

**Divisions- N/A**

## **COUNTY COUNCIL – 1 April 2025**

### **REPORT OF THE CABINET**

***Cabinet Member: Leader***

#### **1. Response to Government Consultation on Remote Attendance and Proxy Voting at Council Meetings**

*(Cabinet: 17 December 2024)*

Cabinet considered a report proposing a response to the Government's consultation on enabling remote attendance, remote and hybrid meetings as well as proxy voting at Council meetings.

Cabinet approved the recommended response to the consultation stating that there should be no limitations placed upon councils with regard to setting arrangements for remote attendance of council meetings, up to and including full remote attendance but did not support any introduction of proxy voting.

#### **2. Devolution White Paper and Response**

*(Cabinet: 9 January 2025)*

Cabinet had before it a report setting out a proposed response to the Government's Devolution White Paper published on Monday 16 December 2024.

The White Paper set out the most significant reforms to local government since the Local Government Act 1972. A significant element of the Paper progressed the English devolution agenda which commenced in 2009, providing powers to create Combined Authorities that would enable Councils to collaborate more formally to accelerate inclusive and sustainable economic growth

Cabinet agreed the proposed response to the Government including a request that Government places Oxfordshire into a 'fast track' programme to progress local government reorganisation ambitions first and continue to work with partners on a future Mayoral Strategic Authority. Members also agreed to express to Government the County Council's significant concerns in postponing ordinary elections in 2025, but that it would accept a postponement if it could commit to the most ambitious timescale of elections to a new shadow Council/Councils in May 2026.

### **3. Citizens' Assembly Update**

*(Cabinet: 21 January 2025)*

Cabinet received a report providing an update on the citizens' assembly on future travel, transport and connectivity in Oxfordshire to be delivered by external agency MutualGain in February and March 2025.

Following the motion agreed at Full Council on 10 December 2024 the assembly will be extended from 30 to 45 hours to enable a dedicated focus to be given, within the wider assembly, to the council's suite of traffic management measures in central Oxfordshire, including the traffic filters trial, the workplace parking levy, and the expanded zero emissions zone

### **4. Cabinet response to motion on changes to inheritance tax and other farming matters**

*(Cabinet: 21 January 2025)*

Cabinet had before it a report which addressed the motion agreed by Council on 10 December 2024 that related to the impact on farm businesses and farming families of measures announced in the autumn statement of 30 October 2024. The report summarised the council's existing and emerging policy and programme support to rural businesses and set out how the council's approach will address the issues raised in the motion that are within the influence of the County Council.

Cabinet noted the council's current and planned policy and programme activity in support of the rural economy and how the council's approach will address the issues raised by the motion on Farming passed by Council on 10 December 2024.

### **5. Affiliation between Oxfordshire County Council and HMS Diamond**

*(Cabinet: 21 January 2025)*

Cabinet approved by an affiliation between Oxfordshire and His Majesty's Ship (HMS) Diamond following an approach by the Royal Navy. The proposed affiliation aimed to strengthen the bond and support between the Royal Navy and the local community in Oxfordshire by raising awareness of the Royal Navy and specifically of HMS Diamond.

### ***Cabinet Member: Deputy Leader with Responsibility for Climate Change, Environment and Future Generations***

### **6. Beyond Net Zero - Growing the Market for Carbon Dioxide Removals**

*(Cabinet: 17 December 2024)*

Professor Steve Smith from the University of Oxford addressed the Cabinet, emphasising the importance of carbon dioxide removal methods as part of the council's climate ambitions.

Cabinet noted the underdevelopment of the market for Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR) technologies, and the risk this created for meeting net zero. Members supported the recommendations to scale the market for CDRs through the council's policy making and partnership activity, growing both the supply and demand side of the market, and, subject to funding committed to go 'Beyond Net Zero' - extending the council's current carbon neutral target for the council's own estate emissions to be 'beyond zero', with a target figure to be agreed at a later date

## **7. Warm Homes: Local Grant Capital Retrofit Programme**

*(Cabinet: 21 January 2025)*

Cabinet received a report regarding a funding application had been submitted to the Warm Homes: Local Grant through Department for Energy Security & Net Zero. The bid supported the Council's climate action and health agendas and followed on from a range of retrofit programmes delivered to low-income households in fuel poverty. This was a three-year scheme currently and may be extended to up to five years, subject to approval at the spending review.

## **8. Local Flood Risk Management Strategy Update**

*(Cabinet: 21 January 2025)*

Cabinet had before it a report on the revised Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (LFRMS), an overarching framework developed by Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) as the Lead Local Flood Authority. The strategy was a statutory document required by the Floods and Water Management Act 2010 and served to address flood risk within the county.

The LFRMS aims to develop, maintain, apply, and monitor effective flood risk management practices across Oxfordshire. It encompasses flood risk from surface runoff, groundwater, and ordinary watercourses. The strategy outlines the roles and responsibilities of risk management authorities including statutory and non-statutory elements.

Cabinet approved the strategy as recommended.

## **9. Badger Culling**

*(Cabinet: 25 February 2025)*

Cabinet had before it a report which set out a proposed response to the motion on Badger Culling passed at the meeting of the Council on 10 December 2025.

Councillor Ian Middleton addressed the Cabinet urged the Council to fully implement the measures called for in his motion. He hoped that this stance would prompt the current Labour government to review their position on the cull.

Cabinet re-affirmed the Council's opposition to badger culling. A specific policy about badger culling not being permitted on Council-owned land would be presented for adoption in due course. Members also noted that the Leader had written to DEFRA making clear the council's continued opposition to the cull and any extension in size and scope.

## **10. Oxfordshire Climate Adaptation Route Map & Oxfordshire County Council Climate Adaptation Delivery Plan**

*(Cabinet: 25 February 2025)*

Cabinet approved the adoption of the Oxfordshire Climate Adaptation Route Map and Delivery Plan. The route map identified the key actions that needed to be taken by Oxfordshire's stakeholders to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

The Route map had been developed in partnership with district councils and had been endorsed by the Future Oxford Partnership. It serves as a framework strategy, directing stakeholders on where action is needed. The County Council Delivery Plan focuses on addressing the strategic risk of climate impacts on vulnerable residents.

## **11. Household Waste Recycling Centre Service Delivery Model**

*(Cabinet: 25 February 2025)*

Cabinet had before it a report in proposals for a new service delivery model for the Council's Household Waste Recycling Centres. Oxfordshire had been the top waste recycler in England for the past ten years. The Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) are a popular and effective part of this success.

The Council recently extended the current contract for the management of HWRCs by three years, but this contract would need to be re-tendered in 2.5 years. The Council's waste team was proactively starting the process to explore and consider options for the future management of HWRCs. This included taking into account the new government's implementation of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and the goal of zero waste.

Cabinet approved the commencement of work to explore and consider options for the Household Waste Recycling Centre Management service delivery provision, noting that the current contract is coming to an end in September 2027. Members also approved the use of Extended Producer Responsibility funding for consultancy work to support the future household waste recycling centre model development.

## ***Cabinet Member: Adult Social Care***

### **12. Henley Short Stay Hub Beds**

*(Cabinet: 17 December 2024)*

Cabinet had before it a report which outlined a response to the motion on Henley Short Stay Hub Beds agreed by the Council on 5 November 2024 and the questions subsequently raised by Councillor Gawrysiak addressed to Cabinet. It set out the background to the decisions made in 2023 and the actions taken subsequently to address the concerns raised in the Motion.

Cabinet endorsed the Home First Discharge to Assess model of care that has been implemented countywide since January 2024 and reaffirmed that the former Chiltern Court beds are not reinstated for the reasons set out in the report. Members noted the engagement that had taken place with the public and stakeholders during 2024 and endorsed ongoing engagement with Oxfordshire residents around out of hospital care.

### **13. Funding contribution towards a jointly commissioned Mental Health Contract 2025-2035**

*(Cabinet: 21 January 2025)*

Cabinet had before it a report on proposals for a new mental health contract which would bring together several existing mental health contracts in one place for Oxfordshire residents aged 18+ years whose mental health fell into primary, core or enhanced need in the new framework for defining mental health need. These services aim to ensure adults with poor mental health and serious mental illness receive specialist support as part of their recovery. Bringing these elements together into a single contract will simplify the management processes and reduce bureaucracy, creating greater flexibility and clearer oversight through a Performance and Assurance Oversight Board.

Members approved the recommendations including the direct award of a new mental health contract between Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire West Integrated Care Board ("BOB ICB") and Oxford Health (NHS) Foundation Trust funded under the pooled fund arrangements of the S 75 Agreement.

## ***Cabinet Member: Community and Corporate Services***

### **14. Workforce Report and Staffing Data - Quarters 2 & 3 2024-25**

*(Cabinet: 17 December 2024 & 25 February 2025)*

Cabinet received reports which provided an overview of the progress towards delivering the Our People and Culture Strategy and also reviewed the workforce

profile including the key workforce trends and other relevant management information and performance indicators which were set out in the annexes.

Members welcomed the positive direction of travel in terms of the performance indicators detailed in the report and referred, in particular, to the increased allocation of resources which had led to success of the Council's apprenticeship scheme. The reports also highlighted a reduction in working hours lost due to sickness, improvements in workforce diversity, and an increase in the proportion of staff from ethnic minorities (from 9.44% to 11.3%) and staff with disabilities (from 6% to 8.7%). Cabinet discussed the positive impact of the People and Culture Strategy and the importance of continuing to support staff development and well-being. The reduction in agency staff spending over the past 12 months was also highlighted as a significant achievement.

### ***Cabinet Member: Finance***

## **15. Capital Programme and Monitoring Reports**

*(Cabinet: 17 December 2024, 21 January and 25 February 2025)*

The Capital Programme was approved by Council in February 2024 and updated during the year through the capital programme and monitoring reports. Cabinet had before it update and monitoring reports which set out change requests requiring Cabinet approval that will be incorporated into the agreed programme and included in the next update to the Capital Programme in March 2025.

They also approved the following additions to the programme:-

- a) the inclusion of the William Fletcher CE Primary School (Expansion) scheme in the Capital Programme with an indicative budget of £3.9m to be funded from S106 developer contributions and basic need funding
- b) the inclusion of a programme of work which will create breathing apparatus and cleaning / decontamination areas across Oxfordshire's fire stations, with an indicative budget of £1.8m, to be funded from earmarked reserves, agreed by Council in February 2024.
- c) the inclusion of 'The Greenwood Centre', an 11-bed accommodation block for 16–17-year-olds in need of supported accommodation, into the Capital Programme at an indicative cost of £1.932m, to be funded from £6.000m agreed by Council in February 2024 for additional Children's Homes.
- d) a budget increase of £6.39m for 'Great Western Park Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) School', to be funded from the High Needs Grant.
- e) a budget increase of £1.500m to the Energy Saving Measures Programme, to be addressed through the annual Budget and Business Planning process and approval by Council in February 2025.
- f) a budget increase of £11.516m to the Didcot to Culham River Crossing, part of the Housing Infrastructure 1 (HIF1) programme, to be funded through

additional funds granted by Homes England and agreed by Cabinet in July 2024.

- g) a budget increase of £12.537m to Didcot Science Bridge, part of the Housing Infrastructure 1 (HIF1) programme to be funded through additional funds granted by Homes England and agreed by Cabinet in July 2024.
- h) a budget increase of £11.916m to the Clifton Hampden Bypass project, part of the Housing Infrastructure 1 (HIF1) programme to be funded through additional funds granted by Homes England and agreed by Cabinet in July 2024.
- i) the inclusion of a new one-form-entry primary school -East Carterton - into the Capital Programme with an indicative budget of £10.227m, to be funded from S106 developer contributions and basic need funding.
- j) Members also noted that £7.500m of the remaining Housing and Growth Deal funding is to be allocated to Grove Airfield School in 2024/25.

## **16. Business Management and Monitoring Report - November 2024** (Cabinet: 21 January 2025)

Cabinet considered a report presenting the November 2024 performance, risk, and finance position for the council. The business management reports were part of a suite of performance, risk and budget documents which set out the council's ambitions, priorities, and financial performance.

Cabinet approved the financial adjustments recommended in the report including the creation of a new reserve to support costs associated with Local Government Devolution and Reorganisation and the transfer of £5.0m to the reserve and transfer of £3.0m from Adult Services to the Budget Priorities reserve.

## **17. Budget and Business Planning 2025/26 - 2027/28** (Cabinet: 28 January 2025)

Cabinet had before it a report setting out the Cabinet's revenue budget for 2025/26, medium term financial strategy to 2027/28, capital programme to 2034/35 plus supporting policies, strategies and information.

The report set out the budget engagement and consultation 2025/26 findings, the Cabinet's proposed Revenue Budget Strategy and the Capital & Investment Strategy. Alongside this, the report also set out the Review of Charges for 2025/26.

The revenue budget proposals took into consideration the latest information on the council's financial position outlined in this report. In finalising the proposals, the Cabinet had taken into consideration feedback from the public engagement and consultation on the revenue budget proposals.

Cabinet approved the recommendations regarding the Revenue Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy and agreed a number of recommendations to Council regarding the revenue budget for 2025/26, the Capital and Investment Strategy for 2025/26 - 2035/36 and the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy for 2025/26.

## **18. Councils for Fair Tax Declaration**

*(Cabinet: 25 February 2025)*

Cabinet received a report proposing a response to the motion passed at the County Council meeting on 5 November 2024, requesting approval for the "Councils for Fair Tax Declaration."

Created by The Fair Tax Foundation Limited, the declaration advocates responsible tax conduct with support from 63 UK councils. It commits the council to exemplary tax practices, demands transparency from suppliers, and calls for powers to address tax avoidance in procurement.

The Leader of the Council was also requested to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer supporting reforms in UK procurement law. The Cabinet Office confirmed that The Procurement Act, effective 24 February 2025, will mandate excluding bidders guilty of tax evasion or abusive tax avoidance schemes.

The Cabinet approved endorsing the Councils for Fair Tax Declaration.

## **19. City Centre Accommodation Strategy - Proposed Disposal of New and Old County Hall**

*(Cabinet: 25 February 2025)*

Cabinet had before it a report on the proposals for the disposal of New and Old County Hall and the establishment of the Council's core office at a reimagined Speedwell House campus. This City Centre Accommodation strategy aims to consolidate the council's physical presence in Oxford to have one core central office complemented by community hubs across the county. The strategy also emphasises the importance of maintaining public access to the new and Old County Hall as far as possible, recognising it as a massive community asset in the centre of Oxford. Additionally, the strategy aims to set out the council's ambitions around regeneration, renewal, and restoration of the city centre.

Cabinet approved the freehold disposal of New and Old County Hall and delegated authority to the Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, to negotiate and agree the final heads of terms and complete all necessary legal documentation to implement the disposal.



## ***Cabinet Member: Infrastructure & Development Strategy***

### **20. Infrastructure Funding Statement**

*(Cabinet: 17 December 2024)*

Cabinet had before it a report on the Infrastructure Funding Statement. This was a statutory statement of fact to be reported annually, by 31 December 2024 on developer contributions secured, spent or received during the previous financial year, 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024.

Members approved the publication of the report onto the Oxfordshire County Council website and delegated authority to make any minor amendments to the report prior to its publication to the Director of Economy & Place in consultation with the Chief Executive

## ***Cabinet Member: Public Health, Inequalities and Community Safety***

### **21. Response to Motion by Councillor Reeves on Winter Fuel Payments**

*(Cabinet: 21 January 2025)*

Cabinet had before it a report recommending a response to the motion agreed at Council on 5 November 2024, on the subject of recent changes to Winter Fuel Payments (WFP). The motion sought to ensure that the Council supported low income pensioners who were losing their WFP, and that this support was communicated both to them and those who support them such as family and friends.

Cabinet noted the measures introduced to support low-income pensioners including the Residents' Support Scheme, a communications campaign which raised awareness about available support, and a cost of living programme which included funding for energy vouchers, practical support with energy efficiency, and small community organisation grants.

## ***Cabinet Member: SEND Improvement***

### **22. Enhanced Pathways Business Case - Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategic Early Intervention Team**

*(Cabinet: 25 February 2025)*

Cabinet had before it a report which sought approval to expand the funding for the Enhanced Pathway project, which was part of the SEND transformation programme. Enhanced Pathways provided teacher-led support in mainstream schools for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The initiative offered a bespoke curriculum to meet their needs while still at mainstream schools.

Cabinet approved the recommendations to continue to fund 20 existing Enhanced Pathways and a further 20 Pathways to enable the Council to meet the increasing numbers and complexities of children and young people with Special Educational Needs in mainstream schools and to realise probable savings through this spend to save model. The budgetary commitment was for a period of 3 years for each Enhanced Pathway (barring significant changes to central government funding of SEND during that period). Members also agreed to consider and review opportunities to upscale the Enhanced Pathways programme over the coming years in line with the impact evidence provided.

## ***Cabinet Member: Transport Management***

### **23. Civil Enforcement Procurement Model**

*(Cabinet: 21 January & 25 February 2025)*

Cabinet approved a preferred service model and procurement strategy (enhanced multi contractor) for the Council's Civil Enforcement and Zero Emission Zone (ZEE) operation. The model took into account the importance of effective enforcement in achieving the county's transport goals. The need for better enforcement of parking regulations, the potential use of new technologies, and the importance of recruiting and retaining civil enforcement officers were emphasised by members during discussion.

### **24. Scrutiny Reports**

*(Cabinet: 17 December 2024, 21 & 28 January 2025 and 25 February 2025)*

Cabinet received the following Scrutiny Reports:-

Community Asset Transfer Policy (Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

Commercial Strategy (Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

Healthy Weight (Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

Education other than at Home Strategy (EOTAS) (Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

Local Nature Recovery Strategy (Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

Infrastructure Funding Statement and s.106 Funding (Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

City Centre Accommodation Strategy – Disposal of Old and New County Hall (Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

**LIZ LEFFMAN**

Leader of the Council

April 2024