

Minutes of the Bicester Town Council

A meeting of the **Bicester Town Council** was held on **Monday 12th January 2026** on the Rise of the Annual Town Meeting at the **Chamber Room, Bicester Town Council, The Garth, Launton Road, Bicester, Oxon OX26 6PS.**

Present:

Cllr Alisa Russell (Chair)
Cllr Paul Wheatley (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Tom Beckett
Cllr Donna Ford
Cllr Damien Maguire
Cllr Rachel Mallows
Cllr Chris Pruden
Cllr Les Sibley
Cllr John Willett

In Attendance:

Trevor Longfield, RFO and Finance
Chloe Challinger, Civic and Democratic

52/ Apologies for Absence

2526 RESOLVED that apologies were received from Cllr Dan Hallett, Cllr Harry Knight, Cllr Nick Mawer and Cllr Jim Webb.

RESOLVED that apologies were received from Cllr Sean Gaul (OCC).

53/ Declarations of Interests

2526 RESOLVED that declarations of interest were received from Cherwell District Councillors.

Cllr Tom Beckett, Cllr Donna Ford, Cllr Chris Pruden, Cllr Alisa Russell, Cllr Les Sibley and Cllr John Willett

54/ Public Session

2526 RESOLVED that Cllr Sean Gaul was unable to attend, apologies sent with an update via email provided.

OCC Councillor highlighted the following:

- February budget is still to be finalised.
- Government have assumed all councils will raise their council tax to the maximum allowable before a referendum is required - 4.99%.
- Oxfordshire has a high tax base; Government have calculated that Oxfordshire needs £14 million less.
- Children's Services. Requesting more in the budgeting process to support in areas for youth services.
- Unlikely that Oxfordshire County Council will need to pass any substantial savings.
- Aim to alleviate pressures and therefore mitigate rolled forwards of unmet savings from previous years.
- SEND high overspend, which continues to grow. Forecast of overspend up until March 2026 has risen from £128 million to more than £160 million.

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Signed

Dated

- Government have announced that they will 'own' local authority's high needs overspends from March 2028. Indication that Government will not cover 100% of the overspend with guidance that responsible management of this is considered.
- Oxfordshire requires more foster carers. Minimum age restriction of 18, no upper age limit. Approval process lasts around 6 months. If Bicester Town Councillors can recommend anyone interested, then to contact: fostering@oxfordshire.gov.uk
- Elections expected to take place in May next year (2027) for the new council and decisions to work as a shadow authority for a year alongside the original councils.
- In May 2028, the original councils will cease to exist, with the shadow authority('s) then becoming the actual authority('s).
- Local government reorganisation continues – awaiting Government ministers to decide on the 1, 2 or 3 proposals. Decision expected in autumn 2026.
- Each authority has put in their bids to government detailing their case for their preferred outcome. For Bicester, we are looking at a Cherwell District Council preferred approach.
 - Oxfordshire being carved into two.
 - This side of Oxfordshire; Cherwell District Council, West Oxfordshire District Council.
 - Oxford City Council under this proposal would come together as one, assuming the responsibilities currently carried out by Oxfordshire County Council.
 - Oxford City would prefer to not combine with any of the districts and put forwards a proposal that would see Oxfordshire carved up into three, with Cherwell District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council coming together without them.
 - Oxfordshire County Council have put forwards a single Oxfordshire proposal.

Cllrs reviewed report with nothing to be noted.

CDC Councillor highlighted the following with questions answered:

- Budget consultation still under review.
- Confirmation requested of proposals from the update received from OCC in relation to local government reorganisation. Refer to OCC update above.
- Update of Traffic order outside The Perch required to stop illegal parking. This is to be fed back to CDC.
- Market Square update required. Project underway by CDC on The Perch and the Market square with ongoing concerns about Sainsbury's and the movement of cars.
- Parking outside The Perch. There is an official waiting area for lorries with a planter blocking the turning circle. To be fed back to CDC.
- Illegal waste dumping on sites around Kidlington being investigated further to prevent ongoing issues and has been cleaned up.
- Single waste sites surrounding Bicester and clarification required on whether Cherwell District Council have completed inspections of the sites.
 - July 2025 the environmental agency was to take a legal injunction against the landowners.
 - Encouragement of citizens to report any other sites to be investigated.

55/ Bicester Town Council Budget Approval 2026-2027.

2526 APPROVED precept and budget. Majority in favour of budget with eight approvals to two abstains. Budgets passed with further details regarding Whitelands to be confirmed.

RESOLVED but with **CONCERNS RAISED** for the following:

Suggestion that the budget decision be delayed for approval until confirmations received from Town Clerk regarding ongoing queries.

- 4% raise for precept to bring in line with inflation with a projected 2.5%.
- Requirement to cover expected rises for next year as well as offsetting costs from previous year to bridge difference in the 2% projection of that year. This is due to inflation rising by 3.2%.
- RFO should have been formally signed in prior to the start of the meeting to make them official.
- Request to know when BTC Town Clerk is returning due to the democratic deficit. When information is received can Cllrs be informed with update. Concerns that budget should be approved as unlikely to receive answers until
- An EGM would be required if the budget approval is delayed beyond the end of January 2026.
- Recommendation raised that budgets should have a formalised standard.
- Contracts have inflation increases.
 - Concerns about Whitelands contract and lease agreement. This is with BTC solicitors as is being hastened.
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- Extra housing but with little services to Kingsmere and Elmsbrook.
 - Elmsbrook play parks belong to the developer
 - Kingsmere playground are not up to standard so should not be accepted until there is a twenty-year guarantee from the developer.

56/ Minutes of the Town Council Meeting

2526 APPROVED by full council.

- Approved 35/2526
- Rail freight requiring an update from 50/2526.

57/ Minutes of the Environment Committee Meeting

2526 APPROVED by full council.

58/ Minutes of the Policy Committee Meeting

2526 APPROVED by full council.

- Correction required to Cllr names due to spelling error.

59/ Minutes of the Planning Committee Meeting

2526 APPROVED by full council.

60/ Minutes of the Working Parties Meeting

2526 APPROVED by full council.

61/ Mayors Report

2526 APPROVED by full council.

- Date review required for attendance of event on 18th October 2025 for Deputy Mayor.

62/ Appointment of RFO

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- 2526** **APPROVED** by full council.
- RFO has completed exceptional work with reviewing outstanding insurance claims and bank account corrections.
 - Cllr raised positive feedback on the professional capacities and proactive approach by the RFO.
 - Any further training to be discussed within the Personnel Committee meetings.

63/ Date of Next Meeting
2526 Monday 9th March 2026 – 7pm, The Chamber Room, Garth House

CLOSE OF MEETING:
19:44hrs