

To: Council

Date: 14 July 2025

Report of: Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer)

Title of Report: Urgent Key Decisions Since March 2025

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To update Council on key decisions taken in cases of special urgency since 24 March 2025.
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Susan Brown, Leader and Cabinet Member for Partnership Working and Inclusive Economic Growth
Corporate Priority:	A Well Run Council.
Policy Framework:	None.

Recommendation(s): That Council resolves to:
1. Note the urgent key decisions taken in cases of special urgency as set out in the report.

Information Exempt From Publication	
N/A	N/A

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
N/A	N/A	N/A

Introduction and background

1. The Leader of the Council is required by regulations to report to Council at least annually on executive decisions taken under special urgency procedures. Special urgency rules apply to key decisions that have not been notified on the Forward Plan for at least 5 clear days. Such decisions can only be taken where the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee (or if there is no chair, the Lord Mayor) agrees that the making of the decision is urgent and cannot reasonably be deferred. This report updates Council on executive decisions taken in cases of special urgency since 24 March 2025.

Local Government Reorganisation – Interim Response to Government

2. This decision, taken by Cabinet at their meeting on 19 March 2025, was to submit Oxford City Council's response to the Government's Local Government Reorganisation. The deadline was 20 March 2025, and had to coincide with other responses from local authorities in Oxfordshire.
3. As this was a response to a consultation, the decision was not considered Key, however as per section 17.1 of the Constitution, all resolutions by Cabinet are subject to a call-in period.
4. The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee was consulted to remove the call-in period under section 17.9 of the Constitution, due to the deadline to submit the response to Government.
5. Alternative Options Considered – to keep the call-in period, which was concluded after the deadline for submission to Government. This is not considered appropriate because Oxford City Council wouldn't have submitted their proposal for a City Unitary Authority.

OxWed LLP Funding Arrangements

6. The decision, taken on 27 March 2025, the Group Finance Director to agree a follow-on loan agreement for existing and future loans to OxWed LLP.
7. The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee was consulted to remove the call-in period under section 17.9 of the Constitution.
8. Oxwed LLP is a partnership between Oxford City Council and Nuffield College Developments 1 Limited.
9. The partnership's purpose is to facilitate the development of land held by the partnership in the Oxpens area of the City.
10. There is an existing loan agreement in place which terminates on 31st March 2025. It is therefore necessary to agree a new loan agreement in order to allow Oxwed LLP to continue with the development proposals.
11. The background to and key terms of the agreement were agreed by Cabinet on 5 February 2025. This decision is therefore to agree to a loan agreement in accordance with those terms.
12. This decision did not result in any additional financial commitment beyond that already agreed by Cabinet and Council in providing loans to Oxwed LLP. Any additional loans beyond those already agreed would only be provided in line with separate Cabinet and Council approval.
13. Risks relating to this report are risks facing the development itself which may impact on the returns obtained from the development. The agreement terms allow for the loans and interest arising therefrom to be secured on the land held by the LLP. The land value is higher than the value of current and anticipated loans and interest debt and therefore risk of development failure is mitigated.
14. Reasons for decision – the existing loan agreement ends on 31 March 2025 and a replacement loan agreement is required.
15. Alternative Options Considered - since the Oxwed LLP still requires loans to progress the development, the only other option would be to require the LLP to seek loans from elsewhere. This is not considered appropriate because this would result

in interest being paid to parties other than the Partners, thus resulting in a lower overall return to the Council.

16. Additionally, if a third-party lender were to be involved this would dilute the control that the partners of the LLP currently have over shaping the development.

To sell the freehold title of 64-65 Cornmarket Street

17. The decision, taken on 2 May 2025 was to sell the freehold title of 64-65 Cornmarket Street.
18. The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee was consulted to remove the call-in period under section 17.9 of the Constitution.
19. Oxford City Council owned the freehold of 64-65 Cornmarket Street, currently leased to HSBC on a 5-year lease expiring September 2025, with a renewal in progress for another 5 years. The freehold is not held in its entirety by the Council and is instead split with another freeholder.
20. An options analysis was previously carried out at the end of last year in the lead up to the expiry of the lease to HSBC to understand best future use for the property. Due to the complicated nature of the split freehold, the substantial upper parts and the fact the property is listed, there was very limited potential for any regeneration or change of use of the building if HSBC were to vacate after the expiry in 2030, which is likely as we are aware they are seeking alternative premises. This is due to the capital expenditure required to convert the property into any alternative use being too high for the rental income the Council would receive, as well as the awkward nature of the freehold split likely to deter interest from parties.
21. The new freeholder of the other portion of the property had put forward an offer to purchase the Council's freehold interest. Due to the outcome of the options analysis, we are recommending the Council accepts the offer and proceeds with the transfer of freehold title.
22. Reasons for decision – the decision provides the Council with a capital receipt for a property that would otherwise have restricted options in the future.
23. The reason this was taken as an urgent decision was due to the tight timescales for completion of the sale within 30 days, which, if not progressed, would leave the Council with a potential problematic property to manage in the future, with the possibility of high void costs and maintenance liabilities.
24. Alternative Options Considered – The alternative option is to not proceed with the sale. It is believed that an offer of this level would not be forthcoming from another purchaser due to the nature of the purchaser being a neighbouring freeholder and viewed as a "special purchaser".

Financial implications

25. There are no financial issues arising directly from this report.
26. Financial implications for each of the Urgent Key Decisions have been outlined above, and the Group Finance Director (Section 151 Officer) was consulted before each decision was taken.

Legal issues

27. Regulation 19 of The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 requires that the executive Leader submits a report to the authority at least annually on executive decisions taken in cases of special urgency (Regulation 11), including the particulars of each decision.
28. Legal issues for each of the Urgent Key Decisions have been outlined above, and the Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer) was consulted before each decision was taken.

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Background Papers:	
1	Agenda for Cabinet on Wednesday 19 March 2025, 6.00 pm Oxford City Council
2	Decision - Oxwed LLP Funding Arrangements Oxford City Council
3	Decision - To sell the freehold title of 64-65 Cornmarket Street Oxford City Council