

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday 12 March 2025

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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:

Caroline Green, Chief Executive

Tom Bridgman, Deputy Chief Executive – Place

Tom Hook, Deputy Chief Executive – Citizen and City Services

Emma Griffiths, Deputy Monitoring Officer

Mish Tullar, Director of Corporate Strategy

Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager

Dr Brenda McCollum, Committee and Member Services Officer

Becky Walker, Home Improvement Agency Manager

Lucy Cherry, Policy and Partnerships Officer

Ossi Mosley, Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Manager

Francesca Barr, Senior Rough Sleeping Officer

Nerys Parry, Director of Housing

Bill Lewis, Financial Accounting Manager

Clare Paterson, Strategic Finance Manager

Also present:

Councillor Katherine Miles, Chair of Scrutiny

Apologies:

Councillor Turner sent apologies for his inability to attend in person. He attended the beginning of the meeting online.

Councillor Arshad sent apologies for arriving to the meeting late.

130. Declarations of Interest

None.

131. Addresses and Questions by Members of the Public

None received.

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

None.

133. Councillor Addresses on Neighbourhood Issues

None received.

134. Items raised by Cabinet Members

Councillor Arshad presented an update on the Adult Exploitation and Modern Slavery report from Scrutiny Committee. She noted that this report had been an opportunity where the Scrutiny team worked together and produced one recommendation regarding the funding for this area. Councillor Arshad stated that the current position is funded by the PCC and in order for it to be sustainable, so that this work could continue, Cabinet was asked to keep this position in mind in the next round of funding. Councillor Arshad stated that they had worked with over fifty partners and had conducted over fifty joint operations. Through this work, over seventy individuals were brought to safety. Councillor Arshad said that they team also delivered trainings and held events to raise awareness regarding Adult Exploitation and Modern Slavery.

135. Scrutiny Reports

Councillor Miles presented the reports from Scrutiny Committee.

The Scrutiny Committee met on 3 March 2025, and they considered reports relating to agenda items 9 and 10 and the Adult Exploitation and Modern Slavery Report. The Climate and Environment Panel met on 26 February 2025, and the Housing and Homelessness Panel met on 6 March 2025.

Councillor Miles presented the Scrutiny Committee's discussions relating to the Oxford City Council Annual Business Plan 2025 – 2026.

- Recommendation 1: That Cabinet ensures locality-based support for business in Oxford, outside the city centre, focuses on the commercial centres as defined in the Local Plan; and that efforts be made to collaborate with businesses that,

while not formally designated as commercial centres, provide essential services to local residents within walking distance of certain residential areas.

- Recommendation 2: That the reference to the creation of an Accommodation Business Improvement District in the Oxford City Council Annual Business Plan Priorities 2025-2026 be revised to clearly indicate that its establishment is contingent on the decision of the businesses involved, and not the Council.

Councillor Hollingsworth responded and noted that Cabinet had agreed the recommendations from Scrutiny.

Councillor Miles presented the Scrutiny Committee's discussions regarding the update report on Adult Exploitation and Modern Slavery.

- Recommendation 1: That Cabinet assesses the sustainability of funding in advance of the next budget setting round to ensure continued support for the role and ongoing work on adult exploitation, should external funding become unavailable.

Cabinet noted that these recommendations had been accepted.

Councillor Miles presented the Climate and Environment Panel's discussions concerning the Net-Zero Masterplan. She congratulated the work that had been done already in this area.

- Recommendation 1: The Sustainability team to invite Councillors to visit an exemplary Net Zero New Build, as part of the Council housing stock to see provisions for Net Zero.

Councillor Miles presented the Climate and Environment Panel's discussions concerning the Update and Overview of the Work of the Waste Review.

- Recommendation 1: For Oxford City Council (Finance and Waste teams) to conduct some research to explore cost recovery from student landlords, related to waste services as a result of the densification of student properties and challenges of waste management.

Councillor Miles presented the Climate and Environment Panel's discussions concerning the Heat Networks and Zoning.

- Recommendation 1: For Oxford City Council to explore heat decarbonisation mapping exercise to support the work of Heat Networks.

Councillor Railton responded and noted that these recommendations had been accepted by Cabinet.

Councillor Miles presented the Housing and Homelessness Panel discussions concerning the Selective Licensing Implementation Update – Year 2.

- Recommendation 1: For Officers to collate data from proactive visits to review the Housing Stock in the private rented sector in Oxford.
- Recommendation 2: For Officers to prioritise the importance of the media campaign and to engage with tenants' unions and organisations, and to track the engagement to review the success of the campaign.

Councillor Miles presented the Housing and Homelessness Panel discussions concerning the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment. She thanked all of the officers and Councillors for this work on this matter.

- Recommendation 1: For the Officers, as part of on-going review of Housing's complaint handling process, to further reflect on how often the reports are brought to Cabinet or other suitable governing bodies e.g. the Tenant and Leaseholder Board.

Councillor Smith responded and noted that the recommendations had been accepted by Cabinet.

136. Integrated Performance Report Q3 2024/25

The agenda order was amended, and this item was taken first, following the Scrutiny reports.

The Group Finance Director had submitted a report to note the update to the Cabinet on Finance, Risk and Corporate Performance matters as at 31st December 2024.

Councillor Turner presented the report. He said that in the general fund there is favourable out turn and that the temporary accommodation pressure was well known and represented a significant challenge. He noted that they have tried to provide a realistic forecast in the report. Councillor Turner said that in the HRA the expenditures for repairs were higher than they would like them to be, and that officers and members will need to work towards a balance in this, so that they can have a better grip on this. He said that this was not an existential threat to the HRA, but the current situation was something they need to continue working on. Councillor Turner said that on the Capital Programme, there was further slippage. One of the biggest issues causing this was loans to companies. Councillor Turner suggested that they need to watch this area, for the ways that it could impact future dividend payments.

Councillor Chapman observed that in the section regarding the overspend in the repairs, some of those spends are necessary and will happen no matter what mitigations they undertake. He said he was more concerned about the cost of day-to-day repairs, and he was pleased that there was a plan to get a grip on this and improve clienting and increase transparency. On the void process, Councillor Chapman said they should look at that closely and see if it is as efficient as other authorities and if there are ways that they could make improvements in this area.

Councillor Hollingsworth asked about the capital programme deadlines. He said that the planning of their finances was more robust that it had been three to four years ago, but asked if there were further messages to be highlighted regarding a sense of direction in the plan for improving the planning of their finances.

Councillor Brown stated that the housing services issue around temporary accommodation remains as a financial and human concern. She said that this was one of those issues which is close to their hearts, because they are aware of the human misery that accompanies this matter. She stated that this was not a good thing financially or for families. She emphasised their need to continue to work hard to build the housing the city needs, because that is the best solution for families.

Councillor Turner responded that he agreed with Councillor Chapman on the repairs situation. He said that across the Council they need to look at this. He stated that this issue involves clienting, tenancy management, their property team, and they clearly want to work on this, because the current situation is not what they want. He

highlighted that they were having good conversations already, but it was one to watch. Councillor Turner suggested that in a year's time they might not be where they want to be, but maybe in two years.

Councillor Turner responded to Councillor Hollingsworth and said that there were two ways they could plan. One was about realistic project planning and not being overly optimistic, and they have gotten better at that. However, they still get curve balls and need to navigate optimism bias. Councillor Turner emphasised that they are getting better at bearing down on optimism bias and at budget time they pushed back quite hard. He added that their pipeline process was also working quite well. The second part, regarding planning the draw down funds, Councillor Turner said that they now put in a heavy contingency in their budget and treasury planning, assuming that there will be some slippage. He stated that they are now pretty good at that.

Councillor Turner said that in terms of planning, the big numbers in the report are to do with company loans. He advised that they need to take an honest view when they look at business plans going forward. On the temporary accommodation matter, this is an area where officers are working hard, and they have a range of things going to work on this matter. Councillor Turner agreed with Councillor Brown and noted that the immediacy of the housing issue continues and is arguably getting worse, and they need to do everything they can to address this issue. He said that they are responding to governance consultation on homelessness reduction funding. He noted that they need all the support they can get from central government in this area.

Bill Lewis, Financial Accounting Manager, said that on the capital side, the Council is getting better. He noted that there were issues around the phasing, but that a lot of that was outside of the Council's control. However, it does need to be looked at so that project managers phase according to what is likely to happen. He noted the delays in capital loans and said that when they set the budget, they set it with assumptions. Nonetheless, later quarters experience the knock-on effects of things that happened in earlier quarters. Regardless, he stated that they do make an assessment on the global level of reduced capital financing requirements, however the impact depends on what schemes slip and what the financing methodology was for those schemes. He advised that they are getting better, but there is always rooms for improvement.

Clare Paterson, Strategic Finance Manager, said that the Council is working continually, progressing around its financial forecasting and understanding of overspend areas. She said that they are strengthening work in overspend areas and strengthening their response in those particular areas.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the projected financial outturn as well as the current position on risk and performance as at **31st** December 2024.

Councillor Arshad arrived during this item, at 18:21.

Councillor Turner exited the meeting after the discussion of this item.

137. Oxfordshire Joint Leaders' Committee Terms of Reference

The **Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer)** had submitted a **report** for Cabinet to approve the Terms of Reference for the Oxfordshire Leaders Joint Committee.

Councillor Brown presented the report. She stated that this report regards the terms of reference for joint meetings held between authorities. She detailed what Oxfordshire Joint Leaders' Committee was and the membership of the group. Councillor Brown noted that the terms had not changed significantly from earlier terminology.

Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager, noted that the Oxfordshire Joint Leaders' Committee do not have any decision making powers, any decisions made at the Committee would need to come to Cabinet or other decision making bodies for approval.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the new Terms of Reference for the Oxfordshire Joint Leaders' Committee at Appendix 1;
2. **Approve** the updated Memorandum of Understanding at Appendix 2.

138. Oxford City Council Annual Business Plan 2025 - 2026

The Director of Corporate Strategy had submitted a report to seek the Cabinet's approval for the Council's Annual Business Plan Priorities 2025 to 2026; and to provide an update on delivery of the 2024 to 2025 Business Plan.

Councillor Brown presented the report. She thanked the officers for their work on this report. Councillor Brown said that the plan focuses on the delivery of the Council's priorities. Councillor Brown noted the slight amendments from Scrutiny and the useful recommendations that had come from the Committee.

Lucy Cherry, Policy and Partnerships Officer, outlined the process that they had taken to develop the plan. She stated that they had reviewed the last business plan, aligned it with the Council's Strategy, and colleagues across services provided a list of possible deliverables. The Policy and Partnerships Officer said that was then filtered down and they had held a workshop with the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT), and business leads to filter down the list to 34 key actions. She noted that many other proposals that came forward which were not included in this plan would be taken forward in individual service area plans. The Policy and Partnerships Officer said that this had been cross Council and cross service contribution to the plan, and they think this leads well into the Council's strategy.

Councillor Hollingsworth asked about priority 4, specifically first action within the year two actions, on page 44. He asked about the aspiration for meeting energy efficiency targets and noted that the non-housing targets and housing targets said two different things. He asked for clarification regarding the goal for average EPC in Council housing.

Councillor Smith responded and said that their goal is for 95% of council homes to have an EPC rating of C.

Councillor Brown advised that they should remove the word average in that part of the report so that this would be more clearly stated.

Councillor Hollingsworth commented on the significant impact that this target would have on people's lives and stated that they should be pleased that this was included as a target. He stated that this was an important development for people's lives and for the environment.

Councillor Brown said that she was proud of the ambitious plan and that it reflects their ambitions for the city, for citizens, and the city's businesses. Councillor Brown state that there were a lot of good things in the plan, but that it would take a lot of work to ensure that the plan is delivered. Councillor Brown expressed hope that they would be able to deliver on the ambitious plan before them.

Councillor Munkonge noted that there were improvements and increases in investments in the leisure centres. He noted that they are continuing this investment program, where other local authorities are closing these types of programs, and that this was a point of pride for him in the plan.

Councillor Chapman commented on priority five. He said that it was good to see these priorities and that he was particularly proud of the work they are doing to develop staff within the organization. On the ICT AI connectivity issue, Councillor Chapman noted that there was interesting work going on with members of staff that are undertaking parttime AI apprenticeships, and he would like to hear more about that going forward.

Councillor Hollingsworth expressed praise for priority two in the plan. Councillor Hollingsworth noted the importance of meeting the needs of their stakeholders and investors, while also signalling to central government that they are a fast-growing economy and city. He stated that another important element was that this economic growth should be for all people in this city, not just some communities.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Agree** the draft Oxford City Council annual Business Plan priorities 2025 to 2026, which set out the Council's priority work for the next financial year beginning 1 April 2025;
2. **Delegate** authority to the Director Corporate Strategy in consultation with the Council Leader to make any further minor amendments to the Business Plan priorities before implementation, provided that such amendments do not materially affect the substance of the Business Plan;
3. **Note** the progress made in delivery against the actions set out in the Business Plan 2024 to 2025.

139. Allocation of Preventing Homelessness Budget 2025/26

The Deputy Chief Executive – City and Citizens had submitted a report for Cabinet to approve the Preventing Homelessness Budget allocations for 2025/26; and to approve grant assistance using Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant funding for 2025/26.

Councillor Smith presented the report. She congratulated the Housing Needs team for their nomination for an award and thanked them for their hard work in this area. Councillor Smith stated that it is important for them to remember that this work is non statutory, it is work they fund as a Council because they care about it. Councillor Smith stated that they are determined to do what they can to end homelessness. Councillor Smith noted that they had been allocated 600k of additional grants from government and they have used 100k of that to add to this budget. They are also providing an uplift in the grants that they are making to organizations that work with the homeless communities in the city. Councillor Smith expressed pride in the work of these organizations and said that she was pleased that they are moving more towards a housing led approach.

Ossi Mosley, Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Manager, said that since the report was written the government had announced their figures for homelessness across the UK. She noted that they had not seen the increases in Oxford, despite increases nationally. However, she stated that they still have higher numbers than they would like. She stated that they are particularly concerned with long term homelessness and that is an issue they are seeking to address.

Francesca Barr, Senior Rough Sleeping Officer, added that the Council's budget for homeless services was partially made up through grants from central government and their PHB. She said that the main change in the report before them was to move towards a more housing led approach, and this included an additional commitment of 100k. She stated that this will allow more people to move into their own accommodation.

Councillor Hollingsworth noted that there are many groups of people who are particularly prone to homelessness and flagged the particularly difficult position of former offenders. He said that he was pleased in the proposal to see an increase in service for that group of individuals. Councillor Hollingsworth said that this is a service for people who are in the most need of help. He stated that the transformational potential of this service is notable and thanked the team for their work.

Councillor Arshad congratulated Councillor Smith and the officers for their work in this sector and on this report. She thanked them for their important work.

Councillor Brown agreed with the positive comments and said that they are grateful to the officer for the fantastic job they were doing. She said that it is a tribute to their excellent work that at a time when the housing situation is increasingly serious and the national picture is seeing big increases in rough sleeping, Oxford is seeing decreases. Councillor Brown thanked the officers for their work.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the allocation of the Preventing Homelessness Budget to commission homelessness services in 2025/26 as detailed in Table 1 of this report.
2. **Approve** the following 12-month grants for rough sleeping support: £90,000 to Aspire Oxfordshire; and £41,100 to Turning Point using Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant funding received from MHCLG for 2025/26.
3. **Delegate** to the Deputy Chief Executive – City and Citizens, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, the authority to revise if required the allocation of the Preventing Homelessness Budget set out in Table 1 provided the total allocation is not increased.
4. **Delegate** to the Deputy Chief Executive – City and Citizens the authority to take any steps necessary to enable and facilitate the implementation of the grants approved in this report and the allocations set out in Table 1.

140. Contract for the supply of HIA Ramps, Level Access Showers/Wetrooms and Associated Bathroom Works

The Director of Planning & Regulation had submitted a report to seek approval of Cabinet to procure a framework agreement and delegation to a senior officer to take the decision to appoint suppliers to the framework once the procurement is concluded.

Councillor Smith presented the report. She said that this will allow a housing improvement agency to get on with the work they need to do. She noted that the report contains references to important policies that they have in the council.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve the procurement of a Framework Agreement for Ramps, Level Access Showers/Wetrooms and Associated Bathroom Works; and**
2. **Delegate authority to the Director of Planning and Regulation to enter into the Framework Agreement and award a place on the framework to the successful contractors following the procurement process.**

141. Minutes

Cabinet resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on **05 February 2025** as a true and accurate record.

142. 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 18:00 and ended at 19:00.

Chair

Date: Wednesday 19 March 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.