

Minutes of a meeting of Council on Wednesday 16 February 2022

Council members present:

Councillor Lygo (Lord Mayor)

Councillor Wolff (Sheriff)

Councillor Arshad

Councillor Bely-Summers

Councillor Brown

Councillor Clarkson

Councillor Corais

Councillor Diggins

Councillor Dunne

Councillor Fry

Councillor Hayes

Councillor Humberstone

Councillor Landell Mills

Councillor Malik

Councillor Mundy

Councillor Pegg

Councillor Rehman

Councillor Roz Smith

Councillor Thomas

Councillor Turner

Councillor Wade

Councillor Goddard (Deputy Lord Mayor)

Councillor Abrishami

Councillor Aziz

Councillor Walcott

Councillor Chapman

Councillor Cook

Councillor Coyne

Councillor Djafari-Marbini

Councillor Fouweather

Councillor Gant

Councillor Hollingsworth

Councillor Jarvis

Councillor Latif

Councillor Miles

Councillor Munkonge

Councillor Pressel

Councillor Linda Smith

Councillor Snowton

Councillor Tidball

Councillor Upton

Councillor Waite

Also present for all or part of the meeting:

Caroline Green, Chief Executive

Susan Sale, Monitoring Officer and Head of Law & Governance

Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services

Andrew Brown, Committee and Member Services Manager

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Altaf-Khan, Haines, Hunt, Nala-Hartley and Rowley sent apologies.

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

92. Declarations of interest

Cllr Malik declared that the decisions at agenda item 6 related to Licensing fees and charges for 2022/23 affected his declared disclosable pecuniary interest (DPI) and he would leave the meeting and take no part in the debate on this item.

93. Announcements

The Lord Mayor noted that:

- This was the last meeting he would attend as Lord Mayor as the March Council meeting clashed with his planned visit to the Council's twinned city, Grenoble which he would report back to Council on.
- He had recently agreed to attend a series of events in the Council's twinned city, Ramallah and would report back to Council on the visit.
- He had recently attended a tree planting and community lunch organised by the High Sheriff of Oxfordshire to celebrate Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee, which was attended by Lord Mayors from around the county and the Leader of Oxford City Council, Cllr Susan Brown. He added that it was great to see the community, volunteers and organisations come together for the celebration.

The Leader announced the following nominations for Civic Office-holders in the 2022/23 municipal year:

- Cllr James Fry – Lord Mayor
- Cllr Mark Lygo – Deputy Lord Mayor
- Cllr Mike Rowley – Sheriff

94. Budget debate procedure

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

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

Council heard an address from Adam Powell-Davies, Oxford Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

Cllr Turner, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management read the written response.

The address and response are set out in full in the minutes pack.

96. Licensing and Gambling Acts and General Purposes Licensing Committees - recommendations on fees and charges 2022/23

Cllr Malik having declared this item related to his disclosable pecuniary interest, left the meeting for the duration of this item and returned to the meeting at the start of the next item.

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 and 6c and repeated in the budget papers at item 9 Appendix 7.

Cllr Cook and Cllr Clarkson, Chairs of the Licensing & Gambling Acts Committee and the General Purposes Licensing Committee, moved and seconded the recommendations from the two committees.

On being put to the vote these were agreed.

Council resolved to approve the fees and charges included in items 6a, 6b and 6c and repeated in the budget papers at item 9 Appendix 7.

97. Report of the Council's Chief Finance Officer on the robustness of the 2022/23 budget

Council considered a report from the Head of Financial Services 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 Head of Financial Services acknowledged the work of Scrutiny and officers in challenging assumptions and estimates and highlighted that the Government's one-year settlement did little to address areas of uncertainty, such as Business Rates. He confirmed that the previously estimated £29 million budget deficit over the four year MTFP period as a result of reduced income streams still held true. He highlighted the impact on the levels of the Council's reserves to balance the deficit and that an £11 million draw on reserves remained a key mitigation.

Council noted the report and its implications in setting its budget for 2022/23 and the indicative budgets for 2023/24 – 2025/26.

98. 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 09 February and the Cabinet's response.

Cllr Fry, Chair of the Budget Review Group, outlined the key findings and recommendations in the report and Cllr Turner outlined Cabinet's responses.

Both thanked all the officers involved in the budget scrutiny process.

Cllr Landell Mills commented on the report, raising a number of concerns related to the Council-owned companies.

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

99. Budget 2022/23

Council had before it and considered:

- The report of the Head of Finance to Cabinet on 09 February 2022 setting out the outcome of the budget consultation and seeking agreement of the Council's Budget for 2022-23 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2023-24 to 2025-26.
- Cabinet's recommendations as set out in the minutes of its meeting on 09 February 2021.
- The Liberal Democrat group's submitted amendments published with the briefing note.
- The Green group's submitted amendments published with the briefing note.

Cllr Turner, seconded by Cllr Brown, proposed agreement of the Budget and the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the recommendations from Cabinet

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

There were no additional recommendations or corrections.

b) Alternative budget proposals - Liberal Democrat Group amendments

Cllr Snowton, seconded by Cllr Roz Smith, moved the Liberal Democrat group amendments. After debate these were put to the vote.

With more councillors voting against (30) than for (8), the Liberal Democrat amendments were not carried.

Cllr Djafari-Marbini arrived during this item.

c) Alternative budget proposals - Green Group amendments

Cllr Jarvis, seconded by Cllr Pegg, moved the Green group amendments. After debate these were put to the vote.

With more councillors voting against (30) than for (3) and 9 abstentions, the Green amendments were not carried.

The meeting broke for 30 minutes at the conclusion of this item.

Cllrs Gant and Tidball left the meeting and did not return.

d) Alternative budget proposals - Independent Group amendments

There were no alternative budget proposals from the Independent Group.

e) Individual amendments to the budget

There were no individual amendments to the budget.

f) Decision on the Cabinet Budget

After debate, the recommendations of the Cabinet as agreed at its meeting on 09 February including the details of the budget for 2022-23, Medium Term Financial Strategy, Housing Revenue Account, Capital Programme and other matters as 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 Cabinet recommendations to Council as set out in the minutes of that meeting:

Councillors Abrishami, Arshad, Aziz, Bely-Summers, Brown, Chapman, Clarkson, Cook, Corais, Coyne, Diggins, Djafari-Marbini, Dunne, Fry, Hayes, Hollingsworth, Humberstone, Latif, Lygo, Mundy, Munkonge, Pressel, Rehman, Linda Smith, Thomas, Turner, Upton, Waite, Walcott (29)

Against the Cabinet recommendations to Council:

None (0)

Abstentions:

Councillors Fouweather, Goddard, Jarvis, Landell Mills, Miles, Pegg, Roz Smith, Smowton, Wade, Wolff (10)

With more councillors voting for than against, the resolution to approve the Cabinet recommendations was carried.

Council resolved in accordance with the recorded vote to:

1. Approve the 2022-23 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budgets and the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Strategy as set out in Appendices 1-10, noting:

- a. the Council's General Fund Budget Requirement of £22.382 million for 2022/23 and an increase in the Band D Council Tax of 1.99% or £6.37 per annum representing a Band D Council Tax of £326.54 per annum;
- b. the Housing Revenue Account budget for 2022/23 of £47.882 million and an increase of 4.10% (£4.51 per week) in social dwelling rents from 1 April 2022 giving a revised weekly average social rent of £112.00 as set out in Appendix 5;

- c. the increase in shared ownership rental in accordance with the lease as shown in paragraph 44 and the discretion used by the Head of Housing in setting the initial rent for the unsold share of 2% and giving delegated approval to the Head of Housing to set this for future shared ownership rents up to 2.75%;
- d. the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme as shown in Appendix 6.

2. Approve the appropriation of Alice Smith House from the HRA to the General Fund in accordance with paragraph 44 subject to any consents which are required.

100. Council Tax 2022/23

Council considered the report of the Head of Financial Services setting out the necessary calculations to enable Council to set the 2022/23 Council Tax for Oxford City.

Cllr Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, proposed and Cllr Brown seconded the recommendations in the report.

Cllr Roz Smith stated that she was not happy about Council Tax as she saw it as a regressive tax and those on less income paid more than those on a much higher income or those in a much better financial position – which she noted was to be regretted.

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

For the resolution set out below:

Councillors Abrishami, Arshad, Aziz, Bely-Summers, Brown, Chapman, Clarkson, Cook, Corais, Coyne, Diggins, Djafari-Marbini, Dunne, Fouweather, Goddard, Fry, Hayes, Hollingsworth, Humberstone, Jarvis, Landell Mills, Latif, Lygo, Miles, Mundy, Munkonge, Pegg, Pressel, Rehman, Linda Smith, Roz Smith, Smowton, Thomas, Turner, Upton, Wade, Waite, Walcott, Wolff (39)

Against the resolution:

None (0)

Abstentions:

None (0)

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

Council resolved in accordance with the recorded vote to approve for the financial year 2022/23 recommendations 1 to 5 and to note points 6 to 8:

1. The City Council's precept and Council Tax requirement of £15,028,571 including Parish precepts and £14,757,529 excluding Parish precepts.
2. The average Band D Council Tax figure (excluding Parish Precepts) of £326.54 a 1.99% increase on the 2021/2022 figure of £320.17. Including Parish Precepts the figure is £332.54, a 1.9% increase (see paragraphs 2 to 6).

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 9 and 10).
4. The amount of £638,036 to be treated as Special Expenses (see paragraph 13).
5. The Band D Council Taxes for the various areas of the City (excluding the Police and County Council's precepts) as follows:

Littlemore £366.94

Old Marston £360.32

Risinghurst and Sandhills £349.98

Blackbird Leys £331.59

Unparished Area £329.30

These figures include Parish Precepts and special expensing amounts as appropriate; in addition to the City-wide Council Tax of £312.43.

Council noted:

6. Oxfordshire County Council's precept and Band D Council Tax as set out in paragraph 17.
7. The Police and Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley's precept and Band D Council Tax as set out in paragraph 18, and
8. The overall average Band D equivalent Council Tax of £2,225.43 including Parish Precepts (subject to confirmation of the Band D figures for the County Council and Police and Crime Commissioner).

101. Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2022/23

Council considered the report of the Head of Financial Services, submitted to Cabinet on 26 January 2022 to consider the feedback from the recent consultation on the proposed changes to the 2022/23 Council Tax Reduction Scheme and to agree the principles of the new scheme for approval by Council.

Cllr Aziz, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Communities, presented the report and moved the recommendations, which were agreed on being seconded, debated and put to the vote.

Council resolved to adopt the new Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2022/23 taking into account the following:

- To increase the Income Bands in line with paragraph 8 Table 1 using CPI for the Benefit Cap uprating;
- To continue to support a 100% CTR entitlement;

- To continue with a Banded Scheme based on Income rather than family composition;
- To leave non dependant deductions as they are currently.

102. Treasury Management Strategy 2022/23

Council considered the report of the Head of Financial Services, submitted to Cabinet on 09 February 2022, presenting the proposed Treasury Management Strategy for 2022/23 together with the Prudential Indicators for 2022/23 to 2025/26.

Cllr Turner, 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:

1. The Treasury Management Strategy 2022/23 as set out in paragraphs 22 to 63 of this report and the Prudential Indicators for 2022/23 – 2025/26 as set out in Appendix 2;
2. The Borrowing Strategy 2022/23 at paragraphs 38 to 40 of this report;
3. The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement at paragraphs 41 to 43 which sets out the Council's policy on charging borrowing to the revenue account; and
4. The Investment Strategy for 2022/23 and the investment criteria as set out in paragraphs 44 to 62 of this report and in Appendix 1.

103. Capital Strategy 2022/23

Council considered the report of the Head of Financial Services, submitted to Cabinet on 09 February 2022, presenting the Capital Strategy 2022/23 – 2025/26 for approval.

Cllr Turner, 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 2022/23 – 2025/26.

104. Report of the Scrutiny Budget Review Group - exempt Appendix 1

There was no discussion under this item.

105. Announcements

The Lord Mayor asked Council to save the date for 'The Lord Mayor's Quiz Night' which was scheduled for Friday 8 April 2022 at Oxford Town Hall.

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 8.20 pm

Lord Mayor

Date: Monday 21 March 2022

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.

This page is intentionally left blank

To: Council

Date: 16 February 2022

Report of: Head of Law and Governance

Title of Report: Public addresses and questions that relate to matters for decision at this meeting

Introduction

1. Addresses made by members of the public to the Council about matters for decision at this meeting, are below. Any available written responses provided by Cabinet Members are also included.
2. The text reproduces that sent in by the speakers and represents the views of the speakers. Their addresses are not to be taken as statements by or on behalf of the Council.
3. This report will be republished after the Council meeting as part of the minutes pack. This will list the full text of speeches delivered as submitted, summaries of speeches delivered which differ significantly from those submitted, and any further responses.

Addresses and questions to be taken in Part 1 of the agenda

1. Address by Adam Powell-Davies, Oxford Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) – Council Budget

Addresses and questions to be taken in Part 1 of the agenda

1. Address by Adam Powell-Davies, Oxford Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) – Council Budget

My name is Adam Powell-Davies, and I'm a hospitality worker currently living in Headington. I'm also the branch secretary for the Oxford branch of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (or TUSC), and it is in this capacity – as a young, working-class socialist – that I am speaking this evening.

Later in this meeting, we'll hear alternative budget proposals from the Liberal Democrat, Green, and Independent council groups. Given that TUSC has no councillors in Oxford, I would like to use this address as an opportunity to formally present some of our alternative budget proposals, as outlined in our 'People's Budget' document, which we submitted as part of the budget consultation last month.

Oxford TUSC understands that government financial support has only partially compensated the cost of keeping our city running during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we recognise that the Council has suffered from a similar lack of government funding in the years prior to the pandemic. We condemn the austerity-driven attacks to council budgets seen over the past decade, which have been implemented by consecutive Conservative governments. But we also reject the idea that Labour-led councils like Oxford have no option but to accept these vicious funding cuts, which are aimed at making the working-class majority pay for the economic crises of a Capitalist system that defends the interests of a super-rich minority.

Concerning this year's proposed budget, Oxford TUSC welcomes proposals to use Council reserves to maintain the provision of services despite the funding shortfall. We also welcome the Council's emphasis on building sustainable, green council housing.

Nonetheless, the proposed budget does not go far enough in providing what our city desperately needs. For example, plans to build 1,114 council homes over the next decade go nowhere near meeting actual housing need. We also oppose proposals to raise social housing rents by 4.1%, as well as plans to again raise council tax by the maximum rate of 1.99%. These rises are attempts by the Council to make local residents pay for the ongoing crisis in local authority funding – in effect passing on Tory austerity to those who can least afford it. We also ask why £200k is being cut from the community funding grant, when the Council still has over £10 million in reserves.

Oxford TUSC demands that the Council's not insignificant reserves be used now to first prevent all cuts; and that they then be used, together with the Council's borrowing powers, to meet the needs of local people.

Adopting this tactic, we would make the following proposals:

- Begin a mass building programme – one that actually meets housing demand – of eco-friendly affordable council homes, while ensuring the local community is consulted throughout.
- Upgrade the Landlord Accreditation Scheme into a compulsory housing register for private landlords and set up council-run lettings agencies, as the means to tackle repair standards, high rents, over-occupancy, extortionate letting fees, and unfair evictions for private homes.
- Use empty business space to tackle homelessness.
- End rises to council tax and council housing rents; demand the Government provides the funding Oxford needs, instead of passing the bill onto those who can least afford it.
- Publicly oppose academisation and demand the County Council bring schools under local authority control.
- Launch a public campaign encouraging the city's vast body of students to get active in the movement for free education.
- Publicly back council unions' campaigns for a 10% pay rise from Local Government Employers, as a first step to winning back the 25% decrease in pay suffered by council workers over the last decade.
- Set a lead in tackling the cost-of-living crisis by paying all workers employed by the Council a £15-an-hour minimum wage. Launch a campaign encouraging

workers in Oxford to join their trade union and fight for a £15-an-hour minimum wage in their own workplace.

- Bring all council services under council control, restoring them to an even better standard of service than before.
- Reverse the planned cuts to the community fund grant.
- Ensure full democratic community involvement in council budgeting and all aspects of decision-making; for communities to be empowered, not merely informed.

By implementing these kinds of policies in its budget – policies which would radically improve the lives of local people – Oxford Council could buy time to launch a mass campaign that unites local trade union branches, student groups, community campaigns, and others – including other councils nationally – to resist austerity and win adequate, long-term funding from the Government.

Should Oxford win the funding it actually needs, the Council would no longer have to rely on its 'Oxford Model', which we view as a 'clever' work-around to avoid the need for genuine mass struggle. We can have no trust in council-owned companies and commercial premises to deliver the funding Oxford needs, and this much has been shown by dwindling council revenues over the pandemic.

To finish: TUSC seeks to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business, anti-working-class policies of the Tories and Starmer's New Labour. We will be standing as widely as possible in the May elections, both in Oxford and nationally. Oxford TUSC warmly invites any councillors who agree with our approach to join us in building an anti-austerity, working-class, community fightback in Oxford. But to any councillors who will not stand up to win the funding our communities need, we say: step aside for someone who will.

Thank you.

Written Response from the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, Councillor Ed Turner

Thank you for taking the time to address us. Obviously you mention that you represent a political party without any councillors in Oxford – it is your good right to stand in elections and make whatever points you wish in your manifesto for voters. Nonetheless, I would like to address a few points of principle that you raise.

First, our Council has been clear that Government funding for local government was inadequate before the pandemic and has got substantially worse since. We lose no opportunity to raise this with Ministers – as both Elected Members and officers – and while we sometimes make progress, this has been insufficient. It is my view that underfunding of local authorities represents a conscious choice, underpinned by ideology, from the current Government, and the only long-term solution is for there to be a different Government. I am happy to be campaigning every week for there to be that different Government, and believe the best way to achieve it is with support for the Labour Party, not splinter groups on the far left.

Secondly, it seems quite wrong for our Oxford Model to be criticised. It works like this: rather than cutting services, instead we try to raise income by in-sourcing work which would otherwise be done by others. That way profits from the work can be retained and

reinvested in front-line Council services (rather than paying a profit to private shareholders), we can be confident that the Oxford Living Wage applies, and that workers are fairly treated. We are proud of what this model – with excellent support from our two staff trade unions, Unison and Unite, has achieved.

On some of the points of detail: the address refers to remaining reserves. To be clear, these are reserves earmarked for a purpose, and I would encourage you to read the report of our Chief Financial Officer on the adequacy of our reserves. What you are encouraging us to do is run down reserves further, in order to meet ongoing costs. I think you can be clear from the report of the Section 151 Officer that such a move would put us at serious risk of seeing a statutory notice issued stopping discretionary spending, and take us close to having commissioners put in by Government to run our services. That is where the road of spending money in local government that you don't have takes you.

You urge a Council Tax and council rent freeze. In the case of Council Tax, we are one of relatively few local authorities to continue to provide full Council Tax relief to those on the lowest incomes, and the effect of such a freeze would simply be less money for the Council each and every year to provide services. In the case of council house rents (which are supported by housing benefit when they cannot be afforded), it would mean we would need to scale back our council house building programme. These are choices we have to make, and I think we owe it to people who rely on our services, on those who need our support, on those who will benefit from new council housing, not to run away from them.

We appreciate your comments about our new council house building programme. I am happy to reassure you we do not think that this represents the full scale of genuinely affordable housing that is needed: other affordable housing will be delivered through routes such as contributions from the planning system.

You imply that there are lots of services that we have outsourced that should be brought back in-house. I am puzzled by this, because at Oxford City Council we are not in the business of outsourcing services, instead we choose to retain services in-house and deliver them ourselves. I am surprised this approach is not being acknowledged and praised in the address.

It strikes me that what is being said here is really that we ought to avoid taking any difficult decisions in our budget. We ought to rip up our successful Oxford Model (which would have the effect of passing more work to private, for-profit companies). We ought to hammer our sources of income that enable us to fund our front-line services and build new council houses. We ought to make our budget balance by speculating that continued lobbying of Government will lead the Conservatives suddenly to release millions of pounds to us to fund services properly. If – or more likely when – that does not happen, then we would have no reserves left, we would be barred from discretionary spending, we'd be laying staff off left, right and centre, and we'd be letting down precisely the people we were elected to serve. I, for one, have no interest in being part of such an atrocious betrayal of my community.