

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday 18 June 2025

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Committee members present:

Councillor Brown

Councillor Chapman

Councillor Munkonge

Councillor Linda Smith

Councillor Arshad

Councillor Hollingsworth

Councillor Railton

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Caroline Green, Chief Executive

Tom Hook, Deputy Chief Executive – Citizen and City Services

Tom Bridgman, Deputy Chief Executive – Place

Emma Jackman, Director of Law, Governance, and Strategy (Monitoring Officer)

Bill Lewis, Financial Accounting Manager

Mish Tullar, Director of Corporate Strategy

Dr Brenda McCollum, Committee and Member Services Officer

Emma Gubbins, Corporate Assets Lead

Melissa Hope, Organisational Development Manager

James Baughan, Leisure and Active Wellbeing Manager

Hagan Lewisman, Active Communities Manager

Sarah Harrison, Team Leader (Planning Policy)

Kat Mayes, Customer Care & Complaints Manager

Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager

Alex Miller, Transactions Manager - Corporate Property

Lorraine Freeman, Team Leader - CIL, Data Analysis and Reporting

Sobia Afridi, the Diversity and Inclusion Specialist

Rachel Williams, Planning Policy and Place Manager

Also present:

Councillor Alex Powell, Chair of Scrutiny

Apologies:

Councillor Turner sent apologies for being unable to attend the meeting in person. He joined the meeting virtually.

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Addresses and Questions by Members of the Public

None received.

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

None received.

4. Councillor Addresses on Neighbourhood Issues

None received.

5. Scrutiny Reports

Councillor Alex Powell presented the reports from Scrutiny Committee.

The Scrutiny Committee met on 10 June 2025 to consider the Leisure Investment Programme Update and More Leisure Service Annual Plan, the Oxford Local Plan 2042 Regulation 18 Consultation Document, and the Annual Complaint Performance & Service Improvement Report.

Councillor Alex Powell presented the Scrutiny Committee's discussions and recommendations relating to the Leisure Investment Programme Update and More Leisure Service Annual Plan.

- **Recommendation 1:** That the accuracy of the data presented within the Annual Service Plan, particularly regarding baseline usage figures and the 3% growth KPI's, be improved by utilising best estimates for the quantity of missing visits; and that the revised data be included in the update report to be brought back to the Scrutiny Committee in six months' time
- **Recommendation 2:** That the Council seek confirmation as to whether there is an ongoing contract between Serco and Lynxight and, if so, examine the nature of Lynxight's engagements. This should include providing further details on how human rights and ethical procurement policies are applied within the leisure

service contracts, ensuring this information is published to reassure residents that these commitments are being upheld

Councillor Alex Powell presented the Scrutiny Committee's discussions and recommendations relating to the Oxford Local Plan 2042 Regulation 18 Consultation Document.

- **Recommendation 1:** That the Cabinet review the cycle parking standards proposed in the draft Local Plan 2042 to ensure Consultation materials encourage more specific public feedback on this issue in alignment with the Council's wider transport policy commitments, particularly the goal to increase cycling trips within the city.
- **Recommendation 2:** That the Cabinet review and consider strengthening the wording of policies HD8 and HD9 in the draft Local Plan 2042 to better support appropriate densification in order to meet Oxford's housing needs whilst respecting the scale and character of different parts of the city.

Councillor Alex Powell presented the Scrutiny Committee's discussions and recommendation relating to the Annual Complaint Performance & Service Improvement Report.

- That future complaints handling reports include benchmarking data from other housing providers, particularly those operating at a local level, to help assess the Council's performance in context and support continuous improvement

Councillor Munkonge responded to the recommendations from Scrutiny regarding the Leisure Investment Programme Update and More Leisure Service Annual Plan. He said that Cabinet had agreed the first recommendation in part and that this was due to the regular reviews which would be taken with the plan. Councillor Munkonge said that Cabinet had fully agreed the second recommendation.

Councillor Hollingsworth responded to the recommendations from Scrutiny regarding the Oxford Local Plan 2042 Regulation 18 Consultation Document. He noted the technical difficulties which had impacted the Scrutiny Committee's meeting. With cycle parking, he noted that the policies came from county, but they would be reviewing this to see what they can do and that they would consider this alongside comments from the public. Regarding the second recommendation, Councillor Hollingsworth read the policy and said that it was difficult to change this to make it clearer that density was the issue. He said they can make their language sharper and more clearcut and that they would work to do so. Councillor Hollingsworth commended Scrutiny for their focus on maximising densification and their positive conversations on this report.

Councillor Linda Smith responded to the recommendations from Scrutiny regarding the Annual Complaint Performance & Service Improvement Report. She said that Cabinet had accepted the recommendation from Scrutiny on this paper.

Councillor Brown thanked Councillor Alex Powell for his report and presentation.

6. Leisure Investment Programme Update

The Director of Communities and Citizens Services had submitted a report to update Cabinet on the highlights of the first year of the new leisure contract and approve the Annual Service Plan 2025-26, which is an annual requirement of the operator, aiming to align outcomes to the Council's priorities and to address health inequalities.

Councillor Munkonge presented the report. He said that there was a lot of good work being done in the plan and that they had seen a number of improvements, including an increase in numbers in swimming lessons. Despite these improvements, he recognised that they can always make improvements and do more. Councillor Munkonge apologised that the report did not have information regarding the creche. He noted that conversations were still underway between More Leisure and the Council on this topic and the outcome would be in the next plan for 26/27.

James Baughan, Leisure and Active Wellbeing Manager, said that there had been a lot of success in the last year and they had seen several improvements from their previous operator. Overall, he said that they were confident that everything was now running as it should. With transformation work in the centres, he noted that there was still work to do. Following up from Councillor Munkonge, the Leisure and Active Wellbeing Manager said that their community fund was now open for applications.

Hagan Lewisman, Active Communities Manager, said that there had been great successes with the contracts. He noted the positive developments with Hinksey pool and the Leys soft play area. He noted the good attendance that they had seen and discussed the governance they'd put in place to provide assurance moving forward.

Councillor Linda Smith noted her disappointment that no one from Serco had been able to attend the meeting. Councillor Smith emphasised the importance of having creches in their leisure facilities and discussed how this would make the leisure facilities. She noted that multiple creches had closed during COVID and had not reopened. She said that she was disappointed that the plan did not include the reopening of creches in their leisure facilities.

Councillor Munkonge responded and said that they should focus on the bigger picture. He noted that some of the creches had closed because they were not viable. Councillor Munkonge agreed that the inclusion of a creche was important and apologised that their discussions about the creches had not been included in the agenda pack. He said that he had assured Councillor Smith that he would address this matter. He said that they were working with More Leisure to include creches in their plan for 26/27.

The Leisure and Active Wellbeing Manager added that there was a commitment from Council Officers and More Leisure to explore the viability of the creche for the 26/27 plan. He said that the current contract sought to look at things differently and make the centres more accessible. He noted the small childcare provision which was in place at the moment in one of their locations. He said that they were looking at different options and were looking to work with people in the community to find a good solution.

Councillor Chapman said that there was a lot to be proud of in the plan and in the improvements they'd seen. He noted his concern regarding their resilience with lifeguard staff and the issues that had been seen with catering at several of the centres.

Councillor Arshad said that she was grateful for the report, and she appreciated the work the team had done to get this far. She agreed with Councillor Smith and emphasised the importance of having creches in their facilities so that they were more accessible. She said that she was happy with the Leys soft play area and noted that she was looking forward to the Leys Youth Hub. She asked about the discrepancy in equipment between the different facilities in the city.

The Leisure and Active Wellbeing Manager responded and said that the resiliency of lifeguard staff was an industry issue. He said that they had been working with a national organisation to make leisure a career option for young people. He added that they were also working with a specialised lifeguard recruitment agency. Regarding the catering

issues, he said that ongoing work was being done to address these problems at the Hinksey and Ferry centres. He agreed with Councillor Arshad about the importance of the creche and agreed that they needed to align a creche service with the hours of their women only classes in their centres. The Leisure and Active Wellbeing Manager said that they were still making improvements to the soft play area, to make it more attractive to families during the daytime. He explained that the difference in gym equipment was due to the different age demographics in each area and that some equipment was more suitable for the older demographics in some areas of the city.

Councillor Munkonge added that they were considering undertaking a benchmarking exercise, to compare their approach to leisure centres with neighbouring areas.

The Active Communities Manager said that in addition to their work to recruit more lifeguards, they were also working locally with schools to promote drowning prevention training. He added that they were working to improve the catering in the centres and were striving to make the food healthier. He recognised that there was still work to do in this area.

Councillor Turner concurred with fellow Councillors that there had been significant improvements over the past year. He acknowledged some of the frustration that had been voiced but said that they also needed to take accountability as they had a hand in deciding what was in the contract. He said that it would be useful for More Leisure to aid the visibility of the transport consultation being undertaken by the County Council. Councillor Turner said that he would advise the provider to work with user groups to consider opportunities to further their ambition for improvements.

Councillor Brown thanked the officers for their work. She said they all recognised the significant improvement in their leisure centres that had been seen over the past year. She said that she was excited to see the soft play opening and she noted the work underway to reinstate creches at their centres.

Cabinet resolved to:

Approve the Leisure Annual Service Plan 2025-26.

7. Oxford Local Plan 2042 Regulation 18 Consultation Document

The Director of Planning and Regulation had submitted a report to request that Cabinet approve the First Draft Oxford Local Plan 2042 (Regulation 18 consultation) Document for consultation. The Plan looked to accelerate the move to zero carbon building standards and continues to see housing delivery as a priority whilst ensuring the Council deliver a mixed and inclusive economy.

Councillor Hollingsworth presented the report. He emphasised that although Oxford was a successful and thriving city, that they do not have enough affordable housing. He noted that this was a country wide problem in England, as the country was about 4 million short of the number of houses they need. In this local plan, he said that they would be consulting on their policies to protect and enhance the environment, to protect and enhance their heritage, and to ensure jobs, opportunities, careers, businesses could do well in the city. He said that they would also work on the furtherance of access to affordable housing. Altogether, he said that the plan sought to create equal opportunities across the board for the city and its residents.

Sarah Harrison, Team Leader (Planning Policy), said that the plan before Cabinet was the regulation 18 consultation and that this was the first statutory stage in the local plan process. She said that they had done early consultation and were in a good position to

know what is needed and what people want to see. For this regulation 18 stage, she said that they had presented draft policies to people, they had been clear that there were options behind the draft policies, and they explained why they had selected what they had. She added that they needed to look at green belt work, after direction from national government, and that this work would come in the regulation 19 stage. She said that the regulation 19 stage work was due towards the end of the year. That work would be on the draft plan which they will submit for independent examination. She said that they hoped to be able to submit the plan to government in April 2026 and that from then the timing would be out of their hands, but their goal was to have it adopted by March 2027.

Councillor Arshad asked when the consultation for this would come up.

The Team Leader (Planning Policy) said that the consultation would take place between the 27th of June and the 8th of August.

Councillor Arshad asked what kind of things they were expecting from residents and if they had any expectations on changes that could come from the consultation.

Team Leader (Planning Policy) said that they did not yet know. She said that they had different ways of reaching different people. This included leaflets to be taken door to door, online resources, and events where they would talk with people face to face.

Councillor Brown thanked the Team Leader (Planning Policy) for her responses and for the work that the officers had put into the report. She said that they were very supportive of the plan and she agreed with colleagues that housing remained as one of the biggest crises in the city.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the First Draft Oxford Local Plan 2042 (Regulation 18 Consultation) document for public consultation;
2. **Authorise** the Director of Planning and Regulation to make any necessary minor editorial corrections to the documents and the supporting evidence base prior to going out to consultation.

8. Annual Housing Complaint Performance & Service Improvement Report

The Director of Housing had submitted a report to seek the approval of the Annual Complaint Performance & Service Improvement Report (Landlord Services) 2024/25.

Kat Mayes, the Customer Care & Complaints Manager, presented the report. She said that this was a report that they produce annually, as a requirement from the housing ombudsman. It is required that they publish this report and that they have a response from Cabinet. She highlighted the challenges they had faced in the previous year and discussed the measures they had taken to correct the causes of these issues.

Bill Graves, the Landlord Services Manager, highlighted the exceptional work that the Customer Care & Complaints Manager had done to cover when they'd had a shortage of staff and the work they had done since to improve the situation. He said that they expected to be fully up to speed with responses to complaints by the beginning of July.

Councillor Smith presented the Cabinet's response to the report, also published in the agenda pack.

As a Cabinet, she said that they once again welcomed the publication of this report as part of their commitment to transparency and their determination to ensure the views of citizens help shape their services.

The Customer Care & Complaints team within Landlord Services had faced capacity problems in 2024/25, resulting in the published figures around response times for complaints. She said that they were pleased to note that action had already been taken to increase staff in this area and work was being closely monitored, they expect to see a marked improvement in this area as they progress into 2025/26, alongside an increase in customer satisfaction with their handling of complaints.

Cabinet also noted the service improvements that had been made throughout the Council and by their contractor, ODS, and will be interested to see the longer-term impact of these on the complaints figures for 2025/26.

The Housing Ombudsman determinations are an interesting addition to this year's report, as there were none for last year other than the Complaints Handling Failure Order that the Council regrettably received. Whilst they would like to see a mutually agreed resolution to complaints as early as possible within the process without Ombudsman intervention, these determinations provide a valuable external review of their complaints service and inform them as to whether the Council is meeting the Housing Ombudsman's expectations.

This year's report includes some of the further insight into the types of complaint received and the root causes that they requested last year. Cabinet expected this to continue and for opportunities for deeper analysis to be explored.

Their residents are at the heart of their services, and the plans to expand their involvement in the complaints service and seek their feedback will be a welcome step towards greater transparency, accountability, and co-regulation.

Although parts of this report were not positive, such as the percentage of complaints responded to within target and the findings of maladministration by the Housing Ombudsman, there had also been positive progress in several areas. Cabinet accepted the assurances given that steps have been taken to address issues, and they expected to see evidence that these had succeeded by the time the next annual report is produced.

Cabinet said that they would like to thank all of those within to Council who assisted with the investigation and resolution of complaints, as well as all of the citizens who had taken the time to raise issues and provide their views.

Councillor Brown thanked the complaints team and the Customer Care & Complaints Manager for their work in the difficult year. She thanked them for the improvements that already had been made. Councillor Brown said that they welcome these reports as it is was important for them to learn from the feedback their receive, as that is how they can improve the services.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Agree** the content of the Annual Complaint Performance & Service Improvement Report (Landlord Services) 2024/25 in Appendix 1.
2. **Provide** a formal response to the Annual Complaint Performance & Service Improvement Report 2024/25.

9. Disposal of City Centre Commercial Property

The Director Property & Assets had submitted a report to seek approval for the long leasehold disposal of 9, 10, 16a & 16b Ship Street and 10 St Michaels, properties owned by the City Council.

Councillor Turner presented the report. He said that these disposals would allow them to make best use of their commercial portfolio. He noted that these properties had not been in use recently and there were restrictions in what the Council could do with them. Councillor Turner said that the appropriate processes had been followed and that this decision would be financially beneficial for the Council.

Alex Miller, Transactions Manager - Corporate Property, clarified that they would retain the freehold title of these properties with the current decision.

Councillor Hollingsworth said he was pleased to see this report. He emphasised the properties had been sitting unused for too long and that it was good to see the effort to bring them back into use. He said that this would be a good outcome for the buildings and the Council.

Councillor Brown concurred with Councillor Hollingsworth and thanked the officers for their work on the report.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the long leasehold disposal of 9, 10, 16a & 16b Ship Street and 10 St Michaels these properties as set out in the report.
2. **Delegate** authority to the Director Property & Assets in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Asset Management, the Director of Law, Governance & Strategy and the Group Finance Director the agreement of the detailed terms for the disposal and to enter into all necessary documentation to effect the disposal on the basis that the terms comply with s.123 of the Local Government Act 1972, where powers are not already delegated within the constitution.

10. Adopt the revised Community Infrastructure Levy

The Director of Planning and Regulation had submitted a report to ask Cabinet to recommend to Council the approval of the Partial Review of the Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule.

Councillor Hollingsworth presented the report. He said that this was a proposed change to our CIL charging schedule and that it had been through the appropriate processes. He said that they were not proposing changes to shops and housing but were proposing a change to the office and research and development businesses. He said that the report reflects the demand for those businesses in Oxford and the return those businesses were able to make in the city. He noted that the proposed change would provide a greater source of revenue to be invested in infrastructure and repair in the city.

Lorraine Freeman, the Team Leader - CIL, Data Analysis and Reporting, said that if approved, the decision would go into effect on the 15th of August.

Councillor Brown welcomed the report and thanked the officers for their work on the report.

Cabinet resolved to recommend to Council that they resolve to:

1. **Adopt** the CIL Charging Schedule in line with the recommendation of the independent examiner as set out in Appendix 1; and

2. **Approve** the date on which the amended tariffs will come into effect.
3. **Delegate** authority to the Director of Planning and Regulatory to make any necessary further minor changes to the documents or any minor change to the implementation date for the new CIL rates.

11. Positive Action Policy

The Diversity and Inclusion Specialist had submitted a report to request that Cabinet agree to the proposed Positive Action Policy.

Councillor Chapman presented the report and noted that it would also be going to Council in July. He said that this policy was a subset of their approach to EDI. He emphasised that the policy was focused on tackling underrepresentation in the Council's workforce. He said that the effective use of this policy would cover actions in recruitment, retention, training, mentoring, and development. Councillor Chapman emphasised the differences between positive action and positive discrimination and said that they were only implementing positive action. Applied well, he highlighted how helpful this policy can be.

Sobia Afridi, the Diversity and Inclusion Specialist, said that they believe the policy will help to improve the diversity of the Council. She noted that they want to improve their diversity figures to better represent the people of the city that they serve.

Melissa Hope, the Organisational Development Manager, said that a lot of the work in the policy was already underway, but that the policy would give them a central point to refer to. She said that this would be useful for hiring managers to help them understand how to put the policy into action. She said that they had benchmarked against what other councils do and considered their specific needs when they were making the policy.

Councillor Hollingsworth asked for clarification on how the consultation with the trade unions had worked and asked what the feedback from trade unions had been.

The Diversity and Inclusion Specialist said that the unions had received the policy positively and were keen for it to be implemented. She said that the unions liked that the policy was simple and easy to understand. She said that the unions had flagged the issue of monitoring, and they had agreed. She said they were working to consider how they would monitor the policy, to ensure that it is effectively implemented.

Councillor Arshad said that she was grateful for the policy. She asked if any feedback in this area had been received from exit interviews. She also noted that they had flagged that more work could always be done, she asked what that work could be.

Councillor Chapman responded and said that they do hold exit interviews. He said that most of the reasons given for leaving from individuals from underrepresented groups were related to pursuing other opportunities or higher pay. He said that there was no trend of people leaving because of how they were being treated or due to discrimination. He said that the staff survey had also demonstrated a strong sense of belonging amongst staff. Regarding further work, he said that they just have to continue persistently and patiently doing work in this area. With the more work they do and the more improvements they make, he said they would consistently become a good place to work.

Councillor Arshad thanked the officers for their work on the policy.

Councillor Munkonge highlighted that the politics on EDI were changing and that other places were looking to back off of this work. He emphasised how positive it was that as a Council, they were choosing to not only retain but strengthen their approach to this work.

Councillor Chapman said that when he is presented with arguments made by critics of EDI work, it makes him more determined to fight for these efforts. He emphasised that it was fundamental for the Council to pursue the furtherance of equality and opportunity, because that is how they get a workforce which is representative of the city.

Councillor Brown agreed that it was crucial that they ensure that the Council's workforce represents the people of the city. She concurred that this work is a long process, but that she had also been reassured by the recent staff survey. She welcomed this policy and the ongoing work to make the Council more diverse and representative of the residents of Oxford. She thanked the officers for their work on the policy.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** this policy to go forward to Council for approval, publication and use.

12. Minutes

Cabinet resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on **09 April 2025** as a true and accurate record.

13. Items raised by Cabinet Members

None.

14. 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 19:15.

Chair

Date: Wednesday 9 July 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.

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