

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Held in the Committee Room 1, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28
INB at 5.30 pm on **Wednesday, 10 December 2025**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chair), Genny Early (Vice-Chair), Steve Cosier, Liz Leffman, Nick Levertton, Dan Levy, Paul Marsh, Stuart McCarroll, Michele Mead, Ruth Smith and Alistair Wray

Officers: Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Georgina Dyer (Head of Finance), Ana Prelici (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Alison Borrett (Senior Performance Analyst), Chris Hargraves (Head of Planning), Claire Bromley (Planner (Policy)), Murry Burnett (Strategic Housing Officer) and Gemma Moreing (Business Information and Performance Lead)

Executive Member in attendance: Councillor Andy Graham

62 Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments

Apologies were noted from Councillors Natalie King, Mark Walker and Alex Wilson.

63 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

64 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Chair noted that Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, was present at the previous meeting and the minutes should reflect this.

The approval of the minutes, subject to this correction, was proposed by Councillor Cosier, seconded by Councillor Leffman, put to the vote and agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2025 be confirmed as an accurate record, subject to the inclusion of Cllr Alaric Smith in the list of those present.

65 Chair's announcements

The Chair stated that full Council on 3 December 2025 had referred a motion on Protecting Fire Services in West Oxfordshire to the Committee. This would be considered at the 7 January 2025 meeting and representatives of the County Council and the Fire Brigades Union were being invited. The paperwork for the January meeting would be distributed before Christmas.

66 Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

67 Report back on recommendations

The Committee noted the Executive's response to the Committee's recommendations on Youth Engagement and Local Government Reorganisation.

68 Updates from Task and Finish Groups

10/December2025

The Senior Democratic Services Officer stated that the Waste Transformation Task & Finish Group had met the previous day and wished to submit comments to the Executive on the Waste and Environmental Services Programme report. The Group's comments were tabled and the Committee agreed for them to be submitted to the Executive meeting on 17 December 2025.

The Chair stated that the Waste Transformation Task & Finish Group would hold a further meeting to consider questions raised about waste and recycling at the September Committee meeting.

69 2025/26 Quarterly Finance Review Q2

The Director of Finance introduced the report and highlighted that investment income was above expectations.

The Committee asked questions and noted from the responses of the Director of Finance and the Head of Finance that:

- There was a projected underspend in Environmental Services due to a variety of factors including the positive performance of the trade waste service.
- The Council had been obliged to return unused grant funding to Sports England. This had occurred due to a misunderstanding about VAT treatment (which had been corrected after year end), rather than an underspend on a specific project.
- Officers would recommend setting aside funding in an earmarked reserve for Local Government Reorganisation in the budget setting process.
- Capital slippage in relation to investment property repairs and regeneration was considered normal due to the length and complexity of projects such as Carterton Industrial Estate Units 1-3, which was now in the construction phase.
- Agency costs e.g. in planning services were often due to the need to access specialist consultancy skills for a limited period or to backfill for maternity or sickness absences.
- There was no individual cost centre for fly tipping. Fly tipping had costs in terms of officer time within Environmental and Regulatory Services. Future reports could show fly tipping as a separate item.
- Election income was largely accounted for after elections took place and there were significant time delays.

The Chair thanked the officers for their report and attendance.

70 2025/26 Quarterly Service Review Q2

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the report and highlighted that:

- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) charging would take effect from 31 January 2026.
- Witney and Chipping Norton markets had transferred to a new operator in August which had made a positive difference.
- The Council had endorsed the Oxfordshire Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Progress had been made on decarbonising the Windrush Leisure Centre in Witney.
- Missed bin collections were well within target.

10/December2025

- Gym memberships were above targets, as were visits to leisure centres, helped by improvements and new marketing strategies.
- The processing times for Council Tax Support and Housing Benefit changes had improved but remained below target. £250k had been secured in unclaimed benefits for residents.
- A staff absence in September had impacted Land Charges performance but performance was now improving.

The Committee asked questions and noted that:

- While the Council was not meeting its own targets for appeal decisions, it was within the government targets for both major and minor applications.
- The housing benefit target was under review due to the complexity of the cases and the fact that timescales were measured from the initial contact rather than the required information being received.
- Fly tipping enforcement performance of 0.33% was expected to improve.
- To date this year no officer recommendations that had been overturned by planning sub-committees had been lost on appeal. Appeal decisions were regularly reported to the planning sub-committees. A breakdown could be provided in future reports.
- Garden waste generally accounted for c. 40-45% of all recycling but volumes of green waste had dropped nationally due to the dry summer, affecting the overall recycling rate. The Council continued to perform comparatively very well at recycling.
- Officers were working on benchmarking the leisure service against other Greenwich Leisure Ltd. (GLL) contracts or GLL national figures. Questions were also raised about the reliability of footfall trends given a perceived lack of access controls at facilities.
- There was a need for clear measurable key performance indicators to underpin the Biodiversity Action Plan.
- A complaint that had been upheld by the Local Government Ombudsman had been reported to the Audit and Governance Committee.

The Committee commended the overall positive performance that was presented in the report and requested that future reports include a break down of appeal decisions and more information about disabled facilities grants and fly tipping, in particular the impact of the new bookings system at waste and recycling centres on instances of fly tipping.

The Committee requested an update on why the Chipping Norton Leisure Centre decarbonisation project was not being progressed.

The Chair thanked the Leader and officers for their report and attendance.

Local Plan Annual Monitoring 2024/25

The Principal Planning Policy Officer presented the Local Plan Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) for 2024/25 and highlighted that:

- Three stages of Local Plan consultation had been completed and the fourth stage was underway, generating a positive level of engagement with over 600 comments submitted to date as well as high attendance at community engagement events.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

10/December2025

- The next stage would be the Draft Local Plan consultation in Spring 2026.
- One Neighbourhood Plan had recently been made, making a total of 10 made plans with a further 7 in progress.
- 1368 applications had been determined and over 1100 approved.
- Permission had been granted for a net gain of 667 dwellings and 300 net dwellings had been completed in 2024/25, of which over 50% were affordable tenures. It was acknowledged that housing delivery had not kept up with identified need.
- Progress had been made on the delivery of key infrastructure projects.
- The Council was using Grampian conditions to ensure that sewerage infrastructure was in place prior to the occupation of new dwellings.

The Committee asked questions and noted from the responses of the Head of Planning and Principal Planning Policy Officer that:

- The Draft Local Plan and accompanying Infrastructure Delivery Plan would draw on a range of robust evidence and facilitate a more proactive approach to ensuring that infrastructure would be phased appropriately to support the planned level of growth.
- Grampian conditions were considered a last resort that the Council had had to rely on. The wording of conditions had been improving to make them more robust.
- There was a robust policy on the water environment, including water supply and flood risk. The Council would review this policy as part of the Local Plan process.
- The issue of sewerage capacity was not unique to Oxfordshire but was high on the agenda of the Oxford Growth Commission.
- Policies were in place to ensure that a good proportion of new housing was affordable housing but the overall housing delivery figures were well below target. There were a number of approvals coming through which were expected to lead to an uplift in delivery but the target was very challenging.
- The Council was under an obligation to work collaboratively with neighbouring authorities on housing delivery. Oxford City was looking to rebase its Local Plan from 2025 and discussions remained ongoing.
- The Council did not capture data on the effect of applying the tilted balance (i.e. the numbers of applications approved that would have otherwise been refused if the Council was able to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply).
- It was difficult to estimate when the Council would once again be able to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply but the Council was doing all it could to address the issue.
- The Council had a dedicated officer tracking S106 agreements to ensure their delivery. All tiers of local government could bid for how S106 contributions would be used to mitigate the impact of development.
- The introduction of CIL would provide some funding directly to town and parish councils and could be used more flexibly than S106.
- Officers were being trained ahead of the introduction of CIL and a further briefing session would be arranged for Members on S106 and CIL.

10/December2025

- The under-reporting of flooding was raised as an issue and the AMR could be amended to reflect this. It was suggested that the Council could engage with insurance companies and do more to encourage the reporting of flooding.

The Committee requested information about:

- The number of pub conversions.
- The typical time lags between approval and completion of new housing developments.
- Whether developer funding tended to be inflation-linked.
- Why the number of “at risk” heritage assets had fallen from 8 to 5 in the Historic England data and what the plan was to address the remainder.
- The numbers of listed buildings that were damaged or at risk.
- Solar farm approvals (in future AMRs).

The Committee commended the good quality of information contained in the report and thanked the officers.

Councillor Liz Leffman left the meeting at 7.13pm.

72

Promoting Rural Exception Sites

The Strategic Housing Officer provided a presentation on promoting rural exception sites to deliver affordable housing, including the Council’s policies and recent examples of schemes within the district. The officer highlighted that:

- Planning consent had recently been granted for an affordable housing scheme in Leafield, which had originated from an approach by the landowner. A registered housing provider was looking to take this scheme on, once developed.
- The Council was engaging with Community First, which had a track record of drawing on government funding to support rural affordable housing.
- Conversations were ongoing with a number of parish councils about identifying possible rural exception sites, including Chadlington, Tackley, Enstone, Hailey and Ducklington.
- Work was also going on to engage with Registered Providers who may be interested in managing rural affordable housing schemes. An alternative approach was for schemes to be community-led.

The Committee asked questions and noted that:

- Rural exception sites were those that would be unlikely to be granted consent for open market housing schemes due to their location or other constraints but would be more likely to be considered policy-compliant where they met an identified need for affordable housing.
- The housing need being met by a particular site would depend on its location and which Local Plan policies would be applicable. Within the Cotswold National Landscape area, it would be the identified need within the settlement/area itself. In order areas, it may be the district-wide affordable housing need.
- There was no specific target for affordable housing delivered through rural exception sites. There was an overall identified need of 274 affordable units per year district-wide

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

10/December2025

dating from 2014 and the Council had exceeded that figure in several years. A new affordable housing target would be set as part of the Local Plan process.

The Chair thanked the officers for their presentation.

73 Committee Work Programme

The Senior Democratic Services Officer explained that the budget item had been moved from January to February and Community Grants would move to March as a result. An updated work programme would be published in due course.

The Committee noted the updated work programme.

74 Executive Work Programme

The Committee agreed to add Woodford Way to the January meeting for pre-decision scrutiny.

The Meeting closed at 7.47 pm

CHAIR