

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Council

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB
at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 16 July 2025**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Coles (Chair), Carl Rylett (Vice-Chair), Joy Aitman, Lidia Arciszewska, Thomas Ashby, Hugo Ashton, Mike Baggaley, Andrew Beaney, Michael Brooker, David Cooper, Julian Cooper, Sandra Cosier, Steve Cosier, Rachel Crouch, Genny Early, Duncan Enright, Roger Faulkner, Phil Godfrey, Andy Goodwin, Andy Graham, Edward James, Natalie King, Nick Leverton, Dan Levy, Andrew Lyon, Paul Marsh, Martin McBride, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Rosie Pearson, Elizabeth Poskitt, Andrew Prosser, Nigel Ridpath, Geoff Saul, Sandra Simpson, Alaric Smith, Ruth Smith, Tim Sumner, Sarah Veasey, Liam Walker, Adrian Walsh, Alex Wilson and Alistair Wray

Officers: Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance), Phil Martin (Director of Place), Maria Harper (Democratic Services Assistant), Barry Bodin-Jones (Lead Project Manager), Jasmine McWilliams (Assets Manager) and Mark Pritchard (Head of Communications and Corporate Strategy)

Other Councillors in attendance:

CL.14 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors Adam Clements, Jane Doughty, Liz Leffman, David Jackson, Stuart McCarroll and Mark Walker.

CL.15 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 May were considered.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, proposed accepting the minutes, and Councillor Duncan Enright second this proposal.

The minutes were voted on and agreed.

Voting record – For 36, against 0, abstain 2, did not vote 5

CL.16 Declarations of Interest

Declarations of Interest were received as follows:

Councillor Duncan Enright declared that he knew one of the tenants in the investment property under Item 15, and therefore stated he would leave the Chamber for that item.

Additionally, the Chair reminded members that a standing dispensation had been granted by the Monitoring Officer for Item 11 (regarding members' allowances), so no declarations were required for that item.

CL.17 Receipt of Announcements

The Chair announced the sad passing of Brenda Smith, a former Councillor. The Chair invited tributes from Councillors.

Councillor Julian Cooper, who was elected to the Council along with Brenda Smith in 1986 described her as one of the finest people he had ever met. Councillor Cooper shared a personal anecdote about Brenda's commitment to local issues. He highlighted her tenure as Chair of the Public Health Committee and her remarkable recovery from a terminal cancer diagnosis, which allowed her to continue serving the community for another 30 years. He concluded by acknowledging her lifelong support and the cross-party respect shown at her funeral.

The Council held a minute of silence in Brenda Smith's honour.

The Chair then made the following announcements:

- Members and officers were thanked for their condolences following his personal bereavement.
- The Chair had requested the Chief Executive to summon an extraordinary meeting of the Council, which was Scheduled for 22 October 2025 to consider proposals local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire.
- Members were reminded to review and return their printed register of interests.
- Councillor Sandra Cosier was welcomed to her first meeting.
- Work experiences students Toby, Molly, and Thomas were welcomed.
- Thanks were extended to those who attended the flag-raising event for Armed Forces Day, which included participation from all political parties and local air cadets.
- There were two member learning and development events upcoming – a Planning briefing on Thursday, 17 July at 5:30pm on Teams and Questioning Skills training on Thursday, 24 July at 5:30pm on Teams.

The Vice-Chair announced that he had attended the unveiling of a plaque in Finstock for John Kibble, a local historian and stonemason.

The Deputy Leader, Councillor Duncan Enright, announced a new shop front improvement grant of up to £1,000 which was open until September.

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The Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing reported on the first mental health summit, attended by 13 organisations. There were plans to make it an annual event.

The Executive Member for Housing and Social Care outlined plans to redevelop part of the Woodford Way car park into up to 70 affordable homes, including emergency accommodation.

The Executive Member for Climate Change announced that West Oxfordshire was named the top-performing rural district in the UK in the 2025 National Council Climate Action Scorecards.

The Executive Member for Planning made the following announcements:

- 1) Members were reminded of upcoming consultation events on the Local Plan on Tuesday 22 July at Witney Corn Exchange, 2pm-8pm, and Charlbury on Wednesday 23 July at Charlbury Community Centre, 4pm-8pm.
- 2) The Council's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) had been largely recommended with some modifications by the inspector and would come to Council for adoption in the autumn.

There were no further announcements.

CL.18 Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

CL.19 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.

Due to a car parking issue Councillor Rosie Pearson left the meeting and returned partway through the item.

CL.20 Appointments to Outside Bodies

The purpose of the item was to provide a list of appointments to Outside Bodies for the civic year 2025/26.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council introduced the item and proposed accepting the recommendation to note the appointments. Councillor Graham stated that a review had been carried out during the 2024/25 Civic year, and that a survey had been sent to outside bodies, gathering information on contact details, purpose and type of organisation, roles and duties of appointed members, and whether a WODC member appointment was a constitutional requirement. The responses were used to inform the Leader's appointments to outside bodies, to ensure that appointments were meaningful and constitutionally appropriate.

Councillor Duncan Enright, the Deputy Leader seconded the recommendations.

The Leader was asked how appointments would be evaluated for effectiveness. The Leader and Deputy Leader explained that the purpose of the review was to establish this, and that the improved contact list would further allow this to happen on a regular basis.

The recommendation was voted on and approved unanimously.

The Council resolved to note the appointments to outside bodies as set out in Annex A;

Voting record – For 41, against 0, abstain 0, did not vote 2

CL.21 2024/25 Quarterly Finance Review Q4

The purpose of the item was to report the financial performance of the Council in 2024/25. Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the report. The Executive member stated that;

- The Council had achieved a small surplus of £6,345, slightly above the budgeted contribution of £5,107 to general fund reserves.
- Key financial pressures included:
 - Temporary emergency accommodation: overspend of £489,887 due to increased demand (average of 80 households, up from 60 in 2022/23).
 - Limited Council-owned temporary accommodation (22 units), with the remainder housed in B&Bs or hotels.
- Positive variances included:

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- Treasury management income: £625,000 above budget due to higher interest rates.
- Trade waste income: £110,600 underspend due to improved contract enforcement and billing.
- A £1.3 million transfer was made to a new reserve to mitigate potential future business rates income loss from the fairer funding review proposals.

Members discussed the report and raised the following questions of clarity,

- How many of the 60 temporary housing accommodation places would the Council be providing. The Executive Member for Housing and Social Care explained that the Council's target was to provide 30 of these, 8 in North Leigh.
- Details about the property in North Leigh were requested, it was stated by the Director of Finance that this could not be publicly discussed as the sale was ongoing but that they would email the member who asked the question.
- Details about Carterton Unit 3 were requested, but the Chair explained it was outside of the scope of this item.

In debate, a member of the alliance stated that the Council had turned around earlier forecasts of overspend, and that the capital programme was being used effectively to deliver social rent housing and other priorities. However, they also made reference to the projected loss of income from the fairer funding review.

The Leader seconded the item and commended Cllr Smith for their work. The recommendations were put to a vote and agreed.

Council resolved to:

1. Agree to carry forward the capital budget of £4,951,242.
2. Approve the transfers to and between Earmarked Reserves as detailed in the report.

Voting record – For 42, Against 0, abstain 0, did not vote 1

CL.22 Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme Phase 3c Windrush Leisure Centre

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, introduced the item, the purpose of which was to present the business case for the decarbonisation of Windrush Leisure Centre. In his introduction, the Executive Member:

- Explained that the proposal was to replace the gas fired heating system with Air Source Heat Pumps, and that the report sought approval to proceed to the construction phase and allocate additional Council funding.
- Highlighted that the scheme would result in an 8.8% reduction in the Council's total carbon emissions with a lifetime carbon saving of 5100 tons, helping the Council

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reach its target of carbon neutrality by 2030.

- Stated that the total capital cost of the project was estimated over £2 million, with the Council's contribution being over £500,000.
- Noted that the project must be delivered and operational by 31 March 2026 to receive grant funding.
- Also noted that there was an error in the report, which stated that the carbon reduction saving was 39%, while it was actually 60%.

In the discussion, members raised the following points:

- The point that demolishing the existing leisure center and constructing a new one may be a better option was raised, but it was noted that demolition would be worse for carbon dioxide emissions.
- The potential risks and closure of the leisure center due to extremely cold weather were raised. The Executive Member noted that the risk would only be in very cold weather and an electricity sub-station nearby the leisure center would mitigate the issues.

The Director of Place explained that there was no fixed cost for the project at present and that costs would be properly outlined in September/October this year. They also noted that there was a 10-year commitment to the Windrush Leisure Centre with this project after the issue was raised of having to keep it for potentially 20 years.

Councillor Prosser proposed accepting the recommendations in the report.

Councillor Sumner seconded the recommendations and highlighted that West Oxfordshire had been named the top rural district in the UK for

climate action, explaining the significance would have on helping the community prevent climate change.

The proposal was voted on and approved.

Council resolved to:

- I. Allocate an additional Council contribution of £340,683 towards the project in addition to the £224,866 already included within the capital programme.

Voting record- For 30, Against 5, Abstain 7, Did not vote

CL.23 Carterton Units 1-3 and Station Lane Roofing Project

The item was taken after the members' allowances item at the Chair's discretion.

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The purpose of the report was to request funding for the re-roofing of investment and service properties that form part of the Capital Expenditure Budget for 2025/26. It was also the purpose to seek approval of these costs so that officers could proceed with the works with external contractors. Councillor Alaric Smith, the Executive Member for Finance, introduced the item, highlighting the following points;

- The Council owned the head leases for three commercial units in Carterton and a property on Station Lane.
- These properties required urgent roofing works due to roof failure, the presence of asbestos and poor environmental performance. The works were considered essential.
- Due to the scale and complexity of project, a specialist procurement framework was utilised.
- Carrying out the works as a single project would allow the Council to take advantage of economies of scale.

In debate one member raised concerns about the reliability of any guarantees, given past issues with roofing. The Executive Member and the Director of Finance confirmed that contractors had been selected through a rigorous framework with strong vetting processes to ensure quality and reliability.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, seconded the recommendation and stated that a lack of an asset strategy under the previous administration delayed unnecessary works, and completing the repairs would help maintain rental income and avoid rent reductions due to poor conditions.

Council resolved to:

1. Allocates the total cost detailed in Annex A to the project from the Investment Properties Programme.
2. Delegate authority to Director of Finance (\$151), in consultation with Executive Member for Finance, to approve the final cost of the projects.

Voting record – For 40, Against 0, Abstentions 1, Did not vote, 1

CL.24 Review of Members' Allowances Scheme

This was taken before the item on Carterton units 1-3 at the Chair's discretion.

The purpose of the item was to consider recommendations made to Council by the Independent Remuneration Panel. The Leader introduced the item and explained the changes that had been proposed to the scheme by the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel. The Leader explained that the Council was able to pay an allowance to its co-opted members. The Council had co-opted members for two different purposes which was for advising on

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standards matters and those who sat on the Audit and Governance Committee. Due to the distinction between these two roles, the Panel had recommended that the allowances be paid at different rates for these roles. The Leader also explained that the Panel had recommended paying a special responsibility allowance to the Vice-Chair of Council with the view to reviewing the specific amount at a future review and had discussed but did not make any recommendations on whether to pay an ICT allowance. The Leader thanked the members of the Independent Remuneration Panel for their work.

In introducing the item, the Leader proposed an alteration to the fourth recommendation, which as amended read as “Note that the next meeting of the Independent Remuneration Panel will be in 2026, ahead of the next full review, so that a new members’ allowances scheme can be in place for 1 April 2027.”

Councillor Duncan Enright seconded the recommendations as amended, commending the Council’s decision to adopt a four-year scheme.

Council resolved to:

1. Agree to introduce a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) set at 0.25x of the Basic Allowance (BA) for the position of Vice-Chair of Council, backdated to 21 May 2025.
2. Retain the existing Co-optees’ Allowance (£75 for up to four hours and £150 for more than four hours but less than 24 hours for eligible meetings and other duties as in 5.1 of the Members Allowance Scheme 2023-2027) for Independent Members of the Audit and Governance Committee.
3. Agree that the Co-Optees’ Allowance for Independent Persons who are consulted on standards matters, will be set at a flat rate of £1000 a year, backdated to 1 April 2025.
4. Note that the next meeting of the Independent Remuneration Panel will be in 2026, ahead of the next full review so that a new members’ allowances scheme can be in place for 1 April 2027.

Voting record – For 41, Against 0, abstain 0, did not vote 2

CL.25 Motions on Notice

There were no motions.

CL.26 Exclusion of Public and Press

The Chair, Councillor Andrew Coles, introduced the item and explained that the Council was required to consider whether to exclude the press and public from the meeting during discussion of Agenda Item 15, due to the sensitive nature of the financial information involved.

The motion was proposed and seconded, put to a vote and agreed unanimously.

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Council resolved to:

Exclude the press and public from the meeting in accordance with the provisions of Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that their presence could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined 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 disclosing the information.

CL.27 Exempt Annex A to Item 10 Carterton Units 1-3 and Station Lane Roofing Project

This was not discussed.

CL.28 Options for Investment Property in Witney

The purpose of the item was to request Executive to consider a recommendation to dispose of the property in Witney on the open market for the reasons set out in the report.

Councillor Enright left the room, having declared an interest earlier on.

Councillor Alaric Smith, The Executive Member for Finance, proposed accepting the recommendations

Councillor Andy Graham, the Leader of the Council seconded the recommendations.

The recommendations were put to a vote and agreed.

Council resolved to:

1. Agree that the property should be disposed of on the open market

Delegate Authority to the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance, to approve the final terms of sale including the sale price.

The Meeting closed at 3.40 pm

CHAIR