

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, 9 July 2025**

PRESENT

Councillors: , , Duncan Enright, Hugo Ashton, Rachel Crouch, Andrew Prosser, Geoff Saul, Alaric Smith and Tim Sumner

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive Officer), Phil Martin (Director of Place), Claire Locke (Interim Executive Director), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Barry Bodin-Jones (Lead Project Manager), Michael David (Housing Delivery Programme Manager), Susan Hughes (Business Manager for Support and Advice), Hannah Kenyon (Climate Change Manager), Ana Prelici (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Mathew Taylor (Democratic Services Officer), Maria Wheatley (Shared Parking Manager), Georgina Dyer (Chief Accountant), Philip Measures (Service Leader), Katie Fenton (Climate Change Officer) and Emma Peacock (Communications Officer)

Other Councillors in attendance: Andrew Coles, Julian Cooper, Dan Levy, David Melvin and Elizabeth Poskitt

356 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from:

Councillor Andy Graham and Councillor Lidia Arciszewska.

357 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

358 Minutes of Previous Meeting

There were no amendments to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 June 2025.

The minutes were proposed by Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council. Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive member for Finance, seconded the proposal.

This proposal was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

To approve the minutes of the previous meetings held on 11 June 2025.

359 Receipt of Announcements

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, announced that the Council had been graded as the top rural district for climate action. Councillor Prosser highlighted Officers' work towards this and the successful collaborative efforts with other local authorities as key contributors to the achievement.

Councillor Rachel Crouch, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, advised that a Mental Health Summit was being held 10 July 2025 at Woodgreen. Twelve organisations were attending to share good practice and ways to improve services.

Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning, advised that the Area Action Plan (AAP) hearing for Salt Cross Graden Village had been concluded. Councillor Ashton thanked those involved and noted that it would be some weeks before the views were presented.

360 Participation of the Public

Councillor Enright informed the meeting that a question had been received from a public participant, Mr Tom Harvey, who was not able to be present at the meeting. A written response would be provided to the question, and the additional comments submitted by Mr Harvey would form part of the consultation for the Car Parking Strategy (Item 9 of the agenda).

Mr Derek West addressed the Executive in relation to Item 12 of the agenda, Woodford Way Project, and made the following points:

- Gloucester Place was an old street and was still on the tourist attraction list for Witney.
- Residents of Gloucester Place had concerns around the proposed decrease in parking availability at Woodford Way.
- There had been an increase in the volume of parking required by residents but a decrease in access to such parking. Gloucester Place residents now had approximately 16 spaces for 40 residents.
- In 2007 residents had been promised permits by the Council, however the permits were not issued as there was no obligation on the Council to do so.
- Residents would like to see the Council explore all options in relation to parking.

361 Reports from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 2 July 2025 and made recommendations to Executive in relation to agenda item 9 – Car Parking Strategy, and agenda item 11 – Climate Change Strategy.

In relation to the Car Parking Strategy, it was noted that some of the Committee's recommendations fell outside of the scope of the strategy, but other relevant comments would be discussed later in the meeting.

In relation to the Climate Change Strategy, all recommendations from the Committee were accepted by the Executive. Councillor Prosser advised that the report had been revised to include the recommended amendments.

The Executive members thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their comments and engagement.

362 Matters raised by Audit and Governance Committee

There were no matters raised by the Audit and Governance Committee which met on 26 June 2025. The Committee were thanked for their continued work in this area.

363 2024/25 Quarterly Finance Review Q4

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, presented the item, the purpose of which was to report the financial performance of the Council in 2024/25.

Councillor Smith advised that:

- The original budget provided for a contribution to general fund reserve of £5,107. During the year the Council had been consistently forecasting a cost of service overspend, mitigated by an overachievement of interest on Treasury Management activities.
- At year end overspend on services had amounted to £247,274. The main adverse variances were expenditure on temporary emergency accommodation and the loss of Housing Benefit Subsidy.
- The number of people in emergency accommodation was a situation that the Council did not want to persist. Therefore, £3m had been included in the Capital Programme to purchase high quality temporary housing in the district to mitigate this.
- Costs had been incurred in respect of the Elmfield refurbishment, and unlet units at Marriotts Walk. However, both assets remained good investments.
- The £200k contingency on the leisure contract had proved to be unnecessary.
- Treasury management investment income was higher than budgeted due to high interest rates.

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- Performance on trade waste was positive, and this had resulted in an underspend in this area. This was driven by Officers' work to ensure that correct charging was applied and customers moved to direct debit payments.
- At the end of the year the Council was able to make a contribution to general fund of £6,345.
- In relation to capital spend, the first phase of the waste vehicle fleet replacement was now incorporated into a county wide waste transformation programme.
- The decarbonisation of Witney Leisure Centre was the subject of a separate report which had been brought to this meeting of the Executive.

Councillor Smith proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Enright seconded the recommendations

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Noted the 2024/25 financial performance.
2. Recommend to Council to carry forward the capital budget of £4,951,242.
3. Recommend to Council to approve the transfers to and between Earmarked Reserves as detailed in the report.

Car Parking Strategy

Councillor Tim Sumner, Executive Member for Leisure and Carterton Area Strategy, presented the item, the purpose of which was to consider and agree the revised car parking strategy 2016 – 2031. In presenting the item Councillor Sumner explored the conundrum of car parking which he stated had no absolute solution. Therefore, a car parking strategy needed to balance the demands of parking volume, traffic flow, the needs of residents and businesses and decreasing traffic pollution. It was noted that satisfying one group would not necessarily satisfy others. Councillor Sumner encouraged local engagement with the process and advised that this would be factored into the strategy in future. Finally, Councillor Sumner advised that the Council had finite resources for parking and must maintain and continue to monitor these resources as well as continuing with the free parking offered in the district.

In the discussion the following points were raised by the Executive and Members of the Council present at the meeting:

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- It was noted that there was a difference in the figures for parking need in Witney between the proposed strategy, which showed a surplus of parking spaces, and the previous strategy, which showed a deficit. It was explained that this was reflective of changing parking habits since the previous version of the strategy. This change may have been attributable to changes in working and shopping habits.
- The figures were explored in relation to Woodford Way. The data suggested that the main users of this car park were shoppers and not workers. The data had been gathered using two surveys over a two-year period. The surveys included asking customers the purpose of their visit to the car park.
- The potential use of Council owned land for car parking, in particular Brook Hill and Union Street in Woodstock, was questioned.
- The balance of the number of long stay and short stay parking spaces at Hensington Road car park in Woodstock was explored. It was noted that the survey for Hensington Road had also been completed over a two-year period.
- It was concluded that the strategy provided a platform based on data and was therefore a snapshot. The strategy would go out to consultation following the decision of the Executive. Operational and management matters would also be considered following the consultation. When changes were made subsequent parking orders would be required and this would result in a further consultation.

Councillor Enright informed the Executive that the wording of recommendation 6 was to be amended in accordance with a recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The revised wording of the recommendation would be:

“Approved the funding to investigate the drainage and mitigate flooding at Guildenford car park in Burford at a cost estimated at £20,000”.

Councillor Ashton noted that the report showed that the amount of parking needed in Burford was not provided for at present and advised that the Town Council was looking into ways of increasing parking provision.

Councillor Ashton proposed a wording change to the strategy on page 15. He proposed that the wording:

“With on-street parking charges being introduced by the County Council, the management of the district council car parks require a careful balance”.

Be amended to read:

“Where on street parking charges are introduced by the County Council the management of the district county car parks would require a careful balance.”

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Councillor Ashton also proposed an additional recommendation be added under 5.4 of the Strategy, Options – Sustainable Transport, to read:

“To investigate the practicality of promoting local public transport services at appropriate locations within the Council owned car parks”.

Councillor Sumner proposed accepting the recommendations of the report, with the amended wording to the Strategy as suggested by Councillor Ashton, and the amendment to recommendation 6, as recommended by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Prosser seconded the recommendations and noted that maintaining free parking was central to the strategy, as was aiming to reduce congestion to achieve climate goals.

This proposal was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Endorsed the revised West Oxfordshire District Council Car Parking Strategy 2025 -2031 at Annex A.
2. Authorised the Business Manager (Support and Advice) to make minor amendments to the draft strategy prior to finalisation in consultation with the accountable member of the Executive.
3. Adopted the Action plan in Annex A of the strategy recognising it as a working document to be updated throughout the life of the strategy as a consequence of further consultations with Towns and Parishes.
4. Instructed Officers to make a variation to the Parking Order to implement a mixture of long and short stay times to better meet customer demand in Woodstock, Burford and Charlbury. Recommended splits are attached at Annex B with final exact splits to be determined by Officers in consultation with Executive Member for Environment
5. Delegated authority to Executive Director of Resident Services in conjunction with the Executive Member for Environment to consider consultation feedback on the variations to the parking order and decide whether to make the variation to the Order in whole or in part or to abandon the proposal.

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6. Approved the funding to investigate the drainage and mitigate flooding at Guildenford car park in Burford at a cost estimated at £20,000.

7. Delegated further minor amendments to Parking Orders to the Executive

Director Residents Services in consultation with the Executive Member for

Environment to deal with items arising from Parish and Town Council liaison

meetings subject to formal Parking Order consultation requirements

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HMO Licence Fee, Civil Penalties Enforcement and Amenity Standards Policies

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care, introduced the item, the purpose of which was to review the HMO licence fee and period, to renew the HMO Amenity Standards policy and the Civil Penalties Policy. Councillor Saul noted that the new policies and standards being proposed took account of legislative changes and guidance, including the Renters' Rights Bill. At present the Council had 36 HMO licences issued, which had previously been granted on three-year terms. Following the licence expiry a new licence was required. The proposed change was to a five-year licence period, with a risk rating approach to prioritising inspections. It was hoped that these changes would better use Council resources and improve the process for landlords.

In the discussion the following points were raised:

- Council Officers met regularly with Officers from neighbouring districts to check and review fee levels and terms.
- The change in the licence fee period and inspection process was not expected to reduce the standard of HMO. The Council decided when to inspect and was not therefore bound to only undertaking such inspections on grant of a licence.

Councillor Saul proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Smith seconded the recommendations

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Amend the HMO Licence Fees as set out in this Report and for them to apply from 1st September 2025;
2. Approved the HMO licence period increases from 3 years to 5 years;

3. Approved the HMO Amenity Standards Policy and

4. Approved the Policy for Civil Penalties under the Housing and Planning Act 2016 and The Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England)

Regulations 2020.

Climate Change Strategy

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, introduced the item, the purpose of which was to approve the West Oxfordshire Climate Change Strategy 2025-2030. Councillor Prosser summarised the item making the following points:

- West Oxfordshire had declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency in 2019 and committed to carbon neutrality by 2030 for Council operations.
- Recent surveys had demonstrated that local public support for climate action remained strong.
- The strategy had set out the actions over the next five years towards district wide net zero by 2050.
- The strategy was not focused solely on the Council's own emissions from operations, but also on what would be done to influence emissions across the district.
- The strategy supported achievement of the vision in terms of local clean energy; community resilience and independence; continuous retrofit programmes; tackling fuel poverty; active travel; ultra-low emissions transport; new developments meeting high energy and environmental standards; nature recovery; community led climate action.
- The strategy was aligned with the Paris Agreement and the UK 2050 targets. It also worked closely with other Oxfordshire authorities.
- The achievements and challenges of the Council over the last five years in terms of climate action were listed. Councillor Prosser summarised the priority actions from the strategy and noted that there were challenges to overcome but stated the Council was playing its part and was on the right track with this strategy.

In the discussion the following points were raised:

- The substantial increase in tree planting in the district was noted. Tribute was made to the Town and Parish Councils efforts in this area.
- The value of planting meadows as well as trees to sequester carbon was highlighted.
- It was noted that it was also important to encourage the more sustainable use of water for water resilience.
- The recommendations on this item received from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had all been accepted.

Councillor Prosser proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Enright seconded the recommendations.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Approved the West Oxfordshire Climate Change Strategy 2025-2030 to achieve districtwide net zero by 2050 and climate resilience.

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Woodford Way Project

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care, introduced the item, the purpose of which was to outline the initial work involved in exploring options to deliver social rented homes with a Registered Provider (RP) on part of the Woodford Way Car Park. This proposal formed part of the Council's long-term strategy to deliver the right homes in the right places and to make it easier for local people to afford homes in their communities. This site had always been earmarked for such a development, and this was the first step towards achieving this. The development would be for high-quality affordable one and two-bedroom homes. The Council had seen this as a key opportunity to provide such homes and enable people to stay close to work, schools and support networks. There was a large need for such a development, and it was the Council's responsibility to use such Council owned land to provide social rent housing. Initially the proposal would retain seventy parking spaces, including all existing EV spaces, and took account of the community's overnight parking need. Councillor Saul thanked the earlier public speaker and noted that bringing this item forward at such an early stage was to gather such views. Finally, it was noted that the scheme was at a very early stage and therefore all residents and stakeholders would have the chance to comment through consultation.

In the discussion the following points were raised by the Executive and Members in attendance:

- It was welcome that the scheme was for 100% social housing with a small number of emergency housing units. Also welcome was the retention of seventy parking spaces.
- A residents' permit parking scheme should be considered as part of the scheme. It was agreed that this would be investigated as the scheme is developed.
- Priority for the social housing should be given to key workers, in particular with the proximity of the site to key emergency services.

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- Currently the view was that it would be better for the Council to work with the expertise of a Registered Provider to develop the site, rather than for the Council to develop and manage the site itself. It was noted that the legislation that would allow the Council to develop the site itself was not thought to be in place at present.
- It was noted that providing market housing for sale to raise funds did not align with the Council's priorities. It was noted that better grant funding would be available with 100% social housing rather than a mixed development.
- It was noted that Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) may allow for an increased stock of property for such schemes.
- The change in the use of town centres in general was discussed. Whilst a shopping need would continue there was a swing to leisure and living. Town centre living also enabled sustainable living which was important given the Council's climate goals.

Councillor Saul proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Smith seconded the recommendations and noted that the proposed development would allow younger residents to remain in the area.

This proposal was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Earmarked £215,000 S106 developer contribution funding to support the provision of social housing in Witney
2. Approved the Director of Place to start formal discussions based on developing up to 70% of the Woodford Way Car Park with local Registered Providers in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and Member for Housing and Social Care

Carterton Units 1-3 and Station Lane Roofing Project

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the item, the purpose of which was to request allocation of funding for the re-roofing of investment and service properties that form part of the Capital Expenditure Budget for 2025/26 and to seek approval of these costs so that officers could proceed with the works with external contractors. Councillor Smith gave background to the properties and noted that at the time of acquisition, a business case included planned works to the roofing. Significant upgrades were needed to avoid future degradation and fulfil Council obligations to the tenants. A tender process had taken place for the works and detailed negotiations with the main contractor with input from specialist consultants had been completed.

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Councillor Smith proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Enright seconded the recommendations

This proposal was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Recommend to Council that the total cost detailed in Annex A is allocated to the project from the Investment Properties Programme.
2. Recommend to Council that delegated authority be given to Director of Finance (S151) in consultation with Executive Member for Finance to approve the final cost of the projects

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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. This process involved removal of the reliance on gas fired heating systems and replacing these with Air Source Heat Pumps. Councillor Prosser detailed the reduction in the Council's annual carbon emissions achieved by the scheme. Funding for the scheme was explained to be a combination of Council funding and Salix grants. The scheme must be delivered and operational by 31 March 2026 to secure the remaining grants.

In the discussion it was noted that the 8.8% reduction in total Council carbon emissions achieved by this scheme demonstrated the huge step this scheme would be making towards climate goals. It was noted that the March 2026 deadline carried risk of losing funding, however Officers dealt with such projects and timescales regularly and had expertise in doing so. The Climate Change Manager noted that preparations had been made to enable contractors to be on site very soon following approval by the Executive, the planning permission application was going to Uplands Area Planning Sub-Committee, and it was the aim to complete the scheme by January to allow room to resolve any issues.

Councillor Prosser proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Smith seconded the recommendations

This proposal was voted on and approved unanimously.

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RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Agreed to progress to the construction phase of the Windrush Leisure Centre decarbonisation scheme.
2. Recommended to Council to allocate an additional council contribution of £340,683 towards the project in addition to the £224,866 already included within the capital programme.
3. Requested Officers to bring forward a works programme for the activities identified in the recent condition survey for the Windrush Leisure Centre.

370 Exclusion of Press and Public

The item was not considered at the meeting.

371 Exempt annex for Item 13

This was not discussed, as the item was dealt with in the open part of the meeting without reference to the exempt material.

The Meeting closed at 3.34 pm

CHAIR