

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday 22 January 2025



Committee members present:

Councillor Brown

Councillor Arshad

Councillor Hollingsworth

Councillor Railton

Councillor Upton

Councillor Turner

Councillor Chapman

Councillor Munkonge

Councillor Linda Smith

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

None

Also present:

Councillor Katherine Miles, Chair of Scrutiny

None

None

Apologies:

Councillor(s) None sent apologies.

Substitutes are shown above.

No apologies were received

95. Declarations of Interest

None.

96. Addresses and Questions by Members of the Public

An address to Cabinet was submitted by Mark Pott regarding Agenda Item 11:

This question is similar to my consultation response, which was not listed in the response summary of the report to the Cabinet. (Redesignation of the Neighbourhood Forum for Headington) Decisions seem to be taken for CIL funding by a Committee of only three persons, minutes are extremely sparse and, in some cases, unlinked on the web site. (eg: Dec 2022) There is clearly a relationship between Headington Action and the Forum, but the lines of responsibility are unclear with possible overlap of personnel. There appears to be insufficient publicly available information as to how this arrangement is authorised or how it operates and how responsibilities are delineated.

For example, for a project as large as the Regeneration Plan (£37K for first phase only) at a minimum the following publicly accessible, details should be available:

- Plan objectives (partly provided)
- Outline costs prior to commencement
- Tendering – Tender details, responses, and formal selection process
- Detailed minutes of all meetings and decisions, with clear line of responsibility for the two organisations (Headington Action and Forum) and individuals, and record of voting etc
- Formal consultation and justification of disbursements especially including a go/no go decision with public consultation
- Cost breakdown by item for proposed and completed projects
- What was achieved, lessons learnt, and future steps
- Declaration of interests [1]

This provides accountability and transparency to the taxpayer and residents. The £39,916.67 CIL money for Headington Regeneration Design was disbursed and appears to have been a complete waste of money, providing training for budding urban design consultants, producing a report consisting almost entirely of academic analysis with only 11 “ideas” which are either extremely obvious, completely unrealistic or would be very poor value for money. There is no evidence of any productive outcome or next steps, even recommendations to “declutter” have not only been ignored but clutter has increased. (chairs outside cafes, BT Hubs etc) Similarly, £9800 Street Champion Coordinator was paid for, with no report as to what was achieved for the money spent. The Forum has considered a large disbursement of £33k for Courtside but it is not clear what this was for or whether it was disbursed as it does not appear in the CIL Statement from OCC. (yet?) It includes the extraordinary request that: “The original application was approved by HA committee in January 2022 but was not advertised for consultation at the client’s request.” (08/10/2023) which is extraordinary for a request to disburse public funds. A Street Champion Coordinator 2021-2022 - £9,800. The above is also not addressed in the financial implications section of the report. Without robust governance, the sort of financial disaster the Regeneration Project represents will only be repeated. Whereas the structure appears to be adequate for minor disbursements such as flowers, lights and minor costs, it is inadequate for the large projects as below. Information may be available allay these concerns, but it is not, but should be, publicly accessible via the web site. A yearly report should be produced itemising all costs with the details above for each project for years to date and going forward. Given the weaknesses suggested above, the Forum should not disburse funds greater than say £5000 until the above is implemented. Question To Cabinet There appear to be several issues around governance, consultation and accountability and transparency concerns regarding the Forum. Based on the above, prior to redesignation, can the Cabinet give assurance that the above governance issues will be addressed to ensure CIL and other funds are disbursed transparently, accountably, and with clear rationale for decisions reached? It is surely not possible to redesignate a forum without issues such as these being resolved? Footnote: For clarity, there is no reason to believe any impropriety has occurred and none is implied.

The following response was provided to this question by the Cabinet Member for Planning & Cycling Champion.

The report sets out the rules and regulations that the City Council must follow when considering an application for a Neighbourhood Forum designation (or redesignation). Unfortunately, the question refers to operational issues that do not have direct bearing on the criteria we have to consider. The Headington Neighbourhood Forum (HNF) has demonstrated that it meets all of the required criteria for redesignation so we will be allowing it to proceed.

Perhaps surprisingly, there are no specific rules regarding how a Neighbourhood Forum operates, and there is therefore no basis on which the council can direct how the HNF spends the CIL funds allocated to it, as long as the spend meets the set criteria. However, Officers at the City Council work with all Neighbourhood Forums with regards to governance and other CIL-related matters and they will ensure that the feedback contained in the question is relayed to the HNF.

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

None received.

98. Councillor Addresses on Neighbourhood Issues

None received.

99. Items raised by Cabinet Members

None.

100. Scrutiny Reports

Councillor Miles presented reports from the Scrutiny Committee.

The Scrutiny Committee met on 14 January 2025 and considered reports related to Agenda Items 8, 9 and 10. They discussed flood management systems and governance changes which are being implemented regarding urgent key decisions.

Councillor Miles presented the measures and objectives that were discussed relating to the Council of Sanctuary Framework. She noted that the Scrutiny Committee and discussed queries around data protection. The Scrutiny Committee also discussed problems related to the learning of English and the anti-migrant violence which had emerged since the report was drafted. The Scrutiny Committee had also considered the needs assessment. Councillor Miles presented the following recommendations related to this report.

- Recommendation 1: That the Council establishes and reports on clear Key Performance Indicators for its action plan, providing annual updates to the Scrutiny Committee to monitor its progress and ensure accountability.
- Recommendation 2: That the Council updates the document's text on National Policy Challenges to include contextual information that recognizes the evolving policy environment and anticipates potential changes to national policy.

- Recommendation 3: That the Council acknowledges the prevalence of anti-migrant violence by adding to the Key Challenges section of the document a list of specific responses and preventative measures addressing this key issue.
- Recommendation 4: That the Council releases the Needs Assessment report to the public to foster better understanding of the experiences of people seeking sanctuary, ensuring that any confidential data it contains is appropriately safeguarded.

Councillor Smith presented the response to these recommendations and said that they were happy to accept the first and fourth recommendations. The second and third recommendations were not being accepted. She stated that this was due to the recommendations' references to future changes, which were beyond the scope of the purpose of the paper being presented to Cabinet. She noted that the report being considered by Cabinet involves delegating authority and will be updated as changes occur.

Councillor Miles presented the Scrutiny Committee consideration of the HRA Rent Setting Report 2025/26. She stated that the Committee had discussed the rationale behind the percentage increase in garages and concerns around the need for more dynamic pricing. Councillor Miles said that the Scrutiny Committee had also debated whether they need to consider the impact of rental price changes in the private rental market when adjusting council housing rent prices. Councillor Miles presented the Scrutiny Committee recommendations relating to this report.

- Recommendation 1: That Officers includes a modelling of the impact of limiting garage charge increases to CPI + 1% in the final report presented to Cabinet.
- Recommendation 2: That the report, and any future annual iterations, includes a section reflecting on trends in the private rental market, with any relevant anticipated changes for the year ahead.

Councillor Smith responded that both recommendations had been accepted. She said that they did not believe that a modest increase in council house rents will have any impact on the high rents that they see in the private rental sector in the city.

Councillor Miles then presented the Scrutiny Committee's discussion regarding Flood Management. She said that they had discussed logistical challenges and clarity around the responsibilities of different agencies. Councillor Miles presented the recommendations relating to this issue.

- Recommendation 1: That Cabinet ensures Members are informed whenever flood investigations occur within their areas; sharing findings promptly will enable Councillors to respond effectively to residents' concerns and advocate for necessary measures.
- Recommendation 2: That Cabinet develops clear contact information for Members and distributes guidance leaflets to residents at risk of flooding, explaining proper reporting of flood incidents and actionable advice on mitigating flood risks, and support available for vulnerable residents.
- Recommendation 3: That Cabinet commits to long-term flood resilience and preparedness in the context of the need for climate adaptation measures, by

reviewing and reassessing the adequacy of emergency planning funding reserves, recognizing the growing frequency and severity of flooding in Oxford.

Councillor Railton responded that the third recommendation was agreed, and the first and second recommendations were partially agreed. With the first recommendation, Councillor Railton said that they have agreed to share that information when findings are published, not when the investigations are underway, as it can take some time for findings to be published. Councillor Railton said that she would take the second recommendation as an action item and would come up with advice regarding comms to be distributed to residents.

Councillor Turner said that looking at Councillor Railton's response, members should use the members enquiry form to make enquiries about flood issues. He added that he would also want it to be a default that Cabinet members act as the point of contact for urgent messages.

Councillor Miles then presented the Scrutiny Committee's discussion of the proposed governance changes to address the increase in

Urgent Key Decisions. She said that they had noted that measures are ongoing to address this and that these efforts are strengthening governance in the Council. She also noted that these decisions are being reviewed by full Council as well as Cabinet. She presented the recommendations relating to this matter.

- Recommendation 1: That Cabinet supports the continued implementation and embedding of the actions proposed to mitigate the increased number of Urgent Key Decisions taken.
- Recommendation 2: That Officers ensure an end-of-year report is submitted to the Scrutiny Committee, reporting the number and nature of urgent key decisions taken, including data to track trends and evaluate distinctions between capacity-related and unavoidable issues.

Councillor Brown responded that they are happy to agree the recommendations on this item.

Councillor Miles then presented the Scrutiny Committee's discussion regarding the Withdrawal of Oxford Local Plan 2040 from Examination and Approval of the Local Development Scheme 2025-2030. She said that Scrutiny Committee's discussion on this item focused on the local plan document, the local devolution papers, how the devolution papers might impact the local plan, the implications of extending the end date, and how that would impact neighborhood plans. Councillor Miles said that the Scrutiny Committee had noted with regret the withdrawal of the local plan and they agreed to endorse the officer recommendations. Councillor Miles said that there were no Scrutiny Committee recommendations on this item.

Councillor Brown thanked Councillor Miles for her and the Scrutiny Committee's work and the thorough approach they had taken in their review of these matters.

101. Council of Sanctuary Framework, 2025-2028

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources had submitted a report which sought approval and adoption of the draft Council of Sanctuary framework document.

Councillor Smith presented the report. She said that Cabinet are being asked to agree a three-year local plan and that the paper does not request any new funding to support the proposed action plan. She noted that Oxford has a long history of welcoming

people from around the world and since 2015 the Council had resettled 58 families. She stated that the accreditation and action plan proposed in the report provides a solid platform for providing a city in which everyone can thrive.

Councillor Brown thanked Councillor Smith and Stephen Cohen, Refugee and Resettlement Manager for their work on the report. Councillor Brown agreed that the official status proposed in the report is important and that this was a milestone report for the Council.

Councillor Smith also thanked the Refugee and Resettlement Manager and his team for the work they had done on the report.

Cabinet agreed to:

- **Approve** and adopt the draft Council of Sanctuary Framework document, including the Action Plan.
- **Agree** that an annual progress update should be produced for Cabinet.
- **Delegate** power to the Executive Director – Corporate Resources, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, to amend the design of the framework document without changing the content, and to make changes to the action plan to keep it updated to developments and changes.

102. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Rent Setting Report 2025/26

The Head of Financial Services had submitted a report to present the outcome of Oxford City Council's (the council's) annual rent review and associated rent setting proposal for 2025/26 in respect of all council dwellings within the Housing Revenue Account, including the setting of associated services and facilities charges.

Councillor Smith presented the report and its recommendations. She stated that colleagues will know that there is a need to maximise income into the HRA to fund the Council's housing services. She noted that they need to invest in their Council homes, and they need to continue providing satisfactory landlord services for their tenants. Councillor Smith said that they need to invest in building and buying more affordable homes. Councillor Smith said that her message to tenants is that she regrets the need to raise the rents at all, but that she hopes tenants will understand the reasons this is necessary and that Council rents still represent great value for money.

Councillor Brown agreed that the proposed increases present a modest and necessary rise. She agreed with Councillor Smith that she also regretted that any rise was needed. Councillor Brown stated that it is necessary to put this modest increase in place to care for the housing that the Council provides. She noted that compared to private rents, Council rental prices continue to present significant value for money.

Cabinet agreed to:

- **Recommend** Council to approve an increase of 2.7% for 2025/26 (subject to any subsequent cap on increases imposed by central government) in social dwelling rents from 1st April 2025 giving an average weekly increase of £3.51 per week, and a revised weekly average social rent of £133.68 as set out in the Financial Implications section of this report.

- **Recommend** Council to approve an increase to rents for shared ownership dwellings as outlined in paragraph 21 of the Financial Implications.
- **Recommend** Council to approve an increase to service charges by 2.7% (CPI + 1%) to enable the HRA to recover the associated cost of supply.
- **Recommend** to council to approve an increase to the charge for a garage of 4.1%, equating to an increase of £0.78 per week for a standard garage within a curtilage with a revised charge of £20.00 per week.

103. Withdrawal of Oxford Local Plan 2040 and approval of Local Development Scheme 2025-2030

The Head of Planning and Regulatory Service had submitted a report which sought approval for the withdrawal of the Oxford Local Plan 2040 from Examination and to approve the Local Development Scheme 2025-2030, which sets out the work programme for the revised Oxford Local Plan 2042.

Councillor Upton presented the report and its recommendations. She emphasised that herself and the Council did not want to be taking this step, but that they are where they are. Councillor Upton said that the planning inspectors had asked them to withdraw this plan, and the only sensible option was to do what the inspectors had asked. She said that the report sets out the timeline for that process. Councillor Upton stated that immense work had went into the 2040 plan, but that withdrawing it does give them the chance to review and update the plan. She stressed that it is frustrating that the 2040 plan had been delayed, but that this is perhaps a chance to improve the plan further. Councillor Upton said that the second part of the report proposes changes to CIL charging schedule. For this matter, Councillor Upton said that they can find their own inspector privately and that is their plan. Councillor Upton said that the timetable for this work was set out in the report, and that there will likely be a two-year delay, but that they are working as quickly as they can on this matter.

David Butler, Head of Planning Services, said that they have presented an ambitious timeline to go out for consultation in two rounds. He assured that they will move as rapidly as they can to submit a new robust plan to meet their citizens' needs.

Sarah Harrison, Planning Policy Team Leader, said that the LDS is not going to go to Council. She added that they must make sure they do everything right and make sure they do the processes properly before an updated plan is resubmitted.

Councillor Hollingsworth agreed with the frustration that had been expressed regarding the decision of the inspector and agreed with the need to get the CIL schemes implemented. He asked about the LDS, particularly regarding appendix one and the timings presented there. He said that regulation 18 consultation is being planned to begin in June 2025. He asked if that regulation 18 document would go through cabinet and if so, which cabinet meeting was the team aiming for? Councillor Hollingsworth added that there is a significant amount of material which exists, and he supported the point about needing to keep the materials developed. He asked if he could get a sense of what elements of adjustment rather than change are being taken in this timescale, for example, issues in their conservation areas and the need to reflect on environmental changes in a different way than they had previously done. Councillor Hollingsworth asked if they going to be able to pick those up in the tight timescale being presented.

Planning Policy Team Leader responded that the regulation 18 document will go to a future meeting of Cabinet and that they were aiming to submit this for June 2025

cabinet. She said that consultation is planned to start at the end of June and run for 6 weeks. She added that there will be a lot of points from now to meet with people and discuss their previous set of options and see what needs to be adjusted. She assured that they had factored in time to determine what they should adjust and change into their proposed timescale.

Councillor Brown agreed that she was also disappointed in the inspector's decision. She said that it is disappointing that they are in this position, but they are and they need to make sure they have the right plans and policies in place so that they can ensure decisions are being made in the right way in the Council.

Cabinet agreed to:

- **Recommend** Council to approve the withdrawal of the Oxford Local Plan 2040 and the publication of the withdrawal statement;
- **Approve** the Local Development Scheme 2025-2030;
- **Authorise** the Head of Planning and Regulatory Services to make any necessary minor corrections not materially affecting the document prior to publication.
- **Agree** to the removal of the CIL Charging Schedule from the Planning Inspectorate so that an alternative Examiner (independent of the Planning Inspectorate) may be appointed.

104. Redesignation of the Neighbourhood Forum for Headington

The Executive Director of Development had submitted a report to redesignate the Neighbourhood Forum for Headington.

Councillor Brown presented the question that had been posed by a member of the public regarding this item. She noted that Councillor Upton will provide a response to the question which will be included in the published minutes.

Councillor Upton presented the report. She noted that neighbourhood forums are unique, as they are formed when neighbourhoods and their members seek to form one. She said that this one was first formed in 2014 and every five years it must be redesignated to set out the geographic area. Councillor Upton said that the Forum had applied to be redesignated and they have met all of the requirements. Councillor Upton added that she understands that occasionally people can be upset with how these forums operate, if they are not a part of the group which operates the forum. However, she emphasised there are few ways in which the Council can exercise control over the operation of these forums. She stated that they will make sure the question from the member of the public is shared with the relevant forum.

Councillor Brown added, regarding the governance issues raised regarding these forums, that it is open to a forum to apply to become a parish or community council. She said that if they wish to approach the Council to become one, they could consider this. She added that this could make the governance processes a little more accountable. She emphasised that this matter was not for them to consider in the current report, but that they will feed this back to the forum for their information. Councillor Brown noted on governance and the neighbourhood forums, that they have a couple of forums with neighbourhood plans, and they have in the past tried to engage

with them and invite them to Parish Councils meetings, but that this had not been very successful. She said that they will continue to send out these invitations.

Cabinet agreed to:

- **Approve** the redesignation of Headington Neighbourhood Forum in respect of the originally designated neighbourhood area to which it related.

105. Archive Scanning Project

The Head of Planning & Regulatory Services had submitted a report which sought approval to release £999,500 from the Town Hall Works (Lot 2) fund to complete Phases 1 and 2 of the proposed Archive Scanning Project.

Councillor Chapman presented the report and said that the report asks for resources to catalogue and scan the thousands of documents which are housed in the Town Hall. He said that moving these documents to a digital place would release space in the Town Hall and help to better organise the documents. He added that this would also help to reduce fire risk in the Town Hall. Councillor Chapman said that the money for this proposed work is in the budget, and he asked Cabinet to support the paper.

Nathan Breeze, Regeneration Manager, added that a further benefit of cataloguing the documents is that it would help the Council to better adhere to GDPR and relevant policies.

Councillor Arshad expressed her support for this project and the report.

Councillor Hollingsworth noted the previous efforts which had attempted to do this work. He said that in previous efforts, some document packs only had the front page scanned and that many key documents had not been scanned. He said that they want to make sure that whatever contractor they use, they do not allow them to do a poor job of scanning. He emphasised that they need to ensure the scanning of the whole document is done properly.

Councillor Smith added that she would hope that a critical human eye will be cast over everything, to ensure that documents are kept in good shape once scanned. She asked if the documents would be disposed of after being scanned.

Councillor Turner said that regarding the financial implications of this project, that this work will free up space in the Town Hall. He noted that there is ongoing work to examine the future use of the Town Hall. He said that this work is going to lead to a more effective use of their building which can benefit the Council as an organization and their finances.

The Head of Planning Services responded that part of the first phase of this work will involve officers examining the documents to decide what is going to be scanned and cataloguing the archived documents. He said that they would ensure that scanners don't only scan the first page or do a poor job. He added that their plan is to only retain the physical documents of scanned documents where there is a legal requirement for them to. He stated that they are proposing to confidentially destroy many of the documents once they are scanned.

The Regeneration Manager emphasised that this work provides an opportunity to make better use of the Town Hall and the spaces therein.

Councillor Chapman added that they are expecting to receive some proposals shortly on how the space will be used going forward.

Tom Bridgman, Executive Director of Development said that they are working on this matter. He said that they will be engaging with staff, members, and users on this topic.

Councillor Brown encouraged the Cabinet to remember that storing things digitally also holds a cost that they should consider. Although this project would improve matters, Councillor Brown noted that there are still financial and energy costs associated with storing documents online.

Cabinet agreed to:

- **Approve** the request for the release of £999,500 from the Town Hall Works (Lot 2) fund to complete Phases 1 and 2 of the proposed Archive Scanning project.
- **Delegate** to the Executive Director (Development) in consultation with Councillor Chapman [Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies], the Head of Finance and the Head of Law and Governance the authority to enter into any contracts necessary to undertake the project where they do not already have authority within the constitution.

106.38-40 George Street Regeneration Project -Appropriation

The Executive Director of Development had submitted a report which sought approval to appropriate land (change the statutory basis on which it is held by the Council) at 38-40 George Street to be held in future for planning purposes to facilitate the 38-40 George Street Regeneration Project. The appropriation relates to land owned by Oxford City Council.

Councillor Turner presented the report. He emphasized that this is an important project. He said that they always need to look carefully to make sure that all permissions are in place as needed. He stated that they would like to exercise their powers to undertake this appropriation.

Cabinet agreed to:

- **Approve** the exercise of the Council's powers to appropriate land in its ownership at 38-40 George Street (See plan at Appendices 1 & 2) ("the Land"), for planning purposes under section 122 of the Local Government Act 1972 so as to rely on the use of the Council's powers under sections 203-206 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016.
- **To authorise** the Executive Director of Development in consultation with the Head of Finance/s151 officer and Head of Law and Governance and the Cabinet member (Deputy Leader (Statutory) - Finance and Asset Management) to agree the terms of settlements and any associated fees.

107. Fleet Procurement of RCV's and Toploaders

The Monitoring Officer (Head of Law and Governance) had submitted a report to provide Cabinet with a summary of the matters concerning the procurement of fleet which have led to governance issues arising and actions taken to prevent reoccurrence.

Emma Jackman, The Monitoring Officer (Head of Law and Governance), presented the report. She said that this report concerns a transaction that was entered into to purchase a fleet for ODS. She stated that owing to technical issues, there were some governance processes which were missed which meant the Council entered into a contract without first going to Cabinet. She stated that they have taken the necessary steps to address this issue and they are in the process of dealing with this matter. She said that the report seeks to make Cabinet aware of the issues with the previous contract and to ask Cabinet for contract approval.

Councillor Chapman responded that it was good that they had caught this before they finalised everything. He said that it was also good to see that there will be training and development work for officers around the procurement issue and how approvals should flow. He emphasised that he was reassured about this issue by the report. He added that he was also assured by the report that the risks to service delivery are low and that they are being managed properly. He thanked the Monitoring Officer (Head of Law and Governance) for her work on this matter.

Cabinet agreed to:

- **Note** the historic matters set out in the report
- **Note** the steps taken to address the governance issues to prevent reoccurrence
- **Delegate** to the Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer), in consultation with the Monitoring Officer, authority to award two contract for the purchase of fleet vehicles as detailed at section 17 to 23 of the report following the completion of the procurement process.

108. Minutes

Cabinet resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on **11 December 2024** as a true and accurate record.

109. Dates of Future Meetings

Cabinet noted the dates of future meetings.

Matters Exempt from Publication

If Cabinet wishes to exclude the press and the public from the meeting during consideration of any of the items on the exempt from publication part of the agenda, it will be necessary for Cabinet to pass a resolution in accordance with the provisions of Paragraph 4(2)(b) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 on the grounds that their presence could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in specific paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Cabinet may maintain the exemption if and so long as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 6.55 pm

Chair

Date: Wednesday 5 February 2025

*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.*