

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday 15 March 2023

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Cabinet members present:

Councillor Brown

Councillor Turner

Councillor Aziz

Councillor Chapman

Councillor Hollingsworth

Councillor Munkonge

Councillor Railton

Councillor Linda Smith

Councillor Upton

Councillor Walcott

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Tom Bridgman, Executive Director (Development)

Tristan Carlyle, Ecology and Biodiversity Officer

Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer

Marcia Ecclestone, Deputy Monitoring Officer

Stephen Gabriel, Executive Director (Communities and People)

Caroline Green, Chief Executive

Emma Gubbins, Corporate Asset Lead

Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services

Emma Lund, Committee and Member Services Officer

Nerys Parry, Head of Housing

Amie Rickatson, Strategy & Service Development Manager

Dave Scholes, Affordable Housing Supply Corporate Lead

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy

Jane Winfield, Head of Corporate Property

Christopher Wood, Corporate Asset Manager

Richard Wood, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager

Also present:

Councillor Dr Christopher Smowton, Chair of Scrutiny

Councillor Jemima Hunt, Chair of the Climate & Environment Panel

Apologies:

No apologies were received.

123.Addresses and Questions by Members of the Public

None.

124. Councillor Addresses on any item for decision on the Cabinet agenda

None.

125. Councillor Addresses on Neighbourhood Issues

None.

126. Items raised by Cabinet Members

None.

127. Scrutiny reports

Councillor Dr Smowton, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, presented the reports and recommendations of Scrutiny Committee and the Housing & Homelessness Panel which had met on 13 March.

The Scrutiny Committee had made three recommendations in relation to the Corporate Business Plan 2023, which were all accepted. These related to including higher level key performance indicators; monitoring of progress and implementation of the Urban Forest Strategy; and including explicit reference to working with Thames Water in seeking to improve the situation with water in the City.

The Scrutiny Committee had made five recommendations in relation to the Integrated Care Strategy Draft Strategy Update, which had been mostly accepted. These included recommending that the Council should use its influence via the Integrated Care Board and Strategy action plan to: ensure that the risks and dangers of vaping were emphasised; seek to combat vaccine hesitancy and misinformation; and broaden work on air quality, including indoor air quality and indoor sources of pollutants. There had also been a recommendation that specific attention should be paid to the relevant needs of particular demographic groups (including LGBT communities and minority ethnic communities) and the impact of certain strategies and factors on those groups in particular.

The Scrutiny Committee had made one recommendation in relation to the Integrated Performance Report for Quarter 3. This had related to including the specific categories of work which were proposed to be suspended and the associated financial implications in paragraph 10 of the report. This had been accepted.

The Housing & Homelessness Panel had made one recommendation in relation to the Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy. This related to working with OX Place to consider how it might move towards having a higher percentage of new homes let at social rent level than a simple majority. The recommendation had been partially accepted, for the reasons set out in the Cabinet Member's response within the scrutiny report supplement. The Cabinet Member provided clarification, in relation to the figures provided, that the Local Plan 2016 – 2036 stipulated that any new development over 10 units was required to have 50% affordable units, of which 80% must be social rented. Following changes to the National Planning Practice Guidance, this requirement was amended to 70% Social Housing, 25% First Homes and 5% Intermediate. This policy requirement for social rented units was one of the highest in the country, demonstrating the priority to provide more homes at social rent.

The Chair invited Councillor Jemima Hunt, Chair of the Climate and Environment Panel, to present the Panel's recommendations under agenda item 12 ('Development of a Biodiversity Strategy for Oxford').

128. Delivery of Affordable Housing

The Executive Director (Development) had submitted a report to seek further project approvals and delegations to enable the continued delivery of more affordable housing in Oxford.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Linda Smith, highlighted that the proposal (subject to the necessary planning consents) concerned the purchase of 111 new affordable homes within the Oxford North development and 16 affordable homes at an adjacent site at Goose Green (owned by the Council and with access to be improved as part of the Oxford North development). Approval was also sought for the purchase of 32 affordable homes at Meadow Lane (subject to planning consent) and the adjustment of the HRA capital budgets for a number of other schemes. The latter included increasing the available budgets for the planned developments at Northfield Hostel, Lanham Way; reducing the budget for East Oxford Community Centre, and closing the Juniper Close scheme.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Give project approval** for the acquisition of affordable dwellings developed by Oxford City Homes Ltd (OCHL) for which budgetary provision has been made in the Council's Housing Revenue Account in respect of:
 - a) Oxford North (referenced in paragraphs 9 to 18 of the report), and
 - b) Goose Green, Wolvercote (referenced in paragraphs 19 to 34 of the report), and
 - c) Meadow Lane, Iffley (referenced in paragraphs 35 to 49 of the report);
2. **Delegate authority** to the Executive Director (Development), in consultation with the Executive Director (Communities and People); the Cabinet Member for Housing; the Head of Financial Services/Section 151 Officer; and the Head of Law and Governance/Monitoring Officer, to finalise the scheme design and financial appraisals and enter into agreements and contracts to facilitate the agreed purchase by the Council of the affordable housing (to be held in the HRA) and any associated land, within the identified budget, for the provision of the affordable housing (111 affordable homes) on the Oxford North development, within the project approval;
3. **Delegate authority** to the Executive Director (Communities and People) in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery; the Cabinet Member for Housing; the Head of Financial Services/Section 151 Officer and the Head of Law and Governance/Monitoring Officer to finalise the scheme design and financial appraisals and enter into agreements and contracts to facilitate the purchase by the Council of the social rent and shared ownership homes (to be held in the HRA) and any associated land, within the identified budget and within this project approval for Goose Green, Wolvercote (16 affordable homes);
4. **Delegate authority** to the Executive Director (Development), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management; the Head of Financial Services/Section 151 Officer; and the Head of Law and Governance/Monitoring

Officer, to approve the final terms and enter into the transfer in relation to Goose Green from the General Fund to OCHL;

5. **Delegate authority** to the Executive Director (Development), in consultation with the Executive Director (Communities and People); the Cabinet Member for Housing; the Head of Financial Services/Section 151 Officer; and the Head of Law and Governance/Monitoring Officer, to finalise the scheme design and financial appraisals and enter into agreements and contracts to facilitate the agreed purchase by the Council of the affordable housing (to be held in the HRA) and any associated land, from OCHL, for the provision of the affordable housing on the Meadow Lane, Iffley development (32 affordable homes), and within the identified budget and this project approval; and
6. **Recommend to Council** that it approves a revision to the HRA capital budget of an additional £825,000, with the realignment of budgets and schemes within the HRA new build programme, in order for the schemes listed below to be delivered within the capital programme funded predominantly from borrowing. This additional spend to be profiled into 2024/25.
 - a) Increase Northfield Hostel budget by £3.25m (see report paragraph 52)
 - b) Increase Lanham Way budget by £361k (see report paragraph 53)
 - c) Reduce East Oxford Community Centre budget by £700k (see report paragraph 54)
 - d) Close Juniper Close scheme (see report paragraph 55).

129. Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28

The Executive Director (Communities & People) had submitted a report to seek approval for the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Linda Smith, reported that the Strategy had been subject to a comprehensive consultation. 107 responses had been received, and 60 individuals representing 27 organisations had attended the two workshops which had been held. The responses had been broadly positive: those issues which had been raised had largely related to things over which the Council had little or no direct control, such as private sector rents or support for those without recourse to public funds. The Strategy had been updated following the consultation to explain this.

Councillor Smith highlighted that the action plan accompanying the strategy would be updated annually, and would enable progress to be monitored.

In discussion, it was questioned whether there were ways in which strategic engagement with registered housing providers across the city might be improved. The Executive Director (Communities and People) undertook to give consideration to this, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the progress made to develop the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan for Oxford following feedback from the statutory public consultation;
2. **Recommend to Council** the adoption of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 and its associated appendices;

3. **Recommend to Council** the adoption of the Strategy's Action Plan for 23-24; and
4. **Recommend to Council** that authority be delegated to the Executive Director (Communities and People), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, to update the Action Plan when required.

130. Commercial Tenant Rent Arrears Write-Offs

The Head of Corporate Property had submitted a report to seek approval for the write-off of commercial rent arrears above the limit which officers could approve under the Scheme of Delegation.

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Asset Management, Councillor Ed Turner, drew attention to recent difficult trading conditions, including the pandemic, which had affected businesses. Two of the traders owing arrears to the Council had entered liquidation: there was therefore no prospect of the Council being able to recover these debts. In other cases, agreements had been reached with businesses regarding their commercial rent arrears. The Cabinet Member highlighted that whilst the Council sought to maximise income from its commercial properties, there was also a need to balance future income streams, minimise void periods, and maintain a broad offer of businesses in the city centre. It was also noted that the Commercial Rent (Coronavirus) Act 2022 prevented landlords taking action in respect of rent relating to lockdown periods (i.e. protected rent) and introduced an arbitration process for situations where landlords and tenants had been unable to reach agreement on rent arrears. The Council had to therefore enter into negotiations with its commercial tenant debtors to try and reach negotiated settlements and avoid reference to an arbitrator.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the write-off of arrears relating to Edinburgh Woollen Mill (141 High Street) as detailed in the report;
2. **Approve** the write-off of arrears relating to Nosebag Restaurants Limited (6 St Michaels Street & 6-8 St Michaels Street) as detailed in the report; and
3. **Approve** the write-off of arrears relating to the properties identified in the exempt Appendix 1.

131. Integrated Care System Draft Strategy Update

The Head of Corporate Strategy had submitted a report to present information on the production of a new Integrated Care Strategy by the Integrated Care Board (ICB) for Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Transport, Councillor Louise Upton, reported that newly created Integrated Care Boards had replaced Clinical Commissioning Groups as the NHS bodies which received government funding to plan and buy services. The ICB had been mandated to work in partnership with local authorities, GPs and voluntary groups to create an integrated care strategy focused on ensuring that everyone is able to get a good start in life and to live and age well, with support when needed.

Councillor Upton outlined the five key principles underpinning the strategy, which included Preventing Ill Health and Tackling Health Inequalities. The Strategy would be

delivered through a series of priorities, in some of which the Council had a role and in others it did not.

The Head of Corporate Strategy reported that a Health and Wellbeing Strategy was also being developed for Oxfordshire this year, to come into effect at the start of 2024.

In discussion it was noted that representation on a number of bodies, as well as effective co-ordination and links, would be key to translating the strategies into a meaningful plan for Oxfordshire. These included the Place Based Partnership and the Oxfordshire Systems Leaders' Partnership (which involved leaders of local authorities as well as leaders in the health service). There were also discussions at district council leaders' and chief executives' group meetings and with the Local Enterprise Partnership as well as work by the Active Communities Team.

In response to a question the Head of Corporate Strategy confirmed that the draft document had been approved by the Integrated Care Partnership on 27 February 2023; however the final strategy document had not yet been issued.

Cabinet Members welcomed the strategy and endorsed its principles; however, it was considered that it would only be once actions and measurable outcomes were delivered that its value could be assessed.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the contents of the report for information.

132. Development of a Biodiversity Strategy for Oxford

The Head of Corporate Strategy had submitted a report to present Cabinet with a proposed approach to the development of a Biodiversity Strategy for Oxford.

Councillor Jemima Hunt, Chair of the Climate and Environment Panel, presented the seven recommendations of the Panel relating to the Biodiversity Strategy Development report, and a recommendation arising from a report on fleet decarbonisation which the Panel had also considered. Four recommendations were accepted, and four were partially accepted. One recommendation had related to ensuring that the Council prioritised the protection of mature trees, wherever possible. The Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice, Councillor Anna Railton, responded that there was a balance which needed to be reached in preserving mature trees whilst still being able to deliver on the Council's priority to provide more, affordable housing: it was the role of the planning process and the planning committee to determine where that balance was.

Councillor Railton summarised that the first key step in developing the strategy would be to establish a steering group involving stakeholders, and noting the recommendation of scrutiny to include Oxford University's Biodiversity Network and Healthy Ecosystem Restoration in Oxfordshire (HERO). There would then need to be an exercise to evaluate a baseline and identify the most pressing issues. The report set out suggested key areas of focus, which included maximising the biodiversity value of land under the Council's control; supporting other organisations to do the same; and improving public access to nature within the city. Work would also include auditing the eight sites of special scientific interest (SSSI) and 66 other sites protected by various local designations.

Cabinet heard that the intention was for the strategy to become an inspiring vision for the city as a whole which would go beyond the Council's own land ownership to include other landowners and their biodiversity aspirations for their land.

In discussion it was suggested that biodiversity of waterways; tree planting strategies and the planting of trees providing food; and the implementation, maintenance and monitoring of biodiversity net gain sites might also be included within the work. Correction was also provided in respect of paragraph 11, which erroneously referred to glyphosate as a pesticide rather than a herbicide. In response to a question as to how information about improving biodiversity in domestic settings might be provided to residents, the Head of Corporate Strategy reported that the Council participated in the Climate Action Oxfordshire website, which could provide a mechanism for an organised programme of pro-active communications.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the report and the proposed establishment of steering group in connection with the preparation of the Biodiversity Strategy.

133. Annual Update of the Council's Business Plan

The Head of Corporate Strategy had submitted a report to approve Oxford City Council's Corporate Business Plan priorities for 2023/24.

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships highlighted some of the significant progress which had been made in delivery of the current year's business plan. This had included: adding social value to the procurement process; becoming a signatory to the Inclusive Economy Charter; securing planning permission for the re-provision of affordable work space at Standingford House on Cave Street; securing a funding package for the Cowley Branch Line; increasing the supply of affordable housing and delivering the greenest council homes to date; commencement of the citywide selective licensing scheme; and use of Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme funding to reduce the carbon impact of Oxford's leisure centres and seasonal outdoor pool.

The Leader reported that this was the final year of the Council Strategy 2020-24; a report would be brought to Cabinet later in the year setting out the process for work on a strategy to cover the next four years.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Agree** the draft Oxford City Council Corporate Business Plan priorities 2023/24, which set out the Council's priority work for the next financial year;
2. **Delegate authority** to the Head of Corporate Strategy in consultation with the Council Leader to make further minor amendments to the draft Business Plan priorities before implementation; and
3. **Note** the progress made in delivery against the actions set out in the current year's Corporate Business Plan 2022/23.

134. Integrated Performance Report for Q3 2022/23

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report to update Cabinet on finance, risk and corporate performance matters as at 31 December 2022.

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Asset Management, Councillor Ed Turner, clarified that the areas of suspended work referred to in paragraph 10 related to pre-painting joinery works.

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Asset Management highlighted a number of key points arising from the report. It was noted that the outturn position forecast an adverse variance of £0.718 million against the net budget agreed by Council in February 2022, after a £2 million transfer from the COVID reserve. The financial climate remained challenging. There were some adverse variances in the HRA and this had led to some works being paused: there had also been an increase in fencing work due to storm damage. Options for the future approach towards these works would need to be further looked at.

There had been some slippage on the capital programme: this was in part linked to the unprecedented level of construction cost inflation which had meant that a number of schemes had had to be paused in order for costs to be re-assessed. This was a national and international issue, and was not unique to this Council.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the projected financial outturn for 2022-23 as well as the current position on risk and performance as at 31 December 2022; and
2. **Note** the change in timing of the insurance contract procurement exercise for the new contract to commence from 1st January 2024 as outlined in paragraph 18.

135. Flag Flying and Bell Ringing Arrangements

The Head of Law and Governance had submitted a report to seek agreement of the lists of annual flag flying and bell ringing commitments and approval for a minor amendment to the Oxford City Council Protocol for Flag Flying and Bell Ringing.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Agree** the List of Annual Flag Flying Commitments attached at Appendix A to the report;
2. **Agree** the List of Annual Bell Ringing Commitments attached at Appendix B to the report; and
3. **Approve** the minor amendment to the Oxford City Council Protocol for Flag Flying and Bell Ringing set out in Appendix C to the report.

136. Minutes

Cabinet resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2023 as a true and accurate record.

137. Dates of Future Meetings

19 April 2023

14 June 2023

12 July 2023

9 August 2023

13 September 2023

18 October 2023

All meetings start at 6pm.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.33 pm

Chair

Date: Wednesday 19 April 2023

When decisions take effect:

Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired

*Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal
decision notice is issued*

All other committees: immediately.

Details are in the Council's Constitution.