

COUNCIL – 10 FEBRUARY 2026

BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLANNING 2026/27 – 2030/31

Report by the Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. The Council is RECOMMENDED to:**
 - a. have regard to the statutory report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer) (at Section 3) in approving recommendations b to d below;**
 - b. (in respect of the budget and medium term financial strategy – at Section 4) approve:**
 - (1) the council tax and precept calculations for 2026/27 set out in Section 4.3 and in particular:**
 - (i) a precept of £567,372,273.74**
 - (ii) a council tax for band D equivalent properties of £2,006.78;**
 - (2) a budget for 2026/27 as set out in Section 4.4;**
 - (3) a medium term financial strategy for 2026/27 to 2030/31 as set out in Section 4.1 (which incorporates changes to the existing medium term financial strategy as set out in Section 4.2);**
 - (4) the Financial Strategy for 2026/27 at Section 4.5;**
 - (5) the Earmarked Reserves and General Balances Policy Statement 2026/27 at Section 4.6 including**
 - (i) the Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)'s recommended level of General Balances for 2026/27 (Section 4.6), and**
 - (ii) the planned level of Earmarked Reserves for 2026/27 to 2030/31 (Section 4.6.1)**
 - c. (in respect of capital – at Section 5) approve:**
 - (1) the Capital & Investment Strategy for 2026/27 to 2036/37 including the Prudential Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision Methodology Statement as set out in Section 5.1;**
 - (2) a Capital Programme for 2026/27 to 2036/37 as set out in Section 5.4 which includes new capital proposals set out in Section 5.3.**
 - d. (in respect of treasury management – at Section 5) approve:**
 - (1) the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy for 2026/27 at Section 5.2 including the Treasury Management Prudential Indicators and the Specified Investment and Non-Specified Investment Instruments.**

- (2) that any further changes required to the 2026/27 strategy be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer) in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation;

Executive Summary

2. This report is the culmination of the Budget and Business Planning process for 2026/27 to 2030/31. It sets out the Cabinet's proposed budget for 2026/27, medium term financial plan to 2030/31 and capital programme to 2036/37, together with a number of strategies and policies that the Council is required to approve for the 2026/27 financial year.
3. The report is divided into five sections.

Section 1 – Leader of the Council's overview

4. Section 1 sets out the Leader of the Council's overview of the proposed budget.

Section 2 - Budget engagement & Scrutiny Recommendations

5. Section 2 sets out key findings from budget engagement along with recommendations from Performance & Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet's response.

Section 3 – Statutory Report by the Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)

6. Under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, the Chief Finance Officer is required to report on the robustness of the estimates made in determining the council tax requirement and on the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves. This assessment, undertaken by the Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer) as the Chief Finance Officer, is set out in Section 3 of the report. Council is required to have regard to this report in making their decisions on the budget.

Section 4 – Revenue Budget Strategy

7. This section sets out the detailed 2026/27 revenue budget and the 2026/27 – 2030/31 medium term financial strategy, the overarching financial strategy and the Earmarked Reserves and General Balances Policy Statement. It includes those matters that the Council must approve as part of the budget setting process, including the council tax requirement and council tax amount for a Band D property.

8. The Final Local Government Finance Settlement is expected on 9 February 2026 and information about business rates collection funds is also outstanding. Where estimates have been made in relation to funding for 2026/27 due to final confirmation of sums not being available prior to publication of this report any variations from the estimates will be reported through the Business Management and Monitoring Reports for 2026/27.
9. Any reductions to assumed business rates income arising from the collection fund position will be managed through the Collection Fund reserve. Any other changes to funding notified following the publication of this report will be managed through General Balances.

Section 5 – Capital Budget Strategy

10. This section sets out the Capital and Investment Strategy and the ten-year Capital Programme to 2036/37, together with the strategies which underpin this including the Treasury Management strategy.
11. The overall Capital Programme is unchanged and remains at £1.6Bn and unchanged since the Budget and Business Planning Report to Cabinet in January 2026.

Risk Management

12. The statutory report of the Chief Financial Officer required under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2002, which forms part of the suite of papers considered by Council in setting the budget each February, includes a section assessing the key financial risks.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

13. The Equality Act 2010 imposes a duty on local authorities that, when making decisions of a strategic nature, decision makers must exercise 'due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination... advance equality of opportunity... and foster good relations.'
14. In developing budget proposals, services have considered the potential impact of change with respect to equality, diversity and inclusion, in line with the council's refreshed framework agreed by Cabinet on 19 November 2024, "Including Everyone".
15. The refresh of the framework gives the opportunity to realign the council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) goals with the broader strategic priorities and reconsider how the framework can be used to drive meaningful change. The council has a track record of going beyond its legal equality duty by considering groups and communities beyond the protected characteristics of the Equality Act. For example, the council considers the impact of its decisions on rural communities, armed forces communities, areas of deprivation and carers. The most recent Including Everyone framework goes further, recognising the council's commitment to considering future

generations in decision-making, as well as refugees and asylum seekers by becoming a Council of Sanctuary. The latest framework also includes reference to the socioeconomic duty and consideration of residents experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage.

16. An overarching summary impact assessment for equalities, taking into account the overall impact of the budget proposals, is included at Section 4.7. It should be noted that a number of proposals are very early in the business case development process.

Sustainability Implications

17. The Climate Action Framework sets the council's commitment to tackling the climate emergency which is underpinned by the Council's priority to put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work.
18. An overarching summary impact assessment for climate of the budget proposals is included at Section 4.8. A number of the proposals are very early in the business case development process and therefore will be subject to fuller Climate Impact Assessment as the proposals are developed.

Staff Implications

19. Staffing implications have been considered as part of the Budget and Business Planning process and the proposals are consistent with the council's People and Culture Strategy.

Financial Implications

20. The Council is required by law to set a balanced budget for 2026/27 before 1 March 2026. Alongside this, there is a requirement under Section 25 of the Local Government Finance Act 2003 for the Chief Finance Officer to prepare a statement on the robustness of the budget estimates and the adequacy of reserves. This report completes the process to achieve these objectives.

Comments checked by: Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance

Legal Implications

21. Part 3.2 of the Council's constitution (Budget and Policy Framework) sets out the obligations and responsibilities of both the Cabinet and the Council in approving, adopting and implementing the council's budget and policy framework.
22. The Council Tax scheme is locally determined by each billing authority under Section 13A and Schedule 1A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992. This report provides information which will lead to the council tax requirement being agreed for 2026/27, together with a budget for 2026/27, five-year medium term financial strategy and ten year capital programme.

23. The Council is required to set a balanced budget taking account of balances and any other available reserves before the commencement of the financial year to which it relates. The Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires a council to set a balanced budget. To do this the council must prepare a budget that covers not only the expenditure but also the funding to meet the proposed budget. The Local Government Act 2000 states that it is the responsibility of the council, on the recommendation of the Cabinet to approve the budget and related council tax requirement.
24. The Local Government Act 2003, section 25 requires the Council's Section 151 Officer to report to the council on the robustness of the estimates made and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves assumed in the budget calculations.
25. The Council has a fiduciary duty to council tax payers, which means it must consider the prudent use of resources, including control of expenditure, financial prudence in the short and long term, the need to strike a fair balance between the interests of the Council Tax payers and ratepayers and the community's interest in adequate and efficient services and the need to act in good faith in relation to compliance with statutory duties and exercising statutory powers.
26. Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 precludes a councillor from voting on a calculation which might affect the calculation of the council's budget if they have an outstanding council tax debt of over two months. If a councillor is present at any meeting at which relevant matters are discussed, they must disclose that section 106 applies and may not vote. Failure to comply is a criminal offence.

Comments checked by: Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

Lorna Baxter, Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)

Background papers:

- 1) Budget and Business Planning Report to [Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 18 November 2025, 2.00 pm | Oxfordshire County Council](#)
- 2) Budget and Business Planning Report to [Agenda for Performance & Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee on Friday, 16 January 2026, 10.00 am | Oxfordshire County Council](#)
- 3) Budget and Business Planning Report to [Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 27 January 2026, 2.00 pm | Oxfordshire County Council](#)

Contact Officers: Section 2.1: Kerry Middleton, Head of Communications, Marketing and Engagement

Section 3: Lorna Baxter – Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)

Section 4: Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance

Section 5: Natalie Crawford, Capital Programme Manager and Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance

February 2026