

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting held on Tuesday, 8 July 2025 commencing at 10.30 am and finishing at 4.05 pm

Present:

Councillor Mark Lygo – in the Chair

Councillors:

Ted Fenton (Vice-Chair)	Andrew Gant	Kieron Mallon
Thomas Ashby	Emma Garnett	Emma Markham
Brad Baines	Sean Gaul	Gavin McLauchlan
James Barlow	Stefan Gawrysiak	Lesley McLean
Ron Batstone	Laura Gordon	Ian Middleton
Tim Bearder	Tom Greenaway	Toyah Overton
Will Boucher-Giles	Kate Gregory	Glynis Phillips
Chris Brant	Jane Hanna OBE	James Plumb
Liz Brighthouse OBE	Jenny Hannaby	Susanna Pressel
Mark Cherry	David Henwood	Leigh Rawlins
Andrew Coles	Georgina Heritage	Judy Roberts
Nicholas Michael Cotter	Ben Higgins	James Robertshaw
Andrew Crichton	David Hingley	Paul-Austin Sargent
Hao Du	Johnny Hope-Smith	Geoff Saul
Imade Edosomwan	Robin Jones	John Shiri
Judith Edwards	Emily Kerr	Roz Smith
Gareth Epps	Liz Leffman	Ian Snowdon
Lee Evans	Dan Levy	Bethia Thomas
Neil Fawcett	Dr Nathan Ley	Liam Walker
Rebekah Fletcher	Diana Lugova	Matt Webb
James Fry	Saj Malik	Tony Worgan

The Council considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and decided as set out below. Except insofar as otherwise specified, the reasons for the decisions are contained in the agenda and reports, copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes.

43/25 MINUTES

(Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the Annual meeting on 20 May 2025 were approved with one amendment:

Item 27/25: paragraph 5, line 5 – replace “Councillor Rooke” with “Councillor Lygo”.

The minutes of the Extraordinary meeting on 20 May 2025 were approved.

44/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(Agenda Item 2)

Apologies were received from Councillors Creed, Field-Johnson, Filipova-Rivers, Graham and Stevens.

45/25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE

(Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

46/25 OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS

(Agenda Item 4)

An annual event to celebrate the role of the military took place in Oxford on 23 June looking ahead to national Armed Forces Day which was on Saturday, 28 June.

The armed forces flag was raised on buildings and landmarks around the country. Oxfordshire County Council's flag raising event was overseen by Councillor Mark Lygo, Chair of the Council, in Oxford Castle Yard.

The event involved a parade which was led by 1 Regiment Royal Logistics Corps based at Bicester. Lieutenant Colonel Ged Hennigan joined the Councillor Lygo, the Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire and the High Sherrieff of Oxfordshire in raising the armed forces flag.

Military and civilian representatives were in attendance, including Oxfordshire County Council armed forces champions.

There was also a ceremony to honour the new affiliation between Oxfordshire County Council and HMS Diamond.

As signatories of the Armed Forces Covenant Oxfordshire County Council is proud of its strong and supportive relationship with the local armed forces community.

Other events attended by the Chair and Vice Chair since the last Council meeting were listed in Annex 1 of the Schedule of Business.

A full list of Oxfordshire award recipients in the King's Birthday Honours were listed at Annex 2.

The Chair made the following announcement:

"We meet today on a sad day, when businessman Dave Chester, who died in the tragic incident at Bicester Motion on 15 May, will be laid to rest. The Chester family has asked for a private funeral for family, friends and those who knew and were connected to Dave. In line with their wishes, a small

Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service guard of honour will form for Dave as part of these arrangements.

Members will be aware that firefighters Jennie Logan and Martyn Sadler also tragically died. The funeral for firefighter Martyn Sadler has yet to take place. The funeral for Jennie took place on Saturday 14 June and I'd like to thank our fire service, partners and colleagues for their unwavering support in delivering a very moving and respectful procession in line with her family's wishes.

Members will also be aware that two other firefighters sustained serious injuries. Both have now been discharged from hospital. We remain in contact with them and all families affected.

Members are reminded that our [online book of condolence](#) for Dave, Jennie and Martyn remains open should anyone wish to sign. Councillors and residents can visit www.online-tribute.com/Bicester."

47/25 APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda Item 5)

A report on committee and panel appointments was proposed by the Chair and seconded by the Vice-Chair.

Councillor Leffman proposed an amendment which was seconded by Councillor Fawcett was agreed unanimously:

Paragraph 7, on the Corporate Parenting Panel: Councillor Ben Higgins to be replaced by Councillor Sean Gaul.

The recommendations were approved unanimously as amended.

48/25 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda Item 6)

There were no petitions.

The Chair accepted the following requests to speak:

Item 16: Motion from Councillor Jane Hanna
Melody Drinkwater

Item 18: Motion from Councillor James Plumb
District Cllr Sally Povolotsky
Kimberly Morgan
Neil Barry
Claire Brenner

Speeches that have been supplied are published alongside the minutes.

49/25 QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

(Agenda Item 7)

Nineteen questions were asked. The questions, responses and supplementary questions are recorded in an Annex below.

50/25 QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

(Agenda Item 8)

Fifty eight questions were asked. The questions, responses and supplementary questions are recorded in an Annex below.

51/25 REPORT OF THE CABINET

(Agenda Item 9)

Council received the report of Cabinet covering its meetings on 20 March 2025, 25 March 2025, 22 April 2025 and 17 June 2025.

On Item 1, Councillors Baines and Middleton asked about comparisons being made between the three proposed reorganisation models. Councillor Leffman responded that this was being discussed by Chief Executives to ensure that the same data sets were used and to ensure that service users would not be disadvantaged by the reorganisation.

Councillor Phillips asked if an all-Member briefing was being planned on the government's proposals for fairer funding. Councillor Leffman confirmed that all Members would be briefed once it was known what the proposals were.

On Item 2, Councillor Phillips asked about the target for reduction of agency spend. Councillor Fawcett responded that it would become harder to reduce over time and that there would be a minimum level required to support certain projects and provide cover for leave.

Councillor Smith asked about the Council's record with apprenticeships. Councillor Fawcett responded that it had been a real success story with a high proportion of the apprenticeship levy being drawn down. Officers were exploring other potential ways of increasing the numbers of apprenticeships, particularly targeting disadvantaged groups.

On Item 4, Councillors Brighouse and Baines asked about proposals around part-night lighting. Councillor Brighouse cited concerns of the Children's Commissioner. She asked that all evidence be properly considered. Councillor Baines asked if there was any part of Oxford where this policy might be applied. Councillor Roberts responded that the consultation on this had just finished. Some rural parishes had proposed it for environmental reasons. If area committees believe it would not be safe in their area then they will not request it. The issue had been moved to the Transport Management portfolio and she was certain that Councillor Gant would take all the views from the consultation into consideration.

On Item 5, Councillor Baines asked about progress in seeking alternative sources of finance for capital projects. Councillor Levy responded that he would provide a written answer.

On Item 6, Councillor Baines asked what conversations have taken place around the disparities in High Needs Block funding per pupil across different councils with Oxfordshire receiving a much lower amount than neighbouring councils. Councillor Brighthouse noted that the deficit had doubled in one year and asked for a breakdown of the figures. Councillor Levy responded that officers have been engaged in discussions on this disparities point. He was disappointed that the government had continued to defer a solution to the funding problem. He agreed to provide a breakdown of the figures.

On Item 7, Councillor Baines asked for an update on the proposal to open the Cowley Branch Line given the government's increase in funding towards development of railways. Councillor Levy responded that increased funding was welcome and might support a number of schemes around the county. He agreed to provide a written response on the Cowley Branch proposals.

Councillor Middleton noted the provision of extra funding for the development of Speedwell House and asked for information as to the reasons for that. Councillor Levy responded that the costs of the development were covered by the sale of County Hall.

On Item 8, Councillor Fry asked when progress would be made on the provision of pavement charging facilities. Councillor Levy agreed to provide a written response.

On Item 9, Councillor Baines asked if consideration had been given to using some of the higher than expected return in the parking account to improve the staff offer and recruit more officers for enforcement. Councillor Levy responded that he would consider the suggestion but had concerns about using funds from fines as core income.

Councillor Barlow asked if recycling rates were increasing or decreasing. Councillor Levy agreed to provide a written response.

On Item 10, Councillor Baines asked about the risks associated with the seven year backlog in bridge inspections. Councillor Levy responded that Councillor Gant would ensure that bridge inspections were proceeded with as quickly as possible.

Councillor Fry asked if past over-optimism in forecasts on the delivery of capital projects could be factored in to better inform future forecasts. Councillor Levy confirmed that officers were working on improving forecasts in this matter.

Councillor Barlow asked if the council's climate plan influenced investment strategy to ensure minimising carbon emissions. Councillor Levy responded that carbon efficiency was embedded in everything that the council does.

On Item 11, Councillor Fry asked if any unspent funds from the £6m committed in February last year to easing congestion would be spent in Oxford City. Councillor Levy responded that he would not commit to spending funds in certain areas of the county.

On Item 12, Councillor Baines asked why funds had been transferred from the Traffic Congestion Improvement Fund to pay for the temporary congestion charge plans given that extra funds were available from underspending in some areas and additional interest on reserves. Councillor Levy responded that capital funds were regularly moved around depending on timing of projects within the financial year.

Councillor Saul noted that extra funds had been allocated for signage on the A40 Access to Witney Scheme and asked were the costs of signage not factored in at the start. Councillor Levy confirmed that they were but there was a cost overrun on signage for what was a complicated junction.

Councillor Brighouse noted that money had been allocated many years ago to improve the Corner House junction in her division and asked if that money could be put back into the local community. Councillor Levy responded that the junction had been improved but more work needed to be done.

Councillor Barlow asked if the Access to Witney Scheme might result in inducing an increase in traffic overall. Councillor Levy responded that it was unlikely to do so but that the key aspect was that it would reduce traffic in the centre of Witney.

On Item 12, Councillor Pressel asked about the cost of living programme and asked if some of the £6m could be given to food banks to help feed disadvantaged families. Councillor Gregory thanked her for the suggestion and said she would discuss it with officers.

Councillor Cherry asked if areas of deprivation were taken into account in planning the council's cost of living measures. Councillor Gregory confirmed that the plans were data-driven to ensure that low income households were being targeted.

Councillor Edosomwan asked about the eight week pilot at Oxford Academy providing healthy snacks for pupils and if it was planned to extend it. Councillor Gregory responded that 51% of pupils reported better concentration and suspensions were down 70% in that period. Pupils were also able to spend their snack money on a better lunch instead. Officers were reviewing the findings and considering options going forward.

Councillor Middleton asked if there were any plans to provide extra support following government welfare cuts, particularly for those relying on Personal Independence Payments and other disability benefits. Councillor Gregory responded that those affected by the cuts can apply to the Resident Support Scheme.

Councillor Fry asked what more could be done to reach those most likely to be in need who might not attend advice centres or be aware of the cost of living programme. Councillor Gregory responded that the council worked with district councils and other organisations to get to the hard-to-reach households.

On Item 13, Councillor Baines ask why the temporary congestion charge was not put to the Citizens' Assembly for discussion. Councillor Gant responded that the proposal did not exist at the time of the assembly but arose from Network Rail's announcement of the continued Botley Road closure and appeals from bus companies to take action as a result.

Councillor Brighouse asked why the remit for the Citizens' Assembly was extended to include the whole of Oxfordshire when the original proposal was for it to deal with the Central Oxfordshire area. Councillor Gant responded that it was a matter of record that this was how the advisory board decided to proceed in order to deal with all the issues affecting the residents of Oxfordshire.

52/25 OXFORDSHIRE JOINT HEALTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

(Agenda Item 10)

Council had before it the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report that documented the breadth and depth of the Committee's work over the 2024/25 municipal year.

The report was proposed by Councillor Hanna and seconded by Councillor Epps.

Following discussion, the recommendation was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED: to receive and note the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee's (JHOSC) Annual Report set out in Annex 1.

53/25 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

(Agenda Item 11)

Council was asked to note the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report which documents the activities of the four other overview and scrutiny committees for the 2024/25 municipal year.

The report was proposed by Councillor Walker and seconded by Councillor Brighouse.

Following discussion, the recommendation was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED: Council to receive the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

54/25 APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS OF THE AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

(Agenda Item 12)

At its meeting on 11 July 2023, Council approved the creation of the roles of two Independent Members of the Audit and Governance Committee. The report before Council was to propose appointments to the two positions.

The report was proposed by Councillor Smith and seconded by Councillor Shiri.

Following discussion, the recommendations were adopted unanimously.

RESOLVED: to:-

- a) confirm the appointment Kate Cartwright and Paul McGinn as Independent Members of the Audit and Governance Committee for a term of four years.
- b) record the Council's gratitude and appreciation for the contribution of Dr Geoff Jones as Independent Member of the Audit and Governance Committee and Chair of the Audit Working Group.

55/25 APPOINTMENTS TO AND FORMATION OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

(Agenda Item 13)

The Independent Remuneration Panel makes recommendations to Council on Member Allowances. This report is to form the Panel and appoint members to it.

The report was proposed by Councillor Leffman and seconded by Councillor Fawcett.

Following discussion, the recommendations were approved unanimously.

RESOLVED: to: -

- a) confirm the appointment of Benjamin Anim-Antwi, Martyn Hocking, Stephen McKechnie and Dave Shelmerdine as Members of the Independent Remuneration Panel and
- b) to form the Independent Remuneration Panel for a period of two years.

56/25 COUNCILLORS PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY

(Agenda Item 14)

Council was asked to approve a policy outlining councillors' entitlements to parental leave, which includes maternity, paternity, shared parental, and adoption leave.

The report was proposed by Councillor Leffman and seconded by Councillor Fawcett.

Following discussion, the recommendations were approved unanimously.

RESOLVED: to approve a parental leave policy for councillors, ensuring support for new parents and best practice in local governance. The policy includes provisions for temporary cover and reflects the council's commitment to promoting equality and diversity among elected officials.

57/25 PRESENTATION OF SCROLL TO ALDERMAN BOB JOHNSTON

(Agenda Item 15)

The Extraordinary Council meeting on 20 May 2025 approved the appointment of former Councillor Bob Johnston as Alderman. As Alderman Johnston was unable to attend on that day, Council agreed to defer the presentation of the scroll to this meeting.

Members paid tribute to Alderman Johnston's work on the council and in the community. Alderman Johnston responded with thanks and recalled some of his best memories as a councillor.

The Chair presented the scroll and alderman's medal to Alderman Johnston.

58/25 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR JANE HANNA

(Agenda Item 16)

The motion was proposed by Councillor Hanna and seconded by Councillor Hope-Smith.

Following discussion, an electronic vote was taken. The motion was approved with 62 votes in favour, none against and no abstentions.

RESOLVED:

Council notes with deep concern the failure of successive governments to address the crisis in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Provision.

Councils across the country are grappling with soaring high needs deficits, which the Local Government Association (LGA) predicts will exceed £5 billion nationally by next year.

Over half the councils providing these services warned they would face effective bankruptcy when the statutory override for SEND deficits was to

expire in 2026. The extension to 2028 has not solved the underlying problem.

Between 2020 and 2024, Oxfordshire County Council's deficit on the 'Dedicated Schools Grant' was £46 million. This increased to £85m at the end of financial year 2024-25 and is budgeted to reach £127m by the end of financial year 2025-26.

Oxfordshire saw a 27% increase in requests for Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) during 2023/24 with an increase of 18% of approved EHCPs. These increases continue upward.

The LGA says that the current SEND system is "not working for anyone in it". The Spending Review once again failed to provide clarity on how the Government will address these mounting deficits.

The announced increase in core school funding amounts to just a 1.1% uplift-insufficient to keep pace with inflation and rising pay costs in schools.

The Council asks the leader to write to the Chancellor, Rachel Reeves MP, urging her to set out urgently how the Government will eliminate high needs deficits and deliver a SEND system that works for children, families and councils alike.

59/25 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR LIZ BRIGHOUSE

(Agenda Item 17)

The motion was proposed by Councillor Brighouse and seconded by Councillor Baines.

An amendment was proposed by Councillor Kerr and seconded by Councillor Garnett. The proposer and seconder of the motion did not accept the amendment.

Following discussion, Councillor Levy proposed an amendment to Councillor Kerr's amendment under CPR 14.1 (vi). The new amendment was accepted by the proposer and seconder of the original amendment.

Council voted to take the new amendment with 39 votes in favour, 21 against and no abstentions.

The amendment was carried with 40 votes in favour, 21 against and no abstentions.

Following further discussion, the motion as amended was carried with 40 votes in favour, 21 against and no abstentions.

RESOLVED:

The Children's Society notes that transport poverty exacerbates other inequalities, ~~with children from low-income families potentially missing out on school trips, extracurricular activities, or suffering poor school attendance.~~ **A and a 2025 report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies similarly identified that young people's mobility is closely tied to long-term social and economic outcomes.**

The Council notes that it is working with bus companies to improve services in Oxfordshire and thanks them for their support for its schemes to make bus services more reliable, quicker and more extensive. It would welcome the opportunity to make services more accessible to young people and others.

This Council notes that there are many transport disadvantaged groups who could significantly benefit from targeted support with public transport, such as those under 18, care leavers and asylum seekers.

~~This Council, being aware of the levels of child poverty in this county and the effect this has on the ability of families and young people to travel by public transport, asks the Cabinet to set up a Cabinet Advisory Group to consider a scheme~~ **for the whole county to provide free or significantly reduced bus travel for children and young people up to age of 18 where the money for such scheme would require substantial funding to be viable and longterm and that this will require funding from central government in addition to Oxfordshire making a contribution were a Workplace Parking Levy to be introduced.**

~~Such a scheme could be funded from fines from ANPR enforcement and would enable children and young people to get to school and college settings by enabling bus companies to develop routes to school that better meet the travel needs of families and children.~~

~~This Council notes West of England Mayor Helen Goodwin has funded free travel for children up to 16 this summer.~~

60/25 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES PLUMB

(Agenda Item 18)

The time being 3.30 pm, this motion was considered dropped in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2.

61/25 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR IAN MIDDLETON

(Agenda Item 19)

The time being 3.30 pm, this motion was considered dropped in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing