

Tuesday, 18 February 2025

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COUNCIL

You are summoned to a meeting of the Council which will be held in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB on **Wednesday, 26 February 2025 at 2.00 pm.**



Giles Hughes
Chief Executive

To: Members of the Council

Councillors: Elizabeth Poskitt (Chair), Andrew Coles (Vice-Chair), Joy Aitman, Lidia Arciszewska, Thomas Ashby, Hugo Ashton, Mike Baggaley, Andrew Beaney, Michael Brooker, Adam Clements, David Cooper, Julian Cooper, Steve Cosier, Rachel Crouch, Jane Doughty, Genny Early, Duncan Enright, Roger Faulkner, Phil Godfrey, Andy Goodwin, Andy Graham, David Jackson, Edward James, Natalie King, Liz Leffman, Nick Leverton, Dan Levy, Andrew Lyon, Paul Marsh, Charlie Maynard, Martin McBride, Stuart McCarroll, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Rosie Pearson, Andrew Prosser, Nigel Ridpath, Carl Rylett, Geoff Saul, Sandra Simpson, Alaric Smith, Ruth Smith, Tim Sumner, Sarah Veasey, Liam Walker, Mark Walker, Adrian Walsh, Alex Wilson and Alistair Wray

Recording of Proceedings – The law allows the public proceedings of Council, Executive, and Committee Meetings to be recorded, which includes filming as well as audio-recording. Photography is also permitted. By participating in this meeting, you are consenting to be filmed.

As a matter of courtesy, if you intend to record any part of the proceedings please let the Democratic Services officers know prior to the start of the meeting.

AGENDA

1. **Minutes of Previous Meeting (Pages 5 - 18)**
To approve the minutes of the ordinary and extraordinary meetings of full Council held on 29 January 2025.
2. **Apologies for Absence**
To receive any apologies for absence.
3. **Declarations of Interest**
To receive any declarations from Members on any items to be considered at the meeting.
4. **Receipt of Announcements**
To receive any announcements from The Chair, Leader, Members of the Executive, the Head of Paid Service, the Director of Finance and the Director of Governance.
5. **Participation of the Public**
There were no submissions for public participation received by Democratic Services before the deadline of 12.00pm on Monday 17 February 2025.
6. **Questions by Members**
The following questions have been submitted by Members of Council to Members of the Executive, in accordance with the Council Procedure Rules (Constitution Part 5A, Rule 12).

Written responses will be circulated to Members and published on the Council's website at least one working day prior to the meeting. A Member submitting a question is entitled to ask one supplementary question at the meeting which must arise directly from the question or the response to it.

The supplementary questions and answers will be detailed in the minutes of the meeting.

Question 1 from Councillor Liam Walker to Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning:

Can the Executive Member confirm when the draft housing site proposals that will be considered as part of the Local Plan review will be made public?

Question 2 from Councillor Andrew Coles to Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment

At the full-council meeting on 25th September 2024, you agreed to undertake a review of the council's Tree Management Policy during 2025 after a number of members, from all sides of the chamber, expressed concerns about the current policy, which a previous Conservative administration imposed some years ago. At the time the previous administration didn't take on board the concerns raised by the then Environment overview & scrutiny committee. The concerns members have subsequently expressed is that the existing policy isn't meeting the needs of residents or providing best practice for West Oxfordshire. Could the Executive Member please outline when the review will

take place and in what form the review will take?

Question 3 from Councillor Liam Walker to Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare

What is the latest with the Knights Court site in Oxford?

7. Report of the Chief Finance Officer on the robustness of the budget estimates, adequacy of the Council's reserves and risk 2025/26 (Pages 19 - 26)

Purpose

Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 places a duty on the Chief Financial Officer to make a report to the Council on the robustness of the budget estimates and the adequacy of the Council's reserves.

Recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes this report and has regard to it when making its decisions about budget and Council Tax for 2025/26.

8. Budget 2025/26 (Pages 27 - 148)

Purpose

To provide the proposed budget for 2025/26, whilst also considering approval for:

1. The Draft Base Budget for 2025/26
2. The Council's Capital Programme for 2025/26 to 2031/32
3. The level of Council Tax for 2025/26
4. The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)
5. The Council's Financial Strategies
6. The Council's Pay Policy Statement

Recommendation

That Council resolves to approve:

1. The General Fund Revenue Budget as Summarised in Annex A.
2. The Updated Medium Term Financial Strategy in Annex B.
3. The Capital Programme for 2025/26 to 2031/32 as set out in Annex D.
4. The Council's Pay Policy Statement as set out in Annex J.
5. The Council's Capital Strategy as set out in Annex K
6. The Council's Investment Strategy as set out in Annex L
7. The Council's Treasury Strategy as set out in Annex M

9. Council Tax 2025/26 (Pages 149 - 152)

Purpose

To enable the Council to calculate and set the Council Tax for 2025/26.

Recommendation

That the Council passes the resolution set out in Annex A to the report.

Motions on Notice

10. **Motion A: Devolution and Local Democracy Proposed by Councillor Rosie Pearson, Seconded by Councillor Andrew Prosser**

This motion seeks to establish the key principles which should underlie a democratic devolution process for the future Thames Valley region's strategic authority. We want to see democracy enhanced, and proper accountability to residents and to the unitary authorities which will take over from district and county councils. This Council should support and advocate for the following principles:

- 1) **Democratic oversight of combined authorities:** the decisions, actions and budgets of the strategic authority need scrutiny by a body/assembly with proportional political representation from elected councillors in unitary authorities. This would ensure power is exercised transparently and in the best interests of residents, and prevent excessive power being concentrated in a single individual. Consideration should be given to mayoral candidates standing as joint mayor and deputy candidates.
- 2) **A fairer voting system:** Until 2023, mayoral elections in England were conducted under the Supplementary Vote system. This Council should advocate for a fairer voting system than First Past the Post in future mayoral elections.
- 3) **Costs and fairness:** Mayoral elections should be inclusive, without excessive financial barriers for candidates. The current costs of standing in mayoral elections (£5,000 deposit, and £5,000 candidate booklet contribution) is too high. There should be reasonable limits on election spending so that those candidates with the deepest pockets do not have an unfair disadvantage.
- 4) **Local representation:** unitary authorities should not be so large that they lose local knowledge and influence or the important connection with rural and urban communities. Town and parish councils should have enhanced powers and financial compensation. Strong lines of connection should be made between them and the unitaries, so that there is a clear chain of representation at all levels.
- 5) **Democratic oversight of this council's decisions:** a mechanism should be found to ensure that decisions made during the devolution and local government reorganization process put the long-term future of residents ahead of any short-term political considerations. This could be, for example, a cross-party working group on devolution.

(END)