

CABINET

MINUTES of the meeting held on Tuesday, 21 April 2026 commencing at 2.00 pm and finishing at 4.10pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Liz Leffman – in the Chair
Councillor Neil Fawcett
Councillor Tim Bearder
Councillor Andrew Gant
Councillor Sean Gaul
Councillor Kate Gregory
Councillor Jenny Hannaby
Councillor Ben Higgins
Councillor Dan Levy

Other Members in Attendance: Councillors Thomas Ashby and Liam Walker

Officers:

Whole of meeting Martin Reeves (Chief Executive), Anita Bradley (Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer), Paul Fermer (Director of Environment and Highways), Chris Reynolds (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

The Cabinet considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting, together with a schedule of addenda tabled at the meeting, and decided as set out below. Except insofar as otherwise specified, the reasons for the decisions are contained in the agenda, reports and schedule, copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes.

48/26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(Agenda Item. 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Judy Roberts.

49/26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(Agenda Item. 2)

There were none.

50/26 MINUTES

(Agenda Item. 3)

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2026 were approved as a correct record.

51/26 QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

(Agenda Item. 4)

See attached.

52/26 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda Item. 5)

7 - Reports from Scrutiny Committees

Cllr Glynis Phillips

8 – Improving our Fire and Rescue Service

Cllr Glynis Phillips

9 – Oxford Congestion Charge Investment Plan

Luke Marion
Bernadette Evans
Richard Parnham
Robin Tucker

12- Community cohesion action plan

Danny Yee
Robin Tucker
Cllr Susanna Pressel

14 – Updates to the Parking Standards for New Developments

Danny Yee

53/26 APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda Item. 6)

There were no appointments to report to this meeting.

54/26 REPORTS FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

(Agenda Item. 7)

Cabinet received the following recommendations from the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee and will respond in due course:-

- a) Devolution Update – Thames Valley Strategic Authority
- b) Community Asset Transfer and Community Leasing Policy

55/26 IMPROVING OUR FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

(Agenda Item. 8)

Cabinet had before it an interim report regarding the “Improving our Fire and Rescue Service” public consultation conducted from October 2025 to January 2026. The report focused on proposals to enhance emergency response effectiveness, including changes to fire station operations, fire engine availability, and workforce deployment, while reflecting on public and employee feedback and financial considerations to guide future decisions and investments in the service.

Councillor Neil Fawcett, Cabinet Member for Resources and Deputy Leader presented the report.

The Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety referred to the significant level of public engagement in the consultation, which had received over 1,200 formal responses. The feedback demonstrated strong public concern regarding station closures, reductions in night-time cover and the removal of fire engines, alongside a preference for investment-led approaches to improving service performance.

Having carefully considered the consultation responses, Cabinet agreed to withdraw the proposals to close fire stations in Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock, and to withdraw the proposal to remove the second fire engine at Thame Fire Station. The proposal relating to North Oxfordshire Fire Station was paused for further consideration.

Cabinet also agreed to continue structured engagement with employees and their representatives on the proposal to introduce 12-hour day shifts and noted the financial implications of withdrawing certain proposals. Any investment-led options would be considered as part of the 2027/28 budget planning process.

Councillor Fawcett moved and Councillor Levy seconded the recommendations and they were approved.

RESOLVED to:-

- a) note the contents of this report**
- b) confirm:-**
 - i) support for the fire and rescue service to continue engagement with its employees with respect to the main proposal comprised of implementing 12-hour day shifts for full-time firefighters at five currently on-call fire stations.**
 - ii) support for the Fire and Rescue Service to continue engagement with its employees with respect to the proposal to remove the On Call fire engine from Rewley Road Fire Station.**

- iii) **agreement to revisit at a later date the north of Oxford fire station proposal once further details are known.**

- iv) **the withdrawal of the proposal to remove the second fire engine at Thame Fire Station whilst the Fire and Rescue Service continue discussions with colleagues around fire and rescue cover in this area.**

- v) **agreement to withdraw any station closures from the proposals to provide an opportunity for the service to explore further local and centralised firefighter recruitment.**

- vi) **recognition of the financial implications of recommendations iv and v (as set out in Annex 2) and agreement to consider the need for further investment for the Fire and Rescue Service in line with Options 5 - 7 as part of the budget planning for 2027/28.**

- vii) **approval of any other actions required to enable continued engagement and consideration of the revised policy approach.**

56/26 OXFORD CONGESTION CHARGE INVESTMENT PLAN

(Agenda Item. 9)

Cabinet had before it a report setting out the proposed investment plan for surplus income from Oxford's temporary congestion charge scheme, outlining recommended allocations and justifications for spending to support local transport policies.

Cabinet heard from external speakers on matters including the performance of the free park and ride scheme, bus usage, impacts on small businesses, monitoring arrangements, and proposals for express hospital bus services and enhanced active travel infrastructure.

Councillor Andrew Gant, Cabinet Member for Transport Management, presented the report.

Cabinet acknowledged the positive outcomes identified to date, including reduced congestion and improved bus reliability, but agreed that further stakeholder engagement and refinement of the proposals was required before formal approval.

RESOLVED to defer consideration of this item to the meeting on 19 May 2026.

57/26 DEVOLUTION UPDATE - THAMES VALLEY STRATEGIC AUTHORITY

(Agenda Item. 10)

Cabinet received a report which provided an update recent progress in devolution discussions for the Thames Valley, focusing on the evolving national policy context and governance options.

Councillor Liz Leffman, Leader of the Council, presented the report.

Cabinet noted the recent invitation to submit an expression of interest in becoming a foundation strategic authority, as a precursor to potential mayoral strategic authority status.

Cabinet noted that an expression of interest had been submitted by the government's deadline and that further progress remained subject to post-election clarification on governance and geographic arrangements for any future Thames Valley Authority.

Councillor Leffman moved and Councillor Higgins seconded the recommendations and they were approved.

RESOLVED to:

- a) note progress on devolution discussions across the Thames Valley between December 2025 and March 2026.**
- b) note the evolving national policy context and the emerging position on governance and the supplementary expression of interest (EOI) submitted on 20 March 2026.**
- c) agree the proposed next steps to continue constructive engagement with partner authorities and Government, while maintaining the Council's commitment to securing a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) for the Thames Valley.**

58/26 COST OF LIVING PROGRAMME 2026-29

(Agenda Item. 11)

Cabinet received a report presenting the proposed structure and details of the Cost of Living Support Programme for Oxfordshire from 2026 to 2029. The report outlined the government's introduction of the three-year Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF), replacing the previous Household Support Fund (HSF), and explained how the funding would be allocated and used to support residents facing financial hardship due to ongoing cost of living pressures. The report also reviewed the 2025/26 programme and incorporated findings from a resident consultation to inform future priorities.

Councillor Kate Gregory, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Inequalities, presented the report.

Cabinet noted reductions in government funding and the ending of free school meal vouchers during school holidays, with the final vouchers having been issued at Easter. Cabinet agreed alternative targeted support measures, including enhanced support through family hubs, early years services, resident support schemes, school-based interventions and the Holiday Activities and Food programme.

Councillor Gregory moved, and Councillor Gaul seconded the recommendations and they were approved.

RESOLVED to:-

- a) **agree the proposed structure of the cost of living support programme for 2026-29.**
- b) **delegate authority to the Director of Public Affairs, Policy & Partnerships in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Inequalities to agree new areas of expenditure, and allocate funding from the Crisis and Resilience Fund during 2026-29.**

59/26 COMMUNITY COHESION ACTION PLAN

(Agenda Item. 12)

Cabinet had before it a report detailing Oxfordshire County Council's ongoing efforts to enhance community cohesion in response to a council motion and amid various social challenges. It outlined recent initiatives, contextual background, and future plans to foster stronger, more connected communities.

Councillor Kate Gregory, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Inequalities, presented the report.

The report referred to new government guidance and strategy documents on community cohesion, including the Common Ground framework and the Protecting What Matters action plan, which emphasise tackling misinformation, hate crime, and declining trust in institution

Cabinet noted the establishment of a cross-party advisory group, ongoing member workshops, and pilot "listening exchange" work in partnership with the University of Oxford. Members welcomed suggestions regarding the role of public realm and transport schemes in supporting community cohesion.

Councillor Gegory moved and Councillor Leffman seconded the recommendation, and it was approved.

RESOLVED to note the progress being made by the Council to strengthen community cohesion across the county in response to the motion approved at Council on 9 December 2025.

60/26 COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER AND COMMUNITY LEASING
(Agenda Item. 13)

Cabinet had before it a report regarding two updated policies for transferring or leasing council-owned properties to community organisations to promote public benefit and community empowerment. These policies clarified processes, eligibility, and assessment criteria to better support local voluntary and community groups while safeguarding council interests.

Councillor Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, presented the report. He explained that the policy established a process for receiving and assessing applications from community groups, with working parties evaluating proposals against council priorities such as equality and public health. Ongoing monitoring would ensure that groups used assets as intended.

Councillor Levy moved and Councillor Hannaby seconded the recommendations and they were approved.

RESOLVED to approve the Community Asset Transfer (Annex 1) and Community Leasing (Annex 2) Policies.

61/26 UPDATES TO THE PARKING STANDARDS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENTS
(Agenda Item. 14)

Cabinet received a report which detailed proposed updates to its 'Parking Standards for New Developments' to better align with the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) and recent national policy changes, aiming to reduce car dependency and promote sustainable travel in new developments.

Councillor Andrew Gant, Cabinet Member for Transport Management, presented the report. Councillor Gant pointed out that a revised version of the parking standards (annex 1 to the report) had been published in the addenda to the agenda. The updated parking standards aimed to reduce reliance on private cars and encourage sustainable transport, introducing a new 'car light' category and aligning cycle parking requirements with national guidance (LTN 120), while acknowledging local variations in cycling rates.

During discussion, Cabinet members highlighted the importance of the policy in supporting future housing growth, sustainable transport, and active travel, while noting the need for improved public transport services and enforcement by local planning authorities.

Councillor Gant moved and Councillor Leffman seconded the recommendations and they were approved.

RESOLVED to adopt the proposed updates to the 'Parking Standards for New Developments' document as set out in annex 1 to the report.

62/26 REFRESH OF THE OUR PEOPLE & CULTURE STRATEGY 2026-2028

(Agenda Item. 15)

Cabinet received a report on the refreshed Our People and Culture Strategy 2026–2028 which outlined Oxfordshire Council’s approach to supporting and developing its workforce amid organisational change, focusing on leadership, culture, and capability to deliver quality services. This refreshed strategy was built on previous plans and responded to current challenges including Local Government Reorganisation and financial pressures.

Councillor Neil Fawcett, Cabinet Member for Resources and Deputy Leader, presented the report. Councillor Fawcett explained that the refreshed strategy maintained the four pillars of attract, thrive, grow, and lead, with a renewed focus on leadership development, diversity and inclusion, learning and development, and workforce planning to support staff during a period of significant organisational change.

The strategy was designed to help staff navigate the challenges of local government reorganisation, ensuring they felt secure and supported as they transitioned to new roles or organisations, and emphasising the importance of clear communication and ongoing engagement.

Councillor Fawcett moved and Councillor Gregory seconded the recommendations and they were approved.

RESOLVED to

- a) **note the refreshed Our People and Culture Strategy 2026–2028 and its four priority areas for attracting, supporting, developing and equipping colleagues to deliver high-quality services for Oxfordshire.**
- b) **note that the full Strategy is provided as an accessible PDF, which sets out the detailed approach, supporting actions, and measures of success.**

63/26 DELEGATED POWERS REPORT FOR JANUARY TO MARCH 2026

(Agenda Item. 16)

There was no use of delegated powers during the period January to March 2026.

64/26 FORWARD PLAN AND FUTURE BUSINESS

(Agenda Item. 17)

The Cabinet considered a list of items for the immediately forthcoming meetings of the Cabinet together with changes and additions set out in the schedule of addenda.

RESOLVED to note the items currently identified for forthcoming meetings.

65/26 FOR INFORMATION ONLY: CABINET RESPONSES TO SCRUTINY ITEMS

(Agenda Item. 18)

Cabinet noted the following responses to Scrutiny items:-

- Local Area SEND Partnership
- Attainment
- Education Other Than At School
- Fostering
- Business Management and Monitoring Report (Public Health focus)
- Parking permits
- Social Value

.....in the Chair

Date of signing