



Additional Supplement for:

COUNCIL – WEDNESDAY 27 SEPTEMBER 2023

Agenda No Item

6. **Questions by Members**
(Pages 7 - 14)

Written responses to questions raised by Members, are included within the supplement.
Members are entitled to ask a supplementary question at the meeting if desired.

9. **Review of Political Proportionalities**
(Pages 15 - 18)

The supplement contains Annex A (Political Proportionalities on Committees with three Overview and Scrutiny Committees), and Annex B (Political Proportionalities on Committees with one Overview and Scrutiny Committee), detailed within the original Report FrontSheet for Agenda Item 9 – Review of Political Proportionalities.

11. **Motion B: Keeping West Oxfordshire Safe and Tidy – Proposed by Councillor Jane Doughty, Seconded by Councillor Liam Walker.**
(Pages 19 - 20)

The supplement contains a tabled amendment to the original motion, proposed by Councillor Dan Levy and seconded by Councillor Andrew Prosser.

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Members Questions & Responses for WODC Full Council – 27 September 2023

Question	Raised By	Executive Member / Lead Officer	Response
<p>What adjustment measures is the Executive Member for Finance contemplating to bring the budget back on track in the second half of the current fiscal year given the significant shortfall in income thus far, mainly investment property rent, and which is likely to continue for the rest of the fiscal year?</p>	<p>Councillor Alaa Al-Yousuf - Conservative, Freeland and Hanborough.</p>	<p>Councillor Dan Levy, Executive Member for Finance. / James Howse, Interim Director of Finance.</p>	<p>The Council set the 2023/24 budget in February 2023 with a net operating expenditure total of circa £16m for the year to March 2024. The Quarter One Financial Performance showed an overall overspend of £0.3m against budget, largely due to vacant rental properties at Des Roches, Talisman & Marriotts Close during the first part of the year.</p> <p>Measures have been taken to attract new tenants which has been successful. New leases have recently been agreed at all three sites. The Council receives regular advice from its property agents to ensure that rental terms are optimised. The in-year budget will continue to be monitored closely, and the full year budgetary impact of vacant properties will be updated within Quarter 2 reporting.</p> <p>A 'line by line' review of all budgets is currently also being undertaken by officers in advance of proposals being presented to Council with regard to the</p>

			2024/25 budget. As part of this, a specific review of investment property vacancy rate assumptions is being undertaken to ensure that the estimates contained within the budget are as accurate and prudent as possible.
What progress has the Executive Member for the Environment made with Thames Water in reaching a binding agreement or undertaking to reduce sewage pollution in our waterways as previously announced in a press release dated 24 March 2023?	Councillor Alaa Al-Yousuf - Conservative, Freeland and Hanborough.	Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment. / Phil Martin, Assistant Director, Business Services.	<p>Since the press release dated 24th March, progress continues to be made in regard to reducing sewage pollution in our waterways. The Validation Checklist has now been fully embedded within the Council Planning team and is pro-actively avoiding situations where developers were submitting plans that will have a detrimental impact on the existing sewage infrastructure, which in many locations is not meeting current levels of demand. Regular meetings with Thames Water (TW) have continued, which have focused on verifying the capacity of the 9 main Sewage Treatment Works (SWT) within the district to ensure that TW investment plans adequately meet both current and future demands. This work has also challenged the fundamental elements of the way capacity is calculated, which has resulted in TW working closer with the Council's Local Planning Team.</p> <p>An agreement in principle has been reached with Thames Water who will refine their planning responses to the Council such as firstly acknowledge that there is an issue and secondly, wherever possible,</p>

			<p>that they will specify what is required to resolve the issues and by when that will be delivered. This will address the vast majority of cases but more recently our officers have additionally been working with their counterparts at TW to refine the condition such that it splits out the differences between ‘Network’ and ‘Sewage Treatment’ upgrades and is nuanced as regards whether it is a known and planned development where the required works are already identified or the far lesser number of schemes where the development has come in “off plan” and the required works to ameliorate the impacts have yet to be specified. This has resulted in the production of a working model matrix.</p> <p>The Council will be running another ‘Waterways’ day on the 23rd November in the Corn Exchange, Witney, building upon the success of last year's event. This year the Environment Agency will be attending and presenting, along with other organisations including Thames Water, Windrush Against Sewage Pollution (WASP), Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), The Evenlode Catchment Partnership /Wild Oxfordshire & Blenheim Estates.</p>
<p>Could the Executive Member for Economic Development please update the Council on the</p>	<p>Councillor Alaa Al-Yousuf - Conservative,</p>	<p>Councillor Duncan Enright,</p>	<p>The Council did not borrow externally to fund the purchase of Marriott’s Walk, and instead utilised internal funding built up from balances and reserves</p>

<p>source and terms of funding for the purchase of Marriott's Walk?</p>	<p>Freeland and Hanborough.</p>	<p>Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economic Development. / James Howse, Interim Director of Finance.</p>	<p>held. Indeed, currently the Council holds no external borrowing and therefore pays no interest.</p>
<p>In the February 2023 budget, sixteen growth requests were made. Can you please tell us how many of these roles have been filled and into which positions?</p>	<p>Councillor Michele Mead - Conservative, Carterton South and Leader of the Opposition.</p>	<p>Councillor Dan Levy, Executive Member for Finance. / James Howse, Interim Director of Finance.</p>	<p>Of the 16 posts included as growth items within the 2023/24 Budget (set back in February of this year), it should first be emphasised that some of these related to converting previously fixed term contracts to permanent posts, and some also related to shared posts with other partner councils as part of the Publica arrangement.</p> <p>That said 12 of these posts have been filled in the areas of Democratic Services, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Waste Management, Customer Services, Empty Homes, Regulatory Services, Flooding, Asset Management, Cyber Security, Climate Change and Market Towns.</p>

			<p>Proposals to recruit 3 specialist shared Human Resources staff have not been progressed, due the lack of agreement with partner councils. The recruitment of an additional member of Finance staff is also currently ongoing and is therefore a work in progress.</p>
<p>Did the Executive have their proposed “away day”, and if so, when will members hear the outcomes and be advised of any KPIs set?</p>	<p>Councillor Michele Mead - Conservative, Carterton South and Leader of the Opposition.</p>	<p>Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council. / Giles Hughes, Chief Executive Officer.</p>	<p>The Executive did hold an ‘Away Day’ at the end of May this year. The purpose of the Away Day was to discuss the challenging financial picture facing the Council, and for a strategic discussion to take place on how the Council might respond in terms of service transformation, investment and revenue generation.</p> <p>The discussion on the day fed into the first stages of the budget process for next year’s budget (2024/25) and into early stages of work to revise the medium term financial strategy. Both the budget and medium term financial strategy will be reported through to Executive, Scrutiny and Council in due course.</p> <p>The Away Day did not set any new key performance indicators. On 13 September, the Executive resolved to ask officers to review the performance indicator data set to better reflect the emerging priorities and actions in the revised Council Plan.</p>

<p>Can the Executive Member confirm if Woodstock swimming pool will open next year on the same reduced opening times as this year?</p>	<p>Councillor Liam Walker - Conservative, Hailey, Leafield and Minster Lovell.</p>	<p>Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects. / Stuart Wilson, Leisure Contract Specialist.</p>	<p>For the Summer season of 2023, the difficult decision was made to reduce the opening dates for Woodstock Outdoor Pool, due the energy price crisis which was being faced in the leisure industry (and throughout the UK) at the time.</p> <p>The outdoor pool operates as a loss-making service each year, but this loss is subsidised by the income generating elements of the Leisure contract as a whole. This is true for a number of the provided leisure services; however the intention is that by combining the whole leisure offer with our appointed leisure contractor, we are able to deliver as many services as possible that suit the needs and requirements of the users, by combining profits and losses whilst still returning a positive management fee payment to the Council.</p> <p>For the summer season of 2024, it is hoped that we will be able to return to a standard contract position for the outdoor pool, whereby it will open in April through to September. However, whilst energy prices have stabilised, they still remain high and discussions will need to be made with GLL Better in the New Year to ascertain the financial burden that may still exist above the forecast losses from the original contract tender. Wherever possible, mitigations will</p>
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			<p>be made to reach the contract position or as close to it as possible.</p>
<p>There are a lot of housing estates whereby greenspaces, including woodland areas are maintained by West Oxfordshire District Council. The Council has a Tree Management Policy whereby the Council absolves much responsibility, meaning residents need to pay from their own pocket if there is a tree overhanging their boundary or causing issues with their property. This is not fair. There are many elderly people who have issues with trees close to their property who shouldn't have to have the stress or pay out of their own pocket for tree maintenance.</p> <p>Therefore, will the Executive Member ask officers to review West Oxfordshire District Council's Tree Management Plan, to ensure that trees which affect residential property can be investigated and maintained at a resident's or Councillors request?</p>	<p>Councillor Thomas Ashby - Conservative, Witney West</p>	<p>Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment. / Bob Lightfoot, Waste Contract Manager.</p>	<p>The trees owned by West Oxfordshire District Council are managed under the Council's Tree Management Policy, which was approved by Council several years ago. The policy enables Officers to prioritise tree works in line with Council priorities and budgets. The main priority is to ensure that the tree stock is maintained in a safe condition.</p> <p>If Members of the public contact the Council to ask if non-safety works can be carried out to trees near their properties, these trees are inspected by the Tree Officer to ensure that they are not a risk to people or property. If they are not in an unsafe condition, in line with the policy, residents are advised that they are able to cut any branches back to their property boundary, at their own cost; however the Council will not undertake this work.</p> <p>The tree team are currently considering how issues relating to trees on residential housing estates will be resolved, and, an option appraisal is in its early stages and will be brought forward at such times when fully complete where members will be given more detailed and costed options.</p>

			Consideration within this review will consider assistance to vulnerable members of the community and possibly those receiving benefits and subsidence living.
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Annex A: Political Proportionalities on Committees 2023-24

Seats on committees are allocated based on the principles set out in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (Section 15). The allocation of seats to political groups has been reviewed following receipt of a notification that a Member had joined a political group:

Liberal Democrat: 17

Conservative: 17

Labour 11

Green: 3

Independent (non-grouped): 1

Table A: Initial Seat Allocations

Committee	Seats	Lib Dem	Con	Labour	Green	Total	Balance
Audit and Governance	17	6	6	4	1	17	0
Development Control	24	8	8	5	1	22	-2
Licensing Committee	11	4	4	2	1	11	0
Climate and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee	15	5	5	3	1	14	-1
Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee	15	5	5	3	1	14	-1
Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee	15	5	5	3	1	14	-1
Performance and Appointments Committee	5	2	2	1	0	5	0
Total seats allocated (entitlement)	102	35 (35)	35 (35)	21 (23)	6 (6)	97 (102)	-5

Steps to allocate remaining seats:

1. Labour Group has an overall under-allocation of two seats. Labour Group gains an additional seat on Development Control Committee, which has an under-allocation of two seats and for which the Labour Group has a minority proportional entitlement of 0.39 to an additional seat.
2. Labour Group has an under-allocation of one seat and gains one seat on one overview and scrutiny committee of its choice. Labour chooses an additional (4th) seat on the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
3. All groups now have their full proportional entitlement of seats. The remaining two seats on overview and scrutiny committees (Climate and Environment & Finance and

Management) and the remaining one seat on Development Control Committee are allocated to the Independent Member.

Table B: Final Seat Allocation After Adjustments

Committee	Seats	Lib Dem	Con	Labour	Green	Ind	Total	Balance
Audit and Governance	17	6	6	4	1	0	17	0
Development Control	24	8	8	6	1	1	24	0
Licensing Committee	11	4	4	2	1	0	11	0
Climate and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee	15	5	5	3	1	1	15	0
Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee	15	5	5	4	1	0	15	0
Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee	15	5	5	3	1	1	15	0
Performance and Appointments Committee	5	2	2	1	0	0	5	0
Total seats allocated	102	35	35	23	6	3	102	0
Rounded entitlement		35	35	23	6	N/A	100	
Real entitlement		35.39	35.39	22.90	6.24	N/A	99.92	
Percentage of seats allocated		(34.31)	(34.31)	(22.55)	(5.88)	(2.94)	100	

Annex B: Political Proportionalities on Committees 2023-24 with a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Seats on committees are allocated based on the principles set out in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (Section 15). The allocation of seats to political groups has been reviewed following receipt of a notification that a Member had joined a political group:

Liberal Democrat: 17
 Conservative: 17
 Labour 11
 Green: 3
 Independent (non-grouped): 1

Table A: Initial Seat Allocations

Committee	Seats	Lib Dem	Con	Labour	Green	Total	Balance
Audit and Governance	17	6	6	4	1	17	0
Development Control	24	8	8	5	1	22	-2
Licensing Committee	11	4	4	2	1	11	0
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	24	8	8	5	1	22	-2
Performance and Appointments Committee	5	2	2	1	0	5	0
Total seats allocated (entitlement)	81	28 (28)	28 (28)	17 (18)	4 (5)	77 (81)	-4

Steps to allocate remaining seats:

1. Green Group has an overall under-allocation of one seat and a minority entitlement to an additional seat of 0.49 on both Development Control Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Green Group can choose one seat on one of those committees. Green Group chooses an additional (second) seat on Development Control Committee.
2. Labour Group has an overall under-allocation of one seat and a minority entitlement to an additional seat of 0.39 on both Development Control and Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Labour Group gains one seat on the committee not selected by the Green Group. Labour Group gains an additional (sixth) seat on Overview and Scrutiny Committee).
3. All groups now have their full proportional entitlement of seats. The remaining seat on Development Control Committee and the remaining seat on Overview and Scrutiny Committee are allocated to the Independent Member.

Table B: Final Seat Allocation after Adjustments

Committee	Seats	Lib Dem	Con	Labour	Green	Ind	Total	Balance
Audit and Governance	17	6	6	4	1	0	17	0
Development Control	24	8	8	5	2	1	24	0
Licensing Committee	11	4	4	2	1	0	11	0
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	24	8	8	6	1	1	24	0
Performance and Appointments Committee	5	2	2	1	0	0	5	0
Total seats allocated	81	28	28	18	5	2	81	0
Rounded entitlement		28	28	18	5	N/A	100	
Real entitlement		28.10	28.10	18.18	4.96	N/A	99.92	
Percentage of seats allocated		(34.57)	(34.57)	(22.22)	(6.17)	(2.47)	100	

Amendment to Motion B: Keeping West Oxfordshire Safe and Tidy – Proposed by Councillor Dan Levy, Seconded by Councillor Andrew Prosser.

Words removed in ~~strikethrough~~ text

Words added in **red** text

~~Over the last couple of years, we continue to witness a lack of grass cutting and weeding across Witney and West Oxfordshire. Re-wilding has been used as an excuse for this, when really our pavements are becoming unsafe for those walking and cycling, with weeds ultimately leading to the paths breaking up and generally towns becoming untidy.~~

For a considerable period, local government has been starved of resources by central government that would have permitted it to deliver the level of services that West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) would want, in particular for resurfacing and maintaining roads and paths. This includes grass cutting and foliage trimming services to ensure that pathways don't become unsafe for those walking and cycling.

There are suitable areas across the Town and District where wildflowers ~~could~~ **can** be **left to grow or** planted if our local authorities had the vision, **and other areas where** highway maintenance and safety should be the main focus ~~as the weeds growing from within our pavements will lead them to deteriorate quicker than usual, and the lack of cutting across some verges makes vision at junctions very poor for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians.~~

WODC works with Oxfordshire County Council and with Parish and Town Councils to ensure that verge and hedge cutting is done effectively and appropriately.

Council Resolves to ask the Leader of the Council to:

1. Write to Oxfordshire County Council requesting that **the County Council publicise their grass and hedge cutting policies and ensure that they are complied with in practice and that the County Council keep these policies under review.**
 - ~~• The Council review their grass cutting policies to include:-~~
 - ~~• Cutting grass verges at junctions more regularly;~~
 - ~~• Cutting grass verges one meter between the carriageway and the rest of the verge.~~
2. ~~Ensure that the Council works with Witney Town Council/Oxfordshire County Council to develop a weeding policy so:~~
 - ~~• There is regular maintenance on pavements, kerbs and drains so that fewer potholes are created;~~
 - ~~• Kerbs do not break away from the pavement;~~
 - ~~• Our District can look tidy and we see an improvement in our street scene.~~

2. Write to each parish and town council with an outline of the WODC grass cutting policy.
3. ~~Request that~~ Ask officers to bring forward proposals ~~to the Executive~~ as part of the budget process for ~~to providing the Climate and Biodiversity Team with~~ funding for the planting of ~~to ensure we see more~~ wildflower meadows within West Oxfordshire in appropriate areas.
4. Ask officers to review WODC's policies on a regular basis and ensure that those areas for which WODC is responsible are cut in line with WODC's policies.

If the amendment is agreed, the motion would read:

For a considerable period, local government has been starved of resources by central government that would have permitted it to deliver the level of services that West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) would want, in particular for resurfacing and maintaining roads and paths. This includes grass cutting and foliage trimming services to ensure that pathways don't become unsafe for those walking and cycling.

There are suitable areas across the District where wildflowers can be left to grow or planted, and other areas where highway maintenance and safety should be the main focus.

WODC works with Oxfordshire County Council and with Parish and Town Councils to ensure that verge and hedge cutting is done effectively and appropriately.

Council Resolves to ask the Leader of the Council to:

1. Write to Oxfordshire County Council requesting that the County Council publicise their grass and hedge cutting policies and ensure that they are complied with in practice and that the County Council keep these policies under review.
2. Write to each parish and town council with an outline of the WODC grass cutting policy.
2. Ask officers to bring forward proposals as part of the budget process to provide funding for the planting of wildflower meadows within West Oxfordshire.
3. Ask officers to review WODC's policies on a regular basis and ensure that those areas for which WODC is responsible are cut in line with WODC's policies.