

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday 11 December 2024

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Committee members present:

Councillor Brown

Councillor Arshad

Councillor Chapman

Councillor Hollingsworth

Councillor Munkonge

Councillor Railton

Councillor Linda Smith

Councillor Upton

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Tom Bridgman, Executive Director (Development)

Caroline Green, Chief Executive

Tom Hook, Executive Director (Corporate Resources)

Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services

Peter Matthew, Executive Director of People and Communities

Emma Jackman, Head of Law and Governance

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy

Jenny Barker, Regeneration Manager

Hannah Carmody-Brown, Committee and Member Services Officer

Lourdes Debarry, Housing Consultant

Lorraine Freeman, CIL Data Analysis and Reporting Team Leader

Sarah Harrison, Team Leader (Planning Policy)

Hagan Lewisman, Active Communities Manager

Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager

Bruce McRobie, Capital Programme Surveyor

Rachel Nixon, Principle Planner

Nerys Parry, Head of Housing Services

Paula Redway, Culture and Community Development Manager

Jane Winfield, Head of Corporate Property

Also present:

Councillor Katherine Miles, Chair of Scrutiny

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Turner sent apologies.

76. Declarations of Interest

None.

77. Addresses and Questions by Members of the Public

None received.

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

None received.

79. Councillor Addresses on Neighbourhood Issues

None received.

80. Items raised by Cabinet Members

Councillor Railton expressed her appreciation to City Council and ODS employees for their diligent response to recent storm conditions in November and flash flooding in September. She noted their commitment to circulating information, installing equipment, and checking on vulnerable residents. She also warned that similar weather conditions are likely to occur more frequently in Oxford City as winters get warmer and wetter and the Council must be considerate of this when planning. Councillor Railton thanked specific frontline staff for their work protecting the community. Councillor Brown echoed the comments.

81. Scrutiny Reports

Councillor Miles presented reports from the Scrutiny Committee.

The committee met for an extraordinary meeting on 18 November 2024 to consider a call in of a Cabinet decision from 16 October 2024 regarding the entering of an options agreement for Foxwell Drive. The Committee discussed concerns relating to the length of the agreement, risks, and concerns around the separation of planning and land disposal processes. The Committee upheld the original Cabinet decision.

The Scrutiny Committee convened on 2 December 2024 to consider the Thriving Communities Strategy Update and the Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2023/24. 7 recommendations were proposed. On the first item, the Committee raised the need for data reporting to be more outcome focused and comparable, the need for more member engagement in locality plans, and the success of the EPAU at Rosehill. Councillor Miles pointed to the recommendations in the pack and Councillor Brown confirmed that all had been agreed. Councillor Munkonge thanked all involved with the strategy and echoed the acceptance of the recommendations. In relation to The Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2023/24, the Scrutiny Committee discussed concerns over the loss of family homes to students, the use of existing student accommodation, and the effect of increasing student numbers on the private rented sector in the city. The Committee requested more detailed data relating to student housing demand and considered whether land options for student housing demand could be sought outside of the city

centre. This discussion resulted in 2 recommendations, as noted in the report. In response, Councillor Upton explained that the report is focused on presenting data and measuring policy performance. As such, not all aspects of the recommendations could be incorporated into this report and some of the data requested already exists. She did however note her agreement with the sentiment of the first recommendation. On the second recommendation, she assured Councillor Miles that engagement with universities already takes place to encourage them to facilitate student housing on their own land; little more can be done.

The Climate and Environment Panel convened on 20 November 2024 to discuss updates around the UK Moorings Project and the deliverability of solar opportunities in Council car parks. This produced 4 recommendations, three of which related to the Council car parks project which have been agreed to. Councillor Railton noted that the recommendation regarding eco-moorings will be accepted only in part as there is not sufficient budget for letter drops to surrounding residents.

The Housing and Homelessness Panel convened on 27 November 2024 for an extraordinary meeting to discuss the HRA Asset Management Strategy and 5-Year Investment Programme and the Tenancy Engagement and Management report. Councillor Smith noted her support for the first recommendation relating to engaging young people as tenants in council properties. The recommendation was accepted. Councillor Smith noted a second recommendation regarding tenant satisfaction which focused on a discrepancy between corporate KPIs and the report. This recommendation was also accepted.

The Finance and Performance Panel convened on 4 December 2024 but made no recommendations.

Councillor Brown thanked Councillor Miles for her work within the Scrutiny Committee.

82. Housing Revenue Account Business Plan

The Executive Director Communities and People had submitted a report to present the HRA 40-year Business Plan for approval and implementation. Councillor Smith presented the report which aims to continue investment in Council homes, generate capacity to build more, and maintain sustainable levels of borrowing. The plans within the report are affordable and set out intentions to maximise income whilst replacing and improving old housing stock. The combined measures will support the reduction of debt and enable funding of future priorities. This will ensure that Oxford City Council is the best social landlord going forward.

The Executive Director Communities and People highlighted that the business plan is a medium-term plan which gives consideration beyond 2031 for future investment plans as the HRA's borrowing ability improves.

Councillor Chapman praised the report and noted his comfort in finally seeing comprehensive plans for house repairs to be conducted through ODS that will ensure value for money and responsive service. Councillor Railton focused on the topics of retrofitting and decarbonisation in relation to EPC commitments. Finally, Councillor Brown positively commented that that Oxford City Council is the only in the Oxford

region to possess and control its own housing stock meaning it can be ensured that tenants receive a better experience.

Councillor Smith specifically thanked the Housing and Tenant Consultant for this report who in return noted that the report is beneficial for the future of tenant experiences, should hold ODS to account, and ensure good value for money.

Cabinet agreed to

1. Adopt the new OCC Housing Revenue Account 40-Year Business Plan, which is attached at Appendix A that shows the HRA is able to fund planned expenditure over the medium term as set out in the 2025/26 Budget and MTFP proposals.
2. Agree:
 - i. implement the actions set out at paragraph 3.12 for further improving the financial position of the HRA in the medium term and bring forward availability of new borrowing from 2030/31; and
 - ii. prepare the options available to the Council for investing the HRA beyond 2030/31 as outlined at paragraphs 3.19/20.

83. Asset Strategy and 5 Year Investment Programme

The Executive Director, Communities and People, had submitted the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Asset Management Strategy and 5-Year Investment Programmes for adoption and approval. Councillor Smith presented the report and its findings which offered more detail on how investment in Council owned homes over the next 5 years will use £250m. She explained that plans are informed by data and stock condition surveys and tenant feedback. ODS will complete half of the work, with the other half to be allocated through a bidding process. The strategy also seeks to support ODS with their business planning to ensure value for money is achieved.

Councillor Chapman welcomed the level of certainty and long-term plan that the strategy offered but questioned how more efficiency will be guaranteed given the scale of the workload. He queried what project management systems will be in place. The Executive Director for Communities and People informed Cabinet that a delivery work plan, managed by a governance structure, is being designed with the Council and ODS. Additionally, there are provisions for a 1-year transition period for ODS to make necessary adjustments. The detail of the work plan is due in the new year and The Chief Executive Officer noted that it will be discussed amongst CMT pending the report's approval at Cabinet.

Councillor Turner requested further information and examples of the likely spends on energy efficiency that could be made within this plan. The Executive Director for Communities and People informed him that the plan to 2030 includes around £40m from the HRA to invest in measures such as window replacements but admitted that investment must be targeted to ensure that units below EPC are picked up and improved to meet targets.

Cabinet agreed to

1. Adopt the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Asset Management Strategy plan for 2025-28, a draft for which is attached at Appendix A.
2. Approve the HRA Investment Programmes of up to £250m over the next 5 years. The programmes are summarised at Appendix B, and comprise:
 - a. HRA 5-year Capital Programme (planned works) totalling up to £177m, which should ensure that OCC meets its landlord obligations including new safety, quality and decent home standards; and
 - b. annual demand led revenue works for responsive repairs and services of up to £14m for 2025/26 (up to £70m over 5 years).
3. Approve the commissioning of the following sub programmes to Oxford Direct Services Ltd (ODS) through current HRA direct award arrangements:
 - a. capital programme and projects valued at up to £77m over the next 5 years; and
 - b. responsive repairs (revenue) programme for 2025/26 valued at up to £12m (£60m).
4. Approve the commissioning, clienting and financial management arrangements at Appendix C and D for effectively implementing the recommendations above and enable the development of annual Delivery Plan by ODS for 2025/26
5. Delegate authority to the Executive Director for Communities and People, in consultation with the lead member for housing, to:
 - a. agree annual capital plans and programmes that are in line with the approved 5-year capital programme; and
 - b. make minor modifications to the specifications at Appendix C and D
 - c. delegate/decision to commence procurement activities to ensure delivery of capital and revenue works as required.

84. Tenancy Engagement and Management

The Executive Director of Communities and People had submitted a report to set out and seek approval for the reset of the Council's Tenant Engagement work, in its role as a social landlord and in alignment with the new Consumer Standards issued by the Regulator for Social Housing. Councillor Smith presented the high-level report which seeks to ensure improved and increased consultation with tenants alongside the maintenance of a direct link between the Council's governance structure and a new representative forum for tenants. She outlined that the forum would include the Cabinet Member for Housing who will be able to bring feedback directly to Cabinet. The report also explained the reorganisation of landlord services to ensure more responsive work on the ground to facilitate relationships with tenants and to inspire confidence in the Council's plans. The Head of Housing Services explained that the plans seek to bring the landlord function in line with the expectations of the tenants as a means of

strengthening a two-way relationship. This will place the tenant's voice at the decision-making table.

Councillor Brown thanked those involved in the report.

Cabinet agreed to

1. To approve the adoption and implementation of the new approach to Tenant Engagement as set out in this report.
2. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Communities and People (Interim) to make any further changes as necessary in line with service development and new legislation.

85. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 and 2028/29 and 2025/26 Budget for Consultation

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report to propose a Medium-Term Financial Strategy and the 2025/26 Budget for consultation. Councillor Turner presented the report and its findings with reference to an amended circulation of documentation provided. He thanked officers for their work on the fast-moving matter considering recent Government funding changes. As such, he noted the discrepancy between the 'potential support' committed to by Government, and the materialisation of these funds; local governments will need to be assertive in accessing this money. He explained that the aim of the strategy is to deliver services properly and efficiently in a context where resources are more constrained. Due to Covid it is expected that reserves will be drawn on for a couple of years but that changes to business rates could tighten the budget in the future. Furthermore, by planning more than one year ahead, negative events in the future could be reduced and risks mitigated to some extent by ensuring dividends, such as those from ODS and OX Place. Overall, Councillor Turner explained intentions to run the Council in a progressive way which maintains services and insources work.

Councillor Brown thanked Councillor Turner and the relevant officers.

The Head of Financial Services highlighted the benefits of having a 4-year balanced plan which has been achieved by using £5.5m of reserves and the reliance on the two companies to produce £19m in dividends over the next few years. However, he also noted uncertainty around the Government's budget announcement and the lack of clarity this offered. He cautioned that although the plan is positive, care must be taken to ensure and maintain income streams.

Councillor Brown thanked The Head of Financial Services and officers and noted that suggestions or questions regarding the report should be saved until the next meeting of Council.

Councillor Munkonge queried how the reform to business rates, if it goes ahead, would impact small businesses, and asked who is lobbying for this reform. Councillor Turner advised that the matter is complex and includes changes such as the business rate reset which will affect council income rather than small businesses, and the fairer funding changes which will impact how business rates are allocated. There will be

Government consultation on other changes to business rates and he committed that Oxford City Council will respond, as well as the LGA. The Head of Financial Services committed to sharing the draft response to the Government consultation with the Council.

Councillor Hollingsworth referred to paragraph 42C in the report relating to car parking and the closure of Oxpens car park. He asked whether any other car parks will be closed, specifically Worcester Street. The Head of Financial Services explained that any changes on Worcester Street would fall outside the timeframe of this budget.

Cabinet agreed to

1. Approve the 2025-26 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 £29.678 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 assuming it is confirmed that the authority is able to do so (see para 14 below)
 - b. The Housing Revenue Account budget for 2025/26 of £54.810 million and an increase of 2.7% (average of £3.51 per week) in social dwelling rents from 1 April 2025 (see paragraphs 76-78) giving a revised weekly average social rent of £133.68 as set out in Appendix 5.
 - c. The increase in shared ownership rental in accordance with the lease as shown in paragraph 79-80.
 - 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 to the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Board Member for Finance and Assets 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 23-24 of the report.

86. Controlled Parking Zones and CIL Spend

The Head of Planning and Regulatory Service had submitted a report to approve the release of CIL monies to the Local Highway Authority, Oxfordshire County Council for spending on the review of 7 existing Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs) within the Oxford City boundary. Councillor Upton presented the report and its findings. She explained that the CIL is a levy charged per square metre of infrastructure to help fund the city. The report seeks approval for the release of plots and expenditure to support work around CPZs, managed by Oxford County Council. Councillor Upton noted this as a good opportunity to improve CPZs with input from residents.

Councillor Brown welcomed the report and noted her personal dissatisfaction with many local CPZs. However, she also emphasised that the process of reviewing CPZs must engage with city and county councillors.

Councillor Smith welcomed the scope for the City Council to influence how Oxford County Council consults residents to ensure improvements. She also extended the consideration to local businesses and highlighted that the review of CPZs could improve possibilities for visitors to access small businesses more easily, especially in East Oxford.

Councillor Hollingsworth agreed with the plans in principle but questioned the appropriateness and legality of using CIL funds for the review of CPZs. He expressed understanding that CIL should not be used to redevelop existing infrastructure. The Head of Law and Governance acknowledged the question as valid and noted that the plans should be considered in principle at Cabinet, with a commitment to checking the detail and legality later. Councillor Brown agreed further discussion was required. The Team Leader for CIL, Data analysis and Reporting explained that CIL regulations change regularly and at present, would allow for the plans set out in the report. Per the Planning Act 2008, she noted no issue with the plans but committed to confirm this.

The Head of Law and Governance clarified that the recommendation could be accepted in principle but that further legal advice on funding should be sought with the final decision being delegated to the Head of Planning in consultation with Councillor Upton following the meeting.

On this basis, Cabinet agreed to

1. Approve, in principle, the request for the release of £358,000 In CIL monies to Oxfordshire County Council, for spending towards the review of 7 existing CPZs within Oxford City, but to delegate the final decision to The Head of Planning in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning, subject to consultation with Oxford City councillors, residents and businesses.

87. Integrated Performance Report Q2 2024/25

Councillor Ed Turner, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets had submitted a report to update the Cabinet on Finance, Risk and Corporate Performance matters as at 30th September 2024. Councillor Turner presented the report and its findings. He explained that more money had been spent than anticipated due to pressures from temporary accommodation and increased HRA costs this year. Consideration of these factors will be accounted for when assessing the budget for next year.

Cabinet agreed to

1. Note the projected financial outturn as well as the current position on risk and performance as on 30th September 2024.

88. Treasury Management Mid Year Review - April to September 2024

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report to report on the performance of the Treasury Management function for the 6 months to 30 September 2024. Councillor Turner presented the report and its findings. He explained that the figures in the review are a response to interest rates and property funds which have been invested in.

Cabinet agreed to

1. Note the performance of the Treasury Management function for the six months to 30th September 2024.

89. Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2023/24

The Head of Planning and Regulatory Service had submitted a report to approve the Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement for publication. Councillor Upton presented the report and its findings. She explained that it is a statutory requirement for the Council to set out how well it is doing against the criteria of its planning policies, measured against three objectives: strong economy, healthy and vibrant communities, and protection of natural and built environments. She focused on several highlights within the report including the 365 homes built in Oxford in the last year which includes 61 affordable homes, the increase in employment floor space across the city, and the role of Oxford as a major driver of the UK economy.

Councillor Hollingsworth noted that the plan will be out of date from next year and questioned whether this could be causing some of the delays and reductions in the production of developments in the last year. In response, The Team Leader for Planning Policy explained that the local plan will remain the relevant document beyond next year and that work for a new plan is continuing. The reduction in permissions for housing developments in the last year are more linked to other factors including reliance on smaller sites for permissions She noted that these tend to be more unreliable and subject to the variability of the economic climate.

Councillor Chapman requested clarification on an error on page 293 of the report. Cabinet and officers collectively agreed the error.

Councillor Railton queried why there is a difference in how housing and employment land are reported on in respect of the measured categories of permissions and completions. The Team Leader for Planning Policy confirmed that housing uses both measures, but employment land is based only on one. This is based on requirement.

Cabinet agreed to

1. Approve the Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2023/24 for publication.
2. Authorise the Head of Planning and Regulatory Services to make any necessary minor corrections not materially affecting the document prior to publication.

90. Thriving Communities Strategy Update

The Executive Director for Communities and People had submitted a report to provide an update on the delivery of the Thriving Communities Strategy. Councillor Munkonge presented the report on the progress of the strategy and thanked officers and cabinet members for their work. He noted that the strategy supports the Council's wider corporate priorities and is underpinned by work with a range of partners. Successes and highlights to date were noted which have contributed towards inequality reduction and improved ability for the community to enjoy local spaces. Councillor Munkonge pointed to the measures in the report which demonstrate the strategy's success, particularly measure 4 relating to swimming rates of young people in Oxford. He concluded that further improvements are required and acknowledged the recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Arshad also summarised the update report and focused on its ability to unite leisure, culture, and community initiatives to foster collaborative outcomes. To date, it has secured £2.8m in external funding and will distribute £1.5m annually through the Oxford Community Impact Fund. She also welcomed the recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Hollingsworth praised the consistency of the report for establishing and continually monitoring 11 measures. He noted the importance for using these for developing a useful and comparable data set over time.

The Active Communities Manager highlighted the importance of community work and the breadth of partnerships at the core of the strategy, including cultural partners and those within the health system. The Culture and Communities Development Manager added that the strategy is a whole system approach which includes the voluntary sector and other statutory agencies through a locality-based approach.

Councillor Brown pointed to the greater engagement the city has experienced recently from Oxford University as a result of this strategy and expressed hope that the trend continues. She explained that this could offer further access to the university's facilities, people, and expertise and concluded by thanking The Executive Director for Communities and People.

Councillor Arshad thanked all officers who have worked on the strategy.

Cabinet agreed to

1. Note the update on the delivery of the Thriving Communities Strategy.

91. Blackbird Leys Development Project - Compulsory Purchase Order

The Executive Director of Development had submitted a report to seek approval to utilise the Council's Compulsory Purchase powers to support the acquisition of properties required for Phase 2 of the Blackbird Leys Development Project. Councillor Smith presented the report outlining that phase 1 of the regeneration scheme was under way for new homes, new shops, and a new community centre. Preparation is under way for phase 2 which involves planning for the use of compulsory purchase

order powers as a last resort if agreement cannot be sought in the first instance. She explained that the report would allow necessary preparation to take place, but that a Cabinet decision would still be required in the future should the use of the compulsory purchase order powers be necessary. The unit in question includes shops and maisonettes which would be taken down for the development of a new residential block containing 98 affordable units.

Cabinet agreed to

1. Authorise the use by the Council of its Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) making powers pursuant to Section 226(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 for the acquisition of the land and [section 13 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 for the acquisition of new rights over land] shown outlined in red on the plan attached as Appendix 1.
2. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Development in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management and the Cabinet Member for Homes and Communities:
 - a. to take all necessary steps to secure the making, seeking confirmation and implementation of a CPO under section 226(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 including the publication and service of all notices and presentation of the Council's case at any public inquiry following the making of the Compulsory Purchase Order for the land shown on the plan attached as Appendix 1. To agree in principle to the use of the Council's compulsory purchase order powers pursuant to section 226(1) (a) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to acquire third party rights and interests subject to detailed land referencing exercise, in order to facilitate the Blackbird Leys Development Project
 - b. approve and enter agreements with landowners setting out the terms for withdrawal of objections to the Compulsory Purchase Order, including, where appropriate seeking exclusion of land or new rights from the Compulsory Purchase Order and/or making arrangements for the relocation of occupiers
 - c. to agree the terms and any documentation required to settle any property matters necessary to progress the regeneration scheme.

92. Disposal of City Council Land

The Executive Director Development had submitted a report to seek approval for the disposal of City Council owned land with development potential. The Head of Law and Governance provided some clarity regarding recommendation 2 which was updated to read as follows: 'to agree to the proposal to dispose of the land as set out in the report, subject to the agreement of contractual terms'.

Councillor Turner noted that the report must be read in conjunction with the confidential appendix provided to Cabinet. He explained that any disposal of land follows careful process to consider balance between controls of ownership and the potential benefits of disposal, including financial and other. He also assured Cabinet that on cases such as this, expert independent advice is utilised.

Councillor Brown reminded Cabinet of the confidential nature of this report and offered to enter a private session for further discussion. No private session was requested.

Cabinet agreed to

- 1. Note the contents of the report.
- 2. To agree to the proposal to dispose of the land as set out in the report, subject to the agreement of contractual terms.
- 3. Delegate to the Executive Director Development in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management and the Head of Law and Governance and Head of Financial Services the agreement of the detailed terms for the sale and to enter into all the necessary agreements to effect the disposal of the land on the basis that the terms comply with S123 of the Local Government Act 1972.

93. Minutes

Cabinet resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2024 as a true and accurate record.

94. Dates of Future Meetings

Cabinet noted the dates of future meetings.

The meeting started at 6.05 pm and ended at 7.40 pm

**Chair
January 2025**

Date: Wednesday 22

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.