

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting held on Tuesday, 10 September 2024 commencing at 10.30 am and finishing at 3.25 pm

Present:

Councillor Alison Rooke – in the Chair
Councillor Mark Lygo – Vice Chair

Councillors:

Mark Lygo	Ted Fenton	Michael O'Connor
Juliette Ash	Nick Field-Johnson	Glynis Phillips
Brad Baines	Donna Ford	Sally Povolotsky
Hannah Banfield	Andrew Gant	Susanna Pressel
David Bartholomew	Stefan Gawrysiak	Eddie Reeves
Robin Bennett	Andy Graham	Judy Roberts
Felix Bloomfield	Kate Gregory	David Rouane
Liz Brighthouse OBE	Jane Hanna OBE	Geoff Saul
Kevin Bulmer	Charlie Hicks	Les Sibley
Nigel Champken-Woods	John Howson	Nigel Simpson
Mark Cherry	Tony Ilott	Roz Smith
Andrew Coles	Bob Johnston	Ian Snowdon
Imade Edosomwan	Liz Leffman	Peter Stevens
Trish Elphinstone	Nick Leverton	Dr Pete Sudbury
Duncan Enright	Dan Levy	Bethia Thomas
Mohamed Fadlalla	Dr Nathan Ley	Michael Waine
Arash Fatemian	Ian Middleton	Liam Walker
Neil Fawcett	Jane Murphy	

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.

80/24 MINUTES

(Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2024 were approved.

81/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(Agenda Item 2)

Apologies were received from Councillors Bearder, Corkin, Hannaby, Haywood, Mallon, van Mierlo, Miller and Reynolds.

Council on 16 April 2024 agreed a dispensation for Councillor Constance.

82/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE

(Agenda Item 3)

Councillor Rouane declared that he was a director of OxLEP and was a member of the board of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, both of which were referenced in the papers for the meeting and he stated were non-pecuniary interests.

Councillors Graham, Leffman and Thomas also declared that they were members of the board of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.

83/24 OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS

(Agenda Item 4)

Council congratulated Oxfordshire students who have recently received their results for A levels, GCSEs and other specialist qualifications. The Chair also thanked all the teachers, schools and settings who have made it possible for students to achieve their goals.

Council was also notified of the passing in August of former Councillor Teresa Smith. She was first elected as the Labour Member for the then Oxford South Division in 1985 with a majority of 679 votes, returned again in 1989, and stood down ahead of the 1993 elections.

Councillors Brighouse and Howson paid tribute to former Councillor Smith's work on the Council and in particular on the issues facing disadvantaged children. Members stood for a minute's silence in memory.

The Chair thanked those who had attended the Chair's Charity Afternoon Tea at the Earth Trust, Long Wittenham, which raised £1,100 for Parkinsons UK, My Vision Oxfordshire and Earth Trust charities.

The Chair asked Members to take note of the following events:

Monday 16th December 2024 Carol Service with the Bishop of Dorchester, 6.30pm at St Michael's Church Abingdon

Friday 10th January 2025 Chair's charity civic dinner, 7pm in Oxford.

Events attended by the Chair of Council since the July Council meeting were listed in the Schedule of Business.

84/24 APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda Item 5)

Council approved the following change to the membership of the Audit & Governance Committee: Councillor Hicks to replace Councillor Baines

Council noted changes to committee membership given effect by the Monitoring Officer on 21 August 2024 under the delegated authority set out in the Constitution under Part 7.2, section 6.4 (I) using the functions under Section 16(1) and Section 16(2) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to give effect to the wishes of the political groups as regards membership of scrutiny committees and committees of the Council:

Pension Fund Committee - Councillor Stevens to fill the vacancy

Audit & Governance Committee - Councillor Johnston replaced Councillor Hanna.

85/24 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda Item 6)

The following petitions were received by Council

Lesley McCourt: Remove the traffic restrictions in Crowell Road – 152 signatures

Pete Nellist: SEND Services – 669 signatures

Ella Buckingham: SEND Services – 83 signatures

Hannah Pearce: SEND Transport Services – 154 signatures

The following members of the public addressed Council:

Item 13 Motion by Cllr Povolotsky:
Claire Brenner

Item 17 Motion by Cllr Sudbury:
Dr Steve Smith

Item 19 Motion by Cllr Povolotsky:
Anna Gurl

The texts of speeches that have been supplied to us by the speakers are published alongside the minutes.

86/24 QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

(Agenda Item 7)

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

87/24 QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

(Agenda Item 8)

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

88/24 REPORT OF THE CABINET

(Agenda Item 9)

Council received the report of Cabinet covering the Cabinet meeting on 16 July 2024.

On Item 1 Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership - Board Appointments, Councillor Brighthouse asked for a full report on the transfer of the functions of OxLEP to the County Council and how it will relate to the newly established Skills England.

Councillor Leffman responded that Cabinet was reviewing what the structure of OxLEP will be going forwards and she believed they had until October to make that decision. The Skills Bootcamp had been very successful. The aim was to provide upskilling for people to have the opportunity for better jobs especially in the green economy and retrofitting homes for example.

On item 2, Treasury Management Annual Performance 2023/24, Councillor Bartholomew questioned whether further LOBO (Lender Option Borrowed Option) loans would be called-in and what impact this would have on the County Council's finances. Councillor Levy stated that he would ask officers for more details, but that with interest rates falling, the impact was expected to be positive.

On item 3, Business Management & Monitoring Report - May 2024, Councillors Baines and Povolotsky asked if the 20% increase in the charges for the Home to School Transport Spare Seats Scheme was a barrier to working class children getting the best education and if it was not higher than general inflation in the sector. Councillor Levy responded that he did not believe it was a class issue – all children had to get to school. The Council would not charge any more than it had to, given increased operating costs of the services. He stated that the Council would continue to work with the providers and schools to ensure they get best value for money.

Councillor Enright asked if the data on road defects could be broken down by locality and if Members could have the opportunity to provide feedback. Councillor Levy welcomed the suggestion and responded that he would take it up with officers.

Councillor Phillips asked about public support for Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and traffic filters and if the Cabinet will continue to implement them without public support. Councillor Levy responded that he believed that the policies being followed were popular and that the public will have an opportunity to express their views in the Council election in May 2025.

Councillor Bartholomew asked the Cabinet Member to provide details of the steps being taken to recover debt owed to the County Council. Councillor Levy promised to send a written response.

On item 4, Capital Programme Update and Monitoring Report- July 2024, Councillor Baines asked why the additional £4m SEN Capital Grant has not been used to meet growing SEN demand across the county. Councillor Levy responded that the money was put aside by this Council before the amount of the funding from the Government was known. When the Council receives money from the Government it is used as intended.

Councillor Cherry asked when work would start on the new library in Banbury. Councillor Levy responded that he understood fitting out was imminent and that the people of Banbury would have the long-awaited library in the near future.

Councillor Enright asked if there had been any update from Homes England on HIF2 (Housing Infrastructure Fund). Councillor Levy responded that the engagement with Homes England had been positive and it was close to the point where the Council would be able to commit.

Councillor Bartholomew asked how the Cabinet Member could justify the forecast £1m in-year increase in cost for Zero Emission Zones referred to in the report. Councillor Levy responded that a recent report to Oxford City Council demonstrated huge advances in air quality in the city and he looked forward to further clean air measures going forwards.

On item 5, Didcot Garden Town Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF1) - Amendments to the Grant Determination Agreement, Councillor Hicks asked if Cabinet would take on board the vision-led approach advocated in the Government's National Planning Policy Framework which has gone out to consultation. Councillor Roberts confirmed that the Cabinet would respond positively to that aspect of the framework as it was consistent with this Council's LTCP5 (Local Transport and Connectivity Plan).

Councillor Reeves reflected upon the increases to the taxpayer because of the delay to the scheme and asked how much of this would affect local taxpayers in Oxfordshire. Councillor Roberts responded that she would provide a written answer.

Councillor Bennett asked if the Cabinet Member would commit to a review of the forecasts for HIF1 at the end of the process and if she could give him information on the S106 monies that will be available in his division. Councillor Roberts agreed that there would be a lessons-learned exercise for HIF1. She added that the Council was working towards a system whereby Members could check the Section 106 monies in their area online.

89/24 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL PERFORMANCE 2023/24
(Agenda Item 10)

Council had before it for noting the Treasury Management Annual Performance 2023/24 report - the final report for the financial year 2023/24 and setting out the position at 31 March 2024.

The report was moved by Councillor Dan Levy and seconded by Councillor Liz Leffman.

Following discussion, Council noted the report.

90/24 PROPOSED LEADERSHIP RESTRUCTURING - TIERS 3 AND 4
(Agenda Item 11)

RESOLVED: that the public be excluded for the duration of item 11 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.

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

Following discussion in private, the recommendations in the exempt report were approved with 34 votes in favour, 13 against and 3 abstentions.

91/24 URGENT MOTION BY COUNCILLOR SALLY POVOLOTSKY
(Agenda Item)

The Chair stated that she had decided to accept a proposed urgent motion for the Council meeting.

Under Council Procedure Rule 2.2. (xiii) Council will “consider any business which, by reason of special circumstances which shall be specified in the minutes, the Chair agrees should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency.”

The motion proposed to respond to a decision by the Secretary of State on 4 September 2024 to approve the Thames Water Resources Management Plan. This was announced after the agenda for this Council meeting had been published. A period of 60 days has been given for feedback which will expire before the next Council meeting on 5 November 2024.

At the Council meeting on 9 July 2024, Council passed a motion of no confidence in Thames Water and reiterated its opposition to the planned design for SESRO (South East Strategic Reservoir Option) with 29 votes in favour; none against and 13 abstentions. Council Motions in November 2021 and December 2023 opposing the SESRO plans were passed unanimously.

The Chair believed that these reasons amounted to special circumstances that justified taking this motion as a matter of urgency.

The motion was proposed by Councillor Povolotsky and seconded by Councillor Gawrysiak.

Following debate, the motion was carried with 37 votes in favour; 14 against and 0 abstentions.

RESOLVED:

This Council notes that on Wednesday 4th September the Secretary of State approved the Thames Water Resources Management Plan (TWRMP) despite community and council opposition, technical data concerns and damning comments from the Environment Agency.

This Council has passed many motions of concern including a vote of no confidence in Thames Water and we continue to express our concerns that the TWRMP is not fit for purpose and its schemes need independent scrutiny and review, including Waste Management, leaks and the South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO) proposal.

This Council notes that Thames Water has 60 days to take into account feedback and we ask the Leader of the Council and the relevant Cabinet Member to urgently ensure that this Council's voice and that of our residents are heard and that our recommendations have been taken into account.

We reiterate our objection to the plan on the table and continue to call for a public inquiry into the plan, and ask the Leader to request an urgent audience with the Secretary of State to ensure Oxfordshire's voice is heard.

92/24 MOTION BY COUNCILLOR KATE GREGORY

(Agenda Item 12)

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Kate Gregory and seconded by Councillor Bob Johnston.

"The Two Child limit to benefit payments was introduced by the Conservative Government in 2017 and is supported by the current Labour Government. It prevents families from claiming Child Tax Credit or Universal Credit for more than 2 children in the household.

Council notes the recent research conducted by the End Child Poverty Coalition which has found that:

- 1.5 million children in the UK live in households subject to the two-child limit on benefit payments. That is roughly one-in-ten children in the UK.
- In 2023/24 the two-child limit cost families up to £3,235 per child each year.
- Scrapping the two-child limit would lift 250,000 children out of poverty overnight, and significantly reduce the level of poverty that a further 850,000 children live in.

- Scrapping the two-child limit would cost £1.3 billion, however it is estimated that child poverty costs the economy £39 billion each year.

In Oxfordshire 10,850 children in 3050 households are currently affected by the two-child limit to benefit payments.

Council believes that the two-child limit is a cruel policy that should be scrapped

Council resolves to:

- Ask the Leader of the Council to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister expressing Oxfordshire County Council's strong belief that the two child limit to benefit payments should be scrapped.
- Ask the Leader to write to all MPs covering the Oxfordshire area, asking them to commit their public support."

The following amendment was proposed by Councillor Baines and seconded by Councillor Charlie Hicks.

~~"The Two Child limit to benefit payments was introduced by the Conservative Government in 2017 and is supported by the current Labour Government. #~~
This legacy of 14 years of Conservative Government prevents families from claiming Child Tax Credit or Universal Credit for more than 2 children in the household.

Council notes the recent ~~research conducted by the End Child Poverty Coalition which~~ has found that:

- 1.5 million children in the UK live in households subject to the two-child limit on benefit payments. That is roughly one-in-ten children in the UK.
- In 2023/24 the two-child limit cost families up to £3,235 per child each year.
- Scrapping the two-child limit would lift 250,000 children out of poverty overnight, and significantly reduce the level of poverty that a further 850,000 children live in.
- ~~Scrapping the two-child limit would cost £1.3 billion, however it is estimated that child poverty costs the economy £39 billion each year.~~

In Oxfordshire 10,850 children in 3050 households are currently affected by the two-child limit to benefit payments.

Council believes:

- **Reckless decisions by the former Government in supporting unfunded spending commitments has left a black hole in our nation's finances.**

- **Governments and political parties should never commit to unfunded spending commitments, this threatens the stability of our economy.**
- ~~T~~hat the two-child limit is ~~a cruel policy that~~ should be scrapped **once the fiscal environment allows.**

Council resolves to:

- Ask the Leader of the Council to write to the ~~Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister~~ **Minister for the Cabinet Office** expressing Oxfordshire County Council's strong belief that the two child limit to benefit payments should be scrapped **welcoming the establishment of a new child poverty unit and a ministerial taskforce to break down barriers to opportunity for every child.**
- Ask the Leader to write to all MPs covering the Oxfordshire area, asking them to commit their public support **for these measures."**

Following debate, the amendment was lost with 14 votes in favour; 35 against and 0 abstentions.

Following further debate on the original motion, it was lost with 22 votes in favour; 28 against and 0 abstentions.

93/24 MOTION BY COUNCILLOR SALLY POVOLOTSKY

(Agenda Item 13)

The motion was proposed by Councillor Sally Povolotsky and seconded by Councillor Eddie Reeves.

An amendment was proposed by Councillor Eddie Reeves and seconded by Councillor Nigel Simpson. The amendment was accepted by the proposer of the motion.

Following debate on the motion as amended, it was carried with 50 in favour; 0 against and 1 abstention.

RESOLVED:

In September 2023, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission declared their judgment post inspection that the Local Area Partnership (LAP) had multiple systemic failures.

Despite the Priority Action Plan (PAP), the Council is failing to meaningfully engage with **elected members on a cross-party basis or** and capture the voice of **families affected and the user**, our young people.

Council calls on Cabinet to consider;

4. ~~M~~ **More** ~~M~~meaningfully involving young people and youth organisations throughout all policy-making processes within SEND improvement

and the PAP. ~~Co-management and co-creation structures are the best way to ensure direct participation.~~

- 2. Any consultations or engagement with young people by this council must have a visible public follow-up to the outcomes **and tangible metrics to ensure outcomes are delivered.**
- 3. All Council policies ~~and frameworks~~ that affect young people, must include an impact assessment, and ensure ~~there are~~ **that reasonable** mitigation measures **are put** in place ~~for those youth groups that might be negatively impacted by a new policy or framework.~~
- 4. Ensuring that where appropriate all future events, in person/online, run by or funded by OCC, especially those related to the PAP, LAP, and SEND improvement, are open to ~~all~~ **appropriate** young people with the attendance of their parent or carer.
- 5. Launching a rapid task force for the voice of the young person and SEND users, and task them to create a framework for a Youth Forum within ~~3~~ **three** months ~~of this meeting date.~~
- 6. The leader to appoint a SEND Champion **from an opposition group** to enable ~~seldom heard~~ **that a wider range of** voices in the SEND community ~~to~~ **are able to** feed into SEND improvement and services, and that **such** person ~~to~~ **sits** on the SEND Improvement board.

94/24 ITEMS 14 TO 20 MOTIONS BY MEMBERS

The time being close to 3.30 pm, the remaining motions were considered dropped in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing