugh	For
Councillor Lesley McLean	For
Councillor Ian Middleton	For
Councillor Dr Chukwudi Okeke	For
Councillor Rob Parkinson	For
Councillor Lynne Parsons	For
Councillor Rob Pattenden	For
Councillor Chris Pruden	For
Councillor Edward F Reeves	For
Councillor David Rogers	For
Councillor Alisa Russell	For
Councillor Les Sibley	For
Councillor Nigel Simpson	For
Councillor Dr Kerrie Thornhill	For
Councillor Dom Vaitkus	For
Councillor Dorothy Walker	For
Councillor Linda Ward	For
Councillor Amanda Watkins	For
Councillor Douglas Webb	For
Councillor John Willett	For
Councillor Barry Wood	For
Councillor Sean Woodcock	For

The vote on the substantive motion was carried unanimously with all 42 councillors present voting in favour.

Resolved

- (1) That, having due regard, the statutory report of the Chief Finance Officer and the comments of the Chief Finance Officer in respect of the proposed amendments, be noted.
- (2) That, subject to the following amendment, with authority delegated to the Section 151 Officer to update the budget papers to reflect the amendment, the proposed Fees and Charges schedule for 2025/26 be approved and it be noted that statutory notices would be placed where required.
 - That the proposed increase of £6 in garden waste charges in 2025/26 be delayed by one year and this increase be applied in 2026/27 as well as other planned changes and it be noted that this will reduce income in 2025/26 by £0.143m.
- (3) That, having given due consideration, the Equality Impact Assessments of the Budget be noted.
- (4) That the Corporate Plan be approved and the Internal Perspectives be noted.
- (5) That, in relation to the Revenue Budget Strategy and Medium-Term Financial Strategy, the following net directorate budgets, as amended, be agreed, with authority delegated to the Section 151 Officer to update the budget papers to reflect the amendments.

Directorate	Net budget 2025/26 £m	Proposal £m	Revised Net Budget 2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29 £m	2029/30 £m
Communities	12.120	0.339	12.459	(0.333)	(0.079)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Resources	7.528	0.00	7.528	(0.163)	(0.026)	(0.090)	(0.100)
Service Sub-total	19.650	0.337	19.985	(0.496)	(0.105)	(0.105)	(0.115)
Corporate Costs	3.926	(0.189)	3.737	1.889	1.163	1.314	0.324
Policy Contingency	2.620	(0.150)	2.470	0.611	0.799	0.799	0.799
Net Cost of Services	26.194	0.000	26.194	2.004	1.857	2.008	1.008
Funding	(26.194)	0.000	(26.194)	2.993	3.305	3.318	(0.071)
Funding Gap / (Surplus)	0.000	0.000	0.000	4.997	5.162	5.326	0.937

- (6) That, subject to the following amendments with authority delegated to the Section 151 Officer to amend the budget papers to reflect the amendments, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Revenue Budget 2025/2026, including Savings Proposals and Investments be approved:
 - To introduce the following service investments:

- Heating Hardship Fund of £0.100m to support pensioners who are struggling during the cost-of-living crisis
 - Additional Homelessness Prevention Support of £0.065m.
 - £0.051m to fund a Land Drainage Officer to provide additional flood support
 - To delay service investment DPD2504 – Conservation Areas by one year, reducing costs in 2025/2026 only, by £0.020m.
 - To remove the proposed investment in the Waste Collection Partnership Working Fund of £0.150m.
- (7) That an increase in the Basic Amount of Council Tax for Cherwell District Council for the financial year beginning on 1 April 2025 of £5, resulting in a Band D charge of £158.50 per annum, be agreed.
- (8) That it be agreed for long term empty properties, from 1 April 2025 an additional council tax premium will be charged of 100 per cent for properties empty for one year or more, replacing the current 100 per cent premium that begins after 2 years of a property being empty, and that all other empty property premiums will remain.
- (9) That it be noted that the Council Tax Base 2025/26 was determined at the Executive meeting held on 6 January 2025:
- a) for the whole Council area as 59,853.6 [item T in the formula in Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended (“the 1992 Act”)]; and
 - b) For dwellings in those parts of its area to which a Parish Precept relates, (annex to the Minutes as set out in the Minute Book)
- (10) That it be agreed the Council Tax requirement for the Council’s own purposes for 2025/26 (excluding Parish Precepts and Special Expenses) is £9,486,796.
- (11) That, subject to delegation to the Section 151 Officer to update the budget papers to reflect the agreed amendments to a) to reduce expenditure by £0.413m and b) to reduce income by £0.413m, the following amounts be calculated for the year 2025/26 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the 1992 Act:
- a) £140,304,768 (subject to recalculation with a reduction of £0.413m) being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (2) of the 1992 Act, taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils and any additional special expenses.
 - b) £124,192,690 (subject to recalculation with a reduction of £0.413m) being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) of the 1992 Act.

- c) £16,112,078 being the amount by which the aggregate at 3(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 3(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A (4) of the 1992 Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the 1992 Act).
- d) £269.19 being the amount at 3(c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (1(a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the 1992 Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish Precepts and Special Expenses).
- e) £6,625,282 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish Precepts and Special Expenses) referred to in Section 34(1) of the 1992 Act as set out in the annex to the Minutes as set out in the Minute Book.
- f) £158.50 being the amount at 3(d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 3(e) above by Item T(1(a) above), calculated by Cherwell District Council the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the 1992 Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish Precept or special item relates. 1.6.6 It be noted that for the year 2025/26 the Oxfordshire County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley have issued precepts to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the 1992 Act, for each category of dwellings in the Council's area as indicated below:

Valuation Band	Oxfordshire County Council	Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley
	£	£
A	1,274.27	188.85
B	1,486.64	220.33
C	1,699.02	251.80
D	1,911.40	283.28
E	2,336.16	346.23
F	2,760.91	409.18
G	3,185.67	472.13
H	3,822.80	566.56

- (12) That the Council, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the 1992 Act, hereby sets the amounts shown in the annex to the Minutes as set out in the Minute Book as the amounts of Council Tax for the year 2025/26 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings.

- (13) That the Council has determined that its relevant basic amount of Council Tax for 2025/26 is not excessive in accordance with principles approved under Section 52ZB of the 1992 Act.
- (14) That the Capital Bids and Capital Programme (annexes to the Minutes as set out in the Minute Book) be approved.
- (15) That the Capital and Investment Strategy 2025/26 (annex to the Minutes as set out in the Minute Book), including the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy, be approved.
- (16) That the Treasury Management Strategy, including the Prudential Indicators, and Affordable Borrowing Limit for 2025/26 (annex to the Minutes as set out in the Minute Book) be approved.
- (17) That a minimum level of General Balances of £7.8m (as supported by the annex to the Minutes as set out in the Minute Book) be approved.
- (18) That the Reserves Policy ((annex to the Minutes as set out in the Minute Book)) be approved.
- (19) That, subject to the following amendment, with authority delegated to the Section 151 Officer to update the budget papers to reflect the amendment, the Medium-Term Reserves Plan ((annex to the Minutes as set out in the Minute Book) be approved:
 - Reduce the contribution to reserves by £0.189m
- (20) That the Pay Policy Statement, as required by the Localism Act 2010, be approved.

The meeting ended at 8.20 pm

Chairman:

Date: