

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, 15 October 2025**

PRESENT

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

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive Officer), Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Phil Martin (Director of Place), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Rachel Biles (Leisure Strategy Manager), Mandy Fathers (Business Manager - Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service), Susan Hughes (Business Manager for Support and Advice), Paula Massey (Enabling Manager), Mathew Taylor (Democratic Services Officer), Andrew Thomson (Planning Policy Manager) and Stuart Wilson (Leisure Contracts Lead)

Other Councillors in attendance: Andrew Coles, Julian Cooper and Dan Levy

393 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from:

Councillor Lydia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment.

394 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

395 Minutes of Previous Meeting

There were no amendments to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 September 2025.

The minutes were proposed by Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council. Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council, seconded the proposal.

The proposal was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 September 2025.

Receipt of Announcements

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, drew the meeting's attention to the Waterways Fair being held at Witney Corn Exchange on Saturday 25 October 2025 between 10am and 2pm. The Fair was to discover inspiring projects in wetland creation, river restoration and wetland flood management. A number of organisations would be present including the Council's Nature Recovery Officers.

Councillor Rachel Crouch, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, advised that following from World Mental Health Day, a booklet had been produced by the Council which sought to bring information about the mental health services available in the district into one place. This was a working document and could be found by searching "be kind to your mind" on the Council's website.

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, advised that the Council had been granted a one-year extension to the Coronation Living Heritage Fund and therefore encouraged interested towns, villages, parishes and businesses to apply to apply for a community orchard. Councillor Prosser also informed those present that the Community Wellbeing and Nature Recovery Team had been involved in community outreach programmes in Witney and Chipping Norton and would soon be in Carterton to encourage young people and families to get out into nature. This project was for three years and funded by Public Health with a focus on inequality and nature recovery.

Participation of the Public

A question had been submitted to the Executive prior to the meeting by Siobhan Clements, a public participant. The member of the public was unable to attend and requested that the question be read in her absence:

"West Oxfordshire District Council is a partner in the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategy 2022–2025, which commits all councils to action on prevention, safe accommodation, and rural outreach. Yet, from the publicly available minutes, the only WODC activity referenced since 2022 has been a pilot with hairdressers. Could the Executive set out: (1) what concrete actions WODC has taken under the strategy; (2) how those actions are being measured and evaluated; and (3) what specific provision is being made in rural areas of West Oxfordshire, where survivors are often most isolated?"

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care, thanked the member of the public for her question and reiterated that this was an important issue. Councillor Saul advised that a detailed written response that set out the support and provision that the Council provided had been prepared and would be sent to the questioner. Councillor Saul also highlighted the partnership work the Council took part in and made particular reference to the work of the Chipping Norton branch of Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service.

Executive

15/October2025

The full written response was as follows:

- WODC contributes £24,500 annually towards the delivery of the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service (ODAS), delivered by A2Dominion. Whilst the contract is overseen by OCC who make the largest financial contribution, WODC is involved in quarterly contract monitoring. The service provided by ODAS includes:
 - Refuge services
 - Support groups and counselling
 - Practical advice and support face to face or via a helpline
 - Support for children and young people
 - Training and advice for organisations
- In the Housing team, the Housing Specialist Complex Needs team are DA specialists. The lead has been in the role since Nov 2024. She is the current Chair of the Safe Accommodation Working group in Oxfordshire.
- The work of the Housing team in supporting rural victims has been described as 'Gold standard' by Reducing the Risk domestic abuse charity.
- Housing team provides a range of support to victims:
 - Referrals for target hardening – to undertake measures to improve security in the home – referrals from eg TVP, Housing associations and children's social care. Delivered between 24/48 hours after notification. Work with the victim/survivor to take the right steps. A range of measures available – e.g. ring doorbell, lighting, locks, alarms on windows, fire-proof letter bag. Can also arrange 'sanctuary rooms' in properties – making a room in the house independently safe - can do this in private rental or social housing.
 - Principle is to work around the needs of the victim/survivor – often the best outcome is to stay in their own home especially if children are at the property – fleeing is not always ideal. Don't force people into temporary accommodation – put them swiftly onto emergency or gold banding in Homeseeker.
 - The Complex Needs team within the housing team are flexible and can meet in spaces where victim survivors feel comfortable and safe, this could be their home, a friend, a church, GP surgery our offices and we make the space as secure and confidential as possible.
 - The Complex Needs team will give guidance on how to stay safe, we will discuss such a technology abuse and give guidance on safe apps.
 - We will also encourage support once they are safe, a strong encouragement for them to reach out to GPs and professionals along with completion of the "Own my life course" when they feel ready to do so
 - Officers sit on all Multi Agency Tasking and Coordination (MATAC); Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC); Joint Agency Tasking and Coordination group (JATAC) and Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) – to ensure we not only contribute cases directly but also pick up intel from other agencies to ensure that we can take the necessary action.

15/October2025

- We have close working relationships with Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service (ODAS) for medium risk victim/survivor.
- Work closely with Reducing the risk re High risk and Victims First for the low- risk victim/survivors.
- Work with people who come to Council attention making a Homeseeker application or a Homeless application due to fear/risk of violence or DA – who may not have gone to the police yet – may be the first conversation had by a victim/survivor - on average receive 1 case a week.
- Help with getting non molestation orders – and liaison with the Court Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA).
- Network of dispersed accommodation is also available across the county – this is for victim/survivors who can't access refuge such as males, mothers with male children over the age of 10 and those in the LGBTQi+ community.
- Good working relationships with all agencies including Reducing the Risk to be able to review cases and seek advice.
- Sit on the Drive panel. Drive is an intervention for low-risk perpetrators to address behaviours. Drive fills a gap for Standard to Medium risk cases.
- In our Community Safety Partnership Action plan Domestic Abuse is a priority – the CSP has collaborated with the Branch in the past year on a Rural DA campaign focussing on the particular experience faced by survivor victims living rurally where abuse can last up to 25% longer than in urban areas. Also co-hosted an Own My Life event with the Branch in Autumn 2024.
- We established and coordinated the Rural DA subgroup of the Domestic Abuse Strategic Board – 2022-2023 – informed by the publication of the 'Captive and Controlled' report by the Rural Services Network.
- Continue to champion the particular needs of rural victim/survivors in rural areas at all opportunities and at all levels.
- Provided funding to the Branch's Phoenix project film and exhibition led by the Branch in 2022.
- Domestic abuse champions across staff teams – Housing and Community Wellbeing particularly.
- Officers sit on the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategic Board.

398 Reports from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

There had been no meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee since the last meeting of the Executive.

399 Matters raised by Audit and Governance Committee

The Audit and Governance Committee had met on 25 September 2025 and raised no matters for the Executive.

Infrastructure Funding Statement

Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning, presented the item, the purpose of which was to note the West Oxfordshire Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) for 2024/25. In his introduction Councillor Ashton noted that Local Authorities were required to report on the receipt and use of developer contributions through the IFS statement. The amounts of s106 and CIL secured, received, spent and held should be reported and these headline figures were contained in section 2.4 of the report. The IFS was required to be published by 31 December 2025.

Councillor Ashton drew attention to the mechanisms that the Council could use to secure funding such as working with stakeholders, planning policy requirements, negotiating obligations with developers and reviewing site viability. However, it was noted that funding passed onto third party agents was not reported and the Council had no control over how this was spent.

Councillor Ashton stated that £14,377,836.10 of funding was held by the Council. A proportion of this had been allocated for maintenance of open spaces with a further c.£10m of the funds having already been earmarked to specific projects. In addition to the current IFS those in the future would include funds secured through CIL. Finally, Councillor Ashton suggested that the infrastructure funding need that existed in West Oxfordshire was over £140m which was more than could be secured through such funding.

In the discussion that followed the following points were raised:

- A Member queried the Council's plan to secure land in central Woodstock. In the response it was noted that the Infrastructure Delivery Plan would set out infrastructure requirements required for growth and development across the district and would include Woodstock.
- The report included examples of projects delivered in the last year which brought to life what the plan was intended to accomplish.

Councillor Ashton proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Alaric Smith seconded the proposal and reiterated that in future CIL would be a further mechanism to secure infrastructure.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Noted the content of the Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) attached at Annex A, with a view to it being published on the Council's website by 31 December 2025 in accordance with legislative requirements.

401 Safeguarding Policy Update July 2025

Councillor Rachel Crouch, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, presented the report the purpose of which was to inform Members of the updated Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.

In introducing the item Councillor Crouch made the following points:

- Safeguarding was a statutory duty of the Council as it delivered a range of duties which directly impacted the lives of adults at risk, young people and children. The Council was therefore in a key position to safeguard and promote welfare.
- The Policy and Procedures were to ensure the Council was aware of its legal responsibilities. The document outlined roles, aims and responsibilities.
- The Council was part of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board (OSAB) and Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership (OSCP).
- The key areas of concern were detailed in section 3.3 of the report. Particular reference was made to concerns around Mental Health.
- The major changes in the Policy were in the referral process with key responsibilities now clarified. In addition, safeguarding lead job titles were removed but those positions were made clear. Ongoing training would be available to Members next year. Oxfordshire Mind were also offering training to Members.

In the discussion that followed a Member thanked and commended those involved in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

A question was raised around trends in safeguarding cases around Mental Health and Suicide Ideation. It was noted that the increase in cases was a national trend.

Councillor Crouch proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Andy Graham seconded the proposal and noted that it was important, with such a wide-ranging issues, that people who may be affected were made aware that their experiences could fall into the range of categories considered as abuse or a safeguarding concern in order that they would report it.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Agreed and adopted the updated Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.

402 The Low Income Family Tracker

Councillor Rachel Crouch, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, presented the item, the purpose of which was to give a brief overview of the Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT) progress since inception.

Councillor Crouch advised that LIFT was a powerful new data tool to help residents receive support that they are entitled to. The tool was already making a real difference for those in

Executive

15/October2025

crisis who did not realise that they were entitled to support. Councillor Crouch gave examples of cases where the tool had led to identification of those eligible but not in receipt of pension credit which had resulted in 68 successful pension credit claims. Following this success the tool was now being used more widely for families with low incomes to enable them to access monies such as Warm Homes Discount (WHD) and Housing Benefits. The County Council had agreed to continue to fund the scheme up to March 2027.

In the discussion a query was raised as to how communication with potential eligible recipients was made. The Officer advised that this was currently done in writing.

A further point was made regarding the importance of continued work with third parties, such as Citizens Advice, to promote and implement the scheme. This was considered important as some residents may find engagement with the Council a barrier.

Councillor Crouch proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Alaric Smith seconded the proposal and highlighted that the benefits system had high complexity and that therefore people were often unaware of their eligibility for support. This work was therefore impressive and important.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

- I. Noted the report.

403

Exclusion of Press and Public

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, proposed that Executive agree to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the remaining exempt items of business, on the basis that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

This was seconded by Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** in accordance with the provisions of Paragraph 4(2)(b) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 to:

Exclude the press and public from the meeting on the grounds that their presence could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1, 3 and 5 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, with the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighing the public interest in disclosing the exempt information.

404 Reconsideration of Business Rates Hardship Relief

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, presented the item the purpose of which was to reconsider an application for Hardship relief submitted under Section 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Upheld the original decision not to award a Hardship relief submitted under S49.

405 Business Rates Write off in excess of £5,000

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance presented the item the purpose of which was to seek approval to write off irrecoverable business rates in excess of £5,000.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Approved the write offs totalling £95,442.41 as detailed within this report, and;
2. Noted that the actual cost to the council is £38,176.96, being 40% of the total amount to be written off.

406 Options Appraisal of Leisure Management Arrangements

Councillor Tim Sumner, Executive Member for Leisure and Carterton Area Strategy, presented the item, the purpose of which was to inform the Executive of the Leisure Management Options Appraisal outcomes and to seek authority to commence implementation of the recommended management option for the Council's Leisure Services. This recommended option was to extend the current contract with Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) to 31 July 2032. This model was recommended for all sites as it provided security of ongoing leisure provision for residents, financial benefits and strategic alignment through the transition to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The 5-year improvement plan adopted at September's Executive would run in parallel with the implementation of the extension.

A Member raised a question regarding the assumptions made around the continuation of the model following LGR. In particular the Member queried what evidence there was for this assumption and what consequences would occur if this model did not continue following LGR which would mean contracts being broken. In his response Councillor Sumner stated that the rationale for the approach was both to safeguard provision during the transition and to allow a new authority to assess its options. A shorter contract would potentially discourage a provider from taking a contract which could result in a costly procurement exercise.

Councillor Sumner proposed accepting the recommendations in the report.

Councillor Alaric Smith seconded the proposal and further reiterated that decisions such as this were needed in order to ensure that a position was not reached where the Council had no power to action contracts.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

Executive

15/October2025

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Noted the findings of the Leisure Management Options Appraisal and entered a five-year Contract extension with Greenwich Leisure Limited, for the operation and management of the Council's leisure facilities as set out in the current Contract scope.
2. Delegated authority to Director of Place, in consultation with the Director of Finance and Head of Legal, Executive Member for Leisure and Carterton Area Strategy and Executive Member for Finance to commence negotiations with Greenwich Leisure Limited regarding the risk profile of any amendments to the Contract or specifications, and the impact of any capital projects to the Council.
3. Delegated authority to Director of Place, in consultation with the Head of Legal, Executive Member for Leisure and Carterton Area Strategy and Executive Member for Finance to commence consultation with landowners of facilities where lease agreements expire within the extended Contract term.
4. Delegated authority to the Director of Place and Director of Finance, in consultation with Executive Member for Leisure and Carterton Area Strategy and Executive Member for Finance to work in partnership with GLL to develop their capital investment proposals.

The Meeting closed at Time Not Specified

CHAIR