

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the

Executive

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB
at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 12 February 2025**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andy Graham, Duncan Enright, 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), Frank Wilson (Group Finance Director - Publica), Bill Oddy (Assistant Director for Commercial Development), Phil Martin (Director of Place), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Georgina Dyer (Chief Accountant), Mark Pritchard (Business Manager for Communications and Marketing), Ana Prelici (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Mathew Taylor (Democratic Services Officer).

Other Councillors in attendance: Julian Cooper and David Melvin

289 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

290 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Duncan Enright (Deputy Leader) declared that he has undertaken work with The Community Communication Partnership, which offered advice to developers. In this role he did not undertake any work in Oxfordshire. This interest was raised with reference to Items nine and ten on the agenda. Councillor Enright noted that he did not feel that there was a conflict of interest but was making the declaration for transparency.

291 Minutes of Previous Meeting

There were no amendments to the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 15 January 2025.

The minutes were proposed by Councillor Andy Graham and seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright.

They were voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the previous meeting, held 15 January 2025.

292 Receipt of Announcements

Councillor Andy Graham, the Leader of the Council, introduced and welcomed Mathew Taylor to West Oxfordshire Council. Mathew was employed as a Democratic Services Officer and was attending the meeting.

Councillor Graham announced that there would be a briefing held on Devolution on 6 March at 5.30pm. Councillor Graham would also request that the Chair of the Council announces this at the next Council meeting.

Councillor Graham announced that a Special Executive meeting focusing on the Local Plan would be held on 14 May 2025.

293 Participation of the Public

There was no public participation.

294 Reports from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had made the following recommendation on the Update on Budget 2025-26 at its meeting on 5 February 2025:

“That consideration is given to the case for creating a second Fly Tipping Officer (Environment Support Officer) post.”

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, summarised the Executive’s response to the recommendation which had been circulated at the meeting and published on the website. Councillor Smith then proposed that the Executive approved the response to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which was agreed by the Executive.

RESOLVED: To agree the Executive’s response to the recommendation put forward by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

295 Matters raised by Audit and Governance Committee

There were no matters raised by the Audit and Governance Committee.

296 Budget 2025 – 2026

The purpose of the report was to provide an update on the budget for 2025/26 following the provisional government funding settlement on 18 December 2024.

Items to be considered included:

1. The Draft Base Budget for 2025/26
2. The Council’s Capital Programme for 2025/26 to 2031/32
3. The level of Council Tax for 2025/26
4. The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)
5. The Responses from the Statutory Budget Consultation

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, presented the report and proposed accepting the recommendations. Councillor Smith noted that the Budget presented to Executive included a contribution to general fund reserve of £91,280. Version one of the report had been presented to the Executive on 11 December 2024, with an estimated contribution to general fund of £400k before growth which had been based on the anticipated funding settlement.

Councillor Smith presented section five of the report which contained key movements from the approved budget 24/25 which had originally projected and a contribution to General Fund reserves of £5,107. The movements were detailed in table 1 and explained in section 5.3 of the report. The most notable points were summarised by Councillor Smith as; the negative impact of the reduction in the National Insurance threshold and the percentage increase of employer contributions, the positive impact of contract work done with regards to glass recycling and dry and mixed recycling, and the estimate of Council Tax second home premium.

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Councillor Smith stated that the provisional funding settlement was announced on 18 December 2024 and was £55k better than anticipated in version 1 on the budget. The key differences were highlighted in section 4.3 of the report.

Section 6.1 presented key movements from version 1 to version 2 of the budget presented to the Executive on 15 January 2025. Version 2 projected a contribution to General Fund reserves of £554k before growth. The movements were detailed in Table 2 of the report and explained beneath the table. Councillor Smith summarised the key movements: -

- Changes in Fees and Charges including increases in Green Waste Licences of £2.50. Councillor Smith noted that this was still well below charges in most neighbouring districts, and the draft charges had previously been approved by the Executive on 15 January 2025.
- Staff development budget of £150k. The TUPE of staff back to the Council, in phase 1 of the Publica transition had resulted in new organisational structures and additional training needed to be provided to staff to ensure that they were supported in their roles.
- The one-off allocation of £2.3m of Extended Producer Responsibilities funding. This funding was a fee charged for packaging supplies imported into the UK. The money was passed to local Authorities to deal with handling the waste from this. The payment figure for 2025/26 had been announced now to allow authorities to plan. The budget report recommended that £1.7m of this was moved to Earmarked Reserves.

Councillor Smith explained that Section 7 of the report provided details of key movements in the Budget taken to Executive in January to the version being presented at the Executive. The section showed a change from a surplus of £553,881 before growth to an estimated contribution to General Fund of £556,824 before growth and £91,280 after growth. The budget movements were shown in Table 3 and the Growth Requests on Table 4. Councillor Smith presented the key movements:

- Publica Phase 2 costs, including one-off costs which would be funded through earmarked reserves, and enduring costs of £200k per year which had been included in the base budget.
- The estimated growth in Business Rates income of £1,055,228.
- Growth requests included; Transformation roles in Waste and Planning. These roles included a Waste Transformation Lead, Planning Enforcement Officer, housing posts and a Leisure Projects Officer.

Councillor Smith advised that continuing budget risks were identified in section 7.3 of the report and MTFs Assumptions detailed in section 8. Capital Programme information was contained in section 10. The Capital Programme information explained the possibility for the need for external borrowing to fund elements of the programme from 2025 to 2026 onwards. This programme included the purchase of temporary emergency accommodation and replacement waste fleet vehicles.

Statutory Override Provision, Publica Transition and Budget Consultation were detailed in section 11, 12 and 13 respectively.

Councillor Smith advised that the final Local Government Finance Settlement was announced on 3 February 2025. This included an additional £117k for WODC as compensation for the

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increased National Insurance burden. The budget report recommended that this be moved to the budget deficit reserve.

Councillor Smith concluded by stating that the latest version of the budget provided a surplus of £91,280. Councillor Smith summarised that the Council continued to manage the finances and keep lines of communication open and in doing so continued to offer the best service possible to the residents of West Oxfordshire.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, noted that the Budget Report had been presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and was therefore in its final phase before going to Council for approval. Councillor Graham seconded the recommendations which were then taken to a vote and agreed by the Executive.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive noted:

1. The Parish Precepts and Tax Levels set out in Annex H.

Recommended the following to Council for approval:

2. The General Fund Revenue Budget as Summarised in Annex A.
3. The Updated Medium Term Financial Strategy in Annex B.
4. The Capital Programme for 2025/26 to 2031/32 as set out in Annex D.
5. The Council's Pay Policy Statement as set out in Annex J.
6. The Level of District Council Tax for 2025/26 for a Band D property of £129.38 as shown in Annexes E-G.

297 Statement of Community Involvement

The purpose of the item was to agree an update of the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) in accordance with legislative requirements.

Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning, introduced the item. Councillor Ashton noted that members would be aware that the SCI was required to be kept up to date and reviewed every five years. The current Statement was from September 2020, and it was therefore due to be reviewed. The primary changes to the SCI reflected the increased use of social media and the Council's increased use of data.

Councillor Ashton proposed accepting the recommendations.

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, seconded the recommendations and noted that the Council had successfully obtained Prop Tech Innovation Fund funding for this.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Noted the content of the report;
2. Approved the updated Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) attached at Annex A;

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3. Delegated responsibility to the Head of Planning Services, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning, to make any minor changes to the SCI before it is finalised and published.

298 West Oxfordshire District Council response to the Regulation 19 pre-submission draft Cherwell Local Plan

The purpose of the item was to agree the District Council's response to the proposed submission draft Cherwell Local Plan Review 2042.

Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning, introduced the item. Councillor Ashton noted that the report presented to the Executive Members provided an overview of the Cherwell Local Plan Review 2042. The report also sought agreement on West Oxfordshire District Council's response to the Plan Review. Councillor Ashton stated that, if the response was approved, it would be submitted to Cherwell Council as part of the consultation process. Councillor Ashton noted that responses must be relevant to its impact on West Oxfordshire. Councillor Ashton stated that such impact on West Oxfordshire in the main would be due to planned development on land to the south-east of Woodstock. It was noted that West Oxfordshire Council Officers did not feel that there was any material change to the original Cherwell Local Plan with regard to this area to which the Council originally objected. Therefore, it was noted that the Council's response would be maintained from the earlier submission that the housing on the land south-east of Woodstock proposed was not suitable. Councillor Ashton drew the attention of the Executive to Annex A which summarised the concerns of Officers.

At the invitation of the Leader, Councillor Julian Cooper, a Ward Member for Woodstock and Bladon, was invited to comment. Councillor Cooper expressed concerns around proposed development of the site. Councillor Cooper stated that both Woodstock and Bladon would be adversely impacted. Councillor Cooper noted that there was no reference in the documentation to a section of the land proposed for development being Common Land. Councillor Cooper also noted that he felt that there was a strong case for the land to be considered part of the buffer zone for the World Heritage Site. Finally, Councillor Cooper noted that Cherwell Council should consider other more suitable sites.

Councillor Andy Graham thanked Councillor Cooper for his comments. It was noted that decisions around the points raised were a matter for Cherwell Council. Councillor Graham noted that the report was a balanced and focused response.

The Executive's response to the Cherwell Local Plan was proposed by Councillor Hugo Ashton. Councillor Andy Graham seconded the proposal, which was put to the vote and agreed by the Executive

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Noted the content of the report;
2. Approved the draft response attached at Annex A;
3. Delegated responsibility to the Head of Planning Services, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning, to make any minor changes to the Council's draft response before it is formally submitted.

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299 Exclusion of Press and Public

Item 12 on the meeting Agenda contained exempt information. It was proposed by Councillor Andy Graham that a resolution be passed to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the consideration of item 12. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright, put to the vote and agreed by the Executive.

RESOLVED:

The Executive resolved to exclude the press and public from the meeting in accordance with the provisions of the Paragraph 4(2)(b) of the Local Authorities ((Executive Arrangements) Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 on the grounds that their presence could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, with the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighing the public interest in disclosure.

300 Delegation on Purchase of Emergency Accommodation

The purpose of the item was to approve delegated powers in relation to the purchase of Emergency Accommodation.

The report was discussed in private session.

Councillor Geoff Saul proposed the recommendations. Councillor Saul noted that there had been a spike in the need for Emergency Accommodation. Families were less costly to house than single people, and the Council had more access to housing stock for this purpose. However, Councillor Saul noted that individuals in need of emergency accommodation often needed to be housed in bed and breakfast accommodation due to a lack of suitable accommodation owned by the Council. Councillor Saul stated that accommodating individuals in this way was expensive and often sub-optimal. Councillor Saul went on to state that if the Council proposed to purchase suitable stock there was a need to be able to move quickly to acquire it.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor Alaric Smith who noted that such a provision of housing stock would enable West Oxfordshire District Council to increase the quality of emergency housing it is able to offer.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Delegated authority to utilise funds of up to £3,000,000, for the purposes of purchasing emergency accommodation, to the Council's Director of Finance in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Social Care and the Executive Member for Finance.
2. Approved the use of Cottsway Clawback receipts of £500,000 to increase the total funds available to £3,500,000.
3. Agreed that any necessary extension of this delegation will be sought following the purchase of three properties or upon reaching a total expenditure of £3,500,000.

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The Meeting closed at 2.40 pm

CHAIR