

Minutes of a meeting of Council on Wednesday 21 February 2024

Council members present:

Councillor Altaf-Khan	Councillor Arshad (Lord Mayor)
Councillor Aziz	Councillor Brown
Councillor Chapman	Councillor Clarkson
Councillor Corais	Councillor Coyne
Councillor Diggins	Councillor Djafari-Marbini
Councillor Douglas	Councillor Dunne
Councillor Fouweather	Councillor Fry (Deputy Lord Mayor)
Councillor Gant	Councillor Hall
Councillor Hollingsworth	Councillor Humberstone
Councillor Hunt	Councillor Jarvis
Councillor Kerr	Councillor Landell Mills
Councillor Lygo (Sheriff)	Councillor Malik
Councillor Miles	Councillor Muddiman
Councillor Mundy	Councillor Munkonge
Councillor Nala-Hartley	Councillor Pegg
Councillor Pressel	Councillor Railton
Councillor Rawle	Councillor Rehman
Councillor Linda Smith	Councillor Roz Smith
Councillor Snowton	Councillor Turner
Councillor Upton	Councillor Waite

Also present for all or part of the meeting:

Caroline Green, Chief Executive
Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services
Tom Hook, Executive Director (Corporate Resources)
Tom Bridgman, Executive Director (Development)
Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy
Emma Jackman, Head of Law and Governance
Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager
Lucy Brown, Committee and Member Services Officer

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Hayes, Latif, Morris, Sandelson, Thomas and Walcott sent apologies.

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

91. Declarations of interest

Cllr Malik declared that the decisions at agenda item 6 related to Licensing fees and charges for 2024/25 affected his declared disclosable pecuniary interest (DPI) and he would leave the meeting and take no part in the debate on this item.

92. Announcements

The Lord Mayor advised that she had met with the Duke of Edinburgh as he visited Oxford.

93. Budget Debate Procedure

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

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

There were no addresses or questions.

Cllr Douglas arrived at the meeting.

95. General Purposes Licensing and Licensing and Gambling Acts Committees - recommendations on fees and charges 2024/25

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

Cllr Mundy, Chair of the General Purposes Licensing Committee moved the recommendation, and seconded by Cllr Clarkson, Chair of the Licensing & Gambling Acts Committee, from the two committees.

On being put to the vote Council resolved to **agree** the relevant licence fees and charges for 2024/25 as set out in Items 6a, 6b, 6c and 6d (and repeated in the relevant sections of Item 9, Appendix 7).

96. Chief Finance Officer's report on the robustness of the Council's 2024/25 budget

Council considered a report from the Head of Financial Services, 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 Head of Financial Services advised that scrutiny of the budget had been undertaken by the Finance Team, Directors and the Chief Executive, Executive Members and the Scrutiny Committee's Finance Panel, and the figures presented were an estimate of factors at a specific time and therefore liable to change. He highlighted that the estimated income was also subject to the Oxford Model delivering key income streams and as such were outside the control of the Council, however noted that he was confident that the figures provided demonstrated the best estimate and were robust.

Council noted the report in setting the Council budget for 2024/25 and the indicative budgets for 2025/26 – 2027/28.

97. 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 07 February 2024 and the Cabinet's response.

Cllr Fry, Chair of the Scrutiny Budget Review Group, advised that following detailed discussions at each of its meetings throughout January 2024, the Review Group made a total of 9 recommendations, of which all but one had been agreed. He thanked all the officers involved throughout the process, with particular thanks to Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services and to Alice Courtney, as Scrutiny Officer in drafting this report.

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

98. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 to 2026/27 and 2024/25 Budget

Council had before it and considered:

- The report of the Head of Finance to Cabinet on 07 February 2024 setting out the outcome of the budget consultation and seeking agreement of the Council's Budget for 2024/25 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2025/26 to 2027/28.
- The Labour Group's submitted subsequent amendment published with the briefing note.

- The Liberal Democrat Group's submitted amendments published with the briefing note.
- The Green Group's submitted amendments published with the briefing note.
- The Independent Group's submitted amendments published with the briefing note.
- An individual amendment proposed by Cllr Snowton published with the briefing note.
- An individual amendment proposed by Cllr Miles published with the briefing note.
- The Green Group's alternative budget post Labour Group amendment tabled at the meeting.
- An individual amendment proposed by Cllr Mundy tabled at the meeting.
- A subsequent individual amendment proposed by Cllr Mundy tabled at the meeting.

Cllr Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, seconded by Cllr Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships, proposed agreement of the Budget and the Medium Term Strategy and the recommendations from Cabinet. He also moved his amendment to the Budget, published at Item 9a of the agenda, which was seconded by Cllr Brown.

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

Cllr Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, seconded by Cllr Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships, proposed the additional amendment from Cabinet.

b) Alternative budget proposals - Liberal Democrat Group amendments

The Liberal Democrat Group withdrew their amended Budget, following submission of the amended Labour Group Budget.

Council adjourned for 15 minutes.

c) Alternative budget proposals - Green Group amendments

Cllr Landell Mills arrived at the meeting.

Cllr Jarvis, seconded by Cllr Muddiman, moved the Green Group amendments.

Following debate, these were put to the vote.

With more Councillors voting against (21), than for (13), and 8 abstentions, the Green Group amendments were not carried.

d) Alternative budget proposals - Independent Group

Cllr Rehman, seconded by Cllr Aziz, moved the Independent Group amendments.

Council adjourned for 15 minutes.

Following debate, these were put to the vote.

With more Councillors voting against (8) than for (2) and with 30 abstentions, the Independent Group amendments were not carried.

Following agreement from Council, the meeting broke for 15 minutes at the conclusion of this item.

e) Individual amendments to the budget

Cllr Snowton withdrew the individual amendment that had been published with the briefing note.

Cllr Miles, seconded by Cllr Roz Smith moved their individual amendment.

After debate, this was put to the vote.

Cllr Gant declared that as a Cabinet Member for the controlling Authority, he would withdraw from voting on this amendment.

With more Councillors voting against (19), than for (17) and 1 abstention, the individual amendment was not carried.

Cllr Mundy removed the individual amendment that had been tabled earlier in the meeting.

Cllr Mundy, seconded by Cllr Nala-Hartley, moved the individual amendment that had been tabled during the break.

After debate, this was put to the vote.

With more Councillors voting against (21) than for (18) the individual motion was not carried.

f) Decision on the Cabinet Budget

Cllr Kerr left the meeting and did not return.

Following debate, the recommendations of the Cabinet as agreed at its meeting on 07 February 2024 including the details of the budget for 2024/25, Medium Term Financial Strategy, Housing Revenue Account, Capital Programme and other matters set out in the published agenda and briefing note for this meeting and the agreed amendment at Item 99a, 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, and with the agreed amendment at Item 99a:

Councillors Arshad, Fry, Lygo, Brown, Chapman, Clarkson, Corais, Diggins, Douglas, Hollingsworth, Humberstone, Hunt, Munkonge, Pressel, Railton, Rowley, Linda Smith, Turner, Upton, Waite (20)

Against the Cabinet recommendations to Council:

None (0)

Abstentions:

Councillors Altaf-Khan, Aziz, Coyne, Djafari-Marbini, Dunne, Fouweather, Gant, Jarvis, Landell-Mills, Malik, Miles, Muddiman, Mundy, Nala-Hartley, Pegg, Rawle, Rehman, Roz Smith, Snowton (19)

With more Councillors voting for than against, the resolution to approve the Cabinet recommendations, with the subsequent amendment as set out at Item 99a, the recommendations were carried.

Council resolved in accordance with the recorded vote to:

1. Note the approval by Cabinet on 24 January and subsequently agreed by the Council on 29 January of an increase of 7.7% (£9.27 per week) in social dwelling rents from 1 April 2024 giving a revised weekly average social rent of £129.72 as set out in Appendix 5 based on a HRA budget as set out in Appendix 4, together with the comments in paragraphs 35-40;
2. 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 1-9, noting:
 - a) the Council's General Fund Budget Requirement of £27.752 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; 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. 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 paragraphs 16-18 of the report; and
5. Note the changes to council tax charges in respect of second homes and properties empty for more than one year as referred to in paragraphs 19-22 from 1st April 2025 and 1st April 2024 respectively.

Cllr Nala-Hartley left the meeting and did not return.

99. Council Tax 2024/25

Council considered the report of the Head of Financial Services setting out the necessary calculations to enable Council to set the 2024/25 Council Tax for Oxford City.

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

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

For the resolution set out below:

Councillors: Arshad, Fry, Lygo, Ataf-Khan, Brown, Chapman, Clarkson, Corais, Diggins, Douglas, Fouweather, Gant, Hollingsworth, Humberstone, Hunt, Jarvis, Landell Mills, Miles, Muddiman, Mundy, Munkonge, Pegg, Pressel, Railton, Rawle, Rowley, Linda Smith, Roz Smith, Smowton, Turner, Upton, Waite (32)

Against the resolution:

None (0)

Abstentions:

Councillors: Aziz, Coyne, Djafari-Marbini, Dunne, Malik, Rehman (6)

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

Council resolved in accordance with the reported vote to approve for the financial year 2024/25 recommendations 1 to 5 and to note points 6 to 8:

1. The City Council's precept and Council Tax requirement of £16,277,802 including Parish precepts and £16,014,035 excluding Parish Precepts.
2. The average Band D Council Tax figure (excluding Parish Precepts) of £346.36, a 2.99% increase on the 2023/24 figure of £336.30. Including Parish Precepts, the figure is £352.07, a 2.91% increase (see paragraphs 2 to 8 of the report).
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 11 and 12 of the report).
4. The amount of £692,280 to be treated as Special Expenses (see paragraph 16 of the report).
5. The Band D Council Taxes for the various areas of the city (excluding the Police and Crime Commissioner and Oxfordshire County Council's precepts) as follows:

Littlemore	£372.56
Old Marston	£380.03
Risinghurst and Sandhills	£371.41
Blackbird Leys	£350.78
Unparished Area	£349.34

These figures include Parish Precepts and special expensing amounts as appropriate; in addition to the City Wide Council Tax of £331.39.

The Council is also asked to note:

6. Oxfordshire County Council's precept and Band D Council Tax as set out in paragraph 19 below
7. The Police and Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley's precept and Band D Council Tax as set out in paragraph 20 below, and
8. The overall average Band D equivalent Council Tax of £2,441.91 including Parish Precepts (subject to confirmation of the Band D figures for the Oxfordshire County Council).

Cllr Malik left the meeting and did not return.

100. Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25

Council considered the report of the Head of Financial Services, submitted to Cabinet on 07 February 2024, presenting the proposed Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25 together with the Prudential Indicators for 2024/25 to 2027/28.

Cllr Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, presented the report and moved the recommendations. The recommendations were agreed on being seconded and put to the vote.

Council resolved to approve:

1. The Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25 as set out in paragraphs 12 to 60 of this report and the Prudential Indicators for 2024/25 – 2027/28 as set out in Appendix 2;
2. The Borrowing Strategy 2024/25 at paragraphs 34 to 36 of this report;
3. The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement at Appendix 3 which sets out the Council’s policy on charging borrowing to the revenue account;
4. The Investment Strategy for 2024/25 and the investment criteria as set out in paragraphs 38 to 56 of this report and in Appendix 1; and
5. The Treasury Management Scheme of Delegation at Appendix 4.

101. Capital Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28

Council considered the report of the Head of Financial Services, submitted to Cabinet on 07 February 2024, presenting the Capital Strategy for 2024/25 – 2027/28 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 for 2024/25 to 2027/28.

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 8.56 pm

Lord Mayor

Date: Monday 18 March 2024

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.