

Cherwell District Council

Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Council held at 39 Castle Quay, Banbury, OX16 5FD, on 20 July 2026 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Nigel Simpson (Chair)
Councillor Simon Lytton (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Fiaz Ahmed
Councillor Rebecca Biegel
Councillor Gordon Blakeway
Councillor Chris Aramini-Brant
Councillor Besmira Brasha
Councillor Mark Cherry
Councillor Jean Conway
Councillor Grace Conway-Murray
Councillor Nick Cotter
Councillor Dr Henry Elugwu
Councillor Dr Faltermeyer
Councillor Mark Gorman
Councillor Yvonne Greene
Councillor Ian Harwood
Councillor David Hingley
Councillor Frank Ideh
Councillor Paul Jeffreys
Councillor Kieron Mallon
Councillor Fiona Mawson
Councillor Lesley McLean
Councillor Zoe McLernon
Councillor Ian Middleton
Councillor Julian Nedelcu
Councillor Rob Packard
Councillor Julius Parker
Councillor Robert Parkinson
Councillor Rob Pattenden
Councillor Chris Pruden
Councillor Edward Fraser Reeves
Councillor David Rogers
Councillor Alisa Russell
Councillor Les Sibley
Councillor Dr Lisa Smith
Councillor Dr Kerrie Thornhill
Councillor Dom Vaitkus
Councillor Linda Ward
Councillor John Willett
Councillor Douglas Webb
Councillor Bryonie Wells
Councillor Michael Wilson

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Tom Beckett
Councillor Nicola Borkmann
Councillor John Brown
Councillor Becky Clarke MBE
Councillor Dr Isabel Creed
Councillor G.A. Popescu

Officers:

Ian Boll, Executive Director Place & Regeneration
Kristian Aspinall, Executive Director Neighbourhood Services
Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
Kaimi Ithia, Head of Chief Executive's Office
Joanne Kaye, Head of Finance and Deputy S151 Officer
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager

15 **Welcome**

The Chair welcomed Members officers and members of the public to the meeting, including Councillor Rob Packard who was attending his first Council meeting following the by-election in the Kidlington West ward the previous week,

The vacancy had arisen following the resignation of former Councillor Dorothy Walker as a district councillor in June. The Chair paid tribute to former Councillor Walker for her service to her ward and the council, in particular, during her year as Chair. On behalf of Council, the Chair wished former Councillor Walker all the best.

16 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

17 **Communications**

The Chair made the following announcements:

Former Councillor Timothy Hallchurch MBE

The Chair advised Council of the recent passing of Former Councillor, Timothy Hallchurch MBE. Former Councillor Hallchurch MBE was a district councillor from 2002 until his resignation in March 2022. A Conservative councillor, he represented the Otmoor ward from 2002 to 2016 and, following a district boundary review, the Launton & Otmoor ward from 2016 until 2022.

Former Councillor Hallchurch MBE was Chair of the Council for the 2011/2012 municipal year, having been Vice-Chair in 2010/2011. Over the course of twenty years as a CDC councillor, former Councillor Hallchurch MBE served on every CDC committee that existed during that time, including two years as Portfolio Holder for IT in 2004/05 and 2005/06.

Former Councillor Hallchurch was also a County Councillor, the Conservative Member for Otmoor & Kidlington, subsequently Otmoor division following boundary changes from May 2005 until May 2017. Former Councillor Hallchurch MBE served as Vice-Chair of OCC Council in 2012/13 and Chair of Council in 2013/2014.

Councillor Mallon paid tribute to former Councillor Hallchurch MBE.

Council held a minute's silence in honour of former Councillor Hallchurch MBE.

On behalf of Council, the Chair extended condolences to former Councillor Hallchurch MBE's family and friends.

Dispensation request for Cllr Becky Clarke MBE

The Chair advised that the Labour Group Leader, Councillor Biegel, and Councillor Becky Clarke MBE had submitted a request to the Monitoring Officer for a dispensation for Councillor Clarke from attending meetings for 6 months for health reasons. Council agreed the request.

Resolved

That Councillor Becky Clarke MBE be granted a six month dispensation (until 20 January 2027) from attending meetings.

On behalf of Council, the Chair extended best wishes to Councillor Clarke.

Local Government Reorganisation

The Chair referred to the Government announcement on the implementation of the three unitary proposal submitted by Oxford City Council, with West Berkshire included in the southern unitary and confirmed a Member briefing would be scheduled.

The new councils would comprise the current areas of:

- Oxford City Council, together with fifteen parishes from Cherwell District Council, twenty-five parishes from South Oxfordshire District Council and nine parishes from Vale of White Horse District Council (referred to in the proposal as 'Greater Oxford Council').
- Cherwell District Council (less the fifteen parishes included within 'Greater Oxford Council') and West Oxfordshire District Council (referred to in the proposal as 'Northern Oxfordshire Council')
- South Oxfordshire District Council (less the twenty-five parishes included within 'Greater Oxford Council'), Vale of White Horse District Council (less the nine parishes included within Greater Oxford Council), and West Berkshire Council (referred to in the proposal as 'Ridgeway Council').

Operation Ford

Following the tragic murder of former MP Ann Widdecombe and in line with national guidance, the Monitoring Officer had confirmed that Thames Valley Police (TVP) had made contact to offer reassurance, security advice, and support through Operation Ford.

TVP have stated that: “we recognise that councillors regularly engage with the public through surgeries, community meetings, local events, and online platforms. While these engagements are a vital part of local democracy, they can also present opportunities for unwanted attention or concerning behaviour. We would therefore encourage you to review arrangements for any forthcoming public engagements and consider appropriate personal safety measures where necessary. Should members experience any incidents of concern, including threats, harassment, intimidation, suspicious behaviour, criminal damage, or any matter affecting safety and security, it is important that these are reported to the police promptly. Emergencies should be reported via 999, with non-emergency matters reported via 101 or through online reporting channels. Timely reporting enables TVP to effectively assess risk, identify emerging issues, and ensure any necessary safeguarding measures are informed by the most complete intelligence picture available.”

Members were advised to contact the Operation Ford team if they had concerns about their personal security.

Chair's Engagements

A copy of the events attended by the Chair or the Vice-Chair was published with the agenda. The Chair reported that a particular highlight had been the reopening of The Stables at Hook Norton Brewery in Banbury by HRH Princess Royal, whom it had been a great honour to meet.

Meeting Etiquette

The Chair asked Councillors to be respectful of each other when addressing the meeting and to address the meeting through the Chair. If necessary, the Chair would adjourn the meeting to allow for a comfort break at a suitable point.

Members' Pigeonholes

Members were reminded to check their pigeonhole and take any post.

The Leader, Councillor Lesley McLean, made the following announcements:

Designation

Referring to the council being placed under Government designation the previous month for quality of decision-making in respect of applications for planning permission for major developments, the Leader provided additional information in respect of the designation.

The Leader confirmed that the council was reviewing the steps for designation to be lifted. Progress was underway on agreeing an action plan with MHCLG.

The council was fully committed to a planning service which is efficient, transparent, accountable and serves its communities.

The Planning Service had already reported to overview and scrutiny via the planning applications and appeals working group and the Leader was happy for this to continue in order to provide an update on progress.

Site A, Bicester

Site A related to land out to the Bicester Garrison currently in the control of the Ministry of Defence.

The Leader advised Council of the notification timeline in relation to this matter. On 24 June, officers were invited to a meeting on 25 June to discuss asylum accommodation in the area ahead of a planned ministerial announcement. On 25 June, the council was notified by the Home Office that Site A, Bicester was the subject of a proposal for an asylum centre to house 1,250 single males.

On 30 June, the Leader met with the Home Office staff to confirm these details and was informed that should the process move forward, it would include the transfer of the site from the Ministry of Defence to the Home Office and a planning application using the crown mechanism for accommodation would ensue. At this meeting, arrangements for the site were discussed, including site provision, but full assurances on details had not been received, which was being followed up by officers.

The Leader confirmed that officers were continuing discussions with the Home Office and third parties to establish how best Members could serve and support their communities. The Leader would also continue meetings with relevant parties.

18

Petitions and Requests to Address the Meeting

There were no requests to address the meeting.

The Chair advised that one petition had been received with more than 1500 signatures which, in accordance with our Constitution, was submitted to Council for debate.

The petition was submitted by Paul Fennemore, North Oxfordshire Residents Association (NORA), requesting coordinated action to improve the processes and rigour applied to assessing and mitigating the full cumulative (combined) impacts of major developments.

Mr Fennemore was unable to attend the meeting and had nominated Adrian Langdale, supported by Richard Allen, both representing NORA, to introduce the petition to Council. Mr Langdale and Mr Allen duly introduced the petition.

The Chair thanked Mr Fennemore for submitting and Mr Langdale and Mr Allen for introducing the petition.

In accordance the petition procedure, Council debated the petition.

The Chair thanked Members for the contributions and advised that the petition would be referred to Executive with the comments in the debate noted.

19 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

20 **Minutes of Council**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2026 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

21 **Minutes**

a) **Minutes of the Executive, Portfolio Holder Decisions and
Executive Decisions made under Special Urgency**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting of the Executive and Portfolio Holder decisions as set out in the Minute Book be received and that it be noted that since the last meeting of Council at which this was reported, 16 March 2026, two key and / or exempt decisions had been taken by the Executive which were not included in the 28-day notice, relating to “Heyford Park New Town: Acceptance of MHCLG Preparatory Funding and Programme Delivery Arrangements” and “Banbury Museum Utility Charges”.

b) **Minutes of Committees**

Resolved

That the minutes of Committees as set out in the Minute Book be received.

22 **Questions**

a) **Written Questions**

The Chair advised that four written questions, addressed to the Leader, Councillor McLean, had been submitted with advance notice in accordance with the Constitution and had been published with the agenda. Responses to the questions had been published as a supplement to the agenda (and as an annex to the Minutes as set out in the Minute Book).

The first question was from Councillor Cherry, regarding the former Garage Site at Bretch Hill. Councillor Cherry thank the Leader for the response and suggested that Planning should also be involved in any future discussions.

The second question was from Councillor Wilson regarding in person neurodiversity training for Members. Councillor Wilson confirmed he did not have a supplementary question.

The third question was from Councillor Reeves regarding Area Oversight Funds. By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Reeves sought clarity on the figures in the budget papers and Executive report and the inclusion of areas surrounding Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington in the respective budget. The Leader referred to written response which confirmed their was no discrepancy.

The fourth question was from Councillor Jeffreys regarding the replacement of waste bins when they are damaged or no longer serviceable with smaller capacity bins. By way of supplementary question, Councillor Jeffreys queried cross contamination and public awareness of fines. The Leader undertook to ask officers to review and a response would be provided to Councillor Jeffreys.

b) Questions to the Leader of the Council

Questions were asked and answers received on the following issues:

Councillor Reeves: Asylum Facility at MOD Bicester
Councillor Pruden: Asylum Facility at MOD Bicester
Councillor Dr Faltermeyer: Asylum Facility at MOD Bicester
Councillor Sibley: Public toilets at Pioneer Square, Bicester
Councillor Cherry: Flytipping in Appleby Close, Banbury

c) Questions to Committee Chairs on the Minutes

There were no questions to Committee Chairs on the minutes of meetings.

23

District By-Election: Review of Proportionality and Committee Membership

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report to note the result of the by-election held on 16 July 2026 and to note the constitution of political groups, the proportionality calculations and amendments to committee membership arising from the by-election.

Resolved

- (1) That the result of the District by-election held on 16 July 2026 be noted.

- (2) That the constitution of Political Groups following the by-election be noted:
- Liberal Democrat (20 Members, all Liberal Democrat party members)
 - Conservative (8 Members, all Conservative party members)
 - Labour (8 Members, all Labour and Labour & Co-operative party members)
 - Reform UK (6 Members, all Reform UK party members)
 - Green (4 Members, comprising all 4 Green party members)
 - (Two Independent non-aligned councillors)
- (3) That the allocation of seats on committees that are subject to the political balance requirements following the by-election be noted.

	Liberal Democrat	Labour	Conservative	Reform UK	Green	Total
% entitlement	44.16%	16.88%	16.88%	12.99%	9.09%	100%
Audit Committee	4	1	1	1	1	8
Appeals Panel	4	2	2	1	1	10
Budget Planning Committee	6 (+1)	2	2	1 (-1)	1	12
General Licensing Committee	5	2	2	2	1	12
Overview & Scrutiny Committee	5	2	2	2	1	12
Personnel Committee	5	2	2	2	1	12
Planning Committee	5	2	2	1	1	11
Proportional Entitlement by Committee	34	13	13	10	7	77
Aggregate Entitlement	34	13	13	10	7	77
Adjustment Required	+1	0	0	-1	0	-1

- (4) That the allocation of seats on committees that are not subject to the political balance requirements following the by-election be noted:

	Liberal Democrat	Labour	Conservative	Reform UK	Green	Total
Licensing Acts Committee	5	2	2	2	1	12

- (5) That the following amendments to committee membership, as advised by the Leader Liberal Democratic Group be noted:

Planning Committee

ADD Councillor Rob Packard to Liberal Democrat vacancy

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

REMOVE Councillor Bryonie Wells and ADD Councillor Rob Packard
One Liberal Democrat vacancy remains

24 **Treasury Management Report - Outturn 2025/2026**

The Assistant Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report to provide information on treasury management performance and compliance with treasury management policy for 2025-26 as required by the Treasury Management Code of Practice. The report demonstrated that all treasury management activities undertaken during the reporting period complied with the CIPFA Code of Practice and the council's approved Treasury Management Strategy.

Resolved

- (1) That the Treasury Management Annual Performance Report 2025/2026 and the Capital Prudential indicators be noted.

25 **Motions**

The Chair advised that six motions had been published as part of the agenda. As set out on the supplement published the previous Friday, Councillor Sibley had withdrawn his motion and this would therefore not be considered at the meeting.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 4.18, Motions were debated by full Council on any issue over which the meeting has power on or which affects the District.

The first two motions, "Thames Valley Devolution Withdrawal" and "The Implications of Designation" were for Council debate. No amendments had been proposed on either motion and as the deadline for amendments had passed, the motions would be debated as submitted.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 4.18, as the detail of the remaining three motions, "Pavement Blocking", "Councillor Transparency with AI", and "Community Wardens", fell within the remit of Executive, there would be no Council debate on the motions. The proposer of each motion would propose their motion, the seconder would confirm their second and the Leader of the Council, Councillor Lesley McLean would respond to the motion. The motions would stand referred to Executive for consideration.

Motion One: Thames Valley Devolution Withdrawal

It was proposed by Councillor Mallon and seconded by Councillor Rogers that the following motion be adopted:

"Council notes that:

1. The decision by Oxfordshire County Council's Liberal Democrat administration to withdraw support for the proposed Thames Valley Foundation Strategic Authority has effectively halted the current devolution process for Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Swindon.

2. Government ministers had described a Thames Valley devolution deal as a significant opportunity to secure additional powers, investment and strategic influence over transport, infrastructure, housing and economic growth.
3. The withdrawal raises serious questions regarding the impact on residents, businesses and communities across Cherwell, including the potential loss of future investment opportunities, reduced influence over regional decision-making and reputational damage to Oxfordshire as a strategic partner.
4. The Government has made clear its intention that all areas should ultimately be covered by devolved strategic authorities, creating a risk that future arrangements could be imposed with less local influence if consensus cannot be achieved locally.

AND

asks the Leader of the Council to provide a member briefing setting out:

- (a) the financial and officer costs incurred by Cherwell District Council in pursuing the devolution process to date;
- (b) the implications of the withdrawal for Cherwell residents and businesses;
- (c) the process by which the withdrawal decision was reached;
- (d) the risks of future Government intervention or imposed arrangements; and
- (e) the options available to restore progress towards a locally agreed devolution settlement.”

No amendments to the motion having been proposed, the motion was debated as submitted. On being put to the vote the motion was carried.

Motion Two: The Implications of Designation

It was proposed by Councillor Harwood and seconded by Councillor Reeves that the following motion be adopted:

“This Council notes with concern that:

1. Cherwell District Council has recently been designated by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government for its performance in determining planning applications.
2. This is the first time that Cherwell District Council has been subject to designation.
3. Designation means that certain planning applications may be submitted directly to the Secretary of State, reducing the Council's role in determining development within the district.
4. The represents a significant reputational setback for the Council and may undermine public confidence in the integrity, effectiveness and timeliness of the local planning system.
5. The loss of planning application fee income and associated revenues may have financial implications for the Council at a time of continuing budgetary pressures.

6. This designation raises concerns regarding the effectiveness of the Council's planning performance management and the adequacy of measures taken to address known issues.

This Council therefore resolves to:

- (a) Reaffirm its commitment to a planning service that is efficient, transparent, accountable and capable of maintaining the confidence of residents, applicants and local communities and committed to continuous improvement.
- (b) Request that Full Council asks Overview and Scrutiny to include this matter on its work programme and to examine the factors leading to designation, the financial and operational implications, lessons to improve planning performance and the actions being taken to secure removal of the designation."

No amendments to the motion having been proposed, the motion was debated as submitted. On being put to the vote the motion was carried.

Motion Three: Pavement Blocking

Councillor Biegel proposed and presented the following motion, which was duly seconded by Councillor Reeves. Councillor McLean, Leader of the Council, responded to the motion.

"Vehicles parking inconsiderately on pavements is a growing problem across Cherwell. Blocked pavements create significant difficulties for pedestrians, especially wheelchair users, people with pushchairs and those with visual impairments, who are often forced into the road. This unacceptable situation reduces accessibility for vulnerable residents and creates unnecessary safety issues.

The Government has announced welcome plans to give local highway authorities more powers to prevent unnecessary pavement parking and intervene more quickly wherever pavement obstruction creates safety or accessibility risks. Oxfordshire County Council will, if a proactive approach is taken, soon be able to introduce wider pavement parking restrictions in problem areas while still allowing exemptions where pavement parking is genuinely necessary.

Cherwell District Council has an important role to play in supporting Oxfordshire County Council in identifying areas where pavement blocking is a significant issue. Such information can be used to tackle this problem, increase public awareness of the safety and accessibility issues caused by pavement blocking, and feed any proposals for new pavement parking restrictions into Oxfordshire County Council.

This Council therefore resolves to

1. identify areas where pavement blocking is a significant issue by collating evidence submitted by local members, residents, affected groups and others

2. use this local evidence-based information to
 - liaise with other agencies to tackle this issue;
 - provide feedback to Oxfordshire County Council
3. support and promote publicity and education campaigns to discourage inconsiderate pavement blocking”; and
4. request that Oxfordshire County Council takes pavement blocking and highways management with greater seriousness.”

Motion Four: Councillor Transparency over AI Use

Councillor Dr Thornhill proposed and presented the following motion, which was duly seconded by Councillor Vaitkus. Councillor McLean, Leader of the Council, responded to the motion.

“The use of AI (Artificial Intelligence) programmes for generating written and visual communications is increasingly common. Some elected representatives, including Councillors at Cherwell District Council, have chosen to use AI-generated written updates, AI visual materials, and even AI-generated videos, to communicate with the public.

Some AI authored content can undermine transparency. Visual materials imitating public works, or official news sources, have the potential to be misleading. Furthermore, there are serious issues of transparency if AI content is published without clear information on authorship.

Members of the public have a right to know at first glance if a text, image, or video made by their elected Councillors is machine-generated or not.

This Council therefore resolves to:

1. Require that Councillors clearly label material has been wholly or substantially generated using artificial intelligence, in any content published in the public domain, which relates to Council business, campaigning, or their role as a Councillor.
2. Ask the relevant committee to consider whether a policy, written guideline, or training on the transparent use of AI in public communications would be appropriate and report back.”

Motion Five: Community Wardens

Councillor Jeffreys proposed and presented the following motion, which was duly seconded by Councillor Reeves. Councillor McLean, Leader of the Council, responded to the motion.

“Anti-social behaviour (ASB) has a significant impact on residents' quality of life, mental health, community cohesion, and perceptions of safety, with the Home Office recognising that ASB can lead to anxiety, depression, avoidance behaviours, and a loss of trust in public institutions.

Vulnerable adults, older residents, and those living alone are often disproportionately affected by persistent ASB.

Investment in prevention is more cost-effective than dealing with the downstream consequences of ASB.

A full-time Community Warden typically costs £45,000 to £48,000 per year including salary, pension, equipment, and training at today's prices.

An additional team of 4 wardens would cost around £200,000 annually in the current financial year, while a volunteer Special Community Warden scheme could operate for £8000- £20,000 per year for training, uniforms, and supervision. This modest investment, albeit rising annually with inflation, could deliver visible deterrence, reassurance, intelligence gathering and earlier intervention and help to reduce the greater costs of ASB on residents, businesses, and other public services.

We ask that that the Executive.

- Develops a comprehensive policy for tackling ASB, which could include developing a business case to increase the number of Community Wardens across Cherwell.
- Explore external funding opportunities, including from the Police and Crime Commissioner, government community safety grants, and local partnerships.
- Establish a pilot Special Community Warden Scheme, recruiting and training volunteers in a model similar to Special Constables, working alongside existing wardens, Police and community safety partners.
- Report back on the above within six months"

Resolved

(1) That the following motion be agreed:

"Council notes that:

1. The decision by Oxfordshire County Council's Liberal Democrat administration to withdraw support for the proposed Thames Valley Foundation Strategic Authority has effectively halted the current devolution process for Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Swindon.
2. Government ministers had described a Thames Valley devolution deal as a significant opportunity to secure additional powers, investment and strategic influence over transport, infrastructure, housing and economic growth.
3. The withdrawal raises serious questions regarding the impact on residents, businesses and communities across Cherwell, including the potential loss of future investment opportunities, reduced influence over regional decision-making and reputational damage to Oxfordshire as a strategic partner.
4. The Government has made clear its intention that all areas should ultimately be covered by devolved strategic authorities, creating a risk that future arrangements could be imposed with less local influence if consensus cannot be achieved locally.

AND

asks the Leader of the Council to provide a member briefing setting out:

- (a) the financial and officer costs incurred by Cherwell District Council in pursuing the devolution process to date;
- (b) the implications of the withdrawal for Cherwell residents and businesses;
- (c) the process by which the withdrawal decision was reached;
- (d) the risks of future Government intervention or imposed arrangements; and
- (e) the options available to restore progress towards a locally agreed devolution settlement."

(2) That the following motion be agreed:

"This Council notes with concern that:

- 1. Cherwell District Council has recently been designated by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government for its performance in determining planning applications.
- 2. This is the first time that Cherwell District Council has been subject to designation.
- 3. Designation means that certain planning applications may be submitted directly to the Secretary of State, reducing the Council's role in determining development within the district.
- 4. This represents a significant reputational setback for the Council and may undermine public confidence in the integrity, effectiveness and timeliness of the local planning system.
- 5. The loss of planning application fee income and associated revenues may have financial implications for the Council at a time of continuing budgetary pressures.
- 6. This designation raises concerns regarding the effectiveness of the Council's planning performance management and the adequacy of measures taken to address known issues.

This Council therefore resolves to:

- (a) Reaffirm its commitment to a planning service that is efficient, transparent, accountable and capable of maintaining the confidence of residents, applicants and local communities and committed to continuous improvement.
- (b) Request that Full Council asks Overview and Scrutiny to include this matter on its work programme and to examine the factors leading to designation, the financial and operational implications, lessons to improve planning performance and the actions being taken to secure removal of the designation."

The meeting ended at 9.08 pm

Chair:

Date: