

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday 14 December 2022



Cabinet members present:

Councillor Brown	Councillor Turner
Councillor Aziz	Councillor Chapman
Councillor Hollingsworth	Councillor Munkonge
Councillor Linda Smith	Councillor Upton
Councillor Walcott	

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Helen Bishop, Head of Business Improvement
Tom Bridgman, Executive Director (Development)
Ian Brooke, Head of Community Services
Lucy Cherry, Leisure and Performance Manager
Stephen Gabriel, Executive Director (Communities and People)
Caroline Green, Chief Executive
Tom Hook, Executive Director (Corporate Resources)
Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services
Emma Lund, Committee and Member Services Officer
Ted Maxwell, Regeneration Manager
Paula Redway, Cultural Development Manager
Susan Sale, Monitoring Officer and Head of Law & Governance
Dave Scholes, Affordable Housing Supply Corporate Lead
Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy
Rachel Williams, Acting Head of Planning Services (Planning Policy)

Also present:

Councillor Dr Christopher Smowton, Chair of Scrutiny

91. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Imogen Thomas, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice.

92. Declarations of Interest

None.

93. Addresses and Questions by Members of the Public

None.

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

None.

95. Councillor Addresses on Neighbourhood Issues

None.

96. Items raised by Cabinet Members

None.

97. Scrutiny reports

Councillor Snowton, Chair of Scrutiny, presented the recommendations of scrutiny relating to items on the agenda.

Finance and Performance Panel had met on 7 December and had considered the Integrated Performance Report for Quarter 2. No formal recommendations had been made, although the Panel had drawn attention to slippage on fire doors.

Scrutiny Committee had met on 5 December 2022 and had considered: (i) Thriving Communities Strategy 2023-27; (ii) Grant Allocations to Community and Voluntary Organisations 2023/24; (iii) Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2021/22 and (iv) Workplace Equalities and Action Plan.

One recommendation had been made in relation to Grant Allocations to Community and Voluntary Organisations. This related to providing a brief summary of the nature and purpose of organisations in receipt of Community Impact Fund Grants. The recommendation had been accepted, and the information would be published on the Council's website.

One recommendation had been made in relation to the Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement. This related to including the amount of housing delivered as a result of site allocation policies in future Annual Monitoring reports, and had also been accepted.

Four recommendations had been made in relation to Workplace Equalities and Action Plan. These had related to setting out a target for the disability pay gap; recording gender identity, including whether an individual identified as trans or non-binary; reporting on work surrounding trans and non-binary policies; and reporting on the LGBT pay gap. The recommendations had been largely accepted, although Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services, highlighted the need to safeguard anonymity and to exercise caution around drawing conclusions based on very small sample sizes of staff with protected characteristics.

Two recommendations had been made in relation to the Thriving Communities Strategy. These had related to clarifying within future versions of the strategy where changes had been made to principles or ways of working, and providing greater clarity on which partners were involved in particular projects and what the nature and level of that collaboration was. Both recommendations were largely accepted. Councillor Shaista Aziz, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Communities and Culture responded that the strategy would be presented to Council for adoption as part of the policy framework, and as part of that process would be amended to show the changes which were intended to be made.

98. Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2021/22

The Acting Head of Planning Services (Planning Policy) had submitted a report to seek approval of the Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) and Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) 2021/22 for publication.

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery, explained that the Council was required to publish the documents on an annual basis. The AMR assessed the effectiveness of the planning policies contained within the Oxford Local Plan, as well as the implementation of the Oxford Local Development Scheme, the Council's Statement of Community Involvement in Planning and the Duty to Cooperate. The IFS set out information on Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contributions and Section 106 contributions, and the infrastructure items on which CIL was to be spent on in the next five years.

In presenting the report Councillor Hollingsworth drew attention to the positive housing trajectory, which showed that the Council was now ahead of the housing supply projection within the Local Plan. Attention was also drawn to the impact of the Government's changes to the planning use classes system, which meant that all retail uses and all office uses were now essentially within a single use class. Planning permission was therefore no longer needed for changes of building between these uses. The full impact of these changes on high streets and district centres, and on the Local Plan, remained to be determined.

The significant progress in affordable housing completions over the preceding four year period, as shown at figure 3 of the report, was also noted.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2021/22 for publication; and
2. **Delegate authority** to the Acting Head of Planning Services (Planning Policy) to make any necessary minor, non-material corrections to the document prior to publication.

99. Cowley Branch Line Local Funding for Full Business Case

The Executive Director (Development) had submitted a report to (i) seek approval for a funding package and (ii) authority to enter into all necessary contracts in order to undertake the Approval in Principle design and Full Business Case and local connectivity studies for the reopening of the Cowley Branch Line to passengers.

Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Health and Transport, informed Cabinet that Network Rail had produced an outline business case for the re-opening the Cowley Branch Line to passengers. The next stage of the project would be a full business case, and funding was required to enable this to proceed. Whilst producing the full business case would not guarantee delivery of the project to re-open the line, there was no prospect of it progressing without the work. Negotiations had taken place with other landowners who would benefit from the re-opening of the line with regard to co-funding.

Councillor Upton highlighted that benefits to the city of the re-opening of the line would be significant, and included potential new rail stations at South Oxford and East Oxford. The funding being sought would cover the infrastructure to be provided, as well as

ensuring that the connectivity between the stations and local communities and businesses was designed to be as effective as possible.

It was noted that, following legal advice, a correction to the second bullet point under recommendation 1 was proposed. The wording '*Up to £3.5m of CIL to be forward funded from local landowners and then be repaid/offset from CIL liabilities for any future development that gains planning consent after the date that contracts are entered into*' was to be replaced with:

'Up to £3.5m of the costs to be funded by local landowners and then be reimbursed from CIL paid for any future development by those landowners that gains planning consent after the date that contracts are entered into'.

Clarification was provided that a landowner would only be reimbursed if their organisation (and not another organisation) gained planning consent.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve the funding strategy and recommend Full Council to approve** a capital budget of £4.56m to deliver the next phase of the project made up of:
 - Up to £289,000 up front contribution from Oxford City Council from already-secured Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds;
 - Up to £3.5m of the costs to be funded by local landowners and then be reimbursed from CIL paid for any future development by those landowners that gains planning consent after the date that contracts are entered into;
 - At least £771,000 from local landowners and Oxfordshire County Council as a non-repayable grant contribution;
 - In the event that the submitted Levelling Up Fund 2 application seeking £4.0m is found to be successful in total or in part, the local funding arrangement described above would be reduced commensurately from one or more of the funding pots outlined above; and
2. **Delegate authority** to the Executive Director (Development), in consultation with the Council's Section 151 Officer, the Head of Law and Governance, and the Cabinet Members for Health & Transport and for Finance & Asset Management to agree financial contributions and terms, and then enter into all relevant funding agreements and contracts.

100. Delivery of Affordable Housing (Railway Lane and Marston Paddock)

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing, introduced a report to seek further project approvals and delegations to enable the continued development, and purchase into the Housing Revenue Account, of more affordable housing in Oxford at sites at Railway Lane in Littlemore and Marston Paddock in Old Marston.

It was noted that both sites had received planning permission. At Railway Lane permission for 90 homes - of which 100% were to be affordable housing and at least 50% of these for social rent - had been granted, with construction anticipated to start next summer. Permission for 40 homes had been granted for Marston Paddock, of which 50% were to be affordable; however, once purchased by the Council into the HRA the intention was for all 40 properties to be converted to affordable housing (21 for social rent and 19 for shared ownership). All of the properties at both sites would be

high quality, all-electric and with high thermal efficiency. There would also be a mix of units in terms of size, with some much needed larger properties (4- and 5- bedroomed) to be provided, as well as 12 homes which were adapted for wheelchair users. The units would be delivered in partnership with developers, marking an evolution in terms of the method of delivery of affordable housing by the Council.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Grant project approval** for the continued acquisition of affordable dwellings developed by OCHL for which budgetary provision has been made in the Council's Housing Revenue Account in respect of:
 - (i) Railway Lane, Littlemore (referenced in paragraphs 3 to 10 of the report) and
 - (ii) Marston Paddock, Butts Lane, Old Marston (referenced in paragraphs 11 to 17 of the report);
2. **Delegate authority** to the Executive Director (Development), in consultation with the Head of Law and Governance, to approve and facilitate the license to occupy and develop the council owned site in order to facilitate the development within this project approval for Railway Lane, Littlemore; and
3. **Delegate authority** to the Executive Director (Development), in consultation with the Executive Director (Communities and People), the Cabinet Member for Housing, the Head of Financial Services/ Section 151 Officer and the Head of Law and Governance, to enter into agreements and facilitate the agreed purchase by the Council of these developments, with all the affordable housing units from OCHL to be held in the HRA, within this project approval for the Railway Lane and Marston Paddock sites.

101. Grant Allocations to Community & Voluntary Organisations 2023/24

The Head of Community Services had submitted a report to confirm the criteria and weighting for assessing 2023/24 grant allocations, and to give an interim update showing examples of the effectiveness of the Community Impact Fund grants to date.

Councillor Shaista Aziz, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Communities and Culture, reminded Cabinet that in 2021/2022 a decision had been taken to pool a number of different funding streams and create the Oxford Community Impact Fund with the aim of ensuring that funding was more accessible and aligned to the Council's priorities, and that the grant application process was streamlined. An update showing the impact of grants to date was expected to be brought to Cabinet next autumn, covering the full year of funding from 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023.

In considering the grant allocation process for 2023/24, it was recommended that applicants be asked to provide information regarding the demographics of their board/staff/volunteer teams, as well as their response to the cost of living crisis. This would not form part of the application process, but would be used within the monitoring process and was aimed at reducing inequalities and seeking to ensure that the process was fair for everyone in the city.

It was noted that the current economic pressures, and in particular the rising costs of energy, were likely to increase the number of requests for assistance from the Fund.

It was noted that grant applications had previously been brought to Cabinet for approval, and clarification was sought as to whether this process would continue. It

was considered appropriate Cabinet be invited to approve Big Ideas and other major and medium-sized grants, with small grants being reported for information. The Head of Community Services confirmed that work was already underway to this effect.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the implementation of the new Oxford Community Impact Fund agreed by Cabinet on 15 December 2021 as part of the strategic grants review; and
2. **Recommend** that applicants are requested to provide information regarding the demographics of their board/staff/volunteer teams and their response to the cost of living crisis in a voluntary capacity as part of project monitoring for grants awarded in 2022-23 and to make this obligatory for grants awarded in 2023-24; and
3. **Note** that a report to Cabinet seeking approval for major and medium-sized grants, and providing information on the allocation of small grants, was expected.

102. Thriving Communities Strategy 2023-27

The Executive Director (Communities & People) had submitted a report to present the Thriving Communities Strategy 2023-27, and to recommend its adoption by Council as part of the policy framework.

Councillor Shaista Aziz, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Communities and Culture, clarified that the Strategy aimed to improve the way in which the Council worked with and alongside communities, rather than looking to impose solutions. The pandemic and cost of living crisis had demonstrated the excellent work of many thriving community organisations; the Strategy would seek to help people to work more closely together and avoid duplication, provide a voice to communities, and provide autonomy in how communities worked with the Council.

The Head of Community Services highlighted the importance and value of the 10-week Thriving Communities City Conversation which had involved partners, community groups and residents. The outcomes of this process had underpinned and informed the development of the strategy. A desktop version of the strategy was currently being prepared which would include video, and an easy-read version was also available. This was aimed at ensuring the accessibility of the Strategy to everyone. An action plan was also being produced, and it was proposed that an annual update should be brought to Cabinet detailing progress against aims and learning points acquired over the preceding year.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Recommend to Council** to adopt Oxford's Thriving Communities Strategy 2023-27 as part of the Council's policy framework, including the following recommendations:
 - (i) agree and adopt the Thriving Communities Principles across the Council's work and to encourage our partners to do the same;
 - (ii) explore opportunities to improve the inclusivity and sustainability of Oxford's community facilities, and review opportunities as they arise through a business case;

- (iii) continue to integrate council services and seek out opportunities to better align our work with partner agencies, including co-location.
2. **Agree** that an annual progress update should be produced for Cabinet, and that the action plan should be regularly reviewed based on new data and insights such as the census.

103. Workforce Equalities and Action Plan

The Head of Business Improvement had submitted a report to (i) seek approval for the publication of the annual Workforce Equality Report 2022, the Gender Pay Gap Report, the Ethnicity Pay Gap Report and the Disability Pay Gap Report; and (ii) share current progress on the Workforce Equalities Report and Action Plan.

Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services, highlighted that the Workforce Equalities Report was required to be published annually under the Equality Act 2010. It included information on changes to the demographics of the workforce; actions taken in terms of recruitment and retention to improve diversity; and the pay gaps data. Whilst only the gender pay gap report was required by law, the Council also chose to publish an ethnicity pay gap report and a disability pay gap report. The reports were a snapshot as at 31 March 2022, and had demonstrated significant improvements around the role and seniority of women (which had also had a positive impact on the gender pay gap) and an increase in the percentage of staff from ethnic minorities beyond the set target. The pay gap performances were better than the national average, particularly on gender.

Councillor Chapman highlighted that future areas of focus would include seeking to improve the quality of information obtained from staff and the representation of ethnic minority women in leadership roles. Consideration would also be given as to how trans and LGBT representation in the workforce could be monitored and reported.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the Workforce Equality Report 2022;
2. **Delegate authority** to the Head of Business Improvement to make any necessary corrections and minor amendments before publication and publish the Workforce Equality Report;
3. **Approve** the Gender Pay Gap, Ethnicity Pay Gap and Disability Pay Gap reports for this year; and
4. **Delegate authority** to the Head of Business Improvement to publish on the Council's website: (i) the Gender Pay Gap table at paragraph 19 of the report before the deadline of 30 March 2023; (ii) the Ethnicity Pay Gap table at paragraph 27 of the report; and (iii) the Disability Pay Gap table at paragraph 33 of the report.

104. Integrated Performance Report Q2 2022/23

The Head of Financial Services and the Head of Business Improvement had submitted a report to update Cabinet on finance, risk and corporate performance matters as at 30 September 2022.

Councillor Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, highlighted the small adverse variance of £0.193 million against the net agreed budget, but noted that this covered ‘movement under the surface’. Many of the factors which had had a positive impact on the budget had been one-off (such as delays to filling staffing roles, delays to developments resulting in greater than expected income from community centres, and delays in expenditure and borrowing for capital projects) whereas some of the negative factors were potentially more embedded. The outturn for the year was expected to be on, or close to, target; however, pressures remained in relation to interest rates, utility costs, the ongoing impact of Covid on items like commercial property income, and construction inflation.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the projected financial outturn for 2022-23 as well as the position on risk and performance as at 30 September 2022.

105. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 - 2026/7 and 2023/24 Budget for Consultation

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report to propose a Medium Term Financial Strategy and the 2023/24 Budget for consultation.

Councillor Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, referred to a report to Cabinet on 13 July 2022 which had set out the budget setting strategy and a number of challenges to the Council’s financial position in the medium term. He commended officers for their work in achieving a four year balanced budget which sought to safeguard front line services and enable the Council to continue to deliver its priorities. Whilst some increases to charges were proposed, a full Council Tax reduction scheme would remain and there would continue to be significant investment in areas such as affordable housing; community centres; grants; youth ambition; climate change work and advice work. A change to Council Tax charges in respect of second homes and properties empty for more than one year was also proposed, subject to the enactment of Government legislation.

The Local Government finance settlement was expected in the following week, and a cautious approach had been used in relation to the expected level of the settlement.

It was noted that reserves and contingencies remained at a significantly lower level than had been the case prior to the Covid pandemic.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the 2023-24 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 1-9, noting:
 - a) the Council’s General Fund Budget Requirement of £23.433 million for 2023/24 and an increase in the Band D Council Tax of 2.99% or £9.76 per annum representing a Band D Council Tax of £336.31 per annum;
 - b) the Housing Revenue Account budget for 2023/24 of £51.577 million and an increase of 7% (£7.51 per week) in social dwelling rents from 1 April 2023 giving a revised weekly average social rent of £114.73 as set out in Appendix 5;

- c) the increase in shared ownership rental in accordance with the lease as shown in paragraph 88 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. **Agree** the fees and charges shown in Appendix 7;
 3. **Delegate** to the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Deputy Leader (Statutory) - Finance and Asset Management the decision to determine whether it is financially advantageous for the Council to enter into a Business Rates Distribution Agreement as referred to in paragraph 22 of the report;
 4. **Approve** the payment into the County Council Pension Fund of £5 million in 2023-24 as referred to in paragraph 32 of the report; and
 5. **Agree** to implement the changes to Council Tax charges in respect of second homes and properties empty for more than one year as referred to in paragraphs 23-25 from 1st April 2024 when the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill is enacted.

106. Treasury Management Mid-Year Report

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report detailing the performance of the Treasury Management function for the 6 months to 30 September 2022.

Councillor Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management highlighted that budgeted investment income and income from loans had been above projection, largely due to higher interest rates and reduced borrowing and lending. However, it was also noted that there were detrimental consequences in other areas of the budget as a result of rising interest rates.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the performance of the Treasury Management function for the six months to 30 September 2022.

107. Minutes

Cabinet resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2022 as a true and accurate record.

108. Dates of Future Meetings

25 January 2023

8 February 2023

15 March 2023

19 April 2023

All meetings start at 6.00pm.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.58 pm

Chair

Date: Wednesday 25 January 2023

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.