

Minutes of a meeting of Council on Thursday 13 February 2025

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Council members present:

Councillor Qayyum	Councillor Azad
Councillor Jupp	Councillor Max Morris
Councillor Regisford	Councillor Stares
Councillor Yeatman	Councillor Harley
Councillor Henwood	Councillor Robinson
Councillor Altaf-Khan	Councillor Arshad
Councillor Brown	Councillor Chapman
Councillor Clarkson	Councillor Corais (Deputy Lord Mayor)
Councillor Coyne	Councillor Diggins
Councillor Djafari-Marbini	Councillor Fouweather
Councillor Fry (Sheriff)	Councillor Gant
Councillor Hollingsworth	Councillor Hunt
Councillor Jarvis	Councillor Kerr
Councillor Latif	Councillor Lygo
Councillor Miles	Councillor Muddiman
Councillor Mundy	Councillor Munkonge
Councillor Pressel	Councillor Railton
Councillor Rawle	Councillor Rehman
Councillor Sandelson	Councillor Linda Smith
Councillor Roz Smith	Councillor Smowton
Councillor Turner	Councillor Upton
Councillor Waite	Councillor Goddard
Councillor Ottino	Councillor Powell
Councillor Rowley (Lord Mayor)	

Also present for all or part of the meeting:

Caroline Green, Chief Executive
Nigel Kennedy, Group Director Finance
Tom Hook, Deputy Chief Executive – City and Citizens' Services

Mish Tullar, Director of Corporate Strategy (Interim)
Emma Griffiths, Deputy Monitoring Officer
Amber Khaloon, Trainee Solicitor
Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager
Dr Brenda McCollum, Committee and Member Services Officer

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Malik sent apologies.

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

69. Apologies for absence

Councillor(s) Harley, Ottino, and Regisford sent apologies for a late arrival to the meeting.

Councillor Malik sent apologies for being absent for the entirety of the meeting.

70. Declarations of interest

The Deputy Monitoring Officer clarified that Councillors only needed to declare an interest where they were the trustees of an organisation impacted by a decision under consideration. The Leader of the Council and the Deputy Monitoring Officer further clarified that only when Councillors were trustees to an organisation which were subject to an amendment to the budget did they need to declare an interest.

Councillor Mundy declared that decisions at agenda items 9c and 9d related to funding for advice centres affected his declared interest as an employee of an advice centre and he would leave the meeting and take no part in debate for these items.

Councillor(s) Henwood and Stares declared that the decisions relating to agenda item 9d affected one of their declared interests and they would leave the meeting and take no part in the debate on this item.

The Chief Executive clarified that Councillors only needed to declare an interest if an amendment or decision would impact the specific community or advice centre that Councillors worked at or acted as trustees for.

71. Announcements

There were no announcements from the Lord Mayor, the Sheriff, the Leader of the Council, or the Chief Executive.

72. Budget Debate Procedure

Council noted the procedure and times permitted for each stage in the budget debate.

Councillor Djafari-Marbini asked how it would be judged that equal time was given to debate each proposed amendment to the budget.

The Lord Mayor responded that they would end debate on amendments if the debate on certain amendments were going on for too long.

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

Address from Josie Procter – Support for Amendment to Budget on Playground in the City Centre

A few months back, you were kind enough to listen to me, on behalf of Oxplay, bringing you a petition on the subject of a playground in Oxford City centre. I said that Oxford didn't have much-needed play space for children, and that driving footfall to the city centre would be good for families, and good for businesses.

We'd taken the petition to County Council, who also supported it, and want to work with City on providing space for the playground.

The petition was put to a vote, and you unanimously voted to support moving forward with a playground, knowing at the time there was no obvious funding source.

Now, no one expected the council to immediately magic up funds for a playground, but imagine our surprise when we saw no mention of any funds in the budget for even the smallest amount of development work... If we are all agreed that we want to build a playground, and invest in a family friendly city centre, then we need to find a small amount of funding, along with officer time which we wouldn't necessarily see in a budget, to inch it forward. We can only hope that Rachel Reeves' announcement of a Growth Corridor will conjure up a magic money tree, and indeed population growth implies more children. But growth happens in decades and our children are growing up now. Before the impact of that growth commission becomes clear, we need to keep the project moving forward rather than stagnate for a year.

This is why I urge you to both to support the amendment on it and continue your work with the county council to make this a reality. Thank you.

Response from Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management

Thank you for your address and for your ongoing support for a playground in the city centre. You are quite right that the Council unanimously passed a motion on this, and I am happy to confirm that in the background lead members and officers have been looking at opportunities – clearly given the constrained nature of the city centre this is not a straightforward project.

Motions are different to setting a budget, because in a budget you need to make the necessary trade-offs to bring funding forward. In addition, experience has taught us to be cautious about putting money in for projects which are not developed; what that means is that the City Council has to have the funds "at the ready", and if they are not

drawn down it means we will earn less interest on them than if they had been held back.

Nonetheless, having reviewed the position, you will note that our administration amendment today includes funding for work across the next two years on this, and we hope it will enable us to move the project forward. I do not want to underestimate the challenge in finding a suitable site and gaining the necessary permissions, but this will, if needs be, allow us to invest in appropriate feasibility work. Again, thank you for taking the time to raise this with us.

74. General Purposes Licensing and Licensing and Gambling Acts Committees - recommendations on fees and charges 2025/26

Council considered the Licensing & Gambling Acts and General Purposes Licensing Committees' recommendations to approve fees and charges for the licensing functions falling within their remits as set out in agenda items 6a, 6b, 6c and 6d and repeated in the budget papers at item 9 Appendix 7.

Councillor(s) Miles and Mundy, the Committee Chairs presented the reports and supported the recommendations to Council. Councillor(s) Smowton and Muddiman, respectively, seconded the recommendations.

On being put to the vote Council resolved to agree the relevant licence fees and charges for 2025/26 as set out in Items 6a, 6b, 6c and 6d (and repeated in the relevant sections of Item 9, Appendix 7).

78. Chief Finance Officer's report on the robustness of the Council's 2025/26 budget

Council considered a report from the Group Director Finance, as required under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, on the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the calculations of the budget and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves. The Group Director Finance advised that scrutiny of the budget had been undertaken by the Finance Team, Directors and the Chief Executive, Executive Members and the Scrutiny Committee's Finance Panel, and the figures presented were an estimate of factors at a specific time and therefore liable to change. He highlighted that the estimated income was also subject to the Oxford Model delivering key income streams and as such were outside the control of the Council, however noted that he was confident that the figures provided demonstrated the best estimate and were robust. The Group Director Finance also noted the uncertainty which had been introduced by the local government reorganisation plans which had been put forward by central government.

Council noted the report in setting the Council budget for 2025/26 and the indicative budgets for 2026/27 – 2028/29.

79. Report of the Scrutiny Budget Review Group

Council considered the report and recommendations of the Budget Review Group of the Scrutiny Committee to the Cabinet meeting on 05 February 2025 and the Cabinet's response.

Councillor Fry, Chair of the Scrutiny Budget Review Group, advised that following detailed discussions at each of its meetings throughout January 2025, the Review Group made a total of 23 recommendations, of which 9 had been agreed fully, 7 had been partially agreed, and 7 had not been agreed. He thanked all the officers involved throughout the process, with particular thanks to Nigel Kennedy, Group Director Finance and to Celeste Reyeslao, as Scrutiny and Governance Advisor in drafting this report.

Council resolved to note the report and Cabinet's responses to the recommendations.

80. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 to 2026/27 and 2025/26 Budget

Council had before it and considered:

- The report of the Group Director Finance to Cabinet on 05 February 2025 setting out the outcome of the budget consultation and seeking agreement of the Council's Budget for 2025/26 and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2026/27 to 2028/29.
- The Labour Group's submitted subsequent amendment published with the briefing note.
- The Liberal Democrat Group's submitted amendments published with the briefing note.
- The Green Group's submitted amendments published with the briefing note.
- The Independent Oxford Alliance Group's submitted amendments published with the briefing note.
- The Oxford Community Independents Group's submitted amendments published with the briefing note.
- An individual amendment proposed by Councillor Jarvis tabled at the meeting.

Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, presented the report and proposed Cabinet's recommendations. Councillor Turner thanked the Council officers for their work on the budget. He noted the importance of the Council taking the lead on improving the city. He also discussed the outcome of the residents' survey and how that had shaped the proposed budget. Councillor Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, seconded by Councillor Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships, proposed agreement of the Budget and the Medium Term Strategy

and the recommendations from Cabinet. He also moved his amendment to the Budget, published at Item 9a of the agenda, which was seconded by Councillor Brown.

a) Additional recommendations from Cabinet and corrections to the published budget

Councillor Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, seconded by Councillor Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships, proposed the additional amendment from Cabinet.

b) Alternative budget proposals - Liberal Democrat Group amendments

The Liberal Democrat Group withdrew their amended Budget, following submission of the amended Labour Group Budget.

Councillor Harley arrived during the discussion of amendment 9b.

c) Alternative budget proposals - Green Group amendments

Councillor Mundy left the chamber for the discussion of and vote on amendment 9c due to his declared interest in this item.

Councillor Jarvis, seconded by Councillor Max Morris, moved the Green Group amendments.

Following debate, these were put to the vote.

With more Councillors voting against (19), than for (7), and 20 abstentions, the Green Group amendments were not carried.

d) Alternative budget proposals - Independent Oxford Alliance Group Amendments

Councillors Henwood and Stares left the chamber for discussion of and vote on amendment 9d, due to their declared interest in this item.

Councillor Yeatman, seconded by Councillor Rehman, moved the Independent Oxford Alliance Group Amendments.

Following debate, these were put to the vote.

With more Councillors voting against (27), than for (8), and 10 abstentions, the Independent Oxford Alliance Group amendments were not carried.

e) Alternative Budget Proposals - Oxford Community Independents Group Amendments

Councillor Mundy left the chamber for discussion of and vote on amendment 9d, due to their declared interest in this item. Councillors Henwood and Stares re-entered the chamber at this time.

Councillor Djafari-Marbini, seconded by Councillor Coyne, moved the Oxford Community Independents Group amendments.

Following debate, these were put to the vote.

With more Councillors voting against (19), than for (9), and with 18 abstentions the Oxford Community Independents Group amendments were not carried.

Following agreement from Council, the meeting broke for 30 minutes at the conclusion of this item.

f) Individual amendments to the budget

Councillor Regisford arrived at the meeting.

Councillor Jarvis, seconded by Councillor Powell, moved their individual amendment.

After debate, this was put to the vote.

With more Councillors voting for (36), than against (11) the individual motion was carried.

g) Decision on the Cabinet Budget

Following debate, the recommendations of the Cabinet as agreed at its meeting on 05 February 2025 including the details of the budget for 2025/26, Medium Term Financial Strategy, Housing Revenue Account, Capital Programme and other matters set out in the published agenda and briefing note for this meeting and the agreed amendments at Items at 9a and 9f, were put to the vote.

In accordance with legislative requirements, a recorded vote was then taken:

For the Cabinet recommendations to Council as set out in the minutes of that meeting, and with the agreed amendments at Items 9a and 9f:

Councillors Altaf-Khan, Arshad, Brown, Chapman, Clarkson, Corais, Coyne, Diggins, Fry, Fouweather, Gant, Goddard, Hollingsworth, Hunt, Jupp, Lygo, Miles, Munkonge, Ottino, Pressel, Qayyum, Railton, Rowley, Sandelson, Linda Smith, Roz Smith, Smowton, Turner, Upton, Waite (30)

Against the Cabinet recommendations to Council:

Councillor Azad (1)

Abstentions:

Councillors Djafari-Marbini, Harley, Henwood, Jarvis, Kerr, Latif, Morris, Muddiman, Mundy, Powell, Rawle, Regisford, Rehman, Robinson, Stares, Yeatman (16)

With more Councillors voting for than against, the resolution to approve the Cabinet recommendations, with the subsequent amendments as set out at Items 9a and 9f, the recommendations were carried.

Council resolved in accordance with the recorded vote to:

1. Note the approval by Cabinet on 22 January 2025 and subsequently agreed by the Council on 27 January of an increase of 2.7% for 2025/26 (subject to any subsequent cap on increases imposed by central government) in social dwelling rents from 1st April 2025 giving an average weekly increase of £3.51 per week, and a revised weekly average social rent of £133.68 as set out in Appendix 5 based on a HRA budget as set out in Appendix 4, together with the comments in paragraphs 36- 39;
2. Approve the budget in 2024-25 for the acquisition of Barton properties in the amount of £39,732,791 as referred to in paragraph 42 of this report;

3. Approve the 2025-26 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budgets and the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Strategy as set out in Appendices 1-9, noting:
 - i. the Council's General Fund Budget Requirement of £30.542 million for 2025/26 and an increase in the Band D Council Tax of 2.99% or £10.36 per annum representing a Band D Council Tax of £356.72 per annum; and
 - ii. the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme as shown in Appendix 6;
4. Agree the fees and charges shown in Appendix 7;
5. Delegate to the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Deputy Leader (Statutory) – Finance and Asset Management, the decision to determine whether it is financially advantageous for the Council to enter into a Business Rates Distribution Agreement as referred to in paragraphs 21-23 of the report; and
6. Note the changes to council tax charges in respect of second homes premiums to be implemented on 1st April 2025, already approved by Council, as referred to in paragraphs 25-27.

86. Council Tax 2025/2026

Council considered the report of the Group Director Finance setting out the necessary calculations to enable Council to set the 2025/26 Council Tax for Oxford City.

Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, proposed and Councillor Brown seconded the recommendations in the report.

In accordance with legislative requirements, a recorded vote was then taken:

For the resolution set out below:

Councillors: Altaf-Khan, Arshad, Brown, Chapman, Clarkson, Corais, Coyne, Diggins, Djafari-Marbini, Fry, Fouweather, Gant, Goddard, Hollingsworth, Hunt, Jarvis, Jupp, Kerr, Lygo, Miles, Morris, Muddiman, Mundy, Munkonge, Ottino, Powell, Pressel, Qayyum, Railton, Rawle, Regisford, Robinson, Rowley, Sandelson, Linda Smith, Roz Smith, Smowton, Stares, Turner, Upton, Waite, Yeatman (42)

Against the resolution:

None (0)

Abstentions:

Councillors: Azad, Harley, Henwood, Latif, Rehman (5)

With all Councillors present voting for, the resolution was carried.

Council resolved in accordance with the reported vote to approve for the financial year 2025/26 recommendations 1 to 5 and to note points 6 to 8:

1. The City Council's precept and Council Tax requirement of £17,266,136 including Parish precepts and £16,993,288 excluding Parish Precepts.
2. The average Band D Council Tax figure (excluding Parish Precepts) of £356.72, a 2.99% increase on the 2024/25 figure of £346.36. Including Parish Precepts, the figure is £362.45, a 2.95% increase (see paragraphs 2 to 8 of the report).
3. A contribution of £10,000 to Old Marston Parish Council in recognition of the additional expenditure that the parish incurs as a consequence of maintaining the cemetery (see paragraphs 11 and 12 of the report).
4. The amount of £734,560 to be treated as Special Expenses (see paragraph 15 of the report).
5. The Band D Council Taxes for the various areas of the city (excluding the Police and Crime Commissioner and Oxfordshire County Council's precepts) as follows:

Littlemore	£383.64
Old Marston	£391.35
Risinghurst and Sandhills	£384.00
Blackbird Leys	£360.66
Unparished Area	£359.69

These figures include Parish Precepts and special expensing amounts as appropriate; in addition to the City Wide Council Tax of £341.30.

6. Oxfordshire County Council's precept and Band D Council Tax as set out in paragraph 19 below
7. The Police and Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley's precept and Band D Council Tax as set out in paragraph 20 below, and
8. The overall average Band D equivalent Council Tax of £2,557.13 including Parish Precepts (subject to confirmation of the Band D figures for Oxfordshire County Council).

87. Treasury Management Strategy

Council considered the report of the Group Director Finance submitted to Cabinet on 05 February 2025, presenting the proposed Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26 together with the Prudential Indicators for 2026/27 to 2028/29.

Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management presented the report and moved the recommendations. The recommendations were agreed on being seconded and put to the vote.

Council resolved to approve:

1. The Treasury Management Strategy 2025/26 as set out in paragraphs 10 to 61 of the appended report and the Prudential Indicators for 2025/26 – 2028/29 as set out in Appendix 2 to the appended report;
2. The Borrowing Strategy 2025/26 at paragraphs 31 to 32 of the appended report;
3. The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement at Appendix 3 to the appended report which sets out the Council's policy on charging borrowing to the revenue account;;
4. The Investment Strategy for 2025/26 and the investment criteria as set out in paragraphs 35 to 53 of the appended report and in Appendix 1 to the appended report; and
5. The Treasury Management Scheme of Delegation at Appendix 4 to the appended report.

88. Capital Strategy

Council considered the report of the Group Director Finance, submitted to Cabinet on 05 February 2025, presenting the Capital Strategy for 2025/26 – 2028/29 for approval.

Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management presented the report and moved the recommendations, which were agreed on being seconded and put to the vote.

Council resolved to approve the Capital Strategy for 2025/26 to 2028/29.

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 8.30 pm

Lord Mayor

Date: Monday 24 March 2025

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.