



Minutes of a meeting of Cabinet held on Thursday, 7 November 2024

Members present:

Joe Harris - Leader	Mike Evely - Deputy Leader
Claire Bloomer	Juliet Layton
Paul Hodgkinson	Mike McKeown

Officers present:

Robert Weaver, Chief Executive	Ana Prelici, Governance Officer
David Stanley, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer	Kira Thompson, Election and Democratic Services Support Assistant
Angela Claridge, Director of Governance and Development (Monitoring Officer)	Mandy Fathers, Business Manager for Environmental, Welfare and Revenue Service
Caleb Harris, Senior Democratic Services Officer	Joseph Walker, Head of Economic Development and Communities

16 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Tony Dale and Lisa Spivey.

17 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

18 Minutes

The purpose of this item was to consider the minutes of the last meeting of Cabinet on 3 October 2024.

There were no comments or amendments to the minutes proposed.

The resolution to accept the minutes was proposed by Councillor Joe Harris and seconded by Councillor Mike Evely.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2024 be approved as a correct record.

Minutes of 3 October 2024 (Resolution)		
RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2024 be approved as a correct record.		
For	Claire Bloomer, Mike Evey, Joe Harris, Paul Hodgkinson, Juliet Layton and Mike McKeown	6
Against	None	0
Conflict Of Interests	None	0
Abstain	None	0
Carried		

19 Leader's Announcements

The Leader made the following announcements:

- Communities across the Cotswolds would be marking Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Monday, and therefore a one minute silence was held to remember those who had died in conflicts.
- Ana Prelici as the Council's Governance Officer would be leaving the Council to go to a promotion at West Oxfordshire District Council, and the Leader wished to thank Ana for all of their hard work at the Council.
- There would be a Cabinet reshuffle with Councillors Tony Dale and Lisa Spivey leaving Cabinet. Councillor Dale's road traffic accident meant that he needed to focus on his recovery, and the Leader thanked him for his role in supporting businesses across the Cotswolds. Councillor Spivey would be leaving the Cabinet to focus on her role at Gloucestershire County Council, and the Leader thanked her for what had been done in particular with flooding and sewage.

20 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

21 Member Questions

There were no Member questions.

22 Issue(s) Arising from Overview and Scrutiny and/or Audit and Governance

There were no issues arising from the Overview and Scrutiny or Audit and Governance Committees.

23 Council Tax Support Scheme 2025/2026

The purpose of the item was to consider and recommend to Full Council the revised Council Tax Support Scheme for the financial year 2025/2026.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Mike Evemy, introduced the item to Cabinet and made the following points:

- The report provided the annual review of the Council Tax support scheme alongside the proposals for the scheme for 2025/26 that would be approved by Full Council.
- The key elements would be the focus on the cost of living and the rise in incomes which would determine the support for the poorest
- Table 3.3 highlighted the income bands the Council uses alongside personal circumstances which would determine the support provided and determine the final amount of Council Tax owed by a resident.
- The Council's scheme was generous to support those on the lowest incomes who were not in a position to pay the full amount. For Band 1 incomes, that may result in entitlement to 100% relief for Council Tax Support, and this then tapers downwards for higher incomes.
- Para 4.1 highlighted the scale of the Council Tax Support Scheme with an approximate spend of £4.9 million shared across the precepting authorities.
- The proposals would see a 4% increase to the bands from the previous year.
- The Hardship Fund would be continued to support residents outside of the support scheme under exceptional circumstances. £33,000 of the fund was remaining which was recommended to be carried over in to 2025/26.

There was a question regarding how generous the Council is compared to other local authorities. It was noted that in comparison with other local authorities, the scheme was extremely generous given that not all councils provide 100% relief.

It was asked whether there was any penalty for residents who claim for Council Tax Support but are then deemed not eligible. The Business Manager for Environmental, Welfare and Revenue Service confirmed there was no penalty for claiming Council Tax support if they were deemed not eligible, and any change of income in the future may mean they are not eligible.

It was noted that some residents may not be able to access online services and Members asked whether there was any support for them. The Business Manager

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confirmed there was a Client Support Officer to help those specific residents at the office or at their home.

Councillor Joe Harris formally seconded and made the following points:

- The Council was generous with its support scheme, and the refresh reaffirmed its commitment to the cost of living issues.
- There was a determination to provide support within the resources of the Council.
- Residents were encouraged to put in an application and the scheme was means tested.

Councillor Evemy was then invited to sum up:

- It was important to note that the bands increase was allowing for pay rises to protect the real terms value of the support given.
- Partners in Citizens Advice Bureau had provided advice on the setting of the scheme.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Evemy and seconded by the Councillor Joe Harris.

Council Tax Support Scheme 2025/26 (Resolution)		
RESOLVED: That Cabinet AGREED RECOMMEND to Full Council:		
1. The increase to income bands as detailed within paragraphs 3.2, 3.3 and Annex A of this report from 1 April 2025.		
2. That any surplus in the Hardship Fund to be transferred over to 2025/2026 for reasons detailed in paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7 of the report.		
For	Claire Bloomer, Mike Evemy, Joe Harris, Paul Hodgkinson, Juliet Layton and Mike McKeown	6
Against	None	0
Conflict Of Interests	None	0
Abstain	None	0
Carried		

24 Update on the Council's involvement in and support for Cost of Living related initiatives

The purpose of the item was to update the Cabinet on the Council's work to support people affected by the cost of living crisis.

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The Cabinet Member for Cost of Living and Inclusion introduced the item and made the following points:

- Thanks were given to officers and to partners such as Citizens Advice Bureau for their report on the initiatives and for their work.
- The Council was working on long-term solutions as well as short-term relief with an example highlighted of the Cirencester Food Pantry that brings communities together.
- The Cotswold Food Network was noted as example of bringing together stakeholders to provide all residents with nutritious locally sourced food.
- 30 community groups had been uplifted by the Council.
- The Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) programme was highlighted as an example to use data to provide targeted support before income issues become a crisis.
- The Household Support Fund provided energy rebates for residents during a difficult time for energy prices.
- The Holiday Activity Food (HAF) Programme provides wellbeing support for children within the District.
- The recent loss of winter fuel payments meant that pensioners would need to be encouraged to apply for pension credit, and the Council was actively supporting these efforts.

Cabinet noted the work of all officers in the Council for supporting these various initiatives by the Council.

It was highlighted that 30,000-40,000 people in the District on Winter Fuel Allowance would be supported through existing schemes as much as possible.

Clarification was provided about Cotswold Food Network as a network run by Council Officers for different partners to discuss ideas for communities. It was also clarified that The Food Pantry was separate to Foodbanks as the pantry was available to all but both did positive work in communities.

There was a question regarding hard copies of material for the HAF programme for libraries and schools to distribute. It was noted as a good idea to help promoting the programme.

It was noted that the work of officers in regard to retrofit within homes will help support those struggling with the cost of bills alongside benefitting the environment.

It was noted that the current funding from the UK Government for the HAF programme was coming to an end, and arrangements were being put in place to mitigate against this.

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The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Claire Bloomer and seconded by Councillor Joe Harris

Update on the Council's involvement in and support for Cost of Living related initiatives (Resolution)

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. NOTED the Council's work to support communities with the cost of living.
2. REQUESTED that the Cost of Living Steering Group continues to consider further opportunities to support communities with the cost of living.

For	Claire Bloomer, Mike Evemy, Joe Harris, Paul Hodgkinson, Juliet Layton and Mike McKeown	6
Against	None	0
Conflict Of Interests	None	0
Abstain	None	0
Carried		

25 Draft Budget 2025/26 and Medium Term Financial Strategy

The purpose of the item was to set out the Budget Strategy to support the preparation of the 2025/26 revenue and capital budgets and present an updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) forecast.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Mike Evemy, introduced the report and made the following points:

- This was the first report to be received on the budget, with the final budget being received in the New Year before February's Full Council
- The Chief Finance Officer's work with the Deputy Leader had been ongoing ahead of the final budget document.
- The budget had not fundamentally changed and there was still a projected budget gap due to the reduction in government funding.
- Table ES1 showed the pressures on the budget which included the cost of auditors, Crowdfund Cotswold fees and Rental income loss from the Bourton VIC.
- A revised budget gap of £6.5 million for 2027/28 was still present but inflation was falling and interest rates were still remaining higher than normal. The benefit from the cash balances would therefore continue.
- The Pay Award Settlement would have an impact which would be reported in 2025, but there was likely to be a positive variance on the MTFS within the Financial Resilience Reserve.

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- Costs of the Phase 1 Publica Review were noted within the report but there were currently no cost estimates provided for Phase 2 due to it being early in the process. However, it was highlighted that transformation of services would be required to provide additional savings.
- It was highlighted that a change to the Business Rates Pool to remove Cheltenham would generate additional revenue.
- Council tax was predicted to see an increase of £5 for Band D properties and the council tax base would increase by 1%. The Second Homes Premium agreed in March 2024 would not be factored into this and the newly published guidance was being examined for how this would impact the decision.
- Core Grant funding was predicted to remain unchanged but the local government settlement would be confirmed before Christmas.
- The significant increase in the capital costs in 2026/27 to replace waste vehicles was highlighted as older vehicles would be decommissioned for lower emission vehicles.
- The increased cost of National Insurance contributions would be supported by the Government.
- There would be a lower business rates relief rate of 40%.

There was a question around the future plans of the Fairer Funding Review from the previous Government. The Deputy Leader noted that a one year settlement would be received but the 2025 Spending Review would then provide a three year settlement. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed this and added that a White Paper on devolution in England would be forthcoming soon.

Cabinet thanked the Deputy Leader and the Deputy Chief Executive for their work in managing the Council's finances.

It was highlighted the Local Government sector was seeing real terms reductions in funding which was harmful for all authorities.

It was noted that the number of S.114 notices being issued by local authorities was on the rise due to financial pressures, and the Council would need to make difficult decisions to safeguard the financial future.

The Deputy Leader in summing up agreed with comments regarding the pressures within the local government sector. It was noted that the Council was planning ahead for the financial challenges, but there was more work to do in advance of the Budget papers being brought back in February 2025.

Draft Budget 2025/26 and Medium Term Financial Strategy (Resolution)

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. APPROVED the 2025/26 Budget Strategy as outlined in the report.
2. APPROVED the revised Capital Programme including the additional expenditure

on Disabled Facilities funded by Disabled Facilities Grant, as set out in Annex B.		
For	Claire Bloomer, Mike Evely, Joe Harris, Paul Hodgkinson, Juliet Layton and Mike McKeown	6
Against	None	0
Conflict Of Interests	None	0
Abstain	None	0
Carried		

26 Schedule of Decisions taken by the Leader of the Council and/or Individual Cabinet Members

The purpose of the report was to note the decisions taken by the Leader and/or Individual Cabinet Members.

The Deputy Leader commented that the two decisions taken on the Bourton-on-the Water tourism levy was a positive story. The decisions were help to provide funding for projects within Bourton-on-the-Water and to increase the levy to £0.60.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet NOTED the decisions taken

The Meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 7.00 pm

Chair

(END)