

Minutes of a meeting of Council on Monday 29 January 2024

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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 Hayes	Councillor Hollingsworth
Councillor Hunt	Councillor Jarvis
Councillor Kerr	Councillor Latif
Councillor Lygo (Sheriff)	Councillor Malik
Councillor Miles	Councillor Morris
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 Smowton
Councillor Thomas	Councillor Turner
Councillor Upton	Councillor Waite
Councillor Walcott	

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)
Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy

Emma Jackman, Head of Law and Governance
Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager
Celeste Reyeslao, Committee and Member Services Officer
Amber Khaloon, Trainee Solicitor

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Humberstone and Sandelson sent apologies.

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

79. Declarations of interest

Item 13a: Stop the Anti-Boycott Bill

Councillor Linda Smith stated she had an interest relating to this item; this declaration had been entered on her register of interest; she indicated that she would leave the room during the consideration of this item.

Item 10: Questions on Notice from Members of Council (CM6-8: New leisure provider)

Councillor Imogen Thomas stated she had an interest on items relating to the award of contact to Serco; she indicated that she would leave the room during the consideration of these items.

Item 10: Questions on Notice from Members of Council (CM4: Allotment sites asbestos contamination)

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth stated that he was the Chair of Cripsey Meadow Allotments association; he made the declaration for reasons of transparency; it was not a pecuniary interest and he was not required to leave the room during consideration of that item.

Councillor Roz Smith declared an interest relating to allotments and made the declaration for reasons of transparency; she was not required to leave the room during the consideration of this item.

Councillor Louise Upton declared an interest relating to allotments and made the declaration for reasons of transparency; she was not required to leave the room during the consideration of this item.

Cllrs Gant and Mundy arrived the meeting.

80. Minutes

Council agreed to **approve** the minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 27 November 2023.

81. Announcements

The Lord Mayor announced that she had attended Prayers for Peace at Rose Hill Community Centre, which had been organised by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. She had also attended Oxfordshire Together for Humanity which was hosted by the Oxfordshire Civic Community.

The Leader of the Council announced that she had also attended Oxfordshire Together Humanity and noted that the event was very well-attended and extremely organised. She expressed her thanks to those involved. The Leader provided an update on the Mayor of Ramallah's address to Council and stated that a Christmas video message was circulated during the Christmas period. A request for an updated video message was made and would be shared upon its receipt.

The City Rector addressed Council and shared his sombre reflections, having attended Together for Humanity and the Holocaust Memorial event. He conveyed appreciation for the efforts councillors give towards the welfare of the city and their ability to draw out the best in people. He concluded with a call for grace in serving and promoting humanity.

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

There were no addresses or questions.

83. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Rent Setting Report 2024/25

Council considered the report from the Head of Financial Services which presented the outcome of Oxford City Council's annual rent review and associated rent setting proposal for 2024/25 in respect of all Council dwellings within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), including the setting of associated services and facilities charges.

Cllrs Diggins, Clarkson, Goddard and Djafari-Marbini arrived at the meeting.

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing, introduced the report and proposed the recommendation.

Councillor L Smith responded to questions, stating that social and affordable rents in Oxford remained significantly below the local housing allowance rate. It was hoped that further government investments were made available to Councils like Oxford towards building more homes and preventing rent increases, however the Councillor pointed out that this was not the current situation.

In terms of council garage charges, Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, emphasised the need to

strike a balance between encouraging car use and reducing the number of cars on the road. Ultimately, the recommended figure was in alignment with the government guidance on rent increases.

The Committee and Member Services Manager clarified that the briefing note, which had been published on 26 January 2024 and available publicly, contained the updated figure of 7.7% applicable to garages.

In her summary, Councillor L Smith advised that tenant involvement and engagement consultation was in the process of being improved with additional staffing. The Council was reminded that the proposed recommendation pertained to the Housing Revenue Account, a ring fenced budget used solely for the Council's housing services, separate from the General Fund.

The recommendation was agreed on being seconded by Councillor Ed Turner and put to the vote.

Council resolved to:

1. **Approve** an increase of 7.7% for 2024/25 (subject to any subsequent cap on increases imposed by central government) in social dwelling rents from 1st April 2024 giving an average weekly increase of £9.27 per week, and a revised weekly average social rent of £129.72 as set out in the Financial Implications section of this report;
2. **Approve** an increase to rents for shared ownership dwellings as outlined in paragraph 15 of the Financial Implications;
3. **Approve** an increase to service charges by 7.7% (CPI + 1%) to enable the HRA to recover the associated cost of supply;
4. **Approve** an increase to the charge for a garage of 7.7%, equating to an increase of £1.37 per week for a standard garage with a revised charge of £19.22 per week, and an increase of £1.55 per week for a premium garage with a revised charge of £21.71 per week; and
5. **Approve** the option to exercise the Rent Flexibility option in respect of re-lets to new tenants as outlined in paragraph 6 below.

84. Project approvals, budget and delegations to develop five small sites for affordable housing, using spend from the Brownfield Land Release Fund

Cllr Pressel arrived at the meeting.

Council considered the report from the Executive Director (Development) seeking project and contract approval and delegations, budget and delegations in relation to affordable housing schemes across five small/garage sites. All sites had been allocated initial funding through the Brownfield Land Release Fund ("BLRF2") following a successful bid. The report sought approval for appropriation from General Fund ("GF") to Housing Revenue Fund, and to a planning purpose, where necessary; approval for the disposal of land as required; approval for the demolition of garages held in the GF and approval for demolition of vacant units currently held within the Housing Revenue Account ("HRA").

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing introduced the report, proposed the recommendation and answered questions.

The recommendation was agreed on being seconded by Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, and put to the vote.

Council resolves to:

1. **Allocate** of a £340,213 capital budget (which will be funded entirely by the BLRF2 grant) to carry out the demolition/enabling works on each site as detailed within the BLRF2 application (see table, paragraph 14).

85. Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024-25

Council considered the report from the Head of Financial Services seeking approval for changes to the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25.

Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, introduced the report, proposed the recommendation and answered questions.

The recommendation was agreed on being seconded by Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy, and put to the vote.

Council resolved to:

1. **Adopt** the new Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25.

86. Questions on Cabinet minutes

a) Draft Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting held on 13 December 2023

Minute 98 – Equalities Update

In response to a question from Councillor Ed Turner, Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies agreed that investing in diverse workforce was central to the Council's vision for the city and belief in equality, diversity and inclusion, and stated he would not be deflected by the government in its recent audit of EDI spending in civil services.

Councillor Katherine Miles wished to put on record that this was the first Council meeting held where increased representations of women of significance to Oxford's political history were proudly displayed on the walls of the Council Chamber, reflective of the Council's ethos. She congratulated the women represented in the photographs, as well as the Council on progressing its work equality, diversity and inclusion.

b) Draft Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting held on 24 January 2024

Minute 111 - Scrutiny Reports

In response to a procedural question from Councillor Christopher Snowton, Councillor Chewe Munkonge, Cabinet Member for Leisure and Parks sought advice from the Monitoring Officer.

The Monitoring Officer clarified that the evaluation of bids submitted followed legal processes that Councillors should not be involved in the actual procurement process and in the evaluation of the bids. It was explained that the procurement process would be susceptible to challenges in the context of legality where they were further assessed by Councillors outside of the process with view to re-evaluate the outcome of the procurement.

87. Questions on Notice from Members of Council

49 written questions were asked of the Cabinet Members and the Leader, and these and written responses were published before the meeting. These along with summaries of the 20 supplementary questions and responses asked and given at the meeting are set out in the minutes pack.

Council agreed to consider items 12a and 12b next of the agenda before the 30 minutes break and then return to the agenda as listed.

88. Outside organisation/Committee Chair reports and questions

a) Outside Organisation Report: Future Oxfordshire Partnership

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships, introduced the report which updated Council on the work of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP).

Councillor Katherine Miles, Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel, spoke to expressed appreciation to Councillor Brown and FOP officers for their support in the work of the FOP Scrutiny Panel. Councillor Miles drew attention to some challenges of the panel, including delay in the availability of papers for adequate oversight, and an unclear expectation and scope of the panel's responsibilities in relation to the partnership. It was clarified that these challenges had not stopped the collaborative work between the scrutiny panel and the partnership, however it was hoped they were improved moving into the next Council year.

Councillor Brown acknowledged the concerns raised by Councillor Miles.

Cllr Latif arrived at the meeting.

Council resolved to:

1. **Note** the annual update report on the work of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and the Oxford Inclusive Economy Partnership.

b) Scrutiny Committee update report

Councillor Lucy Pegg, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, introduced the report and thanked the members of the Scrutiny Committee and the Scrutiny Officer, Alice

Courtney, for their hard work and contributions. Councillor Pegg updated the Council on the activities of the committee from 01 October 2023 to 31 December 2023, highlighting some of the reports that had been considered during this period, including the Local Plan 2040 Regulation 19 Consultation Document, Equalities Monitoring report, and the Action Plan following the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Review.

Council **noted** the report.

89. Public addresses and questions that do not relate to matters for decision at this Council meeting

Council heard four addresses and Cabinet Members read or summarised their written responses. Both addresses and responses are set out in full in the minutes pack.

1. Address from Isabel Tucker – Operation of Gloucester Green Market
2. Address from Emma Jones – Oxford's Leisure Contract to Serco
3. Address from Maryam Firdous Ahmed – Anti-BDS Bill
4. Question from Chaka Artwell – Female Sanitary Products

The Lord Mayor thanked the speakers for their contributions.

90. Motions on notice 29 January 2024

Council had before it five motions on notice submitted in accordance with Council procedure rules and reached decisions as set out below.

Motions agreed as set out below:

- a. Stop the Anti-Boycott Bill (Proposed by Cllr Dr Hosnieh Djafari-Marbini, seconded by Cllr Chris Jarvis) [Amendment proposed by Cllr Chris Smowton, seconded by Cllr Laurence Fouweather]

Motions taken but lost:

- b. Moving Oxford City Council to a committee system of representation to increase residents' confidence in democracy (proposed by Cllr Amar Latif, seconded by Cllr Shaista Aziz)

Motions not taken as the time allocated for debate had finished:

- c. The Cost of living crisis and local government funding (proposed by Cllr Ed Turner, seconded by Cllr Nigel Chapman). [Amendment proposed by Cllr Andrew Gant, seconded by Cllr Katherine Miles]
- d. Scrap the two-child benefit cap (proposed by Cllr Christopher Smowton, seconded by Cllr Katherine Miles)

e. Disposable Vapes (proposed by Cllr Lucy Pegg, seconded by Cllr Rosie Rawle)

a) Stop the Anti-Boycott Bill (proposed by Cllr Hosnieh Djafari-Marbini, seconded by Cllr Chris Jarvis)

Cllr L Smith left the meeting, having declared an interest on this item.

Councillor Hosnieh Djafari-Marbini, seconded by Councillor Chris Jarvis, proposed the motion as set out in the briefing note. Councillor Djafari-Marbini proposed an amendment to the motion, replacing point 3 of 'this Council resolves' to "Write to the Right to Boycott campaign expressing Oxford City Council's opposition to the Anti-Boycott Bill."

Councillor Christopher Snowton withdrew his amendment as set out in the briefing note.

Council debated the amended motion. Following debate and on being put to the vote, the amended motion was **agreed**.

Council Notes

1. The Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill passed its third reading in the House of Commons on 10 January 2024.¹ It will now continue its passage through the House of Lords.
2. The legislation has been dubbed the 'Anti-Boycott Bill' and seeks to stop public bodies from making any decisions around investment and procurement that aren't in line with UK government foreign or economic trade policies.²
3. The Anti-Boycott Bill is specifically designed to target the international Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement - an initiative launched by Palestinian civil society organisations. The BDS movement seeks to end international support for Israel's oppression of Palestinians and pressure Israel to comply with international law.
4. The only geographical areas that the legislation would prohibit the government making exemption provisions for are - as listed in the Bill - 'Israel', 'the Occupied Palestine Territories' and 'the Occupied Golan Heights'.³ The legislation would therefore explicitly prohibit public bodies - including local authorities - from engaging in any form of boycott of Israeli goods and services, including those produced or developed through an illegal occupation.
5. More than 60 charities, campaign groups, civil society organisations and trade unions have publicly opposed the legislation, including ASLEF, CWU, FBU, Friends of the Earth, Global Justice Now, Greenpeace, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, Liberty, Methodist Church in Britain, Muslim Association of Britain, Na'Amod, NEU, NUS, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, PCS, Unison, UCU, and War on Want.⁴

Council Believes

¹ <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3475>

² <https://righttoboycott.org.uk/>

³ <https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/53574/documents/4223>

⁴ <https://righttoboycott.org.uk/#signatories>

1. The Anti-Boycott Bill is an anti-democratic measure which restricts the ability of public bodies to take ethics and human rights into account in key parts of their decision making. It has profound implications on public bodies' ability to act upon human rights violations, slavery and environmental destruction.
2. Ethical boycotts from public bodies - including local councils - have played an important role in many historic campaigns for justice - most notably in the struggle against the Apartheid regime in South Africa.
3. Local authorities like Oxford City Council have a duty to speak out and resist such attempts to diminish democracy.

Council Resolves

1. To ask the leader of the council to:
 1. Issue a public statement condemning the Anti-Boycott Bill.
 2. Write to the secretary state for leveling up, housing and communities - Michael Gove - expressing Oxford City Council's opposition to the legislation and calling for him to withdraw the Bill.
 3. Write to the Right to Boycott campaign expressing Oxford City Council's opposition to the Anti-Boycott Bill.
 4. Write to Labour leader Keir Starmer, Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey, and Green Party co-leaders Adrian Ramsay and Carla Denyer, encouraging them to ensure that their MPs actively oppose the legislation in parliament.
 5. Write to the leaders of the parliamentary groups in the House of Lords, encouraging them to ensure that peers within their groups actively oppose the legislation in the Lords.

Cllr L Smith and Hayes re-joined the meeting.

b) Moving Oxford City Council to a committee system of representation to increase residents' confidence in democracy (proposed by Cllr Amar Latif, seconded by Cllr Shaista Aziz)

Councillor Amar Latif, on being seconded by Councillor Shaista Aziz, proposed the motion.

Following debate and on being put to the vote, the motion was **lost**.

This Council notes:

Years of low voter turnout in local elections (less than 40% in May 2022)⁵ within Oxford would suggest that there is discontent amongst the electorate in the city.

⁵ https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20046/elections_and_voting/1521/oxford_city_council_election_results_-_5_may_2022

Low turn out has been suggested to disproportionately affect the more disadvantaged across communities and society who may find it more difficult to access elected politicians, find it challenging to access online consultations and be more disenfranchised with the political process.⁶⁷

That the Labour administration has lost 10 councillors since October 13th, 2023, which is almost a third of total Labour Councillors, yet continues as a minority administration.

Furthermore, despite Oxford having the third largest ethnic minority population, 29%⁸, within the Southeast of England, and being proud of its diversity and internationalist identity as a city, there is only one cabinet member from an ethnic minority background.

Prior to the racist murder of George Floyd in the USA in May 2020 and the reinvigoration of the Black Lives Matter and Rhodes Must Fall Movement in Oxford, the Labour lead Oxford City Council carried out internal work to ensure it has a racially diverse and representative Cabinet, the progress made has since been reversed.

That the decision-making process within the City Council leaves large numbers of decisions to individual cabinet members who cannot fully represent the diversity of views from residents across Oxford.

That other Councils, including Sheffield and Bristol, have moved towards a committee system of representation which better reflects views of residents across their respective cities.

This council believes that a committee system of representation:
Is a better and more transparent way for decisions to be made across Oxford, which will create a more equitable system ensuring residents voices are listened to and acted upon alongside a wider group of councillors.

Will allow a less centralised and more collaborative way of working.
Will better reflect the diversity of views and opinions from a wider demographic of society, including across the political spectrum.

Will allow individual Cabinet members to be replaced by Policy Committee Chairs who will have responsibility for different areas of Council policy.

This council agrees to:

Request the Officers assess the implications (financial, resource, legal and otherwise), negatives and positives of the Council moving to a Committee System of governance, including considering and developing plans as to how such a system of governance may work.

⁶ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953623000746>

⁷ <https://www.democraticaudit.com/2019/10/11/have-we-all-underestimated-the-severity-of-socioeconomic-differences-in-electoral-participation/>

⁸ [Ethnicity | Ethnicity | Oxford City Council](#)

Present the final proposals to Cabinet and then Council for comments and consideration as to whether to commence the process to consider a formal change of governance arrangements in the Council, with a view to putting this to a City-wide referendum by May 2025.

c) The Cost of Living Crisis and local spending in England (proposed by Cllr Ed Turner, seconded by Cllr Nigel Chapman)

This motion was not taken as the time allocated for debate had finished.

d) Scrap the two-child benefit cap (proposed by Cllr Christopher Smowton, seconded by Cllr Katherine Miles)

This motion was not taken as the time allocated for debate had finished.

e) Disposable Vapes (proposed by Cllr Lucy Pegg, seconded by Cllr Rosie Rawle)

This motion was not taken as the time allocated for debate had finished.

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 8.45 pm

**Lord Mayor
2024**

Date: Wednesday 21 February

*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.*

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