

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting held on Tuesday, 16 April 2024 commencing at 10.30 am and finishing at 3.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Felix Bloomfield – in the Chair

Councillors:

Alison Rooke	Andrew Gant	Calum Miller
Brad Baines	Stefan Gawrysiak	Michael O'Connor
David Bartholomew	Andy Graham	Glynis Phillips
Tim Bearder	Kate Gregory	Sally Povolotsky
Robin Bennett	Jane Hanna OBE	Susanna Pressel
Liz Brighthouse OBE	Jenny Hannaby	Eddie Reeves
Nigel Champken-Woods	Damian Haywood	G.A. Reynolds
Mark Cherry	Charlie Hicks	Judy Roberts
Andrew Coles	John Howson	David Rouane
Ian Corkin	Tony Ilott	Geoff Saul
Imade Edosomwan	Liz Leffman	Les Sibley
Trish Elphinstone	Nick Leverton	Nigel Simpson
Duncan Enright	Dan Levy	Roz Smith
Mohamed Fadlalla	Dr Nathan Ley	Dr Pete Sudbury
Arash Fatemian	Mark Lygo	Bethia Thomas
Neil Fawcett	Kieron Mallon	Michael Waine
Ted Fenton	Ian Middleton	Liam Walker
Donna Ford	Freddie van Mierlo	

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.

9/24 MINUTES

(Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 February 2024 were approved as an accurate record.

10/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(Agenda Item 2)

Apologies were received from Councillors Ash, Banfield, Constance, Field-Johnson, Johnston, Snowdon and Webber.

11/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE

(Agenda Item 3)

Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer, stated that she had a direct financial interest in Item 16 as a member of the strategic leadership team being consulted with and will leave the meeting for that discussion.

12/24 OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS

(Agenda Item 4)

Ofsted has judged Oxfordshire County Council's Children's Services as 'good' following the inspection that took place in February 2024.

Ofsted commented that "Strong political and corporate support has continued and has ensured that the children's directorate has received ongoing investment to develop and strengthen services for vulnerable children.

Since the last Full Council meeting in February, the Chair has had the following invitations -

- 12th March Opening of Edmonds Park Pavilion, Didcot
- 16th March South Oxfordshire District Council quiz night, Chalgrove
- 22nd March SODC Chair's Civic charity dinner, Chalgrove
- 28th March Oxfordshire music theatre production, Abingdon
- 5th April Mayor of Henley's Civic dinner, Henley
- 13th April Mayor of Thame Civic event, Thame

On the 15th of March Cllr Bloomfield held his annual Civic event raising over £3,000 for his chosen charities.

Upcoming events are –

- 16th April Oxfordshire employment and annual celebration event, Oxford
- 17th April Blue Plaque meeting, Oxford
- 19th April Millstream extension opening
- 21st April Faringdon Civic service
- 7th May Mayor of Didcot's Mayor making
- 14th May Inauguration of the Banbury Town Mayor, Banbury
- 17th May Chair of West Oxfordshire District Council charity quiz, Witney

13/24 APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda Item 5)

There were none notified.

14/24 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda Item 6)

Item 9: Annual Report of the Director of Public Health

Professor Hugh Montgomery
Professor Sir Andrew Haine

Item 17: Motion by Councillor Reeves

Claire Wilding
Helen Evans
Krista Beighton
Clare Nelis
Helen Evans

Item 20: Motion by Councillor Gawrysiak

Janet Waters
Caroline Newton

Item 21: Motion by Councillor Reeves

Kimberly Morgan
Tressa Verrier

Item 26: Motion by Councillor Povolotsky

Claire Brenner
Katie Nellist

15/24 QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

(Agenda Item 7)

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

16/24 QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

(Agenda Item 8)

Twenty-five questions were asked. The questions, responses and supplementary questions are recorded in an Annex below.

17/24 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH

(Agenda Item 9)

Directors of Public Health have a statutory duty to publish an annual report on a subject of their choice that they feel demonstrates the state of health within their community. Council considered this report which shone the spotlight on the impact of climate change on health and the health and wellbeing benefits of positive climate action.

Before the report was proposed, Council heard from two experts on climate change and the health impacts, Professor Hugh Montgomery, Director, UCL Institute for Human Health and Performance and Professor Sir Andrew Haine, Centre on Climate Change and Planetary Health.

The report was proposed by Councillor Nathan Ley, Cabinet Member for Public Health, Inequalities & Community Safety and seconded by Councillor Liz Leffman, Leader of the Council. Following discussion the recommendations were agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED (unanimously): to note the Director of Public Health Annual Report and to take every opportunity to support actions and initiatives that will progress related work.

18/24 DISPENSATION FROM ATTENDING MEETINGS

(Agenda Item 10)

Full Council has the discretion to approve a dispensation, based on the circumstances of the case, which means that the councillor does not cease to be a member of the Council for failing to attend a meeting during a six-month period. The report before Council sought a dispensation for Councillor Yvonne Constance due to illness.

The proposal was moved by Councillor Reeves and seconded by Councillor Leffman. Following a brief discussion the recommendations were agreed unanimously and Members wished Councillor Constance well.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

- a) To grant a dispensation to Cllr Yvonne Constance from the statutory requirement to attend a meeting of the Council within a six-month period from the last noted attendance due to illness.**
- b) To approve that the dispensation last up to and including 30 November 2024**

19/24 REPORT OF THE CABINET

(Agenda Item 11)

Council received the report of Cabinet covering the meetings held on 19 December 2023, 23 January 2024, 30 January 2024, 27 February 2024 and 19 March 2024.

In response to queries raised by Councillors on item 1, Future Council Governance Group – Final Report, regarding the amount of public participation and involvement during the decision making process as part of the future of transport in central Oxford, the Leader of the Council responded that a wider review of transport policies across the County would be sought, and participation of such would be agreed as part of the citizens' panel. She emphasised the need to focus this review across the County, rather than just on travel initiatives within the city.

On item 2, the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Functions, Transition Arrangements, Councillor Phillips asked the Leader of the Council how well the Council has assimilated the responsibilities of the LEP since taking on the LEP functions with specific reference to the commercial strategy. The Leader of the Council responded that the LEP functions had been

assimilated in their existing format and would be reviewed over the next six months to determine how the commercial strategy would be reviewed as part of the Council's economic development.

On item 3, Award for All-Age Advocacy Contracts, Councillor Pressel asked the Cabinet Member regarding procurement for the future provision of the All-Age Advocacy Contracts on progress made since the contract commenced on 1 April 2024. The Leader of the Council advised that she would request that Councillor Bearder provide further details on progress made since its implementation.

On item 4, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) 5G Innovation Region Funding, Councillor Pressel asked if future reports could include information on addressing the gap between those residents that were less connected and the actions that could be taken to address this. Councillor Fawcett outlined the Council's current schemes under the Council's digital strategy including those developed as part of the work done around the rail corridor and how technology could be utilised to expand access to technology.

On item 5, the Workforce Report and Staffing Data – Quarter 2 – July to September 2023, Councillor Pressel asked if information could be provided on the data analysis undertaken to ascertain if the Council's workforce represented the communities in which it served. Councillor Fawcett responded that detailed information was included within the report but noted that improvement had been shown in gender analysis, however more work was required to address the disparity in different ethnic groups.

On item 6, People and Culture Strategy, Councillor van Mierlo asked if the Council policies regarding paternity leave would be reviewed to attract more employees to the Council. Councillor Fawcett responded that policies were currently being reviewed by Officers, however the Council's current policies were above the national standard.

On item 8, Workforce Report and Staffing Data – Q3 October – December 2023, Councillor Phillips asked what was being done to increase the number of non-white staff working at the Council. Councillor Fawcett responded that whilst small improvements had been made, work was underway to move this forward which would be reported in future Workforce Reports.

Councillor Baines requested the Cabinet Member outline the number of full-time equivalent posts removed as part of the staff cuts committed to by the administration. Councillor Fawcett responded that a full consultation with staff was underway with no set target for staff cuts, however this would be reviewed as part of the wider restructure in consultation with the Trade Unions.

In response to a question from Councillor Mallon regarding the representation of 'white working-class males' in the workforce, Councillor Fawcett highlighted that 'class' was not recognised as a fixed group, as

advances were possible for individuals and drew the Council's attention to strategies that could be undertaken by employees, including the positive work of the apprenticeship scheme.

On item 9, Infrastructure Funding Statement 2022/23, Councillor Enright asked if the statement demonstrated if the Council was delivering the infrastructure required for new development. Councillor Roberts responded that the statement was a factual report, however improvements to efficiencies had been made, especially in respect to the reporting of S106 funding.

On item 11, Business Management & Monitoring Report – October/November 2023, Councillor Baines asked if the budgeted savings identified for agency staff had been incorporated into the savings specified for staff cuts, and if the Council had given up on reducing the amount spent on agency staff. Councillor Levy responded that the Council would continue to limit the amount of spend on agency staff and were determined to continue to make the Council as efficient as possible.

On item 13, Freehold Disposal Chilterns End Former Care Home, Henley on Thames, Councillor Baines asked if the Council was opposed to an asset disposal policy that would ensure that Officers could evaluate assets for disposal against a pre-described list of future social value uses. Councillor Levy responded that the Council was legally obliged to obtain the best value for disposal of assets, however where possible, the Council would always seek to assist to do so in the most socially valuable way.

On item 14, Oxford City Centre Accommodation Strategy, Councillor Bartholomew asked if reconsideration would be given to the removal of parking spaces for Councillors as part of the property strategy, particularly the move to Speedwell House. Councillor Levy responded that the Oxford City Centre Accommodation Strategy aimed to ensure that parking spaces be reduced in line with the net zero carbon initiatives, and like residents of Oxford city, full use should be made of the wide range of public transport available.

In response to a question from Councillor Pressel regarding an update to the market engagement exercise, Councillor Levy advised that further discussions were taking place and would update Councillors when appropriate.

On item 15, Budget & Business Planning Report – 2024/25 – January 2024, Councillor Baines asked the Cabinet Member to outline the proposed approach to close the £14M gap for 2025/26 identified in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). Councillor Levy responded that the Council would seek to close any budget gap by ensuring efficiencies were identified and implemented.

On item 17, Commercial Strategy, Councillor O'Connor asked for greater clarification on the strategy and assurances that the needs of Oxfordshire's

residents would be paramount to any future decision-making. Councillor Levy advised that as a Local Authority, the Council was not a profit-making organisation and any funds raised would be transferred to running public services.

In response to queries raised by Councillors Brighthouse, Reeves, Lygo and Pressel regarding the land identified for development of a stadium in Kidlington, Councillor Levy advised that the Heads of Terms had not yet been agreed, however they would be signed prior to any planning application being undertaken. However, due to commercial confidentiality, he could not confirm any further information to the Council at this stage.

On item 19, Business Management & Monitoring Report – January 2024, Councillor Baines asked if information could be provided on the projected number of Education, Health & Care Plan's issued over the MTFS period. Councillor Levy advised that he would provide a response to this following the meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor Elphinstone regarding the expansion of Mabel Pritchard School, Councillor Levy replied that a timeline would be provided to Councillors.

On item 21, Reports received from Scrutiny Committees, Councillor Baines asked if the Council had committed to delivering a comprehensive social value and community welfare strategy as recommended by the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Leader of the Council advised that a report would come back to Cabinet as Council progressed through the current financial year.

20/24 REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS AGAINST MEMBERS

(Agenda Item 12)

On 13 March 2024, the Audit and Governance Committee considered the revised arrangements for dealing with complaints against members and recommended that they be adopted by the Council.

The report was moved by Councillor Roz Smith, Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee, and seconded by Councillor Brad Baines, Deputy Chair. Following discussion, the recommendations were approved unanimously.

RESOLVED (unanimously): to approve and adopt the revised arrangements for dealing with Code of Conduct complaints against members attached to this report together with annexes 1 to 5.

21/24 AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE - WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

(Agenda Item 13)

At its meeting on 13 March 2024, the Audit and Governance Committee received an updated Whistleblowing Policy and recommended its approval.

The report to Council was moved by Councillor Roz Smith, Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee, and seconded by Councillor Brad Baines, Deputy Chair. Following discussion, the recommendations were approved unanimously.

RESOLVED (unanimously): to amend the terms of reference for the Audit and Governance Committee to include the following addition: 'To monitor whistleblowing arrangements and to approve the Whistleblowing Policy'.

22/24 FURTHER DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS RE ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

(Agenda Item 14)

Council considered the Local Government Boundary Commission for England amended proposals for Oxfordshire County Council elections affecting all divisions in Cherwell and most in Vale of White Horse.

The report was proposed by Councillor Gawrysiak and seconded by Councillor Mallon. Following discussion, the recommendations were approved with two abstentions.

RESOLVED: to support the further draft recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) relating to the division boundaries for the Cherwell District and Vale of White Horse District and to submit a response to the further LGBCE consultation confirming this position.

23/24 REVIEW OF POLITICAL BALANCE

(Agenda Item 15)

Following the formation of a new political group in the Council and the proposed replacement of the Corporate Parenting Committee with a Corporate Parenting Panel, Council considered the review of political balance.

The report was moved by Councillor Bloomfield, the Chair of the Council, and seconded by Councillor Rooke, the Vice-Chair.

One amendment was agreed to the membership of committees:

Audit & Governance Committee – Councillor Champken-Woods to replace Councillor Constance.

Following discussion, the recommendations were approved unanimously.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

- a) To note the review of political balance of committees to reflect the formation of a new political group ‘The Independent Voice of Oxfordshire (TIVOO)’ comprising three members: Cllr Stefan Gawrysiak, Cllr Damian Haywood (Deputy Group Leader) and Cllr Sally Povolotsky (Group Leader).
- b) To appoint members to the committees of the Council listed at Annex 1 as amended.
- c) To remove the Corporate Parenting Committee from the list of Council committees.

24/24 PROPOSED LEADERSHIP RESTRUCTURING

(Agenda Item 16)

RESOLVED: that the public be excluded for the duration of item 16 since it is likely that if they were present during that 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.

Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer, had declared an interest in this item at the start of the meeting and absented herself for the discussion and vote.

The report was moved by Councillor Leffman, Chair of the Remuneration Committee, and seconded by Councillor Gawrysiak.

Following discussion in private, the recommendations in the exempt report were approved with 20 votes in favour, 12 against and 15 abstentions.

25/24 MOTIONS BY COUNCILLOR EDDIE REEVES

(Agenda Items 17 to 28)

The time being 3.30 pm, Items 17 to 28 were considered dropped in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing