

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting of the **Executive**

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB  
at 4.00 pm on **Wednesday, 20 November 2024**

### PRESENT

Councillors: Andy Graham (Leader), Duncan Enright (Deputy Leader), Lidia Arciszewska, Hugo Ashton, Rachel Crouch, Andrew Prosser, Geoff Saul, Alaric Smith and Tim Sumner

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive Officer), Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance), Phil Martin (Director of Place), Emma Cathcart (Head of Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit), Mandy Fathers (Business Manager - Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Services), Rachel Biles (Leisure Strategy Manager), Chris Hargraves (Head of Planning) Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services) and Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer)

Other Councillors in attendance: Davy Levy, Julian Cooper, Michele Mead, and David Melvin

#### **244 Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence were received.

#### **245 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **246 Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, proposed that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Wednesday 9 October 2024, be agreed by the Executive as a true and accurate record and signed by the Leader of the Council.

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

The Executive Resolved to:

I. Agree the minutes of the previous meeting, held on Wednesday 9 October 2024, as a true and accurate record.

#### **247 Receipt of Announcements**

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, welcomed attendees to the meeting, and thanked members of the public for attending proceedings. The Leader gave the members of the public in attendance a brief overview of the way that the meeting would run.

The Leader announced the following:

- Rachel Crouch was the Mental Health Champion and would be working closely with the Community Wellbeing Manager.
- The West Oxfordshire District Council Voice magazine was now landing on doorsteps and it contained information on various work that had been undertaken by West Oxfordshire District Council and also contained a handy pull out page that contained waste/recycling collection dates.

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- West Oxfordshire District Council was nominated for a reward, the Smarter Working Live Awards; which was largely due to the adoption of AI software tools that had been incredibly useful within the planning team for mapping.
- The next Executive meeting would be held in Eynsham Village Hall, 46 Back Lane, Eynsham, OX29 4QW at 2.00pm on 11 December 2024.

The Deputy Leader announced that the following events were taking place:

- The Christmas lights switch on would take place in Witney on Friday 29 November and thanks were given to Witney Town Council for the planning of this.
- There was a Christmas market in Marriott's Walk from 5 December to the 8 December and another Christmas market in Chipping Norton on the 8 December.

The Executive Member of Finance announced the following:

- A Budget Consultation had started and would be open until 15 December 2024. Views (on non-statutory services) could be given on what participants would like to see West Oxfordshire District Council prioritise. The consultation could be found at [www.westox.gov/budget](http://www.westox.gov/budget) and it was to be noted that 100 responses had been already received.

The Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects announced the following:

- There would be free activities at West Oxford District Council leisure centres this weekend and promotional posts had been circulated by GLL and on the West Oxfordshire District Council website.
- The Chipping Norton Leisure Centre improvements were recently completed and a promotional video to show the improvements was available on the West Oxfordshire District Council website.

#### **248 Participation of the Public**

There was no participation of the public.

#### **249 Reports from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

There was a recommendation received relating to Item 11, Westhive Criteria, by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday, 6 November 2024. This would be considered under that agenda item.

#### **250 Matters raised by Audit and Governance Committee**

No matters had been raised by the Audit and Governance Committee.

#### **251 Council Tax Support Scheme 2025/2026**

The Executive Member for Finance, Councillor Alaric Smith, introduced the report that considered and recommended to Full Council the revised Council Tax Support (CTS) Scheme for the financial year 2025/2026.

The Council had implemented its own local CTS scheme of support to help those people on low incomes pay their Council Tax in April 2013. Further changes were made in April 2020 introducing the income banded scheme.

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Annual wage growth was expected to be 4% in Q4 of 2024, remaining at the same level during 2025. Without changes to the CTS scheme, this would result in more households being moved into a high-income band and therefore having to pay a higher share of the full Council Tax for their property.

To continue to give support to households during the ongoing cost of living crisis, proposals were being made to increase income bands by 4% and could be seen in the chart in the report.

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

That the Executive resolved to recommend to Full Council to:

1. Agree the inflationary increase in income bands as detailed in paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3 of this report from 1 April 2025.
2. Agree that any surplus in the Hardship Fund is transferred over to 2025/2026 for reasons detailed in paragraphs 2.5 and 2.6 of this report.

## **252 Financial Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter Two**

The Executive Member for Finance, Councillor Alaric Smith, introduced the report that detailed the Council's financial performance for Quarter Two 2024-2025.

At quarter 2 (Q2) there was an overall overspend of £96,821 against the profiled budget for the period and at quarter 1 there was an overall overspend of £257,013 against the profiled budget. The key factors driving this revenue position were income shortfalls in garden waste and development management, the delayed Elmfield office letting, the empty Carterton Industrial Estate units and increased expenditure on waste and recycling container replacement.

Development management income has struggled in the first half of the year but may yet recover should a major application be received. The recycling contract with Suez had also expired at the end of September and the cost centre was showing a temporary underspend of £126,000 against the contract as officers and Suez were negotiating the final two months invoicing cost. The new contract, approved at the Executive meeting on 11 September 2024, was expected to deliver a budget saving of £300,000 from 2025/26 (£62,000 in 2024/25).

The Elmfield offices had been empty since August 2023 and required capital investment before the new tenant occupies the building in January 2025. The tenant would undertake the work and had scheduled it to take 12 weeks. Rent would be paid from mid-January, irrespective of whether the construction works had been completed. There was a table in the report that set out the summary revenue monitoring position for 30 September 2024 against profiled budget by service area.

As reported in Q1 there continued to be some key areas of concern which had been highlighted in the body of the report. Some overspends could not be mitigated and there would be an overspend at year end.

The revenue outturn position, which was forecast to year end in the table at £87,203 overspent did not include the non-revenue budget lines which could materially change the final outturn position i.e. retained Business Rates, Publica contract refund, interest on external borrowing and Minimum Revenue Provision. All of these elements, which were classed as funding, would not be known until year end and therefore the table offered a guide on the

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cost of services position only. All areas would be closely monitored and reported on in future quarterly Financial Performance Reports.

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

The Executive resolved to:

- I. Note the Council's Financial Performance for Quarter Two 2024-2025.

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### **Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit Collaboration Agreement**

The Executive Member for Finance, Councillor Alaric Smith, introduced the report that sought approval to the Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit Partnership Collaboration Agreement between the Cheltenham, Tewkesbury, Cotswold, Forest of Dean, Stroud and West Oxfordshire councils.

In administering its responsibilities, the Council has a duty to prevent fraud and corruption, whether it was attempted by someone outside or within the Council such as another organisation, a resident, an employee or a Councillor. The Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit (CFEU) was a partnership formed in 2017 to mitigate fraud risk and to reduce criminal activity and financial loss in each member council's jurisdiction. The CFEU had evolved over the past seven years to provide a comprehensive, efficient and cost effective corporate, strategic and investigative work service for its partner authorities. The six partner councils at present were Cheltenham Borough, Cotswold District, Forest of Dean District, Stroud District, Tewkesbury Borough and West Oxfordshire District. Stroud District Council had commissioned services from the CFEU for several years but only became a partner on 1 April 2024.

The CFEU acted as an in-house support service supplying preventative activities, proactive drives and reactive investigations and enforcement support. There was a focus on a holistic approach, sharing data and efficiencies across partners. Whilst some areas were generic for resource efficiencies the work plans were bespoke and considered district / borough demographic and individual Council priorities. The structure of the unit allowed partners to maximise the benefits they received from the service, by providing resilience, shared knowledge and efficiencies on a scale that could not be achieved by one Council as a stand-alone service. Annual costs would be subsidised by third party income and through the generation of revenue income streams. The revised agreement was for 10 years with an option to extend for up to 3 years at a time. There was no limit on the number of times the agreement could be extended.

It was requested that Officers were thanked for all their work around this and the report was commended by Members.

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

The Executive resolved to:

- I. Approve the Council entering into the Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit Partnership Collaboration Agreement.

**254 Westhive Criteria**

The Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, Councillor Rachel Crouch, introduced the report that considered the strengthening and clarification of established criteria for the Westhive civic crowdfunding platform.

In March 2023, the Council had agreed to commission Spacehive Ltd to create a Westhive 'movement' on its civic crowdfunding platform. This movement enabled local people to promote ideas for civic projects and to raise money from local supporters including the Council, businesses and residents. Officers and the Westhive Members Panel reviewed and determined the Council pledges in line with the Westhive criteria. Since the launch of Westhive in October 2023, three rounds of pledge review meetings had taken place – in January 2024, June 2024 and October 2024.

Five projects had successfully reached their project targets. The organisations were from a variety of sectors. Officers had drawn together the criteria agreed in all relevant reports to the Executive and as set out in original project initiation documents. Consideration had been given to the wording used in previous Council grant schemes. Officers had also considered the approach taken by Cotswold District Council in relation to Crowdfund Cotswold. The Council Plan priorities were the foundation for the Westhive criteria. It was reiterated that the scheme was doing more than what it had done previously and communities had raised more than what the Council was doing and the reach was double or triple of what was achieved in previous years whilst making money going further.

The Executive thanked Officers for the large amount of work that they dedicated to this scheme. The Executive also confirmed that the recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was agreed.

Councillor Rachel Crouch proposed that the Executive agree the recommendation as listed on the report. This was seconded by the Executive Member for Finance, Councillor Alaric Smith, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

The Executive resolved to agree the Overview and Scrutiny's recommendation that:

3. The Council would review how funding for the West Hive criteria was utilised with a view to ensure that the budget allocated by the Council could be distributed effectively and fully for benefit of the communities.

**255 Leisure Strategic Outcomes Planning Model**

The Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects, Councillor Tim Sumner, introduced the report that considered the findings and recommendations proposed by consultants commissioned to develop a leisure based Strategic Outcomes Planning Model for the district.

Leisure Centres provided a vital role within communities in many way including in health and social care savings, etc. Leisure and wellbeing services had historically operated on low margins to ensure inclusivity and accessibility to all sectors of the community. Although the pandemic, economic and budgetary pressures (cost of living crisis and rising utilities costs) had accelerated the need for the Council to adapt and re-evaluate its leisure and wellbeing services, so that they could deliver what the local community needed, whilst contributing to broader strategic outcomes to deploy and utilise resources effectively. In addition, the financial position that leisure operators were facing was having a knock-on effect in the services they provide, which could have a detrimental effect on the health and wellbeing of residents and the future viability of the sector.

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Taking into consideration all the points above and that the current Leisure Management Contract with Greenwich Leisure Limited was due to expire on 31 July 2027, the Council needed to ensure it has a clear strategic direction, in terms of outcomes, contract scope and preferred operating model for its leisure facilities going forward.

The model set out in further detail in the report followed a place-based approach, which built on the Council's Built Sports Facilities Strategy (2021) and Playing Pitch Strategy (2022 – refreshed 2024). It also considered physical activity opportunities linked to active travel and open spaces, as leisure centres were not the only assets people used to be active.

Members commended the report and its analysis looking at where the need for services, and for what demographics, were greatest. The Leader added that communities did value leisure and he commended Councillor Cooper for his diligence and work to save the Woodstock outdoor pool. The Leisure Strategy Manager and her team were thanked for the work that was done around this and more detailed figures would be presented in the performance report at the next Executive meeting.

Councillor Tim Sumner proposed that the Executive agree the recommendations as listed on the report. This was seconded by the Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, Councillor Andrew Prosser, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

The Executive resolved to:

1. Endorse the findings of the consultants and approves the Strategic Outcomes Planning Model, including its recommended key interventions.
2. Delegate authority to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects, to work in partnership with other organisations and stakeholders to establish the feasibility and funding sources for the projects and interventions identified and to prepare business cases, where opportunities arise to bring them forward for consideration.
3. Delegate authority to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects, to undertake a Leisure Management Options Appraisal to determine the most suitable delivery model, Contract scope and Contract terms for the Council owned leisure assets, when the current contract expires in July 2027 and allocate £15,000 from the 2025/26 leisure budget.

## **256 West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 Update**

The Executive Member for Planning, Councillor Hugo Ashton, introduced the report that provided an update on the emerging draft West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041, with particular regard to proposed national planning policy changes, and a revised timetable for taking the plan through to adoption.

The District Council was in the process of producing a new Local Plan covering the period up to 2041. Good progress was being made with preferred policy options currently being drafted and supporting technical evidence being prepared. However, significant national planning policy changes had been announced in July and these had a direct bearing on the new Local Plan. The purpose of this report was therefore to set out and agree a revised timetable for taking the new local plan forward.

The timetable for taking forward the Local Plan was set out in the Council's Local Development Scheme (LDS). The most recent LDS was published in July but as outlined in the

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report, proposed national planning policy changes had necessitated a further update and a revised LDS was attached at Annex A.

Councillor Julian Cooper, attending as a non-executive member, requested information on the Blenheim buffer zone. It was confirmed by the Head of Planning that a report on that would be forthcoming.

Members commented that it was important to get Salt Cross right and to take more time to reflect on Salt Cross.

Councillor Hugo Ashton proposed that the Executive agree the recommendations as listed on the report and an additional recommendation was proposed due to delays in the Salt Cross project. This was seconded by the Executive Member for Environment, Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

The Executive resolved to:

1. Note the content of the report;
2. Approve the updated Local Development Scheme (LDS) attached at Annex A including the following key milestones for the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041:
  - Regulation 18 preferred option consultation – May 2025
  - Regulation 19 pre-submission draft publication – October 2025
  - Submission for examination – March 2026
3. Delegate responsibility to the Head of Planning Services, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning, to amend the LDS to reflect the latest position on Salt Cross.

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### **Infrastructure Funding Statement 2023/24**

The Executive Member for Planning introduced the report that provided greater clarity on the receipt and use of developer contributions including Section 106 planning obligations to fund new and enhanced infrastructure in support of planned growth. As such, the Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) helped to support several aims and objectives of the Council Plan.

The main purpose of the IFS was to set out in a transparent manner, future infrastructure requirements and expected costs, contributions received during the previous financial year, anticipated funding from developer contributions and the Council's future spending priorities.

The Council held a total of £13m in S106 monies.

Unallocated funds in the report were not unusual and occurred when developments had not been developed to the degree agreed or where funds had not been fully received; those funds were earmarked for specific projects. The second recommendation was meant to address that in future reports.

The Leader welcomed the appointment of an officer to oversee the whole S106 process and explained that it was hoped that a joined up approach with Oxfordshire County Council, and the Town and Parish Councils, would provide a clearer and more sustainable way forwards.

Councillor Dan Levy, attending as a non-executive member, asked what the £1.7m for the maintenance of open spaces was used for and whether private management companies, who had been established to look after open spaces in new developments, could be considered within the Local Plan. The Chief Executive answered that the £1.7m was the Council fund for the maintenance of open spaces that had been received through S106 agreements but would ask an Officer to clarify. The Chief Executive agreed that solutions needed to be found on the

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issues of private management companies and that all open spaces should be managed in an appropriate manner that was accountable to local people.

Councillor Hugo Ashton proposed that the Executive agree the recommendations as listed on the report. This was seconded by the Leader, Councillor Andy Graham, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

The Executive Resolved to:

1. Note the content of the Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) 2023/24 attached at Annex A, with a view to it being published on the Council's website by 31 December 2024 in accordance with legislative requirements; and
2. Request that Officers prepare an Infrastructure Spending Strategy to help prioritise the timely expenditure of unallocated S106 monies on appropriate projects for the benefit of local communities.

## **258 Adoption of Asset Management Plan**

The Executive Member for Finance, Councillor Alaric Smith, introduced the report that looked to adopt the Asset Management Strategy to provide a clear strategy for future decision making and investment in the Council's land and property assets.

The Council owned assets totalling £128m. These assets were held principally as either commercial investments (£51m), to provide services such as Leisure, Waste, Parking or Council Offices (£73m), or as a result of historic ownership, particularly small plots of land (£4m). Recent audit reports had identified significant risks to the Council in managing its Assets without an Asset Management Strategy (AMS) in place.

In order to effectively manage this estate, the Council needed to understand its condition so it could plan and budget for pro-active repairs and maintenance and future investment could form part of the decision making on whether an asset was retained, redeveloped or sold. An AMS would provide a strategic approach to property, establishing what the Council wished to achieve from its estate, aligning it with other Council priorities and ensuring decision making was based on clear policy. Decisions on purchasing, investing in or disposing of property would be based on pre-agreed principles to maximise return, reduce expenses and manage risk, enabling a far more strategic approach rather than consideration of individual properties in a piecemeal way.

The overarching strategic document would then be complimented by a review of the Council's assets to consider what future approach should be taken. This would be based on data such as current value, how the property is performing (lease income and return on investment) and broader opportunities to maximise income or in some cases dispose of a financial liability. There was scope to significantly increase the efficiency with which assets were managed by streamlining delegations and decision making based on the adopted strategy and transferring or selling assets that provided no value but took time and money to manage and maintain.

The Council had used a Procurement Framework to appoint consultants Carter Jonas to undertake a two-stage process. The first stage was the production of a AMS document. The second stage was to undertake a review of key land and property assets held by the Council in line with the Strategy once it has been adopted. Assets would be prioritised, with a focus on those that were underperforming, underutilised or may require significant investment. The Asset Plans produced would guide decision making based on opportunities and costs and may



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result in subsequent reports coming back to Executive with the Asset Plan, recommending disposal or investment. The draft AMS produced was attached at Annex A.

Councillor Alaric Smith proposed that the Executive agree the recommendations as listed on the report. This was seconded by the Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economic Development, Councillor Duncan Enright, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

The Executive Resolved to:

1. Adopt the Asset Management Strategy attached at Annex A.
2. Agree that the Council proceed with the development of Asset Plans for a number of key properties, in line with that Strategy

The Meeting closed at 5.15 pm

CHAIRMAN