

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday 13 December 2023



Committee members present:

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| Councillor Brown | Councillor Turner |
| Councillor Chapman | Councillor Hunt |
| Councillor Lygo | Councillor Munkonge |
| Councillor Railton | Councillor Linda Smith |
| Councillor Upton | |

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Richard Adams, Community Safety Service Manager
Helen Bishop, Head of Business Improvement
Tom Bridgman, Executive Director (Development)
Lucy Cherry, Policy and Partnerships Officer
Alice Courtney, Scrutiny Officer
Caroline Green, Chief Executive
Tom Hook, Executive Director (Corporate Resources)
Emma Jackman, Head of Law and Governance
Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services
Bill Lewis, Financial Accounting Manager
Emma Lund, Committee and Member Services Officer
Gail Malkin, Head of People
Peter Matthew, Executive Director of People and Communities
Alexander Sutton, Planner
Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy
Rachel Williams, Planning Policy and Place Manager

Apologies:

No apologies were received.

91. Addresses and Questions by Members of the Public

None.

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

None.

93. Councillor Addresses on Neighbourhood Issues

None.

94. Items raised by Cabinet Members

None.

95. Scrutiny Reports

The Scrutiny Committee had met on 4 December 2023, the Climate & Environment Panel had met on 29 November 2023, the Housing & Homelessness Panel had met on 5 December 2023 and the Finance & Performance Panel had met on 6 December 2023. The following reports had been considered:

- i. Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2022/23
- ii. Equalities Update
- iii. LGA Corporate Peer Review – Council Action Plan
- iv. Review of Glyphosate use by Oxford Direct Services to manage weeds on behalf of Oxford City Council
- v. Integrated Performance Report Q2 2023/24
- vi. Treasury Management Mid-Year Report
- vii. City of Sanctuary Accreditation

Items (i) – (iv) had been considered by the Scrutiny Committee on 4 December. In total, thirteen recommendations had been made to Cabinet which were included in the separately published supplement together with Cabinet Members' responses.

The Climate and Environment Panel, at its meeting on 29 November, had made recommendations in relation to two non-Cabinet items which would be reported to Cabinet at a future date.

The Housing and Homelessness Panel, at its meeting on 5 December, had made a recommendation relating to City of Sanctuary accreditation, which was included in the separately published supplement together with the Cabinet Member's response.

The Finance and Performance Panel, at its meeting on 6 December, had considered items (v) and (vi) and had in total made three recommendations on these reports which were included in the separately published supplement together with the Cabinet Member's response. The Panel had also noted the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 and 2024/25 Budget for Consultation in advance of Budget Review Group meetings in January.

96. Alcohol Control and Dog Control Public Spaces Protection Orders

The Executive Director (Communities and People) had submitted a report to seek approval for the implementation of a draft Dog Control Public Spaces Protection Order 2023 and an Alcohol Control Public Spaces Protection Order 2023.

Councillor Mark Lygo, Cabinet Member for Safer and Inclusive Communities, reported that the existing Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) for Dog Control and Alcohol Control had expired on 27 November 2023. PSPOs were required to be reviewed every three years and a decision taken as to whether to extend, vary or discharge them. Cabinet was invited to consider approving renewal of both Orders, noting that

the new draft Alcohol Control PSPO proposed an extension to cover the whole city (rather than only the city centre).

Councillor Lygo highlighted that the Council had a graduated approach to enforcement which required officers to operate at the lowest possible level of intervention suitable to the case, most often involving a process of engagement and words of advice.

Both draft PSPOs had been subject to consultation, and a summary of responses could be found in the report together with data relating to incidents.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the implementation of a Dog Control Public Spaces Protection Order as set out in Appendix 1; and
2. **Approve** the implementation of an Alcohol Control Public Spaces Protection Order as set out in Appendix 6.

97. Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2022/23

The Head of Planning and Regulatory Services had submitted a report to seek approval of the Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement for publication.

Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities clarified that production of the report was a statutory requirement and that the report (i) assessed the effectiveness of the planning policies contained within the Oxford Local Plan 2036; (ii) monitored the implementation of key statutory planning documents; and (iii) provided transparency on how developer contributions were spent on infrastructure. The Authority Monitoring Report for 2022/23 had showed that the Local Plan policies were performing well. Affordable housing (social rent or shared ownership) had made up almost half of the housing built in Oxford over the year, which reflected the Council's commitment to create a thriving city. The Council remained on track to meet the target of providing 10,884 dwellings in the city by 2036, and also had a housing land supply of almost five and a half years. Progress had also been made in increasing the amount of student housing provided which had the effect of protecting existing housing for non-student residents of the city.

Councillor Upton drew attention to a number of key points in the report, including the CIL developer contributions and S106 planning obligations received which had been spent during the year, the majority of which had been spent on community facilities, active travel, affordable housing, and green infrastructure.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2022/23 for publication; and
2. **Authorise** the Planning Policy and Place Manager to make any necessary minor corrections not materially affecting the document prior to publication.

98. Equalities Update

The Head of Business Improvement had submitted a report to (i) present and seek approval for the publication of the annual Workforce Equality Report 2023, the Gender

Pay Gap Report, Ethnicity Pay Gap Report and 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 and Council Companies, highlighted that the report gave a full account of how the Council was performing in terms of diversifying its workforce and also included key facts in relation to the gender pay gap, ethnicity pay gap and disability pay gap. Publication of the gender pay gap information was required by law, and the Council voluntarily chose to publish its ethnicity and disability pay gap data. Councillor Chapman highlighted a number of key points arising from the report, including a rise in the percentage of women in senior management, and slight reductions in both the gender and ethnicity pay gaps (which also remained lower than the national average pay gaps). The disability pay gap had risen slightly, although as this related to a small group some caution was needed about interpreting any trends from the data. Councillor Chapman outlined that areas where progress still needed to be made were the number of staff in senior management from ethnic minorities and the overall percentage of staff from ethnic minorities who worked for the Council (currently c14%), although it was noted that it was difficult to effect change quickly given the low staff turnover rate.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the contents of the Workforce Equality Report 2023;
2. **Delegate authority** to the Head of Business Improvement to publish the Workforce Equality Report and to make any changes as may be required before publication following Cabinet discussion;
3. **Approve** the contents of 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 the Gender Pay Gap table at paragraph 14 before 30 March 2024, the Ethnicity Pay Gap table at paragraph 24 and the Disability Pay Gap table at paragraph 30 on the Council's website.

99. Review of Glyphosate Use by Oxford Direct Services to manage weeds on behalf of Oxford City Council

The Head of Corporate Strategy had submitted a report to make recommendations to Cabinet about the use of Glyphosate by Oxford Direct Services to control weeds on behalf of Oxford City Council.

Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies introduced the report, which presented the outcome of a review of glyphosate, its use in Oxford, and the cost and effectiveness of alternative weed treatments. The outcome of the review had been to recommend the continued controlled use of glyphosate. In common with many other councils, glyphosate was used very selectively by ODS on behalf of Oxford City Council to manage certain hard to treat weeds in certain locations, including Japanese Knotweed. Whilst alternative weed treatments existed they were both expensive and less effective: several councils which had previously ceased glyphosate use had reverted to it for these reasons.

Councillor Chapman clarified the regulatory position on glyphosate and that it was approved for use in the UK. The European Commission had recently extended glyphosate's licence for another ten years for use in Europe.

In terms of ecology, it was noted that the Council's Ecology Officer had commented that glyphosate was the only proven treatment for invasive species. Failure to treat invasive species also had an adverse effect on biodiversity.

Cabinet heard that glyphosate was used by ODS only in a safe, targeted and controlled way and only where it was needed. Care was taken to ensure that staff who used it wore protective masks and were properly trained, and that weather conditions were suitable.

Councillor Chapman clarified that a decision to approve the continued controlled use of glyphosate would apply across the whole city.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** that the Council continues to use Glyphosate for its current limited purposes with this position kept under periodic review until such point as Government changes its advice on use of this herbicide, or another viable, economic and effective treatment emerges; and
2. **Approve** that the usage of Glyphosate to manage weed intrusion in paved surfaces is delivered uniformly across the city to meet needs.

100. Local Government Association Corporate Peer Review: Council Action Plan

The Chief Executive had submitted a report to update Cabinet on the Council's Action Plan in response to the Corporate Peer review feedback and recommendations of July 2023.

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader, presented the report and outlined the work which had commenced, and the progress which had been made, in addressing the recommendations arising from the review. It was noted that a refresh of the Council's Corporate Plan was due in the near future, and that the recommendations and action plan would help to inform that process.

Cabinet heard that preparation had also begun for the progress review with the LGA, which would take place in March / April 2024.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the Council's Action Plan in response to the July 2023 Corporate Peer review feedback and recommendations; and
2. **Note** the progress that has already been made towards the July 2023 Peer Review recommendations, which are set out in the Action Plan.

101. Amendment to the Authority to Tender Contract for Insurance Services

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report concerning the future provision of the Council's Insurance Services contracts which sought a change to a previously granted delegation.

Councillor Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, outlined that an opportunity had arisen to extend the period of the Council's existing insurance contract. This would be financially beneficial but required a change to the timescale for procuring a new contract and to the relevant delegated authority.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** amended delegated authority to the Head of Financial Services in consultation with the Head of Law and Governance to award a contract for the provision of insurance services to Oxford City Council and group companies from 1st February 2024 for a period of 3 years with options to extend for up to 2 periods of 2 years each, following a compliant procurement exercise.

102. Integrated Performance Report for Q2 2023/24

The Head of Financial Services and Head of Business Improvement had submitted a report to update Cabinet on finance, risk and corporate performance matters as at 30 September 2023.

Councillor Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management highlighted key points arising from the report, which included some forecast adverse variance on the General Fund and HRA, and a number of pressures. These pressures included temporary accommodation overspend, pressures on income and utilities, and delay to the letting of St Aldate's Chambers. There had also been some capital programme slippage. Councillor Turner emphasised that the financial climate remained very challenging.

The Head of Financial Services provided an update for Cabinet on the scheme to redevelop the site at Standingford House, Cave Street which had been approved by Cabinet in November 2021. Due to the uncertain economic climate and the financial challenges associated with progressing the development at the present time (which were outlined in the report), a decision had been taken to pause the scheme. Options for the site would be brought back to Cabinet in a future report.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the projected financial outturn as well as the current position on risk and performance as at 30 September 2023.

103. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 - 2027/28 and 2024/25 Budget for Consultation

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report to propose a Medium-Term Financial Strategy and the 2024/25 Budget for consultation.

Councillor Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management introduced the report and highlighted that costs and pressures on the Council's budget were rising at a rate which could not be matched by income. The Council was therefore forced into an unwelcome position with regard to some of the budget proposals, such as increases in parking charges, reductions to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and reductions in community services and the grants budget. Some negative responses to the consultation were therefore expected.

Councillor Turner summarised that some of the rising pressures which had had to be taken into account within the proposed budget included temporary accommodation

costs, utility costs and inflationary pressures. The anticipated returns from ODS and OXPlace were important in terms of enabling the Council to continue to deliver its priorities. There would also be an additional c £200k per year of Council Tax income arising from the decision taken in February 2023 to implement changes to Council Tax in respect of second homes and properties empty for between one and two years.

The Financial Services team and the Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management were thanked for their work and for managing to achieve a budget which was balanced not only for the next year but also the next 4-5 years within a very challenging financial climate, notwithstanding that this had necessitated some very difficult decisions.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the 2024-25 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budgets for consultation and the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Strategy as set out in Appendices 1-10, noting:
 - a) the Council's General Fund Budget Requirement of £28.536 million for 2024/25 and an increase in the Band D Council Tax of 2.99% or £10.06 per annum representing a Band D Council Tax of £346.36 per annum;
 - b) the Housing Revenue Account budget for 2024/25 of £51.671 million and an increase of 7.7% (£9.27 per week) in social dwelling rents from 1 April 2024 (see paragraphs 78-79) giving a revised weekly average social rent of £129.72 as set out in Appendix 5;
 - c) the increase in shared ownership rental in accordance with the lease as shown in paragraph 86; and
 - 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 authority** to the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Deputy Leader (Statutory) - Finance and Asset Management to determine whether it is financially advantageous for the Council to enter into a Business Rates Distribution Agreement as referred to in paragraphs 18-19 of the report;
4. **Agree** to the proposal to remove the 1 month 100% unfurnished empty homes discount in accordance with paragraph 25 and note the changes to other discounts approved last year by members in accordance with paragraph 20-22 from 1 April 2024; and
5. **Recommend to Council** to approve the appropriation of Roken House from the General Fund to the Housing Revenue Account at a value of £1,850,000 (paragraphs 48 - 50).

104. Treasury Management Mid-Year Review - April to September 2023

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report on the performance of the Treasury Management function for the 6 months to 30 September 2023.

Councillor Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, reported that Treasury Management had performed favourably against budget. This had largely been due to external borrowing being less than anticipated due to delays in the capital programme, as well as lower than anticipated lending to companies.

Cabinet resolved to:

- 1. **Note** the performance of the Treasury Management function for the six months to 30 September 2023.

105.Minutes

Cabinet resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2023 as a true and accurate record.

106.Dates of Future Meetings

Meetings are scheduled for the following dates:

24 January 2024

7 February 2024

13 March 2024

17 April 2024

12 June 2024

All meetings start at 6.00pm.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.34 pm

Chair

Date: Wednesday 24 January 2024

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.