

Public Document Pack



Tuesday 5 March 2024

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COUNCIL

You are summoned to a meeting of Council, which will be held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB on **Wednesday 13 March 2024 at 2.00pm**.



Giles Hughes
Chief Executive

To: Members of the Council:

Councillors: Andrew Coles (Chair), Elizabeth Poskitt (Vice-Chair), Joy Aitman, Alaa Al-Yousuf, Lidia Arciszewska, Thomas Ashby, Hugo Ashton, Andrew Beaney, Michael Brooker, David Cooper, Julian Cooper, Rachel Crouch, Colin Dingwall, Jane Doughty, Duncan Enright, Phil Godfrey, Andy Goodwin, Andy Graham, Jeff Haine, David Jackson, Edward James, Mark Johnson, Natalie King, Liz Leffman, Nick Leverton, Dan Levy, Andrew Lyon, Charlie Maynard, Martin McBride, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Lysette Nicholls, Mathew Parkinson, Rosie Pearson, Rizvana Poole, Andrew Prosser, Carl Rylett, Geoff Saul, Sandra Simpson, Alaric Smith, Ruth Smith, Harry St. John, Tim Sumner, Dean Temple, 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. **Apologies for Absence**
To receive any apologies for absence from Members of the Council.
2. **Declarations of Interest**
To receive any declarations of interest from Members of the Council on any items to be considered at the meeting.
3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting (Pages 7 - 28)**
To approve the minutes of the previous meeting, held on Wednesday 28 February 2024.
4. **Receipt of Announcements**
To receive any announcements from the Chair, Leader of the Council, Members of the Executive, the Chief Executive Officer, the Director of Governance and the Director of Finance.
5. **Participation of the Public**
There were no submissions for public participation received by Democratic Services before the deadline of 12.00pm on Monday 4 March 2024.
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). Oral responses will be provided at the meeting. Following receipt of the answer to their question, Members are entitled to ask one supplementary question at the meeting. The Questions and Answers will be detailed in the minutes of the meeting.
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Q1. Councillor Liam Walker to Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council:
Can you please update Council on the Motion passed for improving mobile signal in West Oxfordshire?
Q2. Councillor Liam Walker to Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council:
Can you please update Council as to the letter sent to the Cabinet Member for Highways and any further response received about junction safety improvements at Barnard Gate after the Motion to full Council was passed?
Q3. Councillor Michele Mead to Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council:
Can you tell us please how many bookings have been received for the hire of the newly refurbished Council Chamber?
Q4. Councillor Alex Wilson to Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council:
The Swift Brick Motion was brought to the Council months ago, and it was put to be scrutinised, however this has not gone to Scrutiny and has not returned to this chamber. Please could the Executive clarify why this has not gone further and if there are any other motions that have been brought to this Council and not actioned?
7. **Recommendations from the Executive**
There are no recommendations to Council from the Executive.

8. Polling District and Places Review (Pages 29 - 46)

Purpose:

To update Members on the requirement to conduct a review of the Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places within West Oxfordshire, to put in hand the necessary initial steps, and to note the suggested timetable for the review.

Recommendations:

That Council Resolves to:

1. Carry out the statutorily required review of the Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places within West Oxfordshire;
2. Agree that, in accordance with the statute, the Acting Returning Officer for the Parliamentary Constituency of Witney; be requested to submit his representations on the review, to include information as to the location of polling stations (both existing and proposed) within Polling Places (both existing and proposed);
3. Agree that the information in this report as to the processes and the timetable for the review be noted; and
4. Agree that consultation responses and representations be considered at the meeting of Council to be held 25 September 2024/or 27 November 2024.

9. Recommendations of the Constitution Working Group (Pages 47 - 74)

Purpose:

To present recommendations from the Constitution Working Group arising from a meeting held on 13 February 2024.

Recommendations:

That Council Resolves to:

1. Approve the changes to the Constitution Working Group Terms of Reference to include responsibility for oversight of electoral matters (Annex A);
2. Adopt the Draft Webcasting Protocol for inclusion in the Constitution as the new Part 6N (Annex B);
3. Agree an amendment to Article 5 of the Constitution to include at 2E.2 that committees will appoint a Vice-Chair at their first meeting following Annual Council (Annex C);
4. Agree an amendment to Part 5A Rule 17.2 to remove the requirement for the Chair to have cast a deliberative vote in order to use a casting vote (Annex D);
5. Agree to amend Part 5A Rule 3.2 to add Member questions to the business for ordinary Council meetings (after public questions) (Annex E);
6. Agree to amend the Public Participation Rules to clarify the rules for speaking at Development Control Committee and Area Planning Sub-Committee meetings (Annex F);
7. Note the progress the Constitution Working Group has made in during 2023/24 and the items to be carried forward into next year, as set out in Annex G.

10. **Motion A: Supporting Our Farmers in West Oxfordshire – Proposed by Councillor Liam Walker, Seconded by Councillor Alex Wilson.**

West Oxfordshire District Council is committed to supporting local farmers and food producers across our district. Britain has some of the highest animal welfare standards in the world, and WODC should engage and work in partnership with our poultry, arable and livestock farmers, to ensure they can continue to enhance our countryside, and contribute to our nation's food security.

Council Resolves to:

1. Work to support local farmers by being sympathetic to diversification opportunities and by promoting local produce during the Back British Farming campaign week;
2. Be vocal in opposing attempts to diminish the role our meat, dairy, and arable farmers play in our rural way of life;
3. Provide food at Council events, where practical, which is sourced from local suppliers, including meat, fish, dairy, fruit, and vegetables;
4. Work to raise awareness of the importance of shopping locally, wherever possible, taking advantage of home-grown, affordable, and nutritious food, especially through our farm shops, reducing the "food miles" on our plates and supporting our producers.

11. **Motion B: Local Authority Mental Health Challenge – Proposed by Councillor Alex Wilson, Seconded by Councillor Michele Mead.**

One in four people experience a mental health problem of some kind each year. One in six report experiencing common mental health problems in any given week in England. To put this into context, on the last census in 2021 there was a population of 114,200 in West Oxfordshire, meaning that 19,033 people are going through this on a weekly basis. What is being done here and at County isn't enough.

We can play a crucial role in improving the mental health of every member of our community, and to tackle some of the widest and most entrenched inequalities in health, as well as the misconceptions that are applied with these. This administration and others must make this a priority across all local authority areas of responsibility, as the current level of support locally is not good enough for those who are in need.

We ask the administration to appoint a Member as "Mental Health Champion" (MHC).

The MHC will advocate for mental health issues in council meetings and policy development, will reach out to the local community to raise awareness of mental health issues and challenge stigma, and will listen to people with personal experience of mental health and get their perspective on local needs and priorities.

The MHC will scrutinise areas that have an impact on people's mental health such as Housing needs, developments, and other areas, will look at fostering local partnerships between agencies to support people with mental health problems more effectively, and will identify at least one priority each year for focused work.

The MHC will respond to occasional requests from the challenge coordinator for updates on activities undertaken in the role of member champion, and will have access

to advice and support from the mental health challenge national partners, to resources on the challenge website, and an annual meeting with other member champions to share information, experience, and ideas.

We also ask the Council to Identify an existing officer to function as lead officer for mental health.

The officer would:

- Advise the member Champion on current issues and priorities;
- Support strategies initiated by the member champion;
- Raise awareness among council staff about mental health issues;
- Seek external support for activities led by the council to promote mental health and wellbeing;
- Provide information to the member champion to support their work;
- Liaise with mental health challenge national partners to secure information and advice.

The lead officer will also have access to the benefits described above for member champion, will support positive mental health in all areas of our community, work with local partners to offer effective support for people with mental health needs, tackle discrimination on the grounds of mental health in our local community, and proactively listen to people of all ages and backgrounds about their needs for better mental health.

Council Resolves to request the Leader of the Council to:

1. Sign the Local Authority Mental Health Challenge;
2. Appoint a member as “Mental Health Champion” (MHC);
3. Identify an existing officer to function as lead officer for mental health.

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WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Council.

Held in the Council Chamber, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB, at 2.00pm on
Wednesday 28 February 2024.

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Coles (Chair), Elizabeth Poskitt (Vice-Chair), Joy Aitman, Alaa Al-Yousuf, Lidia Arciszewska, Thomas Ashby, Andrew Beaney, Michael Brooker, David Cooper, Julian Cooper, Rachel Crouch, Jane Doughty, Duncan Enright, Andy Goodwin, Andy Graham, Jeff Haine, David Jackson, Natalie King, Liz Leffman, Nick Leverton, Dan Levy, Charlie Maynard, Martin McBride, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Lysette Nicholls, Mathew Parkinson, Rosie Pearson, Andrew Prosser, Carl Rylett, Geoff Saul, Sandra Simpson, Alaric Smith, Ruth Smith, Harry St. John, Tim Sumner, Dean Temple, Liam Walker, Mark Walker, Adrian Walsh, and Alex Wilson.

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive), Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance), Frank Wilson (Managing Director, Publica), Andrew Brown (Business Manager, Democratic Services), Max Thompson (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Christine Elsasser (Democratic Services Officer), Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer), Hannah Kenyon (Climate Change Manager), and Georgina Dyer (Chief Accountant).

Other Councillors in attendance: Nil.

CL.136 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from the following Members:

Councillors Hugo Ashton, Phil Godfrey, Rizvana Poole, Andrew Lyon, Ed James, Mark Johnson, Alistair Wray, and Colin Dingwall.

CL.137 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made by Members of the Council.

The Chair drew Members' attention to Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, which provided that if any Members were in Council Tax arrears of two or more months, they must have declared the fact and could therefore not vote on the Budget or Council Tax resolutions.

CL.138 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Councillor Alaric Smith asked that the word "perceived" be removed from the minutes of the previous meeting, in the minutes text of "Motion A: Thames Water Sewage 'Task Force'". This was subsequently amended by Democratic Services.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, proposed that the minutes of the previous meeting, held on Wednesday 31 January 2024, be agreed by Council as a true and accurate record, and signed by the Chair.

This was seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright, was put to a vote, and was agreed unanimously by Council.

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Council **Resolved** to:

1. Agree the minutes of the previous meeting, held on Wednesday 31 January 2024, as a true and accurate record.

CL.139 Receipt of Announcements

Councillor Andrew Coles, Chair of the Council, welcome all attendees to the meeting, and thanked the public in attendance and those watching the meeting online for joining Council.

The Chair thanked Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt, Vice-Chair of the Council, for Chairing the last meeting of Council. The Chair stated they'd watched the Council meeting online whilst on holiday and that it was pleasing to see the new Council Chamber in action.

The Chair asked Members to remember Sergeant Darren Ostler of Royal Air Force Station Brize Norton, who had suddenly passed away. Sergeant Ostler, a C-130 Hercules Aircraft Engineer, was a prominent, well-known, and much-loved Member of the RAF Brize Norton community, in particular with his comrades on No. 47 Squadron. The Chair offered the Council's condolences to Sgt Ostler's family, friends and Royal Air Force colleagues at a very difficult time.

The Chair advised Members of an invitation to a Quiz Night, being held in the Committee Rooms on Friday 17 May 2024, in support of the Chair's chosen charities. The Chair also advised there would be a raffle to support their charities, and that donations would be gratefully received.

The Chair also drew Member's attention to some all-Member briefings that were to take place in the future. There would be an online GLL and Leisure Briefing, on Tuesday 5 March 2024, starting at 5.30pm. There would also be an all-Member briefing regarding the Boundary Commission after the next meeting of Council on Wednesday 13 March 2024, and an online briefing regarding Health and Well-Being would take place on Thursday 14 March 2024 at 6pm, with the Council's Community Wellbeing Manager, Heather McCulloch. The Chair encouraged all Members to attend wherever possible.

The Chair welcomed Christine Elsasser, who had joined the Council's Democratic Services Team. Christine Elsasser had joined the Council until Summer 2024 to provide cover and resilience to the Democratic Services Team in the absence of Michelle Ouzman. Michelle Ouzman had been unwell and had taken time away from the Council. The Chair passed on their best wishes to Michelle Ouzman and wished them a speedy and full recovery, adding they would look forward to welcoming Michelle Ouzman back to the Council soon.

The Chair advised Council that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday 13 March 2024 at 2.00pm in the Council Chamber.

Councillor Charlie Maynard, Executive Member for Planning and Sustainable Development, advised Council that a High Court Judge had ruled that the Planning Inspectorate was incorrect to 'water down' the Council's Net-Zero Plans for the Salt Cross Area Garden Village. The Executive Member relayed a short statement that had been made regarding the Site, adding they were proud of the work that had been undertaken previously by Officers and Local Councillors regarding the site.

CL.140 Participation of the Public

There was no public participation at the meeting.

CL.141 Questions by Members

Questions by Members, as listed on the agenda, and the responses to those questions, which were circulated in advance, were taken as read.

The Chair invited the questioners to ask a supplementary question if they wished and then invited the relevant Executive Members to respond.

The Written Questions, Written Answers, Verbal Supplementary Questions and Verbal Supplementary Answers are detailed in a separate document appended to the Minutes of the Meeting.

CL.142 Recommendations from the Executive

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Change, introduced the report, which sought to agree recommendations made to Council by the Executive, from its meetings since 31 January 2024, other than recommendations relating to the budget which were included at agenda item 9.

The Executive Member thanked the Climate Change Officer Team, and the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, for their work and comments respectively, which both helped to formulate the Nature Recovery Plan to be recommended by the Executive to Council for adoption.

In debate, Members queried resource levels within the Council's Planning Team and if improved staffing levels would help to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain and the ambitions of the Nature Recovery Plan. The Executive Member stated that a specialist Ecologist would be recruited, which would help strengthen commitments and ambitions surrounding Biodiversity Net Gain.

It was also highlighted that the findings of an external judicial review would allow the Council to impose their own standards surrounding Biodiversity Net Gain. The Executive Member further emphasised the importance of Biodiversity Net Gain on the district and wider region.

Councillor Andrew Prosser proposed that Council agree to the recommendations as listed on the report. This was seconded by Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by Council.

Council Resolved to:

1. Adopt the Nature Recovery Plan as part of the Council's compliance with the new biodiversity duty.

CL.143 Report of the Chief Finance Officer on the robustness of the budget estimates, adequacy of the Council's reserves and risk 2024/25

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the report, which provided an update to Council on the robustness of the budget estimates and the adequacy of the Council's reserves. Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 placed a duty on the Chief Financial Officer to bring a report to Council.

In debate, Members referred to the Council's Transformation Group, which was set up to address challenges faced by local Councils during the current economic climate, and how to use Council assets to the fullest extent.

Members also highlighted that the Council's corporate priorities should have been taken into consideration during a public consultation, made available to residents as part of the Budget

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setting process. It was subsequently confirmed that there was a public consultation as a part of the budget setting process.

Councillor Alaric Smith proposed that proposed that Council agree to the recommendation as listed on the report. This was seconded by Councillor Andy Graham, was put to the vote, and was unanimously agreed by Council.

Council **Resolved** to:

- I. Note the report, and have regard to it when making its decisions about the Budget and Council Tax provisions for 2024/25.

CL.144 Budget 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Strategy

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the report, which provided the proposed Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy for the Municipal Year 2024-2025. The Executive had recommended to Council the approval of the Budget proposals by Council at their last meeting.

A copy of the Leader's Speech is appended to the minutes of the meeting.

The Leader's speech raised a point of clarity surrounding references made to 'external funding'. This was confirmed by the Leader to have related to funding received by Council from both partnership working and funding received from Central Government.

Councillor Michele Mead, Leader of the Opposition, responded stating that the opposition could not support the budget proposals as a result of the details and forecasts provided and a predicted budget overspend. Councillor Mead referred to resident's Council Tax being used to purchase a local shopping precinct, to contribute to the Publica transition programme, and on refurbishment & internal modernisation projects that were not necessary. Councillor Mead also highlighted that the administration was not committed to partnership working, and had previously dodged scrutiny by the Council for a recent purchase of a new waste collection vehicle fleet.

Councillor Mead further highlighted that the residents of West Oxfordshire were set to pick up the bill for the spent money by an increase in Council Tax and an increase to the Garden Waste License, and that these increases would squeeze the budget of low-income households within the district.

Councillor Mead summed up stating that the administration had not learnt lessons from last year's budget, and the same lines from twelve months ago were being repeated. Councillor Mead stated that the residents of West Oxfordshire deserved better.

In the wider budget debate, Members of the Executive thanked the Leader for their budget speech and said that they would support the budget. Executive Members individually stated that the Budget would provide great help and assistance to their individual portfolios, and would better support employment, the community, residents and the wider district more generally.

Executive Members stated that the proposed budget and projects completed within their own portfolio areas were brought as a result of the legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing Cost of Living crisis.

Executive Members highlighted that the priorities and ambitions of the Council would be met because of the budget proposals, and individually thanked Officers from across the Council for their continued hard work.

Members referred to predicted budget overspends in the current and next financial years. Several Members alluded to the opposition not proposing budget amendments or any alternative budget proposals. Members also highlighted their surprise to not see any alternatives offered, adding that there was only one option to vote upon.

Members also made references to the responses received from the Council's budget consultation, stating that there were anomalies in the 'scoring' within responses submitted by residents, and that the anomalies helped to unbalance the budget overall.

Members stated that the opposition were looking to score political points by making references to 'Pet Projects' undertaken by the administration, and that the tactic was also being used at a County Council level. Members also highlighted that political point scoring was a tactic to make headlines in the local media and in the local press, adding that it was not a true reflection on the measures proposed.

Members stated they believed that the term 'Pet Projects' was not appropriate, as the projects were undertaken by the administration with the residents of West Oxfordshire in mind.

Members also queried if Councillors from opposition parties were prepared to vote for the budget proposals, go against a 'status quo' and vote with the alliance to accept the budget proposals. Members also stated that no decisions of the Executive had been called in and made further references to a lack of alternative budget proposals or amendments.

Members made reference to the impacts of austerity measures and spending cuts made from central government and how this had impacted the pressures faced by local governments across the country, adding that the proposed budget would provide the best return for residents that it could, despite a central lack of funding. Members also highlighted that other local authorities were suffering as a result of inadequate funding, with some authorities declaring, or being close to declaring effective bankruptcy.

Members also stated that the proposed budget would allow the Council to make further progress on existing projects whilst continually promoting the needs of residents and promoting the environmental benefits.

Members of the opposition parties stated that the proposed budget was one of convenience for the administration and Council, and did not put the resident's priorities first. Members highlighted that proposed rises in Council Tax levels and increases to the Garden Waste License Fee would impact residents when they were already struggling, whilst the administration prioritised needless projects, made unnecessary spending commitments, and residents would pay more Council Tax as a result to cover the associated costs.

Members also referred to the budget surplus of £5,107 and that the figure was being celebrated by members of the alliance parties, when it was suggested that the figure would be a reason for concern.

Many Members individually thanked the work of the Council's finance team for their work in the preparation of the budget proposals, making reference to the amounts of time and resource this would have taken.

During the wider budget debate, Councillor Liam Walker left the Council Chamber for three minutes before returning. Upon being called to speak, the Director of Governance advised that Chair that under Rule 23.2 of Part 5A of the Council's Constitution, Councillor Liam

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Walker would not be permitted to take part in the vote on the budget proposals put forward by the Executive.

After receiving advice from the Director of Governance, the Chair stated that he would allow Councillor Liam Walker to make representations during the debate, but that under Rule 23.2, Councillor Liam Walker would be recorded as Absent during the budget vote. The Chair apologised to Councillor Liam Walker and Council generally for not advising of the procedure rule ahead of the Budget agenda item.

It was subsequently confirmed that Rule 23.2 would be discussed by the Council's Constitution Working Group at their next meeting.

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance and seconder of the recommendations, thanked Members for their contributions in the Budget debate and for their engagement during the wider process. The Executive Member also echoed the appreciation given to the Council's Finance team for their resolve in the budget preparation and their engagement in the wider process.

The Executive Member stated that commercial property management was not generally understood by those who did not have the relevant experience. The Executive member stated that the Budget had been built upon the foundations of the Council's priorities, and the predictions of the upcoming financial year.

The Executive Member highlighted that the backdrop to the budget was one of ongoing uncertainty surrounding local government finance, inflationary pressures and an ever-increasing stretching of resources.

The Executive Member highlighted that the increase in Council Tax was the only way to ensure that services to residents were maintained to the highest level they could be. The Executive Member stated that the proposed increase in Council Tax had arisen due to economic pressures that had filtered down through central government, and that no lectures would be taken from a party that had been responsible for this at national level. The Executive Member assured Council that the alliance would do all they can to ensure that residents were put first despite the challenges faced in the round.

The Executive Member stated that the Alliance of Labour, Liberal Democrats, and Greens, were fully aligned and committed to delivering for residents of West Oxfordshire. The Executive Member highlighted the administration's Asset Management Strategy programme, and described how this would be of vital importance in the future so that the Council's assets could be fully maintained whilst offering the greatest return in the interest of residents. The Executive member made reference to the commercial leasing of the Council's Elmfield site, the refurbishment of the Woodgreen Council Chamber to enable the facility to be used as a community space, and improvements made to the Town Centre Shop on Welch way in Witney.

The Executive Member referred to the ongoing review into the Publica model, emphasising that the administration were committed to ensuring that the Council delivers for the residents of the district, whilst providing sound management of the finances and resources they currently had.

In formally summing up the Budget Debate the Leader of the Council, thanked Members for their contributions in the Budget debate, thanked officers for their ongoing work, and also thanked Member colleagues within the West Oxfordshire Alliance for their engagement during

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the wider process. The Leader concluded by stating they commended the budget to the residents of West Oxfordshire.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed that Council agree the Budget resolutions, as recommended by the Executive. This was seconded by Councillor Alaric Smith.

In accordance with legislation, a recorded vote on the proposition was taken and administered by Democratic Services, and the result was as follows:

FOR the proposition: J Aitman, A Al-Yousuf, L Arciszewska, M Brooker, A Coles, J Cooper, R Crouch, D Enright, A Goodwin, A Graham, D Jackson, N King, L Leffman, D Levy, C Maynard, D Melvin, M Parkinson, R Pearson, E Poskitt, A Prosser, C Rylett, G Saul, S Simpson, A Smith, R Smith, H St. John, T Sumner and M Walker.

AGAINST the proposition: T Ashby, A Beaney, D Cooper, J Doughty, J Haine, N Leverton, M McBride, M Mead, L Nicholls, D Temple, A Walsh, and A Wilson.

Abstentions: Nil.

There being 28 votes For, 12 Against, and 0 Abstentions, with 9 Members not in attendance. The vote was carried.

Council **Resolved** to approve:

1. The General Fund revenue budgets as summarised at Annex B of the report;
2. The updated Medium Term Financial Strategy at Annex C of the report;
3. The Capital Programme for 2024/25 to 2032/33 as set out at Annex E of the report;
4. Fees and charges for 2024/25, as detailed at Annex J and K of the report;
5. The Council's Pay Policy Statement as set out at Annex M of the report;
6. The Council's Capital Strategy as set out at Annex N of the report;
7. The Council's Investment Strategy as set out at Annex O of the report;
8. The Council's Treasury Strategy as set out at Annex P of the report.

The Chair announced a 5-minute comfort break at the end of the Agenda Item, to allow Members to ensure they did not fall foul of Procedure Rule 23.2.

The meeting was adjourned at 3.56pm and reconvened at 4.01pm.

Councillor Natalie King left the meeting at 3.56pm.

CL.145 Council Tax 2024/2025

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the report, which enabled the Council to calculate and set Council Tax levels for the municipal year 2024-2025.

The Council was lawfully required to make resolutions in respect of the tax base (Schedules 1 and 2) and aggregate levels of Council Tax. The aggregate levels of Council Tax comprise the 'basic amount' – Parish and District levy (Schedules 1 and 2), amounts for each Council Tax band (Schedule 3) and precepts for Oxfordshire County Council and the Police & Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley (Schedule 4).

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Councillor Alaric Smith proposed that Council agree to the resolution as set out in the report annex. This was seconded by Councillor Andy Graham.

In accordance with legislation, a recorded vote on the proposition was taken and administered by Democratic Services, and the result was as follows:

FOR the proposition: J Aitman, A Al-Yousuf, L Arciszewska, A Beaney, M Brooker, A Coles, J Cooper, R Crouch, D Enright, A Goodwin, A Graham, D Jackson, L Leffman, D Levy, C Maynard, D Melvin, M Parkinson, R Pearson, E Poskitt, A Prosser, C Rylett, G Saul, S Simpson, A Smith, R Smith, H St. John, T Sumner and M Walker.

AGAINST the proposition: T Ashby, D Cooper, J Doughty, J Haine, N Leverton, M McBride, M Mead, L Nicholls, D Temple, L Walker, A Walsh, and A Wilson.

Abstentions: Nil.

There were 28 votes For, 12 Against, and 0 Abstentions, with 9 Members not in attendance. The vote was carried.

Council Resolved to:

1. Note that, for the purpose of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 Section 35(2), there are no special expenses for the District Council in 2024/25;
2. Note that at its meeting held on 17th January 2024, the Executive acknowledged the calculation of the Council Tax Base for 2024/25:
 - a) For the whole Council area as £47,841.03 [item T in the formula in Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended (the “Act”)]; and
 - b) For dwellings in those parts of its area to which a Parish Precept relates as in the attached Schedule 1.
3. Agree that the Council Tax requirement for the Council’s own purposes for 2024/25 (excluding Parish Precepts and Special Expenses) is £124.38;
4. Agree that the following amounts be calculated for the year 2024/25 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
 - a) £53,370,154 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act, taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils and any additional special expenses.
 - b) £42,341,615 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) of the Act.
 - c) £11,028,539 being the amount by which the aggregate at 4(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 4(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act).
 - d) £230.52 being the amount at 4(c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (2(a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish Precepts and Special Expenses);
 - e) £5,078,072 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish Precepts and Special Expenses) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act as per the attached Schedule 2.

- f) £124.38 being the amount at 4(d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 4(e) above by Item T(2(a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish Precept or special item relates;
 - g) The amounts shown in Schedule 2 being the amounts given by adding to the amount at 4(f) above, the amounts of the special item or items relating to dwellings in those parts of the Council’s area shown in Schedule 2 divided in each case by the amount at 2(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(3) of the Act, as the basic amounts of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate;
 - h) The amounts shown in Schedule 3 being the amounts given by multiplying the amounts at 4(f) and 4(g) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation Band D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands;
5. Note that for the year 2024/25 the Oxfordshire County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley have issued precepts to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each category of dwellings in the Council’s area as indicated below:

| Valuation band | Oxfordshire County Council £ | Police and Crime* Commissioner for Thames Valley £ |
|----------------|------------------------------|---|
| A | £1,213.71 | £179.52 |
| B | £1,415.99 | £209.44 |
| C | £1,618.28 | £239.46 |
| D | £1,820.56 | £269.28 |
| E | £2,225.13 | £329.12 |
| F | £2,629.70 | £388.96 |
| G | £3,034.27 | £448.80 |
| H | £3,641.12 | £538.56 |

- 6. Agree that the Council, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the amounts shown in Schedule 4 as the amounts of Council Tax for the year 2024/25 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings;
- 7. Agree that the Council’s basic amount of Council Tax for 2024/25 is not excessive in accordance with principles approved under Section 52ZB Local Government Finance Act 1992;
- 8. Agree that the following Council/Publica Officers: Director of Finance, Assistant Director – Resident Services, Legal Services Manager, Legal Executive, Business Manager – Operational Support, Revenues Manager, Revenues Lead and Court Officer be authorised to:

Council

28/February2024

- a) Collect and recover any National Non-Domestic Rates and Council Tax; and
- b) Prosecute or defend on the Council's behalf or to appear on its behalf in proceedings before a magistrate's court in respect of unpaid National Non-Domestic Rates and Council Tax.

CL.146 Motions on Notice

There were no Motions on Notice considered by Council at the meeting.

The Meeting Closed at 4.06pm.

CHAIR

Questions by Members – Council – 28 February 2024

| <u>Written Question</u> | <u>Written Answer</u> | <u>Verbal Supplementary Question</u> | <u>Verbal Supplementary Answer</u> |
|---|---|---|---|
| Q1. Councillor Michele Mead to Councillor Joy Aitman, Executive Member Stronger, Healthy Communities: | | | |
| <p>Can you tell us how many local organisations have been successful in reaching their fundraising goals through WestHive and how much has WODC given so far (not including current pledges)?</p> | <p>WestHive has only recently launched its first round.</p> <p>One of the five projects that are currently live on the WestHive platform has reached its target - 'Cycles of Good'.</p> <p>All other projects are still campaigning one of which is currently at 95% of its target - 'Cotswolds Arts Through Schools'.</p> <p>Beyond current pledges there is no further funding given as this is the first round.</p> <p>All information about projects and Council pledges is fully transparent and available on the WestHive website.</p> <p>At the bottom of the homepage, information about the impact to date is available (number of backers, projects and total amount of pledges to date).</p> | <p>Thank you very much for the response, Councillor Aitman. A little disappointing that in the last year we haven't given any of the good projects any money, only pledged.</p> <p>Can you tell me if the money that we were hoping to pledge this year will be carried over to next year, or are we starting from the beginning again?</p> | <p>I don't know what you mean by starting at the beginning again. I don't think we should worry too much about who we've reached so far, and with a lot of these projects it is a slow burn to start with.</p> <p>Nobody wants to be the first up on the platform.</p> <p>As you can see if you follow the platform, that one Group "Cycles for Good" have reached their target and "Cotswolds Arts Through Schools" is just about there. An additional workshop was held today for the new round of funding, and 25 applicants attended that, and they all had really interesting projects.</p> <p>The funding is being given in cycles as we move through them, and where people are apply for funding.</p> |

| Q2. Councillor Thomas Ashby to Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance: | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| <p>Can the Executive Member provide a breakdown of costings for the refurbishment of Committee Rooms 1 and 2?</p> | <p>The costs associated with the refurbishment of Committee Rooms 1 & 2 are -</p> <p>Replace ceilings and upgrade lighting to LED - £10,484 (£7,084 for ceiling, and £3,400 for LED).</p> <p>Decorating (walls, woodwork) - £4,174</p> <p>Carpet £4,200</p> <p>Blinds £1,868</p> <p>Total - £20,726</p> <p>The upgrade of the lighting to LEDs, is aligned with the Council's drive to reduce its overall carbon footprint. Due to the age of the existing ceiling, replacement tiles are no longer available to fit the existing grid so as part of the lighting upgrade a new ceiling will have to be installed.</p> | <p>Thank you for your answer. Now that we have spent £500,000 on this Chamber, and £21,000 downstairs, will there be any other refurbishments in the next 12 months?</p> | <p>In terms of the Agile Working Project, I think we are more or less coming to the end of that. There are other projects that we will look at potentially as we go through the asset strategy.</p> <p>We will be looking at later in the year, because basically what we are trying to do is review all of our assets to see what needs to be done with each of them, and we will put forward proposals in due course where they make sense.</p> |

| Q3. Councillor Thomas Ashby to Councillor Tim Sumner, Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects: | | | |
|---|--|--|---|
| <p>There is a significant sum of S106 money which is designated for an Adventure Play Area in West Witney. Can the Executive Member provide me with an update on the progress on this please?</p> | <p>Monthly project meetings are already taking place between Officers from WODC and Witney Town Council (WTC) to discuss play and leisure facilities in Witney to ensure a joined-up approach. Discussions are taking place about WTC project managing the implementation of the Adventure Play Area in West Witney.</p> | <p>Thank you to Councillor Sumner for your initial response. Is there a date in which these reports will come to Council, and can we have a meeting in the next few weeks to discuss this project?</p> | <p>As it says, it is anticipated that reports will come forward to councillors as the project progresses, so there isn't at this stage a definite date.</p> |
| | <p>WODC Officers are currently in the process of obtaining a quote from SSE in order to look at having the overhead electric cabling put underground to allow for safe development of play structures at the site. Once these are received, the next stage will be to discuss and develop project timelines with WTC. It is anticipated that reports will come forward to councillors as the project progresses.</p> | | <p>I will check with Officers that we can have a follow up meeting.</p> |

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INTRODUCTION

Today I am pleased to present the second budget of this West Oxfordshire Alliance made up of a partnership of Liberal Democrat, Labour and Green Councillors that form this administration since May 2022. We present is a balanced budget with a surplus of £5,107 that shows our commitment to maintaining the financial stability of this Council.

We have been clear over recent years that this council belongs to the people of West Oxfordshire and our investment in our staff, and therefore our services are of paramount importance in setting a budget because this is not just a budget that adds up the numbers on a spreadsheet.

It is a budget that delivers what local people have told us they want to see us deliver while also carefully managing our finances during what is a challenging time for all local government.

ACHIEVEMENTS OVER THE YEAR

The background to this budget is the ambitious Council Plan, which this council approved.

It is a plan based on what our residents told us they wanted this council to focus its efforts on. We have five priorities of equal importance:

1. Putting Residents First
2. Enabling a Good Quality of Life for All
3. Creating a Better Environment for People and Wildlife
4. Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency
5. Working Together for West Oxfordshire

Over the past year we have made real progress across the board.

When it comes to our commitment to putting residents first, we have.

- Installed new technology so that residents can now watch our meetings from wherever they may be.

- We have continued in our commitment to better, more meaningful consultation whether it be for our new local plan or seeking feedback from the young people in the district who are seldom heard.
- We have continued our Executive on Tour – taking our decision making out to local communities so people get more of a chance to engage with us.
- We have opened our new council chamber facility – taking the opportunities of external funding and much needed maintenance and in doing so have created a community space that will be used by our residents and community groups across the district far more than in the past.

In our efforts to enable a good quality of life for all we have:

- Invested in and regenerated Marriotts Walk which has seen new shops opening and the hugely successful Christmas Market that saw nearly 15,000 shoppers visiting the centre. We are also working on supporting other markets across the district.

-

Creating a better environment for people and wildlife is crucial along with tackling the climate and ecological emergency. In this area we have:

- Seen great progress in our work with Thames Water to stop the polluting of our waterways. We held another successful, sold-out Waterways Day to discuss action on protecting our waterways. We have also made changes to our planning process to make sure any new homes have the sewage treatment infrastructure they need.
- Officers continued to work tirelessly to reduce our carbon footprint as a Council and across the district. This includes work to install low-carbon heating in our buildings, creating more natural habitats and expanding our electric vehicle fleet.

At the heart of a lot of our work is working together. For this priority we have:

- Launched WestHive, our Crowdfunding website to help local communities access the funding they need. This programme is designed to help residents

and groups to collaborate and deliver locally led projects that are genuinely supported by local community networks, businesses and the Council. We have already seen our first project funded through the site and we expect many more will follow.

- Worked closely with our residents, campaign group and
- town and parish councils to help them respond to the proposed Botley West Solar Farm project.
- Continued work on our local plan with over 2000 responses to our latest consultation. The Local Plan will be crucial for the whole district, and we are committed to delivering it in partnership with our communities.

On top of the progress, we have made against our priorities we have also continued to deliver council services. In the past year we have:

- responded to over 775 fly tips.
- answered 74,361 queries through our customer services team.
- emptied over 6.83M million bins.
- Processed over 2600 planning applications.
- supported over 170 households to avoid them becoming homeless.
- investigated 390 abandoned vehicles.
- processed over 750 benefits and financial support claims for people in need of support.
- In 2023, our work with housing providers has helped us deliver a range of affordable homes, including 164 rental and 99 shared ownership properties.
- We also built 4 First Homes, a new form of affordable home ownership, bringing us a step closer to meeting our community's housing needs.

Most importantly, we have been supporting people and communities during the cost-of-living crisis.

Many people from all walks of life struggle from time to time and during the cost-of-living crisis many people have found themselves in difficult positions they were not expecting.

We have continued to support communities through the cost-of-living crisis by providing funding to our amazing community groups that provide support to local people such as foodbanks and community larders.

There is support available from us at the District Council along with many our national and local organisations. We have pulled together a wide range of resources our residents can go to for support whether that be help with energy payments, benefits, or childcare costs through to making your home more efficient.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

Now while we have made good progress, there is still much more for us to do and that is where this year's budget comes in.

Before I get to specifics for this year it is important, we recognise the national context in which we set this budget.

This year has seen local government funding enter the national spotlight. Multiple councils have issued section 114 notices and many more are warning of significant financial challenges.

As you will all be aware local government funding has reduced over a number of years. We have lost 60% of our funding in real terms as government grants have disappeared and inflation has increased costs.

We also need to consider and prepare for the fundamental changes to Local Government Finance by central government which are expected in 2026/27. If these go through as we have been told, we could lose up to 38% of our current funding.

Single year settlements add to the financial strain on the Council, restricting our ability to confidently plan for more than one year in advance.

And on top of the funding challenges there is the prospect of a general election and inflation remains high, adding a lot to the costs of running the organisation.

For this budget we have made reasonable assumptions with regards to this pressure and uncertainty and these assumptions underpin the 2024/25 budget and also our Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

THIS YEARS BUDGET

Now with that context in mind I would like to propose the budget for the next financial year.

This is a balanced budget, continuing to deliver local services but also gives us opportunities to invest in improvements across the district. It also sets us up for the future funding challenges, creating a sound platform for us to move forward.

Given the reduction in government funding, we work diligently to attract external funding whenever possible. Over the past year

- The Climate team, in collaboration with other Oxfordshire authorities, secured £298k of Innovate UK funding to enable nature-based carbon offsetting in Oxfordshire.
- The Climate Team submitted an application for £1.6m Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) 3c funding for the decarbonisation of Windrush Leisure Centre.
- The Leisure team secured £355k of Swimming Pool Support Funding from Sport England. to assist with the running costs of swimming pools in the district.

It will be crucial to continue this work over coming year to make the most of external funding opportunities to offset some of the core funding we are losing. We don't know when or where these opportunities will come up, but we will be sure to attract as much external funding as we can.

As I said before this budget also looks to build on the progress, we have made against the priorities set out in the Council plan. I would like to highlight some key areas of investment that we believe will deliver for local residents:

- A Strategic Housing Development & Enabling Manager who will help us to shape a more proactive approach to increase the supply of affordable housing within the district.
- A Youth Development Officer to help us better support young people and build on the results and findings of the recent Youth Needs Assessment where over 3000 young people engaged.
- A Nature Recovery Officer to help deliver the Council's Nature Recovery Plan.
- A Climate Change Officer post made permanent to continue to deliver against the ambitious target of carbon neutrality by 2030.
- A capital allocation for a phased waste fleet replacement programme. This will ensure that we continue to deliver the most efficient service. A phased approach will also allow us to take advantage of new technologies as they mature and become more reliable and spread the cost over a number of years – thus reducing the amount of external borrowing needed.

And finally, John Donne famously said, “no man is an island” and we cannot make progress, on addressing the challenges facing West Oxfordshire, as a Council standing alone.

Partnership is the key, meaningful partnership with our town and parish councils, and beyond, to ensure we are working together in the most effective way.

Working together we can create more opportunities to invest and attract inward investment so that our residents have secure jobs, housing and a healthy and green environment to sustain a quality of life.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have taken a prudent approach to the budget setting which is appropriate as we enter turbulent waters in terms of local government finances with funding reforms, continued single year settlements and a general election on the horizon.


This administration will continue to deliver against our priorities and keep a steady hand on the tiller of our finances.

This balanced budget for 2024/25 is a sign of our commitment to our residents, local businesses and other organisations that we will continue to take action on the issues that matter most to them.

West Oxfordshire is a fantastic district with amazing people, and we will continue to work hard as an administration to support residents, business and communities over the next year.

I commend this Budget for approval.

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|  WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL | WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL |
| Name and Date of Committee | COUNCIL – 13 MARCH 2024 |
| Subject | REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACES |
| Wards Affected | ALL |
| Accountable Member | Councillor Andy Graham – Leader of the Council. Email: andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk |
| Accountable Officer | Giles Hughes – Chief Executive and (Acting) Returning Officer. Email: giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk |
| Report Author | Sharon Ellison – Electoral Services Manager. Email: sharon.ellison@westoxon.gov.uk |
| Purpose | To update Members on the requirement to conduct a review of the Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places within West Oxfordshire, to put in hand the necessary initial steps, and to note the suggested timetable for the review. |
| Annexes | Annex A – Witney County Constituency - Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places; Annex B – Timetable for the Review of Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places. |
| Recommendations | That Council Resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Carry out the statutorily required review of the Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places within West Oxfordshire; 2. Agree that, in accordance with the statute, the Acting Returning Officer for the Parliamentary Constituency of Witney; be requested to submit his representations on the review, to include information as to the location of polling stations (both existing and proposed) within Polling Places (both existing and proposed); 3. Agree that the information in this report as to the processes and the timetable for the review be noted; and 4. Agree that consultation responses and representations be considered at the meeting of Council to be held 25 September 2024/or 27 November 2024. |
| Corporate Priorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver the highest standard of service; |

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working Together for West Oxfordshire |
| Key Decision | NO |
| Exempt | NO |
| Consultees/ Consultation | Initial meeting with the Constitutional Working Group took place on 13 February 2024. |

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The statutory responsibility for reviewing UK Parliamentary polling districts and places rests with each local authority. The Council is required to review their polling districts and polling places for the UK parliamentary constituencies at least once every five years.
- 1.2 The length of the review process is not prescribed provided that all the steps required by the legislation can be undertaken within it.
- 1.3 Time allowed for the consultation should be sufficient to enable interested persons and groups to read and understand the proposals, gather comments and respond with any alternative arrangements that they may wish to submit.
- 1.4 A public notice will be given stating the review will take place for all polling districts and polling places within West Oxfordshire including the location of polling stations. The Acting Returning Officer has been asked to make representations to include details of the location of existing polling stations together with any suggested alternatives.
- 1.5 The Council will welcome any person or body with expertise in access for persons with any type of disability to comment on the ARO's representations or on any other matter. Any comments should, if possible, give alternative places that may be used as polling stations.
- 1.6 Comments will also be welcomed from persons registered as electors within the District of West Oxfordshire.
- 1.7 The notice of review will be circulated as widely as possible, including parish and town councils, libraries, current polling premise locations, and other groups including those with disabilities, food bank and community areas across the District.
- 1.8 The Acting Returning Officer's representations will be published and will be available for inspection both online on the Council's website and at the Council Offices, Witney.
- 1.9 The final representations will be put forward to Council before concluding the review.
- 1.10 The new Register of Electors will be published to reflect any changes consequent to the review.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. Sections 18A and 18B of the Representation of the People Act 1983 require that the Council must (i) divide its area into polling districts for UK Parliamentary elections; (ii) designate a polling place for every polling district; and (iii) keep the polling districts and polling places under review.
- 2.2. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 amended the 1983 Act by the amendment of Section 18C to require that Authorities must complete a review within the period of 16 months from 1 October 2023, and undertake and complete subsequent reviews within the period of 16 months beginning on 1 October of every fifth year after that. The next review must therefore be completed by 31 January 2025.

3. MAIN POINTS

- 3.1. The first part of the review consists of the publication of a Notice of the Review, and requesting the Acting Returning Officer to make representations to the Council, which must include information as to the location of polling stations (both existing and any proposed) within Polling Places (both existing and any proposed). The Council is then required to publish these representations and to invite representations from such

persons thought to have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons with varying disabilities. Representations would also be sought from political parties within the Constituency, the various political groups on the Council and from Town & Parish Councils and Parish Meetings.

- 3.2. The existing polling districts and polling places are included at Annex A, for the Councils' information.
- 3.3. As stated in paragraph 2.2 above, the review has to be completed within the period of 16 months beginning with 1 October 2023 and the suggested timetable referred to in paragraph 3.4 and in Annex B would comply with this and enable any changes to be effective (i) from publication of a revised electoral register on 1 February 2025; and therefore (ii) for the Oxfordshire County Elections scheduled to take place on Thursday 1 May 2025.
- 3.4. The timetable takes into account the need for an adequate period for consultation and the consideration of responses, and it is intended that a report will come back to this Council at its meeting to be scheduled for 25 September 2024/or 27 November 2024. In addition, the Electoral Registration Officer is under a statutory duty to publish a revised version of the register no later than 1 December 2024, *unless* there is an 'election' held during the Canvass, or where the introduction of new legislation is taking place. From 7 May 2024 through to 31 January 2025 the Electoral Registration Officer will be reviewing all Registered European Electors under the EA2022 legislation for "EU Citizen's Voting and Candidacy Rights". The Electoral Registration Officer can make the decision to Publish the Register on 1 February 2025.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1. The review is statutorily required, so there is no option other than to undertake it and to complete the review by the end of January 2025.
- 4.2. The Council could choose to vary the timetable as it saw fit, subject to the review being completed within the statutory period.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The only direct financial implications arising from this matter relate to the necessary publishing/advertisement of the proposals in due course. These are mandatory, and are anticipated to be in the region of £1,000 and will be accommodated within existing budgets.

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 Failure to carry out a review would be a breach of the Council's statutory duties.

7. REASONS

- 7.1 To comply with the statutory requirement to conduct a review of polling districts and polling places.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

(END)

Annex A

WITNEY COUNTY CONSTITUENCY

Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places

| Polling District(s) | Current Polling Place | Electorate | No. PS | Constituency *Parliamentary Constituency to take affect from the Next PGE | Ward | Parishes within Polling District |
|---------------------|---|------------|--------|--|---------------------------|--|
| FA | Alvescot Village Hall, The Walk, Alvescot, OX18 2PU | 371 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Alvescot and Filkins Ward | Alvescot |
| FJ, GV | Kencot Village Hall, Kencot, GL7 3QT | 184 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Alvescot and Filkins Ward | Broadwell, Kencot |
| GH | Filkins Carter Institute, Filkins, Nr Lechlade, GL7 3JQ | 340 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Alvescot and Filkins Ward | Filkins and Broughton Poggs |
| GM, GY, HB | Langford Village Hall, Filkins Road, GL7 3LW | 381 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Alvescot and Filkins Ward | Grafton & Radcot, Langford, Little Faringdon |
| GS, JC | Westwell - The Conservatory, 5 Mitford Cottages, OX18 4JU | 72 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Alvescot and Filkins Ward | Holwell, Westwell |
| GU | Kelmscot Morris Memorial Hall, Kelmscott, GL7 3HG | 67 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Alvescot and Filkins Ward | Kelmscot |

| Polling District(s) | Current Polling Place | Electorate | No. PS | Constituency *Parliamentary Constituency to take affect from the Next PGE | Ward | Parishes within Polling District |
|---------------------|--|------------|--------|--|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| FB | Ascott under Wychwood - Tiddy Hall, Shipton Road, Ascott Under Wychwood, OX7 6AG | 463 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Ascott and Shipton Ward | Ascott under Wychwood |
| HD, HQ | Shipton Under Wychwood - Beaconsfield Hall, Station Road, OX7 6BQ | 1289 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Ascott and Shipton Ward | Lyneham, Shipton under Wychwood |
| FE | Bampton Village Hall, Market Square, Bampton, OX18 2JH | 2503 | 2 | Witney County Constituency | Bampton and Clanfield Ward | Bampton |
| FF | Black Bourton - St Mary the Virgin Church, Burford Road, OX18 2PQ | 207 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Bampton and Clanfield Ward | Black Bourton |
| FV | Clanfield - The Carter Institute, The Green, OX18 2SR | 713 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Bampton and Clanfield Ward | Clanfield |
| FC | Asthall Leigh Memorial Hall, Minster Road, OX29 9PX | 212 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Brize Norton and Shilton Ward | Asthall Leigh |
| FI | Brize Norton Elder Bank Hall, Station Road, Brize Norton, OX18 3PS | 1303 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Brize Norton and Shilton Ward | Brize Norton |

| Polling District(s) | Current Polling Place | Electorate | No. PS | Constituency *Parliamentary Constituency to take affect from the Next PGE | Ward | Parishes within Polling District |
|---------------------|---|------------|--------|--|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| HP | Shilton - The Old School, Church Lane, Shilton, OX18 4AE | 504 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Brize Norton and Shilton Ward | Shilton |
| HY | Swinbrook Village Hall, Swinbrook, OX18 4DY | 118 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Brize Norton and Shilton Ward | Swinbrook |
| FL, GK | Burford - Warwick Hall, Church Green, Burford, OX18 4RY | 1612 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Burford Ward | Burford, Fulbrook |
| JA | Taynton Village Hall, Taynton, OX18 4UH | 78 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Burford Ward | Taynton |
| FM3 | Carterton Methodist Church and Hall, Burford Road, OX18 3AG | 1520 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Carterton North East Ward | Carterton Upavon Town Ward |
| FM4 | Carterton Community Centre - The Small Hall, Shilton Park, OX18 1AX | 2561 | 2 | Witney County Constituency | Carterton North East Ward | Carterton Upavon Town Ward |
| FM | Carterton Methodist Church and Hall, Burford Road, OX18 3AG | 1707 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Carterton North West Ward | Carterton Rock Farm Town Ward |

| Polling District(s) | Current Polling Place | Electorate | No. PS | Constituency *Parliamentary Constituency to take affect from the Next PGE | Ward | Parishes within Polling District |
|---------------------|---|------------|--------|--|--------------------------------|---|
| FM2 | Carterton - Army Cadet Force Hut, Swinbrook Road, Carterton, OX18 1DU | 2217 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Carterton North West Ward | Carterton Shillbrook Town Ward |
| FN, FN2 | Carterton Town Hall, Alvescot Road, OX18 3JL | 3356 | 2 | Witney County Constituency | Carterton South Ward | Carterton Gateway Town Ward |
| FP, FS, FX | Chadlington Memorial Hall, Chapel Road, OX7 3NA | 820 | 1 | *Banbury County Constituency | Chadlington and Churchill Ward | Chadlington, Chilson, Cornbury & Wychwood |
| FU, HO | Churchill Village Hall, Church Road, OX7 6NJ | 551 | 1 | *Banbury County Constituency | Chadlington and Churchill Ward | Churchill, Sarsden |
| HS | Spelsbury War Memorial Hall, Charlbury Road, Spelsbury, OX7 3JR | 237 | 1 | *Banbury County Constituency | Chadlington and Churchill Ward | Spelsbury |
| FQ | Charlbury War Memorial Hall, Browns Lane, OX7 3QW | 2389 | 2 | *Banbury County Constituency | Charlbury and Finstock Ward | Charlbury |
| GF, GI | Finstock Village Hall, Well Hill, OX7 3BU | 633 | 1 | *Banbury County Constituency | Charlbury and Finstock Ward | Fawler, Finstock |

| Polling District(s) | Current Polling Place | Electorate | No. PS | Constituency *Parliamentary Constituency to take affect from the Next PGE | Ward | Parishes within Polling District |
|---------------------|---|------------|--------|--|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| FT | Chipping Norton Town Hall, Market Place, OX7 5FB | 5658 | 3 | *Banbury County Constituency | Chipping Norton Ward | Chipping Norton |
| GA, HA | Curbridge Parish Hall, Main Road, OX29 7NT | 880 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Ducklington Ward | Curbridge, Lew |
| GC | Ducklington Village Hall, Standlake Road, OX29 7UX | 1279 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Ducklington Ward | Ducklington |
| FO | Cassington Village Hall, The Green, OX29 4DN | 597 | 1 | *Bicester and Woodstock County Constituency | Eynsham and Cassington Ward | Cassington |
| GE | Eynsham Village Hall, Back Lane, OX29 4QW | 4163 | 3 | *Bicester and Woodstock County Constituency | Eynsham and Cassington Ward | Eynsham |
| HR | South Leigh and High Cogges Village Hall, South Leigh, OX29 6UR | 269 | 1 | *Bicester and Woodstock County Constituency | Eynsham and Cassington Ward | South Leigh & High Cogges |
| GJ | Freeland Village Hall, Newell Room, Wroslyn Road, OX29 8AQ | 1290 | 1 | *Bicester and Woodstock | Freeland and Hanborough Ward | Freeland |

| Polling District(s) | Current Polling Place | Electorate | No. PS | Constituency *Parliamentary Constituency to take affect from the Next PGE | Ward | Parishes within Polling District |
|---------------------|--|------------|--------|--|--|----------------------------------|
| | | | | County Constituency | | |
| GP | Hanborough - The Pavilion, Playing Field, Roosevelt Road, OX29 8JG | 2719 | 2 | *Bicester and Woodstock County Constituency | Freeland and Hanborough Ward | Hanborough |
| FZ, GO | Hailey Village Hall, Middletown, OX29 9UA | 1082 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Hailey, Minster Lovell and Leafield Ward | Crawley, Hailey |
| GZ | Leafield New Village Hall, Lower End, OX29 9QJ | 718 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Hailey, Minster Lovell and Leafield Ward | Leafield |
| HF | Minster Lovell - St. Kenelms Hall, Brize Norton Road, OX29 0SE | 1337 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Hailey, Minster Lovell and Leafield Ward | Minster Lovell |
| HJ | Ramsden Memorial Hall, High Street, OX7 3AU | 278 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Hailey, Minster Lovell and Leafield Ward | Ramsden |
| FR, FY, GX | Kingham Village Hall, West Street, OX7 6YQ | 686 | 1 | *Banbury County Constituency | Kingham, Rollright and Enstone Ward | Chastleton, Cornwell, Kingham |

| Polling District(s) | Current Polling Place | Electorate | No. PS | Constituency *Parliamentary Constituency to take affect from the Next PGE | Ward | Parishes within Polling District |
|---------------------|--|------------|--------|--|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| GD | Enstone Parish Hall, The Paddocks, OX7 4AZ | 986 | 1 | *Banbury County Constituency | Kingham, Rollright and Enstone Ward | Enstone |
| GN, HC | Great Tew - The Tew Centre, Ledwell Road, OX7 4AF | 249 | 1 | *Banbury County Constituency | Kingham, Rollright and Enstone Ward | Great Tew, Little Tew |
| GR, HI | Over Norton Village Hall, Choicehill Road, OX7 5PP | 494 | 1 | *Banbury County Constituency | Kingham, Rollright and Enstone Ward | Heythrop, Over Norton |
| HK | Great Rollright Village Hall, Great Rollright, High Street, OX7 5RY | 419 | 1 | *Banbury County Constituency | Kingham, Rollright and Enstone Ward | Great Rollright |
| HM | Salford Village Hall, Salford, OX7 5YP | 252 | 1 | *Banbury County Constituency | Kingham, Rollright and Enstone Ward | Salford |
| HX | Swerford Village Hall, Between Towns Lane, Swerford, OX7 4BB | 120 | 1 | *Banbury County Constituency | Kingham, Rollright and Enstone Ward | Swerford |
| FK, HE | Milton under Wychwood Village Hall, Shipton Road, Milton under Wychwood, OX7 6JW | 1549 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Milton under Wychwood Ward | Bruern, Milton under Wychwood |

| Polling District(s) | Current Polling Place | Electorate | No. PS | Constituency *Parliamentary Constituency to take affect from the Next PGE | Ward | Parishes within Polling District |
|---------------------|---|------------|--------|--|--|----------------------------------|
| GG, GT | Fifield Parish Hall, High Street, OX7 6HL | 258 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Milton under Wychwood Ward | Fifield, Idbury |
| HG | North Leigh Memorial Hall, Park Road, OX29 6SA | 1842 | 2 | *Bicester and Woodstock County Constituency | North Leigh Ward | North Leigh |
| FD | Aston New Village Hall, Cote Road, Aston, OX18 2DU | 1147 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Standlake, Aston and Stanton Harcourt Ward | Aston, Cote, Shifford & Chimney |
| GQ, HT | Standlake Village Hall, Rack End, OX29 7SB | 1250 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Standlake, Aston and Stanton Harcourt Ward | Hardwick with Yelford, Standlake |
| HH | Northmoor Village Hall, Northmoor, OX29 5SX | 353 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Standlake, Aston and Stanton Harcourt Ward | Northmoor |
| HU | Stanton Harcourt Millennium & Memorial Hall, Blackditch, Stanton Harcourt, OX29 5SB | 973 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Standlake, Aston and Stanton Harcourt Ward | Stanton Harcourt |
| FW | Combe Reading Room, The Green, OX29 8NT | 580 | 1 | *Bicester and Woodstock County Constituency | Stonesfield and Tackley Ward | Combe |

| Polling District(s) | Current Polling Place | Electorate | No. PS | Constituency *Parliamentary Constituency to take affect from the Next PGE | Ward | Parishes within Polling District |
|---------------------|--|------------|--------|--|------------------------------|---|
| GL, GW, JR | Wootton Village Hall, Church Street, OX20 1DZ | 577 | 1 | *Bicester and Woodstock County Constituency | Stonesfield and Tackley Ward | Glympton, Kiddington with Asterleigh, Wootton |
| HL, HZ | Tackley Village Hall, 27 Medcroft Road, Tackley, OX5 3AH | 941 | 1 | *Bicester and Woodstock County Constituency | Stonesfield and Tackley Ward | Rousham, Tackley |
| HW | Stonesfield Village Hall, Field Close, Stonesfield, OX29 8HA | 1311 | 1 | *Bicester and Woodstock County Constituency | Stonesfield and Tackley Ward | Stonesfield |
| HN, JS | Sandford St Martin Parish Hall, Sandford St Martin, OX7 7AH | 224 | 1 | *Banbury County Constituency | The Bartons Ward | Sandford St. Martin, Worton |
| HV, JB | Middle Barton Memorial Sports & Social Club, Worton Road, Middle Barton, OX7 7EE | 1290 | 1 | *Banbury County Constituency | The Bartons Ward | Steeple Barton, Westcot Barton |
| JD | Witney - Ceewood Hall, Fettiplace Road, Witney, OX28 5AR | 1350 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Witney Central Ward | Witney Central Town Ward |
| JD2 | Witney - Davenport Road Methodist Church, Davenport Road, Witney, OX28 6EJ | 3006 | 2 | Witney County Constituency | Witney Central Ward | Witney Central Town Ward |

| Polling District(s) | Current Polling Place | Electorate | No. PS | Constituency *Parliamentary Constituency to take affect from the Next PGE | Ward | Parishes within Polling District |
|---------------------|---|------------|--------|--|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| JE | Witney - Wood Green School, Woodstock Road, OX28 1DZ | 918 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Witney East Ward | Witney East Town Ward |
| JE2. JF | Witney - Blake C.E. School, The Main Hall, Cogges Hill Road, OX28 3FR | 2632 | 2 | Witney County Constituency | Witney East Ward | Witney East Town Ward |
| JF2 | Witney - Madley Park Hall, Northfield Farm Lane, OX28 1UE | 2182 | 2 | Witney County Constituency | Witney East Ward | Witney East Town Ward |
| JG | Witney - WODC Committee Room I, Council Offices, Woodgreen, OX28 1NB | 1632 | 2 | Witney County Constituency | Witney North Ward | Witney North Town Ward |
| JH | Witney - Witney C.P.School, Hailey Road, Witney, OX28 1HL | 1383 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Witney North Ward | Witney North Town Ward |
| Jl, JK | Witney - Burwell Hall, Thorney Leys, Witney, OX28 5NP | 2231 | 2 | Witney County Constituency | Witney South Ward | Witney South Town Ward |
| JJ | Witney - Corn Exchange, Market Square, Witney, OX28 6AB | 2518 | 2 | Witney County Constituency | Witney South Ward | Witney South Town Ward |

| Polling District(s) | Current Polling Place | Electorate | No. PS | Constituency *Parliamentary Constituency to take affect from the Next PGE | Ward | Parishes within Polling District |
|---------------------|---|------------|--------|--|---------------------------|--|
| JL | Witney - Burwell Hall, Thorney Leys, Witney, OX28 5NP | 1008 | 1 | Witney County Constituency | Witney West Ward | Witney West Town Ward |
| JM | Witney - The Joint Cadet Centre, Edington Square, OX28 5YP | 3832 | 2 | Witney County Constituency | Witney West Ward | Witney West Town Ward |
| FG | Bladon Church Room, Church Street, Bladon, OX20 1RS | 704 | 1 | *Bicester and Woodstock County Constituency | Woodstock and Bladon Ward | Bladon |
| FH, JN, JP | Woodstock - Blenheim Estate Office, Woodstock Gate - Blenheim Palace, Park Street, OX20 1PP | 1075 | 1 | *Bicester and Woodstock County Constituency | Woodstock and Bladon Ward | Blenheim, Woodstock No.1, Woodstock No.3 |
| JO, JQ | Woodstock Bowls and Tennis Club, Cadogan Park, Woodstock, OX20 1UW | 1770 | 1 | *Bicester and Woodstock County Constituency | Woodstock and Bladon Ward | Woodstock No.2, Woodstock No.4 |

PS = Polling Station

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Annex B

WITNEY COUNTY CONSTITUENCY


Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places

Timetable

| Activity | Date |
|--|--|
| Initial report to Full Council for the Review to take place | Wednesday 13 March 2024 |
| Formal review notice published | Monday 20 May 2024 |
| Review period commences | Monday 20 May 2024 |
| (Acting) Returning Officers' comments published by | Friday 24 May 2024 |
| End of consultation period - Representations to be received by | Monday 8 July 2024 |
| Report to Full Council | Wednesday 25 September 2024 or 27 November 2024 |
| Revised arrangements come into Force | Saturday 1 February 2025 |
| Publication of the new register | Saturday 1 February 2025 |

Giles Hughes
(Acting) Returning Officer
February 2024

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| | |
|---|--|
|  <p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p> | <p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p> |
| <p>Name and Date of Committee</p> | <p>COUNCIL – 13 MARCH 2024</p> |
| <p>Subject</p> | <p>RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CONSTITUTION WORKING GROUP</p> |
| <p>Wards Affected</p> | <p>None</p> |
| <p>Accountable Member</p> | <p>Councillor Mathew Parkinson – Chair of the Constitution Working Group. Email: mathew.parkinson@westoxon.gov.uk</p> |
| <p>Accountable Officer</p> | <p>Andrea McCaskie – Director of Governance. Email: andrea.mccaskie@westoxon.gov.uk</p> |
| <p>Report Author</p> | <p>Andrew Brown – Business Manager, Democratic Services. Email: democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk</p> |
| <p>Purpose</p> | <p>To present recommendations from the Constitution Working Group arising from a meeting held on 13 February 2024.</p> |
| <p>Annexes</p> | <p>Annex A – Constitution Working Group Terms of Reference Annex B – Draft Webcasting Protocol Annex C – Article 5, 2E.2 Committee Membership Annex D – Part 5A Rule 17.2, Chair’s Casting Vote Annex E – Part 5A Rule 3.2 Business (Ordinary Meetings) Annex F – Public Participation Rules Annex G – Constitution Working Group Work Plan</p> |
| <p>Recommendations</p> | <p>That Council Resolves to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approve the changes to the Constitution Working Group Terms of Reference to include responsibility for oversight of electoral matters (Annex A); 2. Adopt the Draft Webcasting Protocol for inclusion in the Constitution as the new Part 6N (Annex B); 3. Agree an amendment to Article 5 of the Constitution to include at 2E.2 that committees will appoint a Vice-Chair at their first meeting following Annual Council (Annex C); 4. Agree an amendment to Part 5A Rule 17.2 to remove the |

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| | <p>requirement for the Chair to have cast a deliberative vote in order to use a casting vote (Annex D);</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Agree to amend Part 5A Rule 3.2 to add Member questions to the business for ordinary Council meetings (after public questions) (Annex E); 6. Agree to amend the Public Participation Rules to clarify the rules for speaking at Development Control Committee and Area Planning Sub-Committee meetings (Annex F). 7. Note the progress the Constitution Working Group has made in during 2023/24 and the items to be carried forward into next year, as set out in Annex G. |
| Corporate Priorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting Residents First • Working Together for West Oxfordshire |
| Key Decision | NO |
| Exempt | NO |
| Consultees/ Consultation | Constitution Working Group. |

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** This report recommends changes to the Council's Constitution following a meeting of the Constitution Working Group held on 13 February 2024. Council is recommended to expand the terms of reference for the Constitution Working Group to include responsibility for considering electoral matters. Council is also recommended to adopt a webcasting protocol and clarify the rules on public participation at planning meetings. Other minor amendments are recommended to ensure that the Constitution remains up to date and reflects current governance practices.
- 1.2** Proposed amendments to existing rules are shown in the annexes in red text (for words added) and red strikethrough text (for words removed).

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The Council's Constitution sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are taken and the procedures which are followed to ensure that decision-making is efficient, transparent and accountable to local people.
- 2.2** The Council has a legal duty to publish a constitution, which should be reviewed at least annually. The Council has an established, cross-party Constitution Working Group, which meets regularly and makes recommendations to Council regarding amendments to the Constitution, keeping it up to date with changes to legislation, governance practice and the wishes of the Council.
- 2.3** The Constitution Working Group met remotely on 13 February 2024 to consider a number of items on its work plan.

3. CONSTITUTION WORKING GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 3.1** The Constitution Working Group considered a proposal from officers that the terms of reference for the Constitution Working Group be amended to include responsibility for overseeing electoral matters. The Local Government Boundary Commission is initiating a review of the number of councillors and the boundaries of electoral wards for the purposes of district council elections and a briefing for Members is scheduled to take place following the 13 March 2024 Council meeting. The suggestion is that the Constitution Working Group will provide member oversight of this review, together with the review of Polling Districts and Polling Places, which the Council will be consulting on following the 2 May 2024 local elections.
- 3.2** Other minor amendments to the terms of reference are intended to update the document and make it more future proof.
- 3.3** The revised terms of reference document, which Council is recommended to approve, is attached as Annex A.

4. WEBCASTING PROTOCOL

- 4.1** The Council has recently invested in the installation of webcasting technology, first in the committee rooms and now also in the Council Chamber, to facilitate the live streaming of Council and Committee meetings to improve public access and transparency.
- 4.2** The Constitution Working Group considered a draft Webcasting Protocol which is intended to provide guidance for attendees about how such meetings will operate and to ensure that remote viewers will be able to follow meetings effectively.
- 4.3** The proposed Protocol sets out some general principles, the role of the Chair and the etiquette which all attendees are advised to follow. There is also additional guidance and etiquette related to remote attendance, which is suggested as being an option for some attendees in exceptional circumstances (the Members of a meeting need to be physically present in the meeting room in order to vote).
- 4.4** The Constitution Working Group's discussion focused on the use of devices during meetings and whether attendees should be required to adhere to the etiquette, or advised to follow the etiquette, favouring the latter approach.
- 4.5** The Webcasting Protocol which Council is recommended to adopt at Part 6N of the Constitution is attached as Annex B.

5. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRS

- 5.1** The Constitution Working Group recommend a minor amendment to include in the Constitution that committees will appoint a Vice-Chair at the first meeting following Annual Council. This had been raised by a Member as being an oversight in the Constitution, which currently only refers to the election of a Chair, and as such this item had been added to the Constitution Working Group's work plan.
- 5.2** The minor amendment to Article 5 2E.2 of the Constitution which Council is recommended to agree is shown in Annex C.

6. CHAIR'S CASTING VOTE

- 6.1** During the recent Charing Skills training it had been highlighted that the Council's provision for the chair of a meeting to use a casting vote was quite unusual in requiring the chair to have cast a deliberative vote before using a casting vote. This provision was identified as being out of step with current practice and the Constitution Working Group agreed that this requirement should be removed from the Constitution.
- 6.2** The amendment to Part 5A Rule 17.2 which Council is recommended to agree is shown in Annex D.

7. MEMBER QUESTIONS

- 7.1** The Constitution Working Group considered proposals from officers for some additional rules in the Constitution to govern member questions at Council meetings to guard against the system being abused in future.

- 7.2 The Constitution Working Group disagreed with the options put forward by officers, which included a word limit, a limit on the number of questions a member can submit to each meeting, a time limit for supplementary questions and rotating the order of questions between groups (as with motions).
- 7.3 The Constitution Working Group did agree that Member questions should be added to the order of business for ordinary Council meetings.
- 7.4 The amendment which Council is recommended to agree is shown in Annex E.

8. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- 8.1 The Constitution Working Group considered some amendments proposed by officers to clarify the rules on public speaking at Development Control Committee and Area Planning Sub-Committee meetings. The public participation rules are set out on the website, with a signpost from the Constitution.
- 8.2 This item followed the recent Development Control Committee meeting where there was some confusion about whether the public speaking rules for planning sub-committees or the rules for committee meetings should be applied, given that the Committee was not meeting to determine an application.
- 8.3 It is also suggested that reference is included in the rules to the Chair having discretion to extend the time allocated for representations in exceptional circumstances.
- 8.4 The amended public participation rules, which Council is recommended to agree, are included in Annex F.

9. CONSTITUTION WORKING GROUP WORK PLAN

- 9.1 The Constitution Working Group has made good progress in delivering its busy programme of work for 2023/24. The work plan is included as Annex G with items completed shown in green text and items to be carried forwards into 2024/25 shown in black text. Items are being carried forwards to next year either because they have only recently been added to the work plan or because they represent significant pieces of work for officers which there has not been capacity to deliver during 2023/24, for example due to staffing changes.

10. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 10.1 An alternative to expanding the terms of reference for the Constitution Working Group to include responsibility for overseeing electoral matters would be for Council to agree to establish a separate cross-party working group. This is a viable alternative although the use of the established Constitution Working Group may be considered to be a more efficient approach.
- 10.2 The Council could choose not to adopt a Webcasting Protocol but given that webcasting is now a feature of Council and committee meetings this option is not recommended. Adopting a Webcasting Protocol will help to ensure that meetings will run effectively and will help to protect the reputation of the Council.

10.3 Council could choose to not agree to recommended changes or to refer items back to the Constitution Working Group for further consideration.

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

12. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

13. RISK ASSESSMENT

13.1 If Council does not adopt a webcasting protocol, there is an increased risk that webcast meetings will not operate effectively which could result in reputational damage.

14. EQUALITIES IMPACT

14.1 Adopting a webcasting protocol will help to improve the accessibility of Council and committee meetings. There are no other equalities impacts arising from this report.

15. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no climate and ecological emergencies implications arising from this report.

16. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

(END)



TERMS OF REFERENCE

22/23 CONSTITUTION WORKING GROUP

1.0 CONSTITUTION

The Constitution Working Group is constituted by resolution of Council. It is a non-Executive working group that reports to Council.

2.0 PURPOSE

The Constitution Working Group has been established to review the Constitution and ensure that it is complete, accurate, up to date, clear, lawful and fit for purpose. It will undertake this role by:

- 1.1 Receiving and considering requests from the Monitoring Officer, Members, the Council or Committees to review specific parts of the Constitution;
- 1.2 Reviewing areas in the Constitution to ensure that they are complete, accurate, up to date, clear, lawful and fit for purpose;
- 1.3 Receiving and considering recommendations on proposed amendments and improvements from the Monitoring Officer, Members, the Council or Committees;
- 1.4 Making recommendations on proposed amendments to the Constitution to the Council.

3.0 REMIT

Also, within the remit of the Constitution Working Group will be the responsibility for reviewing the arrangements in respect of recording of meetings and webcasting.

The Constitution Working Group will also formulate draft recommendations to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England for consideration by the Council including:

- a) the total number of Councillors of the Council;
- b) the number and boundaries of electoral wards for the purposes of the election of Councillors;

c) the name of any electoral ward area.

The Constitution Working Group will also make recommendations to the Council on its future electoral cycle, if considered appropriate.

The Constitution Working Group will also consider any review of polling districts and polling places.

4.0 MEMBERSHIP

The Constitution Working Group shall comprise of 7 members, with seats being offered on the basis of political balance in accordance with the wishes of the political groups as indicated by political group leaders (i.e. for 2023/24 ~~3~~ 2 Conservative Members, 2 Liberal Democrat Members ~~and~~, 2 Labour Members ~~and~~ 1 Green Member). Should a group leader not wish to appoint the entitlement of members to the working group, the seat may be offered to another member with the group leader's consent.

Other members will be invited to meetings as required on a case by case basis.

5.0 CHAIR OF CONSTITUTION WORKING GROUP

The Chair of the Constitution Working Group will be appointed at its first meeting ~~on 12th August 2022~~ of each municipal year.

6.0 VOTING

Voting at the Constitution Working Group will be by way of a simple majority of those present and voting, by way of a show of hands. Where the vote is equal, the Chair of the Working Group shall have a casting vote ~~provided they have cast their deliberative vote, and there is no constraint up how a casting vote is cast.~~

7.0 QUORUM

The quorum of a meeting of the Constitution Working Group will be 3 members from the membership of the working group. Substitute members will be permitted on the Constitution Working Group, with members being substituted by a member from the same political group.

8.0 FREQUENCY

The Constitution Working Group will meet as and when required. At least 7 calendar days' notice of meetings will be provided. All meetings will be held in private. Meetings will generally take place either remotely via ~~Webex or Google Meet Teams~~, or will be Hybrid meetings, or in person meetings. ~~Where practicable meetings will generally be held at 10am on Fridays~~

9.0 MINUTES

Minutes of the Constitution Working Group will be agreed at the next suitable meeting of the Working Group, or where there is no such meeting within the next 6 months or at all, by the next available Council meeting provided it is not a special meeting.

10.0 OFFICER SUPPORT

The Constitution Working Group will be advised and supported by the Monitoring Officer, ~~or in her absence and~~ the Deputy Monitoring Officer and Business Manager for Democratic Services.

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Draft Protocol for Webcasting Meetings

Introduction

West Oxfordshire District Council ('the Council') is committed to involving local residents in decision making, however some residents may sometimes not be able to attend the meetings they are interested in. To ensure that those residents can still get involved, the Council live streams meetings of Council, the Executive and committees (except for any exempt or confidential business). Recordings of meetings can be viewed online as the meeting happens and for up to 6 months from the date of the meeting. The written minutes are the permanent record of the meeting.

Role of Chair

To ensure that attendees are aware the meeting is being webcast.

To welcome viewers of the live stream to the meeting.

To remind attendees at the start of the meeting and when required to use their microphones when speaking and to turn their microphone off when not speaking. The Chair's microphone takes precedence over other microphones meaning the Chair will be displayed on the webcast whenever their microphone is on.

Role of all attendees

All attendees are to advised to follow this etiquette:

- To use microphones when speaking and to turn microphones off when not speaking.
- To be aware that whatever is said in the meeting is being broadcast.
- To refrain from having side-conversations, which may be picked up on the webcast (whether audio or video).
- To ensure that any devices are only used for Council business purposes during the meeting as images on laptops etc. may be seen on the live stream.

Remote attendance

Elected members must be physically present in the meeting room in order to participate as members of the meeting and vote. Officers and other attendees may, in exceptional circumstances (i.e. inability to travel), request to join meetings remotely by giving at least one weeks' prior notice to Democratic Services. Remote attendance will be subject to officer capacity to support the hybrid meeting on the day and the agreement of the Chair. If agreed, Democratic Services will provide a link for joining remotely. The limiting factor with a hybrid connection is the strength of the remote attendee's internet connection.

Any remote attendees are to adhere to the following additional etiquette:

- To ensure as far as possible that they have a strong and stable internet connection.
- To ensure as far as possible that there will not be interruptions.
- To ensure that the background is blurred or nondescript.
- To ensure that the camera is on and that their microphone is unmuted when speaking.
- To ensure that the microphone is muted when not speaking.

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2E.2 Committee Membership

The appointment of members to these Committees will be made in accordance with the Council Procedure Rules in Part 5A of this Constitution. Appointments will be made by the Council, in accordance with the rules relating to political balance, having received nominations from Group Leaders. However, where a Group Leader confirms to full Council that he is making no such nomination for a seat that his party is entitled to, appointment to that seat on a Committee will be made by the Council, in accordance with the Council's decision, regardless of political balance.

The Committee, at its first meeting following Annual Council, will elect its Chair for the year, **appoint its Vice Chair for the year** and consider the establishment and appointment to any sub-Committees.

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17.2 Chair's Casting Vote

If there are equal numbers of votes for and against, the Chair will have a second or casting vote. There will be no restriction on how the Chair chooses to exercise a casting vote. ~~The Chair may only use a casting vote if they have already cast their deliberative vote.~~

If there are equal number of votes for and against and the Chair chooses not to exercise their casting vote, then the matter to be determined shall fall.

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3.2 Business

Ordinary meetings will:

- (i) Elect a person, who is not a Member of the Executive, to preside if the Chair and Vice-Chair are not present;
- (ii) Receive apologies for absence;
- (iii) Receive any declarations of interests from Members;
- (iv) Approve the minutes of the last meeting;
- (v) Deal with any business expressly required by statute to be carried out;
- (vi) Receive any announcements from the Chair, Leader, Members of the Executive, Head of Paid Service, Chief Financial Officer or Monitoring Officer;
- (vii) Receive any announcements from the Monitoring Officers as to changes to appointment of Members on Committees, for the Council to ratify and note;
- (viii) Receive any questions from members of the public in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11;
- (ix) Receive any Member questions and responses in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 12;
- (ix) Receive any Petitions and consider in accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme;
- (xi) Deal with any business remaining from the last Council meeting;
- (xii) Receive reports, and consider any recommendations from the Council's Committees and the Executive to the Council;
- (xiii) Receive reports about and receive questions and answers on the business of joint arrangements and external organisations;
- (xiv) Receive and consider reports from Officers;
- (xiv) Receive questions from Members in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 12;
- (xvi) Consider motions of which notice has been given in accordance with Rule 13 of these procedures;
- (xvii) Consider any other business specified in the summons to the meeting, including consideration of proposals from the Executive in relation to the Council's budget and policy framework and reports of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for debate; and
- (xviii) Consider any matters deemed urgent by the Chair, after having taken advice from the Monitoring Officer or their representative, in that the matter to be determined has arisen since the publication of the agenda and failure to determine it at this meeting would cause significant adverse impact to the Council.

The order of business of a meeting of the Council may be varied by the Chair or by the meeting in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 8.

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Public participation

We encourage members of the public to participate in our affairs. All relevant issues raised by members of the public will be taken into account when the Council is making its decisions.

Taking part in Executive meetings

Executive meetings are open to the public and there is a standing item on Executive agendas for public participation.

Members of the public may ask a question at a meeting of Executive for up to three minutes on any agenda item or on any issue that affects the district or its people.

Members of the public wishing to speak at an Executive meeting must notify democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk, including their name and the agenda item or topic they wish to speak on, by 2.00pm two clear working days before the meeting (e.g. for a Wednesday meeting, the deadline would be 2.00pm on the Friday before).

If the topic of the question is not within the remit of the Council, advice will be provided on where best to direct the question.

The relevant Executive Member will either respond verbally at the meeting or provide a written response which will be included in the minutes of the meeting.

Taking part in Council and Committee meetings

These meetings are all open to the public and most have time set aside for submissions to be read out. Direct questions are not allowed, but you may read a statement or express an opinion.

Anyone who lives in the district or who pays Council Tax or business rates is eligible to take part. You will need to send us a written submission of no more than 750 words. For committee meetings we must receive your written submission by 10am on the working day before the meeting. For Council meetings we must receive your written submission by noon on the seventh working day before the meeting. You must contact us to request to take part and let us know what you want to comment on by:

- calling Customer Services on 01993 861000
- emailing democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk

What your submission can be about

At committee meetings your submission must relate to points on the meeting agenda. At full council meetings other issues can be raised which are relevant to the district. You can find out which committee has responsibility for the issue you want to raise by looking at the

agendas and reports for the meetings. These are available five working days before each meeting. Some matters may be excluded, contact us for advice or more information.

What happens during the meeting

The time limit for one submission is five minutes. If several people want to contribute on the same subject they are restricted to a total of five minutes. The time for all submissions at one meeting is 30 minutes. You will be invited to read out your statement, or if you are unable to attend the meeting in person, your submissions will be read to the meeting by a member of staff. You will not be asked questions on your submission. Contact us for advice if you are unsure.

These **temporary** processes aim to strike a balance between the need to conduct business, technological and other risks, and being able to hear the views of the public. We will keep this process under review.

Taking part in planning **meetings committees**

When planning applications are heard by the **Development Control Committee or a Planning Sub-Committee**, there is an opportunity for applicants, members of the public and other interested parties to put forward views for or against the application. The information that they provide is considered to be very useful in helping the **Committee or Sub-Committee** to reach a sound planning decision.

You can request to attend the meeting and address the **Committee or Sub-Committee** in person. Three minutes is allocated for each of the following groups to address the committee:

- Those objecting to the application
- The relevant parish or town council
- Those supporting the application, including the applicant
- **The ward member(s)**

The time limit will be strictly applied. This means that the total time allocated for all representations on any application is **nine twelve** minutes. We ask that you forward a copy of your submission to us prior to the meeting, just in case there are any difficulties on the day and you are unable to attend the meeting.

Planning applications for which a speaker or speakers have been registered will, whenever possible, be heard first. This may involve some re-ordering of the applications compared to how they appear on the committee agenda.

Please contact us by 12 noon the Friday before the meeting to request to take part by emailing democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk or by calling Customer Services on 01993 861000.

What you can comment on

Submissions will be allowed on any application on the schedule of planning applications to be considered by the **Development Control Committee or** Planning Sub-Committees. For example, applications for planning permission, listed building consent, conservation area consent, advertisement consent and applications to fell trees the subject of Tree Preservation Orders. It will also be allowed those types of application included on the agenda for determination at the meeting, or where confirmation of a previous decision is being sought. Submissions will not be allowed on items within the Agenda, such as potential enforcement action cases where there is no associated retrospective planning application or Lawful Development Certificates which are legal determinations based on the facts.

Planning meetings are held in public and no submissions of a personal, slanderous, defamatory, or otherwise offensive or abusive nature should be made.

A maximum of three minutes per submission will be allowed. The time must be strictly adhered to. **The Chair may, in exceptional circumstances, use their discretion to extend the time allocated for representations.**

Conflict of interests

Submissions must be seen to be truly independent and not have a direct interest in the application or be related to, or a business associate of the applicant. Town and Parish Councillors are reminded of their responsibilities under the agreed Code of Conduct. We will not be aware of any interests or conflicts which town or parish councillors have. So the responsibility for complying with this rests with the council and councillor concerned.

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PROPOSED WORK PROGRAMME

CONSTITUTION WORKING GROUP 23 / 24 – 4 March 2024

| # | Item | Responsible | Reference | New item? | Description |
|---|--------------------------------|--|--------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Admin | Democratic Services | Whole constitution | | All links in the Constitution need checking to ensure they are correct. 3 versions of complete constitution need printing out – 2 for the members' rooms and 1 for the Chairman. |
| 2 | Officer Code of Conduct | Monitoring Officer / Business Manager for Business Continuity, Governance & Risk | Part 6 | New – WODC has a Policy being revised | Cheryl Sloan is working on an updated Employee CofC which is not currently part of the Constitution and should be included after being formally adopted. |
| 3 | Members Code of Conduct | Monitoring Officer | Part 6A | Minor amendment | Need to amend appendix C of the code – for clarity and consistency as agreed with other Oxfordshire MO's. Should now read: Any Body of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management which is: Exercising functions of a public nature; Directed to charitable purposes; or One of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union). References to Cabinet at Page 6 paras 7.1 – 7.3 to be revised to Executive |
| 4 | Whistleblowing Policy | Monitoring Officer | Part 6 | New – WODC has a whistleblowing | WODC already has a whistleblowing policy but it's not part of the Constitution and should be included and formally adopted to be. |
| 5 | Anti-Fraud & Corruption Policy | Monitoring Officer | Part 6 | New – WODC has a AF&C Policy | WODC already has an AF&C Policy but it is not part of the Constitution and should be included and formally adopted to be. |

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| 6 | Officer Employment Rules | Monitoring Officer | Part 5j | Revised | In compliance with The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) England Regs. 2001 Page 175 Para 3.2 Consultation Procedure for Appointment. The first line needs to include 'Statutory Chief Officers' and the table at Para 3.3 under column 3 Conditions insert the words in the first 3 rows for HPS, CFO, MO Requires consultation with the Executive and requires Council approval. |
| 7 | Contract Rules | Monitoring Officer | Part 5H | Revised | 20.3 & 20.4 replace Borough with Authority's 22.1 Replace relevant Director with Head of Paid Service 4.2.10 replace reference to Council's with Authority's Para 4.4, 6.14, 6.2.1 replace reference to Cabinet to Executive Para 11.3 remove last bullet point symbol Typo on Page 7 replace 'but' with 'by' |
| 8 | Delegations | Monitoring Officer | Part | | Page 68 re CEO's Urgency & Emergency powers – should also be included in part 4 Officer Delegations in full on Page 73 between paras 4 and 5. Remove reference after the CFO 'who also holds the position of Deputy Chief Executive' |
| 9 | Member / Officer Protocol | Monitoring Officer | Part 6B | Revised | Needs reviewing |
| 10 | Probity in Planning | Monitoring Officer / Business Manager for Planning | Part 6L | New | Officers to prepare a document for consultation with the Constitution Working Group. |
| 11 | Protocol on the Recording of Meetings | Monitoring Officer / Business Manager for Democratic Services | Part 6j | Revised | Needs reviewing |
| 12 | Protocol for webcasting meetings | Monitoring Officer / Business Manager for Democratic Services | ? | New | No current document in place. Needs a protocol in light of new equipment and Council decision to live stream meetings. Should cover safeguarding e.g. under 18's in public gallery, questions posed by public if under 18 etc., and notification to whole meeting, and retention of recording, general etiquette |

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| | | | | | and GDPR, etc. Document to be created for consultation with the Constitution Working Group. |
| 13 | Council Procedure Rules | Monitoring Officer | Part 5A | New | Para 6.2 - Authority to cancel meetings and reschedule them by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the relevant Chair of Council, Committee, Sub-Committee. |
| 14 | Budget Procedure Rules | Director of Finance | Part 5j | New | CWG 22/23 considered a priority for 23/24. It was promised in 22/23 but slipped a few times. |
| 15 | Financial Procedure Rules | Director of Finance | Part 5l | Revised | Considered high priority as current rules not reviewed for a significant period of time. Need to check whether some of the limits contradict other parts of the constitution e.g. financial limits of Individual Exec Member decisions. Exec delegations in Part 3 have no financial limit on Individual Exec Member delegations but Financial Procedure Rules limit write off-of business rates to £5,000. |
| 16 | Delegations | Monitoring Officer | Part 4A Introduction | Revised | Not considered at all in 22/23 and needs updating Counter Fraud team want additional delegations to have power to deal with animal welfare and environmental crime A delegation needs adding to enable Publica to act on behalf of WODC in an emergency (similar to Forest of Dean constitution) – emergency planning delegation. |
| 17 | Overview & Scrutiny Rules | Monitoring Officer | Part 5C | Revised | High priority if Council decided to amend the current structure around scrutiny function. Part 3 on responsibility and functions will also need updating to reflect the changes. |
| 18 | Procedure in relation to Licensing Applications | Monitoring Officer / Licensing Officer | Part 5D | New | To be considered initially with the Licensing Team. |
| 19 | Electing Vice Chairs | Monitoring Officer / Business Manager for Democratic Services | Part 2 E2 and elsewhere | New – from Cllr Poskitt | To consider inclusion of provisions for electing Vice Chairs (as well as Chairs). |

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| 20 | Overview and Scrutiny reports to Council | Monitoring Officer / Business Manager for Democratic Services | Part 2 C3 | New – from Cllr Poskitt | O&S must report to full Council annually. Should it not be asked to report more frequently than that otherwise half of full Council might not be aware of what O&S are getting up to? |
| 21 | Performance and Appointments Committee | Monitoring Officer / Business Manager for Democratic Services | Part 3C | New – from Executive | To consider the expansion of the Committee's terms of reference to include responsibility for adopting and amending employment and health and safety policies. |
| 22 | Communications Protocol | Business Manager for Communications | Part 6 | New – from Mark Pritchard | To consider the adoption of a Communications Protocol. |
| 23 | Chair's casting vote | Business Manager for Democratic Services | Part 5A | New – from Chairing Skills training | To consider removing the requirement that "The Chair may only use a casting vote if they have already cast their deliberative vote." |
| 24 | Treasury Management reporting | Business Manager for Democratic Services | | New – from Overview and Scrutiny Committee | To consider whether statutory quarterly reports should go to O&S or A&G (O&S recommend A&G). |
| 25 | Development Control Committee responsibilities | Business Manager for Democratic Services | Part 3C | New – from Director of Governance | Points 1 and 2 could be clearer as they potentially conflict e.g. in relation to responsibility for considering nationally significant infrastructure projects. |
| 26 | Review of Overview and Scrutiny Structure | Business Manager for Democratic Services | Part 3C | New – from external audit | To consider the new Overview and Scrutiny Committee structure post-implementation, taking into account the views of the Chair and Vice Chair. |
| 27 | Member training | Business Manager for Democratic Services | N/A | New – from external audit | To consider options for fostering greater engagement and attendance for member training sessions with a particular emphasis on inclusion and diversity, social media and the members Code of Conduct. |
| 28 | Gifts, Hospitality and Sponsorship Process | Director of Governance | Part 6 | New | To consider a proposed addition to the Constitution. |
| 29 | Member questions at Council | Business Manager for Democratic Services | Part 5A Rule 12 | New | To consider: I. A word limit on questions |

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| | | | | | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. A limit on the number of questions a member can submit (e.g. 2 per meeting). 3. A time limit on supplementary questions (e.g. 1 minute) 4. Adding Member questions to the business for ordinary council meetings at 5A Rule 3, para. 3.2 (after viii public questions) 5. Rotating the order of questions between groups |
| 30 | Review of Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places | Business Manager for Democratic Services | N/A consultation prior to Council decision | N/A | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) That the statutorily required review of the Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places within West Oxfordshire be carried out; b) That, in accordance with the statute, the Acting Returning Officer for the Parliamentary Constituency of Witney be requested to submit his representations on the review, to include information as to the location of polling stations (both existing and proposed) within Polling Places (both existing and proposed); c) That the information in this report as to the processes and the timetable for the review be noted; and d) That consultation responses and representations be considered at the meeting of the Committee to be held in July 2024. |
| 31 | Public participation rules | Business Manager for Democratic Services | Links to webpage | New | Public speaking rules for Development Control Committee not clear as it's not a planning sub-committee. |
| 32 | Attendance for part of a meeting | Business Manager for Democratic Services | Part 5A 23.2 | New – raised at Council on 28 February 2024 | To consider the rule that “Any Member who is not present for the entirety of an agenda item, and has not heard the whole of the presentation and/or debate, is precluded from participating in the vote of that matter.” |
| 33 | Call in rules | Business Manager for Democratic Services | Part 3A and Part 5C | New | To ensure that the call in rules are consistent throughout the constitution in terms of which decisions are subject to call in. |

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