

## **Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 11 August 2026**

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### **Committee members present:**

Councillor Powell (Chair)

Councillor Azad

Councillor Jarvis

Councillor Max Morris

Councillor Qayyum

Councillor Munkonge (substitute)

Councillor Altaf-Khan

Councillor Elphinstone

Councillor Lancaster

Councillor Ottino (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Stares

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

Celeste Reyeslao, Scrutiny and Governance Advisor

Hannah Carmody-Brown, Committee and Member Services Officer

Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager

Clive Tritton, Interim Programme Director, Cowley Branch Line

### **Apologies:**

Councillor Corais sent apologies; Councillor Munkonge attended as substitute.

## **24. Declarations of interest**

None.

## **25. Chair's Announcements**

The Chair thanked Councillor Ottino for chairing the last meeting in his absence and reminded members of the scheduled online Scrutiny training session on 22 September; Members were encouraged to attend.

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

The Committee **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2026 as a true and accurate record.

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

None.

## **28. Councillor addresses on any item for discussion on the Scrutiny agenda**

None.

## **29. Cowley Branch Line infrastructure and public realm funding**

Cabinet, at its meeting on 19 August 2026, will receive a report from the Deputy Chief Executive for Place seeking approval for future CIL funding collected within the vicinity of the Cowley Branch Line to be ringfenced to meet necessary infrastructure and public realm costs in relation to the reopening of the line for passenger services.

Clive Tritton, the Interim Programme Director for Cowley Branch Line, was present to respond to questions.

The Interim Programme Director summarised the report, noting that following the development of a full business case last year, the Council is now looking to develop a revised plan by autumn in order to trigger a final investment decision from the Government. The Committee understood that the Cowley Branch Line project will upgrade 3 miles of freight track in order to support 2 passenger trains per hour as an extension of the existing Chiltern Railways line between Oxford and London Marylebone; it was estimated around 1 million passengers per year would use this. The Interim Programme Director also emphasised the extensive benefits that the project will bring for local communities by enabling mobility and encouraging more infrastructure and innovation. The Committee was informed that the report outlined two main areas of funding; a detailed summary was provided. The Committee understood that Cabinet's agreement is being requested in order to ringfence a level of funding to ensure the project can go ahead.

The Chair invited questions from the Committee.

Councillor Ottino suggested that the Committee be provided a map which outlined the 1.5km radius noted in the report and the rationale behind this measurement was queried. Councillor Ottino also asked whether affected ward and parish councils, as well as South Oxfordshire District Council, had been contacted to make financial commitments towards the project given the benefits they would receive following its completion.

Councillor Munkonge queried the proportion of CIL being used towards the project for up to 10 years, and asked what assurances could be provided to residents that this

would not come at the expense of other much needed infrastructure. It was also asked whether landowners who will benefit from the project had been asked to make a financial contribution.

In relation to the 1.5km radius, the Interim Programme Director explained that the measurement had been used previously within the full business case as the accepted immediate influence area of the Cowley Branch Line. The Committee was also informed that a request for £2.5 of CIL, in comparison to the higher amount which may be unlocked, is very achievable and it was explained that the onus has been placed on section 106 for delivering as much as of the project as possible; direct land value uplift has to mitigate the impact of the scheme locally. The Interim Programme Director explained that focus was paid to creating balance, and this is why CIL has been identified for creating the infrastructure that supports local communities, whereas section 106 links to private sector landowners. In response to Councillor Ottino, the Interim Programme Director committed to providing the requested map.

In relation to approaching other councils, it was noted that neither parish councils nor South Oxfordshire District Council had been contacted.

Councillor Altaf-Khan requested a breakdown of CIL expenditure from the city and county council to inform an understanding of how it is spent in geographical terms. Councillor Altaf-Khan also asked how Local Government Reorganisation may impact CIL expenditure and the Cowley Branch Line project.

Councillor Elphinstone raised a question testing the robustness of the percentage forecasted to cover the £2.5m contributions, and whether local landowners had been asked to contribute. Councillor Elphinstone also requested information on how the project aligns with the city's transport and climate objectives.

Councillor Stares recognised that the project would benefit the whole city, however highlighted concerns that the most deprived area of the city would be expected to finance the scheme whilst being reduced geographically to a thoroughfare. Councillor Stares noted that the funds that should be used to mitigate the effects of developments on the Cowley branch line are instead being ringfenced.

The Interim Programme Director could only comment on CIL funding relating to the report being presented and emphasised that the project did not seek to divert money away from communities in the local vicinity. The Committee heard that the request to Cabinet seeks only to ensure a citywide ringfence is in place to support paying back the enterprise zone funding. It was also clarified that a tariff would be applied to any developments that came forward within the vicinity of the project to ensure CIL is collected for the city as a whole. The Interim Programme Director emphasised that this would not divert money away from communities in need and, in relation to parish councils, confirmed that there is no suggestion they would receive less CIL.

Councillor Stares emphasised the need for more infrastructure and spending in Littlemore.

The Interim Programme Director reiterated that he could not comment on the wider CIL process but offered a separate meeting with Councillor Stares to discuss the Cowley Branch Line.

In response to Councillor Altaf-Khan, the Chair noted that a paper had been submitted to the Committee several months ago which outlined broader CIL mechanisms. Members were referred to this for questions relating to CIL beyond the scope of the report.

The Interim Programme Director emphasised that a good balance and support had been developed between the authorities contributing to the project, resulting in £10m of secured funding from the City and County Councils. In response to questions relating to the involvement of other local councils, the Committee learned that £14.5m from enterprise zones via wider district support will be utilised to deliver the line until S106 and CIL funding comes forward to replace it. The Committee was also reminded that the Growth Commission had forecasted that significant amounts of CIL will be unlocked.

The Chair invited final questions from the Committee.

Councillor Morris noted from the report that the ARC and Science Park are contributors and beneficiaries of the Cowley Branch Line project. In reference to section 30 of report, it was asked why discussions with other private sector providers had stalled.

The Interim Programme Director explained that no one singular factor was responsible; however, matters such as perception of risk, market factors, and uncertainty were notable contributors. It was noted that the content of confidential discussions could not be discussed in a public meeting.

Councillor Munkonge requested a breakdown of what other infrastructure could have received this funding if it had not been ringfenced for the Cowley Branch Line project. This was noted as a possible recommendation.

The Chair requested commentary on how robust the arrangements for the project are given the upcoming changes expected as part of Local Government Reorganisation and changing local geographies. It was asked whether future opportunities to reach out to other authorities had been acted on or identified.

The Interim Programme Director emphasised that he could not respond fully to questions relating to political considerations and emphasised that his role is to support

the Council's delivery of the Cowley Branch Line project. In terms of Local Government Reorganisaition, the Interim Programme Director noted his hopes that the current scale of support for the project would mean that a future new authority would wish to continue progress. The Committee were reminded that conversations with all other authorities have been indicative of long-term support. In relation to CIL and expanding geographies, it was reiterated that there should be enough CIL coming forward as a result of this scheme within the current boundary; a wider boundary would therefore encourage more. Whilst beneficial, a wider geography is not required in order to deliver on the scheme.

The Chair queried whether, once the shadow authority exists, future spending decisions would be approved by them, and how confident the council currently is that the predicted costs are likely to be accurate.

The Interim Programme Director emphasised that the robustness of the plan at this stage is strong, however it is not possible to predict any future government changes which may require adjustments to the budgets; it has been expressed to government that it would be challenging to revisit local funding options and the Department for Transport has been accepting of this. The Committee was reminded that it is vital that full local funding is demonstrated when the revised FBC is submitted in the autumn.

Councillor Ottino requested information on the proportion of CIL predicted to be collected across the whole city that would come within the 1.5 km radius noted in the report, and also for an estimation of how much CIL could be generated from development resulting from the project in local areas.

The Chair suggested these questions be incorporated into recommendations and be submitted to the Director of Planning.

The Interim Programme Director referred the Committee to the Local Plan and the Growth Commission forecasts which indicate the magnitude of CIL being unlocked from the project could be many times bigger than that referenced in the report. The Committee were also however reminded that the Growth Commission's work is at a very early stage and that the nature of any development coming forward as a result of the Cowley Branch Line will dictate the value of CIL unlocked. The Committee understood that any further CIL discussions would be beyond the remit of this report, but the Interim Programme Director emphasised that as much as possible is being done to support the city and county in delivering the project.

The Chair invited the Committee to consider recommendations.

**The Committee made the following recommendations to Cabinet:**

1. That Cabinet ask the Director of Planning and Regulation to provide supplementary information that further clarifies the impacts on city-wide CIL.
2. That Council approach South Oxfordshire District Council for some portion of contribution toward the funding of CBL given the benefits it will unlock for the area.
3. That Council also approach other landowners who would benefit from new rail lines for fair contribution towards the funding of the project.
4. That Cabinet look at the geographic scope around which the development impacts are considered when making future considerations relating to the Cowley Branch Line.

The Chair thanked the Interim Programme Director for his work on the Cowley Branch Line.

*The Interim Programme Director for Cowley Branch Line left the meeting and did not return.*

### **30. Scrutiny Work Plan**

The Chair outlined a new item added to the work plan relating to community employment and procurement plans.

The Committee **agreed** the work plan.

### **31. Cabinet responses to Scrutiny recommendations**

The Chair noted that 11 recommendations were made at the last meeting, and all were agreed by Cabinet.

The Committee **noted** Cabinet's responses to its recommendations.

### **32. Endorsement of Recommendations from Working Groups**

The Chair noted that 11 recommendations were made at the last meeting, and all were agreed by Cabinet.

The Committee **noted** Cabinet's responses to its recommendations.

### **33. Dates of future meetings**

The Committee noted the dates of future meetings.

**The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.00 pm**

**Chair .....**  
**2026**

**Date: Tuesday 8 September**

*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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