

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting held on Tuesday, 9 December 2025 commencing at 10.30 am and finishing at 3.40 pm

Present:

Councillor Mark Lygo – in the Chair

Councillors:

Ted Fenton (Vice-Chair)	James Fry	Saj Malik
Thomas Ashby	Andrew Gant	Kieron Mallon
Brad Baines	Emma Garnett	Emma Markham
James Barlow	Sean Gaul	Gavin McLauchlan
Ron Batstone	Stefan Gawrysiak	Ian Middleton
Tim Bearder	Laura Gordon	Toyah Overton
Will Boucher-Giles	Andy Graham	Glynis Phillips
Chris Brant	Tom Greenaway	James Plumb
Liz Brighthouse OBE	Kate Gregory	Susanna Pressel
Mark Cherry	Jane Hanna OBE	Leigh Rawlins
Andrew Coles	Jenny Hannaby	Judy Roberts
Dr Izzy Creed	David Henwood	James Robertshaw
Hao Du	Georgina Heritage	Geoff Saul
Imade Edosomwan	Ben Higgins	Roz Smith
Judith Edwards	David Hingley	Ian Snowdon
Gareth Epps	Johnny Hope-Smith	Peter Stevens
Lee Evans	Robin Jones	Bethia Thomas
Neil Fawcett	Emily Kerr	Liam Walker
Nick Field-Johnson	Liz Leffman	Matt Webb
Maggie Filipova-Rivers	Dan Levy	Tony Worgan
Rebekah Fletcher	Diana Lugova	

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.

97/25 MINUTES

(Agenda Item 1)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2025 be approved and signed as an accurate record of the proceedings.

98/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cotter, Crichton, Ley, McLean, Sargent and Shiri. Councillor Sargent observed the meeting online.

99/25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE

(Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

100/25 OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS

(Agenda Item 4)

The Chair announced that Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) had confirmed that the Oxfordshire local area partnership had taken effective action to make improvements in services and support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. A monitoring inspection to assess progress began on 15 September and ended with onsite activity between 29 September and 1 October 2025. Ofsted and CQC found that the local area partnership had taken “effective action” in all five areas that were previously identified as priorities. Whilst the partnership recognised there was more to do to ensure all children, parents and carers feel these changes, this was an important milestone which showed a positive direction of travel.

The Chair thanked everyone who came to his Charity Christmas Quiz, held on 3 December, which raised £730 for his chosen charities. This was the third of his charity quizzes. Together, they have now raised £2,000 for OXSRAD, Abingdon RDA, and Oxford United in the Community.

The Chair was honoured to lay a wreath at the Oxford Service of Remembrance on Remembrance Sunday this year and thanked councillors who likewise placed wreaths on his behalf in their divisions.

A list of the Chair’s Events since the last Council meeting in November was included in Annex 1.

The Chair also announced some coming events:

10 December from 12.45 pm, the Annual City and County Council Christmas Fun Run in Christ Church Meadows.

On Monday, 15 December, the Chair’s Christmas Carol Service at 6.30pm in St Nicholas Church in Marston. All councillors were invited to attend.

Council had been notified of the passing on 19 November of former county councillor Roy Darke. He was elected as a Labour Member for the Headington & Marston Division in 2009 but did not contest the election in

2013. He served as a member of the Audit Committee, which then became the Audit & Governance Committee, and sat as a member of the Standards Committee and Pension Fund Committee at periods during his term of office.

He also served on Oxford City Council from 2002 to 2004 and again from 2008 to 2016; and Sheffield City Council from 1990 to 1994. The Chair paid tribute to his years of service and Members stood for a minute's silence.

101/25 APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda Item 5)

There were no appointments to be made.

102/25 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda Item 6)

The Chair accepted a request from Becky Howard to present a petition on 'Increase mental health care capacity in Oxfordshire'

Becky Howard stated she arranged the petition after witnessing a series of violent incidents perpetrated by a man in schizophrenic crisis. The petition requested NHS leaders to increase mental healthcare capacity in Oxfordshire by training more nurses, doctors and well-being professionals, opening more beds and recruiting more staff.

Councillor Tim Bearder, Cabinet Member for Adults, responded that the petition raised issues that sat largely within NHS responsibilities. Oxfordshire County Council works closely with the NHS with one of the biggest pooled budgets in the country. Councillor Bearder stated that he would refer the petition to the Chief Officer and ask them to liaise with our NHS partners to get a response back to the petitioner.

103/25 QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

(Agenda Item 7)

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

104/25 QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

(Agenda Item 8)

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

105/25 REPORT OF THE CABINET

(Agenda Item 9)

Council received the report of the Cabinet covering its meetings for 13 November and 18 November 2025.

On Item 1: Local Government Reorganisation – Submission of Proposal to Government.

Councillor Pressel asked how the County Council thought it could possibly run a unitary council across the whole of Oxfordshire, when it had no proper building to work from. Councillor Leffman responded by saying that the unitary authority would decide where it was going to be based and there was no reason why Speedwell and other buildings in the Council's possession should not be part of that consideration.

Councillor Evans asked that, given the Council's revised proposal to have 99 councillors for a unitary Oxfordshire Council, it was difficult to see how any of the proposals for local government reorganisation could go ahead without a boundary review. As such, Councillor Evans asked the Leader of the Council whether the Leader was confident that elections to a new authority would go ahead in May 2027. Councillor Leffman responded by saying that the elections would go ahead in accordance with the current boundaries.

Councillor Malik asked, whether Councillor Leffman had managed to convince her Members to support the 'one unitary' bid proposal or whether the matter was still undecided. Councillor Leffman responded that it was the Government's decision as to the configuration of the new unitary and it was not for Councillor Leffman to persuade anybody.

Item 3: HR and Cultural Change - Quarterly Employee Data Report - Quarter 2 2025-26

Councillor Barlow noted that the non-disclosure of ethnicity increased from 8 to 10% and asked how that compared to other local authorities and similar sized organisations and whether any analysis of the reasons for that had been undertaken. Councillor Fawcett undertook to look into this matter further.

Councillor Kerr asked if Oxfordshire had plans, similar to South Cambridgeshire, to move to a 4-day week, which was working well, or to permit officers more flexible working arrangements, such as allowing staff to work from abroad during the Christmas break. Councillor Fawcett responded that the county council was very keen to give staff as much flexibility as possible in terms of their working arrangements. Furthermore, he said that in terms of the 4-day working week, while some of the data was positive, there were some question marks over the outcomes. However, he was open to looking into this matter further.

Councillor Pressel asked why the amount spent on expensive agency staff had gone up based on the report. Councillor Fawcett confirmed that there had been a slight increase in this quarterly report. However, he said the trend over the last few years, was going in the right direction and stronger practices were in place to monitor the situation.

Councillor Malik asked about access to technology, especially for the elderly, where staff worked from home. Councillor Malik wanted to know what could be done to make sure that people could have face to face interaction with the relevant officers. Councillor Fawcett responded that staff were employed based on having the right skills as well as the right equipment if they were working from home. Furthermore, work could also be carried out from the local offices.

Item 4: Treasury Management Mid-Term Review 2025-26

Councillor Baines asked for details about draft plans for the issuing of a further green climate bond, including the timeline for issue, the total value and what the raised capital would be spent on. Councillor Levy advised that he was unable to provide any details as nothing had been planned as yet.

Item 5. Budget and Business Planning Report 2026/27 - 2030/31

Councillor Baines asked for an outline of the instructions given to directors as part of the budget planning process. Councillor Baines raised the matter , given the anticipated financial pressures expected on the headline budget as a result of the Fair-Funding review, the additional £5.2 million annual pressure to children's services and the financial adjustment already applied to savings within children's services. Councillor Levy responded that directors were expected to keep within the budget levels already set and to make as many savings as possible, while still delivering the services required by residents.

Councillor Smith asked why the process was so different this year. Councillor Levy responded that the full details from central government were awaited. Furthermore, he said that it was likely that, in the spending review, money would be taken away from places like Oxfordshire given it had a high council tax base. Councillor Levy added that the final data from the Fair Funding review as well as final settlements were still being awaited.

Councillor Fry asked what the implications would be for the Council with regard to the packaging extended producer responsibility, which had been introduced to encourage separate recycling of paper but had resulted in extra costs being imposed on the recycling system. Councillor Levy said that he would obtain a written answer to the question and reminded Council that roadside collections were the responsibility of the districts and not of the county council.

Item 6. Business Management & Monitoring Report - Performance and Risk Quarter 2 2025/26

Councillor Middleton noted that recycling was below target and some collection authorities were also looking at changes in collection cycles that could help. He understood that for it to be viable, there needed to be a financial concession from the county council which can be offset against costs as a result of the emissions trading scheme. He asked if this was

something that was being actively considered, and if so, how long was it likely to be before a deal was struck. Councillor Levy said he would have to obtain further information to respond to the issue.

Councillor Baines asked how short the Council had fallen of its target for footway and cycle maintenance and whether the cabinet member believed that the target could be met. Councillor Levy responded that there was a commitment to make active travel as popular as possible but there was an issue with maintaining cycle ways and pavements. He said he would obtain further information on the issue and get a written answer.

Councillor Brighthouse asked what the Council was doing to address the massive risk that existed in relation to the deficit in the High Needs Block. Councillor Levy responded that central government had suggested that there would be a mechanism to deal with the issue. Future costs of SEND was a real issue, and more information was needed from central government to create a work plan.

Item 7. Capital Programme Approvals - November 2025

Councillor Kerr asked what percentage of road building schemes had seen a 20 or 30% capital overrun in the last couple of years. Councillor Levy responded that he would obtain more information and provide a written response on the issue.

Councillor McLauchlan asked what was being done strategically to minimise disruption in the area surrounding Steventon and Benson Lane in Crowmarsh. Councillor Levy responded that the question was an infrastructure issue rather than a financial one but undertook to ensure a written response would be provided.

Item 8. Response to motion by Councillor Creed on Children's Centres

Councillor Creed asked what steps had been taken by Cabinet to ensure that the money spent by local government was going to help the children that were the most deprived and most in need in the county, to ensure the success of the family hubs. Councillor Gaul responded that a strategic plan had been approved which was committed to achieving a good level of development for five-year-olds at 77.8%. This was a higher target than the rest of the country which was at 75%. Furthermore, it was hoped that the Children's Trust Board would also be used to examine what can specifically be done to reduce inequality.

Councillor Baines asked what steps the Council was taking to ensure that Best Start family hubs in Oxfordshire were delivered directly by the county council, rather than being reliant on a post code lottery of suitable charities and voluntary organisations, and how services would be effectively integrated with the in-house youth service. Councillor Gaul responded that there was an investment of £245,000 to get the programme up and running and another £1,000,000 set aside by the authority to boost the work in this

area, which demonstrated a partnership approach. Furthermore, he said that the locations of the primary hubs would follow the geography of the existing district and city councils.

Councillor Brighthouse asked how Cabinet would judge whether the funding going into deprived communities was equitable and enabling those children who were not doing well to succeed. Councillor Gaul responded that Cabinet had received a presentation on how the areas of need were being analysed in order to help determine the specific locations of the family hubs.

Councillor Edwards asked if Councillor Gaul would confirm that a key priority would be to support the existing excellent children's centres in the county. Councillor Gaul responded that work was currently underway to determine who would be supported. He added that the work would be carried out in partnership with the voluntary and community sector.

Item 9. Response to motion by Councillor Hanna on Healthwatch Oxfordshire

Councillor Hanna asked if the mapping of the services of Healthwatch would be completed and given consideration by the Health and Well-being Board (HWB) in time for any required submission of local plans to the NHS, early next year. Councillor Gregory responded that a working group will be established to map out the next steps to ensure that there was a good understanding of the functions that needed protection. Councillor Gregory was committed to ensuring that the good work of Healthwatch continues beyond 2027.

Item 10. Proposed changes to the Waste Acceptance Policy (WAP) for Oxfordshire's household waste recycling centres (HWRCs)

Councillor Middleton noted that there were many concerns around imposing any barriers to the access and use of the HWRC's, which could reduce the use of those facilities and increase fly tipping and asked what the Council was doing to mitigate those concerns. He also asked if the impacts of those changes were being closely monitored and whether they would be reported to Council. Councillor Roberts assured Councillor Middleton that the impacts of the changes would be closely monitored and reported to Council as well as Cabinet. Furthermore, a review would be undertaken as to the effectiveness of the changes.

Councillor Phillips asked if staff were trained to handle asbestos-containing material and whether there were concerns that charging for asbestos disposal would encourage fly-tipping. Councillor Roberts responded that most people do not have a lot of residential asbestos in their own household and highlighted that the waste system was for residential use only and not for trade use. Councillor Roberts said she was quite certain that staff were fully trained with asbestos, given they already handle such waste, but would check the position..

Councillor Creed asked what was going to be done, particularly in areas around Banbury, where there was a requirement to pre-book waste disposal, which it was felt, could increase the amount of fly tipping. Councillor Roberts responded that the impact of the introduction of a pre-booking system would be monitored.

Councillor Snowden asked how costs would not be increased if more staff were required to deal with more people turning up or would volunteers be used. Councillor Roberts responded that it had not been said that more staff would be hired, but that more staff would be available.

106/25 THE CALENDAR OF COUNCIL MEETINGS 2026-27

(Agenda Item 10)

It was reported that, following discussions with the Political Group Leaders, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 2.1, the Chair of the Council had decided to bring forward the Council meeting originally scheduled for 7 July 2026, to 30 June 2026. This change was made in order to avoid a clash with the Local Government Association Annual Conference.

RESOLVED:

That it be noted that the Council meeting originally scheduled for 7 July 2026, be brought forward to 30 June 2026, in order to avoid a clash with the Local Government Association Annual Conference.

107/25 DEVOLUTION FOR OXFORDSHIRE

(Agenda Item 11)

Council received a report requesting Cabinet to approve the decision that Oxfordshire submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) to Government for a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA).

The report was moved by Councillor Liz Leffman and seconded by Councillor Ben Higgins.

Following discussion, an electronic vote was taken. The recommendations were approved with 60 votes in favour, 2 abstentions and no votes against.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the draft Cabinet report be noted.**
- b) That Cabinet be recommended to approve the submission of the Expression of Interest (EOI) to Government, as set out in Annex 2 of the report.**

108/25 GENDER AND ETHNICITY PAY GAP REPORTS 2024/25

(Agenda Item 12)

Council had before it two reports, the Gender Pay Gap Report which the Council is legally required to publish, and the Ethnicity Pay Gap Report which the council also publishes to be transparent about the Council's performance in this area.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Neil Fawcett and seconded by Councillor Liz Leffman. Following discussion, the recommendations were approved with 61 votes in favour, one abstention and no votes against.

RESOLVED:

a) That Oxfordshire County Council's statutory Gender Pay Gap report of 2025 be noted and approval be given to its onward submission to the Gender Pay Gap Service by 31 March 2026.

b) That the Council's voluntary Ethnicity Pay Gap report of 2025, be noted.

c) That approval be given to the publishing of both reports on the Council's website by 31 March 2026.

109/25 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-TERM REVIEW

(Agenda Item 13)

Council received a report on the performance for the first half of the year to September 2025, measured against the budget agreed by Council in February 2025.

The report was moved by Councillor Dan Levy and seconded by Councillor Ben Higgins.

Following discussion, the recommendation was approved with 55 votes in favour, seven abstentions and no votes against.

RESOLVED:

That the Council's treasury management activity in the first half of 2025/26, be noted

110/25 REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

(Agenda Item 14)

Council considered a report of the Independent Remuneration Panel proposing a Scheme of Members' Allowances to apply from 1 April 2026 for a maximum of a four-year period. The report set out options in relation to implementation covered in recommendations 1 to 4, of the report.

The Chair noted a correction in Appendix 1 to the report, page 99 in the agenda pack, in the list of scrutiny chairs in the table, "Health" should be

replaced by “People”. The Chair also reminded Members that Annex 2 to the report, the Equality Impact Assessment, was published in an Addenda.

Councillor Liz Leffman moved recommendations 1 and 5 in the report, for approval. These were seconded by Councillor Neil Fawcett. Following discussion, an electronic vote was taken. Recommendations 1 and 5 were approved with 44 votes in favour, 17 abstentions and no votes against.

RESOLVED:

1) That the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel made in November 2025, and as set out in Annex 1 to the report, be adopted.;

5) That the Council adopts an annual index for a four year period (whereby if no other changes occur to a Scheme, then the Members’ Allowances may increase in relation to that index for a period of no more than four years), and that this should relate (as in previous years) to the annual pay award for local government staff. The increase will be in line with the percentage rise in overall employee costs for Oxfordshire County Council arising from the annual Local Government Pay Award for staff and that this should take effect from the date on which the award for staff similarly takes effect.

111/25 REVIEW OF MEMBER CHAMPIONS

(Agenda Item 15)

Council had before it a report proposing some changes to the role and function of Member Champions and clarifying the appointment process for future Member Champions.

The report was moved by Councillor Liz Leffman and seconded by Councillor Neil Fawcett. Following discussion, the recommendation was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Council’s Constitution be amended to replace part 8.5, Member Champion Role with the text set out in Appendix 2 of the report.

112/25 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR GAVIN MCLAUCHLAN

(Agenda Item 16)

The motion was proposed by Councillor Gavin McLauchlan and seconded by Councillor Peter Stevens.

“Council notes that in July 2025 a judicial review upheld the Secretary Of State for the Environment’s decision to approve the proposed Thames Water

Resources Management Plan which includes the South-East Strategic Reservoir Option in Abingdon.

As a result, Thames Water has to have an Emergency Discharge facility in place including the ability to empty the reservoir at a rate of 1 metre per day, possibly over a period of 3 to 4 weeks. This would put water back into the Thames at a rate of 75 m³/s just south of Abingdon c.3x greater than its normal flow.

Such a discharge could cause havoc along the Thames, endangering Life, residences, businesses, wildlife and the environment, yet there is no requirement for the reservoir operator to have an emergency plan before building the reservoir, only before filling it. Dealing with the emergency in the wider area will be the responsibility of this Council as the local emergency planning authority along with the emergency services.

This Council makes clear its deep concern that we could be made responsible by default for safely managing such an emergency, leaving us with impossible decisions about which lives, homes and businesses to save in a crisis situation.

We therefore call on the Leader to write to the Secretary of State to request clarity on how such an emergency discharge would be managed and to provide a commitment that we will be provided with the resources to do so before any Development Consent Order is considered.”

Following discussion, an electronic vote was taken. The motion was carried with 61 votes in favour, no abstentions and none against.

113/25 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR MAGGIE FILIPOVA-RIVERS

(Agenda Item 17)

The motion was proposed by Councillor Maggie Filipova-Rivers and seconded by Councillor Emma Markham.

“Council notes that:

- Oxfordshire residents have endured successive crises in recent years: Covid, the cost-of-living emergency, underfunding of public services by successive governments, leaving many residents in precarious situations, creating a climate of uncertainty and fear.
- Research shows that rising inequality fuels support for far-right movements, eroding trust in institutions and creating fertile ground for scapegoating and division.
- Against this backdrop, right-wing media and far-right groups have wrongly blamed migrant communities to further their agendas.
- Extensive research, including the Migration Observatory’s 2024 study, finds that migration contributes positively to the UK economy by expanding the labour force, addressing skill shortages, and supporting productivity and growth, with little evidence of wage suppression for

native workers. Migrants' net fiscal impact is generally positive, with greater contributions in taxes than cost to public services.

- Oxfordshire is proud to be the first County Council of Sanctuary, committed to ensuring that everyone who lives here, whether newly arrived or long settled, is treated fairly.

Council therefore resolves to:

- Recognise the risks to our communities if the disinformation, suspicion, and intolerance disinformation generates go unchallenged, and commit to addressing them wherever they occur.
- Work with partners to ensure the safety and wellbeing of everyone in our communities and that racism is confronted wherever it occurs, in schools, workplaces, and on our streets.
- Request that Cabinet supports the co-production of a community cohesion action plan with key stakeholders in consultation with councillors, including actions to support community-led dialogue and ensure appropriate resourcing is considered during budget setting."

Following discussion, an electronic vote was taken. The motion was carried with 49 votes in favour, two abstentions and 10 votes against. The motion was referred to Cabinet.

114/25 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR LIZ BRIGHOUSE

(Agenda Item 18)

The motion was proposed by Councillor Liz Brighouse and seconded by Councillor Izzy Creed.

"This Council being deeply concerned by the impact of poor mental health on adults and children in the County asks the Health and Wellbeing Board to request the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to investigate and report back to them and to the County Council on how Mental Health services provided by Oxford Health and other organisations are tackling this issue.

Such an investigation of issues needs to include addressing accessibility to services including

- Prevention
- Assessment
- Therapeutic support
- Medication
- Emergency intervention such as "sectioning"
- Inpatient beds

How these issues impact on other public services such Community Safety, Public Health, Housing, Schools, Fire and Rescue and the Police also needs to be assessed and understood. Most of all poor mental health impacts on individuals, families, and communities around the County and this must be addressed.

Council requests that the outcome of the investigation be sent to the appropriate Secretaries of State.”

Following discussion, an electronic vote was taken. The motion was carried with 61 votes in favour, no abstentions and none against.

The time being 3.30 pm, the following motions were not considered in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2.

115/25 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES PLUMB

(Agenda Item 19)

**116/25 CROSS-PARTY MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR NATHAN LEY,
SECONDED BY COUNCILLOR JAMES BARLOW**

(Agenda Item 20)

..... in the Chair

Date of signing