

Minutes of a meeting of Council on Monday 23 February 2026

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Council members present:

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

Also 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
Nigel Kennedy, Group Finance Director

Laura Bessell, Local Taxation and Benefits Service Delivery Manager

Emma Jackman, Director of Law, Governance and Strategy

Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager

Dr Brenda McCollum, Committee and Member Services Officer

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

101. Apologies for absence

Councillors Latif and Hunt sent apologies for absence. Councillors Goddard and Djafari-Marbini were noted for a late arrival.

102. Declarations of interest

Councillors Henwood and Stares declared an interest in the line regarding the Littlemore Community Centre in the budget report. They said that they would leave the meeting during this discussion.

Councillors Arshad and Malik declared an interest in agenda item 8 and would leave the meeting during the discussion.

103. Announcements

The Lord Mayor noted that they would adjourn at 5:30 for members observing Ramadan to breakfast. She noted the date of the Lord Mayors Quiz and celebrated the achievement and recent award won by the communications team.

The Deputy Lord Mayor congratulated the communications team for their award. He noted his work at the One World Fair and the opportunity he'd had to give out awards to young musicians in the city.

The City Rector discussed the fourth anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the ramifications of this violence. He commemorated those that had suffered in this invasion. He noted the upcoming anniversary of a poet from the seventeenth century and the importance of ordinary, good actions, particularly when they have local impacts.

Councillor Mundy arrived during this item at 17:06.

104. Budget Debate Procedure

Council noted the procedure and times permitted for each stage in the budget debate. The Lord Mayor noted that groups had agreed to have a thirty-minute break after the initial debate, for groups to propose further amendments. Cllr Turner seconded the acceptance of this amendment to the standing orders. Council voted and accepted this amendment to the standing orders for budget debate procedure.

105. Public addresses that relate to matters for decision at this meeting

Council received one address from a member of the public from Paul Wightman.

Hello, my name is Paul Wightman.

I'm here today as a director of Causing a Scene Ltd, which is a community- owned and run co-operative, set up by a diverse community of music fans, musicians, DJs, managers, producers, promoters, technicians, creatives and community leaders...
...to be the collective voice & champion of Oxfordshire's music scene, and its associated culture.

Specifically, I'm here to support the introduction of the new Live Music Fund, which is outlined in the budget before you for consideration today.

Causing a Scene's vision, is of a vibrant local music culture that's diverse, resilient and deeply valued...

...not only for its creativity, but for the hugely positive role it plays in improving individual wellbeing, community cohesion and a sense of belonging... ..and as a too-often overlooked multiplier of the local economy.

This city is the birthplace and home of extraordinary artists, venues and promoters that we can be rightly proud of.

Whether that's the incredible, diverse talent that you can see performing at a grassroots level on a daily basis..... people who perform for the sheer love of creativity and community connection.

Or the artists that became famous and put us on the global culture map, such as: Radiohead, Ride, Supergrass, Glass Animals, Foals and Stornoway.

You may not be aware, but Oxford was recently crowned the UK's rock music capital in terms of album chart and streaming success over the past 30 years, beating Manchester, Liverpool and London.

In a world where Berlin Techno has just been designated as an intangible global cultural asset by UNESCO, Oxford's music heritage is a largely untapped asset that, with the right backing and strategy, could generate significant income and overnight stays for the local visitor economy.

Meanwhile, a new generation of diverse, up and coming artists, such as: South Arcade, Elmiene, Sammy Virji, Hamdi, and Artemas continue to blow up across the globe.

Elmiene for instance, who came to Oxford as a 5 year-old Sudanese refugee, recently sold out the Brixton Academy, while Sammy Virji is fast becoming one of the world's biggest DJs, and Artemas, in 2024, had the most globally successful single of any UK artist.

They all developed their craft at local grassroots music venues in this city. Venues which continue to act as the Research & Development centres of the next big Oxford export, in a UK music sector that generated over £8 billion for UKDP last year.

So with all this success you might be wondering why a new Live Music Fund is needed?

Across the UK, music and arts venues and artists, are facing existential threats, but in Oxford, there is a very specific additional, underlying challenge.

It's a city with uniquely acute competition for physical space.... which, if left purely to commercial forces, without interventions from public bodies and the occasional benevolence of landlords and philanthropists...

.... means music, arts and community, inevitably lose out to student accommodation, laboratories and boutique hotels...

...despite the fact that, music, art and community are the very things that make people want to move here and to stay and put down roots, especially young people entering the workforce, which employers rely on to drive their strategic growth plans.

No young people, no growth.

If you're yet to be convinced, consider this: Tech start-ups and University spin-outs are essentially subsidised on the basis of their IP until they turn a profit, why shouldn't musicians, or the R&D venues where they learn their craft?

In summary, although we wait with interest to see the finer details of the new Music Fund, and would welcome working with you to ensure it has maximum impact, we urge all councillors to back this aspect of the budget today, as a brave first step in the right direction.

Back the spaces where music lives, the talents that use them, and the communities that thrive in them.

And ensure music's place at the heart of Oxford's cultural life and night time economy for generations to come.

Thank you for your time.

Councillor Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Culture, presented the Council's response to the address from the member of the public.

He said that the matter of live music in the city was very personal to him. He said that in 1995 he worked to keep a music venue open in Oxford and that this issue was salient in 1995 and remains to be an important issue. He discussed the importance of grassroots venues across the city, for musicians and for the people who visit them. Councillor Hollingsworth spoke about the personal positive impacts that attending gigs in Oxford has had on his life and how this demonstrates the importance of live music venues for all in the city.

Councillors Corais, Pressel, and Goddard arrived during this item at 17:14.

106. Licensing Act 2003 and Gambling Act 2005 Licence Fees and Charges for the 2026/27 financial year

The Deputy Chief Executive for City and Citizen Services submitted a report to seek agreement on the licence fees for 2026/27 where the council has discretion over the level of fee charged, following recommendation from the Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee on 9 February 2026.

Councillor Miles presented the report. She thanked the Licensing officers for their hard work in enforcement across the city. She discussed the statutory and legal responsibility they held as the Council to set these fees. She moved the report for resolution by the Council.

Councillor Mundy seconded the report.

Council resolved to:

1. **Agree** the licence fees and charges for 2026/27 as recommended by the Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee and as set out in Appendix 1.

Councillor Djafari-Marbini arrived during this item at 17:21.

107. Miscellaneous Licensing Fees and Charges for the financial year 2026/2027

The Director of Planning and Regulation submitted a report to seek agreement of the licence fees for 2026/27 where the Council has discretion over the level of fee charged, following recommendation at the General Purposes Licensing Committee on 9 February 2026.

Councillor Muddiman presented the report. She outlined the charges for street traders and the law dictating how they set these fees and charges. She said that although this was an increase, officers had assured them that this was a fair and reasonable increase. She moved the report for Council resolution.

Councillor Rehman seconded the report.

Council resolved to:

1. **Agree** the Miscellaneous Licensing Fees and Charges for 2026/2027 recommended by the General Purposes Licensing Committee as set out in Appendix 1.

108. Hackney Carriage and Private Hire, Road Closure Orders, Scrap Metal Dealers, Sex Establishments Street Parties and Commercial Events: Licence Fees and Charges for the 2026/27 financial year

Councillors Malik and Arshad left the room for this item, due to declared interests.

The Deputy Chief Executive for City and Citizen Services submitted a report to seek agreement on the licence fees for 2026/27 where the council has discretion over the level of fee charged following recommendation from the General Purposes Licensing Committee on 9 February 2026.

Councillor Muddiman presented the report. She said that there were no increases to charges to many licenses this year and that the increases for road closures were minimal. She thanked the licensing officers for their work. She moved the report for Council resolution.

Councillor Rehman seconded the report.

Council resolved to:

1. **Agree** the licence fees and charges for 2026/27 as recommended by the General Purposes Licensing Committee and as set out in Appendix 1.

Council broke for members observing Ramadan to breakfast after this item, at 17:26.

109. Chief Finance Officer's report on the robustness of the Council's 2026/27 budget

Council reconvened the meeting at 18:03.

Councillor Morris arrived after the break at 18:03.

Council considered a report from the Group Finance Director, 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 Finance Director presented the report. He outlined the context of his report and the bankruptcies which many local authorities in the country had recently faced. He noted the uncertainty caused by Local Government Reorganisation and the late arrival of the information regarding the funding from central government. Despite these issues, he said that they had set a four-year financial plan. He outlined the similarities between this and previous years' budgets and the state of the Council's reserves. The Group Finance Director discussed the risks posed by the Oxford model and its reliance on dividend payments from companies and fees. He said that from his analysis he believed that the reserves and income estimates were robust. He noted that if the Council failed to set the budget and council tax in the current meeting, it could have negative impacts on the Council's billing.

Council noted the report in setting the Council budget for 2026/27 and the indicative budgets for 2027/28 – 2029/30.

110. 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 11 February 2026 and the Cabinet's response.

Councillor Fry presented the report. He thanked the officers and committee members for their work on the budget. He summarised the main recommendations from the Budget Review Group and noted those which were and were not accepted by Cabinet. He outlined how the Budget Review Group had considered the context of Local Government Reorganisation and how the implications of this matter.

Councillor Turner said that they had a well practicing set of scrutiny arrangements which were adding value to their budget setting and review process. He thanked the officers and committee members for their time managing and reviewing the budget.

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

111. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 to 2029/30 and 2025/26 Budget

Council had before it and considered:

1. The report of the Group Director Finance to Cabinet on 11 February 2026 setting out the outcome of the budget consultation and seeking agreement of the Council's Budget for 2026/27 and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2027-28 to 2029-30.
2. The Liberal Democrat Group's submitted amendments published with the briefing note.
3. The Green Group's submitted amendments published with the briefing note.
4. The Independent Oxford Alliance Group's submitted amendments published with the briefing note.
5. The Oxford Community Independents Group's submitted amendments published with the briefing note.
6. Two individual amendments from Councillor Dr. Hosnieh Djafari-Marbini published with the briefing note.

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 context of Local Government Reorganisation and the uncertainty which this caused for the Council. Despite this, they were pursuing a four-year plan, demonstrating the financial robustness of the Oxford City Council. He thanked the Council's senior leaders and officers for their work and efforts to create a good working environment. He welcomed the additional funding for homelessness mitigation from the funding settlement from central government. He outlined their commitment to addressing the housing crisis in the city and to the Oxford living wage. He said that they were proposing funding for new community wardens and the free collection of bulky waste for all Oxford residents. Councillor Turner said that they budget also proposed further verge cuttings and improvements to the investments of the gritting of cycle paths. He outlined the other proposals the budget was making to fund and improve many areas of life for the city and its residents. Noting Nigel's upcoming retirement, Councillor Turner thanked Nigel Kennedy, the Group Finance Director, for his tireless work to lead the finances of the City Council for years and expressed that Nigel would be sorely missed.

Councillor Brown, Leader of the Council, seconded the budget proposal for Council resolution.

a) Alternative budget proposals – The Liberal Democrat Group's submitted amendments published with the briefing note.

Councillor Snowton presented the amendments. Councillor Snowton, seconded by Councillor Katharine Miles, moved the Liberal Democrat Group's amendments.

Following debate, these were put to the vote.

With more Councillors voting against (24), than for (7), and 12 abstentions, the Liberal Democrat Group's amendments were not carried.

b) Alternative budget proposals – The Green Group's submitted amendments published with the briefing note.

Councillor Jarvis presented the amendments and noted a change to the amendments' wording. Councillor Jarvis, seconded by Councillor Powell, moved the Green Group's amendments.

Following debate, these were put to the vote.

With more Councillors voting against (23), than for (8), and 12 abstentions, the Green Group's amendments were not carried.

c) Alternative budget proposals – The Independent Oxford Alliance Group's submitted amendments published with the briefing note.

Councillors Henwood and Stares left the room at 19:34 for the discussion of this item, due to their declared interests.

Councillor Yeatman presented the amendments. Councillor Yeatman, seconded by Councillor Harley, moved the Independent Oxford Alliance Group's amendments.

Following debate, these were put to the vote.

With more Councillors voting against (27), than for (2), and 8 abstentions, the Independent Oxford Alliance Group's amendments were not carried.

Council broke for 30 minutes after the discussion of this amendment at 19:51.

Council reconvened at 20:32.

The Lord Mayor proposed that the meeting be extended up to one hour, Councillor Brown seconded. Council passed this amendment to the standing orders.

d) Individual amendments to the budget

- 1) An individual amendment from Councillor Dr Djafari-Marbini, seconded by Councillor Malik, was moved.

Following debate, this was put to the vote.

With more Councillors voting against (20), than for (8), and 15 abstentions, Councillor Dr Djafari-Marbini's amendment was not carried.

- 2) An individual amendment from Councillor Dr Djafari-Marbini, seconded by Councillor Malik, was moved.

Following debate, this was put to the vote.

With more Councillors voting against (20), than for (8), and 15 abstentions, Councillor Dr Djafari-Marbini's amendment was not carried.

- 3) An individual amendment from Councillor Harley, seconded by Councillor Yeatman, was moved.

Following debate, this was put to the vote.

With more Councillors voting against (20), than for (7), and 15 abstentions, Councillor Harley's amendment was not carried.

- 4) An individual amendment from Councillor Snowton, seconded by Councillor Katharine Miles, was moved.

Following debate, this was put to the vote.

With more Councillors voting against (23), than for (18), and 1 abstention, Councillor Snowton's amendment was not carried.

- 5) An individual amendment from Councillor Jarvis, seconded by Councillor Powell, was moved.

Following debate, this was put to the vote.

With more Councillors voting against (27), than for (15), and with no abstentions, Councillor Jarvis's amendment was not carried.

e) Decision on the Cabinet Budget

Following debate, the recommendations of the Cabinet as agreed at its meeting on 11 February 2026 including the details of the budget for 2026/27 Medium Term Financial Strategy, Housing Revenue Account, Capital Programme and other matters set out in the published agenda and briefing note for this meeting were put to the vote.

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

For the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2027-28 to 2029-30 and 2026-27 Budget Housing Revenue Account, Capital Programme and other matters set out in the published agenda and briefing note:

Councillors

Arshad, Brown, Chapman, Clarkson, Corais, Diggins, Fry, Hollingsworth, Lygo, Munkonge, Ottino, Pressel, Qayyum, Railton, Rehman, Rowley, Linda Smith, Taylor, Turner, Upton, Waite

Against the Cabinet recommendations to Council:

Asad, Fouweather, Gant, Goddard, Harley, Henwood, Jupp, Malik, Miles, Roz Smith, Snowton, Stares, Yeatman

Abstentions:

Jarvis, Morris, Muddiman, Mundy, Powell, Rawle, Regisford, Robinson

With more Councillors voting for than against the recommendations were carried.

Council resolved in accordance with the recorded vote to:

- 1) **Note** the approval by Cabinet on 21 January 2026 and subsequently agreed by the Council on 26 January of an increase of 4.8% i.e. CPI+1% in line with the recent Government announcement referred to in paragraph 28 from 1st April 2026, giving an average weekly increase of £8.47 per week, and a revised weekly average social rent of £143.40 as set out in Appendix 5 based on a HRA budget as set out in Appendix 4;
- 2) **Approve** the 2026-27 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 and as amended, noting:
 - a) the Council's General Fund Budget Requirement of £32.185 million for 2026/27 and an increase in the Band D Council Tax of 2.99% or £10.66 per annum representing a Band D Council Tax of £367.38 per annum; and
 - b) the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme as shown in Appendix 6;
- 3) **Agree** the fees and charges shown in Appendix 7;
- 4) **Confirm** the Council Tax Base for 2026-27 of **48,725.2** as per paragraph 17 below and Appendices 11 and 12 attached.

Councillor Djafari-Marbini left the meeting during this item at 20:52.

112. Council Tax Setting

The Group Finance Director (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report to provide the necessary calculations to enable the Council to set the 2026/27 Council Tax for Oxford.

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 2026/27 Council Tax for Oxford:

Councillors

Arshad, Brown, Chapman, Clarkson, Corais, Diggins, Fry, Fouweather, Gant, Goddard, Harley, Henwood, Hollingsworth, Jarvis, Jupp, Lygo, Miles, Morris, Muddiman, Mundy, Munkonge, Ottino, Powell, Pressel, Qayyum, Railton, Rawle, Regisford, Robinson, Rowley, Linda Smith, Roz Smith, Smowton, Taylor, Turner, Upton, Waite, Yeatman

Against the Cabinet recommendations to Council:

Azad, Malik, Stares

Abstentions:

Rehman

With more Councillors voting for than against, the recommendations were carried.

Council resolved in accordance with the recorded vote to:

1. **Approve** the Council's precept and Council Tax requirement of £18,191,281 including Parish Precepts and £17,900,664 excluding Parish Precepts.
2. **Approve** the average Band D Council Tax figure (excluding Parish Precepts) of £367.38, a 2.99% increase on the 2025/26 figure of £356.72. Including Parish Precepts, the figure is £373.34, a 3.00% increase, noting that this is not the figure that is used to compare to the referendum limit (as set out in paragraphs 2 to 8 of the report).
3. **Approve** a contribution of £10,000 to Old Marston Parish Council in recognition of the additional expenditure that the Parish Council incurs as a consequence of maintaining the cemetery in Marston (as set out in paragraphs 11 and 12 of the report).
4. **Approve** the amount of £773,943 to be treated as Special Expenses (see paragraph 15 of the report).
5. **Approve** the Band D Council Tax for the various areas of the city (excluding the Police and Crime Commissioner and Oxfordshire County Council's precepts) as follows:

Littlemore	£393.69
Old Marston	£402.73
Risinghurst and Sandhills	£399.04
Blackbird Leys	£371.13
Unparished Area	£370.48

These figures include Parish Precepts and special expensing amounts as appropriate; in addition to the City-Wide Council Tax of £351.50.

6. **Note** Oxfordshire County Council's precept and Band D Council Tax is as set out in paragraph 19 below
7. **Note** the Police and Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley's precept and Band D Council Tax is as set out in paragraph 20 below, and
8. **Note** the overall average Band D equivalent Council Tax is £2,678.40 including Parish Precepts (subject to confirmation of the Band D figures for Oxfordshire County Council).

113. Treasury Management Strategy

The Group Finance Director (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report to approve the Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2026/27 together with the Prudential Indicators for 2026/27 to 2029/30, following recommendation from Cabinet.

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

Councillor Turner responded to questions on the report from Councillors Mundy, Miles, and Smowton.

Council resolved to:

1. **Approve** the Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27 as set out in paragraphs 11 to 56 of this report and the Prudential Indicators for 2026/27 – 2029/30 as set out in Appendix 2;
2. **Approve** the Borrowing Strategy 2026/27 at paragraphs 32 to 33 of this report;
3. **Approve** the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement at Appendix 3 which sets out the Council's policy on charging borrowing to the revenue account;
4. **Approve** the Investment Strategy for 2026/27 and the investment criteria as set out in paragraphs 37 to 55 of this report and in Appendix 1;
5. **Approve** the Treasury Management Scheme of Delegation at Appendix 4

114. Capital Strategy

The Group Finance Director (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report to approve the Capital Strategy, following recommendation from Cabinet.

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

Council resolved to:

1. **Approve** the Capital Strategy attached at Appendix 1.

115. Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2026/27

The Group Finance Director (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report to approve the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2026/27. To note that the current 2025/26 scheme has been through a public consultation and the proposed changes are reviewed with an Equality Impact Assessment.

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

Council resolved to:

1. **Approve** the change to the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme to the income bandings in accordance with Option 2 listed at paragraphs 32-37 within the report.
2. **Delegate authority** to the Group Finance Director (Section 151 Officer) to draft the details of the new Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2026/27

The meeting started at 17:00 and ended at 21:52.

Lord Mayor

Date: Monday 23 March 2026

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.