

# **Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday 21 January 2026**

## **Committee members present:**

Councillor Brown	Councillor Arshad
Councillor Chapman	Councillor Hollingsworth
Councillor Munkonge	Councillor Railton
Councillor Linda Smith	

## **Officers present for all or part of the meeting:**

Caroline Green, Chief Executive  
Nigel Kennedy, Group Director Finance  
Tom Hook, Deputy Chief Executive - Citizen and City Services  
Tom Bridgman, Deputy Chief Executive – Place  
Emma Jackman, Director of Law, Governance, and Strategy  
Nerys Parry, Director of Housing  
Jason Jones, Finance Business Partner  
Sarah Harrison, Team Leader (Planning Policy)  
Ted Bowler, Corporate Asset Manager  
James Watkins, Housing Policy and Projects Officer  
Gail Malkin, Head of People  
Sobia Afridi, Diversity and Inclusion Specialist  
Dr Brenda McCollum, Committee and Member Services  
Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager

## **Also Present:**

## **Apologies:**

Councillor Turner sent apologies.

## **121. Declarations of Interest**

None.

## **122. Minutes of the previous meeting**

**Cabinet resolved to approve** the minutes of the meeting held on **10 December 2025** as a true and accurate record.

## **123. Addresses by members of the public**

Cabinet received one address from a member of the public.

### **Dominic Woodfield, representative of Friends of Iffley Village**

I address you on behalf of Friends of Iffley Village, but also as an ecological and environmental planning consultant with longstanding experience of the Local Plan process and the concept of 'soundness'.

I wish to explain why I and many others believe strongly that your planning policy department's proposed retention of the "Land at Meadow Lane, Iffley" site allocation (SPS 8), is unsound and why the allocation should be deleted and the land properly (and belatedly) zoned as a vital part of the city's Green Infrastructure network.

This is a site that this Council has rejected as unsuitable twice previously. It passed muster in the preparation of the last Local Plan only due to a series of technical and procedural errors. Surveys since 2021 have outed those errors, revealing beyond question that this is a site of at least city-wide importance for nature conservation, comfortably meeting the criteria for formal designation, and harbouring rare, scarce and protected species. The recently published Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Oxfordshire duly recognises this importance.

These ancient meadows are also a designated and integral part of Iffley's Conservation Area, close to the Thames (and partly in flood zone 3). Any development would require road traffic to be introduced along a designated Principal (and very popular) Quiet Route for Active Travel which adjoins the site, directly compromising its function and value for non-car transport.

Applying the Council's criteria for Green Space multifunctionality (agenda pack p109-110) not only does this site tick all 6 environmental functions, but also several social / health and wellbeing functions, and economic functions giving a total score of 13/17. With such a high score it is clear that the meadows should be re-zoned and protected as a 'Core (green) space' under Policy G1A.

The unsuitability of this site for development is further reflected in the Council's own sustainability appraisal process.

The relevant Sustainability Appraisal Site Assessment Forms (pp664-670 of the agenda report) demonstrate that (compared to other sites in the emerging plan), the Land at Meadow Lane site is a clear outlier, with 15 negative flags raised against it: 2 red (conservation, biodiversity) and 13 amber (including flood risk, access and transport, and poor use of land). These constraints act cumulatively to provide no certainty of delivery of any housing, hence the absurd 'ZERO' figure in the proposed allocation. The next most sensitive site (with 11 negative flags) is the Kassam overflow carpark (SPS11) which as a previously developed site dominated by hardstanding is in no way comparable and will actually deliver a substantive number of 100 homes.

Moreover, this sustainability appraisal, as damning as it already is, remains infected by factual errors and very questionable assumptions carried over from its flawed LP2036 predecessor, despite these having been highlighted via 2 rounds of consultation feedback. For example, the appraisal still fails to accurately note or record that the ancient meadows are an integral part of the Iffley Conservation Area, which is of course about protecting setting as well as material structures. The meadow is a crucial part of that setting. Further, the list of notable ecological features, while correctly mentioning that the site is of *at least* City Wildlife Site status, fails to mention that the site is wholly within the LNRS not just part of it as the appraisal and draft policy claims. These are base errors and their correction will worsen the site's sustainability score still further.

This cabinet is presented with an opportunity to rectify these past and ongoing mistakes. There can be no remaining question that it was a mistake to allocate Land at Meadow Lane for housing in LP 2036. The Council's own work on a planning application, and its abandonment of a minimum target for the delivery of homes at this location, merely exposes the magnitude of that mistake and the extent to which this meadow is an unsuitable and unsustainable site for any development.

Circumstances around housing need have also, changed considerably since the 2036 LP was adopted:

The availability of sites for residential delivery has expanded via:

- redundant retail and long-unused commercial;
- new employment site policies;
- expansion onto the greenbelt that could bring a vast number of new homes.

Meanwhile:

- The severity of the climate and ecological emergencies has worsened;
- The mental and physical health of children and young people has become a more acute issue, related to their diminishing contact with nature, for which there is little structured provision for them in this City.

There is growing support for an alternative beneficial use of the meadows in Iffley as a dedicated, safe site for outdoor education to benefit the learning and wellbeing of young people in East Oxford, where there are very high rates of deprivation. At just under 1 hectare, the meadow is just large enough to accommodate managed footfall whilst at the same time protecting and enhancing its important biodiversity. Supporting agencies are poised to secure funding for the delivery of this initiative, at little or no cost to the Council.

To conclude, there is simply no policy or moral justification for re-allocating Land at Meadow Lane in the draft LP 2045. Please remove it so that the draft Plan can go forward for adoption on a sound basis and so that the outdoor education proposal can

be advanced. This would be a win not just for sustainability but also a win for this Council, demonstrating it that it is capable of recognising and reacting to changed circumstances and is genuinely forward thinking in planning the future resilience of this City.

Thank you.

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth responded to the address from the member of the public and said that he would ask Council officers to address the issues and concerns raised in their discussion of the report under agenda item 10.

## **124. Councillor addresses on any item for decision on the Cabinet agenda**

None received.

## **125. Councillor addresses on Neighbourhood Issues**

None received.

## **126. Items raised by Cabinet Members**

None.

## **127. Reports from the Scrutiny Committee**

The Scrutiny Committee met on 13 January 2025 and considered the following items.

- Workforce Equality Update
- Proposed Submission Draft Oxford Local Plan 2045

Councillor Alex Powell presented the Scrutiny Committee's discussions and recommendations regarding the Workforce Equality Update. He said that the Committee had noted the progress that the Council had made in this area of work.

- **Recommendation 1:** That the current target for workforce representation of 17% for employees from minority ethnic groups be increased to a higher, evidence-based, figure in order to restrengthen the Council's recruitment from these groups.
- **Recommendation 2:** That Cabinet fully implement an anonymised, third-party reporting system, reflecting standard practice across the public and private sectors, to enable employees to raise concerns relating to harassment, bullying, discrimination, corruption and other workplace-related issues with confidence.
- **Recommendation 3:** Acknowledging there are challenges posed by low staff numbers and reliability of available data in this area, that future workforce equality reports include a dedicated section on gender reassignment, recognising this as a protected characteristic.

Councillor Chapman presented Cabinet's response to this discussion and recommendations. He said that Cabinet accepted the first recommendation and would consider what the figure could be raised to. He said that Cabinet also accepted the second recommendation. Regarding the third recommendation, he said that Cabinet would accept the recommendation in part, due to issues of staff privacy.

Councillor Alex Powell presented the Scrutiny Committee's discussions and recommendations regarding the Proposed Submission Draft Oxford Local Plan 2045. He noted that there had been a lot of discussion about local centres in the Committee's consideration of the report. He noted that the Committee also discussed the removal of the Meadow Lane allocation, concerns about addressing the needs of children and young people, and the feasibility to deliver greater levels of affordable housing.

- **Recommendation 1:** For officers to undertake a further review of the areas in Greater Leys, in particular Dunnock Way, and other sites such as Littlemore to be allocated Local Centres under Policy C1, noting their similarities to Underhill Circus.
- **Recommendation 2:** That the evidence-base is thoroughly examined to determine whether 10% biodiversity net gain is conclusively the most ambitious minimum the council could set.
- **Recommendation 3:** For officers to explore whether a higher threshold for the acceptability of loss of sports facilities could be incorporated in the Local Plan.
- **Recommendation 4:** For officers to reconsider the language in Policy C2(h) encouraging the development of city centre play amenity.

Councillor Hollingsworth responded to the recommendations from Scrutiny Committee. Of the four recommendations, he noted that the questions had been raised by previous local plans and that they were working within distinct definitions and limitations. He said that officers were thinking about the first recommendation and were considering how they could address the challenge raised by this recommendation. Regarding the second recommendation, he said that the minimum they had set was the most ambitious which was possible for the Council to pursue, so they were not accepting the recommendation.

On the third recommendation, Councillor Hollingsworth said that the Local Plan was already setting higher thresholds than required and that they did not think it was possible to go any further than they had proposed. Councillor Hollingsworth said that they did reconsider the language referenced in recommendation four and that Cabinet and Officers believed that the language was sensible as it read and should not be changed as requested in the recommendation. Councillor Hollingsworth said that there was a larger issue in how Local Plans treat children and play. However, he said that the wording in Policy C2(h) was sufficiently broad to indicate the Council's support for play areas.

## 128. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Rent Setting 2026/27

The Group Finance Director submitted a report to Cabinet to present the outcome of Oxford City Council's (the council's) annual rent review and associated rent setting proposal for 2026/27 in respect of all council dwellings within the Housing Revenue Account, including the setting of associated services and facilities charges.

Councillor Linda Smith presented the report. She discussed the ongoing cost of living crisis and the unfortunate position that the Council is in, causing their need to raise rents and service charges. She said that the changes will allow them to continue to invest in Council properties and into new homes. She said that they still do not have an update on rent convergence, but that the report gives them space to raise legacy rents, which she explained are sometimes lower than those of individuals who are currently moving into Council properties. She said that addressing this would also help them address inequality, but that they were not yet sure to what level they could raise legacy rents as they were awaiting further information from central government. Despite the raise in rents, she said that the rents would still be very good value for money and affordable for the city.

Councillor Arshad asked about legacy rents and how much the increase in rent prices would be.

Councillor Smith said that the rise would be between one to two pounds a week, in addition to the raise in rents which all residents of Council housing would be facing.

Councillor Brown expressed her support for rent convergence and how this would address inequality in this sector.

Cabinet resolved to:

**Recommend** to Council to:

- a. Approve an increase of 4.8% + up to £2 for rent convergence (max) for 2026/27 (subject to any subsequent cap on increases imposed by central government) in social dwelling rents from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026 giving an average weekly increase of £8.47 per week, and a revised weekly average social rent of £143.40 as set out in the Financial Implications section of this report.
- Approve an increase to rents for shared ownership dwellings as outlined in paragraph 21 of the Financial Implications.
- Approve an increase to service charges by 4.8% (CPI + 1%) to enable the HRA to recover the associated cost of supply.
- Approve an increase to the charge for a garage of 5.0%, equating to an increase of £1.00 per week for a standard garage within a curtilage with a revised charge of £21.00 per week.
- e. Approve an increase to the rent and service charges for General Fund Temporary Accommodation as set out in the Financial Implications section of this report.

## **129. Proposed Submission Draft Oxford Local Plan 2045**

The Director of Planning and Regulation submitted a report which requested Cabinet to recommend that Council approve the Proposed Submission Draft Oxford Local Plan 2045 for public consultation and, subject to the outcome of the consultation, if no matters are raised that materially impact upon the Plan strategy, to submit the Submission Draft Oxford Local Plan 2045 to the Secretary of State for formal examination.

Councillor Hollingsworth presented the report. He noted that the Local Plan draft would be proceeding to Council, and that amendments to the draft were being submitted by fellow Councillors. He said that they were at the final consultation stage before the plan goes to a planning inspector and through the public hearing process. The last Local Plan was adopted in June 2020, more than 5 years ago. He noted the technical impacts of not having an updated Local Plan for over five years. He said that the previous draft Local Plan that they had taken to public hearing was rendered as not appropriate, so they were undergoing the process again.

Councillor Hollingsworth highlighted the minimal policy changes in this Local Plan. He noted the differences caused by central government's proposed new MPPF, but that this Local Plan needed to be in line with the existing MPPF. He addressed the housing need in the city of Oxford and their inability to meet this need, causing them to have an unmet housing need which they would address by working with neighbouring authorities.

Sarah Harrison, Team Leader (Planning Policy), outlined the housing numbers, the city's need, and their capacity to address the challenge. She said that they have done as much work as they can to identify potential for new homes. She said that they were having continuous conversations with neighbouring authorities to address the housing need and that they welcomed challenges to show that they're doing all they can to find housing in the city.

The Team Leader (Planning Policy) responded to the address from the member of the public regarding the allocation of Meadow Lane. She noted that rejections previously do not mean that a site would always be rejected. She said that the meadows were within the designated conservation area, but it was considered for a potential for a scheme to respond to the setting. She noted that traffic would have to be investigated as part of any proposals and that traffic was likely to be limited and suitable for surrounding roads. She added that a site being in a conservation area does not mean that it cannot be developed. She said that the sustainability appraisal form flagged issues, and proposals would have to mitigate these sensitivities.

The Team Leader (Planning Policy) said that there was still a limited availability of housing sites in the city. She said that the potential to look at all opportunities was vital and that further work undertaken to support that was important. She added that there was still likely potential for development of the site to respond appropriately to the city's need and the wildlife value of the site. She said that they had removed the minimum housing requirement to respond to the sensitivities of the site.

Councillor Brown asked about the LNRS and if that would be amended before the draft plan was presented to Council. The Team Leader (Planning Policy) said that it would not be amended prior to Council but would be amended before the public consultation.

Councillor Hollingsworth said that there were two elements on the advice they had received. He said that there were not grounds that Officers had put forward to remove the site. He added that they had not received advice which suggests that the site should be taken out. Secondly, he noted that they clearly have a very significant housing need. Over the course of the Local Plan, they would require 21,740 homes to be built and they only have sites to meet around 9,267 of those needs. Councillor Hollingsworth said that neighbouring authorities would have to find the rest.

Regarding the gap in housing need, Councillor Hollingsworth said that neighbouring authorities would not be pleased to see the city removing sites and then asking for neighbours to have more housing for the city's need. He also noted the government advice that they have to look at every single potential site, and if there are no reasons

to remove it, then they should be including all sites. He said that removal of this site would send the message that they are not serious about meeting their housing need.

Councillor Brown asked if because the site was allocated did that mean it would be developed. About this site, she said that there were reasons to think that if it was developed it would be done so sensitively and with perhaps relatively fewer houses.

The Team Leader (Planning Policy) said that the allocation does not mean that the site had to be developed. An application would be decided independently. She said that the allocation sets out that if an application does come forward, it must respond to the sensitivities which had been raised.

Councillor Chapman said that they could not see housing in isolation from the broader services needed to help people live quality lives in the city. He said that all of the Councillors meet people in housing distress and if they are going to do anything about that they need to increase the amount of housing being built in the city. He thanked Councillor Hollingsworth and the officers for their work on this report.

Councillor Brown said that the key issue to her were the risks of not having a local plan approved and that they needed to make sure that whatever they put forward can get through. She said that the risks for not having a local plan were significant and it was important that they get through the process.

Councillor Hollingsworth thanked Officers for their work on the plan.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Recommend** Council to approve the Proposed Submission Draft Local Plan 2045 document for public consultation;
2. **Recommend** Council to approve all the supporting statutory documentation including the Sustainability Appraisal, Habitats Regulation 18 October 2019 . Assessment, Infrastructure Development Plan (IDP), Policies Map and Equalities Impact Assessment;
3. **Recommend** Council to authorise the Director of Planning and Regulation, after consultation with the Lead Cabinet Member, to make any necessary minor editorial corrections to the Submission Draft Oxford Local Plan 2045, IDP, Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulation Assessment, Policies Map, and to agree the supporting evidence base prior to going out to consultation.
4. **Recommend** Council to authorise, following publication, the Director of Planning and Regulation, after consultation with the Lead Cabinet Member, to make any minor changes to the document deemed necessary as a result of the consultation.
5. **Recommend** Council to authorise submission of the Oxford Local Plan 2045 to the Secretary of State for examination, following Regulation 19 consultation and any minor amendments made according to recommendation 3 or 4 and subject to there being no matters raised in the consultation that are considered to materially impact upon the Plan strategy.
6. **Recommend** Council to authorise the Director of Planning and Regulation, after consultation with the Lead Cabinet Member, to invite the examining inspector(s) to recommend any modifications considered to be necessary in accordance with section 20(7C) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

## 130. Write-off of Commercial Tenant Rent Arrears

The Director of Property and Assets submitted a report to request that Cabinet approve the write-off of commercial rent arrears above the limit which officers can approve under the scheme of delegation.

Ted Bowler presented the report. He said that the report related to writing off a debt that had been outstanding. He said that there was no ability for them to recover any of the arrears, so they were recommending that they were written off.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the write-off of arrears relating to the property identified in the Exempt Appendix 1.

## 131. HRA Policies

The Director of Housing submitted a report to request that Cabinet recommend to Council to approve the following policies: electrical safety, and legionella policies to ensure the maintenance of the housing stock.

Councillor Linda Smith presented the report. She said that it was two policies for them to recommend to Council for approval. She said that the policies set out the high standards that they have for their Council properties. She said that these were not just operational guidance but are published policies that will be there for residents to refer to and hold them to account.

James Watkins, the Housing Policy and Projects Officer, thanked the residents who participated in the residents' policy review group. He thanked them for their work and commitment and noted that their views had shaped and changed the policies that they had submitted for consideration. Regarding the policies, he said that the electrical safety policy reflects the needs for EICRs, which is a legal requirement. He said that if there was an immediate issue, there would be an immediate response. He said that the policy shows their commitment to the safety of residents.

The Housing Policy and Projects Officer presented the legionella policy. He said that there was a need for this policy on a systematic basis, as well as a regulatory one. He said that this policy states what needs to be put in place to protect individuals who are particularly vulnerable to legionella. The policy states that for vulnerable residents, there would be weekly checks. He outlined the mechanisms that would be introduced to address the risks of legionella and approaches to mitigating the bacteria that leads to legionella. He added that the robustness of the policies and their measures were in the best interest to keep their residents safe.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Recommend** to full Council to approve and adopt the Electrical Safety Policy.
2. **Recommend** to full Council to approve and adopt the Legionella Policy.

## 132. Leasehold consultation and tender process

The Director of Housing submitted a report to Cabinet to request that they approve the commencement of a tender process for a four-year framework for capital works on leasehold properties and delegate authority to award the placement of contractors on the framework and award call-off contracts to those contractors under the framework as and when works are required.

Councillor Smith presented the report. She said they were planning to spend about £9 million on council properties, in areas including fencing, gates, internal and external communal areas, doors, and windows. She said that the report sets out a tender process, to set up a framework, to handle the procurement of the works and to speed up the process and simplify it. She said that it would make it easier for them to reclaim those costs from their leaseholders.

The Housing Policy and Projects Officer said that the report states that there should be a systematic approach from now on, in terms of sensible recovery of costs related to the HRA budget. He said that there would be a full consultation process once the procurement team agrees on the framework. He said that the costs and quality of contractors would be presented to leaseholders for their consideration and there would be a full democratic consultation process. He said that the report states that the Council would work with each individual leaseholder in terms of repayment and be sensitive to their needs on a case-by-case basis.

Councillor Hollingsworth said that he was supportive of this report. He said that with leasehold properties maintenance was not quite as predictable as one would like. This creation of clear program to cover all leaseholder properties was critical. He said that there are a lot of properties which might be ad hoc, and he asked if those older properties would be included in this program. He asked if they would have a program with a timetable by address available to members and leaseholders.

Councillor Brown said that many of their leasehold properties were tenanted to other people. She asked how they could ensure that those tenants don't have the costs passed on to them from leaseholders.

The Housing Policy and Projects Officer said that the policy would cover all ad hoc properties. In terms of timetable, by address, he said that yes, they would have one on each financial year once the capital works program was confirmed and that it would be advertised on the Council's website. Regarding costs being passed on, he said that was something they would take away and consider how they could keep this from happening.

Councillor Smith noted the renter's right act and how this would impact the situation in Oxford.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the commencement of a tender process for a four-year framework for capital works on leasehold properties, subject to the required statutory consultation with leaseholders as detailed in this report
2. **Delegate** authority to the Deputy Chief Executive for Communities and Citizens, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, to:
  - a. award the placement of contractors on the framework and enter into the framework agreement with the successful contractors; and

- b. award call-off contracts procured from the framework to deliver capital works required on the leasehold properties throughout the duration of the framework
- c. finalise any and all contractual arrangements

3. **To approve** the expenditure against the budget for the capital works pursuant to the decision of the Cabinet in December 2024 in respect of the approval of the HRA Asset Management Strategy.
4. **Note** the statutory consultations required with leaseholders when carrying out works on leasehold properties as detailed in this report.

## 133. Workforce Report

The Head of People Services submitted a report to Cabinet to share current progress on the Workforce Equalities Report and Action Plan. The report also presents and seeks approval for the publication of the annual Workforce Equality Report 2024/2025, the Gender Pay Gap Report, Ethnicity Pay Gap Report and Disability Pay Gap Report.

Councillor Chapman presented the report. He said that the report provides a view of the Council as of March 2025 and covers areas such as the gender pay gap and ethnic minority pay gap. He said that the report provides a positive story, demonstrating that the Council is working hard in this area. Councillor Chapman said that they do not shy away from positive action work with their staff and that the Council's workforce is becoming more diverse. He said that they tried to make a workforce plan to reflect the city. He said that he was proud of the report and thanked the Officers for their work to bring the report together.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Approve** the contents of the Workforce Equality Report 2024/2025;
2. **Delegate** authority to the Head of People to publish the Workforce Equality Report and to make any typographical changes and any changes as may be required before publication to reflect the Cabinet decision;
3. **Approve** the contents of the Gender Pay Gap, Ethnicity Pay Gap and Disability Pay Gap reports for this year; and
4. **Delegate** authority to the Head of People to publish the Gender Pay Gap table at paragraph 30 before 30 March 2026, the Ethnicity Pay Gap table at paragraph 40 and the Disability Pay Gap table at paragraph 47 on the Council website.

## 134. Treasury Management Mid-Year Review for April – September 2025

The Group Finance Director submitted a report to Cabinet to report on the performance of the Treasury Management function for the 6 months to 30 September 2025.

Nigel Kennedy, the Group Finance Director, presented the report. He said that this was the mid term report, as of the end of September 2025. He said that the report shows that investments are around 66 million, and they have favourable variance on interest. He said that this would be reflected in the latest budget report coming to Cabinet in the next month. He presented how investments in the core funds were performing. He said that they had fared well compared to other local authorities and that they had fared well considering the risk they had taken on.

Councillor Munkonge said that it was a good report. He noted the concerns in the broader market and indications that it could have a downturn. He asked what mitigation work they would be doing to prevent any negative impacts of this possibility on the Council.

The Group Finance Director discussed how their investments operated and to what extent this provided them with protection. He said that they have certain overrides as a local authority and that they have significant reserves to protect them.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the performance of the Treasury Management function for the six months to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2025.

## **135. 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 19:20.**

**Chair .....**

**Date: Wednesday 11 February 2026**

*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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