

Agenda

Council

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Summons

A meeting of the City Council will be held to transact the business set out below on

Date: **Monday 29 January 2024**

Time: **5.00 pm**

Place: **Council Chamber - Oxford Town Hall**



Proper Officer

Members of the public can attend to observe this meeting and:

- may register in advance to speak to the meeting in accordance with the [public speaking rules](#)
- may record all or part of the meeting in accordance with the Council's [protocol](#)

Information about speaking and recording is set out in the agenda and on the [website](#)

Please contact the Committee Services Officer to register to speak; to discuss recording the meeting; or with any other queries.

This meeting can be viewed live or afterwards on the council's [YouTube channel](#).

For further information please contact:

Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager,

01865 529117  democraticservices@oxford.gov.uk

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All public papers are available from the calendar link to this meeting once published

Membership of Council

Councillors: Membership 48: Quorum 12.

Lord Mayor Councillor Lubna Arshad

Deputy Lord Mayor Councillor James Fry

Sheriff Councillor Mark Lygo

Members	Councillor Mohammed Altaf-Khan	Councillor Sajjad Malik
	Councillor Shaista Aziz	Councillor Katherine Miles
	Councillor Susan Brown	Councillor Alistair Morris
	Councillor Nigel Chapman	Councillor Lois Muddiman
	Councillor Mary Clarkson	Councillor Edward Mundy
	Councillor Tiago Corais	Councillor Chewe Munkonge
	Councillor Barbara Coyne	Councillor Jabu Nala-Hartley
	Councillor Lizzy Diggins	Councillor Lucy Pegg
	Councillor Dr Hosnieh Djafari-Marbini	Councillor Susanna Pressel
	Councillor Dr Sandy Douglas	Councillor Anna Railton
	Councillor Paula Dunne	Councillor Rosie Rawle
	Councillor Laurence Fouweather	Councillor Ajaz Rehman
	Councillor Andrew Gant	Councillor Jo Sandelson
	Councillor Duncan Hall	Councillor Linda Smith
	Councillor Tom Hayes	Councillor Roz Smith
	Councillor Alex Hollingsworth	Councillor Dr Christopher Smowton
	Councillor Rae Humberstone	Councillor Imogen Thomas
	Councillor Jemima Hunt	Councillor Ed Turner
	Councillor Chris Jarvis	Councillor Louise Upton
	Councillor Emily Kerr	Councillor Naomi Waite
	Councillor Tom Landell Mills	Councillor Diko Walcott
	Councillor Dr Amar Latif	

Apologies will be reported at the meeting.

Agenda

The business to be transacted is set out below

	Pages
PART 1 - PUBLIC BUSINESS	
1 Apologies for absence	
2 Declarations of interest	
3 Minutes	21 - 32
Minutes of the ordinary meeting of Council held on 27 November 2023. Council is asked to approve the minutes as a correct record.	
4 Announcements	
Announcements by:	
1. The Lord Mayor	
2. The Sheriff	
3. The Leader of the Council (who may with the permission of the Lord Mayor invite other councillors to make announcements)	
4. The Chief Executive, Chief Finance Officer, Monitoring Officer	
5 Public addresses and questions that relate to matters for decision at this meeting	
Public addresses and questions to the Leader or other Cabinet member received in accordance with Council Procedure Rules in the Constitution relating to matters for decision in Part 1 of this agenda.	
Up to five minutes is available for each public address and up to three minutes for each question. Questions must be less than 200 words.	
The request to speak accompanied by the full text of the address or question must be received by the Head of Law and Governance by 5.00 pm on Tuesday 23 January 2023.	
The briefing note will contain the text of addresses and questions submitted by the deadline, and written responses where available.	
<i>A total of 45 minutes is available for both public speaking items.</i>	

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

6 **Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Rent Setting Report 2024/25**

33 - 44

The Head of Financial Services submitted a report to Cabinet on 24 January 2024 which presented the outcome of Oxford City Council's (the Council's) annual rent review and associated rent setting proposal for 2024/25 in respect of all Council dwellings within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), including the setting of associated services and facilities charges.

The draft Cabinet minutes will be available [here](#) when published.

Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management will present the report and present Cabinet's recommendations.

Recommendations: Cabinet recommends that Council resolves to:

1. **Approve** an increase of 7.7% for 2024/25 (subject to any subsequent cap on increases imposed by central government) in social dwelling rents from 1st April 2024 giving an average weekly increase of £9.27 per week, and a revised weekly average social rent of £129.72 as set out in the Financial Implications section of this report;
2. **Approve** an increase to rents for shared ownership dwellings as outlined in paragraph 15 of the Financial Implications;
3. **Approve** an increase to service charges by 7.7% (CPI + 1%) to enable the HRA to recover the associated cost of supply;
4. **Approve** an increase to the charge for a garage of 7%, equating to an increase of £1.25 per week for a standard garage with a revised charge of £19.10 per week, and an increase of £1.44 per week for a premium garage with a revised charge of £21.60 per week; and
5. **Approve** the option to exercise the Rent Flexibility option in respect of re-lets to new tenants as outlined in paragraph 6 below.

7 **Project approvals, budget and delegations to develop five small sites for affordable housing, using spend from the Brownfield Land Release Fund**

45 - 64

Appendices 1 and 2 to this item include exempt information pursuant to Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. If Council wishes to discuss matters relating to the information set out in Appendices 1 and 2 to the report, it will be necessary for the Council to pass a resolution to exclude the press and public from the

meeting (as set out at agenda item 14).

The Executive Director (Development) submitted a report to Cabinet on 24 January 2024 which sought project and contract approval and delegations, budget and delegations in relation to affordable housing schemes across five small/garage sites. All sites had been allocated initial funding through the Brownfield Land Release Fund (“BLRF2”) following a successful bid. The report sought approval for appropriation from General Fund (“GF”) to Housing Revenue Fund, and to a planning purpose, where necessary; approval for the disposal of land as required; approval for the demolition of garages held in the GF and approval for demolition of vacant units currently held within the Housing Revenue Account (“HRA”).

The draft Cabinet minutes will be available [here](#) when published.

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing will present the report and present Cabinet’s recommendations.

Recommendation: Cabinet recommends that Council resolves to:

1. **Allocate** of a £340,213 capital budget (which will be funded entirely by the BLRF2 grant) to carry out the demolition/ enabling works on each site as detailed within the BLRF2 application (see table, paragraph 14).

8 Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024-25

65 - 94

The Head of Financial Services submitted a report to Cabinet on 24 January 2024 which sought approval for changes to the Council’s Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25.

The draft Cabinet minutes will be available [here](#) when published.

Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Manager will present the report and present Cabinet’s recommendations.

Recommendation: Cabinet recommends that Council resolves to:

1. **Adopt** the new Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25.

QUESTIONS

9 Questions on Cabinet minutes

This item has a time limit of 15 minutes.

Councillors may ask the Cabinet Members questions about matters in these minutes:

9a **Draft Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting held on 13 December 2023**

95 - 102

9b **Draft Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting held on 24 January 2024**

To be circulated with the briefing paper.

10 **Questions on Notice from Members of Council**

Questions on notice from councillors received in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11.11(b).

Questions on notice may be asked of the Lord Mayor, a Member of the Cabinet or a Chair of a Committee. One supplementary question may be asked at the meeting.

The full text of questions must have been received by the Head of Law and Governance by no later than 1.00pm on Wednesday 17 January 2024.

These, and written responses where available, will be published in the briefing note.

PART 2 - PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND SCRUTINY

11 **Public addresses and questions that do not relate to matters for decision at this Council meeting**

This item will be taken at or shortly after 7.00pm

Public addresses and questions to the Leader or other Cabinet member received in accordance with Council Procedure Rules in the Constitution and not relating to matters for decision in Part 1 of this agenda.

Up to five minutes is available for each public address and up to three minutes for each question. Questions must be less than 200 words.

The request to speak accompanied by the full text of the address or question must be received by the [Head of Law and Governance](#) by 5.00 pm on Tuesday 23 January 2024.

The briefing note will contain the text of addresses and questions submitted by the deadline, and written responses where available.

A total of 45 minutes is available for both public speaking items. Responses are included within this limit.

12 Outside organisation/Committee Chair reports and questions

As set out in the Constitution at procedure rule 11.16, Members who are Council representatives on external bodies or Chairs of Council Committees who consider that a significant decision or event has taken place, may give notice to the Head of Law and Governance by 1.00 pm Wednesday 24 January 2024 that they will present a written or oral report on the event or the significant decision and how it may influence future events. Written reports will be circulated with the briefing note.

12a Outside Organisation Report: Future Oxfordshire Partnership 103 - 160

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships, has submitted a report which updates Council on the work of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.

Recommendation: that Council resolves to:

1. **Note** the annual update report on the work of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and the Oxford Inclusive Economy Partnership.

12b Scrutiny Committee update report 161 - 170

The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee has submitted a report which updates Council on the activities of scrutiny and the implementation of recommendations since the last meeting of Council.

Council is invited to comment on and note the report.

PART 3 - MOTIONS REPRESENTING THE CITY

13 Motions on notice 29 January 2024

This item has a time limit of 60 minutes.

Motions received by the Head of Law and Governance in accordance with the rules in Section 11 of the Constitution by the deadline of 1.00pm on Wednesday 17 January 2024 are listed below.

Cross party motions are taken first. Motions will then be taken in turn from the Oxford Socialist Independents, Independent Group, Labour Group, Liberal Democrat Group, Green Group in that order.

Substantive amendments to these motions must be sent by councillors to the Head of Law and Governance by no later than 10.00am on Friday

26 January 2024 so that they may be circulated with the briefing note.

Minor technical or limited wording amendments may be submitted during the meeting but must be written down and circulated.

Council is asked to consider the following motions:

- a) Stop the Anti-Boycott Bill (proposed by Cllr Hosnieh Djafari-Marbini, seconded by Cllr Chris Jarvis)
- b) Moving Oxford City Council to a committee system of representation to increase residents' confidence in democracy (proposed by Cllr Amar Latif, seconded by Cllr Shaista Aziz)
- c) The Cost of Living Crisis and local spending in England (proposed by Cllr Ed Turner, seconded by Cllr Nigel Chapman)
- d) Scrap the two-child benefit cap (proposed by Cllr Christopher Smowton, seconded by Cllr Katherine Miles)
- e) Disposable Vapes (proposed by Cllr Lucy Pegg, seconded by Cllr Rosie Rawle)

13a Stop the Anti-Boycott Bill (proposed by Cllr Hosnieh Djafari-Marbini, seconded by Cllr Chris Jarvis)

Oxford Socialist Independents Group Motion

Council Notes

1. The Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill passed its third reading in the House of Commons on 10 January 2024.¹ It will now continue its passage through the House of Lords.
2. The legislation has been dubbed the 'Anti-Boycott Bill' and seeks to stop public bodies from making any decisions around investment and procurement that aren't in line with UK government foreign or economic trade policies.²
3. The Anti-Boycott Bill is specifically designed to target the international Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement - an initiative launched by Palestinian civil society organisations. The BDS movement seeks to end international support for Israel's oppression of Palestinians and pressure Israel to comply with international law.
4. The only geographical areas that the legislation would prohibit the government making exemption provisions for are - as listed in the Bill - 'Israel', 'the Occupied Palestine

¹ <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3475>

² <https://righttoboycott.org.uk/>

Territories' and 'the Occupied Golan Heights'.³ The legislation would therefore explicitly prohibit public bodies - including local authorities - from engaging in any form of boycott of Israeli goods and services, including those produced or developed through an illegal occupation.

5. More than 60 charities, campaign groups, civil society organisations and trade unions have publicly opposed the legislation, including ASLEF, CWU, FBU, Friends of the Earth, Global Justice Now, Greenpeace, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, Liberty, Methodist Church in Britain, Muslim Association of Britain, Na'Amod, NEU, NUS, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, PCS, Unison, UCU, and War on Want.⁴

Council Believes

1. The Anti-Boycott Bill is an anti-democratic measure which restricts the ability of public bodies to take ethics and human rights into account in key parts of their decision making. It has profound implications on public bodies' ability to act upon human rights violations, slavery and environmental destruction.
2. Ethical boycotts from public bodies - including local councils - have played an important role in many historic campaigns for justice - most notably in the struggle against the Apartheid regime in South Africa.
3. Local authorities like Oxford City Council have a duty to speak out and resist such attempts to diminish democracy.

Council Resolves

To ask the leader of the council to:

1. Issue a public statement condemning the Anti-Boycott Bill.
2. Write to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities - Michael Gove - expressing Oxford City Council's opposition to the legislation and calling for him to withdraw the Bill.
3. Write to Ben Jamal, Director of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, expressing Oxford City Council's opposition to the Anti-Boycott Bill and support for the Right to Boycott campaign.
4. Write to Labour leader Keir Starmer, Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey, and Green Party co-leaders Adrian Ramsay and Carla Denyer, encouraging them to ensure that their MPs actively oppose the legislation in

³ <https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/53574/documents/4223>

⁴ <https://righttoboycott.org.uk/#signatories>

parliament.

5. Write to the leaders of the parliamentary groups in the House of Lords, encouraging them to ensure that peers within their groups actively oppose the legislation in the Lords.

13b Moving Oxford City Council to a committee system of representation to increase residents' confidence in democracy (proposed by Cllr Amar Latif, seconded by Cllr Shaista Aziz)

Independent Group Motion

This council notes:

Years of low voter turnout in local elections (less than 40% in May 2022) [1] within Oxford would suggest that there is discontent amongst the electorate in the city.

Low turn out has been suggested to disproportionately affect the more disadvantaged across communities and society who may find it more difficult to access elected politicians, find it challenging to access online consultations and be more disenfranchised with the political process. [2] [3]

That the Labour administration has lost 10 councillors since October 13th, 2023, which is almost a third of total Labour Councillors, yet continues as a minority administration.

Furthermore, despite Oxford having the third largest ethnic minority population, 29% [4], within the Southeast of England, and being proud of its diversity and internationalist identity as a city, there is only one cabinet member from an ethnic minority background.

Prior to the racist murder of George Floyd in the USA in May 2020 and the reinvigoration of the Black Lives Matter and Rhodes Must Fall Movement in Oxford, the Labour lead Oxford City Council carried out internal work to ensure it has a racially diverse and representative Cabinet, the progress made has since been reversed.

That the decision-making process within the City Council leaves large numbers of decisions to individual cabinet members who cannot fully represent the diversity of views from residents across Oxford.

That other Councils, including Sheffield and Bristol, have moved towards a committee system of representation which better reflects views of residents across their respective cities.

This council believes that a committee system of representation:

Is a better and more transparent way for decisions to be made across Oxford, which will create a more equitable system ensuring residents voices are listened to and acted upon alongside a wider

group of councillors.

Will allow a less centralised and more collaborative way of working.

Will better reflect the diversity of views and opinions from a wider demographic of society, including across the political spectrum.

Will allow individual Cabinet members to be replaced by Policy Committee Chairs who will have responsibility for different areas of Council policy.

This council agrees to:

Request the Officers assess the implications (financial, resource, legal and otherwise), negatives and positives of the Council moving to a Committee System of governance, including considering and developing plans as to how such a system of governance may work.

Present the final proposals to Cabinet and then Council for comments and consideration as to whether to commence the process to consider a formal change of governance arrangements in the Council, with a view to putting this to a City-wide referendum by May 2025.

References:

[1]

https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20046/elections_and_voting/1521/oxford_city_council_election_results_-_5_may_2022

[2]

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953623000746>

[3]

<https://www.democraticaudit.com/2019/10/11/have-we-all-underestimated-the-severity-of-socioeconomic-differences-in-electoral-participation/>

[4]

[Ethnicity | Ethnicity | Oxford City Council](#)

13c The Cost of Living Crisis and local spending in England (proposed by Cllr Ed Turner, seconded by Cllr Nigel Chapman)

Labour Motion

This Council believes that the English local government finance settlement proposed by the Tories for 24/25 is thoroughly inadequate and penalises our poorest citizens the most, who are least well equipped to face the continuing cost-of-living crisis.

Government pronouncements about increased funding are “smoke and mirrors” and do not reflect the reality that costs are rising faster than any increases in funding, and that increases in “core spending

power” largely come from local residents, not government funding.

Council is very concerned that a one-year increase in local housing allowances (after years of freeze) will be eroded by the Government’s failure to increase the benefits cap and temporary accommodation housing benefit, thus offering support with one hand and then denying it with the other. That failure will be exacerbated by reintroducing the housing allowance freeze again in April 25. This will once again increase homelessness in areas like Oxford.

In addition, this Council is angry that the Conservative Government has abolished funding for the Household support grant from May 24 – denying poorer people a welcome source of cash support for household and fuel bills, and vital heating repairs. This comes in addition to the end of centrally provided fuel bill support for many who had been in receipt of it.

Overall, English local government faces a huge funding crisis and cannot close the gap without cutting front line services, especially those aimed at its poorest citizens. This is evidenced by Oxford City Council having to draw down on its reserves and propose a reduction in funding for its Council Tax reduction scheme from April 2025.

More widely, Council believes households are feeling huge pressure as a result of substantial increases in taxes as well as, for many, higher mortgage costs and rents due to the chaos caused by Liz Truss’ mini-budget, and a sharp focus on the cost of living is urgently needed.

This Council calls upon the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government demanding:

1. A sustainable long term funding settlement in the March Budget for councils like Oxford, facing a funding squeeze due to inflation and the rising costs of homelessness.
2. A commitment to increasing local housing allowances annually in line with local housing costs and scrapping the benefits cap.
3. The re-instatement of funding for the Household Support Grant which provides a flexible and rapid response to people with urgent needs.
4. Support for councils like Oxford which retains a Council Tax reduction scheme for people struggling to pay these costs, and encouragement that other councils should instigate such schemes.

It also asks the Leader of the Council to contact our two local MPs, for Oxford East and Oxford West and Abingdon respectively, and ask them to write with the same demands to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

13d Scrap the two-child benefit cap (proposed by Cllr Christopher Smowton, seconded by Cllr Katherine Miles)

Liberal Democrat Group Motion

Council notes that:

- The two-child limit, introduced by the Conservative Government in 2017, restricts support in Universal Credit and tax credits to two children in a family.
- The Child Poverty Action Group identified 4.2 million children living in poverty in the UK in 2021–22, with the prevalence of poverty much higher among Black and minority ethnic groups ^[1].
- Research by the End Child Poverty Coalition shows that scrapping the two-child limit would lift 250,000 children out of poverty, and that the economic and societal effects of child poverty, including spending on public services, cost the UK £39 billion every year ^[2].
- A new report by the Commons Education Select Committee warns that cost-of-living pressures on families are driving missed education ^[3].
- In a country already struggling with fewer and fewer young people supporting an ageing population, it is not in any case in our interests to attempt to prevent or delay people from raising children through financial pressure.
- Despite initially pledging to repeal the policy in 2020 ^[4], the Leader of the Opposition then reversed himself and pledged to keep the Tory policy ^[5], before eventually adopting a noncommittal stance on the issue ^[6].

Council resolves:

- That the Leader should write to both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition expressing this council's strong support for a repeal to the two-child benefit cap.
- That the Leader should further write to Oxford's MPs requesting that they in turn pressure both government and opposition to abolish the cap.

[1] <https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/child-poverty-facts-and-figures>

[2] https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/two_child_limit/

[3] <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/41590/documents/205>

[047/default/](#) particularly para.148

[4] https://twitter.com/Keir_Starmer/status/1225465424092987393

[5] <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/jul/16/labour-keep-two-child-benefit-cap-says-keir-starmer>

[6] <https://news.sky.com/story/starmer-softens-stance-on-two-child-benefit-cap-amid-snp-attacks-ahead-of-by-election-12940684>

13e Disposable Vapes (proposed by Cllr Lucy Pegg, seconded by Cllr Rosie Rawle)

Green Group Motion

Disposable vapes are creating an environmental and health crisis. Far from helping smokers to quit, with their attractive packaging and child-friendly flavours, disposable vapes are getting a new generation addicted to nicotine. Frequently littered and hard to recycle, disposable vapes are also causing damage to the natural environment and wasting critical materials.

This council notes that:

- There has been a fourfold increase in the number of disposable vapes being discarded over the past year, with 5 million vapes now being thrown away every week⁵
- Vapes contain critical raw materials, such as lithium and copper, which are vital for our transition to a greener society. The disposable vapes thrown away over the past year contain enough lithium to create 5,000 batteries for electric cars⁶
- 1 in 9 young people aged 11 to 18 have experimented with e-cigarettes, with 69% of these people choosing disposable vapes, according to research from Action on Smoking and Health (ASH). There has been a 7-fold increase between 2020 and 2022 in the choice of disposables amongst this age group, alongside a 50% year on year increase in the proportion of children experimenting with vaping of all kinds.⁷
- Lithium ion batteries, like those used in vapes, caused 700 fires at waste sites in 2022 due to not being properly disposed of.⁸
- Prominent environmental and health organisations have

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/sep/08/call-for-uk-ban-on-single-use-vapes-as-more-than-5m-discarded-each-week>

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ <https://ash.org.uk/uploads/Use-of-vapes-among-young-people-GB-2023.pdf?v=1690455394>

⁸ <https://www.materialfocus.org.uk/press-releases/over-700-fires-in-bin-lorries-and-recycling-centres-are-caused-by-batteries-many-of-which-are-hidden-inside-electricals/>

called for a ban, including The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Marine Conservation Society, Centre for Sustainable Healthcare and Surfers Against Sewage.⁹

- Councils across the country have called for a UK ban on disposable vapes by 2024, and the Scottish Government has already agreed to carry out a consultation on banning disposable vapes.¹⁰ The UK must rapidly respond to its consultation on youth vaping by bringing in a full prohibition on disposable vapes.
- Whilst vaping can help smokers to quit, reusable vapes serve this same purpose.

This council resolves to:

- Request that the Leader of the Council will write jointly to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, supporting a ban on disposable vapes by the end of 2024 on environmental and child health grounds.
- Request that the Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities investigate ways the council can encourage retailers selling disposable vapes in Oxford to provide recycling facilities for vapes in their stores.

14 Matters exempt from publication and exclusion of the public

If Council wishes to exclude the press and the public from the meeting during consideration of any aspects of the preceding agenda items it will be necessary for Council to pass a resolution in accordance with the provisions of Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 specifying the grounds on which their presence could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in specific paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act if and so long as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

(The Access to Information Procedure Rules – Section 15 of the Council's Constitution – sets out the conditions under which the public can be excluded from meetings of the Council)

Updates and additional information to supplement this

⁹ <https://green-alliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Letter-to-ministers-on-disposable-vapes.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-66718599>

agenda are published in the Council Briefing Note.

Additional information, councillors' questions, public addresses and amendments to motions are published in a supplementary briefing note. The agenda and briefing note should be read together.

The Briefing Note is published as a supplement to the agenda. It is available on the Friday before the meeting and can be accessed along with the agenda on the council's website.

Information for those attending

Recording and reporting on meetings held in public

Members of public and press can record, or report in other ways, the parts of the meeting open to the public. You are not required to indicate in advance but it helps if you notify the Committee and Member Services Officer prior to the meeting so that they can inform the Chair and direct you to the best place to record.

The Council asks Councillors and members of the press and public recording the meeting:

- To follow the protocol which can be found on the Council's [website](#)
- Not to disturb or disrupt the meeting
- Not to edit the recording in a way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings. This includes not editing an image or views expressed in a way that may ridicule or show a lack of respect towards those being recorded.
- To avoid recording members of the public present, even inadvertently, unless they are addressing the meeting.

Please be aware that you may be recorded during your speech and any follow-up. If you are attending please be aware that recordings may take place and that you may be inadvertently included in these.

The Chair of the meeting has absolute discretion to suspend or terminate any activities that in his or her opinion are disruptive.

Councillors declaring interests

General duty

You must declare any disclosable pecuniary interests when the meeting reaches the item on the agenda headed "Declarations of Interest" or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?

Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to your* employment; sponsorship (ie payment for expenses incurred by you in carrying out your duties as a councillor or towards your election expenses); contracts; land in the Council's area; licenses for land in the Council's area; corporate tenancies; and securities. These declarations must be recorded in each councillor's Register of Interests which is publicly available on the Council's website.

Declaring an interest

Where any matter disclosed in your Register of Interests is being considered at a meeting, you must declare that you have an interest. You should also disclose the nature as well as the existence of the interest. If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, after having declared it at the meeting you must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Members' Code of Conduct and public perception

Even if you do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter, the Members' Code of Conduct says that a member "must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself" and that "you must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned". The matter of interests must be viewed within the context of the Code as a whole and regard should continue to be paid to the perception of the public.

Members Code – Other Registrable Interests

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to the financial interest or wellbeing** of one of your Other Registrable Interests*** then you must declare an

interest. You must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and you must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Members Code – Non Registrable Interests

Where a matter arises at a meeting which **directly relates** to your financial interest or wellbeing (and does not fall under disclosable pecuniary interests), or the financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate, you must declare the interest.

Where a matter arises at a meeting which affects your own financial interest or wellbeing, a financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate or a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under Other Registrable Interests, then you must declare the interest.

You must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room, if you answer in the affirmative to this test:

“Where a matter affects the financial interest or well-being:

- a. to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
- b. a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting.”

Otherwise, you may stay in the room, take part in the discussion and vote.

*Disclosable pecuniary interests that must be declared are not only those of the member her or himself but also those member’s spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

** Wellbeing can be described as a condition of contentedness, healthiness and happiness; anything that could be said to affect a person’s quality of life, either positively or negatively, is likely to affect their wellbeing.

*** Other Registrable Interests: a) any unpaid directorships b) any Body of which you are a member or are in a position of general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority c) any Body (i) exercising functions of a public nature (ii) directed to charitable purposes or (iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union) of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management.

Minutes of a meeting of Council on Monday 27 November 2023

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Council members present:

Councillor Altaf-Khan	Councillor Arshad (Lord Mayor)
Councillor Aziz	Councillor Brown
Councillor Chapman	Councillor Clarkson
Councillor Corais	Councillor Coyne
Councillor Diggins	Councillor Djafari-Marbini
Councillor Douglas	Councillor Dunne
Councillor Fry (Deputy Lord Mayor)	Councillor Gant
Councillor Goddard	Councillor Hall
Councillor Hollingsworth	Councillor Humberstone
Councillor Hunt	Councillor Jarvis
Councillor Kerr	Councillor Landell Mills
Councillor Latif	Councillor Lygo (Sheriff)
Councillor Malik	Councillor Miles
Councillor Morris	Councillor Muddiman
Councillor Mundy	Councillor Munkonge
Councillor Nala-Hartley	Councillor Pegg
Councillor Pressel	Councillor Railton
Councillor Rawle	Councillor Rehman
Councillor Rowley	Councillor Sandelson
Councillor Linda Smith	Councillor Roz Smith
Councillor Snowton	Councillor Thomas
Councillor Turner	Councillor Upton
Councillor Waite	Councillor Walcott

Also present for all or part of the meeting:

Caroline Green, Chief Executive
Tom Hook, Executive Director (Corporate Resources)
Tom Bridgman, Executive Director (Development)
Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services
Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy

Emma Jackman, Head of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager
Lucy Brown, Committee and Member Services Officer
Tanaka Merrells, Trainee Solicitor, Legal Services
Amber Khaloon, Trainee Solicitor, Legal Services

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Fouweather and Hayes sent apologies.

The minutes show when Councillors who were absent for part of the meeting arrived and left.

56. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest declared for this meeting.

57. Minutes

Cllr Roz Smith arrived at the meeting.

Council agreed to approve the minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 2 October 2023.

Following the amendment to the minutes of the special meeting held on 7 November 2023, stated to Item 55 as follows:

In Appendix 7.4 (page 437), (for student accommodation) replace “At least 3 spaces for every 4 study bedrooms” with “1 space per study bedroom”. (i.e. revert back to what it currently states in the local plan 2036 which is 'at least four spaces for every four study bedrooms)

On acceptance of the above amendment, the minutes of special meeting of Council held on 7 November 2023 was agreed as a true and correct record.

58. Announcements

The Lord Mayor announced that she had attended the Remembrance Sunday Service at the War Memorial in St Giles', which had been conducted by the City Rector, the Reverend Anthony Buckley. She had also attended and spoke at the Armistice Day at the Town Hall.

The Deputy Lord Mayor announced that he had also attended the above events which were successful as always, and to remind Councillors that the Oxford Museum Gift Shop had reopened of which there were many gifts on display.

The Sherriff announced that he attended the Sixes Social Cricket event at the Westgate, which was very enjoyable.

The Leader updated Council on Cabinet portfolios and announced that Mark Lygo was the new Cabinet Member for the renamed portfolio, Safer and Inclusive Communities.

The City Rector addressed Council on Remembrance Sunday and reflected on the different backgrounds that came together to pay their respects.

59. Public addresses and questions that relate to matters for decision at this meeting

There were no addresses or questions.

60. FutureFit Oxford(shire) Project Grant Funding Bid

Council considered a report from the Head of Corporate Strategy seeking approval for Oxford City Council's involvement in the FutureFit Oxford(shire) Project (FOx Project), and delegated authority for the facilitation and delivery of the project.

Councillor Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice introduced the report, proposed the recommendation and answered questions.

The recommendation was agreed on being seconded by Councillor Louise Upton and put to the vote.

Council resolved to:

1. **Establish** a revenue budget for £1.56 million funded by a government grant to enable the necessary resources to be employed and the work undertaken.

61. Council and Committee meetings programme for May 2024 to May 2026

Council considered a report from the Head of Law and Governance which set out a programme of Council, committee and other meetings for the whole of the 2024/25 and 2025/26 Council years.

The recommendation was agreed on being seconded by Councillor Ed Turner and put to the vote.

Council resolved to:

1. **Approve** the programme of Council, committee and other meetings from 1 May 2024 to 31 May 2026 attached at Appendix A.
2. **Delegate** authority to the Head of Law and Governance, in consultation with Group Leaders, to make changes to this programme in the event that there is any decision by Council to change the committee structure or committee remit which impacts on the programme of meetings: and
3. **Delegate** authority to the Head of Law and Governance to set dates for additional training and briefing sessions for Members.

62. Appointments to Council Committees 2023/2024

Council considered a report from the Head of Law and Governance which requested Council appoint committees and the members serving on those committees for the remainder of the Council year 2023-24.

The Leader of the Council advised of the following amendments to the report:

- General Purposes Licensing Committees and Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee – to add Cllr Barbara Coyne
- Audit and Governance Committee – to add Cllr Amar Latif
- Planning Committee – to add Cllr Saaj Malik
- Scrutiny Committee – Cllr Altaf Khan to replace Cllr Roz Smith
- Standards Committee – to add Cllr Amar Latif

Council resolved to:

1. **Note** the methods, calculations and conventions used in determining political representation on committees as outlined in the report and shown in *Appendix 2: Political proportionalities on Council committees 2023-24*;
2. **Appoint** to committee seats in accordance with the requirements of political proportionality and (where received and detailed in Appendix 3) in line with the nominations made by political groups, as shown in *Appendix 3: Committee nominations 2023-24*;
3. **Appoint** a member of the Independent Group to the General Purposes Licensing and Licensing and Gambling Acts Committees as no nomination has been received from the party. In accordance with the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 the nomination must therefore be made by Council.

63. Decisions taken under Part 9.3(b) of the Constitution

Council considered a report from the Head of Law and Governance, on behalf of the Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive) which noted the decisions taken by the Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive) using the powers delegated in Part 9.3(b) of the Constitution.

Council resolved to:

1. **Note** the decision taken as set out in the report.
Cllr Djafari-Marbini arrived at the meeting.

64. Decisions taken under Part 17.9 of the Constitution

Council considered a report from the Head of Law and Governance which noted the decision taken by the Executive Director (Development) using the powers delegated in Part 17.9(b) of the Constitution.

Council resolved to:

1. **Note** the decision taken as set out in the report.

65. Amendment to Proper Officer Delegations

Cllr Pegg arrived at the meeting.

Council considered a report from the Head of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer) which sought Council's agreement to amend the Constitution to reflect the changes in responsibilities for functions.

Council resolved to:

1. Approve the following changes to the Constitution:
 - a. Amend Part 10.1 to include delegation to the Monitoring Office to make amendments to Proper Officer designations to reflect changes to the senior management structure.
 - b. Amend the table at Part 10.2 (Table of Proper Officer Responsibilities) at Local Government Act 1972 Section 234 "Signing notices, orders and other documents which the Council is required or authorised to issue by or under any enactment" to include 'where no Head of Service, the relevant director will be the Proper Officer'.
2. Note that the changes will take effect as of the 12 December 2023.

Cllr Latif arrived at the meeting.

66. New Byelaws for parks and open spaces

Council considered a report from the Head of Community Services which sought approval that the existing byelaws for parks and open spaces be updated and for a full consultation on the proposed draft set of new byelaws to be undertaken.

Councillor Chewe Munkonge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Leisure and Parks, introduced the report, proposed the recommendations and answered questions.

The recommendation was agreed on being seconded by Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships, and put to the vote.

Council resolved to:

1. **Approve** that the existing byelaws for parks and open spaces are updated with new byelaws as set out in the draft set of new byelaws.
2. **Approve** that Officers undertake a consultation with such persons as the Council considers may be affected by the proposed byelaws when carrying out the regulatory assessment.
3. **Notes** that a further report will be presented to Members with results of the public consultation and whether the Council should submit its application to the Secretary of State for approval.

4. **Notes** that upon the Secretary of State granting leave for the Council to make the proposed byelaws there will be a further period of consultation of not less than 28 days.

67. Questions on Cabinet minutes

a) Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 18 October 2023

None received.

b) Draft Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 15 November 2023

Minute 84 – Appropriation of Land at Bertie Place to a Planning Purpose

In response to a question from Councillor Christopher Smowton, Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing advised that the item was moved to another meeting so that a full evaluation of the public responses could be considered.

68. Questions on Notice from Members of Council

30 written questions were asked of the Cabinet Members and the Leader, and these and written responses were published before the meeting.

These along with summaries of the 16 supplementary questions and responses asked and given at the meeting are set out in the minutes pack.

Cllr Gant left the meeting.

Council agreed to consider item 16a next on the agenda before the break and then return to the agenda as listed.

69. Outside organisation/Committee Chair reports and questions

a) Outside organisation report: Oxford Safer Communities Partnership

Councillor Mark Lygo, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities, introduced the report which provided a summary of Oxford Safer Communities Partnership's (OSCP) achievements in 2022-23.

Council **noted** the report.

The meeting broke for 45 minutes at the conclusion of these items.

70. Public addresses and questions that do not relate to matters for decision at this Council meeting

Cllr Gant re-joined the meeting.

Council agreed to return the remainder of the agenda as listed.

Council heard four addresses and Cabinet Members read or summarised their written responses.

Both addresses and responses are set out in full in the minutes pack.

1. Address by Professor Nick Maynard
2. Address from Rachel Schiller
3. Address from Maryam Ahmed
4. Address from Chaka Artwell – Ethnic Traders and Shoppers of Oxford Cowley Road

The Lord Mayor thanked the speakers for their contributions.

71. Motions on notice 27 November 2023

Council had before it six motions on notice submitted in accordance with Council procedure rules and reached decisions as set out below.

Motions agreed as set out below:

- a) Rent Controls (proposed by Cllr Lucy Pegg, seconded by Cllr Chris Jarvis)
[Amendment proposed by Cllr Alex Hollingsworth, seconded by Cllr Linda Smith]
- b) Motion to call for a ceasefire in Gaza (proposed by Cllr Paula Dunne, seconded by Cllr Jabu Nala-Hartley) [Amendment proposed by Cllr Chris Jarvis, seconded by Cllr Lucy Pegg]

Motions not taken as the time allocated for debate had finished:

- c) Back Oxford communities, Oxfam, and Oxford based medical workers, demanding immediate Gaza ceasefire (proposed by Shaista Aziz, seconded by Cllr Amar Latif)
- d) Peace in Israel and Palestine (proposed by Cllr Susan Brown, seconded by Cllr Anna Railton)
- e) Housing Management System problems and resultant accounts issues at Oxford City Council and ODS (proposed by Cllr Christopher Snowton, seconded by Cllr Laurence Fouweather) [Amendment proposed by Cllr Nigel Chapman, seconded by Cllr Susan Brown]
- f) A Ban on Disposable Vapes (proposed by Cllr Lucy Pegg, seconded by Cllr Rosie Rawle)
- g) School Streets Initiative (proposed by Cllr Katherine Miles, seconded by Cllr Andrew Gant)

72. Rent Controls (proposed by Cllr Lucy Pegg, seconded by Cllr Chris Jarvis)

Councillor Lucy Pegg, seconded by Councillor Chris Jarvis, proposed the amended motion as set out in the briefing note.

On being put to the vote, the amended motion was then agreed.

Council resolved to adopt the following motion:

This council notes:

1. According to the 2021 census, almost a third of all households in Oxford are private renters (32.2 per cent).¹ This has increased from 28.3 per cent at the point of the 2011 census, and is substantially higher than the national average of 20.3 per cent.²
2. In the year to September 2023, tenants in the South East of England experienced rent increases of more than 5 per cent on average.³
3. Studies have shown that Oxford is one of the most expensive cities in the UK to live in⁴, with housing costs being the single biggest contributor to this.⁵
4. A growing number of local authorities and leaders are calling for powers to introduce rent controls in the private rented sector, including Mayor of London Sadiq Khan⁶ and Bristol City Council.⁷
5. The Scottish Government has introduced temporary rent controls, which will be in place until 2024.⁸ Following this, the Scottish Government has stated it intends to introduce a new housing bill that would implement long-term rent controls.⁹
6. That the trend of landlords moving properties from private lets to short term and holiday lets nationally is one that is impacting on large parts of Oxford as well, reducing the number of homes available for rent to families and house-sharers.
7. That this trend is driven largely by the fact that even with the current very high levels of rent in the private rented sector it is possible to generate the same levels of income from a few days rental as a short term let as from a month as a privately rented property.¹⁰
8. That the Government has consistently failed to come close to delivering the number of new homes required each year, with the most recent quarterly figures for planning permissions for new homes been the lowest since records began.

1

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/bulletins/housingenglandandwales/census2021>

² <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/23235132.census-shows-people-renting-privately-oxford/>

3

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/indexofprivatehousingrentalprices/september2023#measuring-the-data>

⁴ <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/23476851.unaffordable-places-live-uk--oxford-ranked-8th/>

⁵ https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20126/housing/458/housing_in_oxford

⁶ <https://www.london.gov.uk/mayors-longstanding-call-rent-controls-more-urgent-ever-private-rents-london-forecast-surpass-ps2700>

⁷ <https://westenglandbylines.co.uk/features/brokenbritain/rent-control-motion-passes-the-bristol-city-council/>

⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/news/scottish-parliament-approves-final-extension-of-tenant-protections/>

⁹ <https://www.thenational.scot/news/23769220.scottish-government-confirms-plans-rent-controls/>

¹⁰ Landlord Today: 3rd May 2023 (<https://www.landlordtoday.co.uk/breaking-news/2023/4/warning-to-landlords-that-switching-to-holiday-lets-wont-be-easy>)

Of even greater concern, the same report shows that the number of social housing units – the only genuinely affordable form of affordable housing – given planning permission has fallen by 24% since the previous year.¹¹

This council believes:

1. Oxford's spiralling housing costs are central to the cost of living crisis in our city, with private renters being among the hardest hit. Without making renting more affordable, thousands of residents in the city will continue to face staggering costs, be plunged further into economic hardship and be priced out.
2. Rent controls are far from a panacea - they will not fix the housing crisis alone or overnight. However, they are a necessary tool to transition to a housing system which puts people before profit.
3. That the introduction of rent controls without the simultaneous introduction of powers to restrict the numbers of short-term lets is likely to increase the shift of privately rented homes to short term lets, further worsening the shortage of homes in Oxford."
4. The only real sustainable and equitable long-term solution to rising housing costs and increasing shortages of homes is a massive and sustained investment in new social housing, to provide genuinely affordable homes in all the cities, towns and villages where people want to live.

This council resolves:

1. To request the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Leader of the Council publicly campaign for local authorities - including Oxford City Council - to be given powers to introduce rent controls.
2. To request that the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Leader of the Housing publicly support Shelter's campaign for a new programme for the mass building of social housing, both nationally and in Oxford and Oxfordshire.
3. To request that the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Leader of the Housing continue the Council's long-standing support for all measures to regulate and control the short-term let sector.
4. To request the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities of the United Kingdom informing them of the council's positions, and request the government allow local authorities to introduce controls on private sector rents.

73. Motion to call for a ceasefire in Gaza (proposed by Cllr Paula Dunne, seconded by Cllr Jabu Nala-Hartley)

¹¹ Glenigan: Housing pipeline report - Q2 2023 report - Published 7 September 2023
(<https://www.hbf.co.uk/news/housing-pipeline-report-q2-2023-report-published-september-2023/>)

Councillor Paula Dunne, seconded by Councillor Jabu Nala-Hartley, proposed the amended motion as set out in the briefing note.

On being put to the vote, the amended motion was then agreed.

Council resolved to adopt the following motion:

Council notes:

- As of 10 November 2023, 11,078 Palestinians, 4,506 of whom were children, have been killed, 27,490 injured and more than 1 million displaced, by Israeli forces.
- Following Hamas' attacks on 7 October - killing 1,200 people and abducting more than 200 people including children, in contravention of the Geneva Conventions, Israeli forces dropped 6,000 bombs on Gaza, one of the world's most densely populated places, home to 2.2 million trapped Palestinians (of whom almost half are children).
- UNRWA has described the situation as reminiscent of the Nakba ('Catastrophe') of 1948 in which more than 750,000 people were forcibly displaced, dispossessed and expelled from their homes.
- Collective punishment is against international law under the Geneva Conventions.
- The Israeli government has cut off water, food, and electricity to Gaza which is a war crime under International Humanitarian Law.
- There has been a 16-year illegal blockade of Gaza, an occupation in the West Bank, including in our twin city of Ramallah, and major NGOs say there is a system of apartheid.
- Hamas' rocket and mortar attacks targeting civilians have been condemned by the UN and human rights organisations.

Council believes:

- There must be an immediate, permanent ceasefire in Gaza.
- Neither the actions of the Israeli government or Hamas will contribute to a just peaceful resolution.
- The killing of all civilians and atrocities committed against civilians in both the ongoing bombardment of Gaza by Israeli forces and the Hamas attacks are horrific and must be condemned.
- Polls show over 70% of the British public surveyed support a ceasefire, which has been called for by the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNICEF, Save the Children, the head of the WHO, Oxfam, Layla Moran MP, and our Lord Mayor. Oxford's four main mosques have also called for the leader of this council and the Oxford East MP to call for an immediate ceasefire.
- There are major concerns about Israeli army and settler violence and intimidation of Palestinians in the West Bank and Ramallah.

- Antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism and hate crimes of all forms, including against Jewish and Muslim people, communities and places of worship, have no place in Oxford.

Council agrees to:

- Request the Council Leader
 - Write to Rishi Sunak, Keir Starmer and Anneliese Dodds demanding they call for an immediate, permanent ceasefire
 - Write to the foreign secretary asking them to:
 - work to ensure full access for humanitarian aid is granted in Gaza
 - seek an immediate unconditional release of all hostages
 - call for Palestinians in arbitrary military detention to be given access to justice through an independent, non-military system
 - raise concerns about Israeli army and settler violence in the West Bank
 - Write to express solidarity with Layla Moran and her family in Gaza
 - Invite the mayor of Ramallah to address full council to discuss the crisis in the West Bank
 - Convene a meeting of religious leaders, including Jewish and Muslim leaders, and community safety stakeholders to discuss how to better tackle Antisemitism and Islamophobia

74. Back Oxford communities, Oxfam, and Oxford based medical workers, demanding immediate Gaza ceasefire (proposed by Cllr Shaista Aziz, seconded by Cllr Amar Latif)

This motion was not taken as the time allocated for debate had finished.

75. Peace in Israel and Palestine (proposed by Cllr Susan Brown, seconded by Cllr Ed Turner)

This motion was not taken as the time allocated for debate had finished.

76. Housing Management System problems and resultant accounts issues at Oxford City Council and ODS (proposed by Cllr Christopher Smowton, seconded by Cllr Laurence Fouweather)

This motion was not taken as the time allocated for debate had finished.

77. A Ban on Disposable Vapes (proposed by Cllr Lucy Pegg, seconded by Cllr Rosie Rawle)

This motion was not taken as the time allocated for debate had finished.

78. School Streets Initiative (proposed by Cllr Katherine Miles, seconded by Cllr Andrew Gant)

This motion was not taken as the time allocated for debate had finished.

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 8.55 pm

Lord Mayor

Date: Monday 29 January 2024

Decisions on items of business take effect immediately:

Motions may be implemented immediately or may require further budget provision and/or reports to Cabinet before implementation.

Details are in the Council's Constitution.

To: Cabinet **Date:** 24 January 2024
To: Council **Date:** 29 January 2024
Report of: Head of Financial Services
Title of Report: Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Rent Setting Report 2024/25

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present the outcome of Oxford City Council's (the Council's) annual rent review and associated rent setting proposal for 2024/25 in respect of all Council dwellings within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), including the setting of associated services and facilities charges.
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) - Finance and Asset Management Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing
Policy Framework:	Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan

Recommendations:	That Cabinet resolves to:
1.	Recommend to Council to approve an increase of 7.7% for 2024/25 (subject to any subsequent cap on increases imposed by central government) in social dwelling rents from 1 st April 2024 giving an average weekly increase of £9.27 per week, and a revised weekly average social rent of £129.72 as set out in the Financial Implications section of this report;
2.	Recommend to Council to approve an increase to rents for shared ownership dwellings as outlined in paragraph 15 of the Financial Implications;
3.	Recommend to Council to approve an increase to service charges by 7.7% (CPI + 1%) to enable the HRA to recover the associated cost of supply;
4.	Recommend to Council to approve an increase to the charge for a garage of 7%, equating to an increase of £1.25 per week for a standard garage with a revised charge of £19.10 per week, and an increase of £1.44 per week for a premium garage with a revised charge of £21.60 per week; and
5.	Recommend to Council to approve the option to exercise the Rent Flexibility option in respect of re-lets to new tenants as outlined in paragraph 6 below.

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Housing Revenue Account Rent by Ward
Appendix 2	Risk and Equalities Assessment

Introduction and background

1. On an annual basis, as part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) sets the Rent for HRA tenants for the next financial year. The rent setting is governed by two national documents – The Rent Standard and the Rent Policy Statement.
 - a. **The Rent Standard states:** *Registered providers must comply in full with all the requirements and expectations set out in this Rent Standard. They must additionally comply with all the requirements and expectations of the Rent Policy Statement on the setting, increase and decrease of rents and service charges.*
 - b. **The Rent Policy defines:**
 - i. **Weekly Formula Rent** as 70% of the national average rent; multiplied by relative county earnings; multiplied by the bedroom weight; plus 30% of the national average rent; multiplied by relative property value.
 - ii. **Affordable Rent** (inclusive of service charges) must not exceed 80% of gross market rent, where ‘Gross market rent’ means the rent (inclusive of any applicable service charges) for which the accommodation might reasonably be expected to be let in the private rented sector. Property size, location type and service provision must be taken into account when determining what gross market rent a property might achieve if let in the private rented sector.
 - iii. **Rent Flexibility Level** - The government’s policy recognises that registered providers should have some discretion over the rent set for individual properties, to take account of local factors and concerns, in consultation with tenants. As a result, the policy contains flexibility for registered providers to set rents at up to 5% above formula rent (10% for supported housing). If applying this flexibility, providers should ensure that there is a clear rationale for doing so which takes into account local circumstances and affordability.
2. The maximum increase in both types of rent is currently restricted to CPI + 1% (CPI as at September in the preceding year) until 2025 at which point this will be reviewed by the government. The September 2023 CPI rate was 6.7%, giving a maximum increase of 7.7% subject to any additional cap imposed by the government. The government imposed a 7% cap on rent increases for the 2023/24 rent setting (Ref. GOV.UK Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing).
3. As well as the restriction on maximum increases, rents are also capped as follows:
 - a. Social Rent – rent caps apply as a maximum ceiling on the formula rent and depend on the size of the property (the number of bedrooms it contains). Where the formula rent would be higher than the rent cap for a particular size of property, the rent cap must be used instead (Ref. GOV.UK Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing).
 - b. Affordable Rents - The rent for affordable rent housing (inclusive of service charges) must not exceed 80% of gross market rent. ‘Gross market rent’ means the rent (inclusive of any applicable service charges) for which the accommodation might reasonably be expected to be let in the private rented sector. Property size, location

type and service provision must be taken into account when determining what gross market rent a property might achieve if let in the private rented sector (*Ref. GOV.UK Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing*).

4. The HRA must adhere to these restrictions and caps on rent increases even if a tenant's rent is below formula rent, or if the HRA has previously applied a lower – or no – annual increase. Where this is the case, the HRA may only move the rent up to formula rent when the property is re-let following vacancy (subject to the rent cap).
5. The table below demonstrates the amount of rental income foregone because of these restrictions, and last year's cap of 7% maximum increase:

	Number of Properties	Total Weekly Rent Foregone	Total Annual Rental Income Foregone
Actual Rent is less than Formula Rent	7,208	£72,856	£3,788,523

One additional consideration is for OCC to join other social housing providers in lobbying government (DLUHC) for the re-introduction of rent-convergence measures to address the gap between actual rents of £48.7m and formula rents of £52.5m. Currently this is an annual loss to the HRA of £3.8m.

6. Rent Flexibility

Landlords are permitted under the regulations to set rents at levels above the social formula rents where it has taken local factors, market conditions and affordability into account.

- For general needs accommodation a 5% flexibility is allowable.
- For supported housing, such as sheltered schemes a 10% flexibility is allowable.

(*Ref. GOV.UK Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing*)

Not all our rents are at a level equal to the formula rent for the property. Where a property becomes vacant and is going to be let to a new tenant following refurbishment, the formula rent for the property is proposed to be set at 105% of formula for general needs accommodation and 110% of formula for all supported housing units.

7. Housing Stock

As at 1st April 2023 the HRA held 7,833 dwellings, as shown below:

	Number of bedrooms						Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5+	
Flat / Maisonette	140	1,222	1,732	156	5		3,255
House / Bungalow		275	830	2,791	253	42	4,191
Sheltered	29	271	30				330
Shared ownership		23	31	3			57
Totals	169	1,791	2,623	2,950	258	42	7,833

8. Types of Rent

There are two types of rent charged within the HRA:

- **Social Rent** - Since 2001, rents for properties let at 'social rent' (which constitute a majority of rented social housing properties) have been set based on a formula set by government. This creates a 'formula rent' for each property, which is calculated based on the relative value of the property, relative local income levels, and the size of the property.
- **Affordable Rent** - In 2011, the government introduced 'affordable rent' which permits rents to be set at up to 80% of market rent (inclusive of service charges).

9. A table of the highest rents charged by OCC HRA is shown below:

No. of Bedrooms	2023/24 Highest Weekly Rents	
	Social Rent	Affordable Rent
1 and bedsits	£133.61	£190.85
2	£174.71	£233.91
3	£199.09	£281.98
4	£195.07	
5	£214.65	
6 or more	£189.72	

Formula rent caps for 2023-24

Number of bedrooms	Rent cap
1 and bedsits	£173.79
2	£184.00
3	£194.22
4	£204.43
5	£214.66
6 or more	£224.87

Housing Benefit / Universal Credit Housing Cost Element

10. As at the end of July 2022 there were a total of 3,559 HRA tenants (45.6%) claiming Housing Benefit or the Housing Cost element of Universal Credit, made up of 2,318 Housing Benefit claimants and 1,241 Universal Credit claimants. The amount claimed by each tenant will vary depending on their individual circumstances.

As Social Rents are based on formula rent, the maximum amount housing benefit will cover is 100% of the rent depending on the tenants' eligibility and financial circumstances.

11. For Affordable Rents, the current Local Housing Allowance Rates for Oxford are set out below. These are the maximum eligible rents to be used when calculating Housing Benefit for Affordable Rental Properties. The government recently announced that these would be increased for the year beginning 1st April 2024.

Local Housing Allowance Rates for 2023/24		
Number of Bedrooms	£ per week	£ per month
Room in Shared Accommodation	118.87	516.52
1 Bedroom	178.36	775.02
2 Bedrooms	210.00	912.50
3 Bedrooms	253.15	1,100.00
4 Bedrooms	364.77	1,585.01

Financial implications

12. The recent HRA Strategic Review identified that the HRA faced an uncertain financial future within the next 10 years due to the scale of investment required because of the demands placed on it by new legislation and housing standards. As a result, the review recommended that the HRA maximised its income streams where permissible. Implementing the maximum rent increase allowed by government would help the HRA to meet its legal obligations and remain viable going forward.
13. A rent increase that is lower than inflation will have a detrimental impact on the viability of the HRA as the income will not be able to keep pace with rising costs and as a consequence would be at risk of failing its tenants in the supply of services and support.
14. The CPI rate for the 12 months to the end of September 2023 was 6.7%. For comparison purposes the impact on rents is shown in the table below using the recently announced Welsh assembly cap of 6.7%, last year's cap of 7%, and CPI+1% of 7.7%:

Rent Increase	Weekly Increase based on Average Social Rent of £120.45	Weekly Increase based on Maximum Social Rent of £214.65	Weekly Increase based on Average Affordable Rent of £215.07	Weekly Increase based on Maximum Affordable Rent of £281.98	Total Annual Increase to HRA Rental Income
6.7%	£8.07	£14.38	£14.41	£18.89	£3.265m
7.0%	£8.43	£15.02	£15.05	£19.74	£3.411m
7.7%	£9.27	£16.52	£16.56	£21.71	£3.752m

15. Shared ownership rent setting is currently laid out in the lease agreements and reviewed annually in accordance with the greater of:

- i) the Gross Rent under this Lease immediately preceding the Relevant Review Date x 1.005; and
- ii) the Gross Rent under this Lease immediately preceding the Relevant Review Date x ((B/A) + 0.01). (Where B & A are the CPI indexes for the review month and 12 months prior respectively).

The rent rise included in the Consultation Budget under these agreements is effectively an increase of 0.5% for properties less than 12 months old of which the Council currently has 2 such properties and CPI + 1% (7.7%) for older properties of which the Council owns 57 properties.

16. The charge for garages is proposed to be increased by 7% from £17.85 to £19.10 per week for a standard garage, and up from £20.16 to £21.60 per week for a premium garage.
17. Service charges such as caretaking, cleaning, CCTV, communal areas etc. will be increased by CPI plus 1% across all tenure types in the HRA to ensure that the HRA recovers the cost of providing these services. Service charges are monitored and reviewed regularly to ensure costs of provision are being recovered and tenants are not being overcharged.
18. The proposed increases and estimates contained within this report are also contained within the report: *Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-26 to 2027-28 and 2024-25 Budget for Consultation* to be presented at Cabinet on 13th December 2023. Due to the requirement to give written notice of increases to tenants - one months' written notice (Social Tenants) and two months' written notice (Shared Ownership Tenants) the need to approve these increases by way of a separate report has arisen. The main budget consultation period runs from the 14th December 2023 to the 31st January 2024, and any responses received relevant to this report by the 17th January 2024 will be included in the version of this report presented to Cabinet and Council.

Budget Consultation

19. The budget consultation concentrates on a number of key areas with 34 responses received as at 10th January. Of the 34 responses, 26 were residents of Oxford, of which 7 were Council Tenants. A summary of the responses is shown below for the main areas:
 - Service Priorities
 - There was strong support for the provision of affordable housing with 67% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing.
 - Capital Investment
 - Highest support (73% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed) for capital investment in new social housing of £352 million which will deliver a return in the future.
 - Energy Efficiency initiatives and Climate Change improvement, funded out of tenants' rents at £33 million – 59% agreed or strongly agreed, with only 17% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.
 - 56% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with £40 million of internal and external capital investment in Council dwellings funded from tenant's rent, whilst only 10% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

- Council Housing

- Highest support was for targeted estate regeneration (66%) closely followed by investing in the look and feel of our Council estates (65%) and improving Energy Efficiency and progressing to zero carbon (60%) with least support given to Building & acquiring new Council homes (49%) and maintaining the quality of existing homes (45%) although it should be noted that only 7 respondents were Council tenants.

20. Members will be updated at the Council budget meeting with any further responses that are received up until the consultation closes on 31st January.

Legal issues

21. The rent setting is governed by two government documents – The Rent Standard (Regulator of Social Housing), and the Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing (GOV.UK).
22. The HRA is a ring-fenced account and is required to finance its activities from the income it generates - predominantly rental income. Failure to maintain a positive balance of the HRA account would lead to the collapse of the HRA at Oxford City Council.

Risk Implications

23. The main risk to the HRA is that the increases are not approved resulting in an unsustainable financial position that would require significant reductions in the provision of services and support to its residents.

Equalities impact

24. See Appendix 2.

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

25. This report is for rent setting purposes, and the proposed budget changes do not affect the Council's ability to reach our net zero target.

Report author	Jason Jones
Job title	Finance Business Partner
Service area or department	Financial Services
Telephone	01865 252365
e-mail	jjones@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers:
1 GOV.UK: Policy statement on rents for social housing
2 Regulator of Social Housing: Rent Standard

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Wards	2023/24		2024/25	
	Actual Rents	Formula Rents	Actual Rents	Formula Rents
Abingdon	134.55	151.18	144.91	162.82
Barton & Sandhills	122.76	132.59	132.21	142.80
Blackbird Leys	117.63	126.15	126.69	135.86
Carfax & Jericho	127.94	149.39	137.79	160.89
Churchill	118.72	126.53	127.86	136.27
Cowley	110.56	117.43	119.07	126.47
Cuttleslowe & Sunnymead	117.03	128.20	126.04	138.07
Didcot	110.80	115.19	119.33	124.06
Donnington	121.58	128.63	130.94	138.53
Headington	121.61	123.12	130.97	132.60
Headington Hill & Northway	118.34	127.55	127.45	137.37
Hinksey Park	119.88	140.85	129.11	151.70
Holywell	116.70	124.20	125.69	133.76
Kidlington	123.41	128.55	132.91	138.45
Littlemore	123.16	116.28	132.64	125.23
Lye Valley	116.97	125.53	125.98	135.20
Marston	125.97	140.55	135.67	151.37
Northfield Brook	116.27	124.92	125.22	134.54
Osney & St Thomas	122.23	135.46	131.64	145.89
Quarry & Risinghurst	117.85	125.42	126.92	135.08
Rose Hill & Iffley	121.88	131.72	131.26	141.86
St Clement's	117.31	125.94	126.34	135.64
St Mary's	121.49	131.00	130.84	141.09
Temple Cowley	122.59	130.33	132.03	140.37
Walton Manor	126.74	146.23	136.50	157.49
Wolvercote	114.35	124.41	123.15	133.99

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Oxford City Council HRA Rent Setting for 2024-25 and for inclusion in the Budget Consultation (Equality Assessment)

The following assessment gives more details from an equality and diversity perspective on the Council’s rent setting proposal. It provides an initial commentary to indicate the potential risks before the wider public consultation period from December 2023 to January 2024.

41

Budget Proposal	Rent setting: Increase in council house rents by 7.7% per annum for 2024/25.
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	From 1 st April 2020 under the 2020 rent standard, the Government have determined that rent will be increased by CPI +1% for a period of 5 years for local authority and housing association social rents. For 2023/24 the relevant CPI rate at September 2023 is 6.7% and hence council house rents under this formula would be estimated to increase by 7.7% from 2023-24 levels. With inflation running at 8.9% the Council would need to make reductions on service should the rent rise not be at least 7.7% which is recommended within this Budget paper.
What are the likely risks?	The increase for 2024-25 at 7.7% represents an average of £9.27 per week. There is a risk of increased rents arrears which could rise as a result of the increase. Issues may arise from the implementation of universal credit which is being monitored by the Council
What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?	The proposed increases will be published in “Tenants in Touch”, both hard copy and digital editions during the consultation period. Once the charges have been approved by Council, Tenants will be notified in writing giving the statutory one months’ notice (Social Tenants) and two months’ notice (Shared Ownership tenants) before implementation on the 1 st April.
What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?	The Social Housing Act and enhanced Regulatory Standards has an expectation that landlords will know their tenants as individuals, understand their views, know their protected characteristics, know reasonable adjustments that need to be made and work with an ever-increasing number of vulnerable tenants in our housing stock, delivering high quality, efficient services. As a result, Housing Officers will need to be able to case manage, key work and co-ordinate a range of services to support tenants going forward. Additional staffing has been proposed in response to the new standards and should assist in providing an early warning mechanism of arrears increasing and a resource to help tackle the potential increased rent arrears. As at the end of July 2022 there were a total of 3,559 HRA tenants (45.6%) claiming Housing Benefit or the Housing Cost element of Universal Credit, made up of 2,318 Housing Benefit claimants and 1,241 Universal Credit claimants. The amount claimed by each tenant will vary depending on their individual circumstances.

Overall assessment of the equality risks			
	Race	Disability	Age
	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
	Gender reassignment	Religion or Belief	Sexual Orientation
	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
	Sex	Pregnancy and Maternity	Marriage & Civil Partnership
Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	

To: Cabinet – 24 January 2024
Council – 29 January 2024

Report of: Executive Director (Development)

Title of Report: Project approvals, budget and delegations to develop five small sites for affordable housing, using spend from the Brownfield Land Release Fund

Summary and Recommendations	
Purpose of report:	This report seeks project and contract approvals and delegations, budget and delegations in relation to affordable housing schemes across five small/ garage sites. All sites have been allocated initial funding through the Brownfield Land Release Fund (“BLRF2”) following a successful bid. The report seeks approval for appropriation from General Fund (“GF”) to Housing Revenue Fund, and to a planning purpose, where necessary; approval for the disposal of land as required; approval for the demolition of garages held in the GF and approval for demolition of vacant units currently held within the Housing Revenue Account (“HRA”).
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) - Finance and Asset Management
Corporate Priority:	More Affordable Housing and Meeting Housing Needs
Policy Framework:	Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2023 to 2028

Recommendations: That Cabinet resolves to:	
1.	Note the Council’s participation in the Brownfield Land Release Fund (BLRF2) in order to undertake demolitions and groundworks and prepare five Council-owned sites to deliver affordable housing. The sites are at: a) Underhill Circus (referenced in paragraphs 26 - 35 of this report) b) Leiden Road (referenced in paragraphs 36 – 44 of this report) c) Balfour Road (referenced in paragraphs 49 - 54 of this report)

- d) Harebell Road (referenced in paragraphs 55 - 64 of this report)
- e) Pegasus Road (referenced in paragraphs 65 - 74 of this report);
2. **Grant project approval** to undertake the works on the basis of which BLRF 2 grant has been made available and for which budgetary provision is detailed below;
 3. **Recommend to Council** the allocation of a £340,213 capital budget (which will be funded entirely by the BLRF2 grant) to carry out the demolition/ enabling works on each site as detailed within the BLRF2 application (see table, paragraph 14);
 4. **Delegate authority** to the Executive Director (Development) in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing; the Head of Financial Services/Section 151 Officer; and the Head of Law and Governance/Monitoring Officer, to enter into agreements and contracts to facilitate the works specified within the BLRF2 application, within the allocated capital budget;
 5. **Grant project approval** to the proposals to enter into contracts and any other necessary agreements or contracts and incur associated development cost spends, as set out in this report, and within the allocated Housing Revenue Account capital budget and business plan, for the purpose of delivering more affordable housing in Oxford for the sites of Underhill Circus and Leiden Road - conditional on the Council approving the budget for these sites;
 6. **Delegate authority** to the Executive Director (Development) in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing; the Head of Financial Services/Section 151 Officer; and the Head of Law and Governance/Monitoring Officer, to enter into build contracts and any other necessary agreements or contracts for the purpose of delivering more affordable housing in Oxford in relation to the sites at Underhill Circus and Leiden Road and within the allocated Housing Revenue Account capital budget and business plan and to apply to the Secretary of State for consent (insofar as required) to the appropriations and disposals under section 19 of Housing Act 1985;
 7. **Delegate authority** to the Executive Director (Development) in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing; the Head of Financial Services/Section 151 Officer; and the Head of Law and Governance/Monitoring Officer, to agree the final terms and enter into the agreement with Oxfordshire Community Land Trust (OCLT) to dispose of the land via a long lease; along with any licences, party wall agreements, grant agreement, or other necessary agreements to enable delivery of the affordable housing at the former garage/ garage sites at Balfour Road; Harebell Road and Pegasus Road for the purpose of enabling the delivery affordable housing subject to compliance with the legal requirements of S123 of the Local Government Act 1972;
 8. **Approve** the appropriation of land at Underhill Circus from the General Fund (GF) to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA); and **agree** to commence appropriation to a planning purpose for the purpose of

developing affordable housing noting the intent to take a full report to Council;

9. **Agree** to commence the appropriation to a planning purpose process on sites at Harebell Road and Pegasus Road noting the intent to take a full report to Council;
10. **Approve** the demolition of garages at sites on Harebell Road and Pegasus Road (held in the GF) for the purposes of delivering affordable housing; and
11. **Approve** the demolition of two homes at 71 and 73 Leiden Road (held in the HRA) for the purposes of delivering affordable housing.

Appendices

Appendix 1 (Confidential)	Development scheme appraisal summary information on proposed Underhill and Leiden HRA schemes
Appendix 2 (Confidential)	Valuations of BBL schemes

Introduction and background

1. The Council continues to develop a supply programme to deliver more affordable housing through multiple work streams, including the delivery of homes through the Council's housing company – OCHL; direct delivery by the Council; joint ventures; regeneration schemes; acquisitions; and enabling activity with Registered Providers, community-led housing groups, and other partners. The Council seeks to deliver over 1,600 affordable tenure homes across the next four years (to March 2027), with at least 850 of those at the most affordable Social Rent level.
2. This report seeks approvals and a budget line to progress initial work across five Council-owned small sites to support both community-led and Council-led affordable housing delivery projects. The Brownfield Land Release Fund grant funds are intended for various works across the different sites including the demolition of the garages, and further work that may be necessary such as site decontamination, relocation of services and some abnormal substructure costs.
3. This report further seeks to progress these five sites to secure affordable housing using two different models. Project approvals, a budget and delegations are requested for two sites to deliver up to 18 affordable homes through the HRA with OX Place providing all development services through a Development Services Agreement. In relation to these two sites the report also seeks approval to appropriate land at Underhill Circus from the General Fund (GF) to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) as well as approval to demolish two vacant (and unsafe) bungalows. Details of the two sites and the delivery model can be found in paragraph 26 - 48.
4. In relation to the other three sites (detailed in paragraphs 49 - 74) these are intended to be subject to a long lease a with Oxfordshire Community Land Trust becoming the tenant. Details of the lease agreement and delivery model can be found in paragraphs 75 - 80. This report seeks the relevant authority to dispose of the land, by way of long lease for the purpose of delivering affordable homes.

Brownfield Land Release Fund

5. The BLRF is a cross-government initiative between the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and One Public Estate (OPE) which is delivered in partnership by the Local Government Association and the Cabinet Office.
6. Grant is available to all English councils over a three-year period to support the release of council-owned brownfield land for housing.
7. The funding will provide up front capital to address viability issues arising from abnormal costs of the proposed development. The type of abnormal costs requiring funding may include but are not limited to:
 - site levelling, groundworks, demolition, remediation
 - provision of small-scale infrastructure
 - highways works or other access challenges
 - addressing environmental constraints
 - external works, substructure and piling
 - asbestos removal
 - sewer diversions.
8. The Council has been successful in securing funding for three (larger) sites in previous BLRF rounds. This application relates to BLRF round 2 which was submitted in March 2023 with confirmation of the successful bid received in August.
9. This report seeks the approvals to participate in the BLRF2 to deliver the works specified in the application. Cabinet is requested to delegate authority to enter into agreements and contracts to facilitate the works specified within the BLRF2 application
10. The funding requirements on the BLRF2 are to:
 - a. Contract for the enabling works by end of March 2024, and
 - b. Release the land for housing (defined as signing a Development Agreement/transferring the land for enabling or Start on Site for direct delivery) by end of March 2027, and
 - c. That the Local Authority update their land and property assets (exc housing) on the ePIMS Lite system by the end of the financial year.
11. There is a small risk regarding repayment of BLRF grant. Should the demolitions and ground works be contracted and undertaken but the March 2027 deadline of release of the land for housing is not met there is a risk that the grant may need to be reclaimed. This scenario has been discussed with the LGA and Cabinet Office and the risk is deemed to be limited. This risk will be further mitigated by extensive due diligence to ensure that there are viable and deliverable plans in place for the new affordable housing ahead of actual BLRF2 funding spend.

Scheme details

12. The application, and this report, relates to five small brownfield Council-owned sites. Each application is on the basis of providing 100 per cent affordable housing on the sites. In total, across all sites, there is the potential to deliver approximately 30 homes, although this estimate is subject to change dependent on feasibility works.

13. It is proposed that the Council should enter into contracts to deliver the specified works below in delivering the schemes according to BLRF2 conditions.
14. These sites are listed below along with the funding requested and allocated to each one:

Site name	Funding allocated
Underhill Circus	£53,496
Leiden Road	£74,825
Harebell Road	£75,260
Balfour Road	£44,045
Pegasus Road	£92,595
Total	£340,221

15. Two schemes are located in Barton and Wood Farm and will be delivered directly by the Council through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA): Underhill Circus and Leiden Road. Underhill Circus is a site with the possibility to provide up to 12 homes. The Leiden Road project could deliver up to 6 flats (replacing 2 bungalows).
16. Three schemes are community-led projects in the Blackbird Leys estate. These were shortlisted as potential development sites from a LGA (Local Government Association) funded feasibility project that was commissioned by the Council in 2021.
17. It is proposed that the Council should enter into a new lease with OCLT. Details of this agreement are in paragraph 77.
18. These sites are intended to be delivered in partnership with Oxfordshire Community Land Trust (OCLT): Harebell Road (potential for four homes), Balfour Road (potential for four homes) and Pegasus Road (potential for four homes).
19. All three are brownfield garage sites on which Oxford City Council has been working in partnership with the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust and Transition by Design since 2020. The key focus of this work is the development of an innovative model of small community-led housing developments on some of the underused garage sites that are scattered across the city, that could then be replicated and scaled up to consider further sites in the future. The Council owns c.1,925 garages across Oxford, on approximately 200 sites. 39% of these garages are not currently let. About 305 of all garage stock is located in Blackbird Leys, and occupancy levels are far lower, with a majority of garages on most sites empty.
20. In 2021 a feasibility study (for all three sites) funded by the LGA Housing Advisors Programme (HAP) was conducted by the three partners. This report can be found here: https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/211220%20-%20HAP%20Final%20report%20-%20Oxford%20City%20Mapping%20Sites%20for%20Affordable%20Housing_0.pdf

21. The study identified key site constraints (via site visits and site searches) across the three sites and established a baseline scheme designed to estimate number of units deliverable on these sites.
22. Extensive community engagement took place as part of the feasibility work (public engagement event, workshops, 3,000 leaflets were distributed to local households). The residents support the development of the garage sites in principle.
23. The sites are at a relatively early stage of development. As such no scheme currently has planning permission (or has submitted planning permission) and details in relation to the size or specification of the units are evolving.
24. Broad delivery timelines are available for each site. Contracts for the demolition/enabling works required must be signed by 31 March 2024 with land released for housing by 31 March 2027.
25. Further detail on each site is provided below.

Underhill Circus

26. The Underhill Circus site is a brownfield site in the ownership of Oxford City Council (OCC). The site is located in Barton and the Council are currently securing legal possession. As such further detail about the site is provided in confidential Appendix 1.
27. The land is currently held in the General Fund. It is proposed that the land will need to be appropriated into the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) as well as being first appropriated to a planning purpose, to develop affordable housing on this site. Cabinet is requested to approve the appropriation of land within the General Fund relating to the purpose for which the land is held, and later to recommend to Council a further appropriation into the HRA for the purpose of delivering affordable homes.
28. Appropriation of the Land to a planning purpose is under section 122 of the 1972 Act. The purpose of this report is to authorise the taking of the first step of advertising the intention to appropriate. Any objections received would be considered at a future meeting of Council when the decision would be taken on whether to appropriate the land.
29. It is necessary to appropriate the land to for the purpose of building affordable housing before the works can be undertaken. At the time of appropriation, the council will need to balance the public benefit of delivering 12 new affordable homes against the loss of current structures.
30. As detailed above there is no planning consent on this site and no planning application has been made. The scheme remains at a relatively early stage of development. It is expected that the site will deliver twelve new homes at social rent although this is subject to change.
31. A valuation has been undertaken for the site detailing its market value.
32. The scheme has been approved to proceed for feasibility study and a capacity study has been undertaken. It is proposed that this site will be delivered by OX Place through the HRA (with a Development Management fee).
33. There have been previous schemes proposed at this site which have not been able to progress for reasons of financial viability. A strong consultation and

programme will be established with necessary contingency for additional design fees.

34. In line with the BLRF2 works OCC propose to contract with ODS by March 2024 to demolish the structures, conditional on the necessary consents and vacant possession.
35. Further details of the delivery model for this site are in paragraphs 45 - 48.

Leiden Road



Red line plan: Leiden Road

36. Leiden Road site is a brownfield site in the ownership of Oxford City Council (OCC). The site is located in Wood Farm and currently occupied by two decanted bungalows. The site sits at the edge of Magdalen woods
37. As above this scheme has been approved for feasibility study and a capacity study has been undertaken.
38. The bungalows are currently held in the HRA.
39. As detailed above there is no planning consent on this site and no planning application has been made. The scheme remains at a relatively early stage of development. It is expected that the site will deliver six new homes at social rent although this is subject to change.
40. It is proposed that this site will be delivered by OX Place through the HRA (with a Development Management fee).
41. Cabinet is requested to approve the demolition of these two vacant and unused homes (no longer considered safe to inhabit) for the purpose of providing new affordable housing.
42. In line with the BLRF2 works OCC propose to contract with ODS by March 2024 to demolish the bungalows, conditional on the necessary consents. It may be necessary to request a variation to the BLRF2 programme to allow part of contracted enabling works to delay until main build contract awarded.
43. Should this milestone not be achieved (and therefore the work not be in contract by this deadline) the grant will be liable to be reclaimed.
44. Further details of the delivery model for this site are in paragraphs 45 – 48.

Delivery model for sites at Underhill Circus and Leiden Road

45. The proposal is for the Council to undertake these developments directly in the HRA, contracting with OX Place for all development services through a Development Services Agreement (DSA). This approach is considered the best option for delivery of this scheme. It is low development risk – buying the completed homes on a ‘turn-key’ basis from the developer – and so therefore

represents the best value for money for the HRA, whilst also providing an appropriate/ risk-adjusted fee to OX Place to reflect the work undertaken to secure this opportunity and manage the development to completion.

46. Appendix 1 of this report provides further information on the financial appraisals (excluded from publication due to the commercial sensitivity of this information). The schemes meet all the financial requirements of the HRA.
47. This report seeks project approval for bringing these schemes into the HRA direct delivery programme, and delegated authority to enter agreements with OCHL.
48. These schemes have been financially assessed through the HRA development scheme appraisal tool. The HRA financial parameters have been met, including a development and admin fee payable to OX Place.

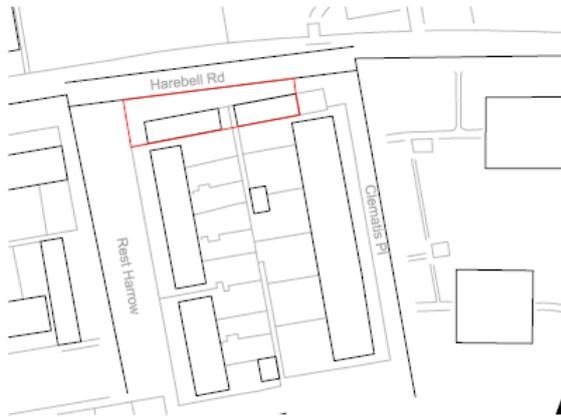
Balfour Road



Red line plan: Balfour Road

49. Balfour Road is a brownfield site in the ownership of Oxford City Council (OCC). The site is located in Blackbird Leys. It is a former garage site with the garages fully demolished and the site clear. The site is an empty underused plot with hard standing remaining from the garage arrangements.
50. The land is currently held in the General Fund as a development site.
51. A valuation has been undertaken showing freehold disposal or leasehold values (at 125 years).
52. This site is subject to an agreement with OCLT whereby OCLT can acquire the site on a long lease at the valuation rate. Detail of the agreement and subsequent development model are in paragraphs 75 - 80.
53. As detailed above there is no planning consent on this site and no planning application has been made. The scheme remains at a relatively early stage of development. It is expected that the site will deliver four new homes at Social Rent although this is subject to change.
54. In line with the BLRF2 funding OCC propose to grant fund OCLT to undertake any enabling works to this site, with that agreement in place by March 2024.

Harebell Road



Red line plan: Harebell Road

55. Harebell Road is a brownfield site in the ownership of Oxford City Council (OCC). The site is located in Blackbird Leys estate and currently occupied by 14 garages.
56. The garages are currently held in the General Fund as garages.
57. The Land is currently held by the Council as a garage site. Appropriation of the Land to a planning purpose is under section 122 of the 1972 Act. The purpose of this report is to authorise the taking of the first step of advertising the intention to appropriate. Any objections received would be considered at a future meeting of Council when the decision would be taken on whether to appropriate the land.
58. It is necessary to appropriate the land to the purpose of building affordable housing before the works can be undertaken. At the time of appropriation, the council will need to balance the public benefit of delivering four new affordable homes against the demolishing of the garages.
59. A valuation has been undertaken showing freehold disposal or leasehold values (at 125 years).
60. This site will be subject to an agreement with OCLT whereby OCLT can acquire the site on a long lease at the valuation price. Details of the lease agreement and subsequent development model are in paragraphs 62 – 67.
61. Seven of the garages are in use/let and are mainly used as storage units due to their restrictive small size. Tenants will be offered an alternative local garage or require one-week's notice to end the agreement.
62. Cabinet is requested to approve the demolition of the garages on this site for the purpose of providing new affordable housing.
63. As detailed above there is no planning consent on this site and no planning application has been made. The scheme remains at a relatively early stage of development. It is expected that the site will deliver four new homes at Social Rent although this is subject to change.
64. In line with the BLRF2 works OCC propose to contract with ODS by March 2024 to demolish the garages, conditional on the necessary consents, and propose to

enter into a grant agreement with the OCLT to undertake other 'enabling works' using the BLRF2 by March 2024.

Pegasus Road



Red line plan: Pegasus Road

65. Pegasus Road is a brownfield site in the ownership of Oxford City Council (OCC). The site is located in Blackbird Leys estate and currently occupied by 20 garages.
66. The garages are currently held in the General Fund as garages.
67. The Land is currently held by the Council as a garage site. Appropriation of the Land to a planning purpose is under section 122 of the 1972 Act. The purpose of this report is to authorise the taking of the first step of advertising the intention to appropriate. Any objections received would be considered at a future meeting of Council when the decision would be taken on whether to appropriate the land.
68. It is necessary to appropriate the land to the purpose of building affordable housing before the works can be undertaken. At the time of appropriation, the council will need to balance the public benefit of delivering four new affordable homes against the demolishing of the garages.
69. A valuation has been undertaken showing freehold disposal or leasehold values (at 125 years).
70. This site will be subject to an agreement with OCLT whereby OCLT can acquire the site on a long lease at the valuation price. Details of the lease agreement and subsequent development model are in paragraph 77 - 80.
71. Nine of the garages are in use/let and are mainly used as storage units due to their restrictive small size. Tenants will be offered an alternative local garage or require one-week's notice to end the agreement.
72. Cabinet is requested to approve the demolition of the garages on this site for the purpose of providing new affordable housing.
73. As detailed above there is no planning consent on this site and no planning application has been made. The scheme remains at a relatively early stage of development. It is expected that the site will deliver four new homes at Social Rent although this is subject to change.

74. In line with the BLRF2 works OCC propose to contract with ODS by March 2024 to demolish the garages, conditional on the necessary consents, and propose to enter into a grant agreement with the OCLT to undertake other 'enabling works' using the BLRF2 by March 2024.

Delivery model for sites at Balfour Road, Harebell Road and Pegasus

75. Partnership with the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust for the delivery of the community-led housing is responding to OCC supporting community-led housing to use the opportunities provided by small sites.
76. Policy H7 of the Local Plan 2036 notes that "Proposals for community-led housing will be supported because of the benefits they are expected to bring in terms of community cohesion, permanent affordability, and sustainable development. The Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2023-28) also includes the aim of "support[ing] and identify[ing] opportunities for community-led housing developments".
77. It is intended that OCC will enter into a new lease agreement, likely to be for a term of 125 years with OCLT allowing them to redevelop the sites.
78. Each site will be subject to a 'Red Book' market valuation to ensure compliance with s123 and the figures detailed in confidential Appendix 2 are indicative and subject to a final valuation. Acquisition of the leasehold for these sites is set at the Red Book valuation..
79. OCLT will deliver these units at Social Rent with nominations from the Council. They will sign the Oxford Register for Affordable Housing (ORAH) agreement confirming a single application process for all affordable housing and signing up to the relevant legal and regulatory frameworks.
80. This report seeks delegated authority to agree the final terms and enter into the lease agreement, and other associated agreements with OCLT.

Budget information

81. This report recommends to Council the allocation of £340,213 capital budget to carry out the works detailed above. This allocation will be entirely met by the BLRF2 grant.
82. This report requests that Cabinet delegate authority to enter into agreements and contracts to facilitate the works specified within the BLRF2 application.

Financial implications

83. This report seeks the required delegations to further develop the programme of affordable housing supply. The Council's Medium Term Finance Plan (MTFP), approved at Council in February 2023, supports the 40-year HRA Business Plan, and makes provision for purchases of affordable housing from OCHL's 10-year development programme of 1,091 properties within an overall budget envelope of £364m (before grant and shared ownership sales).
84. The Consultation Budget (December 2023) proposes that the Underhill Circus and Leiden Road sites have a budget allocated in the HRA Capital Budget 2024/25 and MTFP. This proposal to develop affordable housing on these sites is dependent on this proposal being approved in the 2024/25 Budget and MTFP at Council in February 2024.

85. The decision to proceed with any development or buy-back will take into account the longer-term financial position of the HRA. It will also be supported by a development scheme appraisal/ financial modelling to ensure that financial parameters and requirements are met for OCHL and the HRA. These parameters have been previously agreed and for the HRA are as follows for each scheme:
- a) a payback period of up to 70 years; and
 - b) a positive Net Present Value (NPV) over this period; and
 - c) an Internal Rate of Return (IRR) of at least 3%.
86. Meeting these parameters ensure that the HRA business plan remains financially robust, conversely not meeting these parameters will impact this position.
87. Financial information relating to the two HRA sites is detailed in Appendix 1.
88. There is potential for a small loss of income relating to the occupied garages in the GF. However, there are numerous alternative vacant garages close-by which will be offered to the tenants first in order to try to mitigate any loss of income.

Legal issues

89. The activities, as set out in this report, relate to activity for the purpose of developing homes as affordable housing. This is within the Council's statutory powers. The general power of competence under the Localism Act 2011 and the Local Authorities (Land) Act 1963 enable the Council to develop land it already owns.
90. Any procurement of goods and services for the purpose of developing homes must be carried out in accordance with the Council's constitution and procurement procedures, complying with The Public Contracts Regulations 2015, including ensuring that best value is achieved.
91. Under section 122(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 ("LGA 1972") a local authority "may appropriate for any purpose for which the council are authorised by this or any other enactment to acquire land by agreement any land which belongs to the council and is no longer required for the purpose for which it is held immediately before the appropriation". This general power of appropriation is subject to section 19(1) of the Housing Act 1985 ("HA 1985").
92. Appropriation from General Fund to HRA is specifically dealt with in section 19(1) HA 1985. Section 19(1) HA 1985 states that a local housing authority may appropriate for the purposes of Part II of the Housing Act 1985 any land for the time being vested in them or at their disposal and the authority have the same powers in relation to the land so appropriated as they have in relation to land acquired for the purposes of Part II.
93. The powers of appropriation under section 122 LGA 1972 are in conjunction with the powers of section 203 of Housing and Planning Act 2016. Section 203 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 grants a local authority or successor in title the power to override easements and other rights affecting land such as rights of

way that would impede the development. The effect of section 203 will be that such rights still exist but are overridden and converted to a right of payment of compensation for any interference of such rights. The following four requirements must be met for use of section 203 powers: (1) there is planning consent for the building and maintenance work (2) the work is carried out on other qualifying land (3) the qualifying authority in relation to the land could acquire the land compulsorily for the purposes of the building and maintenance work; and (4) the building or maintenance work is for purposes related to the purpose for which the land was vested in, or acquired or appropriated by, the qualifying authority in relation to the land.

94. The Council does not require Secretary of State approval before it undertakes the demolition works. The Council will want to appropriate the land first for planning purposes in order to enable development of the sites.
95. Section 123 of the Local Government Act requires that subject to certain exceptions a Council may not dispose of land for a consideration that is less than best consideration reasonably obtainable. Therefore the Council will need to obtain a valuation to demonstrate that the land is being disposed of best consideration to OCLT when it grants the lease to OCLT.

Level of risk

96. There may be risks relating to third party rights, utilities infrastructure and access rights. A Report on Title has been instructed which legal are progressing. This will provide the advice needed on these issues including mitigation.
97. Risks also include the potential for party wall agreements for which advice is also being provided.
98. Vacant possession is required on all garage sites. As per OCC obligations in relation to the relevant sites noted above, tenants will be offered an alternative local garage or require one-week's notice to end the agreement.
99. With regard to the two HRA schemes the Council will undertake all necessary due diligence to confirm the viability and expected delivery of the sites in advance of budget spend.
100. There is a small risk regarding repayment of BLRF2 grant detailed in paragraph 11.
101. Any other risks inherent in this programme are already identified elsewhere, with actions to mitigate these detailed in the BLRF2 application.
102. It is noted that these are complex sites which have the potential to require high levels of internal resource to develop. However, the provision of affordable housing will secure a positive future use of underused sites and which deliver on key priorities for OCC.

Equalities impact

103. The removal of access to some in-use garages is noted however, there are over 700 empty OCC garages and the void rate in BBL is over 50 per cent. There are alternative empty garages within a very short distance of the sites required.

104. There are no further adverse impacts in undertaking this activity, with the potential to improve provision for persons in housing need, through the provision of more affordable and accessible housing to better meet client needs.
105. **Environmental considerations**
106. For schemes delivered within the HRA: OX Place (OCHL) and OCC aim to deliver a 40% carbon reduction (on 2022 building regulations) on all new developments. A fabric first approach and focus on renewable energy contribute to this work. The OCLT is seeks to ensure these standards as a minimum requirement, and target delivery that is as close to net-zero as they can viably achieve.
107. The Council and OCLT aims to deliver homes for the benefit of the wider community and as such has a commitment delivering high quality and environmentally sustainable homes.

Report author	Dave Scholes
Job title	Affordable Housing Supply Corporate Lead
Service area or department	Housing Services
Telephone	01865 252636
e-mail	dscholes@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers:	None
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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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To: Cabinet
Date: 24 January 2024
Report of: Head of Financial Services
Title of Report: Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2024/25

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To seek approval for changes to the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) – Finance and Asset Management
Corporate Priority:	Enable an Inclusive Economy Support Thriving Communities
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24
Recommendation: That Cabinet resolves to:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approve the increase in the income bands used in the Council Reduction Scheme for 2024/25 as per table 2; 2. Note that no further changes are being recommended to the scheme for 2024/25; and 3. Recommend to Council to adopt the new Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25. 	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Consultation Questions
Appendix 2	Risk Register
Appendix 3	Initial Equality Impact Assessment
Appendix 4	Glossary of Terms

Introduction and background

1. In April 2013, the national Council Tax Benefit (CTB) scheme was replaced by a new Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme. The CTB scheme was funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and supported people on low incomes by reducing the amount of council tax they had to pay.

2. The CTR scheme is for working age customers and determined locally by Councils rather than nationally by the DWP. The separate scheme that exists for pension age recipients is a national scheme prescribed by regulation and cannot be varied locally. The basic calculation for CTR is an assessment of the household income versus the amount of money that central government says the household needs to live off. A household can be a single person, couples, families with children etc. The scheme works by applying discounts against the council tax liability based on the financial circumstances of a homeowner. The discount reduces the amount of council tax income to be collected by the authority. Whilst the Government initially provided funding for the new local schemes through the Revenue Support Grant, since the Grant has now reduced to zero there is no funding provided by central government for any CTR scheme.
3. Councils are required to review their CTR working age scheme annually and determine whether to revise it. To change its scheme a council is required by law to:
 - Consult with the major precepting authorities
 - Consult with other persons it considers are likely to have an interest in the operation of the scheme.

The CTR scheme itself must be adopted by the Council, and the approval of the scheme cannot be delegated to an officer or committee.

4. The CTR scheme must take account of and support:
 - Work incentives and in particular avoid disincentives for those moving into work;
 - The Council's duties to protect vulnerable people (under the Equality Act 2010, the Care Act 2014, the Child Poverty Act 2010, the Housing Act 1996); and
 - The Armed Forces Covenant which protect those people who have served in the British armies.
5. 2018/19 was the first year that Oxford City Council (OCC) amended its CTR scheme to that introduced by the Government in 2013-14. From 2019/20 and subsequent years, further amendments were made, including moving to an Income Banded Scheme initially for Universal Credit claimants and then across all Working Age claimants. The Council's scheme still provides a reduction of up to 100% against the council tax liability.
6. When the Council set its budget in February 2023 the annual estimated total loss of council tax income arising from CTR was £12.8 million based on the current CTR caseload. The Council's share of this loss of income based on the Council's Band D council tax at the time that the budget was set was £1.9m
7. The balance of the income loss is picked up by the major preceptors, Oxfordshire County Council and Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner.
8. There has been a small decrease in caseload despite a pause in the roll out of Universal Credit as the DWP diverted resources to deal with new claims. The cost to the Council and its major preceptors from loss of council tax income increased due to the increase in the County Council precept for 2023-24.
9. Further funding was granted to those people who were in receipt of Council Tax Reduction as of 1st April 2023, of £25 by the Department for Levelling Up, Communities and Housing (DLUHC) and by an additional amount of £25 paid by Oxfordshire County Council to take into account the increase in Council Tax charge for 2023-24.
10. Any increase in the amount of Council Tax due each April will see the amount of CTR increase proportionally, thus increasing the cost of the CTR scheme.
11. Table 1 below sets out the cost and caseload (number of CTR claimants) for the OCC CTR scheme since its introduction. The cost of the scheme is shared by Oxford City Council

(15.31%), Oxfordshire County Council (73.83%) and Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner (10.86%) in accordance with the proportion of council tax levied by each. The table shows the increase in the cost of the scheme to the authority since 2019-20. Our latest forecast would indicate an increase in the cost since we set the budget for 2023-24 of around £98,762.

Table 1 Cost of CTR to the City Council and its major preceptors					
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Estimate 2023/24
Cost of Pension Age	£3,554,232	£3,841,522	£3,408,679	£3,418,595	£3,589,524
Pension Age caseload	2,918	2,964	2,657	2,549	2,436
Cost of Working Age	£6,459,250	£7,609,169	£8,977,962	£9,478,093	£9,951,997
Working age caseload	5,303	5,871	7,002	6,628	6,543
Total Cost	£10,013,482	£11,450,691*	£12,386,641	£12,896,688	£13,541,521
Total Caseload	8,221	8,835	9,659	9,177	8,979
Cost of the scheme to OCC	£1,579,126	£1,774,857*	£1,893,876*	£1,974,444	£2,073,206

Note that figures marked * are net of any discretionary amounts awarded under s13a. During 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 additional funding was received that allowed us to award a discretionary CTR amount to those liable to pay Council Tax.

12. The Council's caseload has increased by 342 cases since the start of the 2020/21 due to the Covid pandemic. The table shows that whilst the caseload increased significantly in 2021/22, it has again dropped to the current level of 6,628. Expenditure is increased due to the increase in the council tax charge. The Council still receives on average 40 claims per week, demonstrating that the demand is high for this support.

13. Appendix 1 shows the consultation questions for the 2024/25 schemes. These are summarised as:

- Whether or not to increase the Income Bands or to freeze at current levels. With CPI inflation at 6.7% in September 2023, the significant increase to the bands will increase the cost to the scheme overall.
- The income bandings suggested below are reflective of the autumn budget statement in December 2023 being used are shown in Table 2. The figures have been calculated using the following:
 - Band 1 is equivalent to 16 hours on the National Minimum Wage (NMW £11.44 per hour from April 2024) rounded upwards
 - Band 2 is equivalent to 24 hours on the NMW rounded upwards
 - Band 3 is equivalent to 30 hours on the Oxford living wage (OLW £12.49 per hour from April 2024) rounded upwards
 - Band 4 equivalent to the difference between the top of Band 3 and the Band 5 figure
 - Band 5 is the Benefit Cap amount for couples (£423.46) plus 6.7% CPI

	Current	Revised	
Band	Weekly Income	Weekly Income	Discount received
1	£0-£167.00	£0 - £184.00	100%
2	£167.01-£251.00	£184.01 - £275.00	75%
3	£251.01-£341.00	£275.01 - £375.00	50%
4	£341.01-£467.00	£375.01 - £452.00	25%
5	£467.01 and above	£452.01 and above	0%

- It is normal for a council to have a banded scheme nationally as this reduces the cost of administration and simplifies the scheme for local people to easy understand the income that can be earned before it will affect any Council Tax Reduction entitlement.

In the consultation process, the public survey agreed that 78.85% should use a banded scheme. A further 71.72% surveyed stated that the bands should be increased.

14. In balancing its medium-term financial plan for the next 4 years the Council is reluctantly considering making changes to the CTR scheme to limit the amount on which CTR support to 85% of the council tax liability rather than the current 100% in 2025-26, or alternative changes which would lead to a similar reduction in expenditure. Although this will be consulted on more formally next year a question was asked this year to test of the strength of feeling of the principle with 60% of respondents saying that they would agree with such a proposal.

Consultation Process

15. The consultation process from July 2023 was for the statutory 8-week period. The service asked the public by either a paper form (available in the library or by post) or electronic forms on whether a minimum council tax amount should be made by all working age claimants. Further questions were asked if all members of the household should be contributing to the Council Tax charge, such as adult children or other family members. The full results of this survey are in appendix 1.
16. There are no changes to the responses from previous years that at a high level the public would like those financially vulnerable to be supported and those who can contribute should do so.
17. Further questions were asked in the consultation process relating to the administration of the CTR scheme, such as the use of paper letters, use of the on-line forms and asking the public how they wish to be contacted when discussing their claims. This information will feed into the savings that the council could realise if there is a greater uptake of the on-line functionality as this will reduce costs to printing and postage. The council is not proposing to move all claimants to an on-line function but will be promoting this option to those people who wish to use this method of communication with the service.
18. Questions were also asked as to the barriers for those people who do not use online facilities. These answers will be fed into the corporate strategy of on-line functionality to support those members of the public with contacting the council.
19. A review was made of those 435 people who contributed to the consultation to ensure that it was a fair reflection of the caseload make-up. The survey was a successful process as

Appendix 1 demonstrates that the respondents reflected those who benefit from the council scheme and that the answers are a good reflection of public opinion.

Discretionary support

20. The Council Tax Regulations make provision for discretionary support to be made available on application by a customer who is facing difficulty paying their Council Tax.

Financial implications

21. The current cost of the CTR Scheme has been factored into the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan with the Council bearing the full cost of its share estimated at £1.9m for 2024-25. The cost of the scheme has already increased due to increased CTR arising from the cost-of-living crisis and this may increase further as the cost-of-living crisis affects people within the city with the burden of paying household bills. Any further increases in the council tax charge in 2024/25 will also lead to increased CTR and reduced income for the Council.
22. The proposed consultation sought views on changes which affect the future affordability of the scheme. It is worth noting that any changes to the scheme can only affect working age claimants as the scheme for pensioners as set by central government may not be changed. This limits the impact of the total cost of the whole scheme as the council only has the jurisdiction to make changes to part of the expenditure.

Legal implications

23. Local Council Tax Support came into effect on 1 April 2013 pursuant to the Local Government Finance Act 1992. Section 13A(2) of that Act (as amended) provides:
- 'Each billing authority in England must make a scheme specifying the reductions which are to apply to amounts of council tax payable, in respect of dwellings situated in its area, by—
- (a) persons whom the authority considers to be in financial need, or
 - (b) persons in classes consisting of persons whom the authority considers to be, in general, in financial need.'
24. Schedule 1A of that Act prescribes what must be included in a Council Tax Reduction Scheme, and places a duty on the authority, each financial year, to consider whether to revise its scheme or replace it with another scheme. The scheme states the classes of person who are to be entitled to a reduction, the type of reduction and whether there are different reductions for different classes. The scheme should also set out the procedure to apply for a reduction and the appeal procedure.
25. Before preparing a scheme, the authority must (in the following order)—
- (a) Consult any major precepting authority which has power to issue a precept to it,
 - (b) Publish a draft scheme in such manner as it thinks fit, and
 - (c) consult such other persons as it considers are likely to have an interest in the operation of the scheme.
26. The Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) 2012 further prescribes what must be included in the scheme.
27. The scheme must be approved by Full Council no later than 11 March before the financial year it relates to. After approval, the scheme must be published.
28. Since the introduction of CTR schemes, there have been a number of legal challenges against other local schemes. Most of these challenges have been in relation to the consultation undertaken and have questioned whether due regard was given to any equality impact assessment when changes were made to schemes. A Supreme Court ruling in 2014 (*R. (on the application of Moseley) v London Borough of Haringey*) determined that consultation on changes to council tax reduction schemes must provide such information as

necessary in order for consultees to express meaningful views on the proposal. Enough had to be said about realistic alternatives, and the reasons for a preferred choice, to enable the consultees to make an intelligent response in respect of the scheme. This would include an option for any current scheme to be retained on the same level of funding with a consequent reduction in funding for other services. There are questions in the consultation paper on these options.

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

29. By sending details of the consultation electronically we are reducing the use of paper and reducing the environmental impact of transporting these by post.
30. No other carbon or environmental impacts have been identified as a result of this proposal.

Level of risk

31. A risk register is attached at Appendix 2. The identified risks relate to the undertaking of consultation, rather than the changes to the CTR scheme.

Equalities impact

32. An Initial Equalities Impact Assessment is attached at Appendix 3.

Report author	Laura Bessell
Job title	Local Taxation& Service Delivery Manager
Service area or department	Financial Services
Telephone	01865 252649
e-mail	Lbessell@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers: None

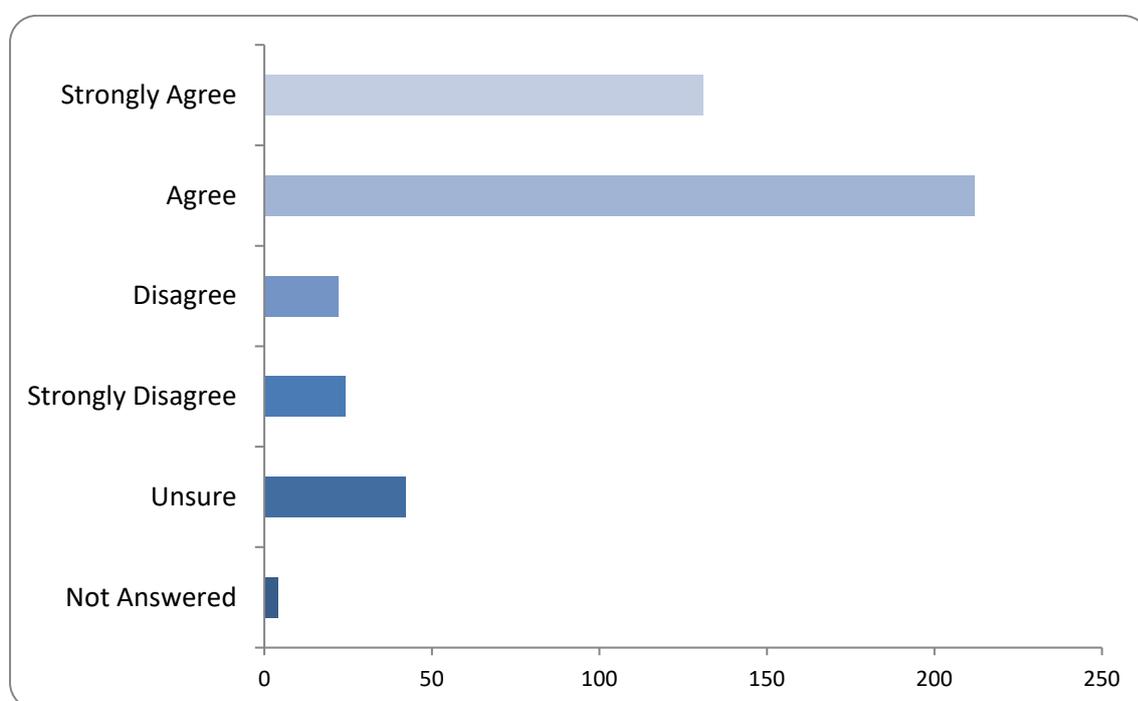
Benefits/Council Tax Reduction Scheme Consultation

<https://consultation.oxford.gov.uk/financial-services/council-tax-reduction>

The activity ran from 11/07/2023 to 04/09/2023.

Responses to this survey: **435**

1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the principle of using income bands for deciding how much support people get in paying their Council Tax?



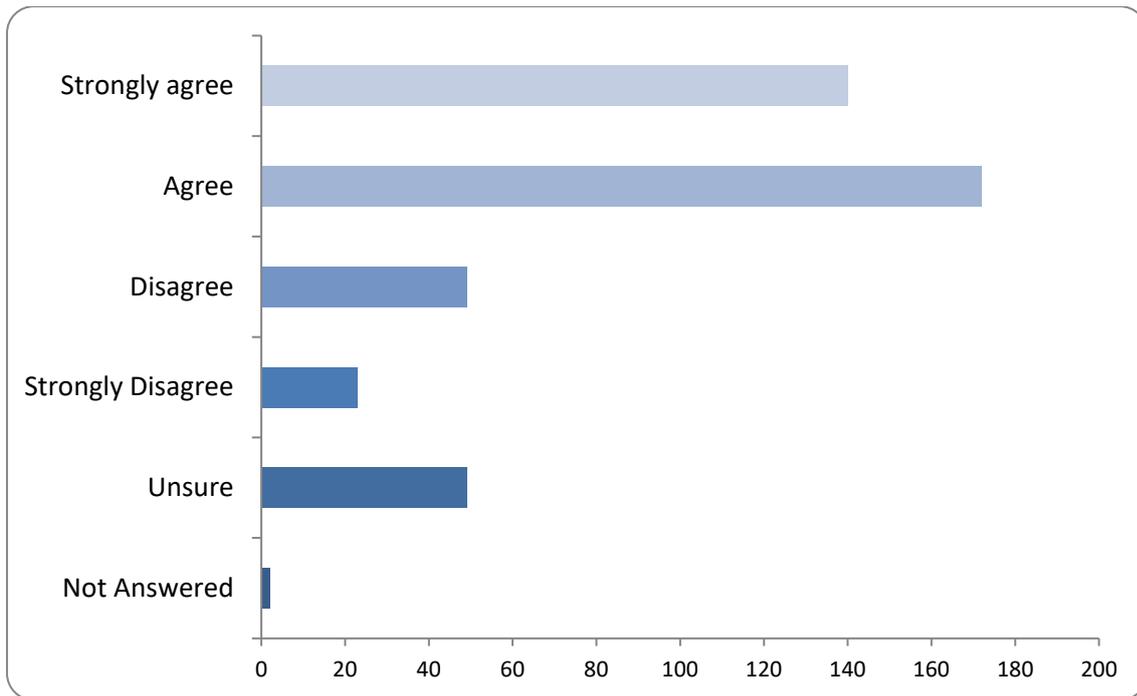
Option	Total	Percent
Strongly Agree	131	30.11%
Agree	212	48.74%
Disagree	22	5.06%
Strongly Disagree	24	5.52%
Unsure	42	9.66%

Not Answered	4	0.92%
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2: Consumer Price Index Inflation last year was 10.1%.

If we increased the income bands by 10.1% from 1st April 2024, anyone with a household income of less than £26,728 would qualify for some support.

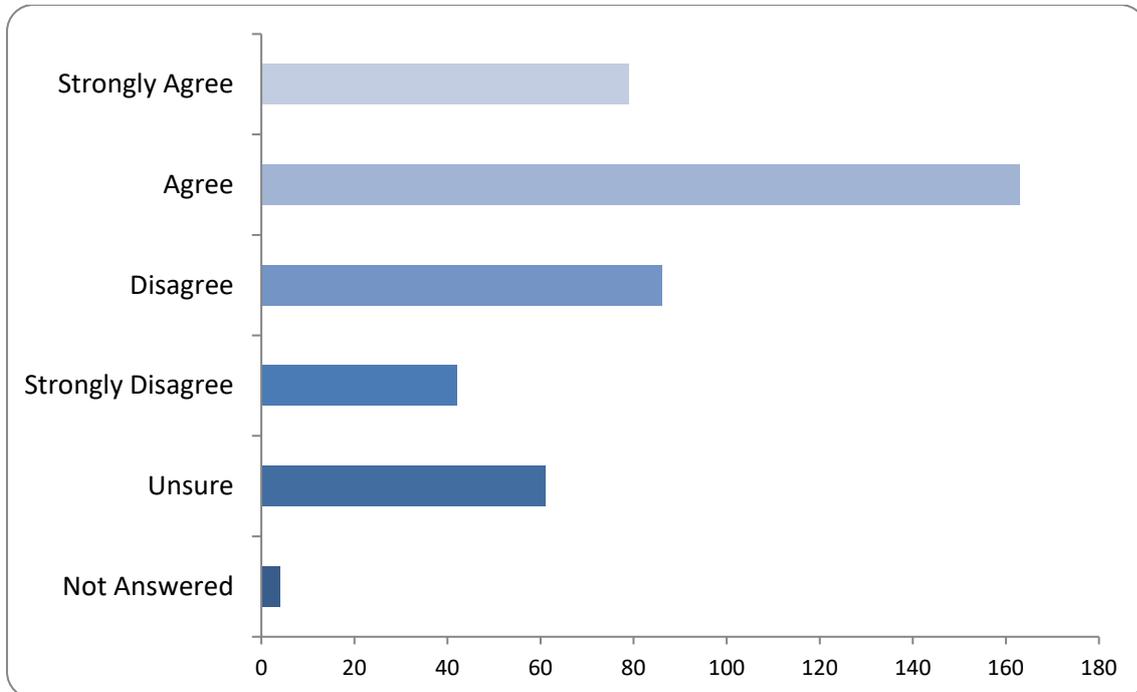
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to uprate the income bands from 2024/25 in line with inflation?



Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	140	32.18%
Agree	172	39.54%
Disagree	49	11.26%
Strongly Disagree	23	5.29%
Unsure	49	11.26%
Not Answered	2	0.46%

3: Increasing the bands by 5% from 1st April 2024, anyone with a household income of less than £25,480 would qualify for some support.

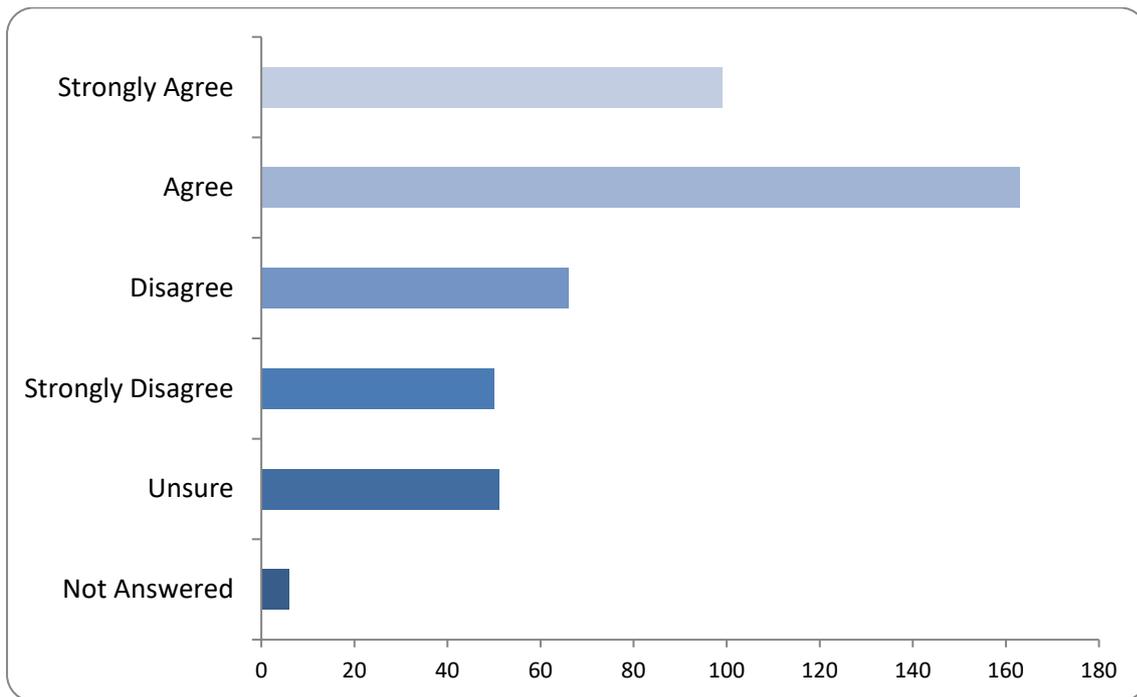
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to uprate the income bands from 2024/25 by a lower percentage such as 5%?



Option	Total	Percent
Strongly Agree	79	18.16%
Agree	163	37.47%
Disagree	86	19.77%
Strongly Disagree	42	9.66%
Unsure	61	14.02%
Not Answered	4	0.92%

4: In our current local scheme support is calculated on the household income, which means the applicant’s income and their partner’s income are taken into account. Anyone who is over the age of 18 and living in the property, but not named on the council tax bill, for example a grown up son or daughter or another relative, is expected to contribute towards paying the council tax charge, unless they fall into an exemption category based on their personal circumstances.

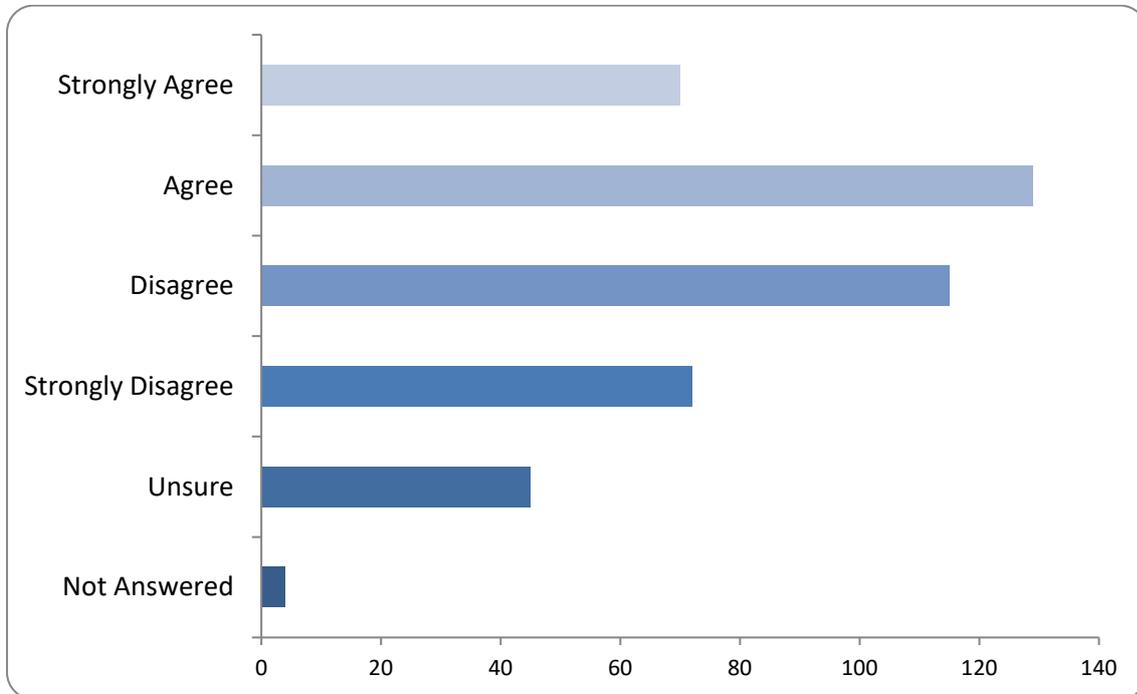
To what extent do you agree or disagree that adult family members should be expected to make a contribution to paying the council tax charge



Option	Total	Percent
Strongly Agree	99	22.76%
Agree	163	37.47%
Disagree	66	15.17%
Strongly Disagree	50	11.49%
Unsure	51	11.72%
Not Answered	6	1.38%

5: The council may be able to make a cost saving, by making letters showing how the level of any reduction is calculated, available online rather than posting them out to customers.

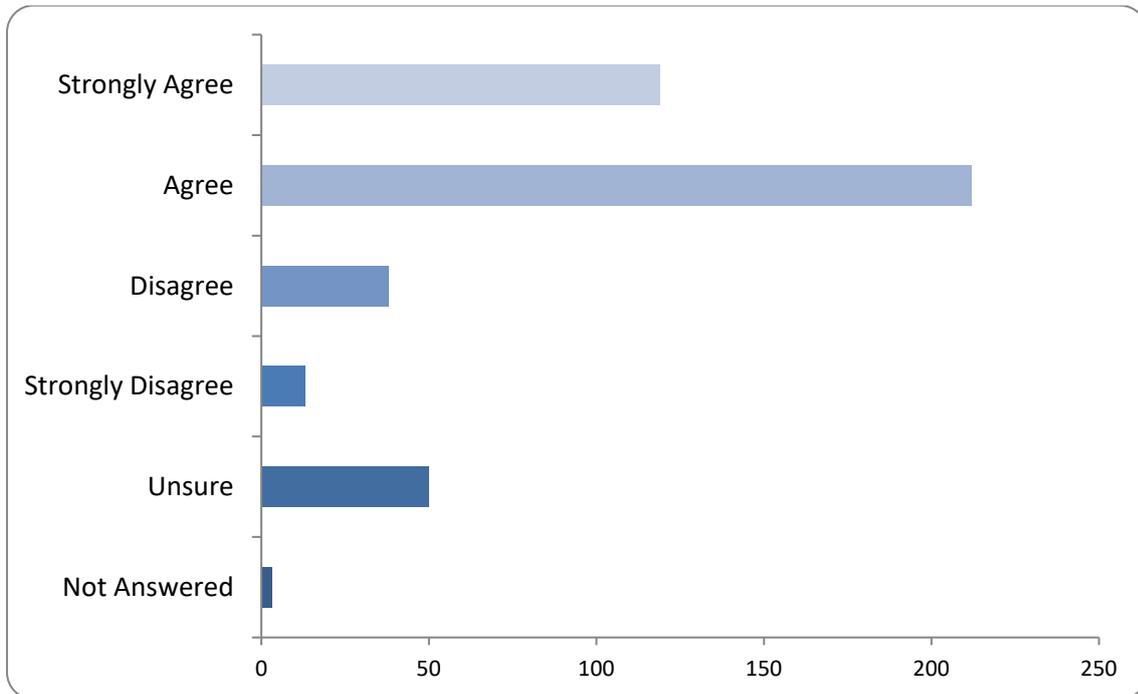
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the council making details of the level of council tax reduction calculated only available online?



Option	Total	Percent
Strongly Agree	70	16.09%
Agree	129	29.66%
Disagree	115	26.44%
Strongly Disagree	72	16.55%
Unsure	45	10.34%
Not Answered	4	0.92%

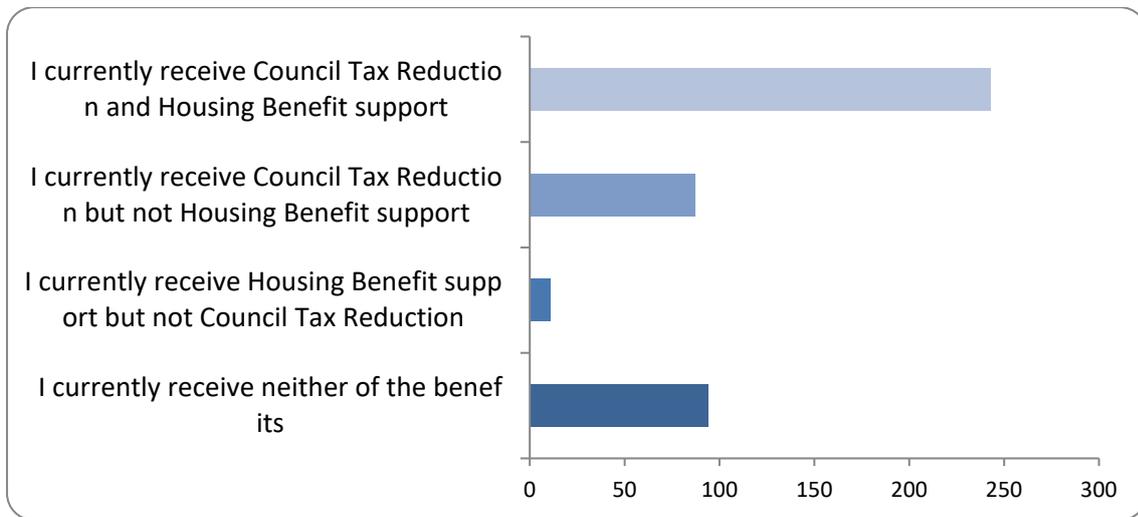
6: Our current council tax reduction scheme allows for an application to be backdated for one month before the date of the application if the applicant was not able to apply sooner and had a good reason for this. It may be possible for a change in the law to cause a charge to be applied for a period that is longer than a month in the past.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the council allowing longer than one month to apply for a council tax reduction where a customer’s council tax charge has been changed due to a change of law.



Option	Total	Percent
Strongly Agree	119	27.36%
Agree	212	48.74%
Disagree	38	8.74%
Strongly Disagree	13	2.99%
Unsure	50	11.49%
Not Answered	3	0.69%

7: Do you currently receive Council Tax Reduction based on your income for help with your Council Tax charge or Housing Benefit support based on your income for help with your rent?



Option	Total	Percent
I currently receive Council Tax Reduction and Housing Benefit support	243	55.86%
I currently receive Council Tax Reduction but not Housing Benefit support	87	20.00%
I currently receive Housing Benefit support but not Council Tax Reduction	11	2.53%
I currently receive neither of the benefits	94	21.61%

8. What do you feel is a reasonable processing time for:

a) New Claims



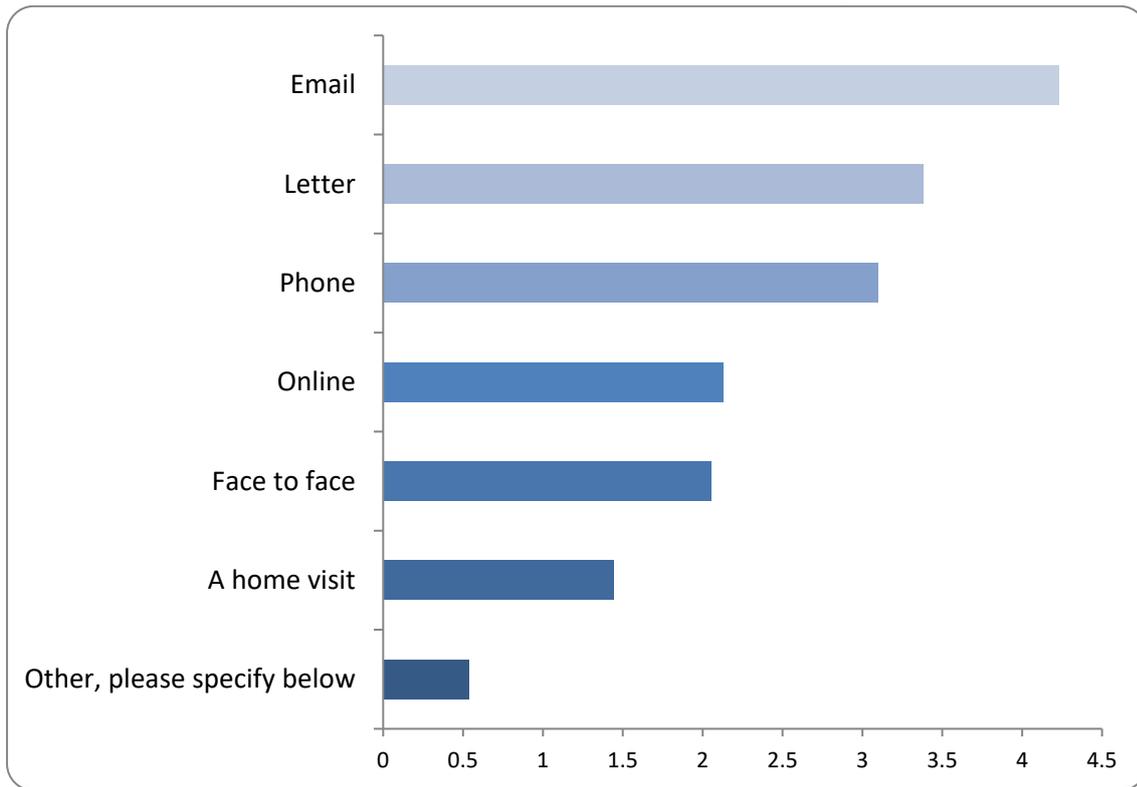
Option	Total	Percent
Within 1 week	47	13.95
1-2 weeks	116	34.42
2-3 weeks	53	15.73
Within a month	104	30.86
4-6 weeks	11	3.26
6 weeks or longer	6	1.78

b) Changes in circumstances



Option	Total	Percent
Within 1 week	70	22.29
1-2 weeks	119	37.90
2-3 weeks	40	12.74
Within a month	72	22.93
4-6 weeks	8	2.55
6 weeks or longer	5	1.59

9: How would you prefer to communicate with us about your benefits?



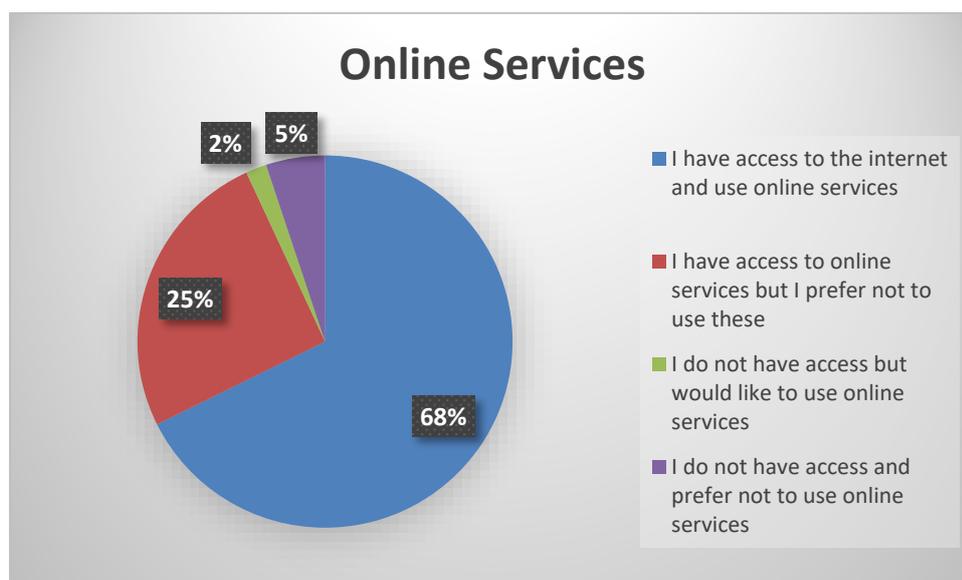
Item	Ranking
Email	4.23
Letter	3.38
Phone	3.10
Online	2.13
Face to face	2.06
A home visit	1.44
Other, please specify below	0.54

Other:

Method	Number
Text	7
Zoom/Teams	3
Via a nominated third party (family member/POA/support worker)	2
Other method (e.g phone, email, face to face) but written confirmation by letter	1
Chat (live chat?)	1
AI	1
An appointment for face to face with more notice	1

Pidgeon	1
I want to provide info in writing (letter/email) but if I have a question phone up or see someone face to face	1
I want to have a choice	1
Whatsapp	1

10. Which of the following describes you best about the usage of our online services?

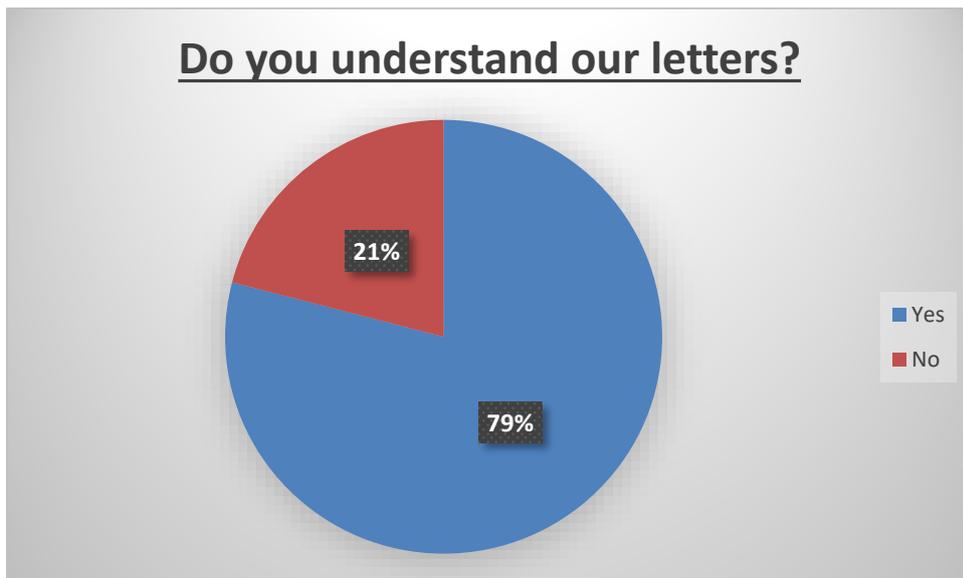


Option	Total	Percent
I have access to the internet and use online services	226	67.66
I have access to online services but I prefer not to use these	85	25.45
I do not have access but would like to use online services	6	1.80
I don't have access and prefer not to use online services	17	5.09

Do you have any other comments or suggestions about our online services?

Theme	Number
It needs to be simpler	13
I can access but I am worried about those who are elderly, disabled or financially excluded	13
I am elderly/disabled and this makes it difficult	12
Suggestions	10
I don't have the knowledge/skills to use	7
I have never used/don't want to	7
There are technical problems with it	7
I am not happy about how my case was dealt with	5
Data Retention	3
I am happy/Thank you/things are better	2

11. Do you understand the letters that we send you to notify you of our decision?

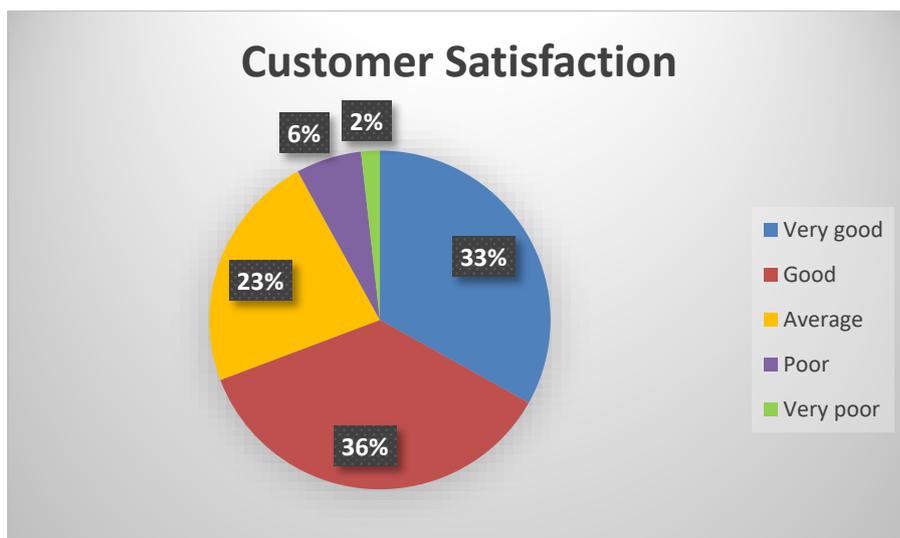


Option	Total	Percent
Yes	264	79.04
No	70	20.96

Please give further explanation:

Theme	Number
Too long and wordy/too much information	26
I need someone to help explain them to me	19
I am happy/it is clear/it has improved	17
The calculations are hard to understand	16
I understand but I find it difficult	15
I don't like the tone of the letter	5
There has been a delay in getting the letter and I don't know if all reported changes have been made	4
Other Suggestions	6
I don't like how my benefit is calculated	3

12. How satisfied are you with the Benefits Service overall?



Option	Total	Percent
Very good	112	33.14
Good	122	36.09
Average	77	22.78
Poor	21	6.21
Very poor	6	1.78

Is there anything that you feel the Benefits Service do well or could do better?

Theme	Number
Quicker response to changes and claims	29
I am happy/things have improved	19
Suggestion	17
I can't afford cost of living increases	13
Improve letters	8
Don't go back so far and raise overpayments	7
I am not happy with suspensions	6
Contact us more often	6
Comment on phone line	5
How my case is calculated	4
Changing benefit so regularly causes financial problems	4
Employ more staff	2
Delay to appeal/recon	2
I didn't know how to report my changes	1

How does your disability impact on your ability to contact us?

Reason	Number
Cognitive impairment	4
Deaf/hearing loss	9
PTSD	2
Anxiety	9
Mental health issues	8
Dementia/Parkinsons	3
ME/MS	2
Speech impediment	2
Memory problems	3
Mobility issues	5
Autism	4
Brain fog/difficulty understanding	9
Sight problems	2
I am a carer so do not the time to contact	2
I cannot use the phone/speak to people (not specified)	3

I have congenital hearing loss and consequently have a mild lisp when speaking. If I have an automated voice on end of the phone asking me to speak to IT!!! This is hopeless for me. Therefore a voice with a heart beat is essential.

I find trying to make a phone call challenging. Having to listen to all the menu options, I almost always have forgotten which option to select after listening. This is frustrating and time consuming. It is not always possible to get through on the phone.

However, my daughter is profoundly disabled and I have been delivering nursing- level care for her 24/7 for 32 years. This not only means that I am a highly skilled unpaid worker whose clinical skills exceed the average nurse (District and hospital to home nurses are not trained in some of the interventions I employ daily), I work more than 100 hours per week. Naturally, due to lack of

support from health and social services, I was forced to give up my highly paid career when my daughter was born, resulting in my exhaustion, shocking levels of sleep deprivation and poverty. I find that the council and its employees have no understanding of the intensity of unpaid work and poverty that some unpaid carers are forced into concerning . These are unpaid carers whose careers are too complex for respite or hospital ward nurses to safely care for. This impacts our lives to a level that most of society do not comprehend and I feel that councils need to institute some training to further respect and sensitivity to this sector. The fact that in the sector below you equate my work to looking after the home' speaks volumes. I guess it's marginally better than that other bureaucratic favourite 'economically unproductive', when unpaid carers constitute a far greater number of workers than the NHS and Social Care combined as no save the government billions per annum.

My disability will often get me confused and stressed and i often need my daughters to correspond back for me .

I have Asperger's, Fibromyalgia, copd and Emphysema. I get tongue tied and sensory overload when pushed to answer questions or produce evidence of benefit entitlement when being given a short time to produce them. Face to face or in person at home takes the pressure off of me.

I've mental health issues anxiety and it doesn't help me if you stress me out on the phone as it brings on a panic attack

Amongst other conditions I have anxiety and agoraphobia so communicating in email or online works much better for me. I live in flats and my mailbox is outside so it can be difficult for me to get my post. Also makes phone calls difficult.

I have autism and get flustered and stressed easily and having to speak to multiple different agents on the phone having to explain again and again the same issues and then being told someone will get in touch and the fail to do so and then I have to again make another phonecall and get someone else to explain issues is not conducive with my state of mind.

I suffer from anxiety and panic attack's and social phobia along with long term illness, so if I have to have a meeting or a phone call I would like enough time to come to terms that this is going to happen and take my medication in time with this appointment!

I've got Long Covid and ADHD. This makes understanding things more difficult at times, phone calls are a no go as I need to see all the information written down to process it at my own pace and respond appropriately.

I suffer from PTSD and depression . That is apart from physical issues. Any changes make me very nervous. Even filling this form worries me. So sometimes it feels safe just to ignore things, and hope that "it will go away".

I communicate with God Jesus and the Holy spirit better than you

Any telephone conversation over 15minutes puts me in a hypervigilant state. As a military veteran, I have Physical Challenges, Complex PTSD, Mental Health Challenges, Seasonal Affective Disorder, Incontinence and Sight Impaired. The daily struggles with

reliving experiences and flashbacks from both Afghanistan and Iraq presents with daily depression and anxiety coupled with insomnia which affect affects my overall health. In constant gnawing consciousness and pain.

1. Arthritic fingers causing difficulty with phones and speed of answering a call or dialling a number.
2. compromised ability to hear causing difficulty negotiating call systems and subsequently hearing/understanding advisors responses
3. Very low mobility, being housebound and therefore unable to visit council offices

Title	Risk description	Opp/ threat	Cause	Consequence	Date Raised	Owner	Gross		Current		Residual		Comments	Controls				
							I	P	I	P	I	P		Control description	Due date	Status	Progress %	Action Owner
Challenge to consultation process	Customers challenge the effectiveness of the consultation	Opp	Due regard not given to statutory guidelines or relevant case law.	Any changes in the CTR scheme may not be upheld by Tribunals or Courts, when challenged by a customer.	21/07/20	Laura Bessell	3	2	1	2	1	2		Reference the relevant regulations and case law in planning the consultation	01/01/2024	Green	50	LocalTaxation & Benefit Service Delivery Manager
Increased customer contact	Customers are concerned at potential changes to the support they get and contact the Council about them.	Threat	Poor explanation of changes, and no mitigation planned.	Customers are not clear about the impact of the changes.	21/7/20	Laura Bessell	3	2	1	1	1	1		Simple explanations given of the proposed changes, together with details of mitigation. A glossary of terms is added to reports and consultation details online. Website will be reviewed and 'plain english' approach to discriptions of the scheme	01/01/2024	Green	50	LocalTaxation & Benefit Service Delivery Manager
Council reputation	Proposals for changes not clearly thought through, and impact not properly understood, resulting in damage to Council reputation	Opp	Insufficient modelling undertaken as part of the consultation feedback, and/or impact of changes not properly understood	Informed customers spot impacts of changes that the Council has not properly identified, undermining both the proposals and consultation process.	21/7/20	Laura Bessell	3	3	3	2	3	2		Expert team from different service areas assembled to work on the proposals, time taken to model changes and understand customer impact.	01/01/2024	Green	50	LocalTaxation & Benefit Service Delivery Manager
Financial implications	Costs are not correctly calculated, or a change in economic climate, for example the ending of the current furlough scheme in October 2020 leading to more redundancies means more claimants	Threat	Poor budgetting. Insufficient modelling of anything that affects the number of claimants	Changes are costed incorrectly and lead to an increase in scheme costs	21/7/20	Laura Bessell	4	3	3	2	3	2		Work with Finance Team to ensure funding available and changes costed	01/01/2024	Amber	50	LocalTaxation & Benefit Service Delivery Manager

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Appendix 3

Initial Equalities Impact Assessment screening form

Prior to making the decision, the Council's decision makers considered the following: guide to decision making under the Equality Act 2010:

*The Council is a public authority. All public authorities when exercising public functions are caught by the Equality Act 2010 which became law in December 2011. In making any decisions and proposals, the Council - specifically members and officers - are required to have **due regard** to the **9** protected characteristics defined under the Act. These protected characteristics are: **age, disability, race, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and marriage & civil partnership***

The decision maker(s) must specifically consider those protected by the above characteristics:

- (a) To seek to ensure equality of treatment towards service users and employees;*
- (b) To identify the potential impact of the proposal or decision upon them.*

The Council will also ask that officers specifically consider whether:

- (A) The policy, strategy or spending decisions could have an impact on safeguarding and / or the welfare of children and vulnerable adults*
- (B) The proposed policy / service is likely to have any significant impact on mental wellbeing / community resilience (staff or residents)*

If the Council fails to give 'due regard', the Council is likely to face a Court challenge. This will either be through a judicial review of its decision making, the decision may be quashed and/or returned for it to have to be made again, which can be costly and time-consuming diversion for the Council. When considering 'due regard', decision makers must consider the following principles:

- 1. **The decision maker is responsible for identifying whether there is an issue and discharging it.** The threshold for one of the duties to be triggered is low and will be triggered where there is any issue which needs at least to be addressed.*
- 2. **The duties arise before the decision or proposal is made, and not after and are ongoing.** They require **advance** consideration by the policy decision maker with conscientiousness, rigour and an open mind. The duty is similar to an open consultation process.*
- 3. The decision maker must be **aware of the needs of the duty.***
- 4. The **impact of the proposal or decision must be properly understood first.** The amount of regard due will depend on the individual circumstances of each case. The greater the potential impact, the greater the regard.*
- 5. **Get your facts straight first!** There will be no due regard at all if the decision maker or those advising it make a fundamental error of fact (e.g. because of failing to properly inform yourself about the impact of a particular decision).*
- 6. What does 'due regard' entail?
 - a. **Collection and consideration of data and information;***
 - b. **Ensuring data is sufficient to assess the decision/any potential discrimination/ensure equality of opportunity;****

c. Proper appreciation of the extent, nature and duration of the proposal or decision.

7. **Responsibility** for discharging can't be delegated or sub-contracted (although an equality impact assessment ("EIA") can be undertaken by officers, decision makers must be sufficiently aware of the outcome).
 8. **Document the process** of having due regard! Keep records and make it transparent! If in any doubt carry out an equality impact assessment ("EIA"), to test whether a policy will impact differentially or not. Evidentially an EIA will be the best way of defending a legal challenge. See hyperlink for the questions you should consider <http://occweb/files/seealsodocs/93561/Equalities%20-%20Initial%20Equality%20Impact%20Assessment%20screening%20template.doc>
1. Within the aims and objectives of the policy or strategy which group (s) of people has been identified as being potentially disadvantaged by your proposals? What are the equality impacts?

Council Tax Reduction is claimed by low income households in the city. The following groups are over represented in this cohort compared to the general population:

Women

Single parent households

Ethnic Minorities

People with a disability or lifelong illness

Age is not affected by this scheme as Pensioners are covered by the national default scheme and this consultation relates to the working age CTR scheme only.

2. In brief, what changes are you planning to make to your current or proposed new or changed policy, strategy, procedure, project or service to minimise or eliminate the adverse equality impacts?

Please provide further details of the proposed actions, timetable for making the changes and the person(s) responsible for making the changes on the resultant action plan

At this stage proposals are only being submitted for consultation. The 2024/25 Council Tax Reduction Scheme will be informed by this consultation process.

This will include:

- Whether or not to increase the Income Bands or to freeze at current levels
- If we do increase, to use CPI instead of RPI in line with the DWP up-ratings
- To consider if the banded income approach should take into account family size. Currently the scheme has a single structure for

a total income for all applications, with no regard to household composition

- To consider giving a reduction of up to 100% for passported cases, limiting the reduction to for all other claims up to 85% of the liability
- To automatically reduce the CTR award to a maximum of 75% if there is a non-dependant in the property. In cases where there is a disability benefit in payment for the applicant or an additional adult, then the reduction would not be applied. This mirrors the application of the single person discount.

Within the existing Council Tax regulations, there is provision for discretionary payments to be made to people experiencing hardship. Anyone disadvantaged by the Council Tax Reduction scheme can apply for help from this scheme.

3. Please provide details of whom you will consult on the proposed changes and if you do not plan to consult, please provide the rationale behind that decision.

Please note that you are required to involve disabled people in decisions that impact on them

The main report seeks approval for consultation about changes to the proposed scheme. This includes general public consultation and advice agencies as well as consulting with the major preceptors. We will use electronic means to consult to avoid respondents using paper forms, as with the current Covid-19 pandemic access to the places we would normally place forms is restricted and we also want to limit any opportunity to spread the virus.

4. Can the adverse impacts you identified during the initial screening be justified without making any adjustments to the existing or new policy, strategy, procedure, project or service?

Please set out the basis on which you justify making no adjustments

Within the existing Council Tax regulations, there is provision for discretionary payments to be made to people experiencing hardship. Anyone disadvantaged by the Council Tax Reduction scheme can apply for help from this scheme.

5. You are legally required to monitor and review the proposed changes after implementation to check they work as planned and to screen for unexpected equality impacts.

Please provide details of how you will monitor/evaluate or review your proposals and when the review will take place

The impact will be monitored via applications for discretionary support. This should highlight any areas of concern.

As people see changes in their circumstances, there will be an opportunity to revise the scheme in future years, if there is any unexpected negative impact on certain groups of customers.

We will talk to other Councils who have adopted different approaches to their CTR scheme to see what works well and what doesn't. The Department for Work and Pensions guidance and case law often influences the approach this Council takes as it will inform us of the impact of certain elements of schemes and the adjustments, if any that are needed.

Lead officer responsible for signing off the EqIA: Laura Bessell

Role: Local Taxation & Benefit Service Delivery Manager

Date: 1st October 2023

Glossary of Terms

Working Age	Age for which the Government expect State Pension to not be claimed. Currently age 66.
Uprating	Department for Work and Pensions annual income-related social security benefit increases each April. These benefits, and the amount which the government state is required to live on each week are increased each April by a percentage. The increase is based on either the Retail Price Index (RPI) or Consumer Price Index (CPI) as at September the previous year.
Income Bands	The amount of weekly net income used in the calculation of the award. Some income is not included, such as certain disability benefits. Where income changes but stays within the same band, then there is no change to entitlement, but the change is still recorded.
Capping	This is a ceiling limit on an award. A capping level could be applied to the council tax bands, so instead of applying Council Tax Reduction (CTR) using all the council tax bands A-H, that only bands A-E are applied. This means that the capping level is at a band E Council Tax amount, and those claims for properties in Bands F-H would only see a maximum level of support to a band E Council Tax liability. The claimant would need to pay the difference between their CTR award and their Council Tax liability.
National Minimum Wage	For 2022/23 the rate is £9.50
Oxford Living Wage	For 2022/23 the rate is £10.50
Benefit Cap	<p>The benefit cap is a limit on the total amount of benefit you can get. It applies to most people aged 16 or over who have not reached State Pension Age. A cap is usually applied when a claimant is not in employment for more than 16 hours per week, and is not exempt by disability.</p> <p>The Cap level currently for outer London is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £384.62 per week (£20,000 a year) if you are a couple • £384.62 per week (£20,000 a year) if you are a single parent and your children live with you • £257.69 per week (£13,400 a year) if you are a single adult
Non-dependant	A non-dependant is an adult who lives with you. This doesn't mean your partner or adult children who are still dependent on you – for example, because they are in education. It could be for example, an adult son or daughter who is working or unemployed and who still lives with you. A deduction is made on the assumption that the 'non-dependant' should make a contribution towards your council tax of at least the amount of the deduction.

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Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday 13 December 2023



Committee members present:

Councillor Brown	Councillor Turner
Councillor Chapman	Councillor Hunt
Councillor Lygo	Councillor Munkonge
Councillor Railton	Councillor Linda Smith
Councillor Upton	

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Richard Adams, Community Safety Service Manager
Helen Bishop, Head of Business Improvement
Tom Bridgman, Executive Director (Development)
Lucy Cherry, Policy and Partnerships Officer
Alice Courtney, Scrutiny Officer
Caroline Green, Chief Executive
Tom Hook, Executive Director (Corporate Resources)
Emma Jackman, Head of Law and Governance
Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services
Bill Lewis, Financial Accounting Manager
Emma Lund, Committee and Member Services Officer
Gail Malkin, Head of People
Peter Matthew, Executive Director of People and Communities
Alexander Sutton, Planner
Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy
Rachel Williams, Planning Policy and Place Manager

Apologies:

No apologies were received.

91. Addresses and Questions by Members of the Public

None.

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

None.

93. Councillor Addresses on Neighbourhood Issues

None.

94. Items raised by Cabinet Members

None.

95. Scrutiny Reports

The Scrutiny Committee had met on 4 December 2023, the Climate & Environment Panel had met on 29 November 2023, the Housing & Homelessness Panel had met on 5 December 2023 and the Finance & Performance Panel had met on 6 December 2023. The following reports had been considered:

- i. Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2022/23
- ii. Equalities Update
- iii. LGA Corporate Peer Review – Council Action Plan
- iv. Review of Glyphosate use by Oxford Direct Services to manage weeds on behalf of Oxford City Council
- v. Integrated Performance Report Q2 2023/24
- vi. Treasury Management Mid-Year Report
- vii. City of Sanctuary Accreditation

Items (i) – (iv) had been considered by the Scrutiny Committee on 4 December. In total, thirteen recommendations had been made to Cabinet which were included in the separately published supplement together with Cabinet Members' responses.

The Climate and Environment Panel, at its meeting on 29 November, had made recommendations in relation to two non-Cabinet items which would be reported to Cabinet at a future date.

The Housing and Homelessness Panel, at its meeting on 5 December, had made a recommendation relating to City of Sanctuary accreditation, which was included in the separately published supplement together with the Cabinet Member's response.

The Finance and Performance Panel, at its meeting on 6 December, had considered items (v) and (vi) and had in total made three recommendations on these reports which were included in the separately published supplement together with the Cabinet Member's response. The Panel had also noted the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 and 2024/25 Budget for Consultation in advance of Budget Review Group meetings in January.

96. Alcohol Control and Dog Control Public Spaces Protection Orders

The Executive Director (Communities and People) had submitted a report to seek approval for the implementation of a draft Dog Control Public Spaces Protection Order 2023 and an Alcohol Control Public Spaces Protection Order 2023.

Councillor Mark Lygo, Cabinet Member for Safer and Inclusive Communities, reported that the existing Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) for Dog Control and Alcohol Control had expired on 27 November 2023. PSPOs were required to be reviewed every three years and a decision taken as to whether to extend, vary or discharge them. Cabinet was invited to consider approving renewal of both Orders, noting that

the new draft Alcohol Control PSPO proposed an extension to cover the whole city (rather than only the city centre).

Councillor Lygo highlighted that the Council had a graduated approach to enforcement which required officers to operate at the lowest possible level of intervention suitable to the case, most often involving a process of engagement and words of advice.

Both draft PSPOs had been subject to consultation, and a summary of responses could be found in the report together with data relating to incidents.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the implementation of a Dog Control Public Spaces Protection Order as set out in Appendix 1; and
2. **Approve** the implementation of an Alcohol Control Public Spaces Protection Order as set out in Appendix 6.

97. Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2022/23

The Head of Planning and Regulatory Services had submitted a report to seek approval of the Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement for publication.

Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities clarified that production of the report was a statutory requirement and that the report (i) assessed the effectiveness of the planning policies contained within the Oxford Local Plan 2036; (ii) monitored the implementation of key statutory planning documents; and (iii) provided transparency on how developer contributions were spent on infrastructure. The Authority Monitoring Report for 2022/23 had showed that the Local Plan policies were performing well. Affordable housing (social rent or shared ownership) had made up almost half of the housing built in Oxford over the year, which reflected the Council's commitment to create a thriving city. The Council remained on track to meet the target of providing 10,884 dwellings in the city by 2036, and also had a housing land supply of almost five and a half years. Progress had also been made in increasing the amount of student housing provided which had the effect of protecting existing housing for non-student residents of the city.

Councillor Upton drew attention to a number of key points in the report, including the CIL developer contributions and S106 planning obligations received which had been spent during the year, the majority of which had been spent on community facilities, active travel, affordable housing, and green infrastructure.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2022/23 for publication; and
2. **Authorise** the Planning Policy and Place Manager to make any necessary minor corrections not materially affecting the document prior to publication.

98. Equalities Update

The Head of Business Improvement had submitted a report to (i) present and seek approval for the publication of the annual Workforce Equality Report 2023, the Gender

Pay Gap Report, Ethnicity Pay Gap Report and Disability Pay Gap Report; and (ii) share current progress on the Workforce Equalities Report and Action Plan.

Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies, highlighted that the report gave a full account of how the Council was performing in terms of diversifying its workforce and also included key facts in relation to the gender pay gap, ethnicity pay gap and disability pay gap. Publication of the gender pay gap information was required by law, and the Council voluntarily chose to publish its ethnicity and disability pay gap data. Councillor Chapman highlighted a number of key points arising from the report, including a rise in the percentage of women in senior management, and slight reductions in both the gender and ethnicity pay gaps (which also remained lower than the national average pay gaps). The disability pay gap had risen slightly, although as this related to a small group some caution was needed about interpreting any trends from the data. Councillor Chapman outlined that areas where progress still needed to be made were the number of staff in senior management from ethnic minorities and the overall percentage of staff from ethnic minorities who worked for the Council (currently c14%), although it was noted that it was difficult to effect change quickly given the low staff turnover rate.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the contents of the Workforce Equality Report 2023;
2. **Delegate authority** to the Head of Business Improvement to publish the Workforce Equality Report and to make any changes as may be required before publication following Cabinet discussion;
3. **Approve** the contents of the Gender Pay Gap, Ethnicity Pay Gap and Disability Pay Gap reports for this year; and
4. **Delegate authority** to the Head of Business Improvement to publish the Gender Pay Gap table at paragraph 14 before 30 March 2024, the Ethnicity Pay Gap table at paragraph 24 and the Disability Pay Gap table at paragraph 30 on the Council's website.

99. Review of Glyphosate Use by Oxford Direct Services to manage weeds on behalf of Oxford City Council

The Head of Corporate Strategy had submitted a report to make recommendations to Cabinet about the use of Glyphosate by Oxford Direct Services to control weeds on behalf of Oxford City Council.

Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies introduced the report, which presented the outcome of a review of glyphosate, its use in Oxford, and the cost and effectiveness of alternative weed treatments. The outcome of the review had been to recommend the continued controlled use of glyphosate. In common with many other councils, glyphosate was used very selectively by ODS on behalf of Oxford City Council to manage certain hard to treat weeds in certain locations, including Japanese Knotweed. Whilst alternative weed treatments existed they were both expensive and less effective: several councils which had previously ceased glyphosate use had reverted to it for these reasons.

Councillor Chapman clarified the regulatory position on glyphosate and that it was approved for use in the UK. The European Commission had recently extended glyphosate's licence for another ten years for use in Europe.

In terms of ecology, it was noted that the Council's Ecology Officer had commented that glyphosate was the only proven treatment for invasive species. Failure to treat invasive species also had an adverse effect on biodiversity.

Cabinet heard that glyphosate was used by ODS only in a safe, targeted and controlled way and only where it was needed. Care was taken to ensure that staff who used it wore protective masks and were properly trained, and that weather conditions were suitable.

Councillor Chapman clarified that a decision to approve the continued controlled use of glyphosate would apply across the whole city.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** that the Council continues to use Glyphosate for its current limited purposes with this position kept under periodic review until such point as Government changes its advice on use of this herbicide, or another viable, economic and effective treatment emerges; and
2. **Approve** that the usage of Glyphosate to manage weed intrusion in paved surfaces is delivered uniformly across the city to meet needs.

100. Local Government Association Corporate Peer Review: Council Action Plan

The Chief Executive had submitted a report to update Cabinet on the Council's Action Plan in response to the Corporate Peer review feedback and recommendations of July 2023.

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader, presented the report and outlined the work which had commenced, and the progress which had been made, in addressing the recommendations arising from the review. It was noted that a refresh of the Council's Corporate Plan was due in the near future, and that the recommendations and action plan would help to inform that process.

Cabinet heard that preparation had also begun for the progress review with the LGA, which would take place in March / April 2024.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the Council's Action Plan in response to the July 2023 Corporate Peer review feedback and recommendations; and
2. **Note** the progress that has already been made towards the July 2023 Peer Review recommendations, which are set out in the Action Plan.

101. Amendment to the Authority to Tender Contract for Insurance Services

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report concerning the future provision of the Council's Insurance Services contracts which sought a change to a previously granted delegation.

Councillor Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, outlined that an opportunity had arisen to extend the period of the Council's existing insurance contract. This would be financially beneficial but required a change to the timescale for procuring a new contract and to the relevant delegated authority.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** amended delegated authority to the Head of Financial Services in consultation with the Head of Law and Governance to award a contract for the provision of insurance services to Oxford City Council and group companies from 1st February 2024 for a period of 3 years with options to extend for up to 2 periods of 2 years each, following a compliant procurement exercise.

102. Integrated Performance Report for Q2 2023/24

The Head of Financial Services and Head of Business Improvement had submitted a report to update Cabinet on finance, risk and corporate performance matters as at 30 September 2023.

Councillor Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management highlighted key points arising from the report, which included some forecast adverse variance on the General Fund and HRA, and a number of pressures. These pressures included temporary accommodation overspend, pressures on income and utilities, and delay to the letting of St Aldate's Chambers. There had also been some capital programme slippage. Councillor Turner emphasised that the financial climate remained very challenging.

The Head of Financial Services provided an update for Cabinet on the scheme to redevelop the site at Standingford House, Cave Street which had been approved by Cabinet in November 2021. Due to the uncertain economic climate and the financial challenges associated with progressing the development at the present time (which were outlined in the report), a decision had been taken to pause the scheme. Options for the site would be brought back to Cabinet in a future report.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the projected financial outturn as well as the current position on risk and performance as at 30 September 2023.

103. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 - 2027/28 and 2024/25 Budget for Consultation

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report to propose a Medium-Term Financial Strategy and the 2024/25 Budget for consultation.

Councillor Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management introduced the report and highlighted that costs and pressures on the Council's budget were rising at a rate which could not be matched by income. The Council was therefore forced into an unwelcome position with regard to some of the budget proposals, such as increases in parking charges, reductions to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and reductions in community services and the grants budget. Some negative responses to the consultation were therefore expected.

Councillor Turner summarised that some of the rising pressures which had had to be taken into account within the proposed budget included temporary accommodation

costs, utility costs and inflationary pressures. The anticipated returns from ODS and OXPlace were important in terms of enabling the Council to continue to deliver its priorities. There would also be an additional c £200k per year of Council Tax income arising from the decision taken in February 2023 to implement changes to Council Tax in respect of second homes and properties empty for between one and two years.

The Financial Services team and the Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management were thanked for their work and for managing to achieve a budget which was balanced not only for the next year but also the next 4-5 years within a very challenging financial climate, notwithstanding that this had necessitated some very difficult decisions.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the 2024-25 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budgets for consultation and the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Strategy as set out in Appendices 1-10, noting:
 - a) the Council's General Fund Budget Requirement of £28.536 million for 2024/25 and an increase in the Band D Council Tax of 2.99% or £10.06 per annum representing a Band D Council Tax of £346.36 per annum;
 - b) the Housing Revenue Account budget for 2024/25 of £51.671 million and an increase of 7.7% (£9.27 per week) in social dwelling rents from 1 April 2024 (see paragraphs 78-79) giving a revised weekly average social rent of £129.72 as set out in Appendix 5;
 - c) the increase in shared ownership rental in accordance with the lease as shown in paragraph 86; and
 - d) the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme as shown in Appendix 6;
2. **Agree** the fees and charges shown in Appendix 7;
3. **Delegate authority** to the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Deputy Leader (Statutory) - Finance and Asset Management to determine whether it is financially advantageous for the Council to enter into a Business Rates Distribution Agreement as referred to in paragraphs 18-19 of the report;
4. **Agree** to the proposal to remove the 1 month 100% unfurnished empty homes discount in accordance with paragraph 25 and note the changes to other discounts approved last year by members in accordance with paragraph 20-22 from 1 April 2024; and
5. **Recommend to Council** to approve the appropriation of Roken House from the General Fund to the Housing Revenue Account at a value of £1,850,000 (paragraphs 48 - 50).

104. Treasury Management Mid-Year Review - April to September 2023

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report on the performance of the Treasury Management function for the 6 months to 30 September 2023.

Councillor Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, reported that Treasury Management had performed favourably against budget. This had largely been due to external borrowing being less than anticipated due to delays in the capital programme, as well as lower than anticipated lending to companies.

Cabinet resolved to:

- 1. **Note** the performance of the Treasury Management function for the six months to 30 September 2023.

105.Minutes

Cabinet resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2023 as a true and accurate record.

106.Dates of Future Meetings

Meetings are scheduled for the following dates:

24 January 2024

7 February 2024

13 March 2024

17 April 2024

12 June 2024

All meetings start at 6.00pm.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.34 pm

Chair

Date: Wednesday 24 January 2024

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.

To: Council
Date: 29 January 2024
Report of: Head of Corporate Strategy
Title of Report: Partnership Report: Future Oxfordshire Partnership

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	Report to update Council on the work of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member with responsibility:	Councillor Susan Brown, Leader and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships
Corporate Priority:	Inclusive Economy, Deliver More Affordable Housing, Support Thriving Communities and Zero Carbon Oxford
Policy Framework:	Corporate Strategy 2020/2024
Recommendation: That the Council resolves to:	
1. Note the annual update report on the work of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and the Oxford Inclusive Economy Partnership	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Future Oxfordshire Partnership Annual Report, November 2023
Appendix 2	Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership Annual Report, November 2023

Introduction and background

1. This report provides an overview of the:
 - a. Progress across various workstreams overseen by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) up to and including August 2023. The information is derived from the FOP Annual Report, November 2023 (see Appendix 1).

This overview emphasises Oxford and incorporates perspectives from the Oxford City Council. The report also encompasses details of other partnership arrangements and engagements in which the FOP has participated.

- b. The Oxford Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP), focusing on the progress highlights as outlined in the OIEP Annual Report of November 2023 (refer to Appendix 2).

Background

2. The FOP operates as a joint committee involving the six councils of Oxfordshire and key strategic partners. Its primary focus is on achieving the ambitious outcomes outlined in the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision for Long-Term Sustainable Development.
3. The FOP accomplishes this by:
 - a. Coordinating local efforts to manage economic, housing, and infrastructure development inclusively, aiming to maximise local social and environmental benefits.
 - b. Facilitating the collaborative execution of projects by the councils of Oxfordshire in the areas of economic development, strategic planning (including infrastructure and housing), and climate change.
 - c. Actively working to secure funding to support the goals outlined in the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision.
 - d. Representing Oxfordshire on matters of regional and national significance.
4. Since July 2023 Councillor Brown/ Oxford City Council has assumed the Chair and at the Council's bidding a workshop was organised in September 2023 to review the future direction of the FOP.
5. In July 2023, the Cabinet made the decision to approve the revised Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding for the FOP. These revisions took effect after the approval by each of the six Oxfordshire councils.
6. The FOP centres its efforts on four key focus areas: environment, affordable housing delivery, infrastructure delivery, and planning. These areas are guided by four corresponding Advisory Groups consisting of lead cabinet members from each council, alongside four corresponding officer groups. A FOP Scrutiny Panel, comprising 18 members (three from each authority), reviews the Partnership's work. Its chair is Oxford City Councillor Katherine Miles, this scrutiny is complemented by the support of a small team of specialist officers.
7. The [Oxfordshire Strategic Vision for long term sustainable development](#), a non-statutory document, was officially endorsed by the FOP in March 2021. Following this endorsement, it received approval from each of the Oxfordshire councils. This vision outlines the FOP's ambitious long-term goals, envisioning the county's potential state by the year 2050.
8. FOP has agreed the creation of an Oxfordshire narrative to underpin work in delivering outcomes of the Strategic Vision. This [Place Narrative](#) is being commissioned for Oxfordshire for the FOP.
9. Each authority maintains control over both their non-executive and executive functions concerning economic development, housing provision, strategic spatial planning, and strategic transport planning.
10. The FOP convenes six times annually, typically in a non-decision-making role. Together with the Advisory Sub-Groups and Scrutiny Panel it is supported by a small team of officers.

Work programmes

11. Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan:

Oxford City Council is actively involved in all of these other than the work on carbon sequestration, which is currently being led by the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership. A £5 million joint bid to the Innovate UK Pioneer Places Fund involving all six councils and other partners was ultimately unsuccessful however, elements of the proposed Future Fit Oxfordshire (FOx) programme will be retained and taken forward - supporting the countywide work on both buildings retrofit and green finance.

Update on the Local Areas Energy Planning work stream:

- a. Given the significant grid capacity constraints in the city Local Area Energy Planning (LAEP) is one of the most urgent workstrands - as we need a robust electricity system to be able to accommodate the significant increase in zero carbon technologies. The loss of a single secondary substation in Osney Island earlier in 2023 required all locally installed solar panels to be switched to avoid overloading the network. Officers from all councils are working directly with distribution network operators and the Low Carbon Hub to develop detailed energy plans to accommodate the transition.
- b. An Executive Steering Board and a multi-agency working group have been established. These groups bring together council representatives, Electricity Distribution Network Operators (DNOs), the gas distributor, and other key strategic partners. They aim to provide strategic direction and practical support to integrate the local area energy planning approach in Oxfordshire.
- c. The FOP has allocated £150,000 to local area energy planning work stream. Oversight and input into the development of the work stream will be provided by the Infrastructure Advisory Group, with updates to the FOP.
- d. Linked to the LAEP work Oxford City Council is providing support to the successor project to Local Energy Oxford (LEO). Project LEO Neighbourhoods (or LEON), is focused on identifying grid edge solutions to balance supply and demand, reducing the need for so much physical network infrastructure. The Alpha phase of LEON work has completed, and a decision is awaited on Government funding following submission of the Beta phase bid by Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks, which is leading the LEON workstream.

Buildings decarbonisation:

- The initiative to "Expand and scale up retrofit delivery" involves the enhancement and broadening of existing retrofit programs in Oxfordshire. Notable examples include:
 - a. Homes Upgrade Grant: This program is dedicated to providing energy efficiency upgrades and introducing low-carbon heating to households experiencing fuel poverty in Oxfordshire, particularly those without gas central heating. The expectation is to upgrade a minimum of 310 properties.
 - b. Heat Pump Ready: This initiative imposes a requirement to incorporate a minimum of 25% heat pumps in specified areas, namely Rose Hill in

Oxford and North-West Bicester in Cherwell.

- c. In addition to these ongoing programs, the Council is leading work through funding under the Government's Pioneer Places programme to develop innovative and cost-effective solutions to facilitate the deployment of decarbonised buildings. This work, involving partners such as the Low Carbon Hub includes testing the concept of a Future Fit One Stop Shop (FOSS) – to provide comprehensive solutions to enhance the efficiency of building retrofitting processes.

Scale up programmes to address the retrofit skills gap:

The initiative involves hosting stakeholder workshops to address skills gaps and explore funding opportunities through the FOSS. Additionally, there is a significant investment of £4 million in capital funding, drawn from the government's Capital Growth Fund and OxLEP, to establish a new training and education centre named Retrofit Academy. This centre will focus on the sustainable construction sector and operate across three sites. Over the next five years, it aims to provide training for 400 apprenticeships and cater to 240 full-time students and 300 part-time students, contributing to the development of a skilled workforce in the field.

Accelerate the roll out of publicly accessible EV (electric vehicles) charge points:

- a. In Oxfordshire, there is already an established joint strategy, the Oxfordshire Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (EVI) Strategy, and a collaborative Cross-Authority stakeholder working group known as the Oxfordshire EV Infrastructure Steering Group. Oxford City Council has also adopted a city level strategy and implementation plan for EV infrastructure deployment. Current work at the countywide level, linked to the EAG work programme has included design and preparation for the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funded EVI deployment in Oxford. Linked to that, there has been discussion with County over the transfer to them of Go Ultra Local Oxford (GULO) funding and responsibilities for the deployment of onstreet EVI. In total LEVI and GULO should see an additional 300 EV charge points installed in the city. Additionally, plans have been agreed at countywide level for the deployment of 500 cable channels to enable onstreet home charging, using part of the LEVI funding, it is hoped the ODS (Oxford Direct Services) GUL-e solution will be selected for use.

Explore opportunities to enhance carbon sequestration through land use change, including targeted habitat restoration and creation:

- Oxfordshire Local Nature is leading on the delivery of this work stream. The progress to date includes:
 - a. *Engagement with Businesses:* Ongoing discussions with businesses positioned to invest in land-based carbon sequestration. Many businesses express interest in diversifying risk across various carbon offsetting projects in Oxfordshire, encompassing nature-based initiatives, solar projects, and retrofit programs.
 - b. *Draft Nature Finance Strategy:* The Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership has developed a draft Nature Finance Strategy. This strategy outlines the creation of a natural capital investment framework that aligns with the evolving Oxfordshire

Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The framework aims to facilitate environmental enhancement projects. Oxford City Council officers are working to ensure clear linkage between the work on nature finance and Local Nature Recovery and work also ongoing to define areas that can be utilised to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), in cases where a developer cannot meet BNG requirements onsite.

Explore new funding mechanisms to support delivery of net zero activity:

- a. *Green Bonds*: Initial discussions within the Environment Advisory Group have centered on the potential use of green bonds to support the deployment of renewable energy technologies.
- b. *Area-Based Insetting Trial*: The Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership, in collaboration with Anthesis, has initiated an innovative area-based insetting trial in Oxford. Funding has been awarded through the Government's Pioneer Places programme. The trial seeks to demonstrate the viability of attracting funding to implement local carbon reduction projects. The success of this trial is expected to create opportunities for shared initiatives.

Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy

12. The original Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) was endorsed by the then Oxfordshire Growth Board in November 2017. OxIS has supported to secure significant investment for infrastructure in Oxfordshire, particularly for transport schemes being funded through the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal (i.e. Homes from Infrastructure) and the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF).
13. As part of the Housing and Growth Deal, there was a commitment to update the [OxIS Stage 1 Report](#) produced in March 2022. As a result of the cessation of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 (OP2050) this update was brought to a halt. Stakeholder engagement sessions have taken place with internal and external partners and have highlighted some common ground around ambitions for the next stage of OxIS, including that it should reflect both the Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan and the Strategic Vision, and aim to expand its scope to include energy supply issues, health issues, and green infrastructure.

Homes from Infrastructure Programme (Housing & Growth Deal)

14. This programme to deliver strategic infrastructure to support the acceleration of already planned houses in Oxfordshire was allocated £150m of government funding. The final tranche of funding is subject to a number of government and reporting requirements set out in a letter from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) following the cessation of work on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 in August 2022.
15. Oxfordshire County Council is now accountable for delivery of the remaining programme; a Memorandum of Understanding sets out commitments to positive partnership working, with particular regard to consulting with partners over any proposed changes to the programme of infrastructure delivery.

Best practice, knowledge transfer and information sharing

16. The partnership working of the FOP is an essential mechanism for sharing knowledge and best practice across the partner organisations. Recent examples include:
- a. A site visit to Graven Hill, Bicester, offered members insight into local activity to accelerate self-build and custom-build properties; the visit follows on from a self-build report the group received from officers in April 2023.
 - b. Members received a report which provides advice to help elected members and officers understand relevant best practice principles and guidance for the deployment of ground mounted solar farms. This report is now being shared across the advisory groups and local authorities.
 - c. The environment officer group supporting EAG has led on the development on an environment strategy map, and a partnerships and environmental programme tracker to support the sharing of best practice and prevent duplication. The strategy map considers national, county wide, and authority level strategy and policy, and in doing so enables an understanding of the different guiding documents and how these might interact.
 - d. The Planning Advisory Group (PAG) is attended by a representative from Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB (Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire) ICB). This creates an opportunity to explore how the NHS planning and future needs process works and the relationship between Integrated Care Services and GP practices, to understand how planning colleagues can best support in resolving gaps in care provision.

Existing council programmes of work overseen by FOP advisory groups

17. Several existing pieces of work currently in development have been identified as benefiting from inclusion within the work programmes of the advisory groups and the FOP as a mechanism for increasing broader member input and buy in at an earlier stage.
- a. Infrastructure Advisory Group (IAG)
Strategies and delivery plans emerging from the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan including Local Area Travel Plans, Bus Service Improvement Plan, mobility hub activity, freight strategy, and Vision Zero are now coming forward to IAG for update and broader member input.
 - b. Environment Advisory Group (EAG)
Work on climate adaptation and resilience, the Oxfordshire food strategy, and Climate Action Oxfordshire behaviour change campaign are now coming forward to EAG for update and broader member input.

Supply and sustainability of energy

18. The FOP has identified shared concerns across Oxfordshire that constraints in the development of the electricity grid have the potential to negatively impact upon the pace of delivery of net zero ambitions.

Oxfordshire's District Network Operators (DNOs)

- a. In April 2023, Local Authority Leaders and OxLEP met with SSEN, National Grid Electricity Distribution, and UK Power Networks to understand the causes of infrastructure delays, reinforcement plans, and opportunities to work together to address ongoing challenges in the local energy network.
- b. The meeting highlighted the importance of local area energy planning and need for local authority input into Distribution Future Energy Scenarios (DFES). Local authorities can input into DFES on an annual basis. DFES map out the different growth projections for electricity distribution networks across the UK, through forecasting changing electricity requirements; in doing so DFES support network upgrade planning and direct investment.

Evidence to the government's Environmental Audit Committee

- a. In June of 2023, the FOP responded to the government's Environmental Audit Committee's call for evidence on 'The sustainable electrification of the UK economy'.
- b. The full response to the call for evidence from the FOP [has been published online](#).

Updates from longstanding work programmes

19. In addition to those work streams listed above, the FOP has delivered outcomes through established programmes of work including a study undertaken on behalf of FOP on facilitating improvements to Oxfordshire's rail connectivity, supporting the delivery of the Strategic Vision outcomes.

Other partnerships

20. The FOP works closely with other partnerships in the county and nationally to enable FOP members to engage with and influence these forums in support of the outcomes of the Strategic Vision. FOP representatives are given a seat on the following partnerships:

- **England's Economic Heartland** - a sub-national transport body for the region stretching from Swindon across to Cambridgeshire and from Northamptonshire down to Hertfordshire which advised the government on the transport infrastructure, services and policy framework which will realise our region's economic potential while supporting the journey to net zero.
- **Oxford to Cambridge Partnership** – A group of leaders from local government, Local Enterprise Partnerships, the Arc Universities Group and England's Economic Heartland, with government, in a new pan-regional partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge area which collaborates to accelerate economic opportunities and achieve environmental enhancements and to unlock investment for inclusive, high quality sustainable development. <https://www.oxford-cambridge-partnership.info/>
- **Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership (OLNP)** - an organisation of key

partners working together to radically enhance nature, its positive impact on our climate and the priority it is given, helping to make Oxfordshire a county where people and nature thrive. While a discrete partnership which does not report into the FOP, the OLNP links in with the FOP on projects and programmes in support of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision – for example, the OLNP is leading on the carbon sequestration workstream of the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route map and Action Plan. The six Oxfordshire councils contribute funding to the OLNP.

- FOP also works closely with other partnerships in Oxfordshire, including the Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership (ZCOP) and the Oxfordshire Bus Enhanced Partnership (OBEP), to support delivery of the aims of the strategic vision.
- In addition, the FOP oversees the work of the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership.

Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership.

21. The OIEP is a county-wide group that brings together employers, business, education, community groups and local government – to share knowledge, expertise and resources, and create links between different areas of work.

22. The work of the OIEP is aligned to and supports delivery against the Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire, by working to enable a local economy which is globally competitive, sustainable, diverse, and inclusive. The six Oxfordshire council's contribute funding to the OIEP.

23. The OIEP contributes to the delivery of the following outcomes of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision:

- *Our residents will be healthier and happier, and overall wellbeing will have improved:* The outcomes of the OIEP will contribute to this priority enabling people to have better skills and education attainment to access employment opportunities etc.
- *Our local economy will be globally competitive, sustainable, diverse and inclusive:* The aim of the OIEP is to create an environment and communities that can adapt to change, a region that is resilient in the face of shocks in the economy and a workforce that responds to different needs and different kinds of work in the future. The education and inclusive employment working groups contribute to this priority.
- *Our vibrant historic and cultural offer will be rich, diverse and enhanced:* The OIEP's aim is to work together to create a more equal region that creates opportunities and benefits for all people within the county.

24. Four action focused working groups work collectively to deliver the OIEP vision:

- **Educational attainment** – focusing on early years education and support, education attainment and better links between business and education links to shape career choices.
- **Inclusive Employment** - focuses on both employers and employees. Looking at how organisations can create better pathways into work whilst understanding the barriers people face to accessing employment.

- **Social value and procurement** - Looking at how the OIEP can grow the amount of money that is spent within the county, for the county. The OIEP are also looking at how the businesses that benefit from this are investing in our local communities, through jobs, training or improving our environment.
- **Place shaping** – ensuring investment is delivered in places that need it most. Communities need to be part of the OIEP work to ensure that money spent in the county helps address some of our biggest challenges – health, environment, and housing.

25. The OIEP's annual report (Appendix 2) provides an overview and highlights progress to November 2023. Of note is the:

- Development of the OIEP Strategy 2023-26 and Delivery Plan 2023-24.
- Implementation and wide uptake of the [Inclusive Economy Charter](#) – Oxford City Council has signed up to this charter to underscore its commitment to making the local economy fairer for everyone.
- Establishment of the OIEP Human Resource (HR) Network to engage with HR leads in businesses across the county to support its inclusive recruitment and employment goals.
- Creation of four focussed working groups that enable partners to support one another delivering aspects of our aim and purpose.

26. Other noted achievements in the report include:

- Establishing and structuring the governance of the partnership and developing key relationships and programmes of work to ensure the partnership is a robust, wide-reaching, and effective mechanism for delivering its vision.
- For each of the four key areas of focus for the OIEP a working group has been established with a broad range of influential representatives and chaired by a member of the partnership with particular expertise and knowledge in that field.
- A brand, including a logo and suite of branded materials, and a web and social media presence, was developed by the communications co-ordinator to improve the OIEP's ability communicate and promote its work.
- The OIEP's pioneering work has been included as an exemplar measure for tackling inequality in the Oxfordshire Local Skills Improvement Plan.
- In 2023, the partnership supported ARCh (Assisted Reading for Children) in a successful fundraising bid. This funding will allow them to recruit a member of staff who will lead on recruiting new volunteers to the charities pioneering work inspiring a love of reading in Oxfordshire children, enhancing their well-being and improving life chances.
- The inaugural HR network was held in July 2023. It was delivered in partnership with Seetec Plus, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), Fedcap, TAP Social Movement, Aspire, DWP and Owen Mumford. Giving practical advice and case studies about supporting ex-offenders into work. The event was attended by over fifty attendees from different sectors across Oxfordshire.
- In September 2023 the OIEP worked with partners to deliver an in-prison open day for employers at HM Bullingdon Prison with a chance for them to see the training centre, workshops and employment hub as well as meet people who are in the last 12 weeks of their sentence.

27. The OIEP's annual report concludes "that the partnership is strong and valuable and has successfully leveraged additional resources from a number of sources, but that it is in need of a continued, diversified and enlarged funding settlement in order to support the development of a more inclusive economy in Oxfordshire."

Oxford City Council Officer Updates

28. The adoption of the Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan by FOP in March 2023, with its 14 workstreams and milestones stretching through 2025, 2030, 2040 and 2050 creates a clear framework for the work of EAG into the future. With so much to do, prioritisation is key and the first suite of programmes cover:

- buildings decarbonisation.
- Local Area Energy Planning.
- Accelerating EV Infrastructure rollout
- Carbon sequestration through land-use.
- Green finance.

29. A significant component of the work associated with the FOP has been the development of the Strategic Economic Plan. This plan is scheduled to be presented to the Cabinet for endorsement in January 2024. Prior to this, it was also submitted to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Board. Given that this initiative was funded through the partnership, it is expected to be reported to the FOP for further discussion and updates.

30. Anticipating the circulation of a report to Housing Advisory Group members in January, the document will outline the new work priorities as agreed upon by the FOP. The report is expected to include a modest amount of capacity funding, with details to be announced soon. The outlined priorities are likely to focus on:

- *Accelerating Affordable Housing Delivery*: Particularly emphasising Social Rent housing. This includes the development of a comprehensive data set covering the entire county.
- *Community Led Housing*: The report is expected to touch upon the sharing of best practices in Community Led Housing. It will likely incorporate rural housing enabling work, which is separately funded and overseen by the Collaborative Housing Hub.
- *Encouraging the USE of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC)*: The emphasis here will be on promoting MMC to enhance sustainability in housing projects.
- *Retrofitting Existing Homes*: The report is likely to highlight efforts and strategies aimed at retrofitting existing homes to improve energy efficiency and sustainability.

31. The Planning Advisory Group focus involves initiating work on Biodiversity Net Gain and Viability work streams, along with Health in Planning. Additionally, there is an upcoming work stream dedicated to Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) that is yet to commence. These efforts reflect a comprehensive approach, addressing biodiversity, economic viability, and public health considerations in planning, and the exploration of innovative construction methods.

Financial implications

32. The FOP budget is made up of a contribution from all six councils of Oxfordshire. The Council makes contribution to the running costs of the FOP of £100k per annum.
33. The Oxford Inclusive Economy Partnership Manager works in the Council's Regeneration Team, the post is funded from the FOP budget.
34. There are no other financial implications for the Council arising from this report.

Legal issues

35. There are no legal implications. This report is not seeking Council approval for recommendations, nor asking for a decision to be made. The report is providing an update to Council on the work completed by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and Oxford Inclusive Economy Partnership.

Level of risk

36. This report is not seeking Council approval for recommendations, nor asking for a decision to be made. The report is providing an update to Council on the work completed by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and Oxford Inclusive Economy Partnership.
37. There are no specific risks arising from the content of this report.

Equalities impact

38. The structure and membership of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and sub-groups is intended to reflect a common commitment among participating organisations to equality. The areas of focus of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and sub-groups are very much focused on tackling inequality and building inclusivity.
39. There is no specific impact on equalities arising from this report.

Report author	Lucy Cherry
Job title	Policy and Partnerships Officer
Service area or department	Corporate Strategy
Telephone	01865 252707
e-mail	lcherry@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers: None	
1	Cabinet report: Updates to the memorandum of Understanding and the Terms of Reference of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (12 July 2023, item 29.)
2	Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership Strategy 2023-26
3	Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership Delivery Plan 2023-24

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To: Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Title of Report: Future Oxfordshire Partnership Annual Report
Date: 28 November 2023
Report of: Andrew Down, Director of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Status: Open

Executive Summary and Purpose:

This report provides an annual update on the Future Oxfordshire Partnership's work to deliver the nine outcomes of the Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development which was formally endorsed by the Partnership in March 2021 and subsequently approved by each of the Oxfordshire Councils. The update covers the period Aug 2022 – Aug 2023. Many of the workstreams that support the delivery of the Strategic Vision are ongoing; as such, this report is intended to provide a snapshot of these programmes rather than a comprehensive review.

Appendices:

- **Appendix 1:** Future Oxfordshire Partnership Update Report from the previous year: [Future Oxfordshire Partnership Annual report 2021-22](#)
- **Appendix 2:** [Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Annual report 2022-23](#)
- **Appendix 3:** Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership Annual report 2022-23 *(due to be published with the FOP agenda pack 21 November 2023)*
- **Appendix 4:** [Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development in Oxfordshire](#)

Report Author: *Becky Chesshyre, Communications Co-ordinator for the Oxfordshire Partnerships*

Contact information: becky.chesshyre@southandvale.gov.uk

Future Oxfordshire Partnership

Annual report 2022-23

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Background

The Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) is a joint committee of the six councils of Oxfordshire together with key strategic partners, focused on the delivery of the bold and ambitious outcomes set out in the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision for Long Term Sustainable Development. It does this by:

- Coordinating local efforts to manage economic, housing and infrastructure development in a way that is inclusive and maximizes local social and environmental benefits.
- Facilitating delivery of projects that the councils of Oxfordshire are seeking to execute collaboratively in the fields of economic development, strategic planning (including infrastructure and housing), and climate change.
- Working to secure funding in pursuit of the aims of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision.
- Representing Oxfordshire on matters of regional and national interest.

Its four current focus areas of environment, housing, infrastructure, and planning are informed by four corresponding Advisory Groups of lead cabinet members from each council, and four corresponding officer groups. The Partnership's work is reviewed by a Scrutiny Panel with 18 members, three from each authority, and is supported by a small team of specialist officers.

Each constituent authority retains all their non-executive and executive functions in relation to economic development, housing provision, strategic spatial planning, and strategic transport planning.

To effectively tackle county-wide challenges like the transition to net zero carbon, improved county-wide connectivity, healthy place-shaping, inequality, and improving the state of our natural environment, we need to collaborate with partners across district and organisational boundaries. The role of the FOP is to facilitate shared working and peer support to enhance the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of provision in these areas, and to co-ordinate monitoring to keep us on track to deliver our goals.

Strategic Vision

The [Oxfordshire Strategic Vision for long term sustainable development](#), which was formally endorsed by the FOP in March 2021 and subsequently approved by each of the Oxfordshire Councils, sets out the FOP's long-term ambition for what the county could be like by 2050. The nine outcomes within the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision are ambitious - delivering them requires long-term collective commitment and investment by the partners that make up the FOP as well as a wider set of strategic stakeholders and partners who make decisions about investment and placemaking across Oxfordshire.

The nine outcomes of the Strategic Vision



Figure 1: Graphic showing the nine outcomes of the Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development in Oxfordshire.

The Strategic Vision is a non-statutory document. It provides an overarching framework to inform a range of different plans, strategies, and programmes, to drive improvements in environmental, social, and economic well-being and further complements plans and strategies already in place and approved by the FOP and partner organisations.

Work programmes

Each of these work programmes works directly to deliver the nine outcomes of the Strategic Vision above.

- Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan
- Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy
- Homes from Infrastructure Programme (Housing & Growth Deal)
- Best practice, knowledge transfer and information sharing
- Existing council programmes of work overseen by FOP advisory groups
- Supply and sustainability of energy

Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan

To support the objective of a net zero Oxfordshire, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership commissioned the development of a route map and action plan for the county, intended to identify joint actions that the Oxfordshire local authorities can take together to provide a catalyst for positive action with regards to net zero, across the region.

The resulting Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan (City Science, 2023) details:

- The emission reductions necessary to achieve net zero by 2050

- The key milestones in 2025, 2030 and 2040
- Carbon budgets of maximum emissions that can be emitted to maintain this pathway
- KPIs to track progress
- Recommended areas for FOP members to work on jointly to accelerate action.

The plan identifies 14 actions to be implemented to help realise collective net zero ambitions. The collaborative action plan does not replace individual organisations' net zero strategy and workplans, or statutory documents and activity such as Local Plans or the Local Transport & Connectivity Plan.

At its meeting in March 2023, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership endorsed the Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan and phased delivery of the identified joint actions. Five action areas were prioritised. Officers and convening leads have been working together to draw up the next steps across the prioritised actions. A programme tracker has been set up to monitor progress. An update on countywide emissions and progress toward net zero targets will be provided to FOP and the respective advisory groups on an annual basis.

The prioritised actions from the Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan being taken forward as core FOP workstreams are as follows:

- Develop an on-going Local Area Energy Planning (LAEP) function
- Accelerate the roll out of publicly accessible EV charge points
- Buildings decarbonisation:
 - Expand and scale up retrofit delivery
 - Scale up programmes to address the retrofit skills gap
 - Develop a collective purchasing approach that supports the widespread deployment of rooftop solar on existing buildings – on hold pending the development of the Future Fit One Stop Shop (FOSS); a feasibility study into this approach is being conducted by the Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Partnership (ZCOP).
- Explore opportunities to enhance carbon sequestration through land use change, including targeted habitat restoration and creation
- Explore new funding mechanisms to support delivery of net zero activity

The workstreams under the prioritised actions are focussed on supporting mobilisation of external investment. Delivery against joint actions is currently being met through existing resources, with additional funding agreed at FOP in March 2023, i.e., £150k to support development of a local area energy planning approach, and £100K for carbon sequestration activity.

Future resource gaps will be looked at through joint funding bids and efficiency savings from commissioning joint evidence – exploring funding mechanisms is one of the five core workstreams (see above). There is still some remaining capacity funding available from the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, such that there may be the opportunity to request additional funding to support the respective workstreams, depending on other FOP priorities.

Updates from these workstreams

Local Area Energy Planning

Local area energy planning is a data driven, whole system approach, which maps out the changes required to transition a locality's energy system to net zero carbon within a defined timeframe and includes consideration of the most cost-efficient technologies to achieve net zero for different carbon emitting assets and processes.

In March 2023, local authority and Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) representatives came together for an initial exploratory session to explore the role and need for local area energy planning in Oxfordshire, and considered different options regarding scales of delivery, and associated pros and cons.

Following this exploratory session, an Executive Steering Board and multi-agency working group is being established. These will bring together council representatives, Electricity Distribution Network Operators (DNOs), the gas distributor, and other key strategic partners to provide the strategic direction and practical support needed to embed the local area energy planning approach in Oxfordshire.

The Local Energy Oxfordshire (LEO) LAEP+ mapping tool developed through Project LEO provides key data and insight to inform local area energy planning, whilst insights from the various LEO asset and place-based trials offer ideas for innovative decentralised, local energy solutions, which can be incorporated.

LEO project partners have secured additional funding via the Strategic Innovation Fund for a 3-month feasibility study (April-June 2023) to further develop elements of Project LEO through LEO Neighbourhoods, which is considering how effective energy planning at the low voltage network can accelerate building decarbonisation. A bid for a further six-month study has been submitted.

Funding secured through the Net Zero Pathfinders Places competition supported further development of the LAEP+ data platform (including functionality to support development of local area energy plans). The project which started in April 2023 is led by Advanced Infrastructure and is being

delivered in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council, Southern and Scottish Electricity Networks (SSEN), Dundee City Council, and Perth & Kinross Council.

The Future Oxfordshire Partnership has allocated £150,000 to local area energy planning workstream.

The Infrastructure Advisory Group will oversee and input into the development of the workstream and provide updates to the FOP.

Buildings decarbonisation

Expand and scale up retrofit delivery

Several retrofit programmes are already in place – for example:

- Homes Upgrade Grant (HUG): Energy efficiency upgrades & low carbon heating to households in fuel poverty in Oxfordshire without gas central heating – expected to upgrade at least 310 properties.
- Heat Pump Ready: Requirement to deliver minimum 25% heat pumps in defined areas (Rose Hill, Oxford and North-West Bicester, Cherwell).

Two projects are also underway in Oxfordshire exploring innovative cost-effective solutions to support the roll out of decarbonised buildings: Local Energy Oxfordshire – Neighbourhoods (LEON) and Future Fit One Stop Shop. The 'expand and scale up retrofit delivery' workstream of the Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan is looking to build upon this work.

Next steps for the workstream

- Establishing a working group to review and share existing evidence on barriers to retrofit and shared learning from innovation programmes. This will link into the ongoing FutureFit One Stop Shop/FutureFit Oxford(shire) bid development.
- Using Oxford as a test case to enable county-wide scaling up of retrofit through partnership working and effective engagement to achieve economies of scale.
- Agreeing joint governance model to retrofit based on defined quality standards (via FutureFit One Stop Shop/FutureFit Oxford(shire) and reliable, up-to-date baseline evidence.
- Capturing retrofit data outside of grant programmes.

The Environment Advisory Group will oversee and input into the development of the workstream and provide updates to the FOP.

Scale up programmes to address the retrofit skills gap

- Hosted stakeholder workshops to discuss skills gaps and funding opportunities via FutureFit One Stop Shop (FOSS)

- £4million of capital funding via the government's Capital Growth Fund and OxLEP is being put into a new training and education centre (Retrofit Academy) in the sustainable construction sector across three sites, which will deliver 400 apprenticeships and serve 240 full-time students and 300 part-time students within the next five years.

Next steps for the workstream

FOP is currently looking to commission a provider to effectively lead the retrofit skills agenda in conjunction with the County Council, City and District Councils, and education providers. Under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), green skills have been identified as a key priority for all districts.

The Environment Advisory Group will oversee and input into the development of the workstream, and provide updates to the FOP.

Accelerate the roll out of publicly accessible EV charge points

A Joint strategy (Oxfordshire Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy) and Cross authority stakeholder working group (Oxfordshire EV Infrastructure Steering Group) are already in place. There are also several innovative EV infrastructure projects being delivered in partnership with the government's Office for Zero Emissions Vehicles and Innovate UK. Examples of these projects include:

- OxGul-e, piloting dedicated pavement cable gullies to residents without off-street parking in both rural and urban locations from a home charge point unit at the kerbside to their vehicle, with minimal disruption to dedicated parking provision and impact on the historic built environment.
- The completed roll out of 20 "hubs" of fast charging points across publicly owned car parks, with overnight charging facilities and free parking to nearby residents, as well as top-up charging to visitors and commuters during the daytime (£5.4 million).

Next steps for the workstream

Oxfordshire County Council are applying to the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV) for Local EV Infrastructure (LEVI) grant funding which will support the following next steps of the FOP's workstream:

- Working in partnership to use LEVI grant funding and private investment to meet predicted need for EV infrastructure and support decarbonisation of road transport, particularly in rural, car dependent communities.

- As part of the delivery of this funding, collaborate with town and parish councils on Community EV Microhubs to help reduce transport emissions in rural, car dependent areas.

The Infrastructure Advisory Group will oversee and input into the development of the workstream and provide updates to the FOP.

Explore opportunities to enhance carbon sequestration through land use change, including targeted habitat restoration and creation

Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership (see ‘FOP representation on other partnerships’, below) will lead on the delivery of this workstream.

The progress to date includes:

- Ongoing engagement with businesses who are in a position to invest in land-based carbon sequestration. This has revealed that many businesses are interested in spreading risk across multiple types of carbon offsetting projects in Oxfordshire, including nature-based projects, solar and retrofit.
- A draft Nature Finance Strategy has been produced by Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership setting out the creation of a natural capital investment framework that will deliver environmental enhancement projects in alignment with the developing Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- £100,000 of funding has been allocated from the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Capacity Fund to take forward work on an area-based inseting investment model, and an offset market, to finance nature-based solutions in Oxfordshire, based on a multi-habitat approach to carbon sequestration.

Next steps for the workstream

- Define potential mechanisms, such as area-based inseting¹ or developer contributions through the planning system, that would allow investment in nature-based carbon offset projects in Oxfordshire.
- Develop a longer pipeline of investment-ready nature-based projects (based on the model set out in the Nature Finance Strategy) in the right places.
- Explore the establishment of an Oxfordshire Environmental Fund.

¹ Area Based Insetting (ABI) is an approach to stimulate investment in schemes that reduce carbon emissions. These can be retrofit, Photovoltaics (PV) or nature-based.

The Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership will lead on the delivery of this workstream; the Environment Advisory Group will oversee and input into the development of the workstream and provide updates to the FOP.

Explore new funding mechanisms to support delivery of net zero activity

The Environment Advisory Group have had initial conversations about the use of green bonds to support the deployment of renewable energy technologies. In addition, Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership have established an innovative area-based insetting trial with Anthesis in Oxford to demonstrate that this would be another a viable means of attracting funding to deliver local carbon reduction projects which will provide opportunities for shared learning in this area.

Next steps for the workstream include:

- Convening a working group to review opportunities for new funding mechanisms to finance delivery of priority actions (e.g., green bonds and 'insetting') which could support the creation of a private finance stream into Oxfordshire's programmes.
- Exploring how we might take a green finance insetting model forward with a focus on districts and how they can plug into what Oxford City Council and Cotswold District Council have done.
- Developing a pipeline of investment ready projects through the Low Carbon Hub and others.

The Environment Advisory Group will oversee and input into the development of the workstream and provide updates to the FOP.

Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS)

The original Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) was endorsed by the then Oxfordshire Growth Board in November 2017. OxIS has supported to secure significant investment for infrastructure in Oxfordshire, particularly for transport schemes being funded through the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal (i.e., Homes from Infrastructure) and the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF).

As part of the Housing and Growth Deal, there was a commitment to update OxIS. The [OxIS Stage 1 Report](#) produced in March 2022 provides a strategic framework for the Oxfordshire Local Authorities, as well as key strategic partners, to support the prioritisation of proposed infrastructure scheme investment, as well as identify potential delivery and funding opportunities to 2040.

An OxIS Stage 2 report had been planned for 22/23, which would consider new proposals for strategic infrastructure required to meet Oxfordshire's needs in the period to 2050; it was due to be aligned with the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 (OP2050). Cessation of the OP2050 brought a halt to the Stage 2 update of OxIS. As a result,

officers have engaged with stakeholders internally and externally to explore what the next stage of OxIS could look like, given that the original proposal for Stage 2 will not proceed as was originally planned in the context of OP2050.

Stakeholder engagement sessions have taken place with internal and external partners and have highlighted some common ground around ambitions for the next stage of OxIS, including that it should reflect both the Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan and the Strategic Vision, and aim to expand its scope to include energy supply issues, health issues, and green infrastructure.

The next steps are that a core working group of relevant officers will be drawn together to agree the final commission principles. Once agreed, the project will require resources to enable a contract to be commissioned, as well as ongoing procurement, legal and financial support to ensure its successful delivery.

Homes from Infrastructure Programme (Housing & Growth Deal)

This programme to deliver strategic infrastructure to support the acceleration of already planned houses in Oxfordshire was allocated £150m of government funding. The final tranche of funding is subject to a number of government and reporting requirements set out in a letter from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) following the cessation of work on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 in August 2022.

Oxfordshire County Council is now accountable for delivery of the remaining programme; a Memorandum of Understanding sets out commitments to positive partnership working, with particular regard to consulting with partners over any proposed changes to the programme of infrastructure delivery.



Figure 2: Infrastructure schemes delivered and in progress and associated housing units delivered through the Homes from Infrastructure programme as of 31 March 2023.

Best practice, knowledge transfer and information sharing

The partnership working of the FOP is an essential mechanism for sharing knowledge and best practice across the partner organisations. Recent examples include:

- **Graven Hill Visit** A site visit to Graven Hill, Bicester, offered members insight into local activity to accelerate self-build and custom-build properties; the visit follows on from a self-build report the group received from officers in April 2023.
- **Solar Farm Guidance** Members received a report which provides advice to help elected members and officers understand relevant best practice principles and guidance for the deployment of ground mounted solar farms. This report is now being shared across the advisory groups and local authorities.
- **Environment strategy map and project/programme tracker** The environment officer group supporting EAG has led on the development on an environment strategy map, and a partnerships and environmental programme tracker to support the sharing of best practice and prevent duplication. The strategy map considers national, county wide, and authority level strategy and policy, and in doing so enables an understanding of the different guiding documents and how these might interact. The partnerships and environmental programme tracker maps out the different environmental programmes of work taking place across Oxfordshire, as well as the partnerships (e.g., ZCOP and OLNP) working in the environmental sector.
- **Planning for health infrastructure** The Planning Advisory Group (PAG) is attended by a representative from Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB). This creates an opportunity to explore how the NHS planning and future needs process works and the relationship between Integrated Care Services and GP practices, to understand how planning colleagues can best support in resolving gaps in care provision.

Existing council programmes of work overseen by FOP advisory groups

Several existing pieces of work currently in development have been identified as benefiting from inclusion within the work programmes of the advisory groups and the FOP as a mechanism for increasing broader member input and buy in at an earlier stage.

- **Infrastructure Advisory Group:** Strategies and delivery plans emerging from the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan including Local Area Travel Plans, Bus Service Improvement Plan, mobility hub activity, freight strategy, and

Vision Zero are now coming forward to IAG for update and broader member input.

- **Environment Advisory Group:** Work on climate adaptation and resilience, the Oxfordshire food strategy, and Climate Action Oxfordshire behaviour change campaign are now coming forward to EAG for update and broader member input.

Supply and sustainability of energy

The Future Oxfordshire Partnership is uniquely positioned to amplify the collective voice of Oxfordshire's local authorities and co-ordinate advocacy work in support of the nine outcomes of the Strategic Vision.

In particular, the FOP has identified shared concerns across Oxfordshire that constraints in the development of the electricity grid have the potential to negatively impact upon the pace of delivery of net zero ambitions.

To achieve collective net zero ambitions while maintaining inward investment within the county, a sustainable, decarbonized energy system is required. However, grid constraints in both the transmission and distribution elements of the electricity network are resulting in delays to deliver renewable energy projects and decarbonization activity, which (including electric vehicle charger rollout and heat pump installation) whilst inhibiting inward investment within Oxfordshire.

Meeting with Oxfordshire's Distribution Network Operators (DNOs)

Following written letters from FOP to the three Distribution Network Operators (DNOs) which cover Oxfordshire, in April 2023, Local Authority Leaders and OxLEP met with SSEN, National Grid Electricity Distribution, and UK Power Networks to understand the causes of infrastructure delays, reinforcement plans, and opportunities to work together to address ongoing challenges in the local energy network. The meeting highlighted the importance of local area energy planning and the need for local authority input into Distribution Future Energy Scenarios (DFES). Local authorities can input into DFES on an annual basis. DFES map out the different growth projections for electricity distribution networks across the UK, through forecasting changing electricity requirements; in doing so DFES support network upgrade planning and direct investment.

Submitting evidence to the government's Environmental Audit Committee

In June of 2023, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership responded to the government's Environmental Audit Committee's call for evidence on 'The sustainable electrification of the UK economy'. In its response the Future Oxfordshire Partnership highlighted:

- Severe concerns that it will not be possible to decarbonize the electricity grid in the timescales stated by National Government i.e., 2035, with significant grid connection delays preventing investment in the scaling up of renewables.

- RIIO ED2 determinations (price control period covering the five-year period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2028)² appear to largely confirm that there is minimal investment in grid infrastructure ahead of connection requests/agreements for the next 5 years, despite projections through Future Energy Scenario planning, and demands that future regulatory price control determinations must proactively enable anticipatory investment, informed by robust local data and insight, to support the transition to net zero.
- Concerns regarding the unknown scale of ‘zombie projects’ within the system, locking up capacity unnecessarily, and preventing renewable schemes which are ready to go from coming online. The FOP argued that there should be a national directive calling for the review of projects which have been within the system over a specified period, to identify and remove them as appropriate and prevent unnecessary and costly infrastructure upgrades.
- The importance of decentralized energy generation and distribution, including the development of mini grids, in supporting net zero ambitions, building on the learnings from Project LEO.
- Any grid development and/or reinforcement activity must factor in an understanding of the impacts of varying temperature increases, to ensure appropriate adaptation measures can be made in support of a resilient energy system.

[The full response to the call for evidence from the Future Oxfordshire Partnership has now been published online.](#)

Co-ordinating local activity to support net zero

Whilst tackling national constraints in the electricity network will require significant investment and action by central government, Oxfordshire partners are working collaboratively to identify local solutions and activity which support in addressing network challenges. [A report submitted to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership in June 2023 outlines several key partnership projects and programmes of work within Oxfordshire, aimed at realising net zero ambitions, and/or supporting to tackle local grid constraints.](#)

As outlined above, as part of the Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan, a significant focus for the partnership moving forward will be exploring what a local area energy planning approach looks like for Oxfordshire, to ensure net zero ambitions can be reached.

Updates from longstanding work programmes

In addition to those workstreams listed above, the FOP has delivered outcomes through established programmes of work.

² <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/publications/riio-ed2-final-determinations>

Rail connectivity

A study undertaken on behalf of FOP is facilitating improvements to Oxfordshire's rail connectivity, supporting the delivery of the Strategic Vision outcomes.

The Oxford Station & Area Upgrade work currently underway will enable greener travel by providing better access to the station entrance, delivering extra rail capacity, getting more freight off roads and onto rail, and enhancing cycling, walking and bus infrastructure at the station. In addition, the planned re-opening of the Cowley Branch Line will improve Oxfordshire's rail infrastructure and transform our connectivity. Both of these projects were identified as a priorities thanks to the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study (ORCS) undertaken on behalf of the FOP.

The ORCS, published in 2021, provided a strategic vision for the proposed development of rail services in Oxfordshire, aligning major programmes of work on the rail network within the county. Recommendations from the ORCS were brought together in an overarching industry strategy for the county known as 'Oxfordshire Connect'.

Other partnerships

The FOP works closely with other partnerships in the county and nationally to enable FOP members to engage with and influence these forums in support of the outcomes of the Strategic Vision.

FOP representatives are given a seat on the following partnerships:

- **England's Economic Heartland** - a sub-national transport body for the region stretching from Swindon across to Cambridgeshire and from Northamptonshire down to Hertfordshire which advised the government on the transport infrastructure, services and policy framework which will realise our region's economic potential while supporting the journey to net zero.
- **Oxford to Cambridge Partnership** – A group of leaders from local government, Local Enterprise Partnerships, the Arc Universities Group and England's Economic Heartland, with government, in a new pan-regional partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge area which collaborates to accelerate economic opportunities and achieve environmental enhancements and to unlock investment for inclusive, high quality sustainable development.
<https://www.oxford-cambridge-partnership.info/>
- **Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership** - an organization of key partners working together to radically enhance nature, its positive impact on our climate and the priority it is given, helping to make Oxfordshire a county where people and nature thrive. While a discrete partnership which does not report into the FOP, the OLNP links in with the FOP on projects and programmes in support of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision – for example, the

OLNP is leading on the carbon sequestration workstream of the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route map and Action Plan. The six Oxfordshire councils contribute funding to the OLN. Please refer to OLN annual report for updates on the work of this partnership.

In addition, the FOP oversees the work of the **Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership**. The work of the OIEP is aligned to and supports delivery against the Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire, by working to enable a local economy which is globally competitive, sustainable, diverse, and inclusive. The six Oxfordshire councils contribute funding to the OIEP. Please refer to OIEP annual report for updates on the work of this partnership.

FOP also works closely with other partnerships in Oxfordshire, including the Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership (ZCOP) and the Oxfordshire Bus Enhanced Partnership (OBEP), to support delivery of the aims of the strategic vision.

Looking forward

Future plans

- A workshop to explore and discuss the focus of the partnership moving forward and how to best realise our ambitions as laid out within the Strategic Vision.³
- Maintaining momentum and delivery of substantial existing programmes of work (see 'Current work programmes', above).
- Tracking progress against the Vision - a key focus for future work will be the development of performance measures to enable the FOP to monitor the direction of travel against the Strategic Vision, and further integration of the Vision within relevant plans and strategies at both a local and regional level, to enable progression towards the nine outcomes.
- The FOP will continue to play an active role in representing a collective Oxfordshire voice on matters of regional and national interest, lobbying HM Government as the partnership deems appropriate, for the benefit of the county's residents, businesses, and the local environment.
- Improved engagement with key strategic partners to draw in and leverage support which helps to deliver the ambitions of the Vision.

Further opportunities for joint working

The FOP is proactively seeking opportunities for joint working to deliver the nine outcomes of the Strategic Vision. In addition to those workstreams listed above,

³ This workshop took place in September 2023, which is beyond the timeframe of this report which covers the period Aug 22-Aug 23. An update on the outcomes of this workshop will be brought to a future meeting of FOP.

most of which are long term, the partnership has been engaging with stakeholders to identify further work programmes.

High level ideas have been developed through:

- **Stakeholder engagement** Stakeholder engagement sessions with LA Chief Executives, Advisory Group Members, the FOP Scrutiny Panel, and officers supporting the FOP arrangements, including the Officer Support Groups.
- **Corporate Plans** Mapped activity within the six LA and OxLEP corporate plans against the nine outcomes of the Strategic Vision to help identify areas for potential collaboration which deliver the Vision as well as corporate plans.

In identifying additional opportunities for collaborative working, ideas focused on areas where joint working across organisations and district boundaries adds value, recognising that certain activity is more appropriately delivered at scale. Consideration was given to opportunities both now and into the future, given that the ambitions of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision take us to 2050.

Suggestions put forward included both new activity or programmes aligned to the outcomes of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision, as well as existing activity that currently sits outside of the FOP arrangements but which participants felt would benefit from increased collaboration and input from a wider group of Oxfordshire political members.

Over 50 opportunities for collaborative working aligned to the outcomes of the Strategic Vision were identified and captured through a combination of the corporate plan mapping exercise and stakeholder engagement. These ideas are currently being filtered and shaped by officers supporting the FOP alongside respective advisory group members; filtered ideas were brought to a FOP workshop in September for consideration. The workshop took place after the timeframe of this report and an update on its outcomes will go to a future meeting of FOP. It is anticipated a couple of projects will progress forward into delivery, supported by remaining funding from the Capacity fund.

The Strategic Vision engagement sessions also identified opportunities for the partnership to make several process improvements – for example, the we have introduced induction materials and a bi-monthly FOP highlights report, refreshed the Terms of Reference for the Advisory Groups, and developed work programme schedules to allow for longer term planning.

Structure and governance

The Partnership meets six times each year, most often in a non-decision-making capacity, and it is supported by four Advisory Sub-Groups for infrastructure, environment, housing and planning), a Scrutiny Panel and a small team of officers

who are tasked with coordinating and/or delivering on elements of the Partnership's work programme.

Whilst voting rights are retained for local authority members only, the FOP's membership also includes the following co-opted Associate Members:

- Chair of OxLEP
- Chair of the Oxfordshire Skills Board
- Universities Representative (OxLEP)
- OxLEP Business Representative-Bicester
- OxLEP Business Representative-Oxford City
- OxLEP Business Representative-Science Vale
- Homes England Representative
- DEFRA Agencies Representative
- Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire Integrated Care System (BOB ICS) Representative (formerly Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group)
- When considering transport infrastructure matters, Network Rail and National Highways have the right to attend as associate members.

The Future Oxfordshire Partnership

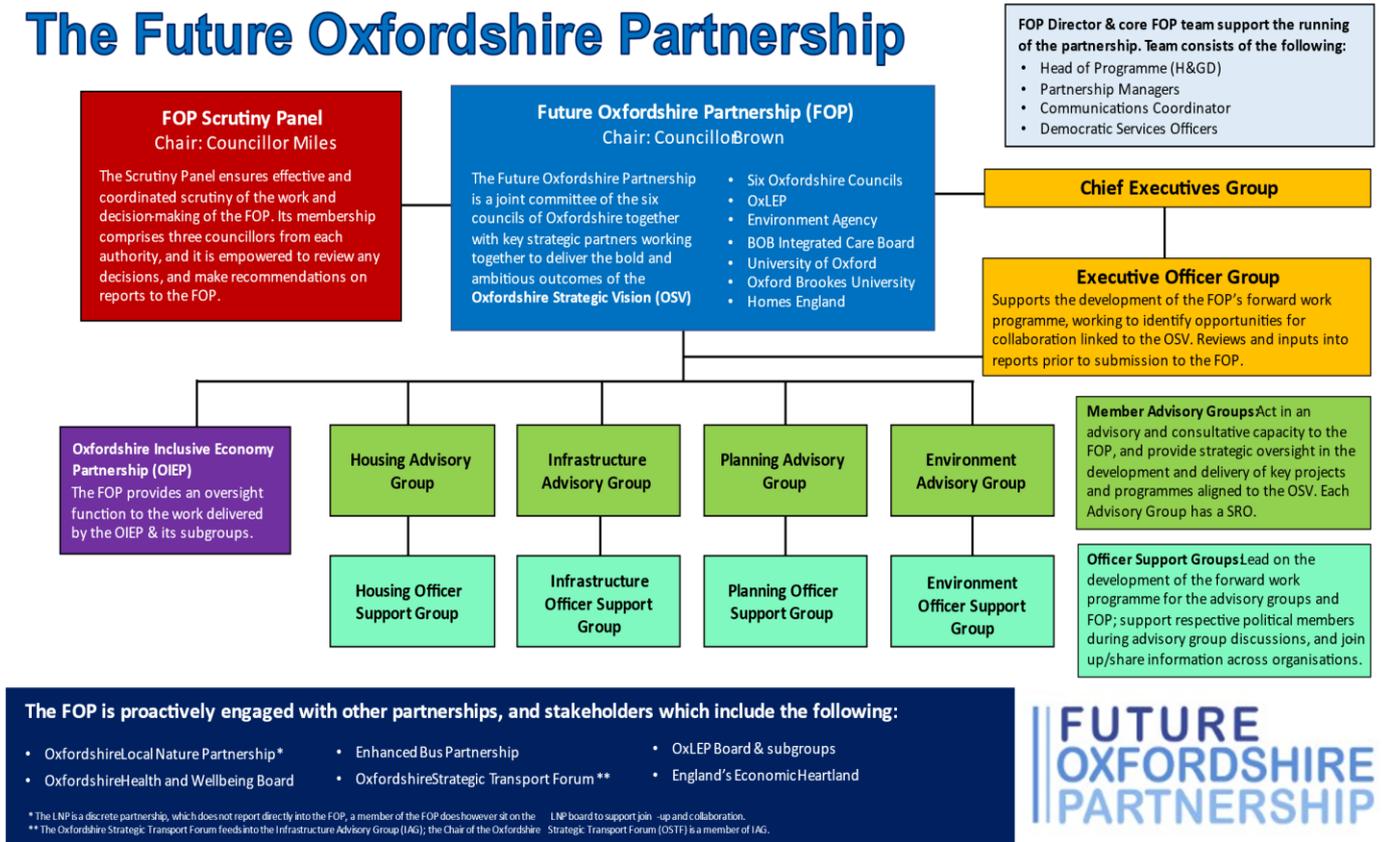


Figure 3: Future Oxfordshire Partnership structure chart

Process updates

In June 2023 terms of reference were reviewed, updated, and endorsed for FOP, the FOP Scrutiny Panel and the Advisory Groups for infrastructure, environment, housing; the Memorandum of Understanding for the FOP was also updated. [More information is available via the FOP public reports pack June 2023, which includes the updates terms of reference for the respective groups.](#)

A new Planning Advisory Group has been introduced following the cessation of work on the joint Oxfordshire plan (OP2050) to support in identifying opportunities for collaborative working across the county which help to deliver the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision within the planning realm. Terms of reference for the Group are based upon the [principles outlined in the paper submitted to FOP in September 2023.](#)

Four officer support groups have been established to support the respective advisory groups for environment, housing, infrastructure, and planning, providing a forum in which the relevant local authority leads can discuss county wide matters as they relate to the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision and coordinate activity which supports delivery of the Vision's outcomes.

Funding and resourcing

The FOP is funded by the six local authorities of Oxfordshire. This funding provides a core team of officers who work together to facilitate and co-ordinate delivery of its work. This includes the FOP manager, FOP director, FOP democratic services officers, and a communications co-ordinator. The team is managed by the Strategic Partnerships Manager based at South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Council.

Communications support

The communications co-ordinator has led on the development of a new website for the partnership (due Oct 2023), which will allow FOP to effectively showcase its work and advocate for the Strategic Vision.

The FOP is a large partnership organisation with multiple complex and overlapping workstreams – in this context it is important that all the partners and officers supporting the partnership are kept up to date with progress. Communications support from the communications co-ordinator helps to achieve this – for example, through the production and distribution of a bi-monthly highlights report sent to officers and members.

Dedicated communications support also facilitates liaison between the communications teams of the individual partners, who can then use their internal and external platforms to inform stakeholders about the workstreams and outputs of the partnership. This communications support also facilitates the FOP's advocacy work -

for example, through co-ordinating input into and writing detailed and clear responses to government calls for evidence.

Through the the website and, where appropriate, press releases and social media content through FOP and partner channels, the communications co-ordinator works to highlight Oxfordshire's pioneering partnership work to deliver a better future for its residents.

Secretariat support

The FOP's democratic services officers are essential to the proper functioning of the partnership. Together they provide a full suite of democratic support to the FOP and all subgroups, including providing advice and support to members and officers, scheduling, planning and delivering cross-county meetings, producing and publishing agendas and minutes, livestreaming meetings, providing background support and updating work programmes.

They provide this support for:

- Future Oxfordshire Partnership
- Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel
- Housing Advisory Group (HAG)
- Infrastructure Advisory Group (IAG)
- Environment Advisory Group (EAG)
- Planning Advisory Group (PAG)
- Executive Officer Group (EOG)
- HAG Officer Group
- IAG Officer Group
- EAG Officer Group
- PAG Officer Group
- Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership
- Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership

Appendices

Appendix one: [Future Oxfordshire Partnership Annual report 2021-22](#)

Appendix two: [Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Annual report 2022-23](#)

Appendix three: Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership Annual report 2022-23
[\(due to be published with the FOP agenda pack 21 November 2023\)](#)

[Strategic Vision \(full version\)](#)



Oxfordshire

Inclusive

Economy

Partnership

Annual report 2022-23

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Overview

Oxfordshire is home to significant inequalities. It is one of only three regions that contributes a surplus to the UK economy, but despite its global position and perceived affluence, its wealth and opportunities are not evenly distributed.

Oxfordshire contains 17 areas within the two most deprived Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) deciles.¹ They are mostly contained within 10 wards – 1 in Abingdon, 3 in Banbury and 6 in Oxford.² The IMD focuses on seven domains of deprivation: income, employment, education, skills and training, health and disability, crime, barriers to housing and services and living environment. The city of Oxford is the second most unequal place in the UK in terms of income, housing, affordability and life expectancy.³

The Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) is a county-wide group established in 2021 that brings together employers, business, education, community groups and public sector. Our aim is to work together to create opportunities and benefits for all people within the county. Our work supports the delivery of the outcomes of the [Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development in Oxfordshire](#), which all councils have adopted. We do this by sharing knowledge, expertise and resources, and creating links between different areas of work.

Partnership working is instrumental to our success, expanding our reach and unlocking access to a breadth of resources and diverse networks that exceed the scope of any individual organisation, fortifying our collective capacity for impactful and sustainable change. We are grateful for the collective drive of our partnership organisations that deliver significant resource in support of the Partnership's aims.

We are focused on four areas to deliver our vision: education, employment, social value and procurement, and place shaping.



We aim to work with projects across Oxfordshire that the OIEP can support and grow or amplify their work. We are also building a repository of resources, case studies and signposting to support organisations working towards a more inclusive economy.

¹ According to the 2019 English Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Oxfordshire contains 17 (out of 407) LSOAs (Lower-layer Super Output Areas) within the 2 most deprived IMD deciles – deciles 1 and 2.

² Oxfordshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment – Oxfordshire's 10 most deprived wards – January 2023

³ [Cities Outlook 2022 | Centre for Cities](#)

This report gives an overview of OIEP and highlights progress so far. Of note is the development of the OIEP Strategy 2023-26 and Delivery Plan 2023-24; implementation and wide uptake of the Inclusive Economy Charter; the establishment of the OIEP HR Network; and creation of four focussed working groups that enable partners to support one another delivering aspects of our aim and purpose.

The report also identifies key stakeholders and assesses the effectiveness of the governance and methods utilised by the partnership.

We conclude that the partnership is strong and valuable and has successfully leveraged additional resources from a number of sources, but that it is in need of a continued, diversified and enlarged funding settlement in order to support the development of a more inclusive economy in Oxfordshire.

Our vision

Our aim is to work together to create a more equal region that creates opportunities and benefits for all people within the county.

Our focus is on tackling areas that really need attention, which will have impact and where we can make a real difference.

We work with projects across Oxfordshire that the partnership can support and help to grow or amplify their work as well as creating a repository of case studies, information and signposting related to the inclusive economy.

Supporting delivery of the Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development in Oxfordshire

The [Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development in Oxfordshire](#) sets out ambitions for what the county could be like by 2050. It has been adopted by each of the Oxfordshire Councils. The nine outcomes within the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision are ambitious - delivering them requires long-term collective commitment and investment by a wide array of strategic stakeholders and partners who make decisions about investment and placemaking across Oxfordshire.



The nine outcomes of the Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development in Oxfordshire.

By fostering collaborative efforts among public, private, and community stakeholders, the OIEP harnesses the collective power of diverse organisations in support of these outcomes. In alignment with the core principles of the Strategic Vision, the OIEP drives initiatives that bolster education, enhance skills development, and create pathways to meaningful employment for all Oxfordshire's residents, establishing a foundation for sustainable prosperity in Oxfordshire.

The Partnership particularly focuses on the following three outcomes:

Outcome: Our residents will be healthier and happier, and overall wellbeing will have improved The OIEP improves skills and educational attainment for Oxfordshire residents, which in turn gives people access to employment opportunities.

Outcome: Our local economy will be globally competitive, sustainable, diverse and inclusive The OIEP's education and inclusive employment working groups are working to create an environment and communities that can adapt to change, a region that is resilient in the face of shocks in the economy, and a workforce that responds to different needs and different kinds of work in the future.

Outcome: Our vibrant historic and cultural offer will be rich, diverse and enhanced The OIEP's partners work together to create a more equal region that creates opportunities and benefits for all people within the county.

Our focus areas

We have set up four action focused working groups to deliver our vision:

- **Educational attainment** - focusing on early years, educational attainment of GCSE English and Maths, and building better links between business and education to help shape career choices.
- **Inclusive employment** - focuses on both employers and employees. Looking at how organisations can create better pathways into work whilst understanding the barriers people face to accessing employment.
- **Social value and procurement** - spending money locally, particularly by large public sector organisations like our councils and our universities, puts money back into the local economy and creates opportunities for local businesses – we aim to grow the amount of money that is spent within our county, for our county. We want to make sure the businesses that benefit from this are investing into our local communities, through jobs, training or improving our environment.
- **Place shaping** - investing in places that need it most and working with local communities so that money spent in our economy helps address our biggest challenges in health, environment, and housing.

Our stakeholders

OIEP has a broad and varied representation bringing expertise and knowledge from business, education, voluntary, community and public sector which enable us to develop and deliver our vision.

Steering Group

Abingdon & Witney College

Activate Learning

Advanced Oxford

Aspire

B4

Beard Construction

Blake Morgan

Brookes University

CBRE

Cherwell District Council

Citizens Advice Bureau

DWP

Federation of Small Businesses

Freeths

Oxfordshire Community Foundation (OCF)

Oxfordshire Community & Voluntary Action (OCVA)

Oxfordshire Social Enterprise Partnership (OSEP)

OxLEP

Oxford City Council

Oxford Civic Society

Oxford Hub

Oxford United Community Foundation

Oxford University Hospitals

Foundation Trust

Oxfordshire County Council

Oxfordshire Youth

Prorsus

RAW

SOFEA

South Oxfordshire District council

Unipart

University of Oxford

Vale of White Horse District Council

West Oxfordshire District Council

Education working group

Acer Trust
Activate Learning
Brookes University
Community First Oxon
Freeths
Homestart

Oxford Civic Society
Oxford Hub
Oxfordshire Youth
Oxfordshire County Council
River Learning Trust
Trinity College

Inclusive Employment working group

Aspire
B4B
Beard Construction
Blake Morgan
Blenheim Palace
Brookes University
DWP
Fedcap
Federation of Small Businesses
HMPPS
OSEP

Owen Mumford
OxLEP
Oxford Artisan Distillery
Oxford Civic Society
Oxford Hub
Oxwash
Seetec Plus
Tap Social
Unipart
Voi

Social value and procurement working group

Amey
Aspire
Blake Morgan
Blenheim Palace
Bouygues
Explosive Learning
ODS
OSEP
OUH Foundation Trust

OxLEP
Oxford City Council
Oxford Civic Society
Oxford Hub
Oxfordshire County Council
Oxwed
RAW
SOHA
University of Oxford

Place based working group

Aspire
Cherwell District Council
Citizens Advice Bureau
Community First Oxon
DWP
Kellogg College
Mind
OCVA
OSEP

Oxford Hub
Oxford Civic Society
Oxfordshire Youth
Oxfordshire County Council
Prorsus
South Oxfordshire District Council
University of Oxford
Vale of White Horse District Council

Resources

Local authority funding was provided to the Strategic Partnerships team to employ a Partnership Manager and part-cover the cost of communications and democratic services support colleagues. A total budget of £18,000 per annum was made

available to the OIEP Manager to cover event costs and expenses for April 2022 – March 2024. This funding is vital for the effective running of the partnership.

Amplifying our impact through partnership working

The OIEP's work is made possible by the significant support and in-kind contributions from the organisations above (*see Stakeholders, above*). Senior representatives from a wide array of influential organisations in the County contribute their expertise and influence to the OIEP, unlocking skills, knowledge, and access to business and community networks.

These organisations are committed to working in partnership and OIEP facilitates this in a strategic, coordinated and proactive manner.

Meetings are chaired and attended voluntarily by working group members: the non-Local Authority contribution to this is conservatively estimated at more than 2.5FTE.

This figure does not account for the additional and significant time these members contribute to the partnership outside these meetings, developing strategies, developing resources, and raising the profile of the Partnership and its aims.

Additional in-kind resource is provided through these stakeholders volunteering time and expertise. For example, the OIEP is receiving support from the previous Director of Development for the Oxford University's Faculty of Law in the development of funding strategy and support for OIEP projects.

We are also grateful to have received a £10,000 contribution from University of Oxford.

Financial support from the local authorities has been a key factor in OIEP's success in 22/23, and this report shows that the same progress and impact is expected for 23/24.

Communications and secretariat support

The support received from the Strategic Partnership support team DSO officers and communications coordinator has been incredibly valuable, allowing the OIEP Manager to focus on delivery. The support team has provided secretariat, event management, social media, and internal and external communications, all of which have enhanced the partnership's local and national profile, engagement, progress, and impact.

The communications co-ordinator has established the OIEP branding, social media channels, web presence, and the new OIEP website (due Oct 23) which will provide a vital showcase for the partnership, facilitating its knowledge-sharing and advocacy work. They have also produced a suite of branded materials to support the OIEP at recruitment fairs and other events, and support with event delivery including follow-up engagement.

Part of the co-ordinator's role is to leverage resource from partner organisations. They designed the Charter and led on its promotion, providing pledgers with a

comms pack to promote the Charter on their own channels. By co-ordinating with the comms teams at the Local Authorities and other partner organisations, the comms co-ordinator is also able to substantially raise the partnership's profile beyond the reach of its own platforms.

The secretariat team plan and deliver OIEP meetings and produce the agendas and minutes for these and help facilitate the organisation and smooth running of the OIEP's stakeholder events. This is vital support in a complex partnership organisation with multiple stakeholders and overlapping workstreams like the OLNP.

Fundraising

OIEP is working hard to develop a funding strategy working group focussed on:

- Funding and scaling-up the work of the OIEP
- Ensuring the OIEP is sustained as an effective partnership with appropriate secretariat and management resource
- Seek an element of investment and recyclable funds

The OIEP also supports its partners' funding applications for specific projects. For example, the partnership supported the volunteer school-reading charity ARCh to draft their funding application for Oxfordshire Community Foundation Step Change fund to enable their expansion.

Achievements

Building an effective partnership

The partnership has an ambitious vision for Oxfordshire's economy – for it to achieve this, it needs effective governance, efficient work programmes, and support from a wide array of influential stakeholders who can make an impact in the County. The first steps to achieving the vision was to establish the structure of the partnership and build relationships with these stakeholders.

Establishing the partnership

- Establishing and structuring the governance of the partnership and developing key relationships and programmes of work to ensure the partnership is a robust, wide-reaching, and effective mechanism for delivering its vision. *(See 'Stakeholders' below for the members of the steering group)*

Establishing working groups

- For each of the four key areas of focus for the OIEP a working group has been established with a broad range of influential representatives and chaired by a member of the partnership with particular expertise and knowledge in that field. *(See 'Stakeholders' below for the members of these working groups)*

Employment of a partnership manager

- An OIEP Manager started in post in September 2022, funded by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) for 2 years. The OIEP Manager provides vital strategic and secretariat support, working with partners to develop and

deliver a long-term programme of activity which will achieve the vision of the OIEP.

Engaging with stakeholders and shaping the vision

- In partnership with Aspire, Oxfordshire Social Enterprise Partnership (OSEP) and Bouygues E&S Solutions, an event was held at the Ashmolean Museum in May 2022 to engage with employers with a focus on *'Let's make an inclusive economy in Oxfordshire a reality'* including a workshop introducing the draft Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership.

The event connected organisations with the support available in Oxfordshire to help organisations to become more inclusive and have an even greater social impact in their community, sharing guidance on how to:

- Procure services and products with social value in mind
- Support digital inclusion efforts and reuse your surplus digital devices
- Empower your employees to volunteer for local good causes
- Recruit inclusively into your workforce.

Establishing the OIEP's profile

- A brand, including a logo and suite of branded materials, and a web and social media presence, was developed by the comms co-ordinator to improve the OIEP's ability communicate and promote its work.

Achieving recognition as a critical organisation for delivering change in Oxfordshire



The OIEP's pioneering work has been included as an exemplar measure for tackling inequality in the Oxfordshire Local Skills Improvement Plan.

Committing to the OIEP Charter features in the plan as a measure local skills providers can take to 'drive work to tackle inequality'.

Growing the work of organisations that are delivering change in Oxfordshire

The OIEP uses its collective power to help organisations that are making positive change in Oxfordshire expand their work. In 2023, the partnership supported ARCh (Assisted Reading for Children) in a successful fundraising bid. This funding will allow them to recruit a member of staff who will lead on recruiting new volunteers to the charities pioneering work inspiring a love of reading in Oxfordshire children, enhancing their well-being and improving life chances.

This in turn supports the OIEP's aim of increasing educational attainment in the County as well as the Strategic Vision outcomes that 'Our residents will be healthier and happier, and overall wellbeing will have improved' and 'Our local economy will be globally competitive, sustainable, diverse and inclusive'.



An ARCh volunteer reading with a child. ARCh's work helps improve educational attainment in Oxfordshire.

Delivery of a new Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Charter

Developing the Charter

The partnership have developed a Charter as a way for employers to demonstrate support for and commitment to making Oxfordshire a fairer and more inclusive place to live and work.

Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Charter

Actively supporting inclusivity across Oxfordshire's economy will generate real benefits for your organisation. Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) factors are increasingly being considered by employees, customers, funders, investors, and partners. Participating in the work of the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership, through the pledges you make within this Charter, provides a way of demonstrating your commitment to social issues:

- Promoting your role in Oxfordshire's inclusive economy work will help you to attract people to work with you.
- Accessing the widest pool of talent will support growth and productivity within your company or organisation.
- Purchasing from local suppliers and supporting your staff to undertake volunteering activities within the community will contribute to well-being and a sense of loyalty among your employees, differentiating your organisation from competitors.

Joining the work of the Partnership is not only a good thing to do, but it will make a difference to your business too.

By signing this Charter, you are demonstrating your support for and commitment to making Oxfordshire a fairer and more inclusive place to live and work.

Charter pledges

As a group of employers, we recognise the importance and value of supporting an inclusive Oxfordshire. We are committed to improving all aspects of social mobility and increasing shared prosperity for both our communities and residents by taking action on these pledges:

- Improve training and educational attainment**
Creating workplaces where employees can thrive and grow and supporting educational programmes for children
- Recruit inclusively**
Making jobs accessible for all residents and hiring from diverse communities
- Offer opportunities into work**
Supporting those furthest from the labour market on their journey towards secure employment
- Support local and social economy**
Using our buying power to support the local economy and maximise social value
- Provide fair wages**
Ensuring employees have a fair and decent wage
- Sharing resources, skills and assets**
Practical ways to ensure goods and services are accessible to all

The Charter promotes action via pledges which organisations will sign up to. These recognise the importance and value of supporting an inclusive economy across Oxfordshire. By taking action on the pledges organisations will show a commitment to improving social mobility and increasing prosperity for both our communities and residents.

Employers are asked to choose from a selection of pledges that are relevant for their own organisations from 6 groups:

- Support local and social economy – *using our buying power to support the local economy and maximise social value*
- Opportunities to work – *supporting those furthest from the labour market on their journey towards secure employment*
- Sharing resources, skills and assets – *practical ways to ensure goods and services are accessible to all*
- Recruit inclusively – *making jobs accessible for all residents and hiring from diverse communities*

- Improve training and educational attainment – *creating workplaces where employees can thrive and grow and supporting education programmes for children*
- Provide fair wages – *ensuring employees have a fair and decent wage*

Launching the Charter

- The partnership launched the Charter at an event on 24th January 2023 at The Old Fire Station in Oxford, attended by over 120 delegates. We were delighted to have some fantastic keynote speakers: Professor Irene Tracey, Marjorie Glasgow and Darren Burns who is the Director of Diversity and Inclusion at Timpson Group and the Head of the Timpson Foundation.

Delegates heard inspiring talks about why each of those pledge groupings are important and the benefits they can bring for both the employer and the employees through presentations from organisations that have already implemented inclusive economy measures.

[You can watch a recording of the event here.](#)



Professor Irene Tracey, Vice Chancellor of University of Oxford, speaks at the OIEP's Charter launch in January.

Promoting the Charter

- The OIEP and its partners have promoted the Charter at events, through word of mouth, and through digital media. More than 50 organisations have either signed or are in the process of signing the charter, equating to approximately 600 pledges.

This includes pledges to transfer unused apprenticeship levy to help grow apprenticeships in Oxfordshire, pledging employee time to volunteer for a variety of community projects and mentoring, donating devices to Getting Oxfordshire On-line as well a variety of pledges focussed on how to improve employment pathways for people through changes to recruitment and HR policies and procedures.



Freeths sign the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Charter, with OIEP Chairs Jeremy Long and Jan Royall.

Supporting Charter organisations

- The OIEP works with each organisation throughout the 12 months providing bespoke support with the implementation of pledges dependent on requirements - this could be signposting to relevant information or buddying with an organisation that has already implemented that pledge.

Monitoring the Charter's impact

- At the end of the first 12 months the impact of the Charter and the pledges for employers, employees and the community will be developed into an annual report to guide the evolution of the Charter and ensure it continues to be an effective mechanism for bringing about change.

The OIEP HR Network

The OIEP has established an HR Network to engage with HR leads in businesses across the county to support its inclusive recruitment and employment goals by:

- sharing information and case studies on making an inclusive economy work in practice.
- providing opportunities to knowledge share and network.

HR Network event: Supporting leavers into employment

- Only 17% of ex-offenders manage to get a job within a year of release. Finding and retaining meaningful employment is vital for helping prison leavers to rebuild their lives, and supporting these people into work can also help businesses tackle skills shortages.
- The inaugural HR network was held in July 2023. It was delivered in partnership with Seetec Plus, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), Fedcap, TAP Social Movement, Aspire, DWP and Owen Mumford. giving practical advice and case studies about supporting ex-offenders into work. The event was a great success with over fifty attendees from different sectors across Oxfordshire - lots of knowledge was shared and new connections made. A follow-up questionnaire found employers who attended were inspired to consider employing prison leavers.



Paul Humpherson from TAP Social Movement presenting to employers at the OIEP's inaugural HR Network event, 'Supporting prison leavers into employment'.

HR Network event: Visit to HM Bullingdon

- In September 2023 the OIEP worked with partners to deliver an in-prison open day for employers at HM Bullingdon Prison with a chance for them to see the training centre, workshops and employment hub as well as meet people who are in the last 12 weeks of their sentence.

Future events

The OIEP is planning further events to engage HR leads to support them in developing inclusive employment practices, including an event about supporting refugees into employment.

Building the OIEP's profile and supporting knowledge sharing

New website for the OIEP

- As well as establishing a brand and digital presence to support the OIEP, the partnership's communications co-ordinator has commissioned development of a new website, due to launch Oct 23. This will:
 - Generate Charter sign-ups through a simple, intuitive user journey.
 - Provide a searchable, organized library of useful resources for organisations. working towards inclusive economy goals, including toolkits and case studies.
 - Amplify the partnership's work in Oxfordshire and the benefits of an inclusive economy.
 - Showcase the work of our Charter pledgers towards building a more inclusive economy in the County.
 - Collect newsletter sign ups to grow the OIEP's profile and keep stakeholders informed about progress.

Developing strategy and impact measurement

To achieve its ambitious vision, the OIEP has built a longer term strategy and also engages with broader local and national strategy development.

OIEP Strategy 2023-6 and Delivery Plan 2023-4

The OIEP has worked with its partners and stakeholders to build an ambitious and achievable future work programme.

- In December 2022, the OIEP's steering group agreed on proposals presented by our educational attainment, employment and social value and procurement working groups for projects that they will focus on over the next 12 months to contribute to the delivery of our vision.
- These proposals have been developed into the OIEP Delivery Plan 2023-24 which sets out the objectives for each of the working groups.
- The ambition of the OIEP goes beyond these proposals and to deliver our vision will require a long-term focus on the key areas identified by the working groups. We have drafted an OIEP Strategy 2023-26 which sets out the partnerships long-term vision and a route to reaching our goals and objectives

Supporting local and national strategy development

The OIEP engages with local and national strategy development in areas like economic development and healthy place shaping to advocate for alignment with the partnership's aims. Current examples include:

- Contributing to the development of Oxfordshire's Strategic Economic Plan (SEP).
- Working with health partners to highlight the crossover of the work of the OIEP tackling health inequalities, and identifying opportunities to link up through the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Impact measurement

- The place based working group will be working with OIEP partners to develop a logic model for OIEP, which is a tool to graphically represent how an initiative or intervention works to achieve its intended outcomes.

About the OIEP

Background

In March 2021, a range of partners drawn from Oxfordshire's public, private, voluntary and community sectors came together to collaborate on launching the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership. The partnership was formed following a set of recommendations and actions from a series of [workshops and seminars in 2019/20](#) looking at the state of the inclusive economy in Oxfordshire.

An OIEP Manager started in post in September 2022, funded by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) for 2 years. The role of the OIEP Manager is to provide strategic and secretariat support working with partners to develop and deliver a long-term programme of activity which will achieve the vision of the OIEP, as well as supporting the FOP in delivering the nine outcomes of its Strategic Vision.

Structure and governance

The OIEP sits under the umbrella of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and is governed by a Steering Group which is co-chaired by Baroness Jan Royall and Jeremy Long. The core functions of the Steering Group are:

- **Strategic oversight and coordination** - agree longer term inclusive economy aims and a rolling programme of work (1-3 years). Ensure projects and activities are joined up and avoid duplication.
- **Prioritise** – continually review and evaluate activities in the wider political and economic context to ensure effort is best placed.
- **Evaluate** – develop measures of success to monitor the county’s progress towards an inclusive economy.
- **Support** – provide advice and feedback to inclusive economy Working Groups and look to add value wherever possible.
- **Accountability** – ensure written steering group meeting notes are made publicly available and where required report to other stakeholders such as the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.
- **Collaborate** – share learning and information across partners.
- **Engage** – look for opportunities to communicate and engage with the community to inform current and future priorities of the OIEP
- **Promote** the OIEP’s aims and ways in which organisations and individuals can make a difference.



Our Charter pledgers *(as of Sep 2023)*



MAGDALEN
COLLEGE SCHOOL
INDEPENDENT DAY SCHOOL
BOYS 7-18 & SIXTH FORM GIRLS



O X F O R D
S C I E N C E
E N T E R P R I S E S



FREETHS



THE
OXFORD ARTISAN
DISTILLERY



BLENHHEIM PALACE

[Activate Learning incorporating "City of Oxford College" and "Banbury and Bicester College"](#)

[Amey](#)

[Aspire Oxfordshire](#)

[Beard Construction](#)

[Blenheim Palace](#)

[Blenheim Estate](#)

[CBRE Ltd](#)

[Cherwell District Council](#)

[Community First Oxfordshire](#)

[Ellison Oxford Limited](#)

[Emmaus Oxford](#)

[Flexicare \(Oxford & Abingdon\)](#)

[Freeths LLP](#)

[Jennings of Garsington Ltd](#)

[Jessop and Cook Architects Ltd](#)

[Learn with Cognitive Analytic Therapy](#)

[Oxfordshire Ltd](#)

[Magdalen College School](#)

[Mental Health Natters](#)

[Mills & Reeve](#)

[ODS](#)

[Old Fire Station](#)

[Oxentia Ltd](#)

[Oxford Human Capital incorporated](#)

[Oxford Science Enterprises](#)

[Oxford University Hospitals](#)

[Foundation Trust](#)

[Oxford University Innovation](#)

[Oxford Wood Recycling](#)

[Oxfordshire County Council](#)

[Oxfordshire Play Association](#)

[Prorsus](#)

[West Oxfordshire District Council](#)

[\(Publica Group\)](#)

[RAW](#)

[SOFEA](#)

[Somerville College, University of](#)

[Oxford](#)

[St John's College, University of](#)

[Oxford](#)

[The Archway Foundation](#)

[The Ethical Property Company PLC](#)

[The Oxford Artisan Distillery](#)

[Voi Technology](#)

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To: Council

Date: 29 January 2024

Report of: Chair of the Scrutiny Committee

Title of Report: Scrutiny Committee Update Report

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To update Council on the activities of the Scrutiny function
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Lucy Pegg, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24
Recommendation:	That Council resolves to note the update report.

Appendices	
None	

Introduction

1. This report provides an update on Scrutiny activity during the period from 01 October 2023 to 31 December 2023.
2. During this reporting period the Committee met three times, on 10 October 2023, 06 November 2023 and 04 December 2023. There was also an extraordinary informal remote meeting of the members of the Scrutiny Committee on 16 October 2023. In addition, there have been four Panel meetings (Housing and Homelessness Panel – 05 October 2023 and 05 December 2023; Finance and Performance Panel – 06 December 2023; Climate and Environment Panel – 29 November 2023) and Companies Scrutiny Panel joined three meetings of the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group on 25 October 2023, 01 November 2023 and 07 December 2023. A summary of each meeting is set out below.

Scrutiny Committee: 10 October 2023

3. At its meeting on 10 October 2023, the Committee considered three substantive reports:
 - Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge (*Cabinet report*)
 - Delivery of Electric Vehicle Infrastructure for Oxford (*Cabinet report*)
 - Utilities Procurement 2024-2028 (*Cabinet report*)
4. The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge report provided an update on the key scope and process of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge, recommendations from the July 2023 Peer Review Team and the outline future Action Plan. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to how longer-term recommendations would be addressed more holistically; the language within the report; and clarifying the meaning of a number of the Peer Review Team recommendations. There were no recommendations.
5. The Delivery of Electric Vehicle Infrastructure for Oxford report set out the proposed Implementation Plan for the Council's Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy (OxEVIS) delivery and highlighted national changes regarding responsibility for Electric Vehicle Infrastructure; responsibility had shifted to Tier 1 local authorities (i.e. Oxfordshire County Council). The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to appropriate priority for EV Infrastructure rollout being afforded to deprived urban areas; how affordability and speed of EV charging could be balanced to encourage EV uptake; potential for Oxford Direct Services (ODS) to commercialise pavement cable gulleys; opportunities for the Council to implement dedicated car club charging spaces within Council-owned car parks; how to overcome barriers to installing EV Infrastructure in conservation areas; the impact of parking constraints on onstreet EV charging; and the possibility of the Council introducing a Local Development Order regarding household planning applications to install onstreet EV Infrastructure. Four recommendations were agreed.
6. The Utilities Procurement 2024-2028 report sought delegated authority to approve contracts for gas and electricity and approval to extend the Council's current contract for water utilities; it also set out a proposal to undertake an Energy Procurement Review to inform the Council's longer-term approach from 2027 onwards. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to which buildings the Council was responsible for paying utility bills for; whether the contracts would be for fixed quantities of energy and what flexibility there was; green/renewable energy; and potential for the Council to buy energy in bulk and act as a reseller. There were no recommendations.

Extraordinary Informal Remote Scrutiny Committee: 16 October 2023

7. At the extraordinary informal remote meeting of the members of the Scrutiny Committee on 16 October 2023, two substantive reports were considered:
 - Local Plan 2040 Regulation 19 Consultation Document (*Cabinet report*)

- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule Partial Review for Consultation (*Cabinet report*)
8. The Local Plan 2040 Regulation 19 Consultation Document report sought approval of the Oxford Local Plan 2040 Proposed Submission Document for consultation; approval of the statutory supporting information (Sustainability Appraisal, Habitats Regulation Assessment, Infrastructure Development Plan, Equalities Impact Assessment); and delegated authority for the Head of Planning and Regulatory Services to make minor changes in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities, as detailed in the report. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to site allocation; local and district centres; provision of healthcare infrastructure; pressures on services from other developments outside of the City boundary; collaboration and partnership working during the Plan making process (both in Oxford and neighbouring Districts); viability policies; affordable workspace; First Homes; parking standards; development density; and information contained in the Sustainability Appraisal (Appendix 2 to the report). Eight recommendations were agreed.
 9. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule Partial Review for Consultation report sought approval for the Draft CIL Charging Schedule to be published for public consultation. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to how Oxford's proposed CIL rates compared to others across the country; the viability evidence used for Oxford; testing of the use class for hotels during the viability study; and dependencies between the CIL Charging Schedule and Local Plan 2040. There were no recommendations.
 10. Agreement was sought from the relevant Cabinet Member that recommendations arising from the two reports would be dealt with in the same way as if they had come from a formal meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

Cabinet Responses to Recommendations: October 2023

11. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in October 2023:
 - Air Pollution
 - Delivery of Electric Vehicle Infrastructure for Oxford (*Cabinet report*)
 - Local Plan 2040 Regulation 19 Consultation Document (*Cabinet report*)
12. Of the fourteen recommendations submitted across the three reports, twelve were agreed and two were not agreed.

Scrutiny Committee: 06 November 2023

13. At its meeting on 06 November 2023, the Committee considered three substantive reports:
 - Grant Allocations to Community & Voluntary Organisations 2024/25 (*Cabinet report*)
 - FutureFit Oxford(shire) Project Grant Funding Bid (*Cabinet report*)
 - Central (City & University) Conservation Area Appraisal (*Cabinet report*)

14. The Grant Allocations to Community & Voluntary Organisations 2024/25 report highlighted the impact of the Oxford Community Impact Fund and sought agreement to the criteria/weighting for the assessment of the 2024/25 Oxford Community Impact Fund grant applications. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to ensuring the funding continued to work with the Inclusive Economy Plan; how grant applicants aligned with the Council's Safeguarding Policy; leverage between community groups; and breakdown of funding for community groups across the City. Two recommendations were agreed.
15. The FutureFit Oxford(shire) Project Grant Funding Bid report sought project approval for Oxford City Council's involvement in the FutureFit Oxford(shire) Project and delegated authority for the facilitation and delivery of the project. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to matching projects with investors; smarter retrofit work; the Council's proposed role in leading the project consortium; development of a sustainable business model; engagement with colleagues in Planning and Conservation; and other existing initiatives which could support the project. There were no recommendations.
16. The Central (City & University) Conservation Area Appraisal report sought adoption of the Central (City & University) Conservation Area Appraisal and endorsement of the Appraisal document for use in informing development management decisions as part of the evidence base for planning policy decisions. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to whether the Council had authority for planning applications regarding replacement of certain historical features across the City (e.g. certain stones used on unlisted historic pathways); options for retrofitting modern features (e.g. energy efficient windows) onto historic buildings; and the possibility of encouraging landowners to make private green spaces more accessible to the public. Two recommendations were agreed.
17. In addition, the Committee considered the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy which was out for public consultation until 12 November 2023. A Scrutiny Committee response to the consultation was agreed and submitted ahead of the consultation closing date.

Cabinet Responses to Recommendations: November 2023

18. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in November 2023:
 - Grant Allocations to Community & Voluntary Organisations 2024/25 (*Cabinet report*)
 - Central (City & University) Conservation Area Appraisal (*Cabinet report*)
19. All of the four recommendations submitted across the two reports were agreed.

Scrutiny Committee: 04 December 2023

20. At its meeting on 04 December 2023, the Committee considered four substantive reports:
 - Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2022/23 (*Cabinet report*)

- Equalities Update (*Cabinet report*)
 - Review of Glyphosate Use by Oxford Direct Services to Manage Weeds on Behalf of Oxford City Council (*Cabinet report*)
 - Local Government Association Corporate Peer Review: Council Action Plan (*Cabinet report*)
21. The Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2022/23 report sought approval of the Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement for publication. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to student numbers and exclusions when calculating those numbers; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student numbers; scope for the Council to cap the number of students at other educational institutions which are not universities (e.g. sixth forms, language schools, colleges etc.); the monitoring of dwelling permissions versus dwelling completions each year; and heritage assets. One recommendation was agreed.
 22. The Equalities Update report sought approval for the publication of the annual Workforce Equality Report 2023, Gender Pay Gap Report, Ethnicity Pay Gap Report and Disability Pay Gap Report; and set out progress on the Workforce Equalities Report and Action Plan. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to minority ethnic group representation within the workforce; number of applications versus appointments of individuals from minority ethnic groups; reflections on whether the workforce reflects the diversity of Oxford's local population; reporting on the sexual orientation pay gap; support for staff identifying as Trans and/or Non-Binary; staff engagement with 'Lunch and Learn' sessions; targets relating to workforce representation; key achievements in relation to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the past year; staff recruitment and retention; career trajectories within the Council of individuals from minority ethnic groups; the availability of comparative benchmarking data from other local authorities; Oxford Direct Services' Gender Pay Gap; the definition of the 'Economically Active Population' of Oxford; and ensuring the Council is a welcoming and inclusive workplace. Seven recommendations were agreed.
 23. The Review of Glyphosate Use by Oxford Direct Services to Manage Weeds on Behalf of Oxford City Council report set out recommendations over the use of Glyphosate by Oxford Direct Services (ODS) to control weeds on behalf of Oxford City Council. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to aligning the work of ODS and local community groups in terms of weed and plant management; communications; areas of the City which had currently 'opted-out' of Glyphosate application in their areas; the annual timetable for Glyphosate application; where Glyphosate was used to control weeds; and possible alternative options to Glyphosate usage. Four recommendations were agreed.
 24. The Local Government Association Corporate Peer Review: Council Action Plan report outlined the Council's Action Plan in response to the Corporate Peer Review feedback and recommendations received in July 2023. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to prioritisation of actions within the action plan; any challenges foreseen in relation to addressing the Peer Review Team's recommendations; project lifecycles; and working with local anchor institutions to further the aims of the City. One recommendation was agreed.

25. In addition, the Committee considered a report which sought appointment of members and chairs to Scrutiny Standing Panels and Review Groups following changes to the political composition of Oxford City Council. The membership of the Standing Panels is as follows:

Housing and Homelessness Panel (6):	Councillor Diggins (Chair), Councillor Aziz, Councillor Clarkson, Councillor Dunne, Councillor Rawle, Councillor Sandelson
Climate and Environment Panel (6):	Councillor Hollingsworth (Chair), Councillor Aziz, Councillor Dunne, Councillor Fry, Councillor Kerr, Councillor Miles
Finance and Performance Panel (6):	Councillor Fry (Chair), Councillor Corais, Councillor Djafari-Marbini, Councillor Jarvis, Councillor Latif, Cllr Smowton
Companies Scrutiny Panel (4):	Councillor Rowley (Chair), Councillor Miles, Councillor Morris, Councillor Rehman

26. The Committee agreed that the Budget Review Group for 2023/24 would comprise the same membership, including the Chair, as the Finance and Performance Panel – in line with the decision of the Committee earlier in the municipal year.

Cabinet Responses to Recommendations: December 2023

27. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in December 2023:

- Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2022/23 (*Cabinet report*)
- Equalities Update (*Cabinet report*)
- Review of Glyphosate Use by Oxford Direct Services to Manage Weeds on Behalf of Oxford City Council (*Cabinet report*)
- Local Government Association Corporate Peer Review: Council Action Plan (*Cabinet report*)
- Integrated Performance Report Q2 2023/24 (*Cabinet report*)
- Treasury Management Mid-Year Report (*Cabinet report*)
- City of Sanctuary Accreditation

28. Of the seventeen recommendations submitted across the seven reports, thirteen were agreed and four were not agreed.

Housing and Homelessness Panel

29. The Housing and Homelessness Panel met twice during this reporting period, on 05 October 2023 and 05 December 2023.

30. At its meeting on 05 October 2023, the Panel considered two substantive reports:

- Update on the Housing First Programme in Oxford
 - Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment
31. The Update on the Housing First Programme in Oxford report was a Scrutiny-commissioned item which provided an update on the Housing First programme in Oxford, including service delivery and outcomes. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to key performance indicators and monitoring; supply of Housing First units; conditions attached to receiving Housing First support; demand for Housing First; thresholds for eviction; and how the two support providers (St Mungo's and A2Dominion) worked together to achieve the best outcomes. There were no recommendations.
 32. The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment report provided an update on the Council's self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to whether the Customer Care and Complaints Manager post had been recruited to; criteria which the Council was not compliant with; analysis of complaint themes; and learning from complaints to inform continuous improvement. There were no recommendations.
 33. At its meeting on 05 December 2023, the Panel considered four substantive reports:
 - Building Safety & Compliance Within Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Stock
 - Housing Performance Monitoring
 - Housing Complaint Handling Performance Q1 & Q2 2023-24
 - City of Sanctuary Accreditation [presentation]
 34. The Building Safety & Compliance Within Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Stock report provided an update on current Building Safety and Compliance performance relating to the Council's Housing Stock. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to tenant communication; response time to issues such as damp and mould; fire safety; lift maintenance; relationship management with internal and external partners in the delivery of building safety and compliance work; and prioritisation of works. There were no recommendations.
 35. The Housing Performance Monitoring report set out the Council's performance on a number of key performance indicators (KPIs) relevant to Housing Services for Quarter 2 of the 2023/24 municipal year. There were no recommendations.
 36. The Housing Complaint Handling Performance Q1 & Q2 2023-24 report provided an update on the Council's complaint handling performance in relation to the landlord function for Q1 & Q2 2023/24. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to complaint categories; the nature of complaints against the Council versus Oxford Direct Services; and compensation. There were no recommendations.
 37. The City of Sanctuary Accreditation item was a Scrutiny-commissioned item to consider an update on progress towards the Council obtaining the City of Sanctuary Accreditation; it consisted of a presentation followed by an opportunity for discussion. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to assurance that the spirit of the Accreditation was being embraced Council-wide;

partnership working with Oxfordshire County Council and other institutions; how different groups of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and their lived experiences fed into this work; advocacy work being undertaken by the Council; how City of Sanctuary work fed into the Council's inclusive economy work; Central Government policy surrounding migrants, refugees and asylum seekers; resource availability; and opportunities for cross-party input into the Accreditation journey. One recommendation was agreed.

38. The following report was submitted to Cabinet in December 2023 (*see paragraphs 27 and 28 above*):

- City of Sanctuary Accreditation

Finance and Performance Panel

39. The Finance and Performance Panel met once during this reporting period, on 06 December 2023.

40. At its meeting on 06 December 2023, the Panel considered six substantive reports:

- Integrated Performance Report Q2 2023/24 (*Cabinet report*)
- Treasury Management Mid-Year Report (*Cabinet report*)
- Budget 2024/25 (*Cabinet report*)
- Background and Implications of Local Authority Section 114 Notices
- Acquisition vs Leasing of Properties and the HRA
- Scrutiny Performance Monitoring

41. The Integrated Performance Report for Q2 2023/24 report provided an update on Finance, Risk and Corporate Performance matters as at 30 September 2023. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to business rates; specific Council programmes and projects; capital expenditure; Temporary Accommodation costs; announcements made by Central Government in the recent Autumn Statement and their impact on the Council; dividends expected to be paid to the Council by its wholly-owned companies; optimism bias relating to the assumptions within the Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan; and programme and project slippage. Two recommendations were agreed.

42. The Treasury Management Mid-Year Report set out the performance of the Council's Treasury Management function for the six months to 30 September 2023. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to changes to the principal value of investments and subsequent impact on the Council; return on investment; whether investments were considered individually or in aggregate within the Council's revenue Budget; and risk profiles. One recommendation was agreed.

43. The Budget 2024/25 report set out a Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2025/26 to 2027/28 and a 2024/25 Budget for consultation. A Budget Review Group has been established to scrutinise the Budget in January 2024, therefore the Panel noted the Budget and agreed to submit a list of written questions to Heads of Service to form part of the discussion for the Budget Review Group meetings. There were no recommendations; any recommendations will be formulated through the Budget Review Group process.

44. The Background and Implications of Local Authority Section 114 Notices report updated the Panel on the background and implications of the series of local authority Section 114 reports which had been issued recently and how Oxford compared to those local authorities and others across the country. The report followed a request made by the Panel at its previous meeting. There were no recommendations.
45. The Acquisition vs Leasing of Properties and the HRA report was a briefing to the Panel following a request for the report made at the previous meeting. There were no recommendations.
46. The Scrutiny Performance Monitoring report set out the Council's performance on a number of key performance indicators (KPIs) as at September 2023. The Panel also considered responses to its written questions on the KPIs which were submitted after the previous meeting. There were no recommendations.
47. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in December 2023 (see paragraphs 27 and 28 above):
 - Integrated Performance Report Q2 2023/24 (*Cabinet report*)
 - Treasury Management Mid-Year Report (*Cabinet report*)

Climate and Environment Panel

48. The Climate and Environment Panel met once during this reporting period, on 29 November 2023.
49. The following report, considered by the Climate and Environment Panel at its meeting on 12 September 2023, was submitted to Cabinet in October 2023 (see paragraphs 11 and 12 above):
 - Air Pollution
50. At its meeting on 29 November 2023, the Panel considered three substantive reports:
 - Biodiversity Action Plan for Oxford City Council Parks and Nature Areas – September 2023 Review
 - Retrofit [presentation]
 - Net Zero Masterplan
51. The Biodiversity Action Plan for Oxford City Council Parks and Nature Areas – September 2023 Review report set out progress against the Action Plan since it was published in June 2020, following a review which was undertaken in September 2023. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the actions delivered which had been the most impactful; key areas where the Council still had more work to do; tree planting – specifically planting the right tree in the right place; ensuring the Action Plan was mainstreamed and not seen as an 'add-on'; the client-contractor relationship between the Council and Oxford Direct Services; data accessibility and mapping of sites/projects; and funding opportunities. Four recommendations were agreed, which will be submitted to Cabinet in January 2024.

52. The Retrofit item was commissioned by the Panel for an update on the Clean Heat Streets programme and, subject to a successful bid, the Pioneering Places scheme – plus any other relevant updates related to retrofit. The Panel received a presentation followed by the opportunity for discussion. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the technical complexity of retrofit and how it could be demystified to encourage public engagement and uptake; promotion of and response to the Council’s Retrofit campaign; community retrofit schemes; lessons learned from retrofit undertaken by the universities on listed buildings; and use of solar tiles. Three recommendations were agreed, which will be submitted to Cabinet in January 2024.
53. The Net Zero Masterplan set out Oxford City Council’s actions over the next two years to achieve its two carbon targets: a Net Zero Estate and Operations by 2030 and a Net Zero City by 2040. There were no recommendations.

Companies Scrutiny Panel

54. The Companies Scrutiny Panel joined three meetings of the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group (SJVG) as non-voting members on 25 October 2023, 01 November 2023 and 07 December 2023 to consider reports relating to OxWED, OX Place, Barton Oxford LLP and Oxford Direct Services. Commercial confidentiality prevents the provision of a summary report.

Report author	Alice Courtney
Job title	Scrutiny Officer
Service area or department	Law and Governance
Telephone	01865 529834
e-mail	acourtney@oxford.gov.uk