

Wednesday, 19 November 2025

Tel: 01993 861000

e-mail: democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk

AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

You are summoned to a meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee which will be held in Committee Room 1, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB on **Thursday, 27 November 2025 at 6.00 pm.**



Giles Hughes
Chief Executive

To: Members of the Audit and Governance Committee

Councillors: Carl Rylett (Chair), Ruth Smith (Vice-Chair), Joy Aitman, Andrew Beaney, David Jackson, Edward James, David Melvin, Elizabeth Poskitt, Nigel Ridpath, Sandra Simpson, Alex Wilson and Richard Deuttenburg (Independent Member)

Recording of Proceedings – The law allows the public proceedings of Council, Executive, and Committee Meetings to be recorded, which includes filming as well as audio-recording. Photography is also permitted. By participating in this meeting, you are consenting to be filmed.

As a matter of courtesy, if you intend to record any part of the proceedings please let the Democratic Services officers know prior to the start of the meeting.

AGENDA

1. **Apologies for Absence**
To receive any apologies for absence. The quorum for the Audit and Governance Committee is 4 Members.
2. **Declarations of Interest**
To receive any declarations from Members of the Committee on any items to be considered at the meeting
3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting (Pages 5 - 10)**
To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2025.
4. **Participation of the Public**
To receive any submissions from members of the public, in accordance with the Council's Public Participation Rules.

The deadline for submissions is 2.00pm, two clear working days before the meeting.
5. **Auditor's Annual Report on West Oxfordshire District Council (Value for Money Arrangements and Recommendations) (Pages 11 - 40)**
Purpose:
To provide Members with the Auditor's Annual Report on Value for Money Arrangements and Recommendations 2024/25.

Recommendation:
That the Audit and Governance Committee resolves to:
 1. Note the contents of the report and annex.
6. **Final 2024/25 Audit Findings Report (ISA260) and Statements of Account for West Oxfordshire District Council (Pages 41 - 176)**
Purpose:
This report presents the Audit Findings Report and Audited Statement of Accounts for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

Recommendations:
That the Audit and Governance Committee resolves to:
 1. Note the contents of the report and annexes.
 2. Approve the Statement of Accounts 2024/25, including the Annual Governance Statement; and
 3. Authorise the Chief Finance Officer and the Chair of the Committee to write a Letter of Representation on behalf of the Committee and Council to Bishop Fleming to enable the opinion to be issued.
7. **Treasury Management Mid-Term Report (Pages 177 - 188)**
Purpose:
To provide Members with an update on Treasury Management activity, the performance of internal and external funds and prudential indicators for the period 1st April 2025 – 30th Sept 2025

Recommendation:

That the Executive resolves to:

- I. Note the contents of the report.

8. **Internal Audit Progress Report** (Pages 189 - 204)

Purpose:

To present a summary of the audit work concluded since the last meeting of this Committee.

Recommendation:

That the Audit and Governance Committee resolves to:

- I. Note the Internal Audit Plan Progress report.

9. **SWAP Internal Audit External Quality Assessment (EQA)** (Pages 205 - 224)

Purpose:

To present a report of SWAP's External Quality Assessment (EQA) 2025.

Recommendation:

That the Audit and Governance Committee resolves to:

- I. Note the SWAP External Quality Assessment Report.

10. **Audit and Governance Committee Work Programme** (Pages 225 - 228)

Purpose

For the Committee to review and note its work programme.

(END)

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WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **Audit and Governance Committee**

Held in the Committee Room I, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28
INB at 6.00 pm on **Thursday, 25 September 2025**

PRESENT

Councillors: Carl Rylett (Chair), Ruth Smith (Vice-Chair), David Melvin, Elizabeth Poskitt, Nigel Ridpath, Sandra Simpson and Alex Wilson

Officers: Lucy Cater (Assistant Director SWAP), Emma Cathcart (Head of Service, Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance and Regulatory Services), Mathew Taylor (Democratic Services Officer), Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer), John Chorlton (Chief Technology Officer) and Georgina Dyer (Head of Finance)

Other Councillors in attendance: None.

79 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2025. Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt proposed that the minutes be agreed. This was seconded by Councillor Carl Rylett, Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee, was put to the vote and agreed by the Committee.

Resolved:

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2025.

80 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Jackson, Andrew Beaney, Edward James and Joy Aitman and from Independent Member Richard Deuttenburg.

81 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

82 Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

83 Internal Audit Progress Report

The purpose of the report was to present a summary of the audit work that had been concluded since the last meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee.

Lucy Cater, Head of Internal Audit. Assistant Director, SWAP Internal Audit Services, introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- The Counter Fraud Enforcement Unit (CFEU) Audit Report had been requested by Emma Cathcart, Head of Service, CFEU. This audit had returned a “low substantial” opinion.
- The payroll audit was split into two areas, and therefore two audit opinions were given. The first of these areas was the Publica controls, which included the systems for processing of the payroll. This audit had returned a “mid substantial” opinion The second of the areas was the Councils service area controls around payroll transactions. This had returned a “mid reasonable” opinion.
- Three further reports had been finalised since the report had been published and would come to the next meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee.
- All agreed actions had continued to be followed up since the last meeting of the Committee.

In the discussion the following points were raised:

- It was noted that policies and procedures had now been revised and implemented with regard to the open agreed actions on the Council’s procurement cards. The Councils Management Team were now aware that paperwork should be checked when completing claims.
- The audit of the engagement with the S106 consultation progress that was pending would be brought to the Audit and Governance Committee in November.
- It was noted that it was good to see an impressive result for the CFEU Audit.

Resolved: The Audit and Governance Committee noted the report.

84 CFEU Update Report

The purpose of the report was to provide the Committee with assurance over the counter fraud activities of the Council and to update the Committee in relation to the areas of fraud risk mitigation. Direct updates would continue to be provided biannually. In addition, the purpose was to present the Committee with an updated Fraud Risk Strategy 2025, Fraud Compliance Report and Fraud Response Plan, so that they could consider the approach taken

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by the CFEU Partnership in this area. Finally, the report provided assurance to the Committee that the risks of fraud committed against the Council were recognised, managed and mitigated in accordance with Council priorities, and changing fraud trends.

Emma Cathcart, Head of Service, Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit (CFEU), introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- The report showed information about bigger strategic projects on areas identified as fraud risks.
- An updated Fraud Risk Strategy was presented to the Committee.
- A new Fraud Response Plan had been introduced along with guidance for staff on how to act when there were suspicions of fraud.
- The Fraud Compliance Report included a completed assessment that listed where the Authority was compliant. Where it was considered not compliant the required actions were detailed in the report.
- It was noted that an area of non-compliance within the report was with regard to portfolio holder updates. However, the view of the Officer was that the reports should not go to the Portfolio holder in isolation as the report effected all Members. Therefore, it was suggested that all Executive Members would be briefed in future to coincide with reports being presented to the Audit and Governance Committee.
- One of the areas of risk from last year had been grants. The Grants Management Policy had now been drafted and was in the final stage of consultation. In addition, a supporting toolkit had been produced for staff.
- The recent prosecution of a member of staff with undeclared secondary employment was discussed. The prosecution demonstrated that the Council's internal approach to fraud matched their external approach, and this was an important message for public confidence.
- In the coming year there would be more work around procurement risks and further reports and updates would be brought to the Committee on this area.

Councillor Alex Wilson joined the meeting at 6:16 pm.

In the discussion the following points were raised:

- A Councillor asked which factors could impact the decision to pursue a case of fraud. The Officer advised that consideration was given to the public interest test, the evidence for prosecution, the damage of the fraud and the funding available.
- The Officer was asked to give more detail around the use data analytics as it currently had a status of "not compliant" on the Fraud Compliance Report. In their response the Officer noted that at present the Council could not be compliant in this area as it did not have software to undertake data analytics. However, it was noted that the Council

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was part of national data matching exercises. In addition, there was a Central Government analytic programme around fraud that may be rolled out for LGA use.

- A Councillor asked for more detail on contractors and third parties sign up to the Whistleblowing Policy, an area that was listed as “not compliant” on the Fraud Compliance Report. It was confirmed that contractors do have access to the Whistleblowing Policy, but more communication was required to draw their attention to this.
- It was confirmed that more work was to be completed in the area of recruitment vetting, which was presently only “partially compliant” on the Fraud Compliance Report. This area was acknowledged to be a growing area of fraud risk that required additional checks, in particular with the rise in the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in applications for roles.

Resolved: The Audit and Governance Committee noted the report, Fraud Risk Strategy 2025, Fraud Compliance Report and Fraud Response Plan.

85 Treasury Management Q1 Report

The purpose of the report was to provide the Audit and Governance Committee the quarter one Treasury Management Indicators as required by the CIPFA Treasury Management Code.

Georgina Dyer, Head of Finance, introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- It had been a quiet quarter. The exception to this was the US reciprocal trade tariffs in April which had affected markets.
- The Council had received a generally good return from its cash and pooled funds which were £96k above budget in quarter one.
- The Council had complied with the Prudential Indicators for quarter one.
- The Council’s Treasury Advisors - Arlingclose, had suggested that a further interest rate cut may be made in the year.

In the discussion the following points were raised:

- A further explanation of the statutory override position was given to Members. It was confirmed that this had been extended to the end of the 2027/28 financial year which would coincide with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
- It was confirmed that the LGA benchmarking information in the report was obtained from the Councils Treasury Advisors, Arlingclose.
- A question was raised about the yields on specific investment properties in Carterton. The Officer agreed to return to the Member on this point.

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- A discussion was held around when the Council would need to begin to use external borrowing for its projects. It was noted that the Council was at the capacity of internal borrowing for current and planned projects. Therefore, funding major future projects in the next 12 to 18 months, may require external borrowing.

Resolved: The Audit and Governance Committee noted the report.

86 Audit and Governance Committee Work Programme

The purpose of the item was to provide The Committee with a schedule of the Committees work programme for the year.

Resolved: It was noted that there may be some movement of items between January and March 2026. There were no further comments made on the work programme.

87 Exclusion of Public and Press

Item 10 on the meeting agenda contained information that was fully exempt from publication. The Committee would therefore need to exclude the press and public to discuss this item.

It was proposed by Councillor Carl Rylett that a resolution be passed to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the remaining exempt item of business.

This was seconded by Councillor Ruth Smith, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by the Committee.

The Committee resolved that, in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in paragraph 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, the public were excluded from the meeting for the remaining item of business.

88 Cyber Security Update

The purpose of the report was to provide the Audit and Governance Committee with an update on cyber security.

John Chorlton, Chief Technology Officer (Publica), introduced the report.

The Committee raised several questions which were addressed by the Officer.


Councillor David Melvin left the meeting at 6.37pm.

Resolved: The Audit and Governance Committee noted the report.

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The Meeting closed at 7.03 pm

CHAIR

 <p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>	<p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>
<p>Name and date of Committee</p>	<p>AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 27 NOVEMBER 2025</p>
<p>Subject</p>	<p>AUDITOR'S ANNUAL REPORT ON WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL (VALUE FOR MONEY ARRANGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS)</p>
<p>Wards affected</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>Accountable member</p>	<p>Cllr Alaric Smith Executive Member for Finance Email: alaric.smith@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Accountable officer</p>	<p>Madhu Richards, Director of Finance Email: madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Report author</p>	<p>Madhu Richards, Director of Finance Email: madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Summary/Purpose</p>	<p>To provide Members with the Auditor's Annual Report on Value for Money Arrangements and Recommendations 2024/25.</p>
<p>Annexes</p>	<p>Annex A – Auditor's Annual Report on Value for Money Arrangements and Recommendations 2024/25.</p>
<p>Recommendation(s)</p>	<p>That the Audit and Governance Committee resolves to:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">I. Note the contents of the report and annex.</p>
<p>Corporate priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting Residents First • A Good Quality of Life for All • A Better Environment for People and Wildlife • Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
<p>Key Decision</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>Exempt</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>Consultees/ Consultation</p>	<p>NO</p>

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Under the National Audit Office (NAO) Code of Audit Practice (“the Code”) external auditors are required to consider whether the Council has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.
- 1.2 This report details the auditor’s findings with regards to the Council’s arrangements for 2024/25.
- 1.3 No significant weaknesses in arrangements were identified.
- 1.4 Improvement recommendations have been made and management responses to each of these are included in the report.
- 1.5 This report also includes a “Follow-up of previous recommendations” section.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1 The annex to this report contains the Auditor’s Annual Report on West Oxfordshire District Council 2024/25.
- 2.2 Charlie Martin, from Bishop Fleming, will be joining the meeting and presenting the report.
- 2.3 Please note that a *single* recommendation in any area leads to an amber rating for that area. Overall, there are six recommendations (page 13 onwards of Annex A):
 - Only one recommendation in the current year – Publica Phase 1 and 2 comprehensive post-implementation review.
 - Five others relate to *prior year* issues believed to be ongoing.Management responses are included for each recommendation.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1 None.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The Audit and Governance Committee are requested to note the report.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None.

7. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 None.

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 8.1 None.

9. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

None.

(END)

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Auditor's Annual Report West Oxfordshire District Council

For the year ended 31 March 2025



Ref: PLWE109788/CM/JS
Date: 12 November 2025

Members of the Audit and Governance Committee
West Oxfordshire District Council
Woodgreen Office
Witney
OX28 1NB

Dear Members

West Oxfordshire District Council ('the Council') – Auditor's Annual Report

We are pleased to attach our draft Auditor's Annual Report. This report summarises our audit conclusions and highlights the key findings arising from our value for money work.

We have initially discussed the contents of our report with management, and we have incorporated their comments where relevant.

This report is intended to be solely for the information and use of the Council's officers and those charged with governance of the Council. It should not be shared with anyone beyond the Council without our prior approval.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Council's officers for the co-operation and assistance afforded to us during the course of the audit.

Yours faithfully

Bishop Fleming Audit Limited

BISHOP FLEMING AUDIT LIMITED

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1. Introduction

Our Auditor's Annual Report ('AAR') summarises the work that we completed for West Oxfordshire District Council ('the Council') for the year ended 31 March 2025.

The Council is responsible for keeping proper accounts and proper records in relation to the accounts and for maintaining an appropriate system of internal control. The Council is responsible for the preparation of annual accounts for each financial year. Such accounts must present a true and fair view and comply with the requirements of enactments that apply to them.

The Council is also responsible putting in place appropriate arrangements to secure the economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources and to maintain an effective system of internal control that supports the achievement of their policies, aims and objectives whilst safeguarding and securing value for money from the public funds at their disposal.

The scope of our work is set in accordance with the National Audit Office's Code of Audit Practice ('the Code') and the International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) (UK). Our work is planned to provide a focused and robust audit. We are responsible for and are required to provide an independent opinion as to whether the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Council at the year end and of its expenditure and income for the year then ended;
- have been prepared properly in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2024/25; and
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

We are also required to report to the Council by exception the following matters, if:

- the Annual Governance Statement does not comply with "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework 2016 Edition" published by CIPFA/SOLACE; or
- we issue a report in the public interest under Section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014; or
- we make a written recommendation to the Council under Section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or
- we make an application to the court for a declaration that an item of account is contrary to law under Section 28 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or
- we issue an advisory notice under Section 29 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or
- we make an application for judicial review under Section 31 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit.

In addition, we are also responsible for reviewing the Council's arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. The Code of Audit Practice requires us to report on the Council's arrangements under three specified reporting criteria:

- Financial sustainability – how the Council plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services;
- Governance – how the Council ensures it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks; and
- Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness – how the Council uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.

We carried out our work in accordance with our External Audit Plan that we issued to the Council in March 2025.

2. Executive summary

Results from the audit of the financial statements

We have substantially completed our audit of the financial statements, and we anticipate issuing an unmodified audit opinion. See Section 3 for more details.

We also completed component auditor procedures, in line with the National Audit Office group auditor instructions. We had no matters to report from this work.




Results on our work on other matters

We are currently completing our work relating to other matters in line with our audit plan. For those minor areas that have required updates or amendments, management have engaged constructively with us and responded positively to our requests. See Section 3 for more details.




Results from our work on VFM arrangements

Under the National Audit Office (NAO) Code of Audit Practice ('the Code'), we are required to consider whether the Council has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2025.

Our conclusions are summarised below. See Sections 4 to 8 for more details.

Financial sustainability	 <i>Amber</i>	We did not identify any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for financial sustainability. We have three unresolved improvement recommendations, originally raised by the predecessor auditors. See Section 8 for details.
Governance	 <i>Green</i>	We did not identify any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for governance and no recommendations made.
Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness	 <i>Amber</i>	We did not identify any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness. We have raised one improvement recommendation and have two unresolved improvement recommendation from the prior year. See Section 8 for details.

Key:

 <i>Green</i>	No significant weaknesses in arrangements identified and no recommendations made
 <i>Amber</i>	No significant weaknesses in arrangements identified but recommendations made
 <i>Red</i>	Significant weaknesses in arrangements identified and recommendations made

3. Audit of the financial statements

Audit opinion on the financial statements

The scope of our work is set in accordance with the National Audit Office's Code of Audit Practice (The Code) and the International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) (UK). We are required to provide an independent opinion as to whether the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Council at the year end and of its expenditure and income for the year then ended;
- have been prepared properly in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2024/25; and
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

We have substantially completed our audit of the financial statements, and we anticipate issuing an unmodified audit opinion.

Key issues arising from the accounts audit

Our testing and review of the financial statements have not identified any significant issues that need to be brought to the attention of the members. The draft accounts and working papers provided were of a good quality, supporting the appropriate progression of the review process and only a few amendments were required.

Other matters

We are required to report to the Council by exception the following matters, if:

- the Annual Governance Statement does not comply with "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework 2016 Edition" published by CIPFA/SOLACE; or
- we issue a report in the public interest under Section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014; or
- we make a written recommendation to the Council under Section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or
- we make an application to the court for a declaration that an item of account is contrary to law under Section 28 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or
- we issue an advisory notice under Section 29 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or
- we make an application for judicial review under Section 31 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit.

We concluded that there were no matters to bring to the Council's attention in respect of these matters.

More detailed findings can be found in our Audit Completion Report which was reported to the Audit and Governance Committee on 27 November 2025.

4. Value for Money

Under the National Audit Office ('NAO') Code of Audit Practice ('the Code'), we are required to consider whether the Council has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2025.

The Code requires us to report our commentary on the Council's arrangements under three specified reporting criteria:

- Financial sustainability – how the Council plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services;
- Governance – how the Council ensures it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks; and
- Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness – how the Council uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.

The NAO has issued guidance for auditors to report against each of the three specified reporting criteria. The guidance also includes a number of further areas for review within each criteria for the auditor to assess those arrangements.

Our risk assessment did not identify any risk of significant weakness.

We asked management to complete an evidenced self-assessment of the Council's arrangements. We then reviewed the evidence provided and carried out follow up work as appropriate to consider whether there are any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

Our commentary on the Council's arrangements in each of these three areas is set out in Sections 5, 6 and 7 of the report.

Our recommendations for improvement are included in Section 8.

5. Financial sustainability

We considered how the Council plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services, including how it:

- ensures that it identifies all the significant financial pressures that are relevant to its short and medium-term plans and builds these into them;
- plans to bridge its funding gaps and identifies achievable savings;
- plans finances to support the sustainable delivery of services in accordance with strategic and statutory priorities;
- ensures that its financial plan is consistent with other plans such as workforce, capital, investment, and other operational planning which may include working with other local public bodies as part of a wider system; and
- identifies and manages risks to financial resilience, e.g. unplanned changes in demand, including challenge of the assumptions underlying its plans.

Overview and 2024/25 outturn

The Council's financial performance report for 2024/25 was considered by the Council's Executive on 9 July 2025. This included the Council's general fund final outturn for the financial year 2024/25. The final outturn position was a contribution to the general fund reserves of £6,345k.

The Financial Performance Report included a narrative summary. It explained the financial year had been challenging for the Council due to an overspend on services, arising from expenditure on temporary emergency accommodation, and worsened by the loss of the Housing Benefit Subsidy. This was mitigated; however, by encouraging results from Treasury activities.

The Financial Performance Report also included explanations of significant variances, and a full list of all budget variances which supports transparency and is in line with good practice.

Financial planning and monitoring

On 28 February 2024, full Council considered the Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy ('MTFS') Report for 2024/25. The report provided a comprehensive assessment of factors and risk, and was supported by the Council's outlook of potential future local government finance settlements, and an explanation of the further deferral of local government finance reform.

The 2024/25 Budget Report reflected on the short-term nature of government finance settlements and the resultant difficulty, experienced by the sector, in accurately forecasting future finance settlements. The Council's detailed analysis and assessment of implications of the current and predicted future local government settlements provided context to the 2024/25 budget report and demonstrates good practice.

During 2024/25, quarterly meetings were held between the finance team and budget holders to complete a budget forecast and identify variances against the original budget set. The reasons for them were then recorded by the finance team in a central system. The finance team then produced quarterly budget monitoring reports for the financial year 2024/25 which were assessed by the Executive with each report detailing and explaining the Council's revenue and capital expenditure, with a supporting narrative explaining significant variances.

Additionally, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee provided additional oversight to the Council's financial performance and considered the quarterly budget monitoring reports for the financial year 2024/25. The Audit and Governance Committee considered a Treasury Management update report and the Treasury Management Outturn Report 2024/25 during a meeting held on 26 June 2025.

Achieving efficiency savings

The Council has a Transformation Working Group whose membership includes the Council leader, Finance Portfolio Lead, Deputy Leader, and statutory officers of the Council. The Transformation Working Group aims is to steer the Council's response to the challenging financial situation, guide the preparation of a sustainable MTFS consistent with the Council's Local Plan 2031, and oversee the delivery of the Council's work programme in terms of service transformation, investment and revenue generation. Detailed within the Transformation Working Group's terms of reference are the following objectives:

- Reach a common understanding of the financial challenges facing the Council and its financial position;
- Champion effective financial planning, and help the Executive/Council develop a sustainable financial strategy which will deliver both a balanced budget and Council Plan priorities; and
- Monitor areas of financial risk and track transformation activity and planned savings.

The Council has put in place arrangements to identify alternatives to the use of reserves to support budget gaps in the Council's MTFS.

2025/26 financial planning

The Council's budget setting process follows an established process that involves thorough internal and external engagement that includes elected members, officers, key partners, and stakeholders which is reasonable practice.

The budget setting process for 2025/26 began in the autumn of 2024 with the Chief Finance Officer and finance team holding meetings with all budget managers where a 'line by line' assessment of each budget area was conducted. During these meetings revenue, capital and earmarked reserves were discussed with budget holders also identifying cost pressures, opportunities for savings or income generation, fees and charges proposals and any service changes that might have a budgetary impact. The Council also stated that in parallel to budget holder engagement there were further meetings held between the respective senior leadership teams of the Council, and the Council's significant partners being Publica and Ubico which provided additional input to the emerging budget position. The output of all the meetings was captured and assessed by the finance team who then produced budget working papers.

On 11 December 2024, the Executive received the first draft of the 2025/26 budget. At this stage, the focus was primarily on the revenue element and the costs associated with the provision of services, while the component remained largely unchanged. The draft budget was prepared on the basis that it was assumed there would be no fundamental changes in government funding in 2025/26.

The Council's Budget Report for 2025/26 included a five-year MTFS 2025/26 – 2029/30 which assumes that the new homes bonus and Extended Producer Responsibility (Waste) payments would end in 2025/26. Furthermore, the outcome of the government's fair funding review will significantly decrease the Council's income from Business Rates from 2026/27. It is therefore likely that the General Fund will be needed to finance the cost of services from 2026/27 to the foreseeable future.

The local government sector is operating with a significant degree of financial uncertainty driven by short term local finance settlements, local government finance reform, and wider economic drivers.

The level of uncertainty faced by the sector has not subsided and scenario planning can be a beneficial tool in supporting financial planning. It can enhance transparency and oversight to the budget setting process and is something that the Council has applied for the 2025/26 budget process.

Prior year external audit recommendations

As part of our audit process for 2024/25, we have revisited the recommendations provided to management following the prior year audit and determined whether changes have been implemented. These are:

- the Council introduces wider financial scenario planning within its MTFS and to include such information in annual budgeting setting reports;
- the Council places a significant and immediate focus on developing planned savings, and wider alternatives to the use of reserves, in the management of budget gaps identified within the Council's MTFS;
- the Council considers the adoption of a voluntary minimum threshold of unallocated general funds reserves and includes details of both unallocated and earmarked reserves in annual budget setting reports;
- the Council clarifies, within its Constitution, the responsibility for the assessment of the Council's Capital, Investment and Treasury Management Strategies as part of the annual budget setting process.

Progress on addressing the recommendations and management's comments is set out in Section 8.

Based on the work carried out, we are satisfied that there are no significant weaknesses in the Council's financial sustainability arrangements. We have made recommendations for areas of improvement in Section 8.

6. Governance

We considered how the Council ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks, including how it:

- monitors and assesses risk and how the body gains assurance over the effective operation of internal controls, including arrangements to prevent and detect fraud;
- approaches and carries out its annual budget setting process;
- ensures effective processes and systems are in place to ensure budgetary control; to communicate relevant, accurate and timely management information (including non-financial information where appropriate); supports its statutory financial reporting requirements; and ensures corrective action is taken where needed, including in relation to significant partnerships;
- ensures it makes properly informed decisions, supported by appropriate evidence and allowing for challenge and transparency. This includes arrangements for effective challenge from those charged with governance/audit committee; and
- monitors and ensures appropriate standards, such as meeting legislative/regulatory requirements and standards in terms of officer or member behaviour (such as gifts and hospitality or declarations/conflicts of interests), and for example where it procures or commissions services.

Risk management

The Council's Strategic Risk Register covers all identified risks for the Council and ranks them by impact and likelihood. Any changes made to the risk score are recorded within the Strategic Risk Register and explained. The Strategic Risk Register is reviewed by the Senior Management Team on a monthly basis and by Informal Executive on a quarterly basis.

For each risk, the type and level of acceptable risk, risk assessment and potential mitigation is documented. The Council provides a detailed written explanation for the scores assigned to each risk, along with the controls in place to mitigate the risk and planned actions. Each risk is also assigned to a risk owner who is responsible for monitoring this risk.

The Council are within the Publica arrangement (this is considered in full in Section 7 "Publica outsourcing arrangements") and the transition of repatriating services are overseen with dedicated risk registers covering each of the two phases of change. The first phase took effect on 1 November 2024, with second phase completed in July 2025. We see that these dedicated risk registers have been in development for the second phase, and have been monitored by the Executive.

The Council's Governance Structure is such that the Strategic Risk Register is maintained by the Business Manager for Governance, Risk and Business Continuity and the Senior Management Team. This is then taken to the Executive Leadership Team for consultation before presentation to the Audit and Governance Committee. This allows for reliable and direct channels of communication between management and elected members to report any risks.

In regard to management of fraud risk, the Council has a Counter Fraud Enforcement Unit ('CFEU') in order to perform reactive review if a fraud is identified or a referral received. We have seen evidence of steps taken by the CFEU of both proactive and reactive positive review actions.

During 2024/25, South West Audit Partnership Limited ('SWAP') delivered the Council's internal audit programme, undertaking a series of reviews across key areas. Each internal audit report summarised the assurance opinion for the work completed and set out agreed management actions arising from the findings, prioritised on a scale from 1 (highest) to 3 (lowest). SWAP reports quarterly on the progress made in implementing these actions, enabling the Audit and Governance Committee to maintain effective oversight. This includes identifying actions that are delayed or not progressing as expected, allowing the Audit and Governance Committee to challenge and support management in ensuring timely resolution.

Internal control

The Audit and Governance Committee has a key role to play in ensuring the overall effectiveness of internal controls. The Audit and Governance Committee discharges this function appropriately by adhering to its terms of reference and challenging officers in relation to internal and external audit findings.

A key element of internal control is the role of Internal Audit. As referred to above, the Council's Internal Audit is provided by SWAP, who have a representative at each of the Audit and Governance Committee meetings to present any findings. The Audit and Governance Committee approves the Annual Internal Audit Plan and is provided with a progress report

against the plan at each meeting. The plan for 2024/25 was approved by the Audit and Governance Committee on 19 March 2024.

The annual opinion of SWAP for 2024/25 on the Council gives a “reasonable” level of assurance and was presented to the Audit and Governance Committee in June 2025, with it stating there is “generally a sound system of governance, risk management and control in place”.

We are satisfied with the internal control arrangements at the Council.

Budget setting and budgetary control

Budgets are designed and set by budget holders before presentation and consultation by the Executive. This is done with review of the performance against the prior year undertaken. Once agreed, it is then ultimately approved at a full Council meeting. Capital programmes and growth forecasts are included as part of the budget setting process.

The budget setting process for 2024/25 considered the risks identified in the risk register and quantified the impact this could have on the budgets. An example is the uncertainty around local government funding from 2026/27 onwards which poses a risk to the financial sustainability of the Council due to the reliance on General Fund reserves to meet increasing budget gaps.

Sufficient evidence has been seen through review of minutes to provide assurance that the budget setting and monitoring processes are reported frequently throughout the year in the quarterly Financial Performance Reports as reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Appropriate analysis of budget variations and explanations were included in the reporting.

Decision making

We are satisfied that appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure that all relevant information is provided to decision makers before major decisions are made, and that there are arrangements for challenge of such decisions before they are made.

There is an appropriate culture set by senior officers, driven by the code of conduct set out in the Council’s Constitution. This includes appropriate levels of engagement by the Executive Leadership Team with other senior members and attendance at governance meetings. Leadership of the Council also ensure that the appropriate experts are consulted for unusual or complex transactions such as the Publica transition reports.

The Audit and Governance Committee commissioned a CIPFA self-review exercise of their governance arrangements during the year. As part of our work, we have reviewed the output recommendations from the report and their implementation across the Council. We can conclude that the Council have implemented adequate governance arrangements through their Framework for Partnership Working. The key areas in the survey included organisational knowledge, the Audit and Governance Committee’s role and functions, governance, internal audit, financial management and reporting, external audit, risk management, counter fraud, values of good governance and treasury management. Following on from the self-assessment exercise, it was agreed by full Council that the size of the Audit and Governance Committee would be reduced to eleven Councillors, up to two Independent Members (not Councillors) recruited to the Audit and Governance Committee, and that members of the Executive are excluded from sitting on the Audit and Governance Committee.

Ensuring appropriate standards

The Council has appropriate policies and procedures in place to ensure appropriate standards are maintained. These include the code of conduct in the Council’s Constitution. It follows the Local Government Transparency Code 2015, which sets out the requirements for local authorities to publish data. Training on this is given to all councillors.

Gifts and hospitality are clearly detailed and recorded as shown on the Gifts and Hospitality Register on the councillor page of the Council’s website. It is published quarterly, including any reasons why gifts have been received.

A register of interest for all councillors is maintained on the Council website and is updated annually. In addition, all Council meetings begin with a declaration of interests.

Prior year external audit recommendations

As part of our audit process for 2024/25, we have revisited the recommendations provided to management following the prior year audit and determined whether changes have been implemented. These are:

- the Council's Strategic Risk Register to be considered quarterly at the Audit and Governance Committee meetings.

Progress on addressing the recommendations and management's comments is set out in Section 8.

Based on the work carried out, we are satisfied that there are no significant weaknesses in the Council's governance arrangements. We have made recommendations for areas of improvement in Section 8.

7. Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

We considered how the Council uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services, including:

- how financial and performance information has been used to assess performance to identify areas for improvement;
- how the Council evaluates the services it provides to assess performance and identify areas for improvement;
- how the Council ensures it delivers its role within significant partnerships and engages with stakeholders it has identified, in order to assess whether it is meeting its objectives; and
- where the Council commissions or procures services, how it assesses whether it is realising the expected benefits.

Assessing performance and evaluating service delivery

The Council reports its performance against its key objectives to the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a detailed assessment of performance against the budget. The quarterly 'service performance report' monitors the reasons for movements to identify where actions should be taken for improvements to be made. This report identifies the Council's progress in the year towards achieving its budgeted position. The Council also takes part in the Local Government Inform steering group, where local authorities compare performance across the year and share knowledge and expertise.

The Council also received quarterly reports from Publica that cover service delivery in all areas. These are then reviewed and an improvement plan developed if any specific weakness or recommendations are identified.

We note that the last corporate peer review was undertaken in 2018. It is recommended that one occurs once at least every five years. We raised a recommendation in the prior year that the Council undertakes one in the next 12 months (see Section 8)

Publica outsourcing arrangements

The Council is one of four local authorities that outsource many core functions (including much of the finance function) to Publica Group Limited ('Publica'). Publica is a 'Teckal company' owned by Cheltenham Borough Council, Cotswold District Council, Forest of Dean District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council. It was established in 2017.

Since 2017, Publica has delivered council services on behalf of the Council. A Local Government Association independent peer review was commissioned in 2022 by Cotswold District Council to look at whether Publica was still able to meet the current and future needs of its owners. Subsequently, an options appraisal was undertaken by the consulting firm, Human Engine, which recommended that the majority of services should move from Publica back to the respective councils, leaving Publica to deliver a reduced number of back office and customer services for the respective councils.

West Oxfordshire District Council agreed with the recommendation made and the Chief Executive organised a detailed transition plan that covered phase 1 of the transfer on 1 November 2024, in conjunction with the respective councils. We are aware that due diligence and monitoring of the transitional plans are in place within the Executive. The Publica Transition Plan - Phase 2 was taken to the Executive on 12 March 2025 where the Executive recommended the implementation of Phase 2. The Council accepted the recommendations on 19 March 2025. Phase 2 was then completed 1 July 2025. We will continue to review the situation further in our 2025/26 audit work.

The functions repatriated to the Council in Phase 1 included: Development management; Democratic Services and Elections; Corporate Plan and Policy; Economic Development; Communities; Climate change / environment / sustainability; Strategic finance; Strategic Housing; and Community Wellbeing. For Phase 2, the functions included were: Waste, Property and Estates, and Leisure.

West Oxfordshire District Council and Cotswold District Council are open to sharing certain roles, to share specialist expertise to support them in the delivery of corporate plan objectives and avoid the need to recruit or use specialist service providers. The relevant employees moved across under TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006) from Publica on 1 November 2024.

In our 2023/24 report, we recommended that the transition process continues to be actively monitored and discussed. Given that Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the transition have now been completed, this recommendation has been superseded with a recommendation in Section 8, to ensure a review of the plan implementation is undertaken, assessing whether the

benefits have been realised and identifying further opportunities and challenges that have arisen following the completion of Phase 2.

Partnership working

The Council participates in a wide range of local partnerships and has a track record of working with strategic partners to develop strategies and translate those into actions for the Council to deliver. Its partnerships cover, for example, regeneration and economic development, planning, procurement, and leisure.

The Council completes a Strategic Partnership Update, and also maintains a Partnership Activity Report which monitors its partnership and collaborative working with other services. These are reported annually to the Audit and Governance Committee who review the progress made within the partnerships in line with the framework for partnership working. An update was presented to the Council meeting on 21 May 2025

The Council has included statements in its Constitution with regards to ensuring that stakeholders are consulted and their responses considered where appropriate.

Commissioning and procuring services

The Council is planning to update their Procurement and Contract Management Strategy in late 2025, having updated its Contract Procedure Rules in April 2025. The Procurement and Contract Management Strategy aims to take value for money, local economy, compliance, transparency, fairness and environmental/ethical procurement practices into account. The strategy was last updated in September 2023 to address the requirements of The Procurement Act 2023 (Consequential and Other Amendments) Regulations 2025, which came into effect on 24 February 2025. In the prior year, we recommended that a regular review cycle be introduced for the Procurement and Contract Management Strategy. Management have informed us that the next review is planned for Quarter 3 2025. As this has not yet occurred, we consider this recommendation ongoing.

There is no evidence that suggests the Council is failing to operate a fair procurement exercise for significant contracts.

Throughout the year, monitoring of contracts is undertaken through the Publica Performance Report which sets out all services and how they have performed against previous quarters. There are also quarterly performance reports to monitor the performance of key providers and sub-contractors as well as monthly portfolio holders' meetings to ensure performance of commissioned services is operating effectively. Any underperforming areas have been seen to be reviewed and a plan to resolve issues put in place.

It has also been noted that the Council monitors its waste contract to ensure that Ubico Limited are meeting their obligations with regards to the environmental services provided.

Prior year external audit recommendations

As part of our audit process for 2024/25, we have revisited the recommendations provided to management following the prior year audit and determined whether changes have been implemented. These are:

- The Council ensures that a more regular update cycle is put in place in regard to the procurement and contract management strategy
- The Council organise a peer review in the coming 12 months.
- The Council ensures that proper due diligence is taken on Phase 2 of the Publica transition

Progress on addressing the recommendations and management's comments is set out in Section 8.

Based on the work carried out, we are satisfied that there are no significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness. We have made recommendations for areas of improvement in Section 8.

8. Recommendations

KEY:





RED – Recommendations that refer to issues that have **resulted in a significant weakness in the Council's arrangements.**



AMBER – Recommendations that should improve the arrangements in place at the Council but are **not as a result of identifying a significant weakness.**

Current Year Issues

Publica Transition Outcomes and Lessons Learned	
 <i>Amber</i>	
<p><i>Improving Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness</i></p> <p>The Publica Review report, considered by the Executive on 16 November 2023, recommended that most services currently provided by Publica should be returned to the Council.</p> <p>The Council developed a detailed transition plan for Phase 1, which was completed on 1 November 2024. The plan for Phase 2 was approved in March 2025 and completed on 1 July 2025.</p> <p>Following the completion of both phases of the Publica transition, it is important that the Council monitors the implementation to assess whether the intended benefits and objectives have been achieved. This review should also identify any new opportunities or challenges that have emerged as a result of the transition.</p>	<p><u>Recommendation</u></p> <p>We recommend that, now that Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Publica Transition Plan have been completed, the Council undertakes a comprehensive post-implementation review. This should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate whether the transition objectives have been met and the anticipated benefits realised. • Assess the effectiveness of the transition process, including planning, governance, and delivery. • Identify any further areas for development or refinement in service delivery. • Capture lessons learned to inform and apply to future organisational change. <p><u>Management Comment</u></p> <p>Whilst a “comprehensive post implementation review” has not been carried out, lessons learnt sessions were conducted after Phase 1 and the learnings applied to Phase 2.</p> <p>Following Phase 2 similar sessions have led to the appointment of two Non-Executive Directors to Publica Shareholder Forum and the creation of the Publica Operational Forum.</p> <p>Management is confident that these steps will ensure that objectives are met, benefits realised and identify further areas for development.</p> <p>The learning from Phase 1 and 2 will also be applied to organisational changes resulting from Local Government Reorganisation.</p>

Procurement Strategy Reviews	
 <i>Amber</i>	
<p><i>Improving Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness</i></p> <p><u>Original Finding</u> We noted that the Council's Procurement Strategy was updated during the financial year in September 2023. Prior to this, it was last updated in 2015.</p> <p>Considering the changing landscape of procurement regulations, it is important to update the strategy on a regular basis.</p>	<p><u>Original Recommendation</u> The Council should ensure that a more regular update cycle is put in place in regard to the procurement and contract management strategy. It would reflect the review due date on the front sheet of the strategy. This is to ensure that the strategy is keeping pace with the fast-changing environment and any changes in legislation and/or regulation.</p> <p><u>Original Management Comment</u> The next review of the Procurement Strategy is planned for Quarter 3 2025 to bring it in line with the new Procurement Act going live in February 2025.</p> <p>The September 2023 strategy did not have a review date on the front sheet due to the uncertainty around the timing of the Procurement Act going live.</p> <p>The next iteration of the strategy will have a review date on the front sheet.</p> <p><u>2025 Update</u> The review has not yet happened. We consider this matter ongoing</p> <p><u>2025 Management Comment</u> The Procurement Act 2023 came into force in February 2025, marking the biggest change to public procurement regulation in over a decade.</p> <p>The focus of the team has been on ensuring that WODC's procurement activity is fully compliant with the new legislation. To achieve this, the Procurement Team has been developing new Contract Procedure Rules, creating toolkits, and delivering officer training, all while continuing to manage day-to-day procurement activity.</p> <p>Unfortunately, this has meant that the work on the strategy has slipped to March 2026. This strategy is on the Forward Plan to come to the 11 March 2026 Executive Committee meeting.</p>

Peer Review



Amber

Improving Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness

Original Finding

A corporate peer review, as overseen by the Local Government Association, supports continuous improvement by providing insight, guidance and challenge, as well as assurance to local leaders and residents.

It is recommended that one occurs once every five years. The Council last had a corporate peer review completed in 2018.

Original Recommendation

We recommend the Council organise a peer review in the coming 12 months.

Original Management Comment

A peer review was considered last year but was not carried out due to the Phase 1 Publica Transition work and the fact that the council was in a period of change.

Whilst management can see the benefits of a peer review, given the announcement of the Devolution White Paper in December 2024 (and the possible impact of that on the future of District Councils) and the ongoing work on Phase 2 of the Publica Transition, the next 12 months would not be the best time to conduct such a review.


2025 Update

While the development of Local Government Reorganisation is ongoing, we continue to recommend the occurrence of a peer review to ensure management are more informed to make plans for the future.

2025 Management Comment

The response is the same as the previous year as management do not consider now to be the best time for a peer review. The Council has just been through Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Publica Transition, and more changes are on the horizon with the Local Government Reorganisation timeline.

It is not clear how a peer review now could help make “plans for the future” when the shape of that future is so uncertain at present.

The Council's Capital, Investment and Treasury Management Strategies	
 <i>Amber</i>	
<p>Financial Sustainability</p> <p>Original Finding Capital, Investment and Treasury Management Strategies were not considered by the Council's Scrutiny Committees or the Audit and Governance Committee ahead of the full Council annual budget setting meeting for the financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25. Members have also recently sought clarity in respect of the responsibility for oversight of the Council's key financial strategies.</p> <p>Oversight and scrutiny of the Council's key financial strategies would enhance transparency and strengthen oversight of Council budgetary decision making.</p>	<p>Original Recommendation The predecessor auditor recommended the Council clarifies, within its constitution, the responsibility for the assessment of the Council's Capital, Investment and Treasury Management Strategies as part of the annual budget setting process.</p> <p>Original Management Comment Agreed.</p> <p>2024 Update We consider this matter ongoing.</p> <p>2024 Management Comment Agreed.</p> <p>Due to staff illness, the finance team were unable to implement this process for the 2025/26 budget setting process, but this will be implemented in 2026/27 with the January Audit and Governance meeting reviewing the strategies ahead of the Council budget setting in February.</p> <p>The Constitution will be amended accordingly via the Constitution Working Group.</p> <p>2025 Update Management informed us that due to staff illness, the finance team were unable to implement this process for the 2025/26 and the constitution will be amended via the Constitution working group. We therefore consider this matter ongoing.</p> <p>2025 Management Comment The constitution is to be amended to update the Terms of Reference of the Audit and Governance Committee to include reviewing the Council's Capital, Investment and Treasury Management Strategies as part of the annual budget setting process.</p> <p>For the 2026/27 budget setting process, these strategies will be taken to the Audit and Governance Committee on 22nd January 2026 before the budget is approved by the Executive and Council in February 2026.</p>

Wider Financial Scenario Planning



Amber

Financial Sustainability

Original Finding

The local government sector is operating within a significant degree of financial uncertainty.

An assessment of differing financial scenarios as part of the MTFS, and the inclusion of these within the annual budgeting setting reports, would improve opportunity identified enhance transparency, strengthen oversight and support financial sustainability of the Council.

Original Recommendation

The predecessor auditor recommended the Council introduces wider financial scenario planning within its MTFS and to include such information in annual budgeting setting reports.

Original Management Comment

The MTFS updated for 2024/25 includes scenarios around key uncertainties including business rates reset, changes to New Homes Bonus funding and the Publica review.

2024 Update

We consider this matter ongoing.

2024 Management Comment

Agreed.

2025 Update

We have seen in the 2025/26 MTFS that it has included the key assumptions used in developing the budget. However, it does not assess or present differing wider financial scenarios based.

2025 Management Comment

Management agree that the scenario planning process is ongoing as it is carried out each year for the budget setting process – hence the management response is the same as last year.

Under the Financial Planning section of this report (page 7) the auditors state that:

“The level of uncertainty faced by the sector has not subsided and scenario planning can be a beneficial tool in supporting financial planning. It can enhance transparency and oversight to the budget setting process and *is something that the Council has applied for the 2025/26 budget process*”

Therefore, management are comfortable with the scenario planning applied to the budget setting process.

Threshold of Unallocated General Funds Reserves



Amber

Financial Sustainability

Original Finding

The Council budget setting reports for 2024/25 included an assessment of the adequacy of reserves but did not include a voluntary minimum threshold of unallocated general funds reserves and did not reference the level of the Council's earmarked reserves.

This recommendation seeks to further enhance the Council's management and oversight of the Council's reserves levels.

Original Recommendation

The predecessor auditor recommended the Council considers the adoption of a voluntary minimum threshold of unallocated general funds reserves and includes details of both unallocated and earmarked reserves in annual budget setting reports.

Original Management Comment

Earmarked reserves are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they are still appropriate. In the 2024/25 budget cycle four specific risk areas are being addressed via this review and repurposing exercise. These include the local government funding reforms, statutory override for financial instruments (set to end in 2025/26), Publica Review and the fluctuations in Investment Property income. This ongoing review is felt to be more conducive to maintaining an appropriate level of unallocated general funds rather than setting a voluntary minimum threshold. The latter could lead to decisions being made solely with regard to that minimum level rather than the business case for each decision.

2024 Update

We consider this matter ongoing.

2024 Management Comment

The management response is the same as previously stated.

2025 Update

Although the approach considers the risk areas for the Council and reviews the earmarked reserves, the setting of a minimum level of unallocated general fund reserves as recommended would further enhance the oversight of the Council's level of reserves.

2025 Management Comment

The response is the same as the previous year as management consider a regular review and repurposing of reserves, to address specific risk areas, to be more conducive to maintaining an appropriate level of unallocated general funds rather than setting a voluntary minimum threshold.

The latter could lead to decisions being made solely regarding that minimum level rather than the merits of each business case put forward for consideration.

Developing Planned Savings	
<p>Financial Sustainability</p>	<p>Original Recommendation</p>
<p>Original Finding</p>	<p>The predecessor auditor recommended the Council places a significant and immediate focus on developing planned savings, and wider alternatives to the use of reserves, in the management of budget gaps identified within the Council's MTFS.</p>
<p>The Council's MTFS 2023/24 to 2031/32 identifies a revenue budget gap of £31.8m and that general fund unallocated reserves will be exhausted by 2027/28. Additionally, the MTFS 2024/25 - 2031/32 does not include a plan to replenish these reserves which reduces the Council's ability to manage financial uncertainty.</p>	<p>Original Management Comment</p>
<p>The Council does have sufficient reserves to support the budget gaps in the MTFS until 2027/28 however the current lack of identified savings and alternative to the use of reserves presents risk to the Council's financial sustainability in the medium term.</p>	<p>The Council has put in place a Transformation Group which includes asset management planning and a review of key contracts (Ubico and GLL) on its Work Plan.</p>
	<p>2024 Update</p>
	<p>We consider this matter ongoing.</p>
	<p>2024 Management Comment</p>
	<p>Agreed. The Transformation Group is still in place and has overseen the development of an Asset Management Strategy which should ensure that Council assets are fully utilised to help bridge the budget gap.</p>
	<p>The plans for next year include a review of the Ubico contract, including how waste services are delivered in the district, and the retender of the leisure contract.</p>
	<p>The Transformation Group will also continue to work on the council priorities especially considering the recent Local Government Review announcement.</p>
	<p>2025 Update</p>
	<p>We have seen the work completed by the Council to focus on the delivery of efficiencies and savings, with the adoption of the asset management strategy, setting up the Waste and Environmental Services Transformation Programme, and review of the UBICO contract, demonstrating the focus on transformation and developing plans for savings.</p>

Members per Committee

Governance

Original Finding

During 2023/24 the Council's Audit and Governance Committee had 17 members. The CIPFA Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police includes a recommendation that councils should strive to have no more than eight members. During 2023/24 the Council operated three Overview and Scrutiny Committees, each with 15 members. During 2024/25 the Council has resolved to have only one Overview and Scrutiny Committee but with 24 members.

This improvement recommendation seeks to ensure the number of members appointed to the Overview and Scrutiny and Audit and Governance Committees are proportionate and suitable for the Council's requirements.

Original Recommendation

The predecessor auditor recommended the Council reviews number of members that serve on the Overview and Scrutiny and Audit and Governance Committees to satisfy itself the numbers are optimum and of a number that supports effective oversight.

Original Management Comment

Agreed – As part of the CIPFA Self-Assessment the Audit & Governance Committee will be invited to consider their composition and, following the recent creation of a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee, a 12-month review will be undertaken to evaluate its effectiveness to include the number of members that serve on it.

2024 Update

We consider this matter ongoing.

2024 Management Comment

A review of Overview and Scrutiny is to be considered by the committee in April 2025.

Any resulting recommendations will be taken to the Council, in May 2025, via the Constitution Working Group.

A 12-month review of the Audit and Governance Committee will be considered in Quarter 2 of 2025.

Any resulting recommendations will be taken to the Council via the Constitution Working Group.

2025 Update

We consider this matter closed as matter reviewed and reported to Full Council on 21 May 2025.

Members Training

Governance

Original Finding

The Council regularly provides training to its 49 elected members. However, there were low levels of attendance to recent member training sessions in respect of inclusion and diversity and social media usage. Increased levels of member participation in training sessions relating to these areas would support members to maintain appropriate standards, demonstrate adherence to the members code of conduct and support the Council's governance arrangements.

This improvement recommendation seeks to further strengthen the Council's governance arrangements and ensure relevant training is undertaken by members.

Original Recommendation

The predecessor auditor recommended the Council explores ways to foster greater engagement and attendance for member training sessions with a particular emphasis on inclusion and diversity, social media and the Members Code of Conduct.

Original Management Comment

Agreed.

2024 Update

We consider this matter ongoing.

2024 Management Comment

This year the Council has introduced monthly All Member Briefings and provided members access to the ihasco training platform.

This is alongside signposting to relevant training courses via the Local Government Association. A detailed report on member training will be taken to the March 2025 Audit and Governance Committee meeting.

2025 Update

We consider this matter closed per the report taken to the 27 March 2025 Audit and Governance Committee.

Partnership Strategy and Association Partnership Register

Improving Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness

Original Finding

The Council has significant partnership arrangements which it regularly monitors and reviews. This recommendation seeks to enhance existing arrangements.

The introduction of a partnership strategy and register would help ensure partnership working is considered in decision-making process, help support partnership management within the Council, enhance transparency of partnership arrangements, and further strengthen the Council's wider governance arrangements.

Original Recommendation

The predecessor auditor recommended the Council develops and approves a partnership strategy and association partnership register, to include:

- A central record of Council's partnership activity, including partnership governance arrangements.
- An assessment of partnership risks and subsequent mitigations through the inclusion of a partnership risk register.
- Best practice information for officers in respect of partnership management.

Original Management Comment

As stated in the Auditor's Annual Report the Council has significant partnership arrangements and can demonstrate that they are regularly reviewed and assessed for their effectiveness. The Council will explore how the approval of a partnership strategy and associated partnership register would support the achievement of the Councils corporate objectives.

2024 Update

We consider this matter ongoing.

2024 Management Comment

There is now a Framework for Partnership Working and listing of partnerships on the Council website.

<https://westoxon.gov.uk/about-the-council/plans-and-policies/partnerships/>

A Strategic Partnership Update is presented to the full Council meeting annually.

2025 Update

The items noted in the prior year response have been in place through 2024/25, with a published list of partnerships and partnership activity. The Strategic Partnership Update taken to the 21 May 2025 Council meeting, which reports on the activities and partnerships throughout 2024/25. We consider this matter closed.

Quarterly Review of Strategic Risk Register

Governance

The Strategic Risk Register is received twice a year by the Audit and Governance Committee, and the Executive Leadership Team keep all risks under review with each risk being assessed on a monthly basis.

In line with good practice which we have seen at other local authorities, the risk register should be considered quarterly by the Audit and Governance Committee.

Recommendation

We recommend the Strategic Risk Register to be considered quarterly at the Audit and Governance Committee meetings.

Management Comment

The Strategic Risk Register is reviewed at the monthly management team meeting, quarterly at Informal Executive and taken to every other Audit and Governance Committee meeting.

Management considers this to be an appropriate level and frequency of review.

2025 Update

We consider this matter closed.

Ongoing Publica Transition

Improving Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness

The Publica Review report, considered by the Executive on 16 November 2023, recommended most of the services currently provided by Publica should be returned to the Council.

The Council had a detailed transition plan in place for phase 1. It is important that such a plan is drafted for phase 2 when ready. We are aware that due diligence is being undertaken for phase 2.

Recommendation

We are aware that management continue to actively monitor phase 2 of the Publica transition back into the Council. We agree with this as it is important a full consideration is undertaken in order to allow members to come to an informed decision. Using the same factors from phase 1, we therefore recommend that the Council continue to focus on:

- Careful alignment of governance and transition arrangements across the four respective Council's including reaching consensus on new operating models and services that are to be retained within Publica to ensure decision making and the pace of change is appropriate and measured.
- Ensuring appropriate ongoing oversight is provided to each stage of repatriation plan.
- Putting in place the required skills and capacity to ensure the repatriation programme is adequately resourced.
- Supporting the existing workforce, and maintaining sufficient workforce capacity, during the transition period.
- Monitoring and maintaining agreed levels of service performance during the transition period.
- Identifying and reporting the actual impacts of repatriation to the Council's MTFS and longer-term financial sustainability.

Management Comment

Agreed.

2025 Update

Recommendation superseded, see current year recommendation.




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 <p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>	<p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>
<p>Name and date of Committee</p>	<p>AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 27 NOVEMBER 2025</p>
<p>Subject</p>	<p>FINAL 2024/25 AUDIT FINDINGS REPORT (ISA260) AND STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS FOR WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>
<p>Wards affected</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>Accountable member</p>	<p>Cllr Alaric Smith Executive Member for Finance Email: alaric.smith@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Accountable officer</p>	<p>Madhu Richards, Director of Finance Email: madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Report author</p>	<p>Georgina Dyer, Head of Finance Email: georgina.dyer@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Summary/Purpose</p>	<p>This report presents the Audit Findings Report and Audited Statement of Accounts for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.</p>
<p>Annexes</p>	<p>Annex A: The Audit Findings for West Oxfordshire District Council including the Letter of Representation</p> <p>Annex B: Statement of Accounts including the Annual Governance Statement</p>
<p>Recommendation(s)</p>	<p>That the Audit and Governance Committee resolves to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the contents of the report and annexes. 2. Approve the Statement of Accounts 2024/25, including the Annual Governance Statement; and 3. Authorise the Chief Finance Officer and the Chair of the Committee to write a Letter of Representation on behalf of the Committee and Council to Bishop Fleming to enable the opinion to be issued.
<p>Corporate priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting Residents First • A Good Quality of Life for All

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Better Environment for People and Wildlife • Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	No

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** Under International Standards of Audit (UK) (ISAs) and the National Audit Office (NAO) Code of Audit Practice (“the Code”) external auditors are required to report whether, in their opinion:
- the Council’s financial statements give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Council and its income and expenditure for the year; and
 - have been properly prepared in accordance with the CIPFA/ LASAAC code of practice on local authority accounting and prepared in accordance with Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.
- 1.2** The auditors are also required to report whether other information published together with the audited financial statements is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or their knowledge obtained during the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated.
- 1.3** The Statement of Accounts are prepared in accordance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2020/21 (‘the Code’). The Council is statutorily obliged under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 to prepare its Statement of Accounts in accordance with the Code.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1** The Audit Findings Report (ISA260) for West Oxfordshire District Council is being presented to the Audit and Governance Committee on 27th November 2025.
- 2.2** The Auditors have completed their audit of the 2024/25 financial statements. Their testing and review have not identified any significant issues and they have given an unqualified opinion.
- 2.3** The 2024/25 audit will be signed off on 27th November 2025.
- 2.4** The annexes to this report contain the Audit Findings Report (ISA260) for West Oxfordshire District Council and the Statement of Accounts including the Annual Governance Statement.

2.5 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The four core statements within the Accounts are:

Comprehensive Income & Expenditure Statement:

This statement shows the accounting cost of services in accordance with generally accepted accounting practices (GAAP). The 'below the line' funding & accounting entries that bring the statement back to the movement on the General Fund (reversing items such as depreciation and accounting for pension contributions) form part of the Movement in Reserves Statement below.

Movement in Reserves Statement:

This statement details the movement in the year between reserves, from the surplus/deficit on provision of services in the Comprehensive Income & Expenditure Statement, to the position on the Balance Sheet at 31 March, splitting the reserves into the usable reserves (which are available to spend) and unusable reserves which represent reserve held for accounting purposes (and are not available for use).

Balance Sheet:

The balance sheet depicts the assets and liabilities of the Authority, with the overall position representing the net worth of the Council.

Cash Flow Statement:

This statement shows the year on year change in cash and cash equivalents (i.e. on demand deposits) available to the Council, as opposed to simply showing the movement in the bank balance.

The notes to the accounts provide additional breakdown and disclosure of balances to support the primary statements.

2.6 Revenue Outturn and Performance

The Council's approved revenue budget for 2024/25 was £15,674,657. The final outturn position saw the Council budget underspent by £6,345. The revenue outturn position was reported to Executive on 9th July 2025 (for a full breakdown of the outturn for the year, please refer to the Executive report, agenda item 363). At their meeting, Executive recommended to Council to transfer £1,731,426 to earmarked reserves. Council subsequently approved the appropriations on 16th July 2025.

2.7 Reconciling the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement and Movement in Reserves Statement to the Revenue Outturn position reported to Executive

The Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement (CI&ES) (page 9 of the Accounts) shows the accounting cost in the year of providing services. The statement is prepared based under International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) and therefore does not match the figure presented to Executive as part of the year-end outturn report, which is prepared on the basis of internal reporting practices.

To reconcile the figures, the CI&ES and Movement in Reserves Statement (MiRS) need to be read together as the MiRS reverses out or adjusts some Income and Expenditure items to make them compatible with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting, and UK statutory requirements.

Note B1 “Expenditure and Funding Analysis” on page 14 of the Accounts reconciles the difference between statutory financial reporting and those figures reported internally to Executive. The CI&ES declares a surplus on the provision of services of £2,067,950. This figure includes changes in asset values and pension fund accounting which are not reported to Members as they are statutory accounting adjustments and do not impact upon council tax payers financing of the Council. These are set out in the column headed “Adjs. between accounting and funding basis” and amount to £503,577. Once adjustments to earmarked reserves of £1,558,027 are considered, the net contribution to the Council’s General Fund Balance is £6,345 (£503,577 - £2,067,950 + £1,558,027).

2.8 Key Balance Sheet Movements

The balance sheet represents the value or net worth of the Council as at 31st March 2025. The key movements in the balance sheet between 31st March 2024 and 31st March 2025 and the reasons for the largest changes are summarised below:

Property, Plant and Equipment

The value of Property, Plant and Equipment has increased by £1.679 million. This is in most part due to the inclusion on the balance sheet of Right of Use Assets following the adoption of IFRS 16. This new accounting standard removes the distinction between operational and finance leases and requires that all substantial leases must be recognised, (low value and very short term leases are excluded). This recognition has increased the value of property assets by £1.292m and also increased long term creditors by £0.92m to reflect the obligation of the Council to pay future lease payments.

Long Term Investments

Long term investments have decreased by £1.833m, which includes the closure of the UBS Pooled Fund. The proceeds of the fund repaid to the Council in September 2024 were not re-invested in a long term investment. Instead, this cash has increased our cash on hand balance and has been used for short term deposits in the Debt Management Office (DMO, part of HM Treasury) and the Money Market Funds to generate maximum interest returns.

Short Term Debtors and Creditors

Short term debtors have decreased by £1.274 m and short term creditors have increased by £5.045m, mainly due to Collection fund balances. Year on year fluctuations of this kind are normal and expected.

Cash and Cash Equivalents

Cash balances increased by £10.2m between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025. Part of this increase relates to the £4.9m slippage in the capital programme combined with £1.2m of Garden Waste licence income received in March 2025 for the 2025/26 financial year, Council Tax prepayments of £1.6m and £1.5m from the closure of the UBS pooled fund.

Pension Liability

The valuation of the pension fund fluctuates each year and is based upon a number of actuarial assumptions and a triennial revaluation cycle. At 31 March 2025, the Council's share of the Oxfordshire Pension Fund stands at a net liability of £3.907m (after the asset ceiling adjustment), a reduction of £1.063m on the previous year.

The return on scheme assets has benefited from high interest rates and higher than normal bond yields. The result, for the second year in a row, is the pension scheme showing as an asset rather than a liability.

Accounting standards only allow an asset to be recognised as far as the employer can gain an economic benefit i.e. through a reduction in future contributions. This limit is known as the asset ceiling. In practice, employers are bound by the contribution level set by the Pension Scheme Administrators every three years and the requirement to contribute enough to fund all future commitments, known as the Minimum Funding Requirement.

The Asset Ceiling charge, levied against the Pension Scheme to maintain the minimum future funding requirement has been calculated by the Actuaries, Hyman Robertson for 2024/25 as £20.682m.

The Council will continue to make sufficient contributions to cover liabilities accruing for all employees that are current members of the scheme.

General Fund

The general fund balance increased by £6,345 from 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025. The movement represents the remaining underspend in the year (after transfers to earmarked reserves). The general fund balance represents the unallocated revenue reserves of the Council. At 31 March 2025, the General Fund balance stood at £12,257,908.

The Council's earmarked reserves represent resources that have been set-aside by the Council for specific projects or money to provide particular schemes in the future. Overall contributions to earmarked reserves amounted to £3.005m, including £1.989m to the Budget Deficit Reserve which will fund the revenue budget gap identified in the MTFS and £0.652m of grant funding that will be spent in 2025/26.

Transfers from earmarked reserves amounted to £1.446m. The most significant expenditure was £0.549m to fund the capital loss from the closing down of the UBS Pooled Fund and £0.2m to fund the one off costs of the Publica Review phase one. The value of earmarked reserves therefore increased by £1.558m in 2024/25.

The 'Net Assets' or 'Net Worth' of the Council has increased by £5.644m. The main contributing factors are the increase in Property Valuations of £1.679m, a decrease of £1.833m in Long Term Investments i.e. the closing of the UBS Pooled Fund, an increase of

£5.045m in short term creditors, a decrease of £1.274m in Short Term Debtors, an increase of £10.794m in cash and a £1.063m decrease in the Pension Liability.

Although the Council faces significant challenges over the short to medium term, the Council is in a stable position at the end of the 2024/25 financial year with a level of reserves to fund budget deficits until they are potentially exhausted in 2030/31 as per the MTFS, updated in November 2025.

3. Adjusted Items

During the Audit, an error was brought to light in relation to the valuation of the Chipping Norton Leisure Centre. Upon discovery, this error was corrected in the Statement of Accounts and is presented in the Auditor's findings report as an adjusted item.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

4.1 None.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 The Audit and Governance Committee are requested to note the report and annexes and approve the Statement of Accounts 2024/25, including the Annual Governance Statement. They are also requested to authorise the writing the Letter of Representation to the Chief Financial Officer and the Chair of the Committee.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 None.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None.

8. RISK ASSESSMENT

8.1 None.

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT

9.1 None.

10. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

None.

(END)

For the year ended 31 March 2025



Ref: 125947/CM
Date: 12 November 2025

Members of the Audit and Governance Committee
West Oxfordshire District Council
Woodgreen
Witney
OX28 1NB

Dear Members

West Oxfordshire District Council (the Council) – Audit Completion Report

We are pleased to attach our draft Audit Completion Report. This report summarises our audit conclusions, highlights the key findings arising from our work and details a number of points that we would like to discuss further with you.

We have initially discussed the contents of our report with management, and we incorporated their comments where relevant.

This report is intended to be solely for the information and use of management and those charged with governance of the Council. It should not be shared with anyone beyond the Council without our prior approval.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the finance team for the co-operation and assistance afforded to us during the course of the audit.

Yours faithfully

Bishop Fleming Audit Limited

Bishop Fleming Audit Limited

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1. Executive summary

Status of audit

The scope of our work is set in accordance with the National Audit Office's Code of Audit Practice (the Code) and the International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) (UK). Our work is planned to provide a focused and robust audit. We are required to provide an independent opinion as to whether the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Council at the year end and of its expenditure and income for the year then ended;
- have been prepared properly in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2024/25; and
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

Our audit is largely complete. However, it is subject to the resolution of certain outstanding queries outlined in Section 2.

Subject to the satisfactory finalisation of these points, we anticipate issuing an unmodified audit report.

Key audit issues

Within our Audit Plan which was presented to the Audit and Governance Committee in March 2025, we outlined a number of risks that we considered to be of particular significance to the audit. Our plan also detailed our planned approach for addressing each of these risks.

The specific significant risks highlighted were as follows:

- Management override of controls;
- Valuation of land and buildings;
- Valuation of investment properties; and
- Valuation of the pension fund net liability.

Our audit work is mostly completed, with some ongoing on some of these areas at the time of writing this report. This is further detailed in Section 4 of this report.

Audit adjustments

During the course of our work, adjustments were identified and, on agreement of management, were adjusted in the financial statements.

Further adjustments were proposed but not made, as those charged with governance do not consider them to be material to the financial statements. We accept this explanation.

Full details of the adjustments identified are included in Section 5 to this report.

Management letter points and Internal control matters

A number of control points were identified during the course of our work, and these are further detailed in Section 6 to this report. Of the matters noted, none are considered to have an important effect on your system of internal control.

Value for Money

We are also required to satisfy ourselves that the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2025. The Code requires us to report on the Council's arrangements under three specified reporting criteria:

- Financial sustainability – how the Council plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services;
- Governance – how the Council ensures it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks; and
- Improving economy, efficiency, and effectiveness – how the Council uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.

Our work has not identified any significant weaknesses; see Section 7 for more details. The results of the Value for Money work are reported separately in our Auditor's Annual Report.

Independence

The FRC Ethical Standard and ISA 260 requires us to communicate with you on a timely basis on all significant facts and matters that bear upon our independence and objectivity. The aim of these communications is to ensure full and fair disclosure by us to those charged with governance on matters in which you have an interest.

We are not aware of any relationships that, in our professional judgment, may reasonably be thought to bear on our independence or the objectivity of the audit engagement team.

We confirm that in our professional judgment, Bishop Fleming is independent within the meaning of regulatory and professional requirements, and the objectivity of the audit engagement partner and audit staff has not been compromised.

We consider that our independence in this context is a matter that should be reviewed by both you and ourselves. It is therefore important that you consider the facts of which you are aware and come to a view. Should you have any specific matters that you wish to discuss, please contact us.

2. Introduction

Responsibilities of the audited body

The audited body is responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for making available to us all the information and explanations we consider necessary. Therefore, it is essential that it confirms that our understanding of all matters referred to in this report are appropriate, having regard to its knowledge of the particular circumstances.

We would point out that the matters dealt with in this report came to our attention during the conduct of our normal audit procedures which are designed primarily for the purpose of expressing our opinion on the financial statements of West Oxfordshire District Council.

In consequence, our work did not encompass a detailed review of all aspects of the system and controls and cannot be relied upon necessarily to disclose possible frauds or other irregularities, or to include all possible improvements in internal control that a more extensive special examination might reveal.

Materiality

In carrying out our audit work we have considered whether the financial statements are free from 'material misstatement'. Materiality is an expression of the relative significance of a particular matter in context of the financial statements as a whole.

In general, misstatements, including omissions, are considered to be material if, individually or in aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of the financial statements.

The assessment of whether a misstatement is material in the context of the financial statements is a matter of professional judgement and will have regard to both the size and the nature of the misstatement, or a combination of both. It is also affected by our perception of the financial information needs of users of the financial statements.

	Basis of materiality	Amount
West Oxfordshire District Council	2% of gross expenditure on provision of services	£1,284,000

The level of materiality has increased since our Audit Plan (Planning materiality: £1,158,000) to reflect the published unaudited 2024/25 financial statements and the increased level of expenditure in the current period compared to the prior period.

Anticipated audit report

Subject to the satisfactory resolution of the outstanding items, and to receiving all outstanding information set out below, we anticipate issuing an unmodified audit report on the financial statements of West Oxfordshire District Council for the year ended 31 March 2025.

Letter of representation

The draft letter of representation is attached at Appendix A.

Update on our planned approach

Our audit work was carried out in accordance with our Audit Plan in response to the perceived audit risks. No matters were identified which required us to change our approach and no additional risks were identified.

Our audit is substantially complete although we are finalising our procedures in the following areas:

- Final senior review of workings papers and the accounts
- Review of the pension fund auditor's response on their work on the Oxfordshire County pension fund

We will also need to complete the following tasks as part of our usual completion procedures:

- Final review of the financial statements
- Consideration of any post balance sheet events prior to opinion being issued
- Confirmation of the approval of the financial statements by the Council
- Receipt of the signed management representation letter











Confidentiality

This document is strictly confidential and although it has been made available to those charged with governance to facilitate discussions, it may not be taken as altering our responsibilities to the Council arising under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (the Act) and from the Code. The contents of this report should not be disclosed to third parties without our prior written consent.

3. Accounts and audit process

The preparation of the financial statements is a vital process for the management of the Council and one which should be performed on a timely basis. We met with senior officers as part of our planning work to discuss how we would work together to make the audit process effective.

We discussed key accounting issues early, such as the entity's approach to adopting and assessing the impact of IFRS 16 and the approach to testing the collection fund, so they could be considered before the audit commenced.

	2025		2024	
Readiness for audit		(Green)		(Green)
Quality of financial statements		(Green)		(Green)
Accuracy of financial records		(Green)		(Green)
Quality of working papers		(Green)		(Green)
Availability of staff		(Green)		(Green)

Key (Impact on audit approach)

None or limited impact		(Green)
Some impact		(Amber)
Significant impact		(Red)

We invested significant time into the audit running as smoothly as possible. At the start of the audit, we held planning meetings with key management personnel and a meeting with the finance team to set expectations for the audit. During the final audit, we held bi-daily calls with the finance team, supported by a status list of ongoing requests. In addition to this, the team carried out testing onsite during the audit.

As a result of the investment made by both parties, we are pleased to say the audit has proceeded smoothly. We are keen to continually improve our service and the effectiveness of the process and, therefore, we will hold a debrief discussion with management to identify areas where this might be possible.

Readiness for audit

We were provided with a copy of the unaudited financial statements in line with the timetable agreed before the start of the audit and as outlined in our audit plan. Information requested during fieldwork was generally provided promptly to our staff. This made the core audit progress relatively smoothly, although there were some areas which naturally took longer considering their complexity such as the valuation work.

Quality of financial statements

Management have taken charge of preparing and preparing the financial statements. We have provided our comments on the financial statements. We raised several minor comments on the accounts to resolve rounding differences, wording and the consistency of balances recognised, as well as to ensure all of the proper disclosures are included. We have identified several immaterial unadjusted disclosure items, as detailed in Section 5. We are comfortable these are to be left as unadjusted as they are immaterial in their nature.

Accuracy of financial records

The majority of the underlying financial records were accurate, agreed to the information provided in the audit file and were easy to understand.

Quality of working papers

While the quality of the working papers and supporting evidence provided was generally good, there were some areas where the audit evidence provided was not appropriate leading to additional follow up queries being required. These included spreadsheets being provided rather than original source documentation in several areas. Once sorted, the working papers reconciled back to the trial balance. This made the core audit work progress smoothly and as planned.

Availability of staff

Key members of the finance team made themselves available to us throughout the audit where possible. We were kept informed of any instances when staff were not available.

4. Audit risks

Significant risks:

Management override of controls	
Significant Risk	Work done and conclusion
We are required by auditing standards (ISA 240) to consider fraud and management override of controls to be a significant risk for all audits as no matter how strong a control environment, there is the potential for controls to be overridden or bypassed.	<p>To address this risk, we have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• reviewed the reasonableness of accounting estimates and critical judgements made by management;• tested journals with a material impact on the results for the year; and• considered a sample of other journals with key risk attributes. <p>In testing journals, we used data analytics tools to interrogate the whole population of journals posted in the year and focus on those with key risk factors.</p> <p>We have not identified any material errors from our work carried out.</p>

Valuation of land and buildings

Significant Risk

There is a risk over the valuation of land and buildings due to the high degree of estimation uncertainty, and judgements involved in build valuations.

Work done and conclusion

To address this risk, we have:

- documented our understanding of the processes and controls put in place by management, and evaluate the design of the controls;
- reviewed the instructions provided to the valuer and the valuer's skills and expertise, in order to determine if we can rely on the management expert;
- written to the valuer to confirm the basis on which the valuation was carried out;
- confirmed that the basis of valuation for assets valued in year is appropriate based on their usage;
- reviewed the appropriateness of assumptions used in the valuation of land and buildings. For assets not formally revalued in the year we assessed how management has satisfied itself that these assets are not materially different from the current value at the year-end;
- reviewed accuracy and completeness of information provided to the valuer, such as floor areas;
- tested a sample of revaluations made during the year to ensure that they have been input correctly into the Council's asset register; and
- formed our own expectations regarding the movement in property values and comparing this to the valuations reflected in the Council's financial statements, following up valuation movements that appear unusual.

We have not identified any material errors from our work carried out. We did identify an adjustment in relation to the Chipping Norton valuation. This has been corrected by management, see Section 5 for further details, and we have raised a recommendation in relation to this finding, see Section 6 for further details.

Valuation of investment properties

Significant Risk

There is a risk over the valuation of investment properties due to the values involved and the high degree of estimation uncertainty, due to the sensitivity of the estimate to changes in key assumptions and judgements.

Work done and conclusion

To address this risk, we have:

- documented our understanding of the processes and controls put in place by management, and evaluate the design of the controls;
- reviewed the instructions provided to the valuer and the valuer's skills and expertise, in order to determine if we can rely on the management expert;
- written to the valuer to confirm the basis on which the valuation was carried out;
- confirmed that the basis of valuation for assets valued in year is appropriate based on their usage;
- reviewed the appropriateness of assumptions used in the valuation of investment properties;
- reviewed accuracy and completeness of information provided to the valuer, such as floor areas;
- tested a sample of revaluations made during the year to ensure that they have been input correctly into the Council's asset register; and
- formed our own expectations regarding the movement in property values and comparing this to the valuations reflected in the Council's financial statements, following up valuation movements that appear unusual.

We have not identified any material errors from our work carried out.

Valuation of the pension fund net liability

Significant Risk

There is a risk over the valuation of the pension fund net liability due to the values involved and the high degree of estimation uncertainty, due to the sensitivity of the estimate to changes in key assumptions.

Work done and conclusion

To address this risk, we have:

- documented our understanding of the processes and controls put in place by management, and evaluate the design of the controls;
- reviewed the instructions provided to the actuary and the actuary's skills and expertise, in order to determine if we can rely on the management expert;
- considered the accuracy and completeness of the information provided to the actuary;
- ensured that the disclosures in the financial statements in respect of the pension fund liability are consistent with the actuarial report from the actuary;
- carried out procedures to confirm the reasonableness of the actuarial assumptions made by reviewing the report of the consulting actuary (as auditor's expert) and performing any additional procedures suggested within the report; and
- obtained assurances from the auditor of Oxfordshire County Pension Fund in respect of the controls around the validity and accuracy of membership data, contributions data and benefits data sent to the actuary by the pension fund and the fund assets valuation in the pension fund financial statements.

Our findings showed the assumptions used are consistent with our expectations and those used by other actuaries at 31 March 2025. The pension valuation has moved from a net deficit of £4.97m at 31 March 2024 to a net deficit position of £3.91m at 31 March 2025. This is inclusive of the liability for unfunded obligations of £0.40m (2023/24: £0.44m).

The key driver of that change was the increase in the discount rate used by the actuaries, which results in a decrease in the net present value of your share of the scheme liabilities.

Key assumptions	2023/24	2024/25
Discount rate	4.80%	5.80%
CPI / pension increase assumption	2.80%	2.80%
Salary increases	2.80%	2.80%

Under IFRS, additional guidance is provided in IFRIC 14 on the extent to which a defined benefit pension asset should be recognised. The actuary has produced an asset ceiling report that demonstrates that by following the guidance in IFRIC 14 none of this asset should be recognised and a liability of £3.51m is recognised instead. This adjustment effectively allows for ongoing commitments to contributions to the pension scheme into the future, over and above the expected service charge.

We have received the response from the pension fund auditor to our inquiries, which we are in the process of reviewing. However, we have not yet received the accompanying ISA260 report for the 2024/25 Pension Fund to complete our procedures.

We have not identified any material errors from our work carried out to date.

As part of our planning, we rebutted the risks of fraud in revenue recognition (required under the ISAs) and fraud in expenditure recognition (required under the Financial Reporting Council's Practice Note 10: Audit of Financial Statements and regularity of public sector bodies in the United Kingdom).

Other risks:

Implementation of IFRS 16 Leases

Other risk

2024/25 was the first year in which local government bodies were required to implement the provisions of IFRS 16 leases.

There is a risk that the Council has not appropriately complied with IFRS 16.

Work done and conclusion

To address this risk, we have:

- Documented our understanding of the processes and controls put in place by management for identifying lease contracts, including those not covered by the transitional arrangements, and evaluate the design of the controls;
- Reviewed the appropriateness of assumptions used in calculating the estimate;
- Reviewed the completeness and accuracy of the data gathering exercise;
- Confirmed the appropriateness of application of exemptions for existing contracts such as short term and low value leases;
- Reviewed the required transitional disclosures and the application of the adjustment to the opening balances; and,
- Tested a sample of leases for accuracy in calculating the right of use asset and lease liabilities.

We have concluded that the Council has appropriately implemented the provisions of IFRS 16 as required by the CIPFA Code of Practice.

We have not identified any material errors from our work. We identified immaterial adjustments in the calculations of the right of use assets and the lease liabilities, see Section 5 for further details, and we have raised a recommendation in relation to this in Section 6.

5. Audit adjustments

In accordance with the requirements of International Standards on Auditing, we must communicate all adjusted and unadjusted items identified during our audit work, other than those which we believe to be clearly insignificant.

Adjusted items

All adjusted items are set out in detail below along with the impact on the key statements for the year ended 31 March 2025:

	Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement		Balance sheet	
	Dr	Cr	Dr	Cr
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
1) Spreadsheet error in the valuation of Chipping Norton Leisure Centre		(506)	506	
Total		(506)	506	

Misclassifications and adjustments to disclosures

The table below provides details of any misclassification and disclosure changes identified during the audit.

Misclassification / Disclosure change	Audit comment	Adjusted?
Depreciation policy	It is the Council's policy not to depreciate assets in the year of acquisition. This has not been disclosed in the Council's depreciation policy.	✗
Lease liabilities, initial application of IFRS 16	The initial calculation of the lease liabilities did not calculate the liabilities to the end of the lease terms, resulting in the disclosed initial application of IFRS 16 to be understated by a projected £145k.	✗

Unadjusted items

The table below provides details of adjustments identified during the 2024/25 audit which have not been made within the final set of financial statements. The Audit and Governance Committee is required to approve management's proposed treatment of all items recorded within the table below. (These are also set out in the Letter of Representation.)

<i>Factual (F), judgemental (J), Projected (P)</i>	Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement		Balance sheet	
	Dr	Cr	Dr	Cr
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
1) IFRS 16 Right of Use Assets Management's calculations not going to the end of the lease terms (P)		(145)	145	
2) IFRS 16 Lease Liabilities Management's calculations not going to the end of the lease terms (P)	136			(136)
Total	136	(145)	145	(136)

Impact of prior year unadjusted items

The table below provides details of adjustments identified during the prior year which had not been made within the final set of 2023/24 financial statements. **We do not consider these to impact on the 2024/25 audit.**

	Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement		Balance sheet	
	Dr	Cr	Dr	Cr
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
1) Understatement of investment property valuation <i>Being a judgemental adjustment arising due to the methodology of the external valuer used by the Council, whereby they would round a valuation of an asset down to the nearest £'000. This adjustment reflects the actual valuation of all assets if no such rounding was applied.</i>		(188)	188	
2) Overstatement of investment income <i>Being balances that we could not evidence on account of sickness within the Council's team.</i>	121			(121)

6. Management letter points and internal control systems

The Council's management is responsible for the identification, assessment, and monitoring of risk, for developing, operating, and monitoring the systems of internal control and for providing assurance to the Audit and Governance Committee as 'Those Charged with Governance' that it has done so.

In accordance with the terms of our engagement we have not provided a comprehensive statement of all issues which may exist in the accounting and internal control systems or of all improvements which may be made, but outline below our observations arising from the audit; none of which are considered significant.

KEY:



RED – Observations refer to issues that are so fundamental to the system of internal control that management should address immediately to minimise the risk of a material misstatement within the financial statements.




AMBER – Observations refer mainly to issues that have an important effect on the system of internal control and, if left uncorrected could potentially lead to a material misstatement within the financial statements.



GREEN – Observations refer to issues that would, if corrected, improve internal control in general and engender good practice, but is unlikely to have a material impact on the financial statements.

Current Year Issues

Spreadsheet errors in valuations	
 <i>Amber</i>	
<p>As part of our valuation testing, we identified three separate spreadsheet errors within the calculations.</p> <p>The errors we noted were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There was an understatement of £506k due to the build cost rather than the total build cost being used to calculate the net replacement cost; 2. There was an overstatement of £80k due to the affordable housing contribution being missed out of the calculation of the cost; 3. There was an understatement of £12k due to the lower range of the adjusted value being selected rather than the mid-point. <p>Although the total errors are immaterial, due to the total value of the revalued assets, this suggests that there is an increased risk due to calculation errors</p> <p>Considering the significant values, it is important that there a rigorous process in place for reviewing valuations to ensure that they are accurate.</p> <p>Management have posted the correction for the first error noted above for £506k, see Section 5 for further details.</p>	<p><u>Recommendation</u> We recommend that the assets team ensures that there are processes in place to ensure the proper checking of valuation calculation and workings to ensure that spreadsheet errors are picked up before the fixed assets register is updated.</p> <p><u>Management comment</u> Recommendation accepted. Finance will work with the Valuer to make sure that the valuation spreadsheets are error free.</p>

Blank journal descriptions



Green

During our testing of journals, a number of journals with blank descriptions were identified.

If there is not a description on the journal, it makes it harder to identify the reason(s) for posting the journal. As a result, it means that there is not a clear audit trail.

Recommendation

We recommend that the finance team ensure that all journal lines include a description explaining the purpose of the journal to enable journals to be easily reviewed and the purpose of them understood.

Management comment

There were 7 journals in 2024/25 that had a blank text description. Best endeavours will be used to ensure that this issue is addressed.

Calculation of the NPV for IFRS 16 Leases and Right of Use assets



Green

During our testing of the right of use assets and lease liabilities for the recognition of IFRS 16 leases, we identified there were errors in the way that the net present value (NPV) was calculated.

Upon investigation, this was due to the incorrect rent being selected for two of the leases and the final half year of rent not being included in the calculation.


This resulted in an immaterial understatement of both the right of use asset and the lease liability, which is detailed in Section 5.

Recommendation


We recommend that when the Council recognises any new IFRS 16 leases in future that they ensure that the correct rental figure is discounted and ensures that the full length of the lease is discounted rather than just the full years of the lease.

Management comment

Recommendation accepted.

Finance leases	
 <i>Green</i>	
<p>As part of the finance lease testing, we identified that it is the Council's policy not to charge interest on finance lease assets in the year of acquisition.</p> <p>We also identified that the finance lease debtor did not include the interest payments and was not discounted by the present value of the future cashflows.</p> <p>However, the effect of none of these issues are material and no adjustments have been made to the financial statements.</p>	<p><u>Recommendation</u> We recommend that going forwards the Council changes their accounting policy to ensure that interest is charged on the finance lease assets in the year of acquisition and implements this for new finance leases acquired in future years.</p> <p>We also recommend that the finance team ensures that the value of the debtor is correctly calculated, including the interest, and then discounted by the present value of the future cashflows.</p> <p><u>Management comment</u> Recommendation not accepted. The Council has a consistent policy for non current assets in relation to the application of depreciation, interest and MRP – nothing is charged in the year of acquisition.</p> <p>The calculation of the debtor value will be reviewed for 2025/26 onwards.</p>

Prior Year Issues – Unresolved

Leases	
CY:  PY: 	
<p>The Council has a number of leases in place, both operating and finance leases. We sampled 42 leases as part of our work as the Council's new auditor. For several leases, it took a notable amount of time for the lease agreements to be located and shared with us.</p> <p>Upon receipt, for 12 leases, while we received the original lease agreement, we did receive evidence for the most recent rent figure that applied in 2023/24. We performed alternative procedures over these leases to ensure they have been recognised at the correct values.</p> <p><u>2024/25 update</u> In the current year we sampled 36 leases as part of our testing. Lease agreements were available for all of the requested leases. However, some leases were either not up to date or did not agree with the value on the Council's leases schedule.</p>	<p><u>2023/24 recommendation</u> We recommend the Council ensures it has easy access to its underlying leases and supporting documents if ever needed.</p> <p>It will also be important as part of the transition work required to be undertaken as the new accounting standard <i>IFRS 16 Leases</i> is adopted in the year ending 31 March 2025.</p> <p><u>2023/24 Management comment</u> Agreed.</p> <p><u>2024/25 recommendation</u> Our original recommendation applies.</p> <p><u>2024/25 Management comment</u> All the information requested by the Auditors was provided.</p>

Prior Year Issues – Resolved

Register of Interests	
<p>Two elected members were identified where their register of interests had not been updated due to no response being given by them in a timely manner.</p>	<p><u>2023/24 recommendation</u> We recommend the Council consider their monitoring process for responses to ensure timely response are being provided.</p> <p><u>2023/24 Management comment</u> Agreed.</p> <p><u>2024/25 update</u> No issues were identified during testing in the current year. We consider this matter closed.</p>

7. Other matters

Other information

We are required to give an opinion on whether the other information published with the audited financial statements (for example, the Narrative Statement and Annual Governance Statement) is materially inconsistent with the financial statement or our knowledge as obtained during the audit.

We have nothing to report in this respect.

Reporting by exception

We are required to report to you by exception the following matters, if:

- the Annual Governance Statement does not comply with “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework 2016 Edition” published by CIPFA/SOLACE; or
- we issue a report in the public interest under Section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014; or
- we make a written recommendation to the Council under Section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or
- we make an application to the court for a declaration that an item of account is contrary to law under Section 28 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or
- we issue an advisory notice under Section 29 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or
- we make an application for judicial review under Section 31 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit.

We have nothing to report on these matters.

The 2014 Act also gives rights to local electors and other parties, such as the right to ask questions of the auditor and the right to make an objection to an item of account. No such objections have been raised.

Going concern

Our work has not identified a material uncertainty related to going concern. We are satisfied that management’s use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Value for money arrangements

We are required to satisfy ourselves that the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2025. The Code requires us to report on the Council’s arrangements under three specified reporting criteria:

- Financial sustainability – how the Council plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services;
- Governance – how the Council ensures it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks; and
- Improving economy, efficiency, and effectiveness – how the Council uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.

We asked management to complete an evidenced self-assessment of the Council’s arrangements. We then reviewed the evidence provided and carried out follow-up work as appropriate to consider whether there are any significant weaknesses in the Council’s arrangements for securing economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in its use of resources.

We have not identified any significant weaknesses, and the results of the Value for Money work are reported separately in our Auditor’s Annual Report.

Whole of Government accounts work

Alongside our work on the financial statements, we also review and report to the National Audit Office on the Council's Whole of Government Accounts (WGA) return. The extent of our review, and the nature of our report, is specified by the National Audit Office.

We have not yet completed the limited procedures required in the National Audit Office's group instructions in respect of our work on the Council's WGA submission. This will be done alongside issuing the audit opinion on the Council's accounts.

Audit certificate

We will be unable to issue our audit certificate alongside the auditor's opinion on the accounts until we have received confirmation from the NAO that no additional work (beyond submission of the Assurance Statement) will be required in respect of the Whole of Government Accounts exercise.

Audit fees

Our final fee (excl. VAT) for the 2024/25 audit is set out below:

	Fee proposed at planning stage (£)	Final fee (subject to approval by PSAA) (£)
PSAA scale fee 2024/25	153,844	153,844
Fee variation – Implementation of IFRS 16	TBC	4,982
Total	TBC	158,826

We can confirm that we have not undertaken any non-audit work at the Council during the year.

Appendices

Appendix A. Letter of representation

Bishop Fleming Audit Limited
Salt Quay House
4 North East Quay
Sutton Harbour
Plymouth
PL4 0BN

Dear Sirs and Madams

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025

The following representations are made on the basis of enquiries of management and staff with relevant knowledge and experience such as we consider necessary in connection with your audit of the West Oxfordshire District Council (the Council) financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2025. These enquiries have included inspection of supporting documentation where appropriate, and are sufficient to satisfy ourselves that we can make each of the following representations. All representations are made to the best of our knowledge and belief.

1. General

We have fulfilled our responsibilities for the preparation of the Council's financial statements in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards and the CIPFA/ LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2024/25 (the Code) and applicable law and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view and for making accurate representations to you.

All the transactions undertaken by the Council have been properly reflected and recorded in the accounting records.

All the accounting records have been made available to you for the purpose of your audit of the Council. We have provided you with unrestricted access to all appropriate persons within the Council, and with all other records and related information requested, including minutes of all Council and Committee meetings.

The financial statements are free of material misstatements, including omissions.

The effects of uncorrected misstatements (as set out in the appendix to this letter) are immaterial both individually and in total.

2. Internal control and fraud

We acknowledge our responsibility for the design, implementation, and maintenance of internal control to prevent and detect fraud and error, and we believe that we have appropriately fulfilled these responsibilities. We have disclosed to you the results of our risk assessment that the financial statements may be misstated as a result of fraud.

We have disclosed to you all instances of known or suspected fraud affecting the Council involving management, employees who have a significant role in internal control or others where fraud could have a material effect on the financial statements.

We have also disclosed to you all information in relation to allegations of fraud or suspected fraud affecting the Council's financial statements communicated by current or former employees, analysts, regulators, or others.

3. Assets and liabilities

The Council has satisfactory title to all assets and there are no liens or encumbrances on the Council's assets, except for those that are disclosed in the notes to the financial statements.

Significant assumptions used by us in making accounting estimates, including those measured at fair value, are reasonable. Such accounting estimates include PPE and investment property valuations, pension liability, and NNDR provisions.

All actual liabilities, contingent liabilities and guarantees given to third parties have been recorded or disclosed as appropriate.

We have no plans or intentions that may materially alter the carrying value and, where relevant, the fair value measurements or classification of assets and liabilities reflected in the financial statements.

4. Accounting estimates

The methods, data and significant assumptions used by us in making accounting estimates and their related disclosures are appropriate to achieve recognition, measurement and disclosure that is reasonable in the context of the applicable financial reporting framework.

5. Legal claims

We have disclosed to you all claims in connection with litigation that have been, or are expected to be, received and such matters, as appropriate, have been properly accounted for and disclosed in the financial statements.

6. Laws and regulations

We have disclosed to you all known instances of non-compliance or suspected non-compliance with laws and regulations whose effects should be considered when preparing the financial statements.

We confirm that all correspondence with our Regulators has been made available to you.

7. Related parties

Related party relationships and transactions comply with the Council's financial regulations, relevant requirements of the Code and have been appropriately accounted for and disclosed in the financial statements. We have disclosed to you all relevant information concerning such relationships and transactions and are not aware of any other matters which require disclosure in order to comply with regulatory, legislative, and accounting standards requirements.

8. Subsequent events

All events subsequent to the date of the financial statements which require adjustment or disclosure have been properly accounted for and disclosed.

9. Going concern

We believe that the Council's financial statements should be prepared on a going concern basis on the grounds that the financial reporting framework applicable to local government bodies means that the anticipated continued provision of entity's services in the public sector is normally sufficient evidence of going concern. We have not identified any material uncertainties related to going concern.

10. Annual Governance Statement

We are satisfied that the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) fairly reflects the Council's risk assurance and governance framework and we confirm that we are not aware of any significant risks that are not disclosed within the AGS.

11. Narrative Report

The disclosures within the Narrative Report fairly reflect our understanding of the Council's financial and operating performance over the period covered by the Council's financial statements.

We acknowledge our legal responsibilities regarding disclosure of information to you as auditors and confirm that so far as we are aware, there is no relevant audit information needed by you in connection with preparing your audit report of which you are unaware.

We have taken all the appropriate steps in order to make ourselves aware of any relevant audit/ other information and to establish that you are aware of that information.

Yours faithfully

.....
Signed on behalf of the Audit and Governance Committee of West Oxfordshire District Council

Date:

Appendix

Unadjusted items

<i>Factual (F), judgemental (J), Projected (P)</i>	Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement		Balance sheet	
	Dr	Cr	Dr	Cr
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
<i>1) IFRS 16 Right of Use Assets Management's calculations not going to the end of the lease terms (P)</i>		(145)	145	
<i>2) IFRS 16 Lease Liabilities Management's calculations not going to the end of the lease terms (P)</i>	136			(136)
Total	136	(145)	145	(136)

Misclassifications and adjustments to disclosures

The table below provides details of any misclassification and disclosure changes identified during the audit.

Misclassification / Disclosure change	Comment
Depreciation policy	It is the Council's policy not to depreciate assets in the year of acquisition. This has not been disclosed in the Council's depreciation policy.
Lease liabilities, initial application of IFRS 16	The initial calculation of the lease liabilities did not calculate the liabilities to the end of the lease terms, resulting in the disclosed initial application of IFRS 16 to be understated by a projected £145k.

Appendix B. Required communications with the Audit and Governance Committee

Under the auditing standards, there are certain communications that we must provide to the Audit and Governance Committee as those charged with governance. These include:

Required communication	Where addressed
Our responsibilities in relation to the financial statement audit and those of management and those charged with governance.	Audit Plan
The planned scope and timing of the audit including any limitations, specifically including with respect to significant risks.	Audit Plan
With respect to misstatements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uncorrected misstatements and their effect on our audit opinion; • the effect of uncorrected misstatements related to prior periods; • a request that any uncorrected misstatement is corrected; and • in writing, corrected misstatements that are significant. 	Audit Completion Report
With respect to fraud communications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enquiries of those charged with governance to determine whether they have a knowledge of any actual, suspected, or alleged fraud affecting the entity; • any fraud that we have identified or information we have obtained that indicates that fraud may exist; and • a discussion of any other matters related to fraud. 	Audit Completion Report Discussions at Audit and Governance Committees
Significant matters arising during the audit in connection with the entity's related parties.	Audit Completion Report
Significant findings from the audit including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • our view about the significant qualitative aspects of accounting practices including accounting policies, accounting estimates, and financial statement disclosures; • significant difficulties, if any, encountered during the audit; • significant matters, if any, arising from the audit that were discussed with management; • written representations that we are seeking; • expected modifications to the audit report; and • other matters significant to the oversight of the financial reporting process or otherwise identified during the audit that we believe will be relevant to the Audit and Governance Committee when fulfilling their responsibilities. 	Audit Completion Report
Significant deficiencies in internal controls identified during the audit.	Audit Completion Report
Where relevant, any issues identified with respect to authority to obtain external confirmations or inability to obtain relevant and reliable audit evidence from other procedures.	Audit Completion Report
Audit findings regarding non-compliance with laws and regulations	Audit Completion Report Discussions at Audit and Governance Committees
Significant matters in relation to going concern.	Audit Completion Report
Indication of whether all requested explanations and documents were provided by the entity.	Audit Completion Report
Confirmation of independence and objectivity of the firm and engagement team members.	Audit Plan Audit Completion Report



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WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2024/25

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NARRATIVE REPORT

About the Council

The population of West Oxfordshire has increased by nearly 10% over the last decade to 119,300, but it is still one of the least densely populated districts in the South East.

The district's population is spread out over a wide area, however it is mainly concentrated in the towns of Witney (33%) and Carterton (22%). Carterton is growing rapidly, due mainly to its proximity to RAF Brize Norton, the largest RAF station in the country. The other main population centres are the towns of Burford, Charlbury, Chipping Norton and Woodstock.

A third of the District lies within the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty with tourism playing a major role in the district's economy, attracting over four million visits per year with destinations such as Blenheim Palace - a UNESCO world heritage site, Cotswold Wildlife Park, Chipping Norton Theatre and miles of unspoilt countryside dotted with towns and villages of honey coloured stone.

West Oxfordshire has a strong and diverse economy and one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country.

Corporate Plan Action Tracker

The Council Plan 2023-2027 was adopted in January 2023. The Plan sets out the Council's key priorities and shows how the Council intends to achieve its ambitions for supporting local communities and the delivery of local services as follows:

1. Putting residents first
2. Enabling a good quality of life for all
3. Creating a better environment for people and wildlife
4. Responding to the climate and ecological emergency
5. Working together for West Oxfordshire

Putting Residents First

The Council partnered with Oxfordshire County Council, the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils, and other local bodies to create the Oxfordshire Councils Charter, a pioneering framework aimed at enhancing local democracy and improving collaboration across all councils in the county. This charter, the first of its kind in the UK,

brought together all three tiers of local government - parish, town, district, city, and county councils.

Involving 32 local councils in West Oxfordshire, the Charter incorporates key themes from their feedback and outlined principles for stronger partnership working while acknowledging the essential role of local councils in supporting residents and delivering services. Designed to be flexible, the Charter empowers councils without imposing additional operational burdens. Endorsed by the Executive in June 2024, the Charter was officially launched at the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils AGM in July 2024, marking a significant milestone in fostering more effective collaboration and communication between Oxfordshire's councils.

In early 2022, the Council conducted the first Youth Needs Assessment for West Oxfordshire, gathering 3,908 paper survey responses and focus group feedback from young people. At its meeting on 11 October 2023, the Executive reviewed the findings and instructed officers to engage with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) to develop a proposal for a dedicated youth specialist role within the Council to lead on youth-related matters and implement the assessment's recommendations.

At the Executive meeting on 14 February 2024, the recruitment of a full-time Youth Development Officer for a two-year period was approved. This senior role is designed to strengthen local capacity, influence external partners, and address key barriers faced by young people—such as access, affordability, isolation, and limited service availability. The officer will work with local providers, engage directly with young people, support internal youth engagement efforts including Local Plan consultation and communications activity, and collaborate closely with OCC.

Enabling a Good Quality of Life For All

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is intended to ensure that new developments contribute fairly and transparently to vital infrastructure such as schools, roads, and community facilities.

A draft CIL charging schedule was prepared and approved by the Executive in July 2024. A public consultation then ran from 2 August to 27 September which led to a large number of responses. In March 2025, the draft charging schedule was formally submitted for independent examination—marking the next stage in adopting the updated levy. A Programme Officer has been appointed to help administer the examination, and the Council is currently awaiting further directions from the

appointed examiner. It is anticipated that CIL charging will commence in 2025/26.

A recent review of Charter Markets in Witney and Chipping Norton received encouraging feedback and informed a new district-wide strategy to revitalise local markets. Developed through extensive collaboration, the strategy aims to support small retailers and start-ups while preserving the traditional character of the markets. Utilising the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) the Council has supported towns and parishes with public realm improvements, enhancing town/village centres and the visitor economy.

Creating a Better Environment for People and Wildlife

Deer Park South is woodland managed by Witney Woodlands Volunteers who have been improving the wood as an environmental resource for the benefit of wildlife and residents.

The Deer Park South Access Project is progressing with infrastructure enhancements to improve public access to the adjacent woodland. Key developments include the installation of two new bridges over Colwell Brook, footpath upgrades, and a new bench offering a scenic view of the site's balancing ponds. Nature trail brass rubbing posts, crafted in collaboration with local artist and Windrush CofE Primary School students, have been installed, enriching the trail's immersive experience.

Interpretation panels are now in place to help visitors better understand the area's natural features and heritage. Additionally, surfacing improvements have been made to the bridleway along the southern boundary of Deer Park South. A land management review and access improvements to Deer Park Wood are currently underway, involving nature recovery officers and Witney Woodland volunteers. A habitat survey, set to be carried out this spring, will inform the land management review.

West Oxfordshire District Council is working with partners to create a habitat bank at Pudlicote Farm near Chipping Norton, marking a significant step forward in protecting local nature.

The habitat bank will allow developers to meet their Biodiversity Net Gain obligations by funding habitat creation and enhancement projects, such as wildflower meadows, native woodlands, and wetland areas. These habitats will support a variety of wildlife, enhance ecosystem services, and contribute to the district's nature recovery efforts.

The Pudlicote Farm project will generate biodiversity units registered with Natural England, which

developers can purchase, provided they have first considered all options on the development site.

The land used for the habitat bank is often low productivity farmland, providing farmers with alternative ways to generate income. The Council is also working to streamline the process for future habitat banks to facilitate more projects across the district.

The project is a vital step towards nature recovery in Oxfordshire and aligns with the government's '30-by-30' biodiversity target and offers local options for developers to meet their planning obligations.

Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency

The decarbonisation of Council-owned buildings is progressing with various initiatives, including the Windrush Leisure Centre project which has received £1.6 million from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme Phase 3c (PSDS 3c) and is expected to reduce the Council's carbon emissions by 8.8%.

A successful bid to the Swimming Pool Support Fund financed the installation of solar PV panels at Windrush Leisure Centre, which provide 20% of the centre's energy needs.

The installation of electric vehicle charging points at the Woolgate car park is part of a broader initiative to expand electric vehicle charging points (EVCP) across the district. The new chargers are designed to encourage the adoption of cleaner driving practices by providing more convenient charging options, particularly for residents without off-street parking.

There are now a total of 42 charging units across 74 parking bays in Council car parks.

The Community Action Plan for Zero-Carbon Energy (CAPZero), developed by Low Carbon Hub in partnership with the community group GreenTEA (Transition Eynsham Area), is the first of its kind in the UK. The plan outlines the steps needed to achieve a net zero energy system in West Oxfordshire by 2050, with a particular focus on the Eynsham Primary Substation Area (PSA), which includes parts or all of eight parishes: Cassington, Eynsham, Freeland, Farmoor in Cumnor, Hanborough, North Leigh, South Leigh, and Stanton Harcourt & Sutton.

Working Together for West Oxfordshire

The Council is entering the final year of UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) and is working to transition

NARRATIVE REPORT

key projects into the 2025/26 funding year. A key initiative in the transition is the Westhive programme which provides essential support to local businesses, entrepreneurs and communities. Round 4 launched with a deadline of 31st March 2025.

New grant agreements are being developed, tailored to meet the specific needs of each intervention, ensuring ongoing projects remain aligned with long-term goals.

The introduction of the Youth Development role has already encouraged an increase in youth-led projects coming forward for Council funding. To complement these efforts, the Council has agreed to launch a small grants fund in June/July, which will support youth activities, grassroots initiatives, and smaller-scale community projects that may not otherwise receive funding through traditional channels.

Publica Group (Support) Limited

Publica Group (Support) Limited ('Publica') is wholly owned by West Oxfordshire District Council, Cotswold District Council, Forest of Dean District Council and Cheltenham Borough Council. It is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee with no share capital and operates with Mutual Trading Status to deliver services under contract on behalf of the Member Councils.

Publica is a Teckal company fulfilling the conditions set out in Regulation 12(4) of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. The Company is subject to management supervision by the Members. As such, the Company is a body governed by public law as defined in the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

While Publica works closely with the Council, the company has its own board of Directors, its own Management team, and operates independently from the Council.

Following an LGA peer review at Cotswold District Council a report was commissioned from external consultants to review the appropriateness of services remaining in Publica. The report recommended that the majority of services should return to the individual Councils in two phases. Phase one, the TUPE of 270 staff (85 to West Oxfordshire) took place on 1st November 2024 with a second phase due to go live on 1st July 2025 involving the transfer of 27 staff.

The aim of the transition is to be more agile and to provide sharper focus on the delivery of Council priorities through direct control of services. Publica will retain a number of services where it has been determined that they offer the most effective delivery model i.e. Revenues & Benefits, Homelessness, ICT and Customer Services.

Ubico Ltd

Ubico Ltd was established in 2011/12 by Cheltenham Borough Council and Cotswold District Council to deliver integrated environmental services including household and commercial refuse collection.

During 2015/16 West Oxfordshire District Council became a shareholder of Ubico Ltd. The Council holds an equal 1/8th shareholding in the Company.

Local Government Re-Organisation

The English Devolution White Paper (published on 16 December 2024) set out the government's vision for simpler local government structures. Alongside the publication of the English Devolution White Paper on the 16 December, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote to all Councils in remaining two-tier areas and neighbouring small Unitary Councils to set out plans for a joint programme of devolution and local government reorganisation.

On the 5 February 2025 the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution issued a statutory invitation to all Councils in 2-tier areas to develop proposals for unitary local government. These will bring together lower and upper tier local government services in new Unitary Councils to deliver local government reorganisation. This invitation requested that Councils produce interim plans and submit these to government by Friday 21 March 2025, setting out their progress on developing proposals in line with the criteria and guidance.

The Councils in Oxfordshire submitted an interim proposal to the Government in March, setting out the three options that would be developed into full proposals:

1. A single Unitary Council covering the current County Council boundary.
2. Two Unitaries - One including the current districts of Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire along with West Berkshire. The second unitary including the current districts of West Oxfordshire and Cherwell along with Oxford City.
3. Three Unitaries - One covering Oxford City but with expanded boundaries from the current city council. A second including the current districts on Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire along with West Berkshire. A third including the current districts of West Oxfordshire and Cherwell.

The Government decision on which proposal goes forward will not be until after the full plans have been submitted later in 2025. The table below gives the expected timeline

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LGR full plan submission deadline	Friday 28th November 2025
Elections to shadow authorities	April/May 2027
Vesting day for new authorities	April 2028

This would mean that West Oxfordshire District Council would cease to be a Council on 31 March 2028, and would be merged into a new Unitary Council as from 1 April 2028, referred to as the vesting day. Up until then West Oxfordshire District Council will continue to deliver services as normal.

Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

The Council operates a rolling 5 year MTFS the most recent version of which recognises:

- The expected loss of £3m of funding through the Business Rates Reset in 2026.
- The loss of income from the Leisure contract from 2027
- Inflationary pressures in both contract costs and wages growth
- The erosion of General Fund balances to fill the funding gap.
- Changes in assumptions on tax base growth and inflation

The Medium Term Financial Strategy has since been revised for the Executive and the revisions shared with wider members as part of member training. It will continue to be updated regularly to forecast the current position and evaluate the impact, both negative and positive of decisions made.

The version of the Medium Term Financial Strategy published with the budget papers can be found on the Council's website within the documents of the Executive meeting of 12th February 2025.

Financial Performance

The Council's 2024/25 budget strategy assumed a contribution to General Fund balances of £5,107. The outturn position (after transfers to earmarked reserves) was a surplus for the year of £6,345.

The full outturn report can be viewed on the Council's website as part of the Agenda for the Executive meeting on 11th July 2025.

Retained Business Rates

There is a £0.155m deficit in our retained Business Rate income for 2024/25 due to the extension of government reliefs to the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Sectors.

West Oxfordshire District Council

The corresponding Section 31 compensation grant received in the year from Central Government has been moved to Earmarked Reserves to fund the repayment of the deficit on the Collection Fund in 2025/26. This deficit has been taken into account when setting the 2025/26 budget.

Capital Programme

The Council maintains a capital programme to support investment and manage its assets. The approved budget for the year was £11.69m.

In 2024/25 the Council spent £6.349m on:

Capital Investment in the year	£000
UK Shared Prosperity Fund	167
UK Rural Prosperity Fund	516
Affordable Housing	635
Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)	942
S106 Funded Projects	628
Solar PV & EVCP	252
IT Equipment and Infrastructure	89
Chipping Norton Leisure Centre	131
Agile Working Programme	761
Ubico Fleet Replacement	1,278
Windrush Leisure Centre	289
Waste & Recycling Bins	139
Other Minor Schemes	522
	6,349

Financial Position

Net Assets increased in the year by approximately £5.06m. The Council continues to maintain a strong Balance Sheet despite financial challenges.



Net Assets 23/24

£149.65m

Net Assets 24/25

£154.71m

Movement

£5.06m

The movement is due to the increase in cash (£10.79m) an upward revaluation of our Property portfolio (£1.25m), and changes in Creditors (-£4.12m) and non current Investments (-£1.83m).

Pension Liability

West Oxfordshire District Council is a member of the Oxfordshire County Council Pension Fund, for which Oxfordshire County Council is the administering

NARRATIVE REPORT

authority. The scheme is a defined benefit statutory scheme that is administered in accordance with the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 1997 (as amended).

At the balance sheet date the actuarial valuation had the pension fund in surplus (assets exceed liabilities).

The valuation is represented as follows:

Pension Assets and Liabilities	£000
Fair Value of Plan Assets	80,552
Present value of obligations	(63,777)
Asset Ceiling Adjustment	(20,682)
Surplus/(deficit) on the pension fund	(3,907)

The actuarial valuation of the pension scheme shows a movement from a net surplus of £5.65m in 2023/24 to a net asset of £16.775m in 2024/25. When a pension scheme returns a net asset IAS19 requires the Council to recognise an additional liability to maintain a minimum funding level to meet all future liabilities, known as the asset ceiling. In 2024/25 the asset ceiling calculation increased the Council's pension liability by £20.682m.

The significant movement in the assets of the scheme was as a result of global economic conditions and high investment returns. Whilst the scheme is in deficit it represents the net value of what the Council owes across all future years. The Council makes contributions to cover liabilities accruing for employees that are current members.

Explanation of the Accounting Statements

The Statement of Accounts sets out the Council's income and expenditure for the year, and its financial position at 31 March. It comprises core and supplementary statements, together with supporting notes. The format and content of the financial statements is prescribed by the CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom, which in turn is underpinned by International Financial Reporting Standards. A glossary of key terms and abbreviations can be found at the end of this publication.

The **Core Statements** are:

The **Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement** – this records all the Council's income and expenditure for the year. The top half of the statement provides an analysis by service area / directorate. The West Oxfordshire District Council

bottom half of the statement deals with corporate transactions and funding.

The **Movement in Reserves Statement** is a summary of the changes that have taken place in the bottom-half of the Balance Sheet over the financial year.

Reserves are divided into “usable”, which can be invested in service improvements or capital investment, and “unusable” which must be set aside for specific purposes.

The **Balance Sheet** is a ‘snapshot’ of the Council's assets, liabilities, cash balances and reserves as at the year-end, 31 March 2024.

The **Cash Flow Statement** shows the reason for changes in the Council's cash balances during the year, and whether that change is due to operating activities, new investment or financing activities (such as borrowing or other long term liabilities).

The **Supplementary Statements** are:

The **Collection Fund** summarises the transactions relating to council tax and business rates collection, and the redistribution of that money.

Business Rates are distributed to Central Government, Oxfordshire County Council and West Oxfordshire District Council. Council Tax is distributed between Oxfordshire County Council, the Police & Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley, West Oxfordshire District Council and the Town & Parish Councils within the West Oxfordshire district.

The **Annual Governance Statement** which sets out the governance structures of the Council and its key internal controls.

NARRATIVE REPORT

Facing the Challenges Ahead

In February 2024, the Council set a balanced budget using £5,107 of general fund reserves. Although the Quarter 1 Financial Performance Report forecast a significantly higher figure for the use of general funds by the year end, the picture improved over the year with a Quarter 3 report forecasting a reduced overspend of £34,344.

The final outturn position was more favourable than forecast with a contribution to reserves of £6,345. This was due to one-off beneficial variances, such as treasury management investment income, reduced capital expenditure due to the lack of suitable investments resulting in savings on budgeted interest costs and below budget Minimum Revenue Provision and Government Grants. These events cannot be relied upon on an ongoing basis.

One of our largest controllable risks continues to be the Leisure contract with our provider Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL). Throughout the year it was reported that this contract would be underspent due to a very prudent income contingency included in the base budget which was not needed at the year end. The contract sum increases annually by CPI inflation, which has been higher than expected, therefore further increasing income and the overall underspend.

The current leisure contract with GLL expires in 2027, and an options appraisal is underway to determine the best course of action for the Council in terms of a contract from 2027. Whatever the outcome of this piece of work, there is going to be a material impact on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) in 2027 which presents a significant challenge ahead.

The Ubico waste contract, the costs of which have been rising over recent years, saw a modest saving in the 2025/26 budget setting process. The contract was extended to March 2027, with the potential to vary from April 2026, with no further extensions available after this date.

As the Council had reached a point where it needed to determine how it wanted to provide waste and environmental services in the future, and who it wanted to commission to provide these, a piece of work was requested to look at the options. This work demonstrated the value of working more collaboratively and the resulting report outlined the

significant financial and non-financial benefits of a more joined-up approach across Oxfordshire to waste management and environmental services. In January 2025 the Executive resolved to support the creation of The Oxfordshire Waste and Environmental Services Transformation Programme working collaboratively with other local authorities in Oxfordshire. An emerging list of short-, medium-, and long-term projects were developed and prioritised and options from these will be brought back to the Executive for consideration as they are completed.

In response to the challenging and volatile market conditions for the Investment Portfolio in 2023/24, the 2024/25 budget setting process revised the base budget to reflect the current rate of voids and was based on a detailed cashflow and took account of service charges and business rates liabilities. The investment Property portfolio had a mixed year with an overall outturn, excluding Carterton Industrial Estate, being underspend of £29,597. Carterton Industrial Estate (Units 1-3) showed an overspend as they are vacant as repairs to the roof are required before the units can be tenanted. The tender process for this work is now complete and work is anticipated to start imminently.

With careful financial management and doing the best possible in terms of the factors within our control, the Council has adequate reserves to fill the gap in the revenue budget identified in the MTFS in the medium term. However, these reserves are not infinite and there are a few key challenges ahead for us as a district council. The most significant of these are the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and the local government funding reforms.

LGR, which is the result of an announcement made by the Government in December 2024, will see the end of two-tier authorities, as seen in Oxfordshire, and new unitary councils created. Many areas of the country are already served by unitary councils who provide all the council services rather than being split across two councils (district and county). Following an interim proposal in March 2025, the councils in Oxfordshire are developing three options which will be submitted to Government by 28th November 2025. These include a single unitary, two unitaries and three unitaries options. Whichever option is ultimately selected by Government, under the current timetable, the elections to a shadow authority would take place in April/ May 2027 with the new council (s) expected to go live in April 2028.

NARRATIVE REPORT

Whilst LGR presents a once in a generation opportunity to shape and strengthen the future of public services, it also presents a major challenge in the years ahead. Not only in terms of the work involved in developing the options but also in delivering the Council's key priorities in the coming years, particularly in the final year of the shadow authority, before West Oxfordshire District Council ceases to exist.

The second consultation on the local government funding reforms, known as Fair Funding Review 2.0, closes on 15th August 2025 and includes the "resetting" of the business rates retention system. West Oxfordshire has benefitted disproportionately from business rates and therefore a reset is expected to have a material impact on funding levels. The size of the impact will depend on the level of compensation funding provided by the government. The proposed changes will be implemented over three years, beginning in 2026-27.

While there are clearly challenges ahead, we will continue to work closely with key partners such as GLL, Ubico, Councils and other local organisations to endeavour to deliver the best for the residents of West Oxfordshire. Working collaboratively is crucial to deliver on our aspirations and the priorities in the Council Plan.

Further information

For further information on the accounts please contact:

Madhu Richards, Director of Finance,
West Oxfordshire District Council,
Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB;

or via email at madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk

The Authority's responsibilities

The Authority is required to:

- Make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs and to secure that one of its officers has the responsibility for the administration of those affairs. In this Authority, that officer is the Chief Finance Officer.
- Manage its affairs to secure economic, efficient and effective use of resources and safeguard its assets.
- Approve the Statement of Accounts.

The Chief Finance Officer's responsibility

The Chief Finance Officer is responsible for the preparation of the Authority's Statement of Accounts in accordance with proper practices as set out in the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom (the Code).

In preparing this statement of accounts, the Chief Finance Officer has:

- Selected suitable accounting policies and then applied them consistently.
- Made judgements and estimates that were reasonable and prudent.
- Complied with the Local Authority Code.

The Chief Finance Officer has also:

- Kept proper accounting records which were up to date.
- Taken reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

CERTIFICATE

I certify that the Statement of Accounts presented here gives a true and fair view of the financial position of the authority at the accounting date and of its income and expenditure for the year ended 31st March 2025.

Madhu Richards
Director of Finance and S151 Officer

Date: _____

In accordance with regulation 10(3) Accounts and Audit Regulations 2016, the statement of accounts is approved by the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee, on behalf of West Oxfordshire District Council.

Cllr Carl Rylett
Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee

Date: _____

2023/2024				Note	2024/2025		
Gross Expenditure £	Gross Income £	Net Expenditure £			Gross Expenditure £	Gross Income £	Net Expenditure £
1,358,171	(598,880)	759,291	- Environmental and Regulatory Services		1,418,552	(692,429)	726,123
1,126,814	(17,710)	1,109,104	Finance, Human Resources & Procurement		1,159,568	(21,509)	1,138,059
2,780,614	(707,156)	2,073,458	ICT, Change and Customer Services		2,548,126	(706,885)	1,841,241
2,622,087	(895,765)	1,726,322	Land, Legal and Property Services		2,483,818	(1,898,955)	584,863
18,488,953	(19,656,427)	(1,167,474)	Revenues and Housing Support Services		20,319,435	(19,245,728)	1,073,707
1,326,044	(84,069)	1,241,975	- Democratic Services		1,935,950	(492,614)	1,443,336
12,717,389	(3,730,345)	8,987,044	Environmental Services		13,108,405	(4,261,453)	8,846,952
5,292,520	(3,078,464)	2,214,056	Leisure and Communities Services		5,035,233	(3,522,923)	1,512,310
3,163,116	(1,488,140)	1,674,976	Planning and Strategic Housing Services		4,403,975	(2,357,530)	2,046,445
3,743,772	(1,468,653)	2,275,119	Other Retained Services		2,389,951	(702,238)	1,687,713
(49,935)	130,619	80,684	Covid-19 Income & Expenditure	B2A	95,221	0	95,221
52,569,545	(31,594,990)	20,974,555	Cost of Services	B1	54,898,234	(33,902,264)	20,995,970
4,622,260	(674,869)	3,947,391	Other Operating Expenditure	B3	5,078,072	(660,540)	4,417,532
721,009	(7,054,123)	(6,333,114)	Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure	B4	4,322,543	(5,808,474)	(1,485,931)
0	(21,679,927)	(21,679,927)	Taxation and Non-Specific Grant Income	B5	0	(25,995,521)	(25,995,521)
57,912,814	(61,003,909)	(3,091,095)	(Surplus) / Deficit on Provision of Services	B1 / B2	64,298,849	(66,366,799)	(2,067,950)
		242,937	(Surplus) / deficit on revaluation of non current assets				(3,452,200)
		47,125	(Gains) / Losses on Financial Instruments at FV through OCI				262,876
		469,000	Remeasurement of the net defined benefit liability				(387,000)
		759,062	Other Comprehensive Income and Expenditure				(3,576,324)
		(2,332,033)	Total Comprehensive Income and Expenditure				(5,644,274)

	Note	Usable Reserves				Total Usable Reserves £	Unusable Reserves £	TOTAL RESERVES £
		General Fund - Unallocated £	General Fund - Earmarked £	Capital Receipts Reserve £	Capital Grants Unapplied £			
Balance at 1st April 2023		(12,240,347)	(14,719,636)	(1,473,793)	(13,203,310)	(41,637,086)	(105,684,151)	(147,321,237)
Movements in reserves 2023/24		2,849,697	(2,849,697)	0	0	0	0	0
Total Comprehensive Income and Expenditure		(3,091,095)	0	0	0	(3,091,095)	759,062	(2,332,033)
Adjustments between accounting basis & funding basis under regulations	C1	230,181	0	(717,530)	868,191	380,842	(380,842)	0
(Increase) / Decrease in Reserves 2023/24		(11,217)	(2,849,697)	(717,530)	868,191	(2,710,253)	378,220	(2,332,033)
Balance at 31 March 2024		(12,251,564)	(17,569,333)	(2,191,323)	(12,335,119)	(44,347,339)	(105,305,931)	(149,653,270)
Movements in reserves 2024/25		1,558,028	(1,558,028)	0	0	0	0	0
Total Comprehensive Income and Expenditure		(2,067,950)		0	0	(2,067,950)	(3,576,324)	(5,644,274)
Adjustments between accounting basis & funding basis under regulations	C1	503,578	0	(529,566)	(923,328)	(949,316)	949,316	0
(Increase) / Decrease in Reserves 2024/25		(6,344)	(1,558,028)	(529,566)	(923,328)	(3,017,266)	(2,627,008)	(5,644,274)
Balance at 31 March 2025		(12,257,908)	(19,127,361)	(2,720,889)	(13,258,447)	(47,364,606)	(107,932,938)	(155,297,544)

	Note	Usable Reserves				Total Usable Reserves £	Unusable Reserves £	TOTAL RESERVES £
		General Fund - Unallocated £	General Fund - Earmarked £	Capital Receipts Reserve £	Capital Grants Unapplied £			
Balance at 1st April 2022		(12,813,345)	(17,801,003)	(6,674,464)	(11,518,508)	(48,807,321)	(80,946,883)	(129,754,204)
Movements in reserves 2022/23		(1,702,630)	1,702,630	0	0	0	0	0
Restated Total Comprehensive Income and Expenditure		987,626	0	0	0	987,626	(18,554,661)	(17,567,035)
Adjustments between accounting basis & funding basis under regulations	C1	1,288,001	1,378,738	5,200,671	(1,684,802)	6,182,607	(6,182,607)	0
(Increase) / Decrease in Reserves 2022/23		572,997	3,081,367	5,200,671	(1,684,802)	7,170,233	(24,737,268)	(17,567,035)
Balance at 31 March 2023 - Restated*		(12,240,347)	(14,719,636)	(1,473,793)	(13,203,310)	(41,637,088)	(105,684,151)	(147,321,239)
Movements in reserves 2023/24		2,849,697	(2,849,697)	0	0	0	0	0
Total Comprehensive Income and Expenditure		(3,091,095)		0	0	(3,091,095)	759,062	(2,332,033)
Adjustments between accounting basis & funding basis under regulations	C1	230,181	0	(717,530)	868,191	380,841	(380,841)	0
(Increase) / Decrease in Reserves 2023/24		(11,217)	(2,849,697)	(717,530)	868,191	(2,710,254)	378,221	(2,332,033)
Balance at 31 March 2024		(12,251,565)	(17,569,333)	(2,191,323)	(12,335,119)	(44,347,343)	(105,305,931)	(149,653,272)

BALANCE SHEET

31st March 2024 £		Note	31st March 2025 £
75,127,761	Property, Plant & Equipment	D1	76,560,032
91,084	Heritage Assets		91,084
53,244,000	Investment Property	D2	53,491,000
(0)	Intangible Assets	D3	0
13,767,762	Non-Current Investments	F2	11,933,980
11,212,474	Non-Current Debtors	D7	11,781,213
153,443,081	Non-Current Assets		153,857,309
77,210	Investments	F2	62,435
16,609	Inventories		21,028
14,799,553	Debtors	D4	13,524,854
1,914,139	Cash and Cash Equivalents		12,708,682
16,807,511	Current Assets		26,316,999
(12,072,629)	Creditors	D5	(16,197,509)
0	Short Term Borrowing		0
(1,262,311)	Creditors - s.106 balances	D5	(1,128,021)
(1,885,750)	Provisions	D6	(2,271,488)
(15,220,690)	Current Liabilities		(19,597,017)
(4,970,000)	Defined Benefit Pension Liability	F1	(3,907,000)
(406,628)	Capital Grants Receipts in Advance	B9	(452,215)
0	ROU Lease Liability		(920,529)
(5,376,628)	Non-Current Liabilities		(5,279,744)
149,653,274	Net Assets		155,297,546
(44,347,343)	Usable reserves		(47,364,606)
(105,305,931)	Unusable Reserves	C3	(107,932,939)
(149,653,274)	Total Reserves		(155,297,546)

These financial statements were certified by the Chief Finance Officer on 30th June 2025.

Madhu Richards
Director of Finance, West Oxfordshire District Council.

CASH FLOW STATEMENT

	Note	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Net surplus or (deficit) on provision of services		3,091,095	2,067,950
Adjustments to net surplus or (deficit) on the provision of services to exclude non-cash movements	E1a	(3,803,312)	7,747,202
Adjustments for items included in the net surplus or (deficit) on the provision of services that are investing or financing activities	E1b	(1,784,733)	(4,564,892)
Net cash flows from Operating Activities		(2,496,950)	5,250,260
Investing Activities	E1c	1,723,876	5,524,657
Financing Activities	E1d	(5,000,000)	0
Net increase or (decrease) in cash and cash equivalents		(5,773,074)	10,774,917
Cash and cash equivalents at 1 April		7,667,461	1,894,387
Cash and cash equivalents at 31 March		1,894,387	12,669,305
Comprising:			
Cash and bank current accounts		(220,611)	354,305
Short term investments		2,115,000	12,315,000
		1,894,389	12,669,305

NOTES TO THE COMPREHENSIVE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT

B1. Expenditure and Funding Analysis

	2024/2025					
	Net Expenditure in CI&ES £	Adjs. between accounting and funding basis £	Transfers to /(from) GF Earmarked Reserves £	Net Exp. Chargeable to the General Fund £	Management Reporting Adjs. £	Outturn Reported to Management £
Environmental and Regulatory Services	726,123	(10,860)	0	715,263	201	715,464
GO Shared Services	1,138,059	(9,815)	0	1,128,244	0	1,128,244
ICT, Change and Customer Services	1,841,241	(149,588)	0	1,691,653	118,635	1,810,288
Land, Legal and Property Services	584,863	(388,270)	0	196,593	340,052	536,645
Revenues and Housing Support Services	984,499	(52,136)	0	932,363	190,220	1,122,583
Democratic Services	1,443,336	4,459	0	1,447,795	0	1,447,795
Environmental Services	8,846,952	(604,894)	0	8,242,058	375,840	8,617,898
Leisure and Communities Services	1,512,310	(2,513,407)	0	(1,001,097)	721,704	(279,393)
Planning and Strategic Housing Services	2,046,445	(806,040)	0	1,240,405	3,557	1,243,962
Other Retained Services	1,687,713	574,289	0	2,262,002	(1,069)	2,260,933
Covid-19 Income & Expenditure	95,221	0	0	95,221	0	95,221
Cost of Services	20,906,762	(3,956,262)	0	16,950,500	1,749,141	18,699,641
Other Income and Expenditure	(22,974,712)	4,459,839	1,558,028	(16,956,845)	(1,749,141)	(18,705,986)
(Surplus) / Deficit on Provision of Services	(2,067,950)	503,577	1,558,028	(6,345)	0	(6,345)
Opening General Fund Balance (Unallocated) at 1 April				(12,251,561)		
(Surplus) / Deficit for the year				(6,345)		
Closing General Fund Balance (Unallocated) at 31 March				(12,257,906)		

NOTES TO THE COMPREHENSIVE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT

	2023/2024					
	Net Expenditure in CI&ES £	Adjs. between accounting and funding basis £	Transfers to /(from) GF Earmarked Reserves £	Net Exp. Chargeable to the General Fund £	Management Reporting Adjs. £	Outturn Reported to Management £
Environmental and Regulatory Services	759,291	(22,387)	0	736,904	3,327	740,231
GO Shared Services	1,109,104	(15,901)	0	1,093,203	0	1,093,203
ICT, Change and Customer Services	2,073,458	(136,794)	0	1,936,664	95,197	2,031,861
Land, Legal and Property Services	1,726,322	(553,034)	0	1,173,288	166,704	1,339,992
Revenues and Housing Support Services	(1,167,474)	(420,594)	0	(1,588,068)	423,367	(1,164,701)
Democratic Services	1,241,975	(49)	0	1,241,926	0	1,241,926
Environmental Services	8,987,044	(613,334)	0	8,373,710	333,024	8,706,734
Leisure and Communities Services	2,214,056	(2,968,532)	0	(754,476)	1,231,504	477,028
Planning and Strategic Housing Services	1,674,976	(293,557)	0	1,381,419	9,274	1,390,693
Other Retained Services	2,275,119	(100,535)	0	2,174,584	228,230	2,402,814
Covid-19 Income & Expenditure	80,684	1,032	0	81,716	0	81,716
Cost of Services	20,974,555	(5,123,685)	0	15,850,870	2,490,627	18,341,497
Other Income and Expenditure	(24,065,650)	5,353,868	2,849,697	(15,862,085)	(2,490,627)	(18,352,712)
(Surplus) / Deficit on Provision of Services	(3,091,095)	230,183	2,849,697	(11,215)	0	(11,215)
Opening General Fund Balance (Unallocated) at 1 April				(12,240,347)		
(Surplus) / Deficit for the year				(11,215)		
Closing General Fund Balance (Unallocated) at 31 March				(12,251,562)		

NOTES TO THE COMPREHENSIVE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT

Adjustments between accounting basis and funding basis

The Expenditure and Funding Analysis shows how annual expenditure is used and funded compared with the resources consumed or earned by the Council in accordance with generally accepted accounting practices as shown in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Account. It also shows how these amounts are allocated for decision making purposes across the Council's Directorates and Services. The adjustments between these amounts are detailed below:

	2024/2025						
	Adjustments between funding and accounting basis (see MiRS Note C1)			Adjustments between amounts chargeable to the General Fund and Management Reporting			Total Management Reporting Adjustments £
	Capital Adjs £	Pension Adjs £	Other Adjs £	Total adjs between funding and accounting £	Depreciation £	Other Segment Adjs. £	
- Environmental and Regulatory Services	0	4,269	6,591	10,860	0	201	201
Finance, Human Resources & Procurement	0	7,865	1,950	9,815	0	0	0
ICT, Change and Customer Services	118,635	30,953	0	149,588	118,635	0	118,635
Land, Legal and Property Services	385,840	(209)	2,639	388,270	337,363	2,689	340,052
Revenues and Housing Support Services	33,262	18,874	0	52,136	33,262	156,958	190,220
- Democratic Services	0	(14,216)	9,757	(4,459)	0	0	0
Environmental Services	450,365	152,449	2,080	604,894	388,803	(12,963)	375,840
Leisure and Communities Services	2,515,291	(7,326)	5,442	2,513,407	926,634	(204,930)	721,704
Planning and Strategic Housing Services	795,233	(14,185)	24,992	806,040	0	3,557	3,557
Other Retained Services	0	(574,473)	184	(574,289)	0	(1,069)	(1,069)
Cost of Services	4,298,626	(395,999)	53,635	3,956,262	1,804,697	(55,556)	1,749,141
Other Income and Expenditure	(3,149,216)	(280,000)	(1,030,623)	(4,459,839)	(1,804,697)	55,556	(1,749,141)
(Surplus) / Deficit on Provision of Services	1,149,410	(675,999)	(976,988)	(503,577)	0	0	0

NOTES TO THE COMPREHENSIVE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT

	2023/2024						
	Adjustments between funding and accounting basis (see MiRS Note C1)				Adjustments between amounts chargeable to the General Fund and Management Reporting		
	Capital Adjs £	Pension Adjs £	Other Adjs £	Total adjs between funding and accounting £	Depreciation £	Other Segment Adjs. £	Total Management Reporting Adjustments £
-							
Environmental and Regulatory Services	0	22,387	0	22,387	0	3,327	3,327
Finance, Human Resources & Procurement	0	15,901	0	15,901	0	0	0
ICT, Change and Customer Services	95,197	41,597	0	136,794	95,197	0	95,197
Land, Legal and Property Services	548,771	4,263	0	553,034	166,704	0	166,704
Revenues and Housing Support Services	393,589	27,005	0	420,594	42,211	381,156	423,367
<u>Democratic Services</u>	0	49	0	49	0	0	0
Environmental Services	431,714	181,620	0	613,334	318,214	14,810	333,024
Leisure and Communities Services	2,955,515	13,017	0	2,968,532	1,215,883	15,621	1,231,504
Planning and Strategic Housing Services	253,500	40,057	0	293,557	0	9,274	9,274
Other Retained Services	893,400	(792,865)	0	100,535	188,100	40,130	228,230
Covid-19 I&E	0	(1,032)	0	(1,032)	0	0	0
Cost of Services	5,571,686	(448,001)	0	5,123,685	2,026,309	464,318	2,490,627
Other Income and Expenditure	(4,851,212)	75,000	(577,656)	(5,353,868)	(2,026,309)	(464,318)	(2,490,627)
(Surplus) / Deficit on Provision of Services	720,474	(373,001)	(577,656)	(230,183)	0	0	0

NOTES TO THE COMPREHENSIVE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT

Capital Adjustments

This column adjusts for depreciation and impairment, revaluations gains and losses in service lines and for transfers of income / net value of assets written off on disposals in Other Operating Income and Expenditure. Taxation and Non Specific Grant Income is credited with capital grants receivable in the year without conditions or for which conditions were satisfied in the year.

Pension Adjustments

This column removes the impact of IAS19 Employee Benefits. For services, this removes current or past service costs and replaces them with the actual employer pension contributions payable. In Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure, the net interest on the net defined benefit liability is removed.

Other Adjustments

This adjustment represents the difference between the amounts chargeable under statutory regulations for Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates and the income recognised under generally accepted accounting practices in the Code. This is a timing difference as any difference will be brought forward in future Surpluses or Deficits on the Collection Fund.

B2. Expenditure and Income Analysed by Nature

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Expenditure		
Employee benefits expenses	2,013,300	4,294,243
Publica Contract Charges	10,957,980	10,100,475
Housing Benefit & Other Transfer Payments	14,130,260	15,037,181
Covid grant payments	(49,935)	95,221
Other service expenses	19,814,698	20,862,541
Depreciation, amortisation and impairment	2,731,611	1,804,697
Interest payments and similar expense	75,000	549,720
Precepts and Levies	4,622,260	5,078,072
Other expenditure	3,617,641	6,387,492
Total Expenditure	57,912,815	64,209,642
Income		
Fees, charges & other service income	(10,954,101)	(11,843,111)
Housing Benefit Subsidy	(14,636,464)	(14,464,522)
Government Grants (incl Covid)	(12,262,521)	(17,204,660)
Income from Council Tax	(10,441,675)	(11,194,356)
Income from Non Domestic Rates	(2,209,646)	(1,994,756)
Non Government Grants & Contributions	(5,865,224)	(6,198,135)
Investment Interest and similar income	(2,220,407)	(2,543,490)
Other income	(2,413,871)	(834,561)
Total Income	(61,003,909)	(66,277,592)
(Surplus) / Deficit on Provision of Services	(3,091,094)	(2,067,950)

NOTES TO THE COMPREHENSIVE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT

B2a COVID

Expenditure	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Contain Outbreak Management	62,626	95,221
Business Lockdown Grants	(118,504)	0
Restart Grants	5,942	0
	(49,936)	95,221

Income	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Business Lockdown Grants	235,737	0
Restart Grants	(105,118)	0
	130,619	0
Total	80,683	95,221

B3. Other Operating Income and Expenditure

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
(Gains) / losses on disposal of non current assets	(74,430)	(13,549)
Unattached capital receipts	(600,439)	(646,991)
Town and Parish Council precepts	4,622,260	5,078,071
	3,947,391	4,417,531

B4. Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Interest payable and similar charges	6,027	55,670
Interest receivable and similar income	(1,780,931)	(1,782,119)
Movement in the fair value of financial assets	(439,476)	68,350
Movement in the creditor loss allowance	468,661	(13,106)
Movement in the fair value of investment property	(1,739,000)	2,888,892
Net investment property (income) / expenditure	(2,923,395)	(2,423,618)
Net interest on the net defined benefit pension liability	75,000	(280,000)
	(6,333,114)	(1,485,931)

NOTES TO THE COMPREHENSIVE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT

B5. Taxation and Non Specific Grant Income

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
National Non Domestic Rates:		
- Redistribution	(2,762,336)	(3,518,998)
- Renewable Energy	(271,541)	(310,768)
- Business rates levy	2,239,995	2,699,222
- Surplus from the pool	(1,674,960)	(1,048,550)
- (Surplus) / Deficit	413,475	184,338
	(2,055,367)	(1,994,756)
Council Tax income (Council and Town/Parish Council shares)	(10,441,675)	(11,194,356)
Revenue Support Grant	(215,801)	(109,577)
New Homes Bonus	(1,579,635)	(1,009,640)
S31 NDR Compensation Grant	(4,895,907)	(5,562,132)
Capital grants and contributions	(1,075,999)	(4,205,237)
Other non-ringfenced government grants	(1,415,543)	(1,919,823)
	(21,679,927)	(25,995,521)

B6. Members' Allowances

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances	410,567	451,448
Expenses	4,133	3,559
	414,700	455,007

B7. External Audit Costs

The Council has incurred the following costs in relation to the audit of the Statement of Accounts, certification of grant claims and statutory inspections, and to non-audit services provided by the Council's external auditors (Bishop Fleming):

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
External audit services carried out by the appointed auditor	150,476	153,844
	150,476	153,844

NOTES TO THE COMPREHENSIVE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT

Most disclosures within the Statement of Accounts give additional details about the amounts receivable and payable included in the core statements. The amounts for External Audit Costs are disclosed in accordance with annually agreed audit fee schedules. Fee variations relating to 2021/22 (£20,000), 2022/23 (£19,850 Statement of Accounts) and for certification of Housing Benefits (£63,900) were also paid.

B8. Officer Remuneration

Senior Officer Remuneration

The Council's senior officers are those with statutory responsibility within the Council.

2024/2025			
Post	Salary, allowances & other benefits £	Pension Contributions £	Total Remuneration £
Chief Executive	111,382	20,186	131,569
Chief Finance Officer	93,795	16,508	112,038
Director of Governance & Monitoring Officer	95,531	16,508	110,303
	300,708	53,202	353,910
2023/2024			
Post	Salary, allowances & other benefits £	Pension Contributions £	Total Remuneration £
Chief Executive	100,943	18,501	119,444
Chief Finance Officer*	40,589	7,144	47,732
Director of Governance & Monitoring Officer*	68,994	12,143	81,137
	210,525	37,787	248,312

*The Chief Finance Officer has been in post since October 2023 and the Director of Governance has been in post since June 2023. The 2023/24 employee costs are therefore only part year.

NOTES TO THE COMPREHENSIVE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT

Other Officer Remuneration

The number of employees whose remuneration (excluding employers' contributions in respect of National Insurance Contributions and Superannuation Contributions) exceeded £50,000 during the year is listed in the table below and excludes Statutory Officers included in the Senior Officer table.

	2023/24	2024/25
	Number of Officers	
£50,000 to £54,999	0	0
£55,000 to £59,999	0	2
£60,000 to £64,999	0	0
£65,000 to £69,999	0	0
£70,000 to £74,999	0	0
£75,000 to £79,999	0	0

B9. Grant Income

The following significant grants and contributions were credited to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement during the year.

	2023/24	2024/25
	£	£
<u>Revenue grants credited to Cost of Services</u>		
Housing Benefit Subsidy	(14,453,696)	(14,287,214)
Housing Benefit Administration Subsidy	(182,768)	(176,809)
	(14,636,464)	(14,464,023)
<u>Revenue grants credited to Taxation and Non Specific Grant Income</u>		
New homes bonus grant	(1,579,635)	(1,009,640)
Revenue Support Grant	(215,801)	(230,095)
S31 NDR compensation grant	(4,895,907)	(5,562,132)
Rural services delivery grant	(148,899)	(186,066)
Funding Guarantee	(910,865)	(1,683,079)
Other specific government grants	(355,779)	(48,251)
	(8,106,886)	(8,719,263)
<u>Capital grants credited to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement</u>		
Better Care Funding	(807,750)	(942,800)
S.106 Receipts & other capital grants	(1,075,999)	(4,205,237)
	(1,883,749)	(5,148,037)

NOTES TO THE COMPREHENSIVE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT

Where the Council has been given grants or contributions with conditions attached, which the Council has yet to meet, these grants are treated as receipts in advance until the conditions are met. The grants and contributions held at the balance sheet date are as follows:

	2023/24 £	2024/2025 £
Environment Agency Grant [for specific Land drainage works]	(174,266)	(160,366)
Better Care Grant Funding	(232,362)	(291,849)
Long Term Capital Receipt in advance	(406,628)	(452,214)
S106 Capital Contributions [due to third parties]	(64,157)	(75,686)
Short Term Capital Receipt in advance	(64,157)	(75,686)
Total Capital Receipt in Advance	(470,785)	(527,901)

B10. Termination Benefits

Redundancy and Compensation

There is no redundancy and compensation cost in 2024/25. (£0 in 2023/24)

Pension Strain

There is no pension strain cost in 2024/25 (nil in 2023/24). Any additional contributions (strain contributions and augmentation contributions) that are due to be paid in the year by the Council, under any agreement with the pension fund, are recognised immediately as an expense.

Exit Packages

There are no exit packages charged to the Council's Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement for the current year. (£0 in 2023/24)

NOTES TO THE COMPREHENSIVE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT

C1. Adjustments Between Accounting Basis and Funding Basis Under Regulations

	2024/25			
	General Fund - Unallocated	General Fund - Earmarked	Capital Receipts Reserve	Capital Grants Unapplied
	£	£	£	£
Capital Adjustments				
Reversal of entries included in the CI&ES relating to Capital Expenditure				
Charges for depreciation, amortisation and impairment	(1,804,697)			
Revaluation losses on Property, Plant and Equipment	(209,792)			
Movements in the fair value of Investment Properties	(2,888,892)			
Capital Grants and Contributions applied	2,603,612			
Revenue Expenditure funded from Capital Under Statute	(3,233,138)			
Non current assets written off on disposal or sale	(1,278,734)			
Adjustments between Capital & Revenue Resources				
Transfer of cash sale proceeds from disposal of non current assets	1,278,734			
Capital expenditure charged against General Fund Balance	546,997			
Statutory provision for the repayment of debt	891,583			
Capital grants and contributions credited to CI&ES	2,297,925			(2,297,925)
Unattached Capital Receipts	646,991		(646,991)	
Adjustments to Capital Resources				
Application of grants to capital financing trfd to CAA				1,374,597
Use of capital receipts reserve to finance new capital expenditure			890,506	
Capital loan repaid			(234,269)	
Transfer from Deferred Capital Receipts on receipt of cash			(538,812)	
Financial Instrument Adjustments				
Reversal of changes in fair value on Pooled Investment Funds	481,371			
Pension Adjustments				
Pension costs transferred to / (from) the Pensions Reserve	676,000			
Accumulated Absences Adjustments				
Movement in accumulated absences adjustment transferred to / (from) Accumulated Absences Adjustment Account	(53,634)			
Other Adjustments				
Council Tax and NDR transfers to / (from) the Collection Fund Adjustment Account	549,252			
Capital expenditure charged against General Fund Balance				
	503,578	0	(529,566)	(923,328)

NOTES TO THE COMPREHENSIVE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT

	2023/24			
	General Fund - Unallocated	General Fund - Earmarked	Capital Receipts Reserve	Capital Grants Unapplied
	£	£	£	£
Capital Adjustments				
<u>Reversal of entries included in the CI&ES relating to Capital Expenditure</u>				
Charges for depreciation, amortisation and impairment	(2,026,311)			
Revaluation losses on Property, Plant and Equipment	(1,552,245)			
Movements in the fair value of Investment Properties	1,739,000			
Capital Grants and Contributions applied	1,037,732			
Revenue Expenditure funded from Capital Under Statute	(2,764,668)			
Non current assets written off on disposal or sale	(334,490)			
<u>Adjustments between Capital & Revenue Resources</u>				
Transfer of cash sale proceeds from disposal of non current assets	334,490			
Capital expenditure charged against General Fund Balance	494,683			
Statutory provision for the repayment of debt	501,616			
Capital grants and contributions credited to CI&ES	809,804			(809,804)
Unattached Capital Receipts	600,439		(600,439)	
<u>Adjustments to Capital Resources</u>				
Application of grants to capital financing trfd to CAA				1,677,994
Use of capital receipts reserve to finance new capital expenditure			863,533	
Capital loan repaid			(253,941)	
Transfer from Deferred Capital Receipts on receipt of cash			(726,683)	
Financial Instrument Adjustments				
Reversal of changes in fair value on Pooled Investment Funds	439,476			
Pension Adjustments				
Pension costs transferred to / (from) the Pensions Reserve	373,000			
Accumulated Absences Adjustments				
Movement in accumulated absences adjustment transferred to / (from) Accumulated Absences Adjustment Account	0			
Other Adjustments				
Council Tax and NDR transfers to / (from) the Collection Fund Adjustment Account	577,656			
Capital expenditure charged against General Fund Balance				
	230,181	0	(717,530)	868,191

NOTES TO THE MOVEMENT IN RESERVES STATEMENT

C2. Usable Reserves

Earmarked Reserves

The Council's General Fund comprises an unallocated element, used to meet day-to-day spending and 'Earmarked Reserves' – amounts set aside to provide financing for future specific expenditure or projects. The material transfer into reserves in 2024/25 is £1,989,534 of S31 grant - compensation for government policies which impair the Council's ability to collect Business Rates, transferred to the Budget Deficit reserve to fund part of the revenue pressures identified in the MTFs. The material transfer from reserves is from the Financial Instrument Revaluation Impact reserve to fund the realised capital loss on the closure of the UBS pooled fund in September 2024.

Movements in 'Earmarked Reserves' during the year are shown below:

Earmarked Reserves	Balance 1 April 2024 £	Transfers between reserves £	Transfers Out £	Transfers in £	Balance 31 March 2025 £
UKSPF	0			(202,987)	(202,987)
Planning Skills Delivery Grant	0			(99,600)	(99,600)
DCLG Community Housing Fund	(59,799)				(59,799)
Garden Village Grant	(455,741)		30,073		(425,668)
Financial Instrument Revaluation Impact Reserve	(750,000)		549,720		(200,280)
Flexible Homelessness Support Grant	(325,579)				(325,579)
Rev & Bens One-off Grant Funding	(301,600)				(301,600)
Homelessness Projects	(293,000)			(135,016)	(428,016)
Delivery of Council Priorities	(470,073)		200,000		(270,073)
Investment Property Reserve	(750,000)		117,128		(632,872)
Homes for Ukraine	(994,670)		53,202		(941,468)
Afghan Resettlement	(492,998)			(214,160)	(707,158)
Local Plan Review	(687,650)			(52,000)	(739,650)
Covid Workstreams	(112,088)		18,635		(93,453)
New Initiatives	(493,025)	25,000	27,496		(440,529)
Contain Outbreak Management Grant	(641,185)		97,373		(543,812)
Business Rates Deficit	(4,095,410)				(4,095,410)
Publica Resourcing	(970,267)		96,172		(874,095)
New Burdens	(344,294)		98,507		(245,787)
Project Contingency	(305,450)		46,659		(258,791)
Budget Deficit Reserve	(1,645,157)			(1,989,534)	(3,634,691)
Publica Review Reserve	(1,353,837)		70,270		(1,283,567)
Other earmarked reserves	(2,027,509)	(25,000)	41,739	(311,705)	(2,322,475)
	(17,569,333)	0	1,446,974	(3,005,002)	(19,127,361)

NOTES TO THE MOVEMENT IN RESERVES STATEMENT

C3. Unusable Reserves

	2023/24	2024/25
	£	£
Revaluation Reserve	(30,959,325)	(33,197,424)
Capital Adjustment Account	(79,174,743)	(77,046,616)
Pension Reserve	4,970,000	3,907,000
Deferred Capital Receipts Reserve	(1,902,750)	(2,642,672)
Collection Fund Adjustment Account	477,995	(71,257)
Accumulated Absences Account	15,587	69,221
Pooled Investment Fund Reserve	1,220,181	738,810
Financial Instruments Revaluation Reserve	47,125	310,000
	(105,305,930)	(107,932,938)

Revaluation Reserve

The Revaluation Reserve contains the gains made by the Authority from increases in the value of its Property, Plant and Equipment. The balance is reduced when assets with accumulated gains are:

- re-valued downwards or impaired and the gains are lost.
- used in the provision of services and the gains are consumed through depreciation, or
- disposed of and the gains are realised.

The reserve contains only revaluation gains accumulated since 1st April 2007, the date that the Reserve was created. Accumulated gains arising before that date are consolidated into the balance on the Capital Adjustment Account.

	2023/24	2024/25
	£	£
Opening Balance - 1 April	(31,823,758)	(30,959,325)
Upward revaluation of assets	(4,303,929)	(4,409,171)
Downward revaluation of assets and impairment losses not charged to the Surplus/Deficit on the Provision of Services	4,546,866	956,971
<i>Surplus / deficit on revaluation of non current assets not posted to the Surplus/Deficit on the Provision of Services</i>	<i>242,937</i>	<i>(3,452,200)</i>
Difference between fair value and historic cost depreciation	546,230	539,548
Other balances written out to the Capital Adjustment Account	75,266	674,553
<i>Amount written off to the Capital Adjustment Account</i>	<i>621,496</i>	<i>1,214,101</i>
Closing Balance - 31 March	(30,959,325)	(33,197,424)

NOTES TO THE MOVEMENT IN RESERVES STATEMENT

Capital Adjustment Account

The Capital Adjustment Account absorbs the timing differences arising from the different arrangements for accounting for the consumption of non-current assets and for financing the acquisition, construction or enhancement of those assets under statutory provisions. The Account is debited with the cost of acquisition, construction or enhancement while depreciation, impairment losses and amortisations are charged to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement. The Account is credited with the amounts set aside by the authority as finance for the costs of acquisition, construction and enhancement.

The Account contains accumulated gains and losses on Investment Properties. The Account also contains revaluation gains accumulated on Property, Plant and Equipment before 1st April 2007 [the date at which the Revaluation Reserve was created to hold such gains].

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Opening Balance - 1st April	(79,170,345)	(79,174,743)
<u>Reversal of items relating to capital expenditure debited or credited to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement</u>		
Charges for depreciation of non current assets	2,026,311	1,804,697
Revaluation losses on Property, Plant and Equipment	1,552,245	209,792
Revenue expenditure funded from capital under statute	2,764,668	3,233,138
Amounts of non-current assets written off on disposal or sale as part of the gain/loss on disposal to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement	334,490	1,278,734
	6,677,715	6,526,361
<u>Adjusting amounts written out of the Revaluation Reserve</u>		
Amounts written out on disposal or sale of non current assets	(75,266)	(674,553)
Historical cost depreciation adjustment	(546,230)	(539,548)
	(621,496)	(1,214,101)
Net written out amount of the cost of non current assets consumed in year	6,056,219	5,312,260
<u>Capital financing applied in year</u>		
Use of the Capital Receipts Reserve to finance new capital expenditure	(609,592)	(656,237)
Capital grants and contributions credited to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement that have been applied to capital financing	(1,037,732)	(2,603,612)
Application of grants to capital financing from the Capital Grants Unapplied Account	(1,677,994)	(1,374,597)
Statutory provision for the repayment of debt	(501,616)	(891,583)
Capital expenditure charged against the General Fund Balance	(494,683)	(546,997)
	(4,321,617)	(6,073,026)
Movements in the market value of Investment Properties debited or credited to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement	(1,739,000)	2,888,892
Closing Balance - 31 March	(79,174,743)	(77,046,616)

NOTES TO THE MOVEMENT IN RESERVES STATEMENT

Pension Reserve

The Pensions Reserve absorbs the timing differences arising from the different arrangements for accounting for post-employment benefits and for funding benefits in accordance with statutory provisions. The Authority accounts for post-employment benefits in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement as the benefits are earned by employees accruing years of service, updating the liabilities recognised to reflect inflation, changing assumptions and investment returns on any resources set aside to meet the costs.

Statutory arrangements require benefits earned to be financed as the Council makes employer's contributions to the pension fund or pays any pensions for which it is directly responsible. The negative balance on the Pensions Reserve represents a shortfall in the benefits earned by past and current employees and the resources the Authority has set aside to meet them. The statutory arrangements will ensure that funding will have been set aside by the time the benefits come to be paid.

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Opening Balance - 1 April	4,874,000	4,970,000
Return on plan assets	(5,480,000)	1,708,000
Remeasurement of the net defined benefit liability	(1,590,000)	(12,153,000)
Reversal of items debited or credited to the Surplus or Deficit on Provision of Services in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement	1,335,000	1,291,000
Employers' pension contributions	(1,708,000)	(1,967,000)
Asset Ceiling Adjustment	7,539,000	10,058,000
Closing Balance - 31 March	4,970,000	3,907,000

Deferred Capital Receipts Reserve

The Deferred Capital Receipts Reserve holds the gains recognised on the disposal of non-current assets but for which cash settlement has yet to take place. Under statutory arrangements, the Council does not treat these gains as usable for financing new capital expenditure until they are backed by cash receipts. When the deferred cash settlement eventually takes place, amounts are transferred to the Capital Receipts Reserve.

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Opening Balance - 1 April	(2,294,942)	(1,902,750)
New loans / new deferred receipt	(334,490)	(1,278,734)
Transfer to the Capital Receipts Reserve on receipt of cash	726,683	538,812
Closing Balance - 31 March	(1,902,750)	(2,642,672)

NOTES TO THE MOVEMENT IN RESERVES STATEMENT

Collection Fund Adjustment Account

The Collection Fund Adjustment Account manages the differences arising from the recognition of council tax income in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement as it falls due from council tax payers compared with the statutory arrangements for paying across amounts to the General Fund from the Collection Fund.

	Balance 1 April 2024 £	Transfers in £	Balance 31 March 2025 £
Amounts by which income credited to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement is different from income calculated for the year in accordance with statutory requirements:			
Council Tax	(219,260)	(9,374)	(228,634)
NNDR	697,255	(539,878)	157,377
	477,995	(549,252)	(71,257)

Accumulated Absences Adjustment Account

The Accumulated Absences Account absorbs the differences that would otherwise arise on the General Fund Balance from accruing for compensated absences earned but not taken in the year (the cost of the annual leave entitlement still owed by the Council to its employees at 31st March).

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Opening Balance - 1 April	15,587	15,587
Movement in year	0	53,634
Closing Balance - 31 March	15,587	69,221

NOTES TO THE MOVEMENT IN RESERVES STATEMENT

Pooled Investment Fund Adjustment Account

The pooled investment fund adjustment account is used solely for recognising fair value gains and losses on the Council's pooled investment funds under statutory provisions.

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Opening Balance - 1 April	1,689,657	1,220,181
movement between reserves	(30,000)	0
Changes in fair value of Pooled Investment Funds	(439,476)	(481,371)
Closing Balance - 31 March	1,220,181	738,810

Financial Instruments Revaluation Reserve

The financial instruments revaluation reserve contains the gains and losses arising from changes in the fair value of its investments that are measured at fair value through other comprehensive income.

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Opening Balance - 1 April	(30,000)	47,125
movement between FIRR and PIFAA	30,000	0
Changes in fair value of financial assets elected to FV through Other Comprehensive Income	47,125	262,875
Closing Balance - 31 March	47,125	310,000

NOTES TO THE BALANCE SHEET

D1. Property, Plant and Equipment

Property, Plant and Equipment

Movements in 2024/25	Land & Buildings £	Vehicles, Plant & Equipment £	Community Assets £	Surplus Assets £	TOTAL PP&E £
- Asset Cost or Valuation					
Asset values at 1 April 2024	69,952,722	2,865,373	993,713	3,590,262	77,402,070
Initial recognition of IFRS16 RoU assets	1,292,922				1,292,922
Additions	612,402	1,808,471			2,420,873
Revaluation increases / (decreases)	2,424,414			(85,047)	2,339,367
Revaluation decreases to I&E	(272,675)				(272,675)
Derecognition - disposals		(1,278,734)			(1,278,734)
Transfer	(2,440,500)				(2,440,500)
Asset values at 31 March 2025	71,569,285	3,395,110	993,713	3,505,215	79,463,323
- Depreciation					
Accumulated depreciation at 1 April 2024	(145,004)	(2,127,555)	0	(1,750)	(2,274,309)
Depreciation charge for the year	(1,547,425)	(255,521)		(1,750)	(1,804,696)
Depreciation written out on revaluation	1,112,831				1,112,831
Depreciation written out to I&E	62,883				62,883
Derecognition - disposals					0
Derecognition - others					0
Accumulated depreciation at 31 March 2025	(516,715)	(2,383,076)	0	(3,500)	(2,903,291)
- Net Book Value of Assets					
1st April 2024	69,807,718	737,818	993,713	3,588,512	75,127,761
31st March 2025	71,052,570	1,012,034	993,713	3,501,715	76,560,032

NOTES TO THE BALANCE SHEET

Movements in 2023/24	Land & Buildings £	Vehicles, Plant & Equipment £	Community Assets £	Surplus Assets £	TOTAL P&P&E £
- Asset Cost or Valuation					
Asset values at 1 April 2023	73,252,841	2,771,591	993,713	3,361,762	80,379,906
Additions	1,054,890	428,273			1,483,163
Revaluation increases / (decreases)	(2,322,529)			228,500	(2,094,029)
Reclassification	(1,832,480)				(1,832,480)
Derecognition - disposals		(334,490)			(334,490)
Transfer	(200,000)				(200,000)
Asset values at 31 March 2024	69,952,722	2,865,373	993,713	3,590,262	77,402,070
- Depreciation					
Accumulated depreciation at 1 April 2023	(483,863)	(1,895,463)	0	0	(2,379,326)
Depreciation charge for the year	(1,792,469)	(232,092)			(2,024,561)
Depreciation written out on revaluation	1,851,093			(1,750)	1,849,343
Derecognition - disposals	280,235				280,235
Other movements					
Accumulated depreciation at 31 March 2024	(145,004)	(2,127,555)	0	(1,750)	(2,274,309)
- Net Book Value of Assets					
1st April 2023	72,768,978	876,127	993,713	3,361,762	78,000,580
31st March 2024	69,807,718	737,818	993,713	3,588,512	75,127,761

NOTES TO THE BALANCE SHEET

The Code requires that assets are formally revalued at least every 5-years. Assets are formally revalued as part of a 5-year rolling programme, with assets revalued more frequently if there is evidence that asset values may have changed. The table below summarises valuations undertaken, by year:

	Land & Buildings £000	Vehicles, Plant & Equipment £000	Community Assets £000	Surplus Assets £000	Total PPE £000
Carried at (depreciated) historic cost	0	1,012	994	0	2,006
Valued at current value as at 31 March:					
2020/21	159	0	0	143	302
2021/22	0	0	0	77	77
2022/23	2,266	0	0	124	2,390
2023/24	11,439	0	0	177	11,616
2024/25	57,189	0	0	2,981	60,170
Total	71,053	1,012	994	3,502	76,561

Asset valuation, amortisation and depreciation

Service areas are charged depreciation to represent the real cost of holding and using non-current assets. The value of an asset (less any residual value) will be written down on a straight-line basis over the useful economic life of the asset. The following useful lives have been used in the calculation of depreciation and amortisation:

- Land assets are generally not depreciated.
- Operational buildings are typically depreciated over 30 to 60 year useful lives, depending upon the particular asset and an estimate of the asset life from the Council's valuer.
- Car Parks – over 20-years or a lifetime agreed with the Council's valuer.
- Vehicles, Plant and Equipment are depreciated over 5 to 7 years as appropriate.
- Surplus assets will have lives based upon the type of asset – e.g. Buildings 30 to 60 years, land indefinite lifespans. Useful economic lives will be agreed with the valuer.
- Heritage and Community Assets are not depreciated.

Effects of changes in estimates

The Council has amended its policy to depreciate Vehicles and Plant over 7 years rather than 5 years. The 7 year period is aligned with the existing vehicle leasing arrangement that the Council has with Ubico.

Revaluations

The 2024/25 PPE valuations and impairment review were undertaken by Publica's internal valuer (Investment Property, Leisure Centres, Surplus Assets) and Carter Jonas (Marriotts Walk). Valuations were undertaken in accordance with the methodologies and bases for estimation set out in the professional standards of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom.

Assets are valued as part of a rolling programme of revaluations. All assets are valued on a 5-year rolling programme.

In estimating asset values it has been assumed that:

- The capacity of utility services [electricity, gas, water, mains drainage] are adequate for the future use of the properties.
- All assets have planning consent for their existing uses.
- Tenancies are not subject to any unusual or onerous restrictions.

NOTES TO THE BALANCE SHEET

- No contamination exists in relation to property assets [land and buildings] sufficient to affect value.

With the introduction and application of IFRS13 in 2015/16, the Council's surplus assets have been reviewed and measured at fair value based upon 'highest and best use'. The surplus assets that the Council owns are strips of land and therefore they are not depreciated. Within the fair-value hierarchy, the Council's Surplus Assets are deemed as 'level 2' category.

D2. Investment Properties

The following items of income and expenditure have been accounted for in the Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement.

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Rental income	(3,563,377)	(3,251,879)
Direct operating expenses	639,982	828,261
Net (gains) / losses from fair value adjustments	(1,739,000)	2,888,892
	(4,662,395)	465,274

There are no restrictions on the Council's ability to realise the value inherent in its investment property or on the Council's right to the remittance of income and the proceeds of disposal. There are contractual obligations on the Council to repair and maintain certain investment properties and these have been included in the relevant property valuations.

The Publica internal valuer undertook the 2024/25 Investment Property valuations. The valuations were undertaken in accordance with the methodologies and bases for estimation set out in the professional standards of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (as outlined in Note D1 above).

Under the CIPFA Code, the Council's Investment Properties are classified as 'level 2' within the fair-value hierarchy. The assets have been suitably valued, based upon current market conditions, sale prices for similar assets, or contractual income for the properties. These observable inputs have been used to classify the assets accordingly. There have been no movements between categories within the hierarchy during the year.

The following table summarises the movement in the fair value of investment properties over the year:

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Opening Balance - 1 April	51,305,000	53,244,000
Additions / Subsequent expenditure	0	695,392
Net gains / (losses) from fair value adjustments	1,739,000	(2,888,892)
Reclassification - transfer to Operational Buildings	200,000	2,440,500
Closing Balance - 31 March	53,244,000	53,491,000

NOTES TO THE BALANCE SHEET

Fair value hierarchy

International Financial Reporting Standard 13 (IFRS13) '*Fair Values*' requires all assets measured at fair value to be classified into one of three levels, depending upon the basis of valuation. The 'fair value' of an asset is the reasonable estimation of its market value if sold.

The Council's Investment Property assets are deemed to be categorised as Level 2 in the valuation hierarchy, as the fair value of the assets have been derived primarily from income streams. Authorities are required to maximise the use of level 1 inputs (available prices) and minimise the use of level 3 inputs (calculations based upon non-market data such as cash-flow forecasts and other non-market data).

D3. Intangible Assets

The Council accounts for its software as intangible assets, to the extent that the software is not an integral part of a particular IT system and is accounted for as part of the hardware item of Property, Plant and Equipment. The intangible assets include purchased software only, as the Authority has no internally generated software.

All intangible assets are amortised on a straight-line basis over a 5 year period. This represents the period over which the software is expected to be of use to the Council.

Amortisation of intangible assets is charged to the Comprehensive Income & Expenditure Account. For service-specific systems, amortisation is charged direct to the service using the asset. For corporate systems amortisation is allocated across all services benefitting from the asset.

Movements in Intangible Assets

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
<u>Asset Cost or Valuation</u>		
Asset values at 1 April	232,769	232,769
Additions		
Derecognition		
Asset values at 31 March	232,769	232,769
<u>Amortisation</u>		
Accumulated Amortisation at 1 April	(232,769)	(232,769)
Amortisation charge for the year		
Derecognition		
Accumulated Amortisation at 31 March	(232,769)	(232,769)
Net carrying amount at 31 March	0	0

NOTES TO THE BALANCE SHEET

D4. Current Debtors

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Government Departments	879,665	3,113,195
Other Local Authorities [Statutory]	3,401,810	3,249,174
Other Local Authorities [Trading]	1,573,497	511,152
Collection Fund debtors (WODC Share)	3,132,362	1,889,210
Housing Benefit recovery	1,658,102	1,711,626
Sundry Debtors	3,600,782	3,352,070
Finance Leases - principal outstanding	538,812	458,018
Other Debtors	1,979,447	1,368,157
Prepayments	1,142,747	864,035
	<u>17,907,224</u>	<u>16,516,637</u>
Less provision for impairment of receivables:		
Collection Fund provisions (WODC share)	(464,879)	(537,151)
Housing Benefit recovery	(1,548,247)	(1,590,698)
Sundry Debtors	(1,094,545)	(863,934)
	<u>14,799,553</u>	<u>13,524,854</u>

Current Debtors include an amount of £236,975.98 reflecting the amounts due in the next 12 months from the Long Term loans made to Cottsway Housing Association and Southill Solar.

D5. Current Creditors

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Government Departments	(2,906,289)	(3,770,976)
Other Local Authorities [Statutory]	(2,895,131)	(3,288,118)
Other Local Authorities [Trading]	(573,125)	(863,742)
Sundry Creditors	<u>(1,757,542)</u>	<u>(3,065,641)</u>
	<u>(8,132,087)</u>	<u>(10,988,478)</u>
Receipts in advance:		
Government Departments	(1,003,531)	(735,500)
Other Local Authorities	(141,133)	(126,628)
Collection Fund (WODC Share)	(534,813)	(1,317,340)
Sundry Creditors receipts in advance	<u>(2,261,065)</u>	<u>(3,029,563)</u>
	<u>(3,940,542)</u>	<u>(5,209,031)</u>
Capital Receipts in Advance	(1,262,311)	(1,128,021)
Total	<u>(13,334,940)</u>	<u>(17,325,529)</u>

NOTES TO THE BALANCE SHEET

D6. Provisions

	Opening Provision 1 April £	New provisions in-year £	Use of provisions £	Provisions returned to revenue £	Closing Provision 31 March £
-					
Business Rates (NNDR)					
Appeals	(1,780,750)	(627,528)	317,790		(2,090,488)
Provision - Subsidence Claims	(30,000)				(30,000)
Carterton Leisure Centre	(75,000)				(75,000)
Contract Payments	0	(76,000)			(76,000)
	(1,885,750)	(703,528)	317,790	0	(2,271,488)

Business Rates (NNDR) appeals

The NNDR provision has been set aside to cover the potential cost to the Council of outstanding appeals against property revaluations.

D7. Non - Current Debtors

	31 March 2024 £	31 March 2025 £
Cottsway Housing Association loan	7,481,696	7,391,372
Equity Loans Scheme	232,114	232,114
Parish/Town Council Loans	107,492	94,989
Charge on former Unicorn Public House - Great Rollright	20,498	20,498
GLL - COVID supporting Loans	304,301	304,301
Vehicles Leases	1,065,890	1,886,606
Southill Solar Loan	2,000,484	1,851,332
	11,212,474	11,781,213

The balances of the loans made to Cottsway Housing Association and Southill Solar have been adjusted to remove the amounts due in the next 12 months. These balances sit in Current Debtors.

NOTES TO THE BALANCE SHEET

D8. Capital Expenditure and Financing

The total amount of capital expenditure incurred in the year is shown in the table below, including the value of assets acquired under finance leases, together with the resources that have been used to finance it. Where capital expenditure is to be financed in future years by charges to revenue as assets are used by the Council, the expenditure results in an increase in the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR), a measure of the capital expenditure incurred that has yet to be financed.

The net movement in the Capital Financing Requirement illustrates the change in the underlying need for the Council to borrow during the year to fund capital investment, which has not been funded from resources such as grants, capital receipts and direct funding from revenue.

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Opening Capital Financing Requirement	28,379,025	28,078,474
Capital Investment in Year		
Property, Plant & Equipment	1,483,163	4,409,188
Revenue Expenditure Funded from Capital under Statute	2,764,668	3,233,138
	<u>4,247,831</u>	<u>7,642,326</u>
Sources of Finance		
Capital Receipts	836,357	890,506
Government grants & other contributions	2,715,726	3,978,208
MRP / Statutory repayment of loans advance	501,616	891,583
Direct Revenue Contributions	494,683	546,997
	<u>4,548,382</u>	<u>6,307,294</u>
Net Increase / (Decrease) in Capital Financing Requirement	(300,551)	1,335,032
Closing Capital Financing Requirement	28,078,474	29,413,506

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

E1. Notes to the Cash Flow Statement

a. Adjustments to the net surplus / (deficit) on the provision of services for non-cash movements

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Depreciation, amortisation and impairment	3,578,555	2,014,489
Increase / (decrease) in creditors	(3,659,845)	3,218,535
(Increase) / decrease in debtors	(649,621)	2,183,935
Increase / (decrease) in provision for bad debts	468,661	76,102
(Increase) / decrease in inventories	4,316	(4,416)
Pensions' liability	(373,000)	(676,000)
Carrying amount of non current assets sold	334,490	1,278,734
Increase / (decrease) in provisions	142,080	385,738
Movements in the fair value of investment properties	(1,739,000)	2,888,892
Other non cash items charged to Surplus/Deficit on the Provision of Services	(1,909,948)	(3,618,807)
	(3,803,312)	7,747,202

b. Adjustments for items included in the net surplus / (deficit) on the provision of services that are investing or financing activities.

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Capital grants and contributions	(849,804)	(2,639,167)
Proceeds from the sale of non current assets	(934,929)	(1,925,725)
	(1,784,733)	(4,564,892)

c. Investing Activities

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Purchase of property, plant & equipment and other capital investment	(1,974,054)	(2,658,976)
Purchase of short term and long term investments	(55,090,000)	(52,015,000)
Proceeds from the sale of non current assets	1,865,934	1,643,821
Proceeds from disposal of short term and long term investments	55,090,000	54,031,138
Other (receipts) / payments from investing activities	1,831,996	4,523,674
	1,723,876	5,524,657

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

F. Events after the Balance Sheet Date

The Chief Finance Officer authorised the Statement of Accounts on 30th June 2025. Events taking place after this date are not reflected in the financial statements or notes. Where events taking place before this date provided information about conditions existing at 31 March 2025, the figures in the financial statements and notes have been adjusted in all material respects to reflect the impact of this information.

A review of Publica was announced in September 2023 which will return a number of services back to the partnership Councils. The detailed implementation plan was approved by full Council in July 2024 with phase one of the transfer on 1st November 2024 relating to 85 employees transferring back to the Council, phase two relating to the transfer of 27 employees will take place on 1st July 2025.

The financial implications of the Publica Review have been the subject of extensive due diligence since programme inception in February 2024. The resulting financial modelling output reflects robust programme assumptions and a detailed audit trail of movements between baseline costing, of delivery via the current Publica model, to the new WODC structure post transition, as proposed in the Detailed Transition Plan.

F1. Defined Benefit Pension Scheme

Participation in pension schemes

As part of the terms and conditions of employment of its officers, the Council makes contributions towards the cost of post-employment benefits. Although these benefits will not actually be payable until employees retire, the Council has a commitment to fund (for those benefits) and to disclose them at the time that the employees earn their future entitlement.

The Council participates in two post-employment schemes:

- The Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) is administered locally by Oxfordshire County Council. It is a defined benefit scheme, based upon final salary scheme and length of service upon retirement. The Authority and employees pay contributions into a fund, calculated at a level intended to balance the pension's liabilities with investment assets.
- Arrangements for the award of discretionary post-retirement benefits upon early retirement – this is an unfunded defined benefit arrangement, under which liabilities are recognised when awards are made. However, there are no investment assets built up to meet these pension liabilities, and cash has to be generated to meet actual pension payments if they are deemed due.

Changes to the LGPS came into effect from 1st April 2014. Benefits accrued from this date are based on a career average revalued salary. Various protections will be in place for those members and benefits accrued in the scheme before the changes take effect.

The scheme is a defined benefit statutory scheme that is administered in accordance with the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 1997 (as amended). It is contracted out of the State Second Pension.

Publica Group (Support) Limited

During 2017/18 the Council transferred the majority of its staff under TUPE legislation to Publica Group (Support) Limited, a wholly owned local authority company, limited by guarantee, operating with Mutual Trading Status to deliver services on behalf of the Council. The pension fund disclosure notes on the following pages include the staff transferred to Publica. All staff are pooled (counted as one scheme by the pension fund) as the Council continues to underwrite the pension liabilities on the whole scheme.

Transactions relating to retirement benefits

The Council recognises the cost of retirement benefits in the Cost of Services when they are earned by employees, rather than when the benefits are actually paid as pensions. However, the charge the Council makes to council tax is based upon the actual cash payable in the year, so the real cost of retirement benefits is reversed out of the General Fund via the Movement in Reserves Statement (MiRS).

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

The following transactions have been charged to the Comprehensive Income & Expenditure account and General Fund Balance during the year:

	2023/24	2024/25
	£	£
Comprehensive Income & Expenditure Statement		
<i>Cost of Services:</i>		
Current Service Cost	1,260,000	1,303,000
Past Service Cost	0	268,000
(Gains)/loss from settlements		
<i>Financing and Investment Income & Expenditure:</i>		
Net Interest Expense	75,000	(280,000)
Net Charge to Surplus or Deficit on Provision of Services	1,335,000	1,291,000
<i>Other post employment benefit charged to Comprehensive Income & Expenditure Statement</i>		
Remeasurement of the net defined benefit liability comprising:		
Return on Plan Assets	5,480,000	(1,708,000)
Actuarial (gains) / losses arising on changes in financial assumptions	3,408,000	11,344,000
Actuarial gains and losses - demographic assumptions	405,000	128,000
Experience (gains) / losses on defined benefit obligation	(2,223,000)	681,000
Asset Ceiling Adjustment	(7,539,000)	(10,058,000)
	(469,000)	387,000
Total post employment benefits charged to the Comprehensive Income & Expenditure Statement	1,804,000	904,000
Movement in Reserves Statement		
Reversal of net charges made to the Surplus or Deficit on Provision of Services for post employment benefits in accordance with the Code	1,335,000	1,291,000
Actual amount charged against the General Fund Balance for pensions in the year		
Employers' contributions payable to the scheme	1,708,000	1,967,000

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

Pension Assets and Liabilities recognised in the Balance Sheet

The amount included in the Balance Sheet arising from the Council's obligation in respect of its defined benefit plans is as follows:

	2023/24	2024/25
	£	£
Present value of the defined benefit obligation - funded	(72,874,000)	(63,380,000)
Present value of unfunded obligations	(442,000)	(397,000)
Fair Value of Plan Assets	78,970,000	80,552,000
Asset Ceiling Adjustment	(10,624,000)	(20,682,000)
Net liability arising from defined benefit obligation	(4,970,000)	(3,907,000)

Reconciliation of Movements in the Fair Value of Scheme (Plan) Assets

	2023/24	2024/25
	£	£
Opening Fair Value of Scheme Assets	71,215,000	78,970,000
Interest Income	3,357,000	3,776,000
Remeasurement Gains / (Losses)	5,480,000	(1,708,000)
Employers' Contributions (including Unfunded)	1,663,000	1,919,000
Employee Contributions	372,000	431,000
Benefits Paid (including Unfunded)	(3,117,000)	(2,836,000)
Closing Balance 31 March	78,970,000	80,552,000

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

Reconciliation of Present Value of the Scheme Liabilities (Defined Benefit Obligation)

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Opening Balance 1 April	(73,004,000)	(73,316,000)
Current Service Cost	(1,260,000)	(1,303,000)
Interest Cost	(3,432,000)	(3,496,000)
Contributions from Scheme Participants	(372,000)	(431,000)
Past Service Cost	0	(268,000)
Remeasurement Gains / (Losses)	1,185,000	12,025,000
Change in demographic assumptions	405,000	128,000
Benefits Paid	3,117,000	2,836,000
Unfunded Benefits Paid	45,000	48,000
Closing Balance 31 March	(73,316,000)	(63,777,000)
Funded	(72,874,000)	(63,380,000)
Unfunded	(442,000)	(397,000)

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

Composition of Scheme Assets

	Period ended 31 March 2025			
	Quoted	Unquoted	Total	Percentage
	£000	£000	£000	of total assets %
Equity Securities:				
Consumer	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
Manufacturing	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
Energy and Utilities	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
Financial Institutions	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
Health and Care	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
Information technology	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
Other	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
Debt Securities:				
Corporate Bonds (investment grade)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
Corporate Bonds (non-investment grade)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
UK Government	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
Other	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
Private Equity:				
All	4,413.6	0.5	4,414.1	5%
Real Estate:				
UK Property	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
Overseas Property	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
Investment funds and unit trusts:				
Equities	0.0	44,594.6	44,594.6	55%
Bonds	0.0	7,581.1	7,581.1	9%
Hedge Funds	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
Commodities	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
Infrastructure	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
Other	0.0	22,289.0	22,289.0	28%
Derivatives:				
Inflation	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
Interest rate	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
Foreign exchange	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
Other	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
Cash and cash equivalents				
All	1,673.2	0.0	1,673.2	2%
Total rounded	6,086.8	74,465.2	80,552.0	100%

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

Basis for estimating assets and liabilities

Liabilities have been assessed on an actuarial basis using the projected unit credit method, as an estimate of the pensions that will be payable in future years dependent on assumptions about mortality rates, salary levels. The financial assumptions are summarised below:

Mortality Assumptions	Males	Females
Current Pensioners	21.7 years	24.4 years
Future Pensioners	23.0 years	25.9 years
Financial Assumptions	2023/24	2024/25
Rate of increase in pensions	2.80%	2.80%
Rate of increase in salaries	2.80%	2.80%
Discount Rate	4.75%	5.80%

Sensitivity Analysis

IAS 19 requires disclosure of the sensitivity of the results to the methods and assumptions used. The sensitivities regarding the principal assumptions used to measure the scheme liabilities are set out below:

Change in assumption at 31 March 2025:	Approximate % increase to Employer Liability	Approximate monetary amount (£000)
0.1% decrease in Real Discount Rate	2%	1,073
1 year increase in member life expectancy	4%	2,551
0.1% increase in the Salary increased Rate	0%	62
0.1% increase in the Pension increase Rate (CPI)	2%	1,040

The estimated employer's contributions for the year to 31st March 2026 will be approximately £1,819,000.

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

F2. Financial Instruments

Categories of Financial Instruments

The following categories of financial instrument are carried in the Balance Sheet.

2023/2024			2024/2025	
Non-Current £	Current £		Non-Current £	Current £
		Financial Assets at Amortised Cost		
360,102	9,403,683	Debtors	9,547,004	4,352,670
0	538,812	Finance Leases	1,886,606	458,018
360,102	9,942,495		11,433,610	4,810,688
		Fair Value through Profit or Loss		
12,814,887	77,210	Investments	11,243,980	62,435
	1,913,919	Cash and cash equivalents		12,708,463
12,814,887	1,991,129		11,243,980	12,770,898
		Fair Value through OCI		
952,875	0	Equity Instruments	690,000	0
952,875	0		690,000	0
14,127,864	11,933,624	Total Financial Assets	23,367,590	17,581,586
		Financial Liabilities at Amortised Cost		
0	(2,944,780)	Creditors	0	(1,291,354)
0	(2,944,780)	Total Financial Liabilities	0	(1,291,354)

Not all short term debtors and creditors fall within the definition of financial instruments. The difference between the totals shown on the Balance Sheet and the values above is as follows:

	Non Current Debtors	Current Debtors £	Current Creditors £
- Total on Balance Sheet	11,781,213	13,524,854	(16,197,509)
Statutory & Government Debtors / Creditors	(347,601)	(7,850,131)	9,697,124
Prepayments / Receipts in Advance	0	(864,035)	5,209,031
Finance Lease Principal / Liabilities	(1,886,606)	(458,018)	0
Total Financial Instruments	9,547,004	4,352,670	(1,291,354)

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

Income, Expense, Gains and Losses

The gains and losses recognised in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement in relation to financial instruments consist of the following items:

2023/2024				2024/2025		
Financial Assets				Financial Assets		
Loans & Receivables	Available for Sale	Fair Value through OCI		Amortised Cost	Fair Value through Profit or Loss	Fair Value through OCI
£	£	£		£	£	£
			-			
			<u>Financing & Investment Income and Expenditure</u>			
6,027	0	0	Interest Expense	0	0	0
(1,058,359)	(639,415)	(28,500)	Interest / Dividend income	(636,462)	(1,112,843)	(30,000)
0	(439,476)	0	Changes in fair value	0	68,350	0
			<u>Other Comprehensive Income</u>			
0	0	47,125	Changes in fair value	0	0	262,875
(1,052,332)	(1,078,891)	18,625	Net (Gain) / Loss for the Year	(636,462)	(1,044,493)	232,875

Fair Values of Financial Assets and Financial Liabilities

Fair Value is defined as “the price that would be received to sell an asset or paid to transfer a liability in an orderly transaction between market participants at the measurement date”.

The Code sets out the fair value valuation hierarchy local authorities are required to follow to increase consistency and comparability in fair value measurements and disclosures: Level 1 assets are valued based upon ‘quoted prices in active markets for identical assets’ where such assets exist. Level 2 is based upon inputs other than quoted prices within level 1 that are observable. Level 3 represents all other unobservable inputs, which can be used to estimate the fair value of the assets.

The following table shows the Council’s financial assets measured at fair value through profit or loss:

	Input level	As at 31/03/2025 £
<u>Fair Value through Profit or Loss</u>		
Money Market Funds	Level 1	12,303,119
Pooled Investment Funds	Level 1	11,306,415
Call Accounts	Level 1	51,259
		23,660,793

Fair values for those financial assets deemed to be categorised as Level 1 have been derived from unadjusted quoted prices in active markets. Except for the financial assets carried at fair value (as shown above), all other financial liabilities and financial assets are carried in the Balance Sheet at amortised cost.

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

The carrying value and fair values are shown below for comparison purposes. Fair values are not required for current debtors and creditors (trade payables and receivables) since the carrying amount is deemed a reasonable approximation of fair value.

	2023/24		2024/25	
	Carrying Amount	Fair Value	Carrying Amount	Fair Value
	£	£	£	£
Financial Assets at Amortised Cost				
Investments	0	0	0	0
Non-Current Debtors	9,786,480	9,786,480	9,547,004	9,547,004
Non-Current Finance Leases	1,065,890	1,065,890	1,886,606	1,886,606
	10,852,370	10,852,370	11,433,611	11,433,611
Financial Liabilities at Amortised Cost				
Borrowing	0	0	0	0
	0	0	0	0

Equity Instruments Elected to Fair Value through Other Comprehensive Income

The Council has elected to account for the following investment as an equity instrument at fair value through other comprehensive income because it is a long-term strategic investment held by the Council primarily to receive regular dividend income rather than for capital growth or to sell.

Presenting changes in its fair value in the surplus or deficit on provision of services is therefore less likely to present a true and fair view of the Council's financial performance than presenting it in other comprehensive income.

	Fair Value		Dividends	
	31 March 2024	31 March 2025	31 March 2024	31 March 2025
	£	£	£	£
Fundamentum Social Housing REIT plc	952,875	690,000	28,500	30,000
	952,875	690,000	28,500	30,000

F3. Nature and extent of risks arising from Financial Instruments

The Council's activities expose it to a variety of financial risks. The key risks are in relation to its financial assets. These are as follows:

- Credit risk – the possibility that other parties may fail to pay amounts due to the Council.
- Liquidity risk – the possibility that the Council might not have funds available to meet its commitments to make payments
- Re-financing risk – the possibility that the Council might be required to renew a financial instrument on maturity at disadvantageous interest rates or terms.
- Market risk – the possibility that financial loss might arise for the Council because of changes in metrics such as interest rates.

Overall procedures for managing risk

The Council's overall risk management procedures focus on the unpredictability of financial markets and implementing procedures to minimise these risks. The duty to manage such risks is set out in the Local Government Act 2003 and the associated regulations. These require the Council to comply with the CIPFA Prudential Code, the CIPFA Treasury Management in the Public Services Code of Practice and Investment Guidance issued through the Act. These procedures require the Council to manage risk in the following ways:

- By formally adopting the requirements of the CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management Services
- By approving annually in advance prudential indicators for the following three years covering:
 - * Limits on the Council's overall debt [external borrowing]
 - * The maturity structure of any external borrowing
 - * The Council's upper limit for exposure to fixed and variable interest rates
 - * The maximum exposure to investments maturing beyond a period of one year.
- By annually approving a Treasury Management Investment Strategy for the forthcoming year, setting out criteria for investments and specifying the minimum credit worthiness for all counterparties.

These are required to be reported and approved at or before the Council's annual Council Tax setting budget. These items are reported with the annual treasury management strategy, which outlines the detailed approach to managing risk in relation to the Council's financial instrument exposure. Actual performance is reported annually to Members.

The Council has adopted CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management (and subsequent amendments) and complies with The Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities.

As part of the adoption of the Treasury Management Code, the Council approves a Treasury Management Strategy before the commencement of each financial year. The Strategy sets out the parameters for the management of risks associated with Financial Instruments. The Council also produces Treasury Management Practices specifying the practical arrangements to be followed to manage these risks.

The Treasury Management Strategy includes an Annual Investment Strategy in compliance with the DLUHC's Investment Guidance for local authorities. This Guidance emphasises that priority is to be given to security and liquidity, rather than yield. The Council's Treasury Strategy, together with its Treasury Management Practices are based on seeking the highest rate of return consistent with the proper levels of security and liquidity.

A central treasury team implements these policies. The Council maintains written principles for overall risk management, as well as written policies covering specific areas, such as interest rate risk, credit risk, and the investment of surplus cash through Treasury Management Practices.

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

Credit Risk

The Council manages credit risk by ensuring that investments are placed with the Debt Management Office, other local authorities, AAA-rated money market funds and Banks and Building Societies of sufficiently high credit quality as set out in the Treasury Management Strategy. A limit of £5m of the total portfolio is placed on the amount of money that can be invested with a single counterparty. The Council also sets a total group investment limit for institutions that are part of the same banking group. No more than £25m in total can be invested for a period longer than one year.

It must also be noted that although credit ratings remain a key source of information, the Council recognises that they have limitations and investment decisions are based on a range of market intelligence. All investments have been made in line with the Council's Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2024/25, approved by Full Council in February 2025.

The ratings of the financial institutions holding Council investments (and investments classified as cash equivalents) at the Balance Sheet date are as follows:

	Investment Balance (£)
<u>Call accounts and other 'cash equivalent' investments</u>	
Money Market Funds	12,303,119
Call Accounts	51,259
<u>UK Equities</u>	
Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT)	690,000
<u>Pooled funds</u>	
Non-rating agency rated pooled fund <i>separately approved by the Council's Treasury Management advisors</i>	11,306,415

The table below summaries the nominal value of the Council's investment portfolio at 31st March 2025 and confirms that all investments were made in line with the Council's approved credit rating criteria at the time of placing the investment.

At the balance sheet date the maturity profile for the Council's investments classified as cash equivalents for financial reporting purposes were distributed as follows:

	Investment values - maturing within:			
	0-3 mths	3-6 mths	6-12 mths	1 year +
	£	£	£	£
<u>Internally managed funds</u>				
Money Market Funds	12,303,119			
Call Accounts	51,259			
UK Equities				690,000
<u>Externally managed funds</u>				
Pooled Funds	62,435			11,243,980

The credit quality of debtors is reflected in the level of impairment allowance for trade debtors shown in note D4.

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

Liquidity Risk

The Council has a cash flow management system that seeks to ensure that cash is available as needed. If unexpected movements happen, the Authority has access to borrowing facilities via the Public Works Loan Board, commercial banks, bond issues, medium term notes, tax increment financing, the European Investment Bank, and other local authorities. There is no perceived risk that the Council will be unable to raise finance to meet its commitments.

The Council also has to manage the risk so that it will not be exposed to replenishing a significant proportion of its borrowing at a time of unfavourable interest rates. The Council would only borrow in advance of the forecast spend in the capital programme where the spend can be reliably committed and the cost of borrowing, such as rising interest rates, make a clear business case for doing so. Although there is currently no external borrowing, there is significant internal borrowing so even if loans were drawn down ahead of a planned capital spend, the Authority would still not be deemed to be borrowing ahead of need. There is no intention to borrow outside of funding spend in the capital programme or to finance future debt maturities.

The Local Government Finance Act 1992 also requires the Council to set a balanced budget which ensures sufficient monies are raised to meet annual expenditure. There is therefore no significant risk that it will be unable to raise finance to meet its financial commitments.

Market Risk – interest rate risk

The Council is exposed to risks arising from movements in interest rates but in a time of large movements in interest rates, the decision on whether to borrow at a fixed rate or a variable rate is taken on a case by case basis, and this is reflected in the Treasury Management Strategy which does not preclude borrowing under either option.

Price Risk

The Council holds some financial instruments, whereby the capital value may fluctuate because of market conditions. However, these instruments are all purchased on a hold to maturity or long term basis and therefore any temporary fluctuations in the market value of such products have no immediate impact on the Council's finances. The losses that have been incurred in these funds would need to be recognised if the investment was withdrawn or at the end of March 2025 when the statutory override on recognising losses in financial instruments is expected to end.

Foreign Exchange Risk

The Council's policy is deal in pounds sterling wherever possible thus mitigating the need to deal in foreign exchange.

F4. Leases

On 1st April 2024 the Council adopted the IFRS16 leasing standard. This removes the distinction between finance and operating leases where the council is the lessee, with all leases being considered a finance lease and recorded on the Balance Sheet. There is an exception for low value or short-term leases.

Where the Council leases out property, plant or equipment (lessor) these leases continue to be recorded as operating leases or finance leases depending on the substance of the lease.

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

The Council as Lessee [obtaining assets under a leasing arrangement]

IFRS 16 removes the previous distinction between finance leases and operating leases for lessees. Under the previous standard, finance leases were recognised on the balance sheet, while operating leases were treated as off balance sheet arrangements, with lease payments charged to revenue as incurred.

IFRS 16 now requires most leases to be accounted for using a single on balance sheet model. Lessees must recognise a right-of-use asset representing their right to use the leased item, and a corresponding lease liability reflecting their obligation to make lease payments. This change provides a more complete picture of the Council's leasing commitments.

The Council has applied recognition exemptions for:

- Short-term leases (ending on or before 31 March 2025, or under 12 months in duration), and
- Low-value leases (where the value of the underlying asset is less than £10,000 when new).

Right of Use Assets and Lease Liabilities

In 2024/25 under IFRS 16, the Council recognises Right of Use (RoU) assets and corresponding lease liabilities for leases previously classified as operating leases, which did not include the lease property as an asset on the balance sheet. The following tables provide details of the RoU assets and associated lease liabilities as at 31 March 2025.

Lease Liabilities	31 March 2024 £	31 March 2025 £
Initial application of IFRS 16	0	1,046,422
Interest Expense	0	55,670
Lease Payments Made	0	(181,564)
Closing Balance	0	920,528

Minimum lease payments for Right of Use Assets in future years	31 March 2024 £	31 March 2025 £
Not later than one year	125,894	178,181
Later than one year and not later than five years	771,643	640,591
Later than five years	148,885	101,806
	1,046,422	920,578

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

The Council as Lessor [leasing assets out]

Finance Leases

The Council leases a number of waste and recycling vehicles to Ubico Limited.

The minimum lease payments comprise settlement of the long-term debtor for the interest in the asset and finance income that will be earned by the Council for the period while the debt remains outstanding.

	31 March 2024 £	31 March 2025 £
Present value of principal payments outstanding on non current assets	1,604,703	2,344,625
Unearned finance income	233,579	188,148
	1,838,282	2,532,772

The gross investment in the lease and the minimum lease payments will be received over the following periods:

	Gross Investment in the Lease		Minimum Lease Payments (excl. int)	
	31 March 2024 £	31 March 2025 £	31 March 2024 £	31 March 2025 £
Not later than one year	594,612	472,341	538,813	458,018
Later than one year & not later than five years	1,018,917	1,447,879	906,655	1,473,471
Later than five years	169,604	380,721	159,236	413,137
	1,783,133	2,300,941	1,604,704	2,344,626

The Council has not included any allowance for uncollectable debts in the table above. Any outstanding debts would be considered within the Sundry Debtors bad-debt provision calculation.

Operating Leases

The Council leases out a number of premises within the local area. The future minimum lease payments receivable under non – cancellable leases in future years are:

	31 March 2024 £	31 March 2025 £
Not later than one year	3,968,264	4,329,292
Later than one year & not later than five years	10,291,006	11,765,689
Later than five years	27,302,404	29,750,555
	41,561,674	45,845,535

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

The minimum lease payments receivable does not include rents that are contingent on events taking place after the balance sheet date.

F5. Accounting Policies

i) General principles

The Statement of Accounts summarises the Council's transactions for the financial year and its position at the 31st March year-end. The Council is required to prepare an annual Statement of Accounts by the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, those regulations which require the accounts to be prepared in accordance with proper accounting practices. These practices primarily comprise the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom supported by International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) and statutory guidance.

The accounting convention adopted in the Statement of Accounts is principally historical cost, modified by the revaluation of certain categories of non-current assets and financial instruments.

These accounts have been prepared on the basis that the Council is a going concern.

ii) Accruals of income and expenditure

Activity is accounted for in the year that it takes place, not simply when cash payments are made or received. In particular:

- Revenue from contracts with service recipients, whether for services or the provision of goods is recognised when (or as) the goods or services are transferred to the service recipient in accordance with the performance obligations in the contract.
- Supplies are recorded as expenditure when they are consumed. Where there is a gap between the date supplies are received and their consumption they are carried as inventories (stock) on the Balance Sheet, where the value is material.
- Expenses in relation to services received (including services provided by employees) are recorded as expenditure when the services are received rather than when payments are made.
- Interest receivable on investments and payable on borrowings is accounted for respectively as income and expenditure on the basis of the effective interest rate for the relevant financial instrument rather than the cash flows fixed or determined by the contract.
- Where revenue and expenditure have been recognised but cash has not been received or paid, a debtor or creditor for the relevant amount is recorded in the Balance Sheet. Where debts may not be settled, the balance of debtors is written down and a charge made to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement for the income that might not be collected (doubtful debts).
- The Council has set a de-minimis level for accruals of creditors and debtors that are calculated manually in order to avoid additional time and cost in estimating and recording accruals. This level is set at £500 with the exception of any grant where applying the de-minimis level would affect a grant claim and any accruals included therein.

iii) Cash and cash equivalents

Cash and cash equivalents are represented by cash in hand and deposits with financial institutions repayable, without penalty, on notice of not more than 24 hours. This includes bank call-accounts, Money Market Funds (MMF) and any other 'overnight-type' investments.

In the Cash Flow Statement, cash and cash equivalents are shown net of bank overdrafts that are repayable on demand and form an integral part of the Council's cash management.

iv) Prior period adjustments, changes in accounting policies and estimates and errors

Prior period adjustments may arise as a result of a change in accounting policies or to correct a material error. Changes in accounting estimates are accounted for prospectively, i.e. in the current and future years affected by the change and do not give rise to a prior period adjustment.

Changes in accounting policies are only made when required by proper accounting practices or the change provides more reliable or relevant information about the effect of transactions, other events and conditions on the Council's financial position or financial performance. Where a change is made, it is applied retrospectively (unless not material or stated otherwise) by adjusting opening balances and comparative amounts for the prior period as if the new policy had always been applied.

Material errors discovered in prior period figures are corrected retrospectively by amending opening balances and comparative amounts for the prior period.

v) Charges to revenue for non-current assets

Services, support services and trading accounts are charged an accounting estimate of the cost of holding non-current assets during the year. This comprises:

- depreciation attributable to the assets used by the relevant service.
- revaluation and impairment losses on assets used by the relevant service where there are no accumulated gains in the Revaluation Reserve against which the losses can be written off.
- amortisation of intangible assets attributable to the service

The Council is not required to raise council tax to fund depreciation, revaluation and impairment losses or amortisation. However, it is required to make an annual contribution from revenue towards the reduction in its overall borrowing requirement equal to an amount calculated on a prudent basis determined by the Council in accordance with statutory guidance. Depreciation, revaluation and impairment losses and amortisation are therefore replaced by the contribution in the General Fund Balance - Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP), by way of an adjusting transaction with the Capital Adjustment Account in the Movement in Reserves Statement for the difference between the two.

vi) Council tax and non-domestic rates

Billing authorities act as agents, collecting council tax and non-domestic rates (NDR) on behalf of the major preceptors (including government for NDR) and, as principals, collecting council tax and NDR for themselves. Billing authorities are required by statute to maintain a separate fund (i.e. the Collection Fund) for the collection and distribution of amounts due in respect of council tax and NDR. Under the legislative framework for the Collection Fund, billing authorities, major preceptors and central government (for NDR) share proportionately the risks and rewards that the amount of council tax and NDR collected could be less or more than predicted.

Accounting for council tax and NDR

The council tax and NDR income included in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement is the Council's share of accrued income for the year. However, regulations determine the amount of council tax and NDR that must be included in the Council's General Fund. Therefore, the difference between the income included in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement and the amount required by regulation to be credited to the General Fund is taken to the Collection Fund Adjustment Account and included as a reconciling item in the Movement in Reserves Statement.

The Balance Sheet includes the Council's share of the end of year balances in respect of council tax and NDR relating to arrears, impairment allowances for doubtful debts, overpayments and prepayments and appeals.

Where debtor balances for the above are identified as impaired because of a likelihood arising from a past event that payments due under the statutory arrangements will not be made, the asset is written down and a charge made to the taxation and non-specific grant income and expenditure line in the CIES. The impairment loss is measured as the difference between the carrying amount and the revised future cash flows.

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

vii) Employee benefits

Benefits payable during employment

Short-term employee benefits are those due to be settled wholly within 12 months of the year-end. They include such benefits as wages and salaries, paid annual leave and paid sick leave, bonuses and non-monetary benefits (e.g. cars) for current employees and are recognised as an expense for services in the year in which employees render service to the Council.

An accrual is made for the cost of holiday entitlement (or any form of leave, e.g. time off in lieu) earned by employees but not taken before the year-end which employees can carry forward into the next financial year. The accrual is made at the wage and salary rates applicable in the following accounting year, being the period in which the employee takes the benefit. The accrual is charged to Surplus or Deficit on the Provision of Services but then reversed out through the Movement in Reserves Statement so that holiday benefits are charged to revenue in the financial year in which the holiday absence occurs.

Overtime is only paid on limited occasions and requires prior Head of Service approval. Overtime is not contractual or regular, and therefore any holiday leave potentially accruing on overtime worked is not significant. The Council does not accrue for holiday pay due on overtime.

Termination benefits

Termination benefits are amounts payable as a result of a decision by the Council to terminate an officer's employment before the normal retirement date or an officer's decision to accept voluntary redundancy, in exchange for those benefits and are charged on an accruals basis to the appropriate service segment, or where applicable, to a corporate service segment within the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement at the earlier of when the Council can no longer withdraw the offer of those benefits or when the Council recognises costs for a restructuring.

Where termination benefits involve the enhancement of pensions, statutory provisions require the General Fund Balance to be charged with the amount payable by the Council to the pension fund or the employee in the year, not the amount calculated according to the relevant accounting standards. In the Movement in Reserves Statement, appropriations are required to and from the pension reserve to remove the notional debits and credits for pension enhancement termination benefits and replace them with debits for the cash paid to the pension fund and pensioners and any such amounts payable but unpaid at the year end.

viii) Post-employment benefits

Employees of the Council are permitted to join the Local Government Pension Scheme, administered by Oxfordshire County Council. This scheme provides defined benefits to members (retirement lump sums and pensions), earned as employees who worked for the Council.

The Local Government Pension Scheme is accounted for as a defined benefits scheme:

- The liabilities of the Oxfordshire County Council Pension Fund attributable to the Council are included in the Balance Sheet on an actuarial basis using the projected unit method – i.e. an assessment of the future payments that will be made in relation to retirement benefits earned to date by employees, based on assumptions about mortality rates, employee turnover rates, etc., and projected earnings for current employees.
- Liabilities are discounted to their value at current prices, using a discount rate based on the gross redemption yield on the Iboxx Sterling Corporate Index, AA over 15 years, at the IAS19 valuation date. This is a high quality corporate bond of equivalent term and currency to the liability.
- The assets of the Oxfordshire County Council Pension Fund attributable to the Council are included in the balance sheet at their fair value.
 - quoted securities – current bid price
 - unquoted securities – professional estimate
 - unitised securities – current bid price
 - property – market value

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

The change in the net pensions liability is analysed into the following components:

- Service cost comprising:
 - current service cost – the increase in liabilities as a result of years of service earned this year – allocated in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement to the services for which the employees worked.
 - past service cost- the increase in liabilities as a result of a scheme amendment or curtailment whose effect relates to years of service earned in earlier years – debited to the surplus or deficit on the provision of services in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement
 - net interest on the net defined benefit liability, i.e. net interest expense for the Council – the change during the period in the net defined benefit liability that arises from the passage of time charged to the financing and investment income and expenditure line of the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement. This is calculated by applying the discount rate used to measure the defined benefit obligation at the beginning of the period to the net defined benefit liability at the beginning of the period – taking into account any changes in the net defined benefit liability during the period as a result of contribution and benefit payments.
- Remeasurements comprising
 - the return on plan assets – excluding amounts included in net interest on the net defined benefit liability – charged to the pensions reserve as other comprehensive income and expenditure
 - actuarial gains and losses – changes in the net pensions liability that arise because events have not coincided with assumptions made at the last actuarial valuation or because the actuaries have updated their assumptions – charged to the pensions reserve as other comprehensive income and expenditure
 - contributions paid to the Oxfordshire County Council Pension Fund – cash paid as employer's contributions to the pension fund in settlement of liabilities; not accounted for as an expense

In relation to retirement benefits, statutory provisions require the General Fund balance to be charged with the amount payable by the Council to the pension fund or directly to pensioners in the year, not the amount calculated according to the relevant accounting standards. In the Movement in Reserves Statement, this means that there are transfers to and from the Pension Reserve to remove the notional debits and credits for retirement benefits and replace them with debits for the cash paid to the pension fund and pensioners and any such amounts payable but unpaid at the year-end. The negative balance that arises on the Pensions Reserve thereby measures the beneficial impact to the General Fund of being required to account for retirement benefits on the basis of cash flows rather than as benefits are earned by employees.

Discretionary benefits

The Council also has restricted powers to make discretionary awards of retirement benefits in the event of early retirements. Any liabilities estimated to arise as a result of an award to any member of staff are accrued in the year of the decision to make the award and accounted for using the same policies as are applied to the Local Government Pension Scheme.

ix) Events after the reporting period

Events after the Balance Sheet reporting period are those events, both favourable and unfavourable, that occur between the Balance Sheet date and the date when the statement of accounts is authorised for issue. Two types of events can be identified:

- those that provide evidence of conditions that existed at the end of the reporting period – the statement of accounts is adjusted to reflect such events
- those that are indicative of conditions that arose after the reporting period – the statement of accounts is not adjusted to reflect such events, but where such a category of events would have a material effect, disclosure is made in the notes of the nature of the events and their estimated financial effect.

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

Events taking place after the date of authorisation for issue are not reflected in the statement of accounts.

x) Financial instruments

Financial liabilities are recognised on the Balance Sheet when the Council becomes a party to the contractual provisions of a financial instrument and are initially measured at fair value and carried at their amortised cost. Annual charges to the Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement for interest payable are based on the carrying amount of the liability, multiplied by the effective rate of interest for the instrument. The effective interest rate is the rate that exactly discounts estimated future cash payments over the life of the instrument to the amount at which it was originally recognised.

Any borrowing that the Council may undertake would be presented in the Balance Sheet at the outstanding principal repayable (plus accrued interest); and interest charged to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement is the amount payable for the year according to the loan agreement.

Where premiums and discounts have been charged to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement, regulations allow the impact on the General Fund Balance to be spread over future years. The Council has a policy of spreading the gain or loss over the term that was remaining on the loan against which the premium was payable or discount receivable when it was repaid, where material. The reconciliation of amounts charged to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement to the net charge required against the General Fund Balance is managed by a transfer to or from the Financial Instruments Adjustment Account in the Movement in Reserves Statement.

Financial assets are classified based on a classification and measurement approach that reflects the business model for holding the financial assets (i.e. why we are holding the asset) and their cash flow characteristics. There are three main classifications:

- Amortised cost
- Fair value through other comprehensive income (FVOCI), and
- Fair value through profit or loss (FVPL)

The Council primarily holds investments to collect contractual cash flows. Financial assets are therefore classified as amortised cost, except for those whose contractual payments are not solely payment of principal and interest (i.e. where the cash flows do not take the form of a basic debt instrument).

Financial assets measured at amortised cost

Financial assets measured at amortised cost are recognised on the Balance Sheet when the Council becomes a party to the contractual provisions of a financial instrument and are initially measured at fair value. They are subsequently measured at their amortised cost. Annual credits to the Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement for interest receivable are based on the carrying amount of the asset multiplied by the effective rate of interest for the instrument.

Any gains and losses that arise on the derecognition of a financial asset are credited or debited to the financing and investment income and expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement.

Expected credit loss model

The Council recognises material expected credit losses on all of its financial assets held at amortised cost, either on a 12-month or lifetime basis except for those where the counterparty is central government or another local authority, where relevant statutory provisions prevent default. The expected credit loss model also applies to lease receivables and contract assets. Only lifetime losses are recognised for trade receivables (debtors).

Impairment losses are calculated to reflect the expectation that the future cash flows might not take place because the borrower could default on their obligations. Credit risk plays a crucial part in assessing losses. Where risk has increased significantly since an instrument was initially recognised, losses are assessed on a lifetime basis. Where risk has not increased significantly or remains low, losses are assessed on the basis of 12-month expected losses.

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

Financial assets measured at fair value through other comprehensive income (FVOCI)

Financial assets that are measured at fair value through other comprehensive income are recognised on the Balance Sheet when the Council becomes a party to the contractual provisions of a financial instrument and are initially measured and carried at fair value. Fair value gains and losses are recognised as they arise in other comprehensive income.

Financial assets measured at fair value through profit or loss (FVPL)

Financial assets that are measured at fair value through profit or loss are recognised on the Balance Sheet when the Council becomes a party to the contractual provisions of a financial instrument and are initially measured and carried at fair value. Fair value gains and losses are recognised as they arise in the Surplus or Deficit on the Provision of Services within the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement.

The Council has chosen to apply statutory provisions for mitigating the impact of fair value movements on Pooled Investment Funds as directed in the relevant Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) (England) (Amendment) Regulations. This allows (where relevant criteria are met) for fair value gains and losses on Pooled Investment Funds made before 1 April 2024 to be reversed to an account established solely for the purpose of recognising fair value gains and losses – the Pooled Investment Funds Adjustment Account.

This statutory provision ceases on 31 March 2029.

For Pooled Investment Funds made on or after 1 April 2024, fair value gains and losses incurred in 2024/25 will be taken to the Pooled Investment Funds Adjustment Account in 2024/25 as the Statutory Override remains in place.

Fair value measurements of financial assets

Fair value of an asset is the price that would be received to sell an asset in an orderly transaction between market participants at the measurement date. The fair value measurements of the Council's financial assets are based on the following techniques:

- instruments with quoted market prices – the market price
- other instruments with fixed and determinable payments – discounted cash flow analysis.

The inputs to the measurement techniques are categorised in accordance with the following three levels:

- Level 1 inputs – quoted prices (unadjusted) in active markets for identical assets that the Council can access at the measurement date.
- Level 2 inputs – inputs other than quoted prices included within Level 1 that are observable for the asset, either directly or indirectly.
- Level 3 inputs – unobservable inputs for the asset.

Any gains and losses that arise on the derecognition of the asset are credited or debited to the financing and investment income and expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement.

xi) Government grants and contributions

Whether paid on account, by instalments or in arrears, government grants and third party contributions and donations are recognised as due to the Council when there is reasonable assurance that:

- the Council will comply with the conditions attached to the payments, and
- the grants or contributions will be received.

Amounts recognised as due to the Council are not credited to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement until conditions attached to the grant or contribution have been satisfied. Conditions are stipulations

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

that specify that the future economic benefits or service potential embodied in the asset in the form of the grant or contribution are required to be consumed by the recipient as specified, or future economic benefits or service potential must be returned to the transferor.

Monies advanced as grants and contributions for which conditions have not been satisfied are carried in the Balance Sheet as creditors. When conditions are satisfied, the grant or contribution is credited to the relevant service line (attributable revenue grants and contributions) or taxation and non-specific grant income and expenditure (non-ringfenced revenue grants and all capital grants) in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement.

Where capital grants are credited to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement, they are reversed out of the General Fund Balance in the Movement in Reserves Statement. Where the grant has yet to be used to finance capital expenditure, it is posted to the Capital Grants Unapplied reserve. Where it has been applied, it is posted to the Capital Adjustment Account. Amounts in the Capital Grants Unapplied reserve are transferred to the Capital Adjustment Account once they have been applied to fund capital expenditure.

Community infrastructure levy

The Council does not currently charge a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) but may do so in future. When in place, the levy will be charged on new builds (chargeable developments for the Council) with appropriate planning consent. The Council will be responsible for charges and collecting the levy, which is a planning charge. Future income from the levy will be used to fund a number of infrastructure projects (these include transport, flood defences and schools) to support the development of the area.

When charged, the CIL is recognised at the commencement date of the chargeable development in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement as a contribution without outstanding conditions. CIL charges, once introduced, will be largely used to fund capital expenditure. However, a proportion of the charges may be used to fund revenue expenditure. A share of the charges which are due to be payable to the County, Town or Parish Councils will remain in creditors (receipts in advance) until due.

xii) Heritage assets

Heritage assets are those assets that are held and maintained principally for their contribution to knowledge and culture.

The Council owns several public artworks. These items meet the classification of Heritage Assets adopted by the Code (FRS102).

Where assets have been purchased or recently obtained, information on their cost or value will be available. The Code allows that where this information is not available or cannot be obtained at a value which is commensurate with the benefits to users of the financial statements, that the assets need not be recognised in the Balance Sheet.

When purchased or where a value is available, heritage assets are recognised on the balance sheet at historic cost. Assets within the Council's ownership are deemed to have indeterminate lives; hence the Council does not consider it appropriate to charge depreciation on those heritage assets on the Council's balance sheet. Due to the nature of the type of assets held, the Council's heritage assets are not subject to revaluation and will only be impaired if there is clear reason to suspect the assets have become impaired.

xiii) Intangible assets

Expenditure on non-monetary assets that do not have physical substance but are controlled by the Council as a result of past events (e.g. software licences) are capitalised when it is expected that future economic benefits or service potential will flow from the intangible asset to the Council. Intangible assets are measured initially at cost.

The depreciable amount of an intangible asset is amortised over its useful life (usually 5 years) to the relevant service line(s) in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement. The Council carries no internally generated intangible assets on its balance sheet.

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

Where expenditure on intangible assets qualifies as capital expenditure for statutory purposes, amortisation, impairment losses and disposal gains and losses are not permitted to have an impact on the General Fund balance. The gains and losses are therefore reversed out of the General Fund balance in the Movement in Reserves Statement and posted to the capital adjustment account or (for any sale proceeds greater than £10,000) the capital receipts reserve.

xiv) Inventories and long-term contracts

Inventories (stocks) are included in the Balance Sheet at cost.

Long term contracts are accounted for on the basis of charging the Surplus or Deficit on the Provision of Services with the consideration allocated to the performance obligations satisfied based on the goods or services transferred to the service recipient during the financial year.

xv) Investment property

Investment properties are those that are used solely to earn rentals and/or for capital appreciation. The definition is not met if the property is used in any way to facilitate the delivery of services or production of goods or is held for sale.

Investment properties are measured initially at cost and subsequently at fair value, being the price that would be received to sell such an asset in an orderly transaction between market participants at the measurement date. As a non-financial asset, investment properties are measured at highest and best use. Properties are not depreciated but are revalued annually according to market conditions at the year end. Gains and losses on revaluation are posted to the Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement. The same treatment is applied to gains and losses on disposal.

Rentals received in relation to investment properties are credited to the Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure line and result in a gain for the General Fund Balance. However, revaluation and disposal gains and losses are not permitted by statutory arrangements to have an impact on the General Fund Balance. The gains and losses are therefore reversed out of the General Fund Balance in the Movement in Reserves Statement and posted to the Capital Adjustment Account or (for any sale proceeds greater than £10,000) the Capital Receipts Reserve.

xvi) Leases

The council as lessee

The Council classifies contracts as leases based on their substance. Contracts and parts of contracts, including those described as contracts for services, are analysed to determine whether they convey the right to control the use of an identified asset, through rights both to obtain substantially all the economic benefits or service potential from that asset and to direct its use. The Code expands the scope of IFRS 16 Leases to include arrangements with nil consideration, peppercorn or nominal payments.

Initial measurement

Leases are recognised as right-of-use assets with a corresponding liability at the date from which the leased asset is available for use (or the IFRS 16 transition date, if later). The leases are typically for fixed periods in excess of one year but may have extension options.

The Council initially recognises lease liabilities measured at the present value of lease payments, discounting by applying the Council's incremental borrowing rate wherever the interest rate implicit in the lease cannot be determined. Lease payments included in the measurement of the lease liability include:

- fixed payments, including in-substance fixed payments
- variable lease payments that depend on an index or rate, initially measured using the prevailing index or rate as at the adoption date
- amounts expected to be payable under a residual value guarantee

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

- the exercise price under a purchase option that the Council is reasonably certain to exercise
- lease payments in an optional renewal period if the Council is reasonably certain to exercise an extension option
- penalties for early termination of a lease, unless the Council is reasonably certain not to terminate early.

The right-of-use asset is measured at the amount of the lease liability, adjusted for any prepayments made, plus any direct costs incurred to dismantle and remove the underlying asset or restore the underlying asset on the site on which it is located, less any lease incentives received.

However, for peppercorn, nominal payments or nil consideration leases, the asset is measured at fair value.

Subsequent measurement

The right-of-use asset is subsequently measured using the fair value model. The Council considers the cost model to be a reasonable proxy except for:

- assets held under non-commercial leases
- leases where rent reviews do not necessarily reflect market conditions
- leases with terms of more than five years that do not have any provision for rent reviews
- leases where rent reviews will be at periods of more than five years.

For these leases, the asset is carried at a revalued amount. In these financial statements, right-of use assets held under index-linked leases have been adjusted for changes in the relevant index, while assets held under peppercorn or nil consideration leases have been valued using market prices or rentals for equivalent land and properties.

The right-of-use asset is depreciated straight-line over the shorter period of remaining lease term and useful life of the underlying asset as at the date of adoption.

The lease liability is subsequently measured at amortised cost, using the effective interest method. The liability is remeasured when:

- there is a change in future lease payments arising from a change in index or rate
- there is a change in the group's estimate of the amount expected to be payable under a residual value guarantee
- the Council changes its assessment of whether it will exercise a purchase, extension or termination option, or
- there is a revised in-substance fixed lease payment.

When such a remeasurement occurs, a corresponding adjustment is made to the carrying amount of the right-of-use asset, with any further adjustment required from remeasurement being recorded in the income statement.

Low value and short lease exemption

As permitted by the Code, the Council excludes leases:

- for low-value items that cost less than £10,000 when new, provided they are not highly dependent on or integrated with other items, and
- with a term shorter than 12 months (comprising the non-cancellable period plus any extension options that the Council is reasonably certain to exercise and any termination options that the Council is reasonably certain not to exercise).

Lease expenditure

Expenditure in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement includes interest, straight line depreciation, any asset impairments and changes in variable lease payments not included in the measurement

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

of the liability during the period in which the triggering event occurred. Lease payments are debited against the liability. Rentals for leases of low-value items or shorter than 12 months are expensed.

Depreciation and impairments are not charges against council tax, as the cost of non-current assets is fully provided for under separate arrangements for capital financing. Amounts are therefore appropriated to the capital adjustment account from the General Fund balance in the Movement in Reserves Statement.

The council as lessor

Leases are classified as finance leases where the terms of the lease transfer substantially all the risks and rewards incidental to ownership of the property, plant or equipment from the lessor to the lessee. All other leases are classified as operating leases.

Finance leases

Where the Council grants a finance lease over a property or an item of plant or equipment, the relevant asset is written out of the Balance Sheet as a disposal. At the commencement of the lease, the carrying amount of the asset in the Balance Sheet (whether property, plant and equipment or assets held for sale) is written off to the other operating expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement as part of the gain or loss on disposal. A gain, representing the Council's net investment in the lease, is credited to the same line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement also as part of the gain or loss on disposal (i.e. netted off against the carrying value of the asset at the time of disposal), matched by a lease (long-term debtor) asset in the Balance Sheet.

Lease rentals receivable are apportioned between:

- a charge for the acquisition of the interest in the property – applied to write down the lease debtor (together with any premiums received), and
- finance income (credited to the Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement).

The gain credited to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement on disposal is not permitted by statute to increase the General Fund Balance and is required to be treated as a capital receipt. Where a premium has been received, this is posted out of the General Fund Balance to the Capital Receipts Reserve in the Movement in Reserves Statement. Where the amount due in relation to the lease asset is to be settled by the payment of rentals in future financial years, this is posted out of the General Fund Balance to the Deferred Capital Receipts Reserve. When the future rentals are received, the element for the capital receipt for the disposal of the asset is used to write down the lease debtor. At this point, the deferred capital receipts are transferred to the Capital Receipts Reserve.

The written-off value of disposals is not a charge against council tax, as the cost of non-current assets is fully provided for under separate arrangements for capital financing. Amounts are therefore appropriated to the Capital Adjustment Account from the General Fund Balance in the Movement in Reserves Statement.

Operating leases

Where the Council grants an operating lease over a property or an item of plant or equipment, the asset is retained in the Balance Sheet. Rental income is credited to the Other Operating Expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement. Credits are made on a straight-line basis over the life of the lease even if this does not match the pattern of payments (e.g. there is a premium paid at the commencement of the lease). Initial direct costs incurred in negotiating and arranging the lease are added to the carrying amount of the relevant asset (if material) and charged as an expense over the lease term on the same basis as rental income.

xvii) Property, plant and equipment

Assets that have physical substance and are held for use in the production or supply of goods or services, for rental to others, or for administrative purposes and that are expected to be used during more than one financial year are classified as Property, Plant and Equipment.

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

Recognition

Expenditure on the acquisition, creation or enhancement of Property, Plant and Equipment is capitalised on an accruals basis, provided that it is probable that the future economic benefits or service potential associated with the item will flow to the Council and the cost of the item can be measured reliably. Expenditure that maintains but does not add to an asset's potential to deliver future economic benefits or service potential (e.g. repairs and maintenance) is charged as an expense when it is incurred.

The Council's capitalisation de minimis is £10,000, except for where the sum of a group of assets is significant, such as waste collection bins and boxes or ICT equipment.

Measurement

Assets are initially measured at cost, comprising:

- the purchase price
- any costs attributable to bringing the asset to the location and condition necessary for it to be capable of operating in the manner intended by management.

The cost of assets acquired other than by purchase is deemed to be its fair value, unless the acquisition does not have commercial substance (i.e. it will not lead to a variation in the cash flows of the Council). In the latter case, where an asset is acquired via an exchange, the cost of the acquisition is the carrying amount of the asset given up by the Council.

Assets are then carried in the Balance sheet using the following measurement bases:

- Community assets and assets under construction – depreciated historical cost
- Surplus assets – the current value measurement base is fair value, estimated at highest and best use from a market participant's perspective.
- all other assets – current value, determined as the amount that would be paid for the asset in its existing use (existing use value – EUV).

Where there is no market-based evidence of current value because of the specialist nature of an asset, depreciated replacement cost (DRC) is used as an estimate of current value.

Where non-property assets have short useful lives or low values (or both) depreciated historical cost basis is used as an approximation of current value.

Assets included in the balance sheet at current value are revalued to ensure that their carrying amount is not materially different from their value at year-end. All land and buildings are revalued at least every 5-years as part of a rolling programme. Increases in valuations are matched by credits to the Revaluation Reserve to recognise unrealised gains. Exceptionally, gains might be credited to the surplus or deficit on the provision of services within the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement where they arise from the reversal of a loss previously charged to a service.

Where items or property plant and equipment are revalued, and the valuer identifies an asset which has component parts that have significantly different useful lives, where one or more parts represent a significant proportion of the overall asset, then the asset may be componentised. With componentisation, one or more constituent parts may be identified, and the component parts separately valued for the accounts and depreciated over different useful lives to the main asset. Useful economic lives (and therefore depreciation calculations) will be based upon the asset lives recommended by the Council's valuer.

Where decreases in value are identified, they are accounted for as follows:

- where there is a balance of revaluation gains for the asset in the Revaluation Reserve, the carrying amount of the asset is written down against that balance (up to the amount of the accumulated gains)
- where there is no balance in the Revaluation Reserve or an insufficient balance, the carrying amount of the asset is written down against the relevant service line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement.

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

The Revaluation Reserve contains revaluation gains recognised since 1 April 2007, the date of its formal implementation. Gains arising before that date have been consolidated into the Capital Adjustment Account.

Impairment

Assets are assessed at each year-end as to whether there is any indication that an asset may be impaired. Where indications exist and any possible differences are estimated to be material, the recoverable amount of the asset is estimated and, where this is less than the carrying amount of the asset, an impairment loss is recognised for the shortfall.

Where impairment losses are identified, they are accounted for as follows:

- where there is a balance of revaluation gains for the asset in the Revaluation Reserve, the carrying amount of the asset is written down against that balance (up to the amount of the accumulated gains)
- where there is no balance in the Revaluation Reserve or an insufficient balance, the carrying amount of the asset is written down against the relevant service line(s) in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement.

Where an impairment loss is reversed subsequently, the reversal is credited to the relevant service line(s) in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement up to the amount of the original loss, adjusted for depreciation that would have been charged if the loss had not been recognised.

Depreciation

Depreciation is provided for on all Property, Plant and Equipment assets by the systematic allocation of their depreciable amounts over their useful lives. An exception is made for assets without a determinable finite useful life (i.e. freehold land and certain Community Assets) and assets that are not yet available for use (i.e. assets under construction).

Depreciation is calculated on the following bases:

- Operational buildings and surplus property – depreciated on a straight-line basis, over a 30 to 60 year period, depending upon the particular asset and an estimate of the asset life from the Council's valuer
- Car Park depreciable components (surface) – 20 years
- Land is not depreciated
- Vehicles and plant - depreciated on a straight-line basis, over a 7-year period
- Furniture and equipment – depreciated on a straight-line basis, over a 5-year period
- Investment property is not depreciated

Where an item of Property, Plant and Equipment asset has major components whose cost is significant in relation to the total cost of the item, the components are depreciated separately.

Revaluation gains are also depreciated, with an amount equal to the difference between current value depreciation charged on assets and the depreciation that would have been chargeable based on their historical cost being transferred each year from the Revaluation Reserve to the Capital Adjustment Account.

Disposals and non-current assets held for sale

When it becomes probable that the carrying amount of an asset will be recovered principally through a sale transaction rather than through its continuing use, it is reclassified as an Asset Held for Sale. The asset is revalued immediately before reclassification and then carried at the lower of this amount and fair value less costs to sell. Where there is a subsequent decrease to fair value less costs to sell, the loss is posted to the other operating expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement. Gains in fair value are recognised only up to the amount of any previously recognised losses in the surplus or deficit on the provision of services. Depreciation is not charged on assets held for sale.

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

If assets no longer meet the criteria to be classified as Assets Held for Sale, they are reclassified back to non-current assets and valued at the lower of their carrying amount before they were classified as held for sale, adjusted for depreciation, amortisation or revaluations that would have been recognised had they not been classified as Held for Sale, and their recoverable amount at the date of the decision not to sell.

Assets that are to be abandoned or scrapped are not reclassified as Assets Held for Sale.

When an asset is disposed of or decommissioned, the carrying amount of the asset in the Balance Sheet (whether property, plant and equipment or assets held for sale) is written off to the Other Operating Expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement as part of the gain or loss on disposal. Receipts from disposals (if any) are credited to the same line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement also as part of the gain or loss on disposal (i.e. netted off against the carrying value of the asset at the time of disposal). Any revaluation gains accumulated for the asset in the Revaluation Reserve are transferred to the Capital Adjustment Account.

Amounts received for a disposal in excess of £10,000 are categorised as capital receipts. The balance of receipts remains within the capital receipts reserve and can then only be used for new capital investment or set aside to reduce the Council's underlying need to borrow (the capital financing requirement). Receipts are appropriated to the reserve from the General Fund balance in the Movement in Reserves Statement.

The written-off value of disposals is not a charge against council tax, as the cost of non-current assets is fully provided for under separate arrangements for capital financing. Amounts are appropriated to the capital adjustment account from the General Fund balance in the Movement in Reserves Statement.

xviii) Provisions, contingent liabilities and contingent assets

Provisions

Provisions are made where an event has taken place on or before the balance sheet date:

- that gives the Council a present obligation
- that probably requires settlement by a transfer of economic benefits or service potential, and
- where a reliable estimate can be made of the amount of the obligation.

If it is not clear whether an event has taken place on or before the Balance Sheet date, it is deemed to give rise to a present obligation if, taking account of all available evidence, it is more likely than not that a present obligation exists at the Balance Sheet date. The present obligation can be legal or constructive.

Provisions are charged as an expense to the appropriate service line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement when the Council has an obligation and are measured at the best estimate at the balance sheet date of the expenditure required to settle the obligation, taking into account relevant risks and uncertainties.

Estimated settlements are reviewed at the end of each financial year. Where it becomes less than probable that a transfer of economic benefits will now be required (or a lower settlement than anticipated is made), the provision is reversed and credited back to the relevant service.

Where some or all of the payment required to settle a provision is expected to be recovered from another party (e.g. from an insurance claim), this is only recognised as income for the relevant service if it is virtually certain that reimbursement will be received if the Council settles the obligation.

Contingent liabilities

A contingent liability arises where an event has taken place that gives the Council a possible obligation whose existence will only be confirmed by the occurrence or otherwise of uncertain future events not wholly within the control of the Council. Contingent liabilities also arise in circumstances where a provision would otherwise be made but either it is not probable that an outflow of resources will be required or the amount of the obligation cannot be measured with sufficient reliability.

Contingent liabilities are not recognised in the Balance Sheet but disclosed in a note to the accounts.

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

Contingent assets

A contingent asset arises where an event has taken place that gives the Council a possible asset whose existence will only be confirmed by the occurrence or otherwise of uncertain future events not wholly within the control of the Council.

Contingent assets are not recognised in the Balance Sheet but disclosed in a note to the accounts where it is probable that there will be an inflow of economic benefits or service potential.

xix) Reserves

The Council sets aside specific amounts as reserves for future policy purposes or to cover contingencies. Reserves are created by transferring amounts out of the General Fund Balance. When expenditure to be financed from a reserve is incurred, it is charged to the appropriate service in that year to score against the Surplus or Deficit on the Provision of Services in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement. The reserve is then transferred back into the General Fund Balance so that there is no net charge against council tax for the expenditure.

Certain reserves are kept to manage the accounting processes for non-current assets, financial instruments, local taxation, retirement and employee benefits and do not represent usable resources for the Council – these reserves are explained in the relevant policies.

xx) Revenue expenditure funded from capital under statute

Expenditure incurred during the year that may be capitalised under statutory provisions but that does not result in the creation of a non-current asset has been charged as expenditure to the relevant service in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement in the year. Where the Council has determined to meet the cost of this expenditure from existing capital resources, or by borrowing, a transfer in the Movement in Reserves Statement from the General Fund Balance to the Capital Adjustment Account then reverses out the amounts charged so that there is no impact on the level of council tax.

xxi) Value Added Tax

VAT payable is included as an expense only to the extent that it is not recoverable from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). VAT receivable is excluded from income.

xxii) Fair value measurement of non-financial assets

The Council's accounting policy for fair value measurement of financial assets is set out in the 'Financial Instruments' section (above). The Council also measures some of its non-financial assets such as surplus assets and investment properties and some of its financial instruments such as equity shareholdings (other financial instruments as applicable) at fair value at each reporting date. Fair value is the price that would be received to sell an asset in an orderly transaction between market participants at the measurement date. The fair value measurement assumes that the transaction to sell the asset takes place either:

- in the principal market for the asset, or
- in the absence of a principal market, in the most advantageous market for the asset.

The Council measures the fair value of an asset using the assumptions that market participants would use when pricing the asset, assuming that market participants act in their economic best interest.

When measuring the fair value of a non-financial asset, the Council takes into account a market participant's ability to generate economic benefits by using the asset in its highest and best use or by selling it to another market participant that would use the asset in its highest and best use.

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

The Council uses valuation techniques that are appropriate in the circumstances and for which sufficient data is available, maximising the use of relevant observable inputs and minimising the use of unobservable inputs.

Inputs to the valuation techniques in respect of assets for which fair value is measured or disclosed in the Council's financial statements are categorised within the fair value hierarchy, as follows:

- Level 1 – quoted prices (unadjusted) in active markets for identical assets that the Council can access at the measurement date
- Level 2 – inputs other than quoted prices included within Level 1 that are observable for the asset, either directly or indirectly
- Level 3 – unobservable inputs for the asset.

F6. Critical Judgements in Applying Accounting Policies

In applying the accounting policies set out in Note F5 above, the Council has had to make certain judgements about complex transactions or those involving uncertainty about future events. The critical judgements made in the Statement of Accounts are:

- The Council has a one-eighth share in Ubico Limited. The company provides a range of integrated environmental services including, commercial refuse collection and grounds maintenance services on behalf of the Council. The separate operating practices, management structure and the application of majority voting on the Ubico Limited board do not constitute the Council having joint-control or significant influence over the company. The Council's interest has therefore been classified as an investment in Ubico and group accounts have not been prepared.
- The Council jointly owns (with Cotswold District Council, the Forest of Dean District Council and Cheltenham Borough Council) Publica Group (Support) Limited, a wholly owned company, limited by guarantee, operating with Mutual Trading Status to deliver services on behalf of the Council and services to other members Councils under contract. Publica can be considered to be an employment vehicle (in accounting terms only a 'holding account'), employing and paying staff and then recharging these costs to the Councils, via a contract sum. It does not trade and does not make a 'profit' as substantially all surpluses are redistributed back to the councils. While the Council has an interest in the Company, the Council's share of any surplus for the year and net assets at the balance sheet date have not been consolidated into the Council's single entity accounts. It is the view of management that the figures involved are not material and the production of group accounts will not enhance disclosure or provide any additional benefit to the reader of the accounts, and on that basis, Group Accounts have not been prepared.
- No allowance has been made in the Councils' accounts for the transfer out of any Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) pension liability to Publica Group (Support) Limited. The service contract and tripartite agreement between the Council, Oxfordshire Pension Fund and Publica Group (Support) Limited mean that the pension liability and risk relating to the pension fund remains with the Council, following the TUPE transfer of the majority of the Council's staff to Publica on 1st November 2017. Therefore, the Council is reporting the pension liability for both staff transferred to Publica, and the Councils retained staff, in the accounts. Although Publica, as the employer of many of the current staff may be initially responsible for paying any exit contributions (for example), for any of its staff that are members of the LGPS, such cost will be reimbursed by the relevant Council. The accounts have been prepared on the basis that the full pension fund liability for the LGPS sits in the Council's accounts. There are no separate disclosures for Publica as they are not responsible for any LGPS liability.
- Under International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), assessments have been made as to the correct accounting treatment for a number of lease agreements, which the Council has entered into. Categorising leases as either operating or finance leases results in different accounting treatment depending upon the categorisation of the lease. In each case, a lease is classified based upon criteria contained within the Code and an assessment of the nature of the leasing arrangement in place.

The Council has entered into a lease-type agreement whereby it provides environmental services vehicles to Ubico Limited. Ubico pay a market-rate for the use of the vehicles and are responsible for insuring and maintaining the vehicles and determining their deployment (including use across other Ubico contracts where necessary). Ubico pay for the vehicles over a period of 7-years for new vehicles, which is deemed to be the useful economic life of the assets. The transaction has been accounted for on the basis that the agreement is a finance lease, because: i) the sum of the lease payments equal the cost of purchasing the asset; ii) the

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

length of the term represents 'substantially all' of the useful life of the asset; and iii) the rights and responsibilities of ownership (maintenance, insurance, deployment) in relation to the vehicle assets sit primarily with Ubico Limited. This agreement has been formalised in a lease agreement between Ubico and the Council.

- The Council leases-in a small number of operational assets on 'peppercorn' or non-commercial terms. For such assets, the assets are not accounted for purely on the financial agreement (lease) in place but include an assessment of the substance of the transaction or underlying arrangement to take account of the view that the purpose of the lease is to provide services or benefit within the district. The terms of the lease and the desire to provide beneficial services are often represented in non-commercial lease-terms being agreed.
- A significant level of risk remains due to the volume of outstanding business rates appeals, which are being processed by the Valuation Office. Where appeals are successful, refunds of business rates are generally repayable back to the latest valuation date, which reduces the business rates yield in the year in which the refund is made. This set of accounts includes a provision for appeal losses. The value has been assessed using information of outstanding appeals supplied by the valuation office, as at 31st March 2024, and using experience of previous appeals rates. The Council's share of the liability stands at £1,780,750.
- Grants are only recognised as income in the CIES, where the Council is acting as a principal. If the Council is acting as an intermediary (agent), then the net balance of monies to either be repaid or due to the council, will be shown on the balance sheet. It is deemed the Council is acting as a principal if they have control of a grant i.e. the ability to direct the use of and obtain substantially all of the remaining benefits from the grant. Following the receipt of a grant the Council had to determine whether in administering the grant it was acting as an agent or principal.

Where the Council was acting as agent, the following conditions applied:

- It was acting as an intermediary between the recipient and the Government Department
- It did not have "control" of the grant conditions and there was no flexibility in determining the level of grant payable.

Where the Council acted as principal, it was able to use its own discretion when allocating the amount of grant payable. The narrative report (page 5) highlights the business grants where the Council is acting as either the principal or agent.

F7. Accounting standards not yet adopted

The Code requires changes in accounting policy to be applied retrospectively unless alternative transitional arrangements are specified in the Code. There is also the requirement for an authority to disclose information relating to the impact of an accounting change that will be required by a new standard that has been issued but not yet adopted.

The Effects of changes in Foreign Exchange Rate – Amendments to IAS 21, issued in August 2023

Insurance Contracts - IAS 17, issued in May 2017

Property, Plant and Equipment – adaptation and interpretation of IAS 16

Intangible Assets - adaptation and interpretation of IAS 38

None of these amendments are expected to have a significant impact on the council's accounts in future years.

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

F8. Assumptions Made about the Future and Other Major Sources of Estimation Uncertainty

The Statement of Accounts contains estimated figures that are based on assumptions made by the Authority about the future or that are otherwise uncertain. However, because balances cannot be determined with certainty, actual results could be materially different from the assumptions and estimates. Significant assumptions affecting the statement of accounts include:

Item	Uncertainties	Effect if actual result differs from assumption
Property, Plant & Equipment – Operational Property	<p>Asset valuations are based on market prices and are periodically reviewed to ensure that the Council does not materially misstate its non-current assets.</p> <p>The Valuer has stated that valuations have been prepared in accordance with RICS Valuation standards and recommendations contained within the RICS Red Book.</p> <p>In context of the Council's Property Portfolio, the Valuer has assessed the impairment risk by sector and individual asset. Due to the material nature of the Council Offices and Leisure Centres it has been considered prudent to revalue all assets within these sectors.</p> <p>The remainder of the portfolio has been assessed and it has been confirmed that there has been no further material changes to the portfolio that is considered sufficient to affect the unvalued portion.</p> <p>Operational assets are depreciated over the best estimate of an assets useful economic life. These asset lives are based upon assumed repairs and maintenance being carried out to maintain an asset. Asset lives are based upon information provided by the Council's valuer.</p> <p>With regards to Depreciated Replacement Cost (DRC) method valuations of operational properties and the residual valuations of the surplus properties, the valuers have conducted a high level sensitivity analysis looking at the build cost growth over a period, 12 months prior to valuation and at the current levels. The valuers consider that of all the valuation elements in a DRC the build costings are the most volatile assumption and most susceptible to change through inflation and rising material/labour costings, among other things.</p> <p>Operational assets are depreciated over the best estimate of an asset's useful economic life. These asset lives are based upon assumed repairs and maintenance being carried out to maintain an asset. Asset lives are based upon information provided by the Council's valuer.</p>	<p>A reduction in the estimated valuations would result in reductions to the Revaluation Reserve /and or a loss recorded as appropriate in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement. If the value of the Council's operational properties were to reduce by 10%, this would be unlikely to result in a significant charge to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement due to the level of revaluation reserve balance held of approximately £32.77m.</p> <p>An increase in estimated valuations would result in increases to the Revaluation Reserve and/or reversals of previous negative revaluations to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement and/or gains being recorded as appropriate in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement.</p> <p>If the useful economic life of an asset is reduced, depreciation increases and the carrying value of an asset will fall. Depreciation charges for operational buildings will change in direct relation to changes in estimated current value. The net book value of non-current assets subject to potential revaluation is £75m.</p>

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

<p>Fair Value measurement of Investment Property</p>	<p>The valuers base their assumptions on observable data as far as possible, but this is not always available. In that case, the valuers use the best information available.</p> <p>The Council's valuer uses valuation techniques to determine the fair value of investment property. This includes developing estimates and assumptions consistent with how market participants would price the property. The investment properties' main assumptions for change are yield and rent. When valuing the investment properties, the valuers have run a number of valuations adjusting yields typically by 25 basis points each time to encapsulate and understand how current and future risk within the yield affects values. Whether this is further potential for rental growth, unknown covenant strength or letting void.</p> <p>During this accounting period Investment properties have been valued against assumptions of the national economic picture and local conditions that impact rental values.</p>	<p>Estimates for fair values may differ from the actual prices that could be achieved in an arm's length transaction at the reporting date.</p> <p>It is not possible to quantify the level of variance that may arise if assumptions used differ from actual asset values. The Council is confident, however, that the risk of any variance will not affect the Council's financial strategy. A fall of 5% in the overall revaluation would result in a fall in value of £2,674,550 against a current NBV of £53.491m.</p>
<p>Pension Liability</p>	<p>The estimation of the pension liability is based upon a number of factors and judgements applied by the scheme's actuary including discount rate used, rate of salary increases, changes in retirement ages, mortality rates and expected return on Pension Fund investments. Estimates are made upon judgements and conditions as seen by the actuary at a point in time.</p> <p>An asset ceiling calculation has been applied to the pension fund asset value included in the accounts. This is due to an ongoing requirement to pay agreed past service contributions. Relevant accounting standards only set out high level principles, which are open to a wide range of interpretation. The approach adopted was proposed by the Council's consulting actuary following discussions with key LGPS audit practitioners.</p> <p>The Council has engaged Hymans Robertson as its consulting actuary to provide expert advice about the assumptions to be applied.</p>	<p>The effect of changing assumptions will result in changes in the valuation of the pension funds' assets and liabilities.</p> <p>Removing the asset ceiling calculation results in an increase in pension fund asset values of £20.682m. Instead of disclosing a pension liability of £3.907m the Council would instead disclose a pension fund asset of £16.775m</p> <p>For further details of the impact of variations in key assumptions, see note F1.</p>

Where other assumptions have been made these will be disclosed in the appropriate note to the accounts.

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

F9. Contingent Liabilities and Contingent Assets

The Council has no significant contingent assets or liabilities to report.

F10. Related Parties

The Council is required to disclose material transactions with related parties – i.e. bodies or individuals that have the potential to control or influence the council or to be controlled or influenced by the council. Disclosure of these transactions allows readers to assess the extent to which the council might have been constrained in its ability to operate independently or might have secured the ability to limit another party's ability to bargain freely with the Authority.

Central Government

Central government has effective control over the general operations of the Authority – it is responsible for providing the statutory framework within which the Authority operates, provides a significant element of the Council's funding in the form of grants and prescribes the terms of many transactions that the Authority has with other parties (e.g. council tax bills and housing benefits). Details of any significant grants received in the year are listed under Note B9, *Grant Income*.

Members of the Council

Members of the council have direct control over the council's financial and operating policies. The total of Members' allowances paid in 2024/25 is disclosed in Note B6, *Members' Allowances*.

All elected Members are required to complete a questionnaire detailing any areas where potential conflicts of interest may occur between their private interests and their position as the elected representatives of the Council. Details are recorded in the register of members' interest, open to public inspection at the Council Offices during office hours.

- Fourteen Members declared an interest as a Town, Parish or County Councillor where precepts were awarded during 2024/25.

Officers

By virtue of the Officer Code of Conduct, employees of the Council are required to declare any relationship with individuals, organisations or companies that might prejudice, or could be viewed as influencing, their professional judgement. On an annual basis, senior officers and officers within positions of influence within the Council are required to complete a related party declaration to highlight any potential conflicts of interest.

Declarations are sought even where no conflicts of interest have been reported. There were no declarations that required further disclosure in this statement of accounts.

Cotswold District Council

Up until November 2017 the Council shared a number of senior staff with Cotswold District Council. On the 1st November 2017 the majority of the Council's staff TUPE-transferred to Publica Group (Support) Limited. Following the transfer, the Council now only share the legal function and the counter fraud unit.

Publica Group (Support) Limited

Publica Group (Support) Limited (the Company), is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee with no share capital.

NOTES TO THE CASH FLOW STATEMENT

West Oxfordshire District Council, along with Cotswold, and Forest of Dean District Councils and Cheltenham Borough Council have jointly set up Publica Group (Support) Limited, a wholly owned company, limited by guarantee, operating with Mutual Trading Status to deliver services on behalf of the Council and services to other members Councils under contract.

Publica Group (Support) Limited is a Teckal company fulfilling the conditions set out in Regulation 12(4) of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. The Company is subject to management supervision by the Members. As such, the Company is a body governed by public law as defined in the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

While Publica Group (Support) Limited works closely with the Council, the company has its own board of Directors, its own Management team, and operates independently from the Council.

85 staff transferred back to the Council on 1st November 2024, with a further 27 staff transferring on 1st July 2025. The impact of these transfers will be included in updates to the MTFS.

Ubico Limited

Ubico Limited was established in 2011/12 by Cheltenham Borough Council and Cotswold District Council to deliver a range of integrated environmental services including household and commercial refuse collection, recycling, street cleansing and grounds maintenance. It commenced operations on 1 April 2012.

During 2015/16 West Oxfordshire District Council became a shareholder of Ubico Limited. The Council holds an equal 1/8th shareholding in the Company.

The company provides services to the shareholder councils on a not-for-profit basis and therefore qualifies for the teckal exemption (named after the EU case that established the principle). As a teckal company, Ubico Limited must ensure that the percentage of work undertaken outside of the shareholder contracts is less than 20% of its total activity.

While the Council has a 1/8th shareholding in Ubico Limited, the Council is not deemed to have significant influence over the company. The separate operating practices, management structure and majority voting on the Ubico board do not constitute any means of joint control over the company. The Council's interest is therefore classed as an investment in Ubico.

Other Public Bodies

The Council collects precepts on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council, Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner and the Town and Parish Councils within the Council area. Precepts for the County Council and Police Authority are shown in the Collection Fund. Town and Parish precepts are shown in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Account.

The Local Government Pension Scheme (of which West Oxfordshire is a member) is administered by Oxfordshire County Council (see note F1).

The Wychwood Project

The Wychwood Project is a registered charity that aims to inspire people to restore and conserve habitats and landscapes within the Wychwood area, which covers 120 sq miles, mostly in the West Oxfordshire District. The Council provided a Community Revenue Grant of £30,000 to the Wychwood Project in 2024/25 and a West Oxfordshire District Council Councillor is a trustee.

THE COLLECTION FUND

This "Agent's" statement shows the transactions of the Council as a billing authority in relation to the collection from taxpayers and distribution to local authorities and the Government of Council Tax and National Non Domestic Rates (Business Rates).

2023/2024				Note	2024/2025		
Business Rates £	Council Tax £	Total £			Business Rates £	Council Tax £	Total £
(105,632,719)	(105,632,719)	(105,632,719)	Council Tax receivable	G1	(112,608,379)	(112,608,379)	(112,608,379)
(37,731,543)	(37,731,543)	(37,731,543)	Business Rates Receivable	G2	(45,007,849)	(45,007,849)	(45,007,849)
(4,245,178)	(4,245,178)	(4,245,178)	Transitional Protection Payments		(1,260,830)	(1,260,830)	(1,260,830)
(2,478,743)	(2,478,743)	(2,478,743)	Contribution to previous year's deficit / (Surplus)		(1,810,539)	(1,810,539)	(1,810,539)
(44,455,464)	(105,632,719)	(150,088,183)	Total Income		(48,079,218)	(112,608,379)	(160,687,597)
			<u>Apportionment of previous year's surplus</u>				
	199,508	199,508	West Oxfordshire District Council			156,443	156,443
	1,567,537	1,567,537	Oxfordshire County Council			1,246,902	1,246,902
	228,998	228,998	Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner			184,285	184,285
0	1,996,043	1,996,043			0	1,587,630	1,587,630
			<u>Precepts, Demands and Shares</u>				
20,652,808		20,652,808	Central Government		22,322,840		22,322,840
16,522,247	10,242,533	26,764,780	West Oxfordshire District Council		17,858,275	11,028,539	28,886,814
4,130,562	81,636,138	85,766,700	Oxfordshire County Council		4,464,569	87,097,466	91,562,035
0	12,065,368	12,065,368	Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner			12,882,633	12,882,633
41,305,617	103,944,039	145,249,656			44,645,684	111,008,637	155,654,321
			<u>Charges on the Collection Fund</u>				
263,518	42,939	306,457	Write-offs of uncollectable amounts		157,147	475,567	632,714
997,455	(378,082)	619,373	Increase / (decrease) in Bad Debt / Appeals Provisions	G3	1,441,901	(539,682)	902,219
172,276		172,276	Cost of Collection		174,021		174,021
271,541		271,541	Disregarded Amounts - Renewable Energy Schemes	G4	310,768		310,768
1,704,790	(335,143)	1,369,647			2,083,837	(64,115)	2,019,722
43,010,407	105,604,939	148,615,346	Total Expenditure		46,729,521	112,532,153	159,261,674
(1,445,057)	(27,780)	(1,472,837)	(Surplus) / Deficit for the Year		(1,349,697)	(76,226)	(1,425,923)
3,182,553	(2,197,323)	985,230	(Surplus) / Deficit brought forward		1,737,496	(2,225,103)	(487,607)
1,737,496	(2,225,103)	(487,607)	(Surplus) / Deficit carried forward	G5	387,799	(2,301,329)	(1,913,530)

NOTES TO THE COLLECTION FUND

G1. Council Tax System

Under the council tax system, West Oxfordshire District Council must collect enough money each year from local residents to cover the cost of the services we provide, which are not funded by other sources such as government grants and fees and charges.

Council Tax was introduced on 1 April 1993, and is a property based tax. The District Valuer valued all domestic property in the area and placed them into one of nine bands. In order to set the Council Tax, the Council estimates the number of dwellings in each of the nine valuation bands and convert these estimates into an "equivalent number of Band D dwellings". The table below shows the calculation for 2024/25.

Band	Total Chargeable Dwellings	Band 'D' Conversion	Band 'D' Equivalent Chargeable Dwellings	New Regulation Adjustments	New Band D Equivalent Chargeable Dwellings
A*	2.00	5/9	1.11	0.00	1.11
A	1,254.70	6/9	836.47	0.00	836.47
B	4,498.05	7/9	3,498.48	0.00	3,498.48
C	15,762.75	8/9	14,011.33	0.00	14,011.33
D	10,607.75	1	10,607.75	-2,123.30	8,484.45
E	7,260.25	11/9	8,873.64	0.00	8,873.64
F	4,325.25	13/9	6,247.58	0.00	6,247.58
G	2,856.75	15/9	4,761.25	0.00	4,761.25
H	374.50	2	749.00	0.00	749.00
Total	46,942.00		49,586.61	-2,123.30	47,463.31
Collection rate %					98.50%
Plus MOD contribution					1,089.67
TAXBASE					47,841.03

The total number of "equivalent Band D dwellings" is divided into net budget requirement to arrive at an "average Band D Tax" per dwelling. Dwellings in bands below "Band D" will pay proportionately less than this average and dwellings in bands above "Band D" will pay proportionately more than this average.

The above calculations resulted in an "average Band D Tax" of £2,324.06 per dwelling for 2024/25 (2023/24 £2,207.87) This included precepts payable to Oxfordshire County Council, the Police & Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley and West Oxfordshire District Council (but excludes amounts payable to the Town & Parish Councils within the district).

G2. National Non Domestic Rates

Under the Business Rates Retention Scheme the Council acts as both principal and agent, in that it is able to retain 40% of the net standard business rates collected within the local area as income within its own budget (net of tariff to central government), as well as 100% of net rates from properties relating to renewable energy schemes (Disregarded Amounts). The Council distributes the remaining net balance of standard business rate income to Central Government, who are allocated 50%, with the final 10% to Oxfordshire County Council.

NOTES TO THE COLLECTION FUND

	2023/24	2024/25
Total Non Domestic Rateable Value at 31 March (£)	117,039,457	118,774,053
National Non-domestic Rate Multiplier - Higher	51.2p	54.6p
National Non-domestic Rate Multiplier - Lower [Small Business]	49.9p	49.9p

The Business Rates receivable amount on the face of the Collection Fund Account is lower than the total of Non-domestic Rateable Value multiplied by the Non-domestic Rate Multiplier due to the award of various reliefs including Small Business Rate Relief and other mandatory and discretionary rate reliefs.

G3. Tax Payers' Arrears & Provisions for Uncollectable Amounts

Provision has been made for uncollectable tax payers' debts. At 31 March the provisions on the Collection Fund were as follows:

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Council Tax	(1,978,410)	(1,438,731)
National Non Domestic Rates	(4,451,878)	(5,226,224)
	(6,430,288)	(6,664,955)

G4. Business Rates – Disregarded Amounts

From April 2013 the Council was allowed to retain 100% of the growth from the business rates associated with renewable energy sites. All such growth is transferred to the Council's General Fund.

NOTES TO THE COLLECTION FUND

G5. Collection Fund Balance Sheet Apportionment

The apportionment of the balances on the Collection Fund as at 31 March is as follows:

2024/2025	West Oxon. District Council £	Oxfordshire County Council £	Central Govt. £	Thames Valley P&CC £
Council Tax	9.93%	78.5%	0%	11.61%
Debtors	823,044	6,499,960		961,412
Bad Debt Provision	(142,936)	(1,128,828)		(166,965)
Prepayments and Overpayments	(208,730)	(1,648,441)		(243,822)
(Surplus) / Deficit at 31 March	(228,633)	(1,805,622)		(267,070)
Business Rates	40.0%	10.0%	50.0%	0.0%
Debtors	922,373	230,593	1,152,967	
Bad Debt / Appeals Provision	(2,309,650)	(577,412)	(2,887,063)	
Prepayments and Overpayments	(1,108,610)	(277,153)	(1,385,763)	
(Surplus) / Deficit at 31 March	155,121	38,783	193,899	

2023/2024	West Oxon. District Council £	Oxfordshire County Council £	Central Govt. £	Thames Valley P&CC £
Council Tax	9.85%	78.5%	0%	11.61%
Debtors	814,311	6,490,314		959,232
Bad Debt Provision	(194,950)	(1,553,814)		(229,645)
Prepayments and Overpayments	(172,453)	(1,374,508)		(203,144)
(Surplus) / Deficit at 31 March	(219,259)	(1,747,561)		(258,280)
Business Rates	40.0%	10.0%	50.0%	0.0%
Debtors	979,374	244,844	1,224,218	
Bad Debt / Appeals Provision	(1,780,750)	(445,189)	(2,225,939)	
Prepayments and Overpayments	(360,037)	(90,009)	(450,046)	
(Surplus) / Deficit at 31 March	694,999	173,752	868,746	

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2024/2025

I. SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY

West Oxfordshire District Council ('the Council') is responsible for ensuring that:

- Its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards
- Public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for
- Public money is used economically, efficiently and effectively; and
- There is a sound system of governance, incorporating the system of internal control

The Council has a Best Value duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

In discharging these responsibilities, the Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and including arrangements for the management of risk.

The Council has developed and approved a Local Code of Corporate Governance ('the Code'), which is consistent with the core principles and sub-principles as set out in the CIPFA/SOLACE "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (2016)" ('the Framework'). This statement explains how the Council has complied with the Code and also meets the requirements of Regulation 6(1)(a) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (England) which requires the Council to conduct a review at least once a year on the effectiveness of its system of internal control and include a statement reporting on the review with any published Statement of Accounts.

In addition to this, CIPFA issued its 'Statement on the Role of the Chief Finance Officer in Local Government (2015)'. The Annual Governance Statement ('the AGS') reflects compliance with this statement for reporting purposes.

2. THE PURPOSE OF THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled including activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads its communities. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost effective services.

The system of internal control is a significant part of the governance framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an on-going process designed to:

- Identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives
- Evaluate the likelihood of those risks occurring
- Assess the impact should those risks occur; and
- Manage the risks efficiently, effectively and economically

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The governance framework has been in place at the Council for the year ended 31 March 2025 and up to the date of approval of the Annual Statement of Accounts.

While financial savings have been delivered over the last few years, we have identified some areas where more resources are required, so additional support has been given in some areas and further reviews are being undertaken.

During 2024-25 the residents of West Oxfordshire have continued to face the challenges presented by the cost of living crisis. The Council has adapted the delivery of its services to meet the changing needs of the residents whilst coping with the financial challenges faced by all local authorities. Single year settlements restrict our ability to confidently plan for more than one year in advance and there is continued uncertainty over the timing of funding changes, such as Business Rates reset and phasing out of New Homes Bonus.

The general and wage inflation also puts additional pressure on the financial position of the council and the possibility of a new government does nothing to alleviate this challenging financial outlook.

3. THE GOVERNANCE ENVIRONMENT

The key elements of the Council's governance arrangements are outlined in the Code. The governance framework includes arrangements for:

- Identifying and communicating the Council's vision of its purpose and intended outcomes for citizens and service users
- Reviewing the Council's vision and its implications for the Council's governance arrangements
- Measuring the quality of services for users, ensuring that they are delivered in accordance with the Council's priorities and ensuring that they represent the best use of resources
- Defining and documenting the roles and responsibilities of the Executive, Non-Executive including Scrutiny and Officer functions, with clear delegation arrangements and protocols for effective communication
- Developing, communicating and embedding codes of conduct, defining the standards of behaviour for Members and employees
- Establishment of a Members' Constitution Working Group to review and update Financial Rules, Contract Rules, Schemes of Delegation, Codes and Protocols, which clearly define how decisions are taken and the processes and controls required to manage risks
- Ensuring effective counter-fraud and anti-corruption arrangements are developed and maintained
- Ensuring the Council's financial management arrangements conform with the governance requirements of the *CIPFA* Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2015)
- Undertaking the core functions of an Audit and Governance Committee, as identified in CIPFA's Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities
- Ensuring compliance with relevant laws and regulations, internal policies and procedures, and that expenditure is lawful
- Arrangements for whistleblowing and for receiving and investigating complaints
- Risk based Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan
- Identifying the development needs of Members and Senior Officers in relation to their strategic roles, supported by the appropriate learning and development opportunities

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- Establishing clear channels of communication with all sections of the community and other stakeholders, ensuring accountability and encouraging open consultation
- Incorporating good governance arrangements in respect of partnerships, including shared services and other joint working and reflecting these in the Council's overall governance arrangements
- Reports from external bodies such as the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman, HM Revenue & Customs, Information Commissioner, Investigatory Powers Commissioner and Planning Inspectorate.
- Overview & Scrutiny Committee represents a public forum through which Councillors can monitor the implementation of the Council's policies and the quality of its services; make recommendations on the discharge of the Council's functions and/or matters effecting the district and hold the Executive to account for their decisions and actions.

The main areas of the Council's governance framework, and the key evidence of delivery, are set out below, under the headings of the core principles and sub-principles from the CIPFA/SOLACE "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (2016)

A. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

- Behaving with Integrity
- Demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values
- Respecting the rule of the law

- The roles and responsibilities of Members generally and all office holders are set out in the Council's Constitution, along with the way in which the various elements of the Council interact and complement each other. The Constitution is supported and underpinned by a separate Code of Conduct for Members and a joint Member / Officer Protocol, which sets out guidelines as to behaviour and practical issues. This is further supported by Publica's¹ Business Conduct rules which set out guidelines for staff on behavioural issues and the Council's Employee Code of Conduct.
- The Council's Constitution is kept under constant review. This process is overseen by the Constitution Working Group which has a busy programme of work and recommends improvements and updates to full Council. In 2024/25 full Council adopted a Members Planning Code of Good Practice, a Communications Protocol and a Protocol for Recording at Meeting. Council also agreed changes to the Council's Contract Procedure Rules, Council Procedure Rules, Statutory and Proper Officer Functions, Standards Sub-Committee Procedure Rules, the Member/Officer Protocol and introduced the Probity in Planning Guidance document.
- Declarations are made at meetings by Members, where appropriate, and are recorded in the minutes of the meeting and on the Council website. The Members' Code of Conduct requires Members to complete a register of interests and these are also recorded and published on the Council website.
- Registers of interest are reviewed and updated annually by Members and published on the Council's website. The register of gifts, hospitality and sponsorship has been reviewed and

¹ Publica Group (Support) Limited is a local authority owned company, jointly owned by Cheltenham Borough Council and Cotswold, Forest of Dean and West Oxfordshire District Councils.
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approved at the Audit and Government Committee on March 2024. All declarations received by Members are recorded by the Monitoring Officer.

- An employee declaration is completed annually by all staff. A register of gifts and hospitality is maintained by the Business Manager, Governance and is reviewed by the Monitoring Officer.
- The Council has a recently updated Employee Code of Conduct in place.
- All HR policies, 29 in total, have been reviewed and approved by Council.
- The Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer report directly to the Head of Paid Service and are members of the Senior Leadership Team.
- Internal audit reviews are designed to ensure services are complying with internal and external policies and procedures / statutory legislation. Where non-compliance is identified, this is reported to Management and to Members via the Council's Audit & Governance Committee.
- The Whistleblowing Policy was included within the Constitution in 2024/25. A counter-fraud unit working across Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire helps prevent and detect fraud and corrupt practices, including misuse of power. The service reports to the Audit and Governance Committee and the Public Board's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee twice a year.
- Training is compulsory for Members exercising regulatory functions through the Development Control Committee and its Lowlands and Uplands area planning sub-committees, the Standards Sub-Committee (of the Audit and Governance Committee) and the Licensing Committee and its two sub-committees.
- An annual summary of Member Code of Conduct Complaints is considered by the Audit and Governance Committee, most recently on 26 September 2024 and lessons learnt endorsed.
- There are safeguards in the Constitution for handling planning and licensing applications from Members and Officers and the Probity in Planning Guidance was adopted by Council in 2024/25.
- Meetings are minuted, with decisions and key actions recorded appropriately. The Council continues to publish key decisions, in line with legal best practice.
- The Council provides regular updates to Members through a programme of monthly member briefing sessions on key Council services and major issues affecting the district (e.g. local government reorganisation and devolution).
- There is an annual programme of member training which is overseen by the Audit and Governance Committee each March. Members also now have access to selected courses via the Council's e-learning platform and are signposted to external training opportunities e.g. through the LGA. The Communications Service remains fully mobilised to ensure communications through all our channels to support public health advice / information / messaging and Council service and support information to reach audiences externally and internally.

B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

- Openness
 - Engaging comprehensively with institutional stakeholders
 - Engaging with individual citizens and service users effectively
-
- Annual accounts are published in a timely manner to help communicate the Council's financial position and performance.
 - The Council's Corporate Plan 2023 - 2027 was reviewed and adopted in January 2023. This is available on the Council website setting out the Council's vision and corporate priorities.
 - A new communications protocol was approved by Council in January 2024 setting out the role of the Team and the way in which it supports the Council including during sensitive periods, such as pre-election periods, was approved by Council in January 2024.
 - All Committee, Executive and Council reports clearly outline their purpose, so the community can understand what is trying to be achieved. Reports also address financial, legal, equalities, risk and climate and ecological implications to aid understanding of the potential impact of their recommendations.
 - The roles and responsibilities of the Executive, Non-Executive, Scrutiny and Officer functions are defined in the Council's Constitution.
 - A Scheme of Delegation of powers to Officers is included within the Constitution.
 - Communication channels for Publica and Council employees include one-to-ones and team meetings. Corporate communications include weekly update emails and an online portal.
 - A Customer Feedback form is available publicly for handling comments, complaints and compliments and the Council's website includes different ways for customers to give feedback or access services. A customer satisfaction survey was carried out on the telephone service provided, with the Council receiving high satisfaction scores being ranked third in the country.
 - A new customer complaints process was in 2024/25 taken through the Audit & Governance Committee and approved for introduced in April 2025 which complies with the newly published Ombudsman Code for Complaint Handling.
 - Ensuring clear channels of communication with all sections of the community and other stakeholders.
 - A new protocol for webcasting all Council Committee Meetings was approved in January 2024 at Full Council enabling greater transparency and community engagement in Council Meetings following the refurbishment to the Council Chamber into a multi-functional venue available for hire by the wider community. This continues to be in place.
 - The ability for members of the public to ask questions at Executive, Full Council and Committee meetings.
 - A report is produced quarterly regarding the performance of the Council's services and the achievement of its aims and objectives. The report is presented to the Executive, discussed at the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and published on the Council's website. The format of the report has been enhanced to provide a narrative and clearer information on Council priorities and KPI's.
 - The Council publishes transparency data on its website which includes supplier payments, senior management structure charts and the Annual Pay Policy Statement. Where data is not

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available in the published data sets, instructions are available on how to make a Freedom of Information requests and the procedure that will be followed to answer the requests.

- A Locality Leadership Team, comprising the Head of Paid Service, the S151 Officer, Monitoring Officer and Publica Directors, meet monthly to discuss projects, performance and risks and reports to be brought forward to the Executive.
- A report on the Council's Strategic Partnerships is considered by Full Council annually.

C. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits

- Defining outcomes
- Sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

- The Council's vision and corporate priorities are contained within the Council Plan 2023 - 2027 which was adopted by Council in January 2023. This sets out the high-level areas of focus, and what the Council hopes to achieve on its own or in partnership with others. These priorities are supported by the Code of Corporate Governance as good governance should underpin all the work of the Council.
- An annual business planning process is also conducted by Publica, which is informed by the corporate priorities, legislation and government guidance. All the areas of focus (corporate priorities) are underpinned by the following principles:
 - Putting Residents First
 - Enabling a Good Quality of Life for All
 - Creating a Better Environment for People and Wildlife
 - Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency
 - Working together for West Oxfordshire
- Detailed proposals arising from the corporate priorities are individually assessed and are included within decision making reports.
- Budget Procedure Rules have been adopted to ensure full engagement in the budget cycle.
- Contract Procedure Rules have been updated and approved by Council following the implementation of the Procurement Act 2023.
- The financial implications of delivering against the Council's priorities are included within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy ('MTFS'), revenue budgets and capital programme. These key financial documents are updated annually during the budget setting process. Variance to budget is reported quarterly.
- As part of its MTFS the Council assesses its forecast financial position and updates its assumptions about the resources available to, and the investment needs of, the Council.
- The Council is facing continued financial pressure from general and wage inflation. These are being incorporated into subsequent iterations of the MTFS and mitigations regarding costs are being developed.
- A Transformation Group has been established to help steer the Council's response to the challenging financial environment, guide the preparation of a sustainable MTFS consistent with the Council Plan, and oversee the delivery of the Council's work programme in terms of service transformation, investment and revenue generation.

D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

- Determining interventions
- Planning interventions
- Optimising achievement of intended outcomes

- The Council has, with three other councils, created a company, Publica Group (Support) Ltd, to deliver more efficient and improved services. Where appropriate, processes have been or are being aligned to ensure consistency across the partner councils, without compromising local priorities. In recognition that Publica is a significant contractor of the Council, the Council monitors its performance by:
 - Considering Publica's Annual Report at Council
 - Considering Publica's draft Business Plan annually at the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Executive in February/March each year
 - Requiring representatives from Publica to attend the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to support discussion on quarterly performance and other reports
 - Receiving monthly "Keeping You Connected" updates by email from Publica to all Members
 - Inviting Publica senior Officers to attend monthly Informal Executive meetings to discuss progress against the Business Plan and Corporate Plan
 - Creation of quarterly WODC retained Officers/Publica Executives meetings where performance and progress against Corporate Plan priorities is a key agenda item.
- A review of Publica was undertaken, and in response to this, a number of services have been transferred from Publica to direct council delivery. All other services continue to be delivered by Publica.
- The Council will be running a business planning process to ensure service delivery is aligned to the Council Plan and MTFS. This is part of the Corporate Planning and Performance Framework which sets out how to Council proactively manages its services and performance to ensure a high level of service delivery and progress against the Council Plan.
- In addition to the creation of Publica, the Council continues to secure savings through improved use of its assets and investments.
- The Council is also a Shareholder in Ubico, which delivers the Council's environmental services including waste and recycling collection services. The Council is focusing on ensuring effective governance arrangements are in place for this wholly owned company.
- The Council has processes in place to identify and respond to external changes, for example: changes to legislation and regulation, emerging risks and opportunities. Corporate processes such as risk management, performance management processes, budget monitoring and other management processes are designed to capture and incorporate these external factors and to enable the Council to respond appropriately.
- The strategic risk register is reviewed regularly by the Senior Leadership Team, Informal Executive, and reported to the Audit & Governance Committee. This has been reviewed to ensure all required risks are escalated and reported.

- Projects and services retain their own risk registers and should elevate any high or strategic risks to the Senior Leadership Team and Publica as appropriate for consideration. The Management Team reviews risk registers bi-monthly and escalates any emerging risks to the strategic register which is considered by Informal Executive and A&G Committee on a quarterly basis. Significant progress has been made in improving the identification and reporting of risks and improved communication and processes to ensure risks are appropriately escalated to the strategic register and visible to the Senior Leadership Team.
- Key performance indicators are measured and reported quarterly. Significant work has been undertaken to develop service performance reports which are present to the Executive and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
- Budgets are prepared annually in accordance with objectives, strategies and the MTFS, following consultation with residents, Members and Officers. The budget procedures rules, contained in the Constitution, were reviewed and amended in November 2023.
- The MTFS is a live document and can be reviewed, updated and reported as necessary, to respond to the changing environment.

As we move forward, we will continue to analyse the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and how that may impact our strategic priorities. The Council will continue to work with residents and local businesses to review and respond to their changing needs.

E. Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

- Developing the entity's capacity
 - Developing the capability of the entity's leadership and other individuals
- The Council is developing a People Strategy to ensure it has the right employees, in the right places to deliver its services and the Council Plan, building on the work delivered through Publica. It will also cover how the Council supports its employees, helps them develop professionally and manage performance. This will be in place during the 25/26 Financial Year.
 - The Constitution contains schemes of delegation for executive and non-executive (Council) functions. These are reviewed and revised as structures change.
 - Financial Procedure Rules are in place and are currently being reviewed with an updated version due to be presented to the Constitution Working Group and full Council during 2025/26.
 - An induction programme is available to new employees and Members. Training is also provided for both Members and Officers on an on-going basis as appropriate and necessary. Members on certain Committees (e.g., Planning, Standards and Licensing) are required to undertake training before attending the Committee meetings, and to attend further training to remain up to date and improve their knowledge.
 - Officers undertake regular 121 meetings with their line manager. As part of these 121 meetings, Officers discuss work plans/tasks and any training requirements associated with the successful delivery of the work plan. Officers are encouraged to complete Continuing Professional Development as relevant to their professional qualifications and service areas hold budgets to ensure that training can be undertaken to maintain skills and knowledge.

- Training is also provided for Officers on an on-going basis as appropriate and necessary with CPD being undertaken by Officers accredited to professional bodies.
- The Head of Paid Service, the Section 151 Officer, the Monitoring Officer and the Leader of the Council have clear statutory responsibilities. Roles and responsibilities are contained within the Constitution along with the Member/Officer Protocol and Monitoring Officer Protocol.
- The Ihasco online training facility has been further developed to create a suite of mandatory and service specific training. Selected courses can now also be accessed by Members.
- Mandatory Officer Cyber Ninja training has been undertaken with a specific tailored on-line module created for and rolled out to Members. Data Protection training will also be rolled out to Members during 2025/26.
- A Leadership Development Programme has been run for senior managers within Publica and the Council. All Senior Managers have received Carbon Literacy training with Silver accreditation being achieved.

F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal controls and strong public financial management

- Managing risk
 - Managing performance
 - Robust internal control
 - Managing data
 - Strong public financial management
-
- The Council explains and reports regularly on activities, performance and the Council's financial position through reports to its Executive and Committees. Timely, objective and understandable information about the Council's activities, achievements, performance and financial position is provided. This includes publication of:
 - Quarterly Performance Reports, publicly reported to the Executive.
 - Externally audited accounts including an Annual Governance Statement.
 - The Senior Leadership Team reviews the Strategic Risk Register on a bi-monthly basis and also presents the Strategic Risk Register to informal Executive. The Strategic Risk Register is reported to the Audit & Governance Committee on a twice-yearly basis.
 - Risks are identified when undertaking Internal Audit reviews and reported when necessary. The Council, through the S151 Officer, is able to flag any areas of concern to be added to the work of the Internal Audit team in the coming year.
 - The work of the Internal Audit team is reviewed and challenged by both the S151 Officer and the Audit and Governance Committee.
 - Performance Management measures the quality of service for users to ensure services are delivered in accordance with the Council's objectives and represent best use of resources.
 - Performance is measured on a regular basis through the quarterly KPI dashboards and reported to Members and the Executive.

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- Minutes of meetings are published and highlight the challenge made by Members to Officers and to Executive Members.
- The Internal Audit service is provided by South-West Audit Partnership Internal Audit Services ('SWAP') and is run in partnership with other local authorities.
- A risk-based Audit Plan is drafted annually following consultation with Officers, Members and the S151 Officer. The Audit Plan is approved at the Audit & Governance Committee prior to the financial year.
- Audit reports, once completed, are discussed with the service manager. Executive summaries, including findings, and progress on the Annual Plan are reported to the Audit & Governance Committee, on a quarterly basis.
- Recommendations made in audit reports are followed up 6 months after the completion of the audit and priority 1 and 2 findings are reported to the Audit & Governance Committee. Recommendations not implemented within that time scale are reported to the S151 Officer and to the Audit & Governance Committee.
- The Audit & Governance Committee's Terms of Reference are contained within the Constitution. Training is provided to Members on various aspects of the Committee's functions and responsibilities (internal audit, external audit, statement of accounts, risk, counter-fraud, treasury).
- The CIPFA self-assessment was carried out by the Audit & Governance Committee in the last quarter of 2023/24 with the results being assessed at Committee in March 2024 recommending to Council to reduce the numbers on the Committee from 15 to 11, not to appoint Executive Members, to recruit up to two IP's and produce a tailored training programme. These recommendations were agreed at the Annual Council meeting in May 2024. The Council has since successfully recruited 2 Independent Members who provide challenge and support to the Committee as non-voting members.
- The Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit supports the Council and other third parties. Where investigations identify possible improvements to the internal control framework the Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit will liaise with the Internal Audit team to ensure the improvements are followed up and implemented by management.
- The Council's Data Protection Officer has responsibility for Data Protection policies and ensuring that Officers and Members are informed and appropriately trained. The Council has appointed the Director of Place as the SIRO.
- The Council has invested in its cyber security capability to increase its resilience against a cyber-attack, by implementing additional security solutions, recruiting additional staff and resourcing an ongoing training programme to maintain the impact of this investment.
- Audit reviews ensure data is held securely whether electronically or hard copy.
- The MTFS is reviewed and updated on a regular basis by the Section 151 Officer to ensure that the Head of Paid Service, Monitoring Officer and Members are aware of the financial standing of the Council.
- A review was undertaken of the Overview and Scrutiny function one-year on from the replacement of three committees with a single committee. A survey was circulated to all Members and Senior Officers and the results were reported to the Constitution Working Group and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in spring 2025. The report identified a number of further improvements to the function and a proposal to reduce the size of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from 24 to 15 Members will be considered at the Annual Council meeting in May 2025.

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

- The Independent Remuneration Panel met in January 2025 to undertake a mid-term review of the Council's Members' Allowances Scheme 2023-27. The recommendations of the IRP will be considered by full Council in July 2025.

G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability

- Implementing good practice in transparency
- Implementing good practices in reporting
- Assurance and effective accountability

- Data in respect of transparency is published on the Council's website.
- The Council's Statement of Accounts is produced and published annually in accordance with statutory legislation. Aligned with this is the production of the Annual Governance Statement which identifies how the Council has met its governance reporting obligations.
- External Audit recommendations are reported to the Audit & Governance Committee, following the completion of their annual audit process, follow-ups of recommendations are also reported.
- Internal Audit processes ensure compliance with Public Sector Internal Auditing Standards. Internal Audit recommendations are followed up and reported to the Audit & Governance Committee, further follow-up is planned if recommendations have not been actioned in full.
- The Council has a process for the receipt and processing of freedom of information requests made under the Freedom of Information Act and environmental information requests under Environmental Information Regulations. The process has been reviewed during 2024/25 to improve efficiency.
- There is a presumption that all reports and the associated annexes to be considered in public meetings will be published. The Council's Legal Officer is consulted in circumstances where reports or annexes contain information which is considered to be exempt from publication.

4. REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS

The Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the senior managers, the annual opinion from the Head of Internal Audit, the Officer Corporate Governance Group and comments made by the External Auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.

The Council's process for maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the governance framework has included the following:

Statutory Officers, Directors, Executive Directors, Assistant Directors and Heads of Service/Business Managers are required to complete an Annual Assurance Statement at the end of the financial year. These governance declarations provide appropriate management assurance that key elements of the system of internal control are in place and are working effectively and help to identify areas for improvement.

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The Senior Leadership Team (including the Chief Executive, Section 151 Officer, the Monitoring Officer and Directors) review the Strategic Risk Register on a bi-monthly basis and Service/Project Risk Registers are maintained by each Head of Service/Business Manager.

A Governance Group meets quarterly to discuss and action matters such as staff declarations of interests/gifts and hospitality, audit recommendations, cyber security and GDPR updates/breaches register and counter fraud updates.

The SWAP Assistant Director (Head of Internal Audit) provides the Audit & Governance Committee, as the Committee charged with governance, with an Annual Opinion on the control environment of the Council, which includes its governance arrangements.

Investigation of, and decisions on, allegations of failure to comply with the Members' Code of Conduct are considered and determined by the Monitoring Officer and the Standards Sub-Committee taking into account the views of the Independent Person.

The Council have three Independent Persons ('IP's') as a result of appointing an additional two IP's, under the Localism Act 2011, during 2023/24 to ensure resilience if there was an absence or conflict of interest situation.

Induction processes are provided for newly elected Members, including a comprehensive welcome pack and training on the Code of Conduct.

Training and awareness sessions are carried out for the Audit & Governance Committee in relation to Informal/External Audit functions, risk, counter fraud, the statement of accounts and treasury annually.

Bishop Fleming have been appointed, by the Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA), as the External Auditors for the period 2023/24 to 2027/28.

The External Auditors present regular progress reports to the Audit and Governance Committee.

The External Auditor's Annual Audit Letter and follow-up of management responses to issues raised in the Letter or other reports are overseen by the Audit & Governance Committee.

Quarterly performance reports, including the budget position, are presented to the appropriate Member panel and Executive, demonstrating performance management against agreed performance indicators and budgets.

The Audit & Governance Committee reviews the Annual Statement of Accounts, including the final AGS, the Treasury Management Strategy and quarterly progress reports from both Internal Audit (SWAP) and External Audit (Bishop Fleming).

Full Council approves the annual budget and reviews and approves the Treasury Management Strategy, following recommendations from the Audit & Governance Committee.

Internal Audit monitors the quality and effectiveness of systems of internal control. Audit reports include an opinion that provides management with an independent judgement on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal controls. Reports including recommendations for improvement are detailed in an action plan agreed with the relevant Director/Head of Service/Business Manager.

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The Annual Internal Audit Opinion for 2024/2025, in respect of the areas reviewed during the year, was one of “Reasonable” Assurance, that there is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place.

The Council’s Financial Rules and Contract Rules are kept under review and revised periodically, with new Contract Procedure Rules adopted in March 2025 and the Financial Procedure Rules currently under review.

Other explicit review/assurance mechanisms, such as the Annual Report from the Local Government & Local Care Ombudsman and reports from SWAP or Bishop Fleming are also reviewed.

APPROVAL OF LEADER AND HEAD OF PAID SERVICE

We have been advised on the implications of the result of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework and that the arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework.

Signed on behalf of West Oxfordshire District Council:

Cllr Andrew Graham
Leader of the Council

Giles Hughes
Chief Executive

Date:

Date:

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

A

Accounting Period

The period of time covered by the accounts, normally a period of 12 months commencing on 1 April. The end of the accounting period is the Balance Sheet date.

Accounting Statements

The Council's Core Financial Statements and Supplementary Financial Statements.

Accruals

Sums included in the final accounts to cover income or expenditure attributable to the accounting period but for which no payment has yet been made or received at the Balance Sheet date.

Actuarial Gains and Losses (Pension Schemes)

Changes in the net pensions liability that arise because events have not matched assumptions at the last actuarial valuation or because actuarial assumptions have changed.

Amortisation

A term used to refer to the charging of the value of a transaction or asset (usually related to intangible assets or deferred charges) to the Income and Expenditure Account over a period of time, reflecting the value to the authority, similar to the depreciation charge for non-current assets.

Appointed Auditors

The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 includes a statutory requirement that a local authority's annual Statement of Accounts be subject to external review by a duly appointed external auditor. From 2018/19, the responsibility for the appointment of said external auditor has been devolved to Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSSA) for Local Government Authorities that have opted into its national scheme. Bishop Fleming is the Council's appointed auditors for the period 2023/24 to 2027/28.

Approved Institutions

Funds that are not immediately required may be invested but only with third parties meeting the credit rating criteria approved annually as part of the Council's Treasury Management Policies and Practices.

Asset

An item having value in monetary terms. See also Current Assets, Non-Current Assets and Financial Asset.

Audit of Accounts

An independent examination of the Council's financial affairs.

B

Billing Authority

A local authority responsible for collecting Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rates.

Budget

The forecast of net revenue and capital expenditure over an accounting period.

C

Capital Expenditure

Expenditure for the acquisition, provision or improvement of non-current assets, which will be of long-term value to the Council, providing services beyond the current accounting period.

Capital Programme

The capital schemes the Council intends to carry out over a specified time period.

Capital Receipts

Money received from the disposal of non-current assets or the repayment of grants and loans, which is available for financing future capital expenditure.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Collection Fund

A statutory fund maintained by a billing authority, which is used to record local taxes and Non-Domestic Rates collected by the authority, along with payments to precepting authorities, the national pool of Non-Domestic Rates and the billing authority's General Fund.

Community Assets

Assets which the Authority intends to hold in perpetuity, that have no determinable finite useful life and that may have restrictions on their disposal, e.g. parks, historical buildings. See also Non-Current Assets.

Consistency

The concept that the accounting treatment of like items within an accounting period and from one period to the next is the same.

Contingency

Money set aside in the budget to meet the cost of unforeseen items of expenditure, or shortfalls in income.

Contingent Asset

A possible asset that arises from past events whose existence will be confirmed only by the occurrence of one or more uncertain future events not wholly within the Council's control.

Contingent Liability

A contingent liability is either:

- a possible obligation arising from past events whose existence will be confirmed only by the occurrence of one or more uncertain future events not wholly within the Authority's control; or
- a present obligation arising from past events where it is not probable that a transfer of economic benefits will be required, or the amount cannot be measured with sufficient liability.

Council Tax

The main source of local taxation for local authorities. Council Tax is levied on households within its area by the billing authority and the proceeds are paid into the Collection Fund for distribution to precepting authorities and the Authority's General Fund.

Creditors

Amounts owed by the Authority for works completed, goods received, or services rendered before the end of the accounting period but for which payments have not been made.

Current Assets

Assets which can be expected to be consumed or realised during the next accounting period.

Current Liabilities

Amounts which will become due or could be called upon during the next accounting period.

Current Service Cost (Pensions)

The increase in the present value of a defined benefit scheme's liabilities as a result of employee service earned in the current period.

Curtailment (Pensions)

An event that reduces the expected years of future service of present employees or reduces for a number of employees the accrual of defined benefits for some or all of their future service.

D

Debtors

Amounts due to the Authority for works completed, goods received, or services rendered before the end of the accounting period but for which payments have not been received.

Depreciation

The estimated benefit of an asset consumed during the accounting period, owing to age, wear and tear, deterioration or obsolescence.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Direct Revenue Financing (DRF)

Resources provided from an authority's revenue budget to finance the cost of capital projects.

E

Equity

The Authority's value of total assets less total liabilities.

Equity Instrument

A contract that evidences a residual interest in the assets of an entity after deducting all of its liabilities.

Events After the Reporting Period

Those (non-adjusting) events, both favourable and unfavourable, of such materiality that their disclosure is required for the fair presentation of the Statement of Accounts, which occur between the Balance Sheet date and the date on which the Accounts are signed by the responsible financial officer.

Exceptional Items

Events or transactions that fall within the ordinary activities of the Authority and need to be disclosed separately due to their size to give fair presentation of the accounts.

External Audit

The independent examination of the activities and accounts of local authorities in order to give an opinion as to whether the Statement of Accounts have been prepared in accordance with legislative requirements and proper practices, and to ensure the authority has made proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

F

Fair Value (FV)

The price an asset could be exchanged for in an arm's length transaction less any grant.

Fees and Charges

Income raised by charging users of services for facilities, e.g. leisure centres, trade refuse, etc.

Finance Leases

A lease that transfers substantially all the risks and rewards of ownership of an asset to the lessee. Accounting guidance requires that it should be presumed that such transfer of risks and rewards occurs if at the inception of a lease the present value of the minimum lease payments including any initial payment, amounts to substantially all (normally 90% or more) of the fair value of the leased asset. The present value is calculated using the interest rate implicit in the lease.

Financial Asset

A right to future economic benefits controlled by the Authority that is represented by:

- cash
- an equity instrument of another entity
- a contractual right to receive cash (or another financial asset) from another entity.
- a contractual right to exchange financial assets/liabilities with another entity under conditions that are potentially favourable to the Authority.

Financial Instruments

Any contract that gives rise to a financial asset of one entity and a financial liability or equity instrument of another entity.

Financial Liability

An obligation to transfer economic benefits controlled by the Authority that is represented by:

- a contractual obligation to deliver cash (or another financial asset) to another entity.
- a contractual obligation to exchange financial assets/liabilities with another entity under conditions that are potentially unfavourable to the Authority.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

G

General Fund (GF)

The main revenue fund of a billing authority, used to meet day-to-day spending.

Government Grants

Grants made by the Government towards either revenue or capital expenditure to support the cost of providing the Authority's services. These grants may be specifically towards the cost of particular schemes or to support the revenue spend of the Authority.

Gross Expenditure

The total cost of providing the Authority's services before taking into account income from government grants and fees and charges for services.

Growth

Any increase in spending from one year to another which enables the Authority to pay for more services rather than to meet higher costs.

H

Housing Benefit (Rent Allowance)

An allowance to persons on low (or no) income to meet, in whole or part, their rent. Benefit is allowed or paid by local authorities but central government refunds part of the cost of the benefit provided and of the running costs of the service to local authorities.

I

Impairment

A reduction in the carrying value of a fixed asset below its carrying value (due to obsolescence, damage or an adverse change in the statutory environment)

Income

Amounts that the Authority receives or expects to receive from any source, including fees and charges, sales and grants.

Infrastructure Assets

Non-current assets belonging to the Authority which do not necessarily have a resale value e.g. highways, and for which a useful life span cannot be readily determined.

Intangible Assets

Non-financial assets which do not have physical substance but are identified and controlled by the Authority through legal rights e.g. IT Software.

Interest Receivable

The money earned from the investment of surplus cash.

Inventories

Items of raw materials and stores an authority has procured to use on a continuing basis and which it has not yet used.

Investment Property

Land and Buildings non-current assets held only for investment potential.

J

Joint Arrangement

An arrangement under which the participants engage in joint activities but do not create a legal entity because it would not carry on a trade or business of its own.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

L

Liability

A liability is where the Authority owes payment to an individual or another organisation. See also Contingent Liability, Current Liabilities and Financial Liability

Local Council Tax Support Scheme

Assistance provided by billing authorities to adults on low incomes to help pay their Council Tax bill. The cost is borne by the Council.

Long-Term Assets

Non-current and other assets which can be expected to be of use or benefit the Authority in providing its service for more than one accounting period.

Long-Term Liabilities

Amounts which will become due or could be called upon beyond the next accounting period.

M

Materiality

The concept that the Statement of Accounts should include all amounts which, if omitted, or misstated, could be expected to lead to a distortion of the financial statements to a reader.

Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)

The minimum amount which must be charged to an Authority's revenue account each year and set aside as provision for repayment of debt as required by the Local Government Act 2003.

N

National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR)

A levy on businesses, based on a national rate in the pound set by the Government, multiplied by the rateable value of the premises they occupy.

Net Book Value (NBV)

The amount at which non-current assets are included in the balance sheet.

Net Debt

The Authority's total borrowings less cash investments.

Net Expenditure

Gross expenditure less specific service income.

Net Interest on the Net Defined Benefit Liability (Pensions)

The net interest expense - the change during the period in the net benefit liability that arises from the passage of time.

Non-Current Assets

Property, plant and equipment and other assets that bring longer term benefit or service potential to the Authority.

Non-Operational Assets

Assets held by the Authority but not directly occupied, used or consumed in the direct delivery of services, e.g. assets in the course of construction and surplus land.

O

Operating Leases

A lease other than a Finance Lease (see above). The future obligations relating to operating leases are disclosed to provide the reader with an estimate of the outstanding un-discharged obligations in relation to such leases.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Operational Assets

Non-current assets held and occupied, used or consumed by the Authority in the direct delivery of those services for which it has a statutory or discretionary responsibility.

Outturn

Actual income and expenditure in a financial year (accounting period).

P

Past Service Costs (Pensions)

The increase in the present value of the defined benefit scheme liabilities, related to employee service in prior periods, arising as a result of, or improvement to, retirement benefits.

Pension Fund

An employees' pension fund maintained by an authority, or group of authorities, in order to make pension payments on the retirement of its participants; it is financed from contributions from the employing authority, the employee and investment income.

Precept

A levy made by one statutory body (Precepting Authority) on another to meet the net cost of its services.

Precepting Authorities

Those authorities that are not Billing Authorities, i.e. do not collect the Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rates. Police authorities are 'major' precepting authorities and town and parish councils are 'local' precepting authorities.

Prior Period Adjustments

Material adjustments applicable to prior years arising from changes in accounting policies or from the correction of fundamental errors. A fundamental error is one that is of such significance as to destroy the validity of the financial statements. This does not include normal recurring corrections or adjustments of accounting estimates made in prior years.

Provisions

Amounts set aside for the purposes of providing for any liability or loss which is likely or certain to be incurred but is uncertain as to the amount or the date on which it will arise, e.g. bad debts.

Prudence

The concept that income should only be anticipated to the extent that it will be received, as cash or other assets, with reasonable certainty and full and proper allowance should be made for all known and foreseeable losses and liabilities.

Prudential Code

The CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities – the guidance applicable from April 2017 for the greater freedom for authorities to borrow to fund capital investment (under the Local Government Act 2003). This Code requires the Authority to set and monitor a suite of Prudential Indicators, including its Affordable Borrowing Limit, and produce a capital strategy to give weight to local circumstances and explain their approach to borrowing and investment.

R

Rateable Value

The annual assumed rental value of a hereditament that is used for NNDR purposes.

Revenue Expenditure Funded by Capital Under Statue (REFCUS)

Expenditure of a capital nature but for which there is no tangible asset, e.g. renovation grants.

Related Parties

Two or more parties are related parties when at any time during the financial period:

- One party has direct or indirect control of the other party: or
- The parties are subject to common control from the same source; or
- One party has influence over the financial and operational policies of the other party to an extent that the other party might be inhibited from pursuing at all times its own separate interests: or
- The parties, in entering a transaction, are subject to influence from the same source to such an extent that one of the parties to the transaction has subordinated its own separate interest.

Examples of related parties to an authority include Central Government, Local Authorities and other bodies precepting or levying demands on the Council Tax, its Members, its Chief Officers and its Pension Fund.

For individuals identified as related parties, it is also presumed that members of the close family, or the same household, or any partnerships, companies in which the individual or a member of their close family, or the same household has a controlling interest, are deemed to be related parties.

Related Party Transactions

The transfer of assets or liabilities or the performance of services by, to or for a related party irrespective of whether a charge is made. The materiality of related party transactions is judged not only in terms of their significance to the Authority, but also in relation to its related party.

Reserves

Amounts set aside in the accounts for the purpose of meeting general, future expenditure. Reserves may also be used to smooth the cost of certain activities over a number of years. A distinction is drawn between reserves and provisions (see above), which are set up to meet known liabilities.

Retirement Benefits

All forms of consideration given by an employer in exchange for services rendered by employees that are payable after the completion of employment.

Return on Plan Assets (Pensions)

Changes during the period in the net benefit liability that arises from the passage of time excluding amounts included in Net Interest on the Net Defined Benefit Liability.

Revenue Expenditure

Spending on day-to-day items including employees' pay, premises and transport costs and supplies and services.

Revenue Support Grant

A general grant paid by the Government to Council's contributing towards the costs of their services.

Right of Use Asset

An asset that represents a lessee's right to use an underlying asset for the lease term.

S

Specific Grants

The term used to describe all government grants, including supplementary and special grants, to local authorities other than Revenue Support Grant and capital grants.

T

Total Cost

The actual cost of services reflecting all of the direct, indirect and overhead costs that have been incurred in providing the service, even where the expenditure is not under the control of the service's chief officer.

W

Work In Progress

The cost of work carried out on an uncompleted project at the Balance Sheet date, which should be accounted for within the accounting period.

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 WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE – 27 NOVEMBER 2025
Subject	2025/26 HALF YEAR TREASURY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY AND PERFORMANCE AS AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2025
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr Alaric Smith Executive Member for Finance Email: alaric.smith@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance Email: madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Sian Hannam, Treasury Accountant Email: sian.hannam@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	To provide Members with an update on Treasury Management activity, the performance of internal and external funds and prudential indicators for the period 1st April 2025 – 30th Sept 2025
Annexes	N/A
Recommendation(s)	That the Executive resolves to: I. Note the contents of the report
Corporate priorities	Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No

1. BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

- 1.1** The overall performance of investments in the 6 months to 30th September 2025 was positive, returning interest of £953,176 against the annual revenue budget of £1,156,230, but also generating an unrealised capital gain of 2.83% or £318,712 in the year to date.
- 1.2** Pooled Funds have maintained strong dividend returns in the first six months of the year and returned 4.83% against the £12m invested in this area (further details provided in section 5). The capital value of pooled funds continues to be affected by economic conditions in the world markets but have provided a gain in the first six months. Pooled funds are intended to be long term investments where short term fluctuations in the capital value are expected. The Council's Treasury Management adviser (Arlingclose) is closely monitoring these funds, and they continue to forecast that the capital values will recover over the next 2-3 years as gilts and bond revenue rates start to decline again.
- 1.3** The Council has benefitted from higher revenue returns due to a delay in Bank of England Interest Rate cuts leading to a sustained higher Bank Rate in the first six months of 2025/26.
- 1.4** This report includes the quarterly updates on treasury management prudential indicators, as required by the 2021 Prudential Code published by CIPFA.
- 1.5** The Council complied with the majority of the Prudential Indicators for 2025/26 as set out in the budget approved by full Council in February 2025. Further details can be found in section 8 of this report.

2. ECONOMIC & FINANCIAL MARKETS BACKGROUND

- 2.1** In the first quarter, global markets were shaken by U.S. trade tariffs, which caused uncertainty and affected both stock (equity) and bond markets. In the second quarter, although uncertainty continued, stock markets started to recover, and U.S. and U.K. government bond yields began moving in different directions after previously tracking closely.
- 2.2** From late June concerns about the U.K.'s economy, government finances, and speculation about the autumn Budget pushed up yields on medium- and long-term government bonds (gilts). The 30-year gilt yield even reached its highest level in almost 30 years.
- 2.3** The Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) cut interest rates twice—first from 4.5% to 4.25% in May, then to 4.0% in August after a rare second vote. The final decision was close (5 votes to 4). In September, most members voted to keep rates steady, while two wanted another cut. The MPC remains divided on whether inflation risks outweigh the risks of slower economic growth.
- 2.4** The August BoE Monetary Policy Report highlighted that after peaking in Q3 2025, inflation is projected to fall back to target by mid-2027. This decline will be helped by slower economic activity and the ongoing impact of previous interest rates. In the short term, economic growth (GDP) is likely to stay weak, while the medium-term outlook will depend on both UK and global developments.

2.5 The Council's treasury adviser, Arlingclose, expects the Bank of England to cut interest rates again because it is prioritising weak economic growth over concerns about inflation. One more cut is likely during 2025/26, which would bring the Bank Rate down to 3.75%. In the short term, the outlook is fairly balanced, but further ahead, risks lean towards slower growth due to weak consumer confidence and low business investment. There is also significant uncertainty about the autumn Budget and how it might affect the economy.

2.6 The US and Eurozone

In the U.S. uncertainty over trade policy and pressure from President Trump led the Federal Reserve to keep interest rates steady for most of the period. In September, it cut rates slightly to 4.00%–4.25%. The Fed also forecast that rates would fall by 0.50% by the end of 2025 and another 0.25% in 2026. It expects U.S. GDP growth of 1.6% in 2025, inflation at 3%, and unemployment at 4.5%.

2.7 The Eurozone Central Bank (ECB) cut its main interest rate from 2.25% to 2.0% in June and then held it steady. Its forecasts show inflation averaging 2.1% in 2025 before dropping below target in 2026, with GDP growth expected to improve and risks becoming more balanced.

2.8 After sharp declines early in the period, market confidence improved, but risky assets remain volatile. Bond yields fell at first but later rose—especially in the UK—because investors demanded higher returns due to concerns about economic risk. Equity markets recovered losses from April and remain strong despite ongoing uncertainty.

2.9 Credit Review - Arlingclose, the Council's treasury adviser, kept its recommended maximum investment period for most banks at six months, with others limited to 100 days.

2.10 Financial markets are expected to stay volatile in the short term. Credit risk indicators, such as credit default swaps, will be monitored closely. The Council's approved list of banks and investment durations will continue to be reviewed regularly.

3. LOCAL CONTEXT

3.1 On 31st March 2025, the Council had net investments of £24.350m arising from its revenue and capital income and expenditure. The underlying need to borrow for capital purposes is measured by the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR), while balance sheet resources are the underlying resources available for investment. These items are summarised in Table I.

Table 1: Balance Sheet Summary

	31.3.25 Actual £m	31.3.26 Forecast £m
General Fund CFR	29.41	34.54
External borrowing	0.00	0.00
Internal borrowing	29.41	34.54
Less: Balance sheet resources	(34.106)	(35.472)
Net investments	(4.696)	(0.932)

- 3.2** The treasury management position on 30th September and the change over the six months is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Treasury Management Summary

	31.3.25 Balance £m	Movement £m	30.9.25 Balance £m	30.9.25 Rate %
Total borrowing	0	0	0	
Long-term investments	11.934	0.278	12.212	4.83
Short-term investments	0.062	2.524	2.586	4.03
Cash and cash equivalents	12.354	8.589	20.943	4.03
Total investments	24.350	11.391	35.741	4.31

4. BORROWING STRATEGY AND ACTIVITY

- 4.1** As outlined in the Treasury Management Strategy, the Council's chief objective when borrowing has been to strike a low-risk balance between securing lower interest costs and achieving cost certainty over the period for which funds are required. Flexibility to renegotiate loans should the Council's long-term plans change has been a secondary objective. The Council's borrowing strategy thus far has maintained borrowing and investments below their underlying levels, known as internal borrowing.
- 4.2** The CIPFA Prudential Code (2021) states that councils must not borrow money just to make a profit from investments. It is also considered imprudent for councils to take on new borrowing or make spending decisions that increase their borrowing requirement unless the purpose is directly linked to delivering council services. In addition, Public Works Loan Board (PWLb) loans are no longer available for councils that plan to buy assets mainly to earn income, except when refinancing existing loans.
- 4.3** At 30th September, the Council had no external borrowing.

5. TREASURY INVESTMENT ACTIVITY

- 5.1 A counterparty list recommended and reviewed by the Council's treasury management advisors, Arlingclose is received monthly, and the treasury team use this to evaluate investment options. At the end of the period the majority of counterparties remained on a 100-day limit maintaining precautions brought about by uncertainty in the market. The treasury team continues to hold most of in-house balances in the liquid Money Market Funds and Call Accounts and making short term deposits with the UK Debt Management Office (DMO). This enables continued cash support for the services the Council provides to the public and provides funding for the Council's capital programme, without the need to borrow.
- 5.2 The Council holds significant invested funds, representing income received in advance of expenditure plus balances and reserves held. The investment position is shown in table 3.

Table 3: Treasury Investment Position

	31.3.25 Balance £m	Net Movement £m	30.9.25 Balance £m	30.9.25 Income Return %
Banks & building societies (unsecured)	0.051	1.460	1.511	3.97
Bank of England DMADF	0.000	1.002	1.002	3.96
Money Market Funds	12.303	8.640	20.943	4.23
Other Pooled Funds				
- <i>Equity & Multi Asset income funds</i>	7.662	0.295	7.957	4.83
- Bond income funds	3.645	0.033	3.678	4.83
- <i>Real Estate Investment Trusts</i>	0.690	(0.040)	0.650	3.00
Total investments	24.351	11.390	35.741	4.31%

- 5.3 Both the CIPFA Code and government guidance require the Council to invest its funds prudently, and to have regard to the security and liquidity of its treasury investments before seeking the optimum rate of return, or yield. The Council's objective when investing money is to strike an appropriate balance between risk and return, minimising the risk of incurring losses from defaults and the risk of receiving unsuitably low investment income.
- 5.4 As demonstrated by the liability benchmark in this report, the Council expects to be a long-term borrower and new treasury investments are therefore primarily made to manage day-to-day cash flows using short-term minimal risk instruments. The existing portfolio of strategic pooled funds will be maintained to diversify risk into different asset classes and boost investment income.
- 5.5 Bank Rate reduced from 4.50% to 4.00% in the six months to 30 September, with short term interest rates largely being around these levels. The rates on DMADF deposits ranged between 4.46% and 3.95% and money market rates between 4.50% and 4.09%.

- 5.6 The progression of risk and return metrics are shown in the Arlingclose quarterly investment benchmarking report; the results of which are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Investment Benchmarking – Treasury investments managed in-house.

	Credit Score	Credit Rating	Bail-in Exposure	Weighted Average Maturity (days)	Rate of Return %
30.9.2024	4.82	A+	96%	6	4.31
Similar LAs	4.53	A+	64%	53	4.27
All LAs	4.54	A+	62%	11	4.20

- 5.7 **Externally Managed Pooled Funds** - £12m of the Council's investments are invested in externally managed strategic pooled bond, equity, and multi-asset funds where short-term security and liquidity are lesser considerations, and the objectives instead are regular revenue income and long-term price stability. These funds generated an interest income return of £300,412 in the first half of the year which supports service delivery, and an unrealised capital gain of £318,712. The current Pooled Fund position can be seen in table 5.

Table 5 Current Pooled Funds

Fund Manager	Original Investment	Value 31st March 2025	Value 30th September	6 Month Dividend 2025/26	2025/26 Capital Gain/(Loss)	Capital Gain/(Loss) vs Original Investment
	£	£	£	£	£	£
M&G Strategic (B)	2,000,000	1,760,300	1,773,981	45,103	13,680.	(226,019)
Royal London (B)	2,000,000	1,862,609	1,881,251	46,498	18,642.	(118,749)
Schroders E	1,000,000	951,479	1,016,710	46,060	65,230.	16,710.
Threadneedle UK E	1,000,000	1,139,932	1,229,226	21,747	89,294.	229,226.
CCLA Diversified Fund (MA)	3,000,000	2,751,339	2,732,484	51,931	(18,856)	(267,516)
Aegon/Kames (MA)	3,000,000	2,778,320	2,929,041	89,074	150,721.	(70,959)
Total - Current funds	12,000,000	11,243,980	11,562,692	300,412	318,712.	(437,308)

(MA = Multi Asset; B= Bond; E= Equity)

- 5.8 Most types of investments performed well during the first half of 2025/26, even though markets were volatile and heavily influenced by political and economic events.

- 5.9 The biggest shock came early in the period when U.S. President Trump announced “Liberation Day” tariffs on 2 April. This caused sharp drops in global stock and bond markets. Confidence improved after the U.S. softened its stance, and markets recovered fairly quickly, although uncertainty remained.
- 5.10 Bond markets stayed unpredictable as investors weighed political risks and concerns about government finances. Corporate bonds generally delivered positive returns, though not as strong as stocks. Longer-term government bonds saw yields rise (meaning prices fell), especially in the UK, where worries about fiscal issues and persistent inflation pushed 30-year gilt yields to their highest level since the late 1990s.
- 5.11 The change in the Council’s funds’ capital values and income return over the 6-month period is shown in Table 5.
- 5.12 Despite ongoing market volatility, most major types of investments delivered positive returns in the first half of 2025/26. Shares (equities) performed best, while bonds (fixed income) and property also contributed positively.

6. TREASURY PERFORMANCE

- 6.1 The Council measures the financial performance of its treasury management activities both in terms of its impact on the revenue budget and its relationship to benchmark interest rates, as shown in table 6.

Table 6: Performance

	Q2 Actual £m	2025_26 Budget £m	Over/ under	Actual %	LA's Average Benchmark %	Over/ under
Short-term investments	0.117	0	0.117	4.15	4.06	0.09
MMF & Call Accounts	0.418	0.348	0.070	4.23	4.06	0.17
Strategic Funds	0.300	0.506	-0.206	4.83	4.94	-0.11
Long Term Loans	0.102	0.273	-0.171	2.84	N/A	N/A
REIT	0.015	0.029	-0.014	3.00	N/A	N/A
Total treasury investments	0.952	1.156	-0.204	4.81	4.90	-0.09

7. COMPLIANCE

- 7.1 The Director of Finance reports that all treasury management activities undertaken during the quarter complied with the principles in the Treasury Management Code and the Council’s approved Treasury Management Strategy. Compliance with specific investment limits is demonstrated in table 7.

Table 7: Investment Limits

	2025/26 Maximum £m	30.9.25 Actual £m	2025/26 Limit £m	Complied? Yes/No
Any single organisation, except the UK Government	2	0	3	YES
Any group of organisations under the same ownership	3	0	5	YES
Any group of pooled funds under the same management	0	0	5	YES
Limit per non-UK country	0	0	1	YES
Registered providers and registered social landlords	9.448	9.33	10	YES
Unsecured investments with banks	3	2.388	5	YES
Money Market Funds	20.066	20.066	25	YES
Strategic pooled funds	12	12	25	YES
Real Estate Investment Trusts	1	1	3	YES

7.2 Compliance with the Authorised Limit and Operational Boundary for external debt is demonstrated in table 8.

Table 8: Debt and the Authorised Limit and Operational Boundary

	Q2 2025/26 Maximum	30.9.25 Actual	2025/26 Operational Boundary	2025/26 Authorised Limit	Complied? Yes/No
	£m	£m	£m	£m	
Borrowing	0	0	36.54	41.54	YES
Total debt	0	0			

7.3 Since the operational boundary is a management tool for in-year monitoring it is not significant if the operational boundary is breached on occasions due to variations in cash flow, and this is not counted as a compliance failure.

8. TREASURY MANAGEMENT PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS

- 8.1 As required by the 2021 CIPFA Treasury Management Code, the Council monitors and measures the following treasury management prudential indicators.
- 8.2 **Liability Benchmark** - This indicator compares the Council's actual existing borrowing against a liability benchmark that has been calculated to show the lowest risk level of borrowing. The liability benchmark is a valuable tool to help establish whether the Council is likely to be a long-term borrower or long-term investor in the future and so shape its strategic focus and decision making. It represents an estimate of the cumulative amount of external borrowing the Council must hold to fund its current capital and revenue plans while keeping treasury investments at the minimum level of £4m required to manage day-to-day cash flow.

	31.3.25 Actual	31.3.26 Forecast	31.3.27 Forecast
Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)	29.41	34.54	38.95
Less: usable reserves	(34.11)	(36.10)	(27.54)
Less: working capital	(17.54)	(13.40)	(13.40)
Net loans requirement	(22.23)	(14.96)	(1.99)
Plus: Liquidity allowance	14.00	14.00	14.00
Liability benchmark	(8.23)	(0.96)	12.01
External borrowing	0.00	0.00	3.85

- 8.3 **Long-term Treasury Management Investments:** The purpose of this indicator is to control the Council's exposure to the risk of incurring losses by seeking early repayment of its investments. The prudential limits on the long-term treasury management limits are:

	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	No fixed date
Limit on principal invested beyond year end	£25m	£25m	£25m	£25m
Actual principal invested beyond year end	0	n/a	n/a	£13m
Complied?	YES	YES	YES	YES

- 8.4 Long-term investments with no fixed maturity date include strategic pooled funds, real estate investment trusts and directly held equity but exclude money market funds and bank accounts with no fixed maturity date as these are considered short-term.
- 8.5 **Security:** The Council has adopted a voluntary measure of its exposure to credit risk by monitoring the value-weighted average credit rating of its investment portfolio. This is calculated by applying a score to each investment (AAA=1, AA+=2, etc.) and taking the arithmetic average, weighted by the size of each investment. Unrated investments are assigned a score based on their perceived risk.

	2025/26 Target	30.9.2025	Complied?
Portfolio average credit rating	A-	A+	YES

- 8.6** Interest Rate Exposures: This indicator is set to control the Council's exposure to interest rate risk.

Interest rate risk indicator	2025/26 Target	30.09.25 Actual	Complied?
Upper limit on one-year revenue impact of a 1% <u>rise</u> in interest rates	160,000	483,588	No
Upper limit on one-year revenue impact of a 1% <u>fall</u> in interest rates	-160,000	- 483,588	No

Due to the lack of capital expenditure, the weighted average on variable rate investments (MMFs) has been higher than originally forecast. The 1% increase was therefore higher than the target and we have generated more interest income.

9. Non-Treasury Management Prudential Indicators

- 9.1** The Council measures and manages its capital expenditure, borrowing and service investments with references to the following indicators.
- 9.2** It is now a requirement of the CIPFA Prudential Code that these are reported on a quarterly basis.
- 9.3** Capital Expenditure: The Council has undertaken and is planning capital expenditure as summarised below.

	2024/25 actual £m	2025/26 forecast £m	2026/27 forecast £m	2027/28 forecast £m
General Fund services	11.28	11.21	2.87	1.97

- 9.4** The main capital expenditure this quarter has been £256,800 installing solar panels to Carterton Leisure Centre funded by a grant, £142,180 on replacement CCTV cameras across the district and £127,408 in repairs to Council owned operational buildings.
- 9.5** Capital Financing Requirement: The Council's cumulative outstanding amount of debt finance is measured by the capital financing requirement (CFR). This increases with new debt-financed capital expenditure and reduces with MRP / loans fund repayments and capital receipts used to replace debt.

	2024/25 actual £m	2025/26 forecast £m	2026/27 forecast £m	2027/28 forecast £m
General Fund services	29.41	34.54	33.50	32.15
TOTAL CFR	29.41	34.54	33.50	32.15

- 9.6** Gross Debt and the Capital Financing Requirement: Statutory guidance is that debt should remain below the capital financing requirement, except in the short term. The Council has

complied and expects to continue to comply with this requirement in the medium term as is shown below.

	2024/25 actual £m	2025/26 forecast £m	2026/27 forecast £m	2027/28 forecast £m	Debt 30.09.25
Debt (Incl.PFI & leases)	0	3.35	3.85	0	0
Capital Financing Requirement	28.62	34.54	33.5	32.15	

- 9.7 Debt and the Authorised Limit and Operational Boundary:** The Council is legally obliged to set an affordable borrowing limit (also termed the Authorised Limit for external debt) each year. In line with statutory guidance, a lower “operational boundary” is also set as a warning level should debt approach the limit.

	Maximum debt 2025/26	Debt at 30.09.25	2025/26 Authorised Limit £m	2025/26 Operational Boundary £m	Complied? Yes/No
External Borrowing	0	0	41.54	36.54	Yes
Total Debt	0	0	0	0	Yes

Since the operational boundary is a management tool for in-year monitoring it is not significant if the boundary is breached on occasions due to variations in cash flow, and this is not counted as a compliance failure.

- 9.8 Net Income from Commercial and Service Investments to Net Revenue Stream:** The Council’s income from commercial and service investments as a proportion of its net revenue stream has been and is expected to be as indicated below.

	2024/25 actual £m	2025/26 forecast £m	2026/27 forecast £m	2027/28 forecast £m
Investment Property Investments	3.27	3.27	3.27	3.27
Service Investments	1.33	1.24	1.40	1.40
Net Revenue Stream	4.60	4.51	4.67	4.67
Proportion of Net Revenue Stream	16.95	18.49	15.31	14.86
	27.14%	24.39%	30.50%	31.43%

- 9.9 Proportion of Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream:** Although capital expenditure is not charged directly to the revenue budget, interest payable on loans and MRP / loans fund repayments are charged to revenue.

The net annual charge is known as financing costs; this is compared to the net revenue stream i.e. the amount funded from Council Tax, business rates, and general government grants.

	2024/25 actual £m	2025/26 forecast £m	2026/27 forecast £m	2027/28 forecast £m
Interest Payable	0.00	0.00	0.16	0.15
MRP	0.52	0.56	0.69	0.69
Total borrowing costs	0.52	0.56	0.85	0.84
Net Revenue Stream	16.95	18.49	15.31	14.86
Proportion of Net Revenue Stream	3.07%	3.02%	5.55%	5.65%

9.10 Conclusion

Overall performance of investments in the 6 months to 30th September 2025 was positive and the Council complied with the majority of the Prudential Indicators for 2025/26 as set out in the budget.

10. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

11. Legal Implications

There are no legal implication arising from this report.

12. Risk Assessment

None required as a result of this report.

13. Equalities Impact

No direct equalities impact with regards to the content of this report.


14. Climate and Ecological Emergencies Implications

None.

15. Background Papers

None.

(END)

 WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 27 NOVEMBER 2025
Subject	INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT
Wards affected	None
Accountable member	Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance Email: Alaric.Smith@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance Email: Madhu.Richards@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Lucy Cater, Head of Internal Audit. Assistant Director, SWAP Internal Audit Services Email: Lucy.Cater@swapaudit.co.uk
Summary/Purpose	To present a summary of the audit work concluded since the last meeting of this Committee.
Annexes	Annex A – Report of Internal Audit Plan Progress Annex B – Report of Agreed Actions
Recommendation(s)	That the Audit and Governance Committee resolves to: I. Note the Internal Audit Plan Progress report
Corporate priorities	Internal Audit supports all Council Corporate Priorities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting Residents First • A Good Quality of Life for All • A Better Environment for People and Wildlife • Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO

Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Not Applicable

1. BACKGROUND

The Internal Audit Service is provided to West Oxfordshire District Council ('the Council') by SWAP Internal Audit Services (SWAP). SWAP is a local authority-controlled company.

The report attached at Annex A sets out the work undertaken by SWAP for the Council within the reporting period. It follows the risk-based auditing principles and, therefore, this is an opportunity for the Audit and Governance Committee to be aware of emerging issues which have resulted from SWAP involvement.

Officers from SWAP will be in attendance at the Committee meeting and will be available to address Members' questions.

2. MAIN POINTS

The progress report (Annex A) enables the Audit and Governance Committee to monitor the work of SWAP and ensure that it remains effective. It also provides the Committee with assurance opinions over areas reviewed within the reporting period, details of audit recommendations and the outcome of follow-up reviews conducted on previous audit recommendations.

Our plan remains flexible to respond to requests for audits or ad hoc reviews.

We continue to follow up all agreed actions. A report (Annex B) showing all open agreed actions has been included for Members information.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

Not Applicable

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Internal Audit Service is operating within the contract sum.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None directly from this report. Internal Audit reviews consider compliance with legislation relevant to the service area under review.

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

The weaknesses in the control framework, identified by the Internal Audit activity, continues to threaten organisational objectives if recommendations are not implemented.

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT

Not Applicable

8. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Not Applicable

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 The following documents have been identified by the author of the report in accordance with section 100D.5(a) of the Local Government Act 1972 and are listed in accordance with section 100 D.1(a) for inspection by members of the public:

- Internal Audit Reports

9.2 These documents will be available for inspection online at www.westoxon.gov.uk or by contacting democratic services democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk for a period of up to 4 years from the date of the meeting.

(END)

West Oxfordshire District Council

Report of Internal Audit Activity

November 2025

Contents

The contacts at SWAP in connection with this report are:

Lucy Cater

Assistant Director

Tel: 01285 623340

lucy.cater@swapaudit.co.uk

Jaina Mistry

Principal Auditor

Tel: 01285 623337

jaina.mistry@swapaudit.co.uk

Charlie Hartshorn-Powell

Principal Auditor

[charlie.hartshorn-](mailto:charlie.hartshorn-powell@swapaudit.co.uk)

[powell@swapaudit.co.uk](mailto:charlie.hartshorn-powell@swapaudit.co.uk)

- Contents:

Internal Audit Definitions

Audit Plan Progress

Finalised Audit Assignments

Internal Audit Definitions

At the conclusion of audit assignment work each review is awarded a “Control Assurance Definition”;

- **No**
- **Limited**
- **Reasonable**
- **Substantial**



Audit Framework Definitions

Control Assurance Definitions

No	Immediate action is required to address fundamental gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance identified. The system of governance, risk management and control is inadequate to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
Limited	Significant gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance were identified. Improvement is required to the system of governance, risk management and control to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
Reasonable	There is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. Some issues, non-compliance or scope for improvement were identified which may put at risk the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
Substantial	A sound system of governance, risk management and control exists, with internal controls operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the area audited.

Non-Opinion – In addition to our opinion based work we will provide consultancy services. The “advice” offered by Internal Audit in its consultancy role may include risk analysis and evaluation, developing potential solutions to problems and providing controls assurance. Consultancy services from Internal Audit offer management the added benefit of being delivered by people with a good understanding of the overall risk, control and governance concerns and priorities of the organisation.

Recommendations are prioritised from 1 to 3 on how important they are to the service/area audited. These are not necessarily how important they are to the organisation at a corporate level.

Each audit covers key risks. For each audit a risk assessment is undertaken whereby with management risks for the review are assessed at the Corporate inherent level (the risk of exposure with no controls in place) and then once the audit is complete the Auditors assessment of the risk exposure at Corporate level after the control environment has been tested. All assessments are made against the risk appetite agreed by the SWAP Management Board.



Audit Framework Definitions

Categorisation of Recommendations

When making recommendations to Management it is important that they know how important the recommendation is to their service. There should be a clear distinction between how we evaluate the risks identified for the service but scored at a corporate level and the priority assigned to the recommendation. No timeframes have been applied to each Priority as implementation will depend on several factors; however, the definitions imply the importance.

	Categorisation of Recommendations
Priority 1	Findings that are fundamental to the integrity of the service’s business processes and require the immediate attention of management.
Priority 2	Important findings that need to be resolved by management
Priority 3	Finding that requires attention.

Definitions of Risk

Risk	Reporting Implications
High	Issues that we consider need to be brought to the attention of both senior management and the Audit Committee.
Medium	Issues which should be addressed by management in their areas of responsibility.
Low	Issues of a minor nature or best practice where some improvement can be made.

Audit Plan Progress

Audit Type	Audit Area	Status	Opinion	No of Rec	Priority			Comments
					1	2	3	
Operational	Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit	Final Report	Low Substantial	1	-	-	1	Reported in September
Key Financial Control	Payroll – Publica Controls	Final Report	Mid Substantial	0	-	-	-	Reported in September
Key Financial Control	Payroll – Council Controls	Final Report	Mid Reasonable	0	-	1	-	Reported in September
Operational	Leisure Facilities	Draft Report						
Governance	Data Retention	Draft Report						
Operational	Digital Exclusion	Final Report	Advisory					
ICT	Disaster Recovery – Revenues and Benefits	Final Report	Low Substantial	0	-	-	-	Report included
Operational	Climate Change – Operational	In Progress						
Key Financial Control	Council Tax and NNDR	In Progress						
Key Financial Control	Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support	In Progress						
Governance	Business Continuity Plans (Services)	Deferred						
Follow-Up	Data Breaches / Protection	In Progress						
Operational	Disabled Facilities Grants	Initiated						
Key Financial Control	Bank Reconciliations	In Progress						

Audit Plan Progress

Audit Type	Audit Area	Status	Opinion	No of Rec	Priority			Comments
					1	2	3	
Operational	Accounts Payable – Quarterly Review 2025/26	On Going						
Grant Certification	Carbon Data 2023/24	Ready to Start						
Support	Business Grant Funding – Aged Debt	On Going						Quarterly review of Business Grant Overpayment Aged Debts with Head of Service, Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit for reporting to BEIS
Support / Advisory	Support to Publica Transition Programme Phase 2	Complete						
Support / Advisory	Oxfordshire Waste Partnership	On Going						
Advisory	Procurement and Commissioning Group	On Going						
Advisory	Health and Safety Working Group	On Going						
Advisory	Management Team Meetings	On Going						
Support	Co-Ordination Team / Emergency Planning	On Going						
Follow-Up	Follow-Up of Agreed Actions (not included in an audit above)	On Going						
Other Audit Involvement	Working with the Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit	On Going						
Other Audit Involvement	Management of the IA Function and Client Support	On Going						

Audit Plan Progress

Audit Type	Audit Area	Status	Opinion	No of Rec				Comments
					Priority			
					1	2	3	
Other Audit Involvement	Contingency – Provision for New Work based on emerging risks							

The following are the Internal Audit reports, of each audit review finalised,
since the last Committee update

ICT Disaster Recovery (Revenues & Benefits) – Final Report – October 2025

Audit Objective

To replicate an ICT disaster recovery (Revenues and Benefits service) scenario and provide assurance that Disaster Recovery arrangements are managed effectively.

Executive Summary



Assurance Opinion

The review confirmed a sound system of governance, risk management and control, with internal controls operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives.

Management Actions

Priority 1	0
Priority 2	0
Priority 3	0
Total	0

Organisational Risk Assessment

Medium

Our audit work includes areas that we consider have a medium organisational risk and potential impact.

Key Conclusions



Disaster Recovery Test: This test intends to replicate a disaster scenario where the Council's physical servers are unavailable. Established criteria for a successful test this year is being able to fully recover and operate the Revenue & Benefits application for each of the 4 Councils in a secure cloud environment using cloud back-ups. Preparation is crucial for ensuring the cloud recovered applications do not interfere with the live applications hosted on the Council servers.



Challenges Encountered: When the recovery test started it was identified that some supporting systems were not starting as expected when mounted in Microsoft Azure (Cloud Computing Platform). This was tracked back to a recent change in the way Microsoft Azure handles recovered systems. It was decided, given that this was a test scenario, there was insufficient working hours' time to complete the recovery, so the test was rescheduled while a solution was identified and implemented. If this had happened in a real disaster it is estimated that this problem would have delayed recovery by approximately 6 hours. A permanent solution for this issue is now in place.

The rescheduled test successfully navigated the issues from the first attempt and the recovery process began as expected. The team reconvened 48 hours later to allow sufficient time for data transfer and working hours. The necessary technical tasks were completed to bring the systems online allowing user access to the system. Screenshots were then obtained to demonstrate that test data was present in the recovered systems demonstrating system integrity.

Audit Scope

The audit includes:

- Test data insertion into the Council's Revenues & Benefits systems prior to the test commencing.
- Full walkthrough of the recovery process of the Council's Revenues & Benefits system.
- Confirmation that the data restored is accurate and data inserted in the on-premises system is present in the recovered system.

Scope exclusions: Service area plans are not included in this ICT review as they are audited separately.

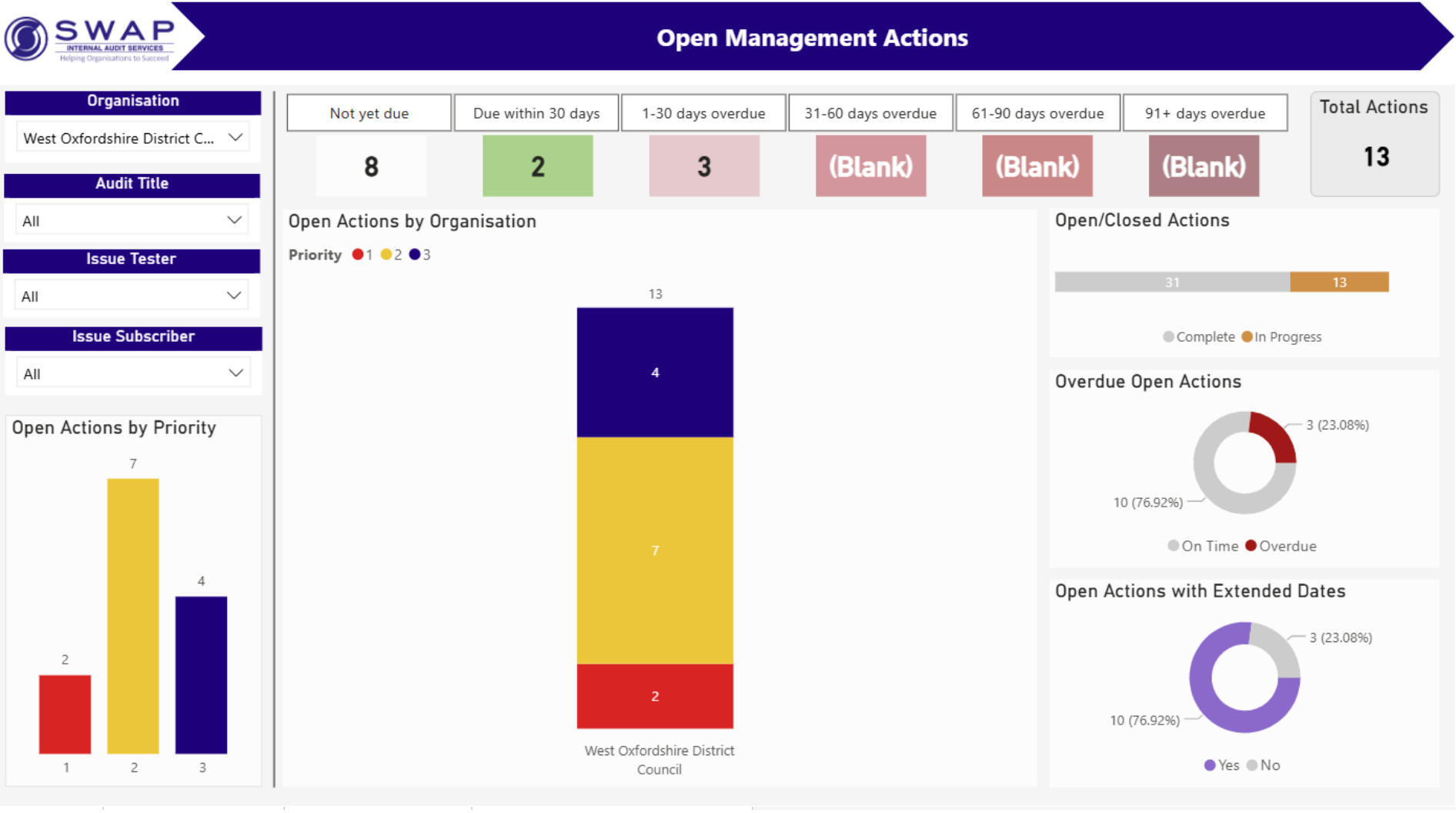
Other Relevant Information

Senior ICT Officers have advised that the longer recovery times compared to last year's recovery test is due to the systems being approximately 4 times larger. A 48-hour window was allocated for this test, but it's important to note that recovery times will vary significantly depending on the nature of the disaster and the priority of systems requiring recovery.

Cyber incidents at neighbouring authorities have further demonstrated that borough and district Councils are targets for hackers. Officers see the threat of a cyber incident as a matter of when and not if. This is the main factor in assessing the Organisational Risk Assessment as "Medium".


Agreed Actions – November 2025

SWAP Action Tracker - Cotswold and Cheltenham Team Analytics DB Access



Open Agreed Actions - November 2025										
ID (Action Plan)	ID (Issue)	Audit Title	Title (Issue)	Issue Status	Period	Priority Score	AP Status	Original Timescale	Timescale	Follow-Up Assessment
2986	2788	WODC - Property Services - Compliance and Health & Safety - March 2023	Central Property Database Accuracy	Pending Remediation	2023/24	3	In Progress	30/09/24	31/10/25	Nov 2025: We have been advised that this is complete. Evidence to be reviewed.
5340	4997	WODC - Members Allowances and Expenses 2024/25	Budget Monitoring.	Pending Remediation	2024/25	2	In Progress	28/02/25	31/03/26	
5751	5391	WODC - Data Breaches - 2023/24	WODC Data Protection Suggestions	Pending Remediation	2024/25	2	In Progress	30/06/25	31/12/25	Sept 2025: Follow-Up audit in progress
5929	5563	WODC - CT/NNDR 2024/25	WODC Revenues and Benefits Suspense Account Monitoring	Pending Remediation	2024/25	3	In Progress	31/03/25	31/10/25	This action is being followed up as part of this year's Revenues and Benefits audit.
5930	5564	WODC - CT/NNDR 2024/25	WODC Historical Revenues and Benefits Suspense Account Entries.	Pending Remediation	2024/25	2	In Progress	31/03/25	31/10/25	This action is being followed up as part of this year's Revenues and Benefits audit.
5938	5572	WODC - Taxi Licensing Safeguarding Follow Up	WODC Taxi Licensing Income Reconciliation.	Pending Remediation	2024/25	2	In Progress	30/06/25	30/11/25	Nov 2025: We have been advised that the Officer has been on long term sick, and is currently on a phased return. Deadline extended.
5953	5587	WODC - Procurement Cards Follow Up 2024/25	WODC - Procurement Card Spend Transparency reports.	Pending Remediation	2024/25	3	In Progress	30/06/25	30/11/25	Oct 2025: Partially implemented - The policy and procedure document was updated in August. The card expenditure requires processing from May onwards, but we were advised that this is delayed due to leave and sickness.
6603	6185	WODC - S106s 2023/24	Roles, responsibilities, and processes not clearly understood by all officers and external stakeholders.	Pending Remediation	2024/25	2	In Progress	30/09/25	28/02/26	Nov 2025: In progress. Deadline extended.
6604	6186	WODC - S106s 2023/24	A review of engagement with the S106 consultation process is required.	Pending Remediation	2024/25	2	In Progress	30/09/25	28/02/26	Nov 2025: In progress. Deadline extended.
6605	6187	WODC - S106s 2023/24	Monitoring processes for non-financial clauses are insufficient	Pending Remediation	2024/25	2	In Progress	31/12/25	28/02/26	Nov 2025: In progress. Deadline extended.
6606	6188	WODC - S106s 2023/24	Improvements to S106 contribution management required	Pending Remediation	2024/25	3	In Progress	31/12/25	28/02/26	Nov 2025: In progress. Deadline extended.

NB: Please note that the number of 'Not Yet Due' items in the dashboard above is showing as 8, however this is a system error, and it should be 6. We are working to resolve this with system administrators.

 WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 27 NOVEMBER 2025
Subject	INTERNAL AUDIT EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSESSMENT
Wards affected	None
Accountable member	Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance Email: Alaric.Smith@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance Email: Madhu.Richards@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Lucy Cater, Head of Internal Audit. Assistant Director, SWAP Internal Audit Services Email: Lucy.Cater@swapaudit.co.uk
Summary/Purpose	To present a report of SWAP's External Quality Assessment (EQA) 2025.
Annexes	Annex A – SWAP EQA 2025
Recommendation(s)	That the Audit and Governance Committee resolves to: I. Note the SWAP External Quality Assessment Report
Corporate priorities	Internal Audit supports all Council Corporate Priorities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting Residents First • A Good Quality of Life for All • A Better Environment for People and Wildlife • Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO

Consultees/ Consultation	Not Applicable
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1. BACKGROUND

The Internal Audit Service is provided to this Council by SWAP Internal Audit Services (SWAP). SWAP is a local authority-controlled company.

The Public Sector Internal Auditing Standard (PSIAS) and the International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF) for Internal Auditing require that an External Quality Assessment (EQA) of an internal audit activity must be conducted at least once every five years by a qualified, independent assessor or assessment team from outside the organisation.

2. MAIN POINTS

SWAP's most recent EQA was conducted during December 2024 by the Devon Assurance Partnership and was based on the PSIAS and the Code of Ethics. They awarded SWAP highest rating available which is **Generally Conforms**. The Final EQA report was issued and shared with the SWAP Board in January 2025.

The actions arising from that assessment form the QAIP (Quality Assurance and Improvement Plan). The QAIP, under Internal Auditing Standards, should be made up of both actions from the EQA and actions arising from internal quality assurance measures. To ensure SWAP continues to conform to the standards, it also undertakes annual self-assessments. Additional actions arising from the annual self assessments are incorporated into the QAIP and are monitored by the SWAP Board of Directors.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

Not Applicable

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Not Applicable

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Not Applicable

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

Not Applicable

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT

Not Applicable

8. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Not Applicable

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 The following documents have been identified by the author of the report in accordance with section 100D.5(a) of the Local Government Act 1972 and are listed in accordance with section 100 D.1(a) for inspection by members of the public:

- Internal Audit Reports

9.2 These documents will be available for inspection online at www.westoxon.gov.uk or by contacting democratic services democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk for a period of up to 4 years from the date of the meeting.

(END)

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SWAP

PUBLIC SECTOR INTERNAL AUDIT STANDARDS

SELF ASSESSMENT WITH EXTERNAL INDEPENDENT VALIDATION

ASSESSMENT DATE – DECEMBER 2024

Draft Report issued 12 Dec 2024

Final Report – Issued 8 January 2025

1. Introduction

1.1 In accordance with the UK Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS), and the Global Internal Audit Standards, the Chief Audit Executive must develop and maintain a quality assurance and improvement programme that covers all aspects of the internal audit activity (performance standard 1300). The quality assurance and improvement programme should be designed to enable an evaluation of the internal audit activity's conformance with the Definition of Internal Auditing and the Standards and an evaluation of whether internal auditors apply the Code of Ethics. The programme also assesses the efficiency and effectiveness of the internal audit activity and identifies opportunities for improvement. The quality assurance and improvement programme must include both internal and external assessments. An external assessment must be conducted at least once every five years. Full details of the PSIAS and requirements can be found on the [CIPFA website](#).

1.2 There are two acceptable approaches to conducting an external assessment:

- Full external assessment, and
- Self-assessment with independent validation.

1.3 The availability and relevant experience of the assessor or assessment team, the likely cost, the potential for added value and lack of any real or apparent conflict of interest are all factors which should be considered in deciding which method to adopt.

1.4 [SWAP Internal Audit Services](#) (SWAP) requested Devon Assurance Partnership (DAP) to support the "Self-assessment with independent validation" approach, and to undertake a peer review and complete a programme of independent validation of their self-assessment.

1.5 There are similarities between the way that the two organisations (SWAP and DAP) operate and the challenges that they face, each being a shared internal audit service established and engaged by a number of local authorities.

1.6 We can confirm that DAP, and the staff completing this self-assessment review, are independent of SWAP. However, it should be noted that DAP and SWAP are both members of Audit Together and various local government groups such as the Chief Auditors Network (CAN).

2 SWAP Internal Audit Services

2.1 The SWAP website explains that SWAP is a wholly-owned public sector audit partnership, and that working in partnerships allows SWAP to:

- Share knowledge around public sector auditing.
- Formulate fresh perspectives on best practice and risk.

- Expand its network of highly qualified professionals.
- Benefit from specialist knowledge around grant certification.
- Increase value for money.
- Benchmark client performance with that of its partners.

2.2 SWAP's website further explains that SWAP is the largest partnership of its type in England and Wales; with 25 partners (including district, borough, city and unitary councils, police, police and crime commissioners and a fire service.) Each of these partners contribute to a central SWAP budget for the provision of internal audit services.

2.3 SWAP also has a number of external clients. As SWAP is a not-for-profit, TECKAL compliant organisation, any surplus generated through this work is used for the benefit of the partners. External clients include academy schools, local councils, charities, housing associations and others.

3 Scope and Methodology of this Review

3.1 The review examined the self-assessment document and associated evidence collated by SWAP senior officers. We spoke with key officers at SWAP, officers for the client councils (including s151 officers) and Board members, and reviewed a recent stakeholder survey of 80 respondents including Partner CEOs, Audit Committee Chairs and Members and Senior Leadership. We also examined a sample of recently completed audit files to compare actual practice with the professional practices and expected working protocols.

3.2 The review included consideration of:

- Audit planning,
- Testing,
- Reporting and follow up processes,
- Conformance with the Code of Ethics,
- The adequacy of training and development arrangements,
- The availability of specialist audit skills; and
- The use of technologies.

3.3 The review was completed remotely; data and evidence from the internal assessment process completed by SWAP was provided to DAP via SharePoint; discussions with key officers, client officers, and Board members, were conducted using the Teams platform.

3.4 The questions included consideration of:

- The overall quality and effectiveness of the internal audit assurance service provided by SWAP via its internal audit provision:
- Resource planning:
- Strategic audit planning:

- Conduct of audit staff;
- The quality of audit reports; and
- Whether the service was seen to add value to its client organisations.

3.5. At the end of the visit, the findings and conclusions of the review team were reported to the Executive Director of Operations of SWAP.

4 Review Team

4.1 The majority of the review was completed by Robert Hutchins. Robert is the former Head of Devon Audit Partnership; he is a Chartered Member of CIMA (Chartered Institute of Management Accountants) and has over 25 years auditing experience in the public sector, including local government. The work completed by Robert has been subject to quality assurance by Tony Rose, Head of DAP (CMIIA, PIIA, CIA IRM Cert).

4.2 Devon Assurance Partnership operates under a partnership arrangement; the partners comprising local authorities and blue light services; the Partnership supports a wide range and number of other clients.

5 Overall Opinion

5.1 It is our overall opinion that SWAP **generally conforms** to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS), including the *Definition of Internal Auditing*, the *Code of Ethics* and the *Standards*.

5.2 The reviewer found areas of good practice and high standards as well as some areas which in our opinion require further attention (see section 7 below). Appendix A records the assessment against each Standard; Appendix B records a summary of the improvement actions identified with management responses; Appendix C sets out the definitions for the ratings; Appendix D provides a summary of areas that should be considered by management, to which management responses are provided at Appendix E.

5.3 The guidance suggests a scale of three ratings, 'generally conforms', 'partially conforms' and 'does not conform'. A full description of the ratings is included at Appendix C and scaled down version is given below:

- **Generally Conforms** – This is the top rating and means that the internal audit service has a charter, policies and processes that are judged to be in conformance to the Standards
- **Partially Conforms** - Means deficiencies in practice are noted that are judged to deviate from the Standards, but these deficiencies did not preclude the internal audit service from performing its responsibilities in an acceptable manner
- **Does Not Conform** - Means the deficiencies in practice are judged to be so significant as to seriously impair or preclude the internal audit service from

performing adequately in all or in significant areas of its responsibilities. The full definitions are given at the end of this document.

5.4 The Standards refer to a set of core Principles which, taken as a whole, articulate internal audit effectiveness. For an internal audit function to be considered effective, all Principles should be present and operating effectively and failure to achieve any of the Principles would imply that an internal audit activity was not as effective as it could be in achieving internal audit's mission. The Principles are summarised as follows: -

- Demonstrates integrity.
- Demonstrates competence and due professional care.
- Is objective and free from undue influence (independent).
- Aligns with the strategies, objectives, and risks of the organisation.
- Is appropriately positioned and adequately resourced.
- Demonstrates quality and continuous improvement.
- Communicates effectively.
- Provides risk-based assurance.
- Is insightful, proactive, and future-focused.
- Promotes organisational improvement.

5.5 It is pleasing to confirm that we consider these core Principles are being achieved.

6 Areas of Good Practice

6.1 SWAP is well established, and the views provided by employees, senior officers and Board members confirmed that the Team have a good reputation with client senior management.

6.2 From our review of records, and feedback from those we spoke with, the audit team conduct themselves in a professional manner, display knowledge of the areas they are auditing, adopt a flexible approach and are seen to be responsive to the needs of the client. It is good to see that knowledge in specialist areas (for example data analytics) is effective, with those we spoke to saying that skills and ability in this area have improved in recent years.

6.3 Audit assignments are well planned, and testing is directed to those areas of greatest importance. Working papers within the Partnership's audit management system (AuditBoard) are completed to a good standard.

6.4 We found that there is an effective charter and strategy in place that guides the audit work for the clients. Reports to audit committees are produced timely, and provide clear and useful information, including various graphics, to help members measure performance and understand how assurance is being provided.

6.5 We spoke to a number of people during the review and some of the (many) positive comments we received included:-

- "SWAP are effective in meeting the needs of their partners in a flexible way".

- “I am really enjoying working for SWAP – it is challenging, but very motivating work”
- “They are great, hard-working, keen, responsive”.
- “Extremely helpful on an individual level – part of the culture”.
- “Fraud, IT audit work, analytics all really good”.

6.6 Other positive areas identified included:-

- All Assistant Director’s (AD’s) are Chartered Internal Auditors (or equivalent). Their personal profiles are available on the SWAP website. <https://www.swapaudit.co.uk/senior-leadership-team>. This promotes openness and transparency.
- All ADs underwent training in the summer of 2024 on providing constructive feedback.
- The AuditBoard management system has good reporting tools that will aid SWAP management to ensure a professional and high-quality service to its many partners and clients.
- Dedicated data analytics team help to “embed” data analytics for all audits and provide specialist advice and guidance when needed.

6.7 SWAP recently conducted a stakeholder survey with 80 replies received. The overall score painted a positive picture, with, for example, 90% of respondents rating the “extent to which you feel the Internal Audit team understands risk, governance and control in your organisation” high or very high. Amongst comments received was : *“Reports are clear and concise, drawing out key issues. The recommendation tracker is particularly useful for Governance group.”*

6.8 The SWAP self-assessment process was detailed and thorough. The process has identified areas where further improvements have been identified, and management have already identified a suggested action to address such weaknesses (for example 1311.e; 2330.e; 2240.f). We are confident that the team will work to complete these actions. To limit duplication, these self-assessment actions are not reported in our report.

7 Areas for further improvement identified by the review

7.1 There is good evidence to confirm that SWAP management continually review practices and procedures, and compliance against the Standards. However,

7.1.1 The AuditBoard Data Quality dashboard shows anomalies such as reviews where the same person signed off the work programme as completed the work. The Leadership Team use these dashboards to identify errors and make improvements to working practices. At the time of this review there were multiple areas to be followed up. AuditBoard provides good analysis for senior management to review / assess working practices and quality of working papers and should be used to understand why some issues and inconsistencies are occurring and to address these issues.

7.1.2 Under the “planning, reporting and engagement” part of Audit Board we were informed that it is expected that key documents, such as the plan, charter, annual report etc should be filed but in some cases such documents were not located in such a folder. This does not mean that the document did not exist, but there may be value in re-affirming to staff the need for all key documents to be stored as expected.

7.1.3 The Quality Assurance Improvement Plan (QAIP) was last presented to the Board in February 2023, although an update on progress was provided in 2024 to reflect the self-assessment process being prepared. Whilst we can see that SWAP look to continuously improve its services, and how it meets (or indeed exceeds) the Standards, we consider that there would be merit in capturing improvement actions in a more dynamic QAIP and in presenting this document on a more frequent basis to the Board. Further, making changes / improvements can often come at “a cost” – be that staff time or other additional resources - and time frames for completion of tasks need to be understood; for these reasons a more comprehensive and informative QAIP, with “SMART” targets would, we consider, be advantageous for senior SWAP staff and the Board.

7.1.4 Examples of Audit Charters that we viewed referred to “global Internal Audit Standards” – but not the PSIAS. As most SWAP clients are in the public sector there would appear to be value in making a simple amendment to the Charter to include reference to the PSIAS, and, where appropriate, the Local Government Application Note (LGAN). Similarly, there is no direct reference to the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, although the Charter does include reference to Internal Audits contribution to control environment effectiveness. There would appear to be value in referring to these regulations in the Charter.

7.1.5 Fraud Risk Assessment - The Charter states that a fraud risk assessment will be reported to the Audit Committee. However, there could be an opportunity to enhance the understanding of the SWAP / internal audit role in relation to Fraud Risk for each client by reflecting the local arrangements for each Partner / Client, including who is completing the Fraud Risk Assessment (i.e. SWAP or the in-house team of that Partner).

7.1.6 It is expected that the Head of Internal Audit will be notified of all suspected or detected fraud, corruption or impropriety. Whilst the current Charter captures the spirit of this, it is not specific in the requirements. There may be scope to clarify / strengthen the wording in the Charter to ensure that Internal; Audit (SWAP) are suitably notified of relevant matters.

7.1.7 Assurance mapping – standard 2050.i.b asks if the audit team have “carried out an assurance mapping exercise as part of identifying and determining the approach to using other sources of assurance” – the self-assessment response identifies inconsistency in approach and acknowledges that some assessments may require a refresh.

7.1.8 We spoke to client officers / board members from a variety of clients. One such officer commented that documents / approaches can sometimes feel “local authority” based and not suitably adapted to reflect the requirements / needs of Blue Light services. There is an opportunity to be more receptive of the needs of different clients.

8. Acknowledgements

8.1 We would like to pass on our thanks to the staff at SWAP and those senior officers and members who gave their time and input to aid us in completing this review.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Rose". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tony Rose
Head of Devon Audit Partnership

8 January 2025

PSIAS External Assessment

Appendix A

Key

GC = Generally Conforms PC = Partially Conforms DNC = Does Not Conform

		GC	PC	DNC
1000	Purpose, Authority, and Responsibility			
1010	Recognizing Mandatory Guidance in the Internal Audit Charter	Y		
1100	Independence and Objectivity	Y		
1110	Organisational Independence	Y		
1111	Direct Interaction with the Board	Y		
1112	Chief Audit Executive Roles Beyond Internal Auditing	Y		
1120	Individual Objectivity	Y		
1130	Impairment to Independence or Objectivity	Y		
1200	Proficiency and Due Professional Care	Y		
1210	Proficiency	Y		
1220	Due Professional Care	Y		
1230	Continuing Professional Development	Y		

		GC	PC	DNC
1300	Quality Assurance and Improvement Program	Y		
1310	Requirements of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Program	Y		
1311	Internal Assessments	Y		
1312	External Assessments	Y		
1320	Reporting on the Quality Assurance and Improvement Program		Y	
1321	Use of "Conforms with the <i>International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing</i> "	Y		
1322	Disclosure of Non-conformance	n/a		

		GC	PC	DNC
2000	Managing the Internal Audit Activity	Y		
2010	Planning	Y		
2020	Communication and Approval	Y		
2030	Resource Management	Y		
2040	Policies and Procedures	Y		
2050	Coordination and Reliance	Y		
2060	Reporting to Senior Management and the Board	Y		

2070	External Service Provider and Organisational Responsibility for Internal Auditing	n/a		
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		GC	PC	DNC
2100	Nature of Work	Y		
2110	Governance	Y		
2120	Risk Management	Y		
2130	Control	Y		
2200	Engagement Planning	Y		
2201	Planning Considerations	Y		
2210	Engagement Objectives	Y		
2220	Engagement Scope	Y		
2230	Engagement Resource Allocation	Y		
2240	Engagement Work Program	Y		
2300	Performing the Engagement	Y		
2310	Identifying Information	Y		
2320	Analysis and Evaluation	Y		
2330	Documenting Information	Y		
2340	Engagement Supervision	Y		
2400	Communicating Results	Y		
2410	Criteria for Communicating	Y		
2420	Quality of Communications	Y		

		GC	PC	DNC
2421	Errors and Omissions	Y		
2430	Use of "Conducted in Conformance with the <i>International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing</i> "	Y		
2431	Engagement Disclosure of Non-conformance	Y		
2440	Disseminating Results	Y		
2450	Overall Opinions	Y		
2500	Monitoring Progress	Y		
2600	Communicating the Acceptance of Risks	Y		

		GC	PC	DNC
	Code of Ethics	Y		

Appendix B

External Assessor Summary of Findings & Recommendations Management Action Plan - Areas for further improvement identified by the review

Report Ref	Areas for further improvement identified by the review	Management Response and Action Plan
7.1.1	SLT should continue to use AuditBoard to review / assess working practices and quality of working papers to understand why some issues are occurring, why there may be inconsistencies, and then work to address these issues.	Agreed and already in progress. The purpose of the dashboards is to highlight such issues so they can be resolved.
7.1.2	A reminder / training should be considered to ensure that key documents, such as the plan, charter, annual report etc are filed on AuditBoard as expected.	Complete - a reminder was issued by the Executive Director of Operations to ADs on 18 December 2024 and will be incorporated into a peer review process.
7.1.3	Quality Assurance Improvement Plan - we consider that there would be merit in capturing improvement actions in a more dynamic QAIP and in presenting this document on a more frequent basis to the Board.	Agreed – The Executive Director of Operations will discuss this with the Board to initiate improvement.
7.1.4	Audit Charters that we viewed referred to “global Internal Audit Standards” – but not the PSIAS. In addition, consider direct reference to the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015.	Agreed – The Executive Director of Operations will ensure these elements are added to the Charter template.
7.1.5	Fraud Risk Assessment - The Charter states that a fraud risk assessment will be reported to the Audit Committee. However, there could be an opportunity to enhance the understanding of the SWAP / internal audit role in relation to Fraud Risk for each client.	Agreed – The Executive Director of Operations will ensure that a requirement to confirm who is completing the fraud risk assessment is added to the Charter template.
7.1.6	It is expected that the Head of Internal Audit will be notified of all suspected or detected fraud, corruption, or impropriety. Whilst the current Charter captures the spirit of this, it is not specifically stated.	Agreed – The Executive Director of Operations will ensure this element is added to the Charter template.
7.1.7	Assurance mapping – the self-assessment response identifies inconsistency in approach and acknowledges that some assessments may require a refresh.	Agreed – The Executive Director of Operations will refer this action to SLT to consider what action needs to be taken.

Definitions*

“Generally Conforms” means the assessor has concluded that the relevant structures, policies, and procedures of the activity, as well as the processes by which they are applied, comply with the requirements of the individual Standard or element of the Code of Ethics in all material respects. For the sections and major categories, this means that there is general conformity to a majority of the individual Standards or elements of the Code of Ethics, and at least partial conformity to the others, within the section/category. There may be significant opportunities for improvement, but these should not represent situations where the activity has not implemented the Standards or the Code of Ethics, has not applied them effectively, or has not achieved their stated objectives. As indicated above, general conformance does not require complete/perfect conformance, the ideal situation, “successful practice,” etc.

“Partially Conforms” means the evaluator has concluded that the activity is making good-faith efforts to comply with the requirements of the individual Standard or element of the Code of Ethics, section, or major category, but falls short of achieving some major objectives. These will usually represent significant opportunities for improvement in effectively applying the Standards or Code of Ethics and/or achieving their objectives. Some deficiencies may be beyond the control of the activity and may result in recommendations to senior management or the board of the organisation.

“Does Not Conform” means the evaluator has concluded that the activity is not aware of, is not making good-faith efforts to comply with, or is failing to achieve many/all of the objectives of the individual Standard or element of the Code of Ethics, section, or major category. These deficiencies will usually have a significant negative impact on the activity’s effectiveness and its potential to add value to the organisation. These may also represent significant opportunities for improvement, including actions by senior management or the board.

* Source – The Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors

Areas which Merit Further Attention

D.1 The following are matters that were highlighted within discussions with the staff and partners which may merit further attention by the SWAP Management Team:

D.1.1 Reward for staff – some officers we spoke with commented about “reward”, sighting this as an area that could be improved. For example:

- “reward used to be more pro-active and good work was “celebrated” – this may still be happening, but as now work at home it feels like this is getting lost”; and
- “Can we have monetary rewards for excellent performance? Does not need to be much (£20 voucher)”

D.1.2 Annual appraisals. There is strong evidence to confirm that staff meet regularly with their line managers in a series of one-to-one meetings. These meetings give good opportunity to discuss work issues, training and development needs etc. However, there is currently no formal “annual appraisal” process. Senior Management should consider if there is a need / opportunity to introduce a formal annual appraisal process for all staff, and to define what that should encompass.

D.1.3 We noted that no formal rotation arrangements of senior SWAP officers (Assistant Directors) are in place; however, we understand that rotation generally happens in practice as new partners onboard, and unitary councils are formed and management structures flex in response. ADs are responsible for rotating assignments within their teams. It was good to note that management keep a watching brief on staff rotation and should continue to do so.

D.1.4 Peer Review - SWAP management may wish to consider some peer review of assignment working papers, files and reports (1311.b). For example, each AD could review one or two files of another AD and feedback their findings for constructive improvement. This would help provide assurance over consistency, but also share “best practice tips” between AD’s.

D.1.5 Consistency. SWAP have adopted an approach of “conformity not consistency” whereby AD’s are allowed a degree of “freedom” to adapt practices, approaches, documents etc to meet the needs of the local Partner / client, whilst ensuring that the approach used suitably conforms with professional standards (e.g. PSIAS). This is acknowledged, and the fact that approaches can (and are) adapted for Partners is considered positive. However, this has led to some inconsistencies, for example in the style and content of annual reports. SWAP Management will need to continue to record and review inconsistencies to ensure maximum quality of service to all partners and clients.

D.1.6 At standard 2120 Risk Management the self-assessment says :-

“....opinions are based on the following, amongst other things “Completed audits which evaluate risk exposures relating to the organisation’s governance, operations and information systems, reliability and integrity of information, efficiency and

effectiveness of operations and programmes, safeguarding of assets and compliance with laws and regulations.”

At present the SWAP template for annual reports does not mention strategic objectives. We consider that an “easy fix” would be to adjust the wording in the statement to read: -

“completed auditsrelating to the organisations strategic risks, governance.....”

D.1.7 At standard 2130 the self-assessment states that :-

“The Annual Opinion states opinions are based on the following, amongst other things “Completed audits which evaluate risk exposures relating to the organisation's governance, operations and in-formation systems, reliability and integrity of information, efficiency and effectiveness of operations and programmes, safeguarding of assets and compliance with laws and regulations.”

There would appear to be scope to add in “....achieve the organisations strategic objectives....” To fully comply with the PSIAS.

D.1.8 We spoke to a range of client / board members and insight gained should help SWAP management to further develop and refine services. The essence of some of the comments provided are set out below. A summary of more detailed comments has been made available to SWAP management.

- Senior management are excellent, but they should not lose focus on the “front line” and the need to have high quality audit assignment work completed by competent and professionally trained staff.
- Staff need to have an awareness of the political (small p) implications of their work, and the recommendations made, and be steered by Principal Auditors in this regard.
- Staff are aware of FOI (freedom of information) requirements, but perhaps regular refresher training would further aid.
- Consistency – ensuring that audits have a consistent overall rating that reflects the “number and priority” of recommendations.

External Assessor Summary of Findings & Recommendations
Management Action Plan - Areas for further improvement

Report Ref	Areas which Merit Further Attention	Management Response and Action Plan
D.1.1	Reward for staff – some officers we spoke with commented around “reward”, sighting this as an area that could be improved.	Agreed – This action is already recognised by the Executive Leadership Team as an area for improvement and is recorded on the corporate action tracker.
D.1.3	Senior Management should consider if there is a need / opportunity to introduce a formal annual appraisal process for all staff, and to define what that should encompass.	Agreed – This action is already recognised by the Executive Leadership Team as an area for improvement and is recorded on the corporate action tracker.
D.1.4	Peer Review - SWAP management may wish to consider some peer review of assignment working papers, files, and reports.	Agreed - The Executive Director of Operations will ensure that a peer review process is formally implemented.
D.1.5	Consistency. SWAP have adopted an approach of “conformity not consistency”. There is an opportunity for senior SWAP management to identify inconsistencies and ensure that SWAP partners are all receiving the high-quality service expected.	Agreed - The Executive Director of Operations will ensure that inconsistencies (including reports) are identified and reviewed.
D.1.6	The SWAP template for annual reports should be adjusted to read: - <i>“completed auditsrelating to the organisations strategic risks, governance.....”</i>	Agreed – The Executive Director of Operations will ensure that the reports are updated.
D.1.7	The SWAP template for annual reports should be adjusted to read: - <i>“.....achieve the organisations strategic objectives....”</i>	Agreed – The Executive Director of Operations will ensure that the reports are updated.

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WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME
1 DECEMBER 2025 – 31 MARCH 2026

The Audit and Governance Committee responsible for monitoring the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements. This includes overseeing the audit function, annual accounts and the work of the internal auditors, promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct of members and, through its Standards Sub-Committee, determining standards matters.

The Committee has the following powers under the Council's Constitution:

- To require the attendance of any Council officers and/or members in order to respond directly to any issue under consideration;
- To review any issues referred to it by the Chief Executive, other statutory officer or any Council body;
- To report and make recommendations to Council;
- To call expert witnesses from outside the Council to give advice on matters under review or discussion;
- The ability to raise issues at a meeting of the Executive; and
- The power to establish Sub-Committees.

This work programme sets out the expected business for meetings of the Audit and Governance Committee.

Item	Meeting Date	Lead Officer
Thursday 27 November 2025		
SWAP Peer Review Assessment	27 Nov 2025	Lucy Cater, Assistant Director SWAP lucy.cater@publicagroup.uk
Auditor's Annual Report on West Oxfordshire District Council (Value for Money Arrangements and Recommendations)	27 Nov 2025	Georgina Dyer, Head of Finance georgina.dyer@westoxon.gov.uk
Final 2024/25 Audit Findings Report (ISA260) and Statements of Account for West Oxfordshire District Council	27 Nov 2025	Head of Finance - Georgina Dyer
Internal Audit Progress Report	27 Nov 2025	Lucy Cater, Assistant Director SWAP lucy.cater@publicagroup.uk
Treasury Management Mid-Term Report	27 Nov 2025	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk
Thursday 22 January 2026		
Internal Audit Progress Report	22 Jan 2026	Lucy Cater, Assistant Director SWAP lucy.cater@publicagroup.uk
Strategic Risk Register	22 Jan 2026	Cheryl Sloan, Assistant Director cheryl.sloan@publicagroup.uk
Provisional member induction and training programme	22 Jan 2026	Andrew Brown, Head of Democratic and Electoral Services andrew.brown@westoxon.gov.uk

Code of Corporate Governance	22 Jan 2026	Cheryl Sloan, Assistant Director cheryl.sloan@publicagroup.uk
Thursday 19 March 2026		
Audit and Governance Committee Annual Council Report	19 Mar 2026 20 May 2026	Mathew Taylor, Democratic Services Officer Mathew.Taylor@Westoxon.gov.uk
Internal Audit Progress Report	19 Mar 2026	Lucy Cater, Assistant Director SWAP lucy.cater@publicagroup.uk
Internal Audit Plan 2026/27	19 Mar 2026	Lucy Cater, Assistant Director SWAP lucy.cater@publicagroup.uk
External Audit Plan 2025/26	19 Mar 2026	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk
CFEU Update Report (RIPA and IPA annual update)	19 Mar 2026	Emma Cathcart, Head of Service, Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit emma.cathcart@cotswold.gov.uk
Annual Governance Statement Action Plan for 2025/26 Update	19 Mar 2026	Cheryl Sloan, Assistant Director cheryl.sloan@publicagroup.uk
Quarter 3 Treasury Management Performance	19 Mar 2026	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk

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