

CABINET

MINUTES of the meeting held on Tuesday, 28 July 2026 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 11.05am

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Tim Bearder – in the Chair
Councillor Neil Fawcett (Deputy Chair)
Councillor Judith Edwards
Councillor Gareth Epps
Councillor Rebekah Fletcher
Councillor Sean Gaul
Councillor Kate Gregory
Councillor Liz Leffman
Councillor Dan Levy

Other Members in Attendance:

Councillors Imade Edosomwan, Glynis Phillips, James Robertshaw and Ian Snowdon.

Officers:

Whole of meeting Dr Martin Reeves OBE (Chief Executive), Lorna Baxter (Deputy Chief Executive – Section 151 Officer), Anita Bradley (Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer), Karen Fuller (Director of Adult Social Care), 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.

113/26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(Agenda Item. 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Laura Gordon.

114/26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(Agenda Item. 2)

There were none.

115/26 QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

(Agenda Item. 3)

See annex.

116/26 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda Item. 4)

6- Proposed Changes to Adult Social Care Contributions Policy

Zoe Williams
Canio Santoliquido

Cllr Imade Edosomwan

117/26 REPORTS FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

(Agenda Item. 5)

Cabinet received the report and recommendations of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Adult Social Care Contributions Policy. The Cabinet response was published with the Scrutiny report.

118/26 PROPOSED CHANGES TO ADULT SOCIAL CARE CONTRIBUTIONS POLICY

(Agenda Item. 6)

Cabinet had before it a report and recommendations on proposed changes to the Adult Social Care Contributions Policy. It included recommendations, consultation outcomes, and implications regarding financial contributions for care services, transport, and telecare.

Councillor Rebekah Fletcher, Cabinet Member for Adults, presented the report. Councillor Fletcher stated that the proposed policy changes were driven by significant financial pressures, including a projected funding gap and government funding cuts, requiring difficult decisions to balance the budget.

Members noted the contributions made by speakers which raised concerns about the impact on disabled and vulnerable residents, administrative burden, and the fairness of shifting costs onto those least able to pay.

During discussion, Cabinet members noted the impact of the proposed changes but emphasised the statutory duties of the Council with regard to Adult social care. There would be ongoing monitoring of the impact of the changes, with safeguards for those most affected.

Councillor Fletcher moved and Councillor Bearder seconded the recommendations and they were approved.

RESOLVED to:-

Note the contents of this report and confirm agreement for

- a) **Reducing the initial Disability Related Expenditure (DRE) allowance from 35% to 25% which is the level that was in place before April 2022,**
- b) **Introducing an Adult Social Care Transport Policy (Annex 2) that explains the council's approach to transport and sets out a flat rate of £10 per day for transport arranged by Adult Social Care,**
- c) **Charge all people using the telecare the actual cost of the service at £9.87 per week.**

119/26 RE-NEGOTIATION OF THE PROJECT AGREEMENT WITH OXFORDSHIRE CARE PARTNERSHIP (OCP)

(Agenda Item. 7)

RESOLVED to exclude the public for the duration of this item since it was likely that if they were present during the item there would be disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and specified below in relation to those items and since it is considered that, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Cabinet had before it a report regarding the re-negotiation of the Project Agreement between Oxfordshire County Council and the Oxfordshire Care Partnership (OCP).

Councillor Rebekah Fletcher, Cabinet Member for Adults, presented the report.

In response to questions, the Director of Adult Social Care provided more information on the proposed adjustments to care provision to better meet demand, particularly for dementia care.

Councillor Fletcher moved and Councillor Bearder seconded the recommendations and they were approved.

RESOLVED to approve the recommendations as set out in the report.

.....in the Chair

Date of signing

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ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Questions are listed in the order in which they were received. Should any questioner not have received an answer in that time, a written answer will be provided.

1. COUNCILLOR LEE EVANS	COUNCILLOR BEKAH FLETCHER, CABINET MEMBER FOR ADULTS
<u>Agenda Item 6</u> The Council's own Equality Impact Assessment acknowledges that these proposals will fall disproportionately on disabled people, older people, people on low incomes, rural residents and carers. We must be absolutely clear about who will bear the burdens of this policy. The administration's answer appears to be that this is acceptable because people can ask for an individual assessment or some other form of appeal or mitigation. But that means these proposals don't simply increase charges for many residents, including disabled people, they impose additional bureaucracy on them if they are to receive the support they need. Does the Cabinet Member accept that some of the people most affected by these proposals may not be able to navigate these reassessment and appeals processes? And what assessment has she made of how many people will never	Thank you for the question. I recognise that the Equality Impact Assessment identifies that these proposals may have a greater impact on disabled people, older people, people on low incomes, rural residents and carers. This reflects the fact that these groups are more likely to use adult social care services, and that the consultation was targeted at people already using services who would be directly affected by the proposed changes to Disability Related Expenditure, telecare and transport. Adult social care is not free at the point of delivery in the way NHS care is. It is a means-tested system. The purpose of this policy is to apply charges more consistently, while ensuring that support remains based on assessed need and that people who cannot afford to pay are protected. It is also important to recognise that this proposal is, in effect, a return to the rate previously applied under the former Conservative administration; the Council increased the allowance when it was financially possible to do so, but the current financial position means that this is no longer sustainable. I also accept that, for some people, the issue is not only the charge itself. It may also be the ability to understand a change, respond to a financial assessment, ask for a review, or challenge a decision. Adult Social Care already has safeguards in place to address this, both within the policy change and in

receive the support they need - and are entitled to - because they do not have the capacity or support to comply with the new administrative burdens?	services more broadly. These safeguards include Care Act assessment and review duties, financial assessment support, Disability Related Expenditure assessments, independent advocacy where someone has substantial difficulty being involved, safeguarding routes, accessible communication, and support from locality teams, carers, representatives or appointees where appropriate. People with eligible care and support needs will continue to be assessed and supported in line with the Council's Care Act duties. We acknowledge that some people may struggle to engage, so the implementation process will monitor complaints, appeals, hardship requests, DRE reassessments, telecare cancellations, transport uptake, safeguarding concerns and other risk escalations. The Equality Impact Assessment also identifies a cohort of 33 people who may be affected by all three proposed changes. Those people will be contacted directly so that their needs and circumstances can be reviewed.
<u>Supplementary question</u> Cllr Evans said he was grateful for the answer already provided and noted that members of the public, including residents of his division, had made their views clear. He stated that: • The consultation showed people did not want the proposed changes. • The council's papers indicated detrimental impacts on disabled people, older people, care leavers and others who rely on	<u>Reply:-</u> Cllr Fletcher replied that: • She did not believe there were other savings that could be made instead. • The proposal formed part of a wider package of measures the council was having to consider. • The Council's financial position meant these measures had to be considered. • She concluded: "Yes, I am satisfied that this is something that we need to be discussing today at Cabinet."

support. He then asked whether the Cabinet Member was 100% satisfied that there is no equivalent waste that could be eliminated to avoid these new charges?	
2. COUNCILLOR PAUL-AUSTIN SARGENT I note that from the front page of the report it is assessed that all county council electoral divisions are affected by the recommendations before you today. This, however, is not entirely true, as divisions are not geographically, economically or socially homogenous. There are spatially large areas of my division, Banbury Grimsbury and Castle, and indeed smaller pockets interlaced with slightly more affluent neighbourhoods that will be disproportionately affected by these proposals. The Burnham Government have announced this week that they will remove Value Added Tax from electricity bills, which equates to a rather meagre saving on the average family bill of ca. 14p a day, which was heralded by the Government as a policy that would help tackle the 'cost of living crisis'. In one fell swoop the Director of Adult Social Care is recommending a £9.87 per week charge for telecare and £10 per day for transport arranged by Adult Social Care. If the Government feel	COUNCILLOR BEKAH FLETCHER, CABINET MEMBER FOR ADULTS Thank you for the question. The assessment that all electoral divisions are affected reflects the countywide nature of the proposals. The charging policy applies across Oxfordshire and is determined by individual financial assessment, assessed care and support needs, and the Council's statutory duties, rather than being limited to specific geographic areas. The Equality Impact Assessment identifies that some groups, including disabled people, older people and residents on lower incomes, may be more affected because they are more likely to use the services impacted by the proposals. These groups are represented across Oxfordshire, including in areas experiencing higher levels of deprivation. Care Act charging arrangements require councils to ensure that people receiving non-residential care retain at least the Minimum Income Guarantee before any contribution towards care costs is assessed. The Minimum Income Guarantee is intended to protect a basic level of income for everyday living expenses. Consequently, people on lower incomes will generally make lower contributions towards the cost of their care. Where someone's circumstances mean a charge would cause hardship, the policy includes review routes and the ability to reduce or waive charges in exceptional circumstances. Individual assessments and co-produced support planning will also continue to form part of the Council's

that 14p per day is a major achievement, then by their definition the kind of rises before you today are catastrophic for those residents in my division who are vulnerable, economically deprived and with little social capital. How can the County Council justify such a disproportionate impact on the residents that I represent, who by all measures are relatively poorer and more deprived than well-heeled residents living elsewhere in the county?	approach. The proposed telecare charge is £9.87 per week where telecare is not meeting an assessed eligible care need, with a free six-week trial where it supports hospital discharge or reablement. As outlined in our EQIA, there are limitations to the current telecare provision and the Council will provide information about how to access other technologies as part of the implementation process. The proposed £10 daily transport contribution applies only where Adult Social Care arranges transport and responses to the consultation identified that some people may have alternative transport options, while others may not. Existing transport users will be reviewed to confirm whether transport is needed to meet eligible needs. The recommendations presented to Cabinet were informed by consultation feedback, the Equality Impact Assessment, operational evidence, financial considerations, the principles of the Oxfordshire Way and the Council's statutory duties. I do not dismiss the financial impact, particularly for residents already facing cost of living pressures. However, the Council must balance individual affordability with the need to sustain adult social care services across Oxfordshire. The safeguards, assessments and monitoring arrangements are there to ensure that the policy is applied fairly, that people on lower incomes are not treated the same as those with greater means, and that limited resources are directed to those with assessed care and support needs.
3. COUNCILLOR PAUL-AUSTIN SARGENT I note that the engagement garnered responses from 9 in 10 people of white ethnicity, two thirds from females and that over half were over 65 years of age.	COUNCILLOR BEKAH FLETCHER, CABINET MEMBER FOR ADULTS Thank you for the question. The consultation was not intended to be a survey of the whole Oxfordshire population. Its main purpose was to hear from people most likely to be affected by the proposals.

This does not feel like a representative sample to me. Of those who were sampled, Marketing Means (UK) and use Adult Social Care arranged transport 52% felt that the proposed charges were unreasonable. This unreasonable cost would accumulate rapidly if the care required transport several times a week. For those with little social capital and with little disposable income the alternative options for travel to care sites is disproportionately impactful. If we believe in the tenets Oxfordshire Way, tailoring help to people to live well at home, how do we help the most derived, the most vulnerable of the county and how do we reliably know how the changes are seen through the lens of sizeable groups from non-white ethnicities or the seldom heard?	That is why the Council used Adult Social Care records to contact affected residents directly by letter or email, alongside publishing the consultation on Let's Talk Oxfordshire and sharing it with other stakeholders. So while the respondent profile should be understood in context, the consultation did what it was designed to do: gather evidence from people with direct experience of the impacted services. That feedback has been considered alongside the Equality Impact Assessment, operational evidence, legal duties, financial modelling and the principles of the Oxfordshire Way. The Oxfordshire Way is about helping people live well and independently, using the right support at the right time, and also making best use of limited public resources. The proposals, if agreed, do not remove the Council's responsibilities to assess eligible needs, consider individual circumstances or provide support in line with statutory duties. Individual assessments and co-produced support planning will continue to form part of the Council's approach. Monitoring as part of the implementation process will therefore be important and will include transport uptake, telecare service cancellations, complaints, appeals, hardship requests, equality impacts where data is available, and any safeguarding or risk escalations. That gives the Council a route to identify unintended impacts, including on communities whose views may be less visible through consultation alone, and respond if needed.
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