

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday 9 July 2025

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Committee members present:

Councillor Brown

Councillor Arshad

Councillor Hollingsworth

Councillor Linda Smith

Councillor Turner

Councillor Chapman

Councillor Railton

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Caroline Green, Chief Executive

Tom Hook, Deputy Chief Executive – Citizen and City Services

Tom Bridgman, Deputy Chief Executive – Place

Emma Jackman, Director of Law, Governance, and Strategy (Monitoring Officer)

Nigel Kennedy, Group Finance Director

Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager

Helen Bishop, Director of Communities and Citizens' Services

Dr Brenda McCollum, Committee and Member Services Officer

Emma Gubbins, Corporate Assets Lead

Melissa Hope, Organisational Development Manager

Richard Wood, Housing Needs and Strategy Manager

Stephen Cohen, Refugee and Resettlement Manager

Vicki Galvin, Citizen Experience Programme Manager

Liz Jones, ASBIT Manager and Domestic Abuse Lead

Also present:

Councillor Alex Powell, Chair of Scrutiny

Apologies:

Councillor Munkonge sent apologies.

15. Declarations of Interest

None.

16. Addresses and Questions by Members of the Public

None received.

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

None received.

18. Councillor Addresses on Neighbourhood Issues

None received.

19. Items raised by Cabinet Members

None.

20. Scrutiny Reports

The Scrutiny Committee met on 1 July 2025 to consider the Domestic Abuse Policy for Service Users, the report on Tourism (a Scrutiny-commissioned paper), and the Citizen Experienced Strategy. The Housing and Homelessness Working Group met on the 24th of June to consider the National Homelessness Property Fund 1 and the Annual Review of the Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28.

Councillor Alex Powell presented the Scrutiny Committee's discussions and recommendations relating to the Domestic Abuse Policy for Service Users.

- **Recommendation:** That there is explicit recognition under section 3, Diversity Implications, of the way in which national immigration policy makes people less likely to disclose domestic violence, given Oxford's status as a Council of Sanctuary, it is especially important to acknowledge how national policy can harm the efforts of local authorities to build inclusive and safe communities.

Councillor Arshad thanked Scrutiny for their recommendation and emphasised the importance of the issue. She said that they had partially accepted the recommendation, to include and highlight the fear certain survivors of domestic abuse might feel towards deportation. This validates concerns of those survivors of domestic abuse and demonstrates their commitment to supporting them. This gives the clarity and support needed to those impacted.

Councillor Alex Powell presented the Scrutiny Committee's discussions and recommendations relating to the Tourism (a Scrutiny-commissioned paper). He noted that the Committee had discussed the challenges of tourism and possible avenues to attract a wider variety of tourist groups.

- **Recommendation 1:** That the Council take further steps to publicise the locations of public toilets that are accessible to visitors and residents alike, such as those in the Town Hall and other public buildings.
- **Recommendation 2:** That Council encourage the highest possible level of elected representation within the ABID task groups, within the constraints of the scheme, in order to promote democratic accountability, recognising the Council's role as the scheme's facilitator.

Councillor Hollingsworth responded to the recommendations and thanked Councillor Powell for the detailed and useful session with Scrutiny. In response to the first recommendation, Councillor Hollingsworth said that they would review to see how else the Council could publicise this information, including physical and digital signage options. Regarding the second recommendation, he said that the Cabinet had agreed the recommendation, but emphasised that the Council are not the decision maker in the ABID

Councillor Alex Powell presented the Scrutiny Committee's discussions and recommendations relating to the Citizen Experienced Strategy. He noted that the discussions analysed how the Council engages with younger people and how they consider the implications of AI.

- **Recommendation 1:** That Cabinet consider incorporating physical presence in future consultations, particularly in areas further outside the city centre, and undertake support of language interpreters where appropriate.
- **Recommendation 2:** That the environmental and equality impacts of AI use be considered as a core component of the full review of the Citizen Experience Strategy in 2027, adding dedicated sections addressing the implications of AI in both areas within the strategy.
- **Recommendation 3:** That proactive efforts be made to consult children under 12, in recognition of the city's commitment to becoming an age and children friendly city.

Councillor Chapman thanked Scrutiny for their recommendations and their discussion of the paper. In response, Councillor Chapman said that they were broadly supportive of the recommendations and had agreed the first and third recommendations. He said that they had not agreed the second recommendation, because the Council was already undertaking work on a broader AI Strategy which would address those issues raised by the second recommendation.

Councillor Alex Powell presented the Housing and Homelessness Working Group's discussions and recommendations relating to the National Homelessness Property Fund 1. No recommendations came to Cabinet from the Working Group regarding this report.

Councillor Alex Powell presented the Housing and Homelessness Working Group's discussions and recommendations relating to the Annual Review of the Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28.

- **Recommendation 1:** That Cabinet continue to actively lobby against changes to local government funding for homelessness services, particularly those that would result in significant funding reductions for Oxford and other local authorities with high levels of homelessness.

- **Recommendation 2:** That Council explore all available measures to safeguard tenants from unjust or revenge evictions pending the passage of the Renters' Rights Bill.

Councillor Smith responded to the Working Group's recommendations and said that Cabinet had agreed both the recommendations. She said that the response from Cabinet demonstrates that they are already working in these areas and will be progressing this work, in line with the recommendations from the Working Group.

Councillor Brown thanked Councillor Powell for their work and the presentations from Scrutiny.

Councillor Arshad left the meeting during this item at 18:15.

21. Appointment to Outside Bodies 2025-26

The Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer) submitted a report to request that Cabinet agree appointments to Outside Bodies for the 2025/2026 Council Year.

Councillor Brown presented the report thanked Jonathan Malton, the Committee and Member Services Manager, and other officers who worked on the report for their efforts in drafting the document. She asked members being appointed to outside bodies to report back to Jonathan and others in his team to let them know if they receive invitations to relevant meetings with Outside Bodies organizations. She highlighted that the aim of these partnerships was to further engagement between members and the organizations, but if this was not happening, the members should report this back to the Committee and Member Services team.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** appointments to charities, trusts, community associations and other organisations as set out in Appendices 1A – 1D; and note the appointments to partnerships as detailed in Appendix 1E;
2. **Note** the guidance for appointees in Appendix 2; and
3. **Delegate** authority to the Director of Law, Governance and Strategy, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, and where appropriate with other group leaders, to make any changes to appointments to Outside Bodies as required during the Council year 2025/2026.

22. Community Rents Policy

The Director of Property and Assets submitted a report to seek Cabinet approval to agree the Community Lettings Policy.

Councillor Turner presented the report. He discussed the need to set an appropriate market rent for community organizations but highlighted that market rent depends on how a space is being used. He said that the report proposes to have three bands of market rents, one for commercial organizations, a second for medium sized charities and non-profits, and a third for small charities and non-profits. The report also proposed to make grants to organizations to help with the cost. He stated that this makes the funding process more transparent and gives the Council an opportunity to decide how they want to prioritize funds. Councillor Turner noted the importance of this considering the two new community centres currently being developed. He said that the report

proposes that the change in charges is phased in over time, to give organizations time to adjust.

Councillor Hollingsworth said that this was an important step to allow the Council to more decisively prioritize how they allocate funding in this area. He noted that this will also support greater transparency and expressed his support for the report's proposals.

Cabinet resolved to:

Approve the Community Lettings Policy in Appendix 1

23. Citizen Experience Strategy Refresh

The Director of Communities and Citizens' Services submitted a report to Cabinet to review the Citizen Experience Strategy 2025-27 and to seek approval of the updated action plan.

Councillor Chapman presented the report. He noted that this was a refresh report and that they were midway through a four-year term of the current strategy. He discussed the transition to digital and said that they had handled this quite well. As they transition to digital, Councillor Chapman emphasised that they would continue to have face to face services, to provide for those individuals who cannot access digital services.

Councillor Chapman presented the four strands of focus for the strategy:

- Citizen Focused
- Positive Citizen Experience (CEX)
- Inclusive Access
- Get it right first time

Councillor Chapman discussed the limitations on what they can offer in some areas and the alternatives they offer as they seek to mitigate these challenges. He said that independent analysis of their performance was positive and said that more work on digital services would be part of the next phase of the strategy. Councillor Chapman highlighted the Council's performance in this area, stating that they are usually rated in the top ten of local authorities in England and Wales.

Councillor Brown said that when they had begun offering digital services, they had endeavoured to take people with them. Now, the situation has changed, and they have to work to keep up with peoples' appetite for online services. She emphasised the importance of ensuring that people can access digital services on their mobile phones and guaranteeing that the information on their websites is accurate.

Councillor Turner asked about the financial implications of the strategy and if they were on course to meet their budget in this area.

Councillor Chapman said that he believed they were. He noted that they could make savings faster, but to do so, they would need to cut back up services which are crucial to ensuring people can access the Council's services. Due to this, he emphasised that it was worth investing this money into working for individuals and keeping a balance between in person and digital services.

Cabinet resolved to:

Approve the Citizen Experience Strategy for 2025-27 and the accompanying Action Plan.

24. Annual Review of the Housing, Homeless & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28

The Director of Housing submitted a report to Cabinet to provide an update on the progress made in Year 2 of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 and to seek approval for the implementation of the Year 3 action plan.

Councillor Smith presented the report. She said that the report asked Cabinet to agree an action plan and signified the great work being done in the Council's housing areas. Councillor Smith highlighted the successes that the team had achieved in the delivery of homes for social rents, supplying more affordable housing, and making the private rental sector more accessible. She said that the team had also done great work in the transformation of landlord services and that their stock condition survey was going well. Councillor Smith added that OX Place was building above regulations to keep carbon emissions down and support the move towards Net Zero. She highlighted the national award that the Housing Team had earned in their work to prevent homelessness. She commended the work that the Housing Team had done to address homelessness and rough sleeping in the city.

Councillor Brown thanked the officers for their thorough report and commended them for their ongoing work in this important area. She emphasised the Council's commitment to tackling homelessness challenges in the city and thanked the officers for their work to support these efforts.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the progress made in Year 2 to implement the Housing, Homelessness, and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan and the emerging risks and challenges for delivery over next year and beyond;
2. **Approve** the adoption of the new Strategy Action Plan for Year 3 (25-26); and
3. **Delegate** authority to the Director of Housing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, to update the Action Plan when required.

The Chair of the meeting slightly amended the agenda and Item 13 was taken directly after Item 11, because the same officers were responsible for the two reports. Agenda Item 12 was taken after Item 13.

25. Domestic Abuse Policy for Service Users

The ASBIT Manager and Domestic Abuse Lead submitted a report to Cabinet to seek approval for the Domestic Abuse Policy for Service Users.

Councillor Turner presented the report in Councillor Arshad's absence. He said that this work represented part of the domestic abuse housing accreditation which the Council are passionate about pursuing in their work to support survivors of domestic abuse. He said that the report had received good input from a public consultation, survivors, charities, and others in the sector. Councillor Turner asked if they would expect changes to come from the report, or if the report was more formalizing their current way

of working. He also flagged the initiatives from central government in this area and asked if there was anything else to highlight.

Liz Jones, the ASBIT Manager and Domestic Abuse Lead, said that the policy would formalize their current processes. She said that they were seeking to improve their responses to domestic abuse and that relevant services had seen an improvement in their engagement with the Council over the past several years. She discussed the recommendation from Scrutiny regarding individuals with insecure immigration status and how they had addressed this recommendation, to ensure that service users with fears of deportation would feel comfortable engaging with the service.

Councillor Brown thanked the ASBIT Manager and Domestic Abuse Lead for their work on the report and emphasised Cabinet and Council's commitment to this area of work.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the Domestic Abuse Policy for Service users (Appendix 1)
2. **Delegate** authority to the Domestic Abuse Lead, to make minor changes in the future to reflect any relevant changes in legislation, guidance or practice.

26. National Homelessness Property Fund One

The Director of Housing submitted a report to seek a decision on the future of the Council's investment in NHPF1.

Councillor Turner presented the report. He said that the Council have an investment into the NHPF1, and it was important to maintain this, due to the financial implications of exiting the fund and the pressures this would further on temporary accommodation. He emphasised that exiting the fund would not only be difficult, but also disadvantageous.

Richard Wood, the Housing Needs and Strategy Manager, discussed the advantages of the fund and said that it makes financial sense for the Council to stay in the fund, as the returns come in through the investment. Moreover, he flagged the immediate impacts on access to housing for the homeless community in Oxford if they exited the fund.

Councillor Brown agreed and highlighted the housing elements, as well as financial implications, to consider in this report.

Councillor Hollingsworth expressed his support for the report's recommendations. He asked about the timeline with the second option, and if the fund had fixed buy in dates.

The Housing Needs and Strategy Manager said that in the last update with Resonance, the intention was for the Ever-Green Fund to launch by the end of the year. He said that we could return to the decision to increase the investment later in the year before the funds launches, but that the indication was that there would be further regular opportunities to invest in the fund into the future. He outlined how this flexibility was a benefit of the fund.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the principle of Oxford City Council moving its current £10m investment in National Homelessness Property Fund One, into a new “evergreen” property fund, in order to preserve nomination rights to 69 homes in Oxfordshire alleviating homelessness.
2. **Delegate** to the Director of Housing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, the Deputy Leader (statutory) for Finance and Asset Management, the Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer) and Group Finance Director (S151) the authority to enter in to such agreements as necessary to make the reinvestment in to the new “evergreen” property fund subject to reassurance from the fund that all or majority of the homes owned in Oxfordshire are retained through the reinvestment and satisfactory approval of the terms of the investment agreement.

27. Making Oxford a Truly Walkable City

The Director of Economy, Regeneration and Sustainability submitted a report to Cabinet to respond to Council motion of 25 November 2024, which requested (subject to a Cabinet decision) a plan for making Oxford a truly walkable city.

Councillor Railton presented the report. She said this was a short paper in response to a motion at Council in November 2024. She said that the motion had asked for the Council to produce a walking map of the city. The report discusses options in how to produce the map but given that there was no budget allocated for this, the report recommends that they do not produce the map. Councillor Railton outlined other work they had done in this area, including discussing the matter with County Council and central government.

Councillor Turner said that they had a budget amendment which reflected the importance Councillors attached to this area of work. He noted the outstanding pavement works that they were going to address in the current year. He expressed his support for the report’s recommendations.

Councillor Chapman commended the paper. He said that they often had motions in Council, but that it was easy for the motions to slip through the cracks and not be addressed. He said that this was a good piece of practice to ensure that they followed up and explained why they could or could not do the things requested in motions.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the Council motion of 25 November 2024 and note those elements which do not rely on additional resources beyond those in the Council’s budget which are currently being implemented.
2. **Not to support** the production of a new plan for walking or a walking map for Oxford as these are County Council responsibilities and would duplicate what is currently available through online and retail outlets.

28. Post Print Contract Re-Tender

The Director of Communities and Citizen Services submitted a report to Cabinet to request the commencement of procurement of a contract for postage and printing of Council correspondence, and to delegate approval to award the contract to Deputy Chief Executive, Citizen & City Services.

Councillor Chapman presented the report. He outlined the hybrid aspects of the report, and how the increasing reliance on working from home changed how posting and printing operated. He said that the contract also related to their online portals and how they contact users of the portals. Councillor Chapman said that the current contract ended on the 31st of October and the request was to Cabinet for the cost of the next contract.

Helen Bishop, Director of Communities and Citizens' Services, said that they might need to push the timetable back slightly and that this was due to staff absence. She said that she was working with procurement colleagues to extend their current contract so that they can undertake the procurement exercise.

In response to a question from Councillor Brown, the Director of Communities and Citizens' Services said that they had not arranged the new contract and procurement process sooner due to staff absence in her team.

Councillor Brown expressed concern that this had happened with contracts frequently. In future, she said that she hoped they could get the procurement process underway sooner, as these tight timetables and extended contracts were not helpful for anyone involved.

Nigel Kennedy, the Group Finance Director, said that they had introduced a business partner role for procurement. He noted that under the new regulations they had to have a procurement pipeline in place. Through the business partnering, he said that they could have more oversight over this and nudge managers to work on these issues earlier. He agreed that in this instance, it had fell because multiple staff involved were absent due to ill health. However, he assured that they would improve on pushing things forward and that they had received assurances from the procurement team as well.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Give project approval** for the procurement of a hybrid print and post contract for a term of four years to replace the existing contract, which expires on 31st October 2025; and
2. **Delegate authority** to the Deputy Chief Executive of City and Citizen Services to take any decisions and actions required to award a contract for the supply of a hybrid print and post solution for the Council.

29. Direct Award for Apprenticeship Training

The Organisational Development Manager submitted a report to Cabinet seeking approval to award a contract without competition for apprenticeship training to the current training provider, Multiverse Group Ltd.

Councillor Chapman presented the report. He said that this training would be with staff in the Council to develop digital and AI skills. He said that they had 88 staff members scheduled for the training and that the feedback from those who had already done the training was positive. He thanked Melissa Hope, the Organisational Development Manager, for her work on the training and her work to organize funding for the training.

The Organisational Development Manager said that they had had great successes from the first people who had gone through the program. She said that the individuals had

also passed learning on to others, demonstrating the usefulness of the training program. She assured that the safe use of AI is embedded into the training. While they are investing significantly into this area, she also assured that they were still focusing on other areas of skill development. She discussed the other apprenticeships they were undertaking in procurement, building control, and other areas within the Council.

Due to one of the companies mentioned by the Organisational Development Manager Councillor Hollingsworth asked if he needed to declare an interest. The Director of Law, Governance, and Strategy confirmed that he did not need to and that he could vote on the item.

Councillor Brown thanked the Organisational Development Manager for her work and said she was proud of the work the Council was doing on apprenticeships. She said that she hoped this work could expand to other areas of the city, to give people more lifelong training opportunities. She expressed her support for the report.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the award of a contract without a competitive procurement process for training in AI, Data and Business Transformation to Multiverse Group Ltd with an approximate value of £600k for cohort 2 (2025/2026/2027). This is a Cabinet and key decision due to the aggregated value of income to Multiverse, following previous appointment of them by the Council for apprenticeship training, being more than £750K (across years 2025/2026/2027). The current spend is approximately £495K (2024/2025)
2. **Delegate** to the Deputy Chief Executive City and Citizen's Services authority to award further contracts if required, in accordance with Councils procurement processes.

30. Minutes

Cabinet resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on **18 June 2025** as a true and accurate record.

31. Dates of Future Meetings

Cabinet noted the dates of future meetings.

Matters Exempt from Publication

If Cabinet wishes to exclude the press and the public from the meeting during consideration of any of the items on the exempt from publication part of the agenda, it will be necessary for Cabinet to pass a resolution in accordance with the provisions of Paragraph 4(2)(b) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 on the grounds that their presence could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in specific paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Cabinet may maintain the exemption 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 meeting started at 18:00 and ended at 19:05.

Chair

Date: Wednesday 13 August 2025

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.