

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting held on Tuesday, 12 December 2023 commencing at 10.30 am and finishing at 3.25 pm

Present:

Councillor Felix Bloomfield – in the Chair

Councillors:

Alison Rooke	Andrew Gant	Jane Murphy
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
Kevin Bulmer	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	Bob Johnston	Les Sibley
Trish Elphinstone	Liz Leffman	Nigel Simpson
Duncan Enright	Nick Leverton	Roz Smith
Mohamed Fadlalla	Dan Levy	Ian Snowdon
Arash Fatemian	Dr Nathan Ley	Dr Pete Sudbury
Neil Fawcett	Mark Lygo	Bethia Thomas
Ted Fenton	Kieron Mallon	Michael Waine
Nick Field-Johnson	Ian Middleton	Liam Walker
Donna Ford	Calum Miller	Richard Webber

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.

100/23 MINUTES

(Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meetings held on 13 October 2023 and 7 November 2023 were approved.

Councillor David Bartholomew noted that the date for the meeting of Council in February 2025 was showing on the Council website as 18 February despite the fact that the Council meeting agreed to change it to 11 February. Anita Bradley, Monitoring Officer, apologised for the error, thanked Councillor Bartholomew for

bringing it to her attention and assured Council that it would be corrected on the Council website immediately.

101/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(Agenda Item 2)

Apologies were received from Councillors Ash, Banfield, Brighthouse, Constance and van Mierlo.

102/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE

(Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

103/23 OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS

(Agenda Item 4)

The Chair summarised his main activities since the last meeting:

15th November – Long service awards, jointly hosted with the Chief Executive

29th November – RAF Benson gate opening ceremony, jointly cut ribbon with Station Commander Chris Royston-Airey

1st December – Christmas tree festival jointly hosted with St Helen's Church in Benson

6th December – County Lights switch on, jointly hosted with Preservation trust in the Castle Courtyard followed by refreshments at County Hall

Councillor Lorna Berrett, Chair of Botley and North Hinksey Parish Council, was awarded Star Councillor of the Year by the National Association of Local Councils. Cllr Berrett has worked tirelessly during her eight years as a councillor especially on improved parish facilities such as public art, new play equipment, bus stops and the running of valued events such as the Remembrance Day service. Congratulations to Councillor Berrett on her award.

We have been notified that former County Councillor John Cochrane has passed away. Councillor Cochrane represented the Wychwood division from 1985 to 1997, served on the Education Committee, and later on the Social Services committee, where he had responsibility for taking care of its finances. As a business man he was also a representative on the South East England Regional Assembly. Council observed a minute's silence in his memory.

104/23 APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda Item 5)

Council approved the following changes:

Audit & Governance Committee – Councillor Glynis Phillips to replace Councillor Trish Elphinstone

OCC & Employees Joint Consultative Committee: Councillor Ilott to replace Councillor Reeves

105/23 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda Item 6)

The following requests to speak were received:

Petition:

Katie Nellist (SEND Services)

Item 12 – Future Council Governance Group:

Alison Chisholm

Item 13 – Electoral Review:

Julie Maberley

Barry Gooch

Item 17 – Motion by Councillor Sally Povolotsky:

Richard Harding

Kiera Bentley

Derek Stork

Barry Gooch

Alison Semple

Ollly Glover

Item 18 – Motion by Councillor Eddie Reeves:

Claire Brenner

Item 19 – Motion by Councillor Michael O'Connor:

John Skinner

Danny Yee

Robin Tucker

Chris Heron

Zuhura Plummer

Richard Parnham

Emily Kerr

Jemima Hunt

Tony Eade

Gabriele Santi

Alexandra West

Clinton Pugh

Item 21 – Motion by Stefan Gawrysiak:

Robert Aitken

Ian Reissmann

Daniel Leveson

The speeches that have been supplied are attached to the minutes.

106/23 QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

(Agenda Item 7)

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

107/23 QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

(Agenda Item 8)

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

108/23 CABINET REPORT

(Agenda Item 9)

Council received the report of Cabinet covering the meeting held on 21 November 2023.

On item 1, the Care Homes Purchasing Framework, Councillor Middleton asked if the Cabinet Member could give an assessment of how the tougher VISA rules unveiled by the government last week would impact the staffing levels in adult social care. Councillor Bearder responded that the government's announcement last week further compounded the lack of preparation on migration issues that had been apparent since the UK took the decision to leave the European Union. Cllr Bearder thanked all of the hard-working staff in the adult social care sector and stressed the need for proper pay, skills training, and protections for all adult social care workers, wherever they come from.

On item 2, the Business Services Transformation Programme Business Refocus, Councillor Bartholomew asked how much money had been wasted on the decision for functions to remain with Hampshire County Council's Integrated Business Centre, after the administration had previously sought to bring these services back in-house. Councillor Fawcett responded that he was unsure of the specific answer but was happy to find out and provide a written response. He highlighted the pragmatism with which the administration dealt with this situation, due to the changing situation that would have had significant costs for the Council.

Councillor Phillips questioned what the new recruitment process outlined in the report would look like, given that there was a lack of information in the report. Councillor Fawcett noted that the point of the exercise was to ascertain the best practice to improve the recruitment process.

Councillor Pressel asked about the news that County Hall would close for 12* days over the Christmas period and if it would also affect registration services. Councillor Fawcett responded that he was happy to check this.

* The offices were actually proposed to be closed for 10 days (23 December to 1 January).

On item 3, the Treasury Management Mid-Term Review, Councillor Bartholomew asked what approach the Cabinet Member would take next year, when there was a

risk of underachievement given that the base rates of interest rates may fall faster than expected. Councillor Levy reflected the point that the Treasury team had to capitalise on favourable conditions, such as interest rates being higher than expected, and stated that he trusted the Treasury team to take the necessary decisions.

Councillor Baines asked that, given the Treasury team expects interest rates to fall in the medium to long term, why was the building of further new children's homes, special schools and sheltered housing not included in the capital programme. Councillor Levy responded that all projects that the Council wants to do were discussed in the budget, but the Council had to be selective due to the lack of proper central government funding.

On item 4, the Budget and Business Planning Report 2024/25, Councillor Bartholomew raised the new financial strategy for children and social care, but questioned the achievements of the current year given that the overspend continued to rise. Councillor Levy replied that he appreciated the current difficulties in adult social care and that the expenditure was greater than forecast, but reflected upon the progress made, which the new Director of Children Services will hope to build on. Councillor Howson also added some of the areas of improvement in the sector.

Councillor Baines asked why there was not the same ambitiousness to deliver improvements in adult services, as there was in children's services and if he considered demographic changes, as well as a cost-of-living crisis as important factors in stopping this. Councillor Levy replied that the administration was trying to be efficient and caring within adult and children's social care, reflecting upon the different nature of each sector.

Councillor Corkin questioned, in his view, the unnecessary expensiveness of the administration's policies on tree-planting and the 20mph speed limit provisions, challenging the Cabinet Member to make better choices within the next budget cycle. Councillor Levy reflected how the choices to be made were complex and multi-faceted, with challenges made having to be accepted and answered by the Council.

Councillor Hicks asked if there was any way for the Council to greater invest in digital to boost public sector productivity and provide better value for money. Councillor Levy noted a number of investments made by the administration, before reflecting upon the time needed to see these improvements.

On item 5, the Business Management and Monitoring Report, Councillor Bartholomew asked, in light of the projected overspend, when the administration was going to accurately forecast financial decisions. Councillor Levy said that he shared his frustrations, stating that the Children's Services directorate and the two new Cabinet members were working to improve both forecasts and outcomes.

Councillor Baines asked if the Cabinet Member could explain how the administration could find the savings to keep this Council solvent. Councillor Levy

responded that the normal budget process was underway and that the added pressures on the Council would be reflected in the process.

On item 6, the Capital Programme Approvals, Councillor Bartholomew asked what costs were incurred when submitting bids for active travel funding. Councillor Levy noted that officers made active travel funding bids as a normal part of their work.

Councillor O'Connor asked for an outline on who was on the board that oversees and monitors capital projects and when it last met. Councillor Levy responded that it comprised senior officers and was chaired by the Chief Executive, but that he would provide a written response outlining the full details to the Councillor.

Councillor Rouane asked if there were the funds and enthusiasm for the project to relieve congestion in Didcot. Councillor Roberts noted that it was on the programme and that she looked forward to being able to approve this project in the near future.

109/23 GENDER PAY GAP REPORT

(Agenda Item 10)

Council considered a report outlining the difference between the average earnings of men and women across the Council workforce. The Council was required to report on this annually. The Council voluntarily reports on the Ethnicity Pay Gap.

Councillor Neil Fawcett, Cabinet Member for Community & Corporate Services, introduced and moved the report. Councillor Liz Leffman, Leader of the Council, seconded the report. Following debate, the recommendations were agreed.

RESOLVED (unanimously): to receive the Gender Pay Gap Report and approve for publication.

110/23 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID TERM REVIEW

(Agenda Item 11)

Council had before it a report setting out the Treasury Management position at 30 September 2023.

The report was introduced and moved by Councillor Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, and seconded by Councillor Leffman.

Following debate, the recommendation was agreed.

RESOLVED (unanimously): to note the council's treasury management activity in the first half of 2023/24.

111/23 FUTURE COUNCIL GOVERNANCE GROUP - FINAL REPORT

(Agenda Item 12)

The Chair noted that the Audit and Governance Committee had welcomed the findings and recommendations of the Future Council Governance Group. Although the only recommendation that needed to be formally presented to Council was the one relating to the formation of the Education and Young People Overview and

Scrutiny Committee, members of the Audit & Governance Committee requested that the group's full report be appended to the committee's report to full Council.

The report was introduced and proposed by Councillor Stefan Gawrysiak, Chair of the Future Council Governance Group, and seconded by Councillor Roz Smith, Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee. An amendment to the recommendations from the proposers was published in Addenda 2.

Councillor Charlie Hicks proposed and Councillor Duncan Enright seconded an amendment to add the word 'Children' to the title of the proposed new scrutiny committee.

Following debate, the amendment was lost with 13 votes in favour, 38 against and no abstentions.

Following further discussion, the recommendations, as amended by the proposers, were approved unanimously (52 votes in favour, 0 against and 0 abstentions).

RESOLVED:

- 1. To establish an Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee comprising nine elected members.**
- 2. To approve the terms of reference for the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee as indicated in the agenda supplement along with the related changes to the terms of reference for the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**
- 3. To note the work undertaken by the Future Council Governance Group including the findings and recommendations at paragraphs 35 to 40 of the report (please refer to the report at Annex 1).**

112/23 ELECTORAL REVIEW: LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

(Agenda Item 13)

Council considered a report recommending some amendments to the draft recommendations following discussions by the cross-party working group.

The report was introduced and proposed by Councillor Gawrysiak and seconded by Councillor Kieron Mallon. The proposers also moved an amendment to their own recommendations outlined in Addenda 2:

In recommendation c): To request adoption of ~~the boundaries included in the Council submission on 28 March 2023 relating to Banbury as they better reflect the identity of local communities, subject to one minor amendment: the area to the west of the railway line and to the east of the canal should become part of Banbury Calthorpe (rather than Grimsbury and Castle).~~ **boundaries relating to Banbury that better reflect the identity of local communities as included in the updated**

map which reflects the adjustment to the boundary between Bodicote and Banbury.

Following discussion, the recommendations were carried as amended with 38 votes in favour, 11 against and 3 abstentions.

RESOLVED: to support the draft recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) relating to the boundaries for 69 single-member divisions with the exception of those divisions in Cherwell District covering the area in and around Banbury for which the following response is proposed:

- a) **To request that the areas affected by the community governance review determined by Cherwell District Council on 17 October 2022 be included within the Banbury divisions.**
- b) **To request adoption of the boundaries included in the Council submission on 28 March 2023 relating to Cropredy and Wroxton, Adderbury, Bloxham and Bodicote, Deddington and Hook Norton, and Fringford and Heyfords.**
- c) **To request adoption of boundaries relating to Banbury that better reflect the identity of local communities as included in the updated map which reflects the adjustment to the boundary between Bodicote and Banbury.**

113/23 COMMITTEES AND REVIEW OF POLITICAL BALANCE

(Agenda Item 14)

Council had before it a review of the political balance on committees following the introduction of the Education & Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee and two extra Member positions on the Pension Fund Committee as well as a number of changes to political group membership.

The Chair, Councillor Felix Bloomfield, moved the recommendations and they were seconded by the Vice-Chair, Councillor Alison Rooke. The Chair noted that revised Annexes 1 and 2 were published in Addenda 2.

Councillor Mark Cherry proposed that separate votes be taken on the three recommendations.

Recommendation 1 was carried with 41 votes in favour, 1 against and no abstentions.

Recommendation 2 was carried with 48 votes in favour, 0 against and no abstentions.

Recommendation 3 was lost with 4 votes in favour, 40 against and 3 abstentions.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the Horton Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee will retain the same political balance:

- 3 Members of the Liberal Democrats/Green Alliance

- 3 Members of the Conservative Independent Alliance
- 1 Member of the Labour & Cooperative Party
- 1 independent non-aligned Member.

The overall political balance was not affected by the decision to retain the committee.

RESOLVED:

1. **To note the review of political balance of committees to reflect the establishment of the new Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the increase in membership of the Pension Fund Committee and changes to the membership of political groups.**
2. **To appoint members to the committees of the Council listed at Annex 1. A fully populated list with nominations from the political groups for the vacant seats will be circulated ahead of the meeting.**

114/23 INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

(Agenda Item 15)

Council considered a report outlining the recommendations from the meeting of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) on 1 December 2023.

The Chair thanked the members of the IRP for their work, in particular for how quickly they had met to assess allowances after the finalisation of the 2023-24 staff pay award.

The Chair proposed the recommendations and the Vice-Chair seconded. The proposers also moved an amendment to the recommendations as published Addenda 2 as follows:

1. To increase councillor allowances by 5.7% with effect from 1 April 2023 in line with the percentage rise in overall employee costs for Oxfordshire County Council arising from the 2023-24 local government pay award.
2. In future years, to increase all councillor, independent member and co-optee allowances in line with the percentage rise in overall employee costs for Oxfordshire County Council arising from the local government pay award.
This is limited to a four-year term of each council period ending in financial year 2025-26.

Following debate, the recommendations as amended were approved with 26 votes in favour, 0 against and 22 abstentions.

RESOLVED:

3. **To increase councillor allowances by 5.7% with effect from 1 April 2023 in line with the percentage rise in overall employee costs for**

Oxfordshire County Council arising from the 2023-24 local government pay award.

- 4. In future years, to increase all councillor, independent member and co-optee allowances in line with the percentage rise in overall employee costs for Oxfordshire County Council arising from the local government pay award. This is limited to a four-year period ending in financial year 2025-26.**

115/23 AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

(Agenda Item 16)

Council had before it terms of reference that had been updated to reflect the CIPFA guidance on audit committees.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Roz Smith, Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee, and seconded by Councillor Brad Baines, Deputy Chair.

Following debate, the recommendations were agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED (unanimously): to make the changes to the terms of reference of the Audit and Governance Committee (Part 5.1A of the Constitution) as highlighted in Annex A to the report. This reflects the latest guidance from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) – Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police (2022).

116/23 MOTION BY COUNCILLOR SALLY POVOLOTSKY

(Agenda Item 17)

The motion was proposed by Councillor Sally Povolotsky and seconded by Councillor Ian Snowdon.

An amendment, listed in the Schedule of Business, had been proposed by Councillor Duncan Enright but was withdrawn.

Following debate, the motion was carried with 51 votes in favour, 0 against and 0 abstentions.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

Over the last 2 years the South East Strategic Reservoir (SESRO) has been placed by Thames Water into the Water Resource South East Strategy (WRSE), the new Thames Water Management Plan (TWMP) and is also entered into a National Infrastructure evaluation called Regulators' Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development (RAPID) run by OFWAT.

This Council under administrations involving Conservative, Labour & Cooperative, Liberal Democrat and Green parties has consistently stood with

the local residents expressing our concerns and publicly stating our position against the SESRO scheme presented for consultation.

This Council notes that

1. Public consultations carried out in the last 18 months were for a scheme design 50% smaller than that now being taken to the Secretary of State for approval.
2. Vale of White Horse District Council also stands against the designs on the table for SESRO as the local planning authority
3. Despite thousands of responses by Oxfordshire residents on SESRO, none of the issues presented have been addressed comprehensively.

This Council resolves to

1. Ask the Leader to request an all party meeting with the current Secretary of State alongside GARD, CPRE and Political leaders in this chamber and the County Councillors in the proposed zone of development.
2. Ask the Leader request that OFWAT pause SESRO in the RAPID scheme given flaws in the data already highlighted by this Council to Thames Water until formal questions are answered.
3. Investigate a Water Resource Task and Finish CAG option and create a Water Resource Champion.

117/23 MOTION BY COUNCILLOR EDDIE REEVES

(Agenda Item 18)

The time being 3.23 pm, this Motion was considered dropped in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2 as the Chair ruled that there was not enough time remaining to have sufficient debate.

118/23 MOTION BY COUNCILLOR MICHAEL O'CONNOR

(Agenda Item 19)

This Motion was considered dropped in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2.

119/23 MOTION BY COUNCILLOR MARK CHERRY

(Agenda Item 20)

This Motion was considered dropped in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2.

120/23 MOTION BY COUNCILLOR STEFAN GAWRYSIK

(Agenda Item 21)

This Motion was considered dropped in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2.

121/23 MOTION BY COUNCILLOR DONNA FORD

(Agenda Item 22)

This Motion was considered dropped in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2.

122/23 MOTION BY COUNCILLOR EDDIE REEVES

(Agenda Item 23)

This Motion was considered dropped in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2.

123/23 MOTION BY COUNCILLOR DAVID ROUANE

(Agenda Item 24)

This Motion was considered dropped in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2.

124/23 MOTION BY COUNCILLOR ROBIN BENNETT

(Agenda Item 25)

This Motion was considered dropped in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2.

125/23 MOTION BY COUNCILLOR MICHAEL O'CONNOR

(Agenda Item 26)

This Motion was considered dropped in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing