

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Executive

Held in the Woodstock Community Centre, 32 New Road, Woodstock, OX20 1PB at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 14 January 2026**

PRESENT

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

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive Officer), Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance and Regulatory Services), Phil Martin (Director of Place), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Maria Harper (Democratic Services Assistant), Mathew Taylor (Democratic Services Officer), Rachel Biles (Leisure Strategy Manager), Michael David (Housing Delivery Programme Manager), Georgina Dyer (Head of Finance), Mandy Fathers (Business Manager - Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service), Emma Peacock (Communications Officer) and Stuart Wilson (Leisure Contracts Lead)

Other Councillors in attendance: Julian Cooper, David Melvin, Elizabeth Poskitt and Liam Walker

443 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

444 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

445 Minutes of Previous Meeting

There were no amendments to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 17 December 2025.

The minutes were proposed by Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council. Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council, seconded the proposal. The proposal was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

1. To approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 17 December 2025.

446 Receipt of Announcements

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, welcomed the public to the meeting of the Executive and invited Executive Members and Officers attending the meeting to introduce themselves to the public present.

Councillor Graham reiterated that there was an engagement session that followed the meeting which would focus on future leisure provision, investment plans and would provide an update on Council facilities, including Woodstock swimming pool.

Councillor Graham advised that a letter had been received from the Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness that had invited the Council to request a delay to the elections scheduled to take place in May 2026 due to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). However, the Leader had consulted with officers, and the elections would go ahead as scheduled.

Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council, noted that Witney had seen a record number of shoppers over the Christmas period which was reflective of the vibrant town centres in the district and, in the context of the move to internet shopping, was a very positive result.

Councillor Rachel Crouch, Executive Member for Stronger Healthy Communities, announced that the Council's Youth Officer would be holding a District Youth Partnership meeting on 15 January 2026 at which twenty-five professionals would discuss youth needs. Councillor Crouch also informed the Executive that round six of the Westhive grant scheme would be closing on 11 February 2026 and encouraged those interested in discussing grants to look at the Council website and contact officers.

447 Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

448 Reports from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Executive noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had met on 7 January 2026. The meeting had considered the Motion from Full Council on 3 December 2025, entitled Protecting Fire Services in West Oxfordshire. The Committee's written response to Oxfordshire County Council's consultation had been sent. The letter objected to and raised a series of concerns about the County Council's current proposals, which included the future closure of fire stations in Woodstock and Eynsham.

449 Matters raised by Audit and Governance Committee

The Audit and Governance Committee had not met since the previous meeting of the Executive.

450

Draft Budget 2026/27 version 2

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the item, the purpose of which was to provide an update on the developing budget for 2026/27 following the provisional government funding settlement which was announced on 17 December 2025.

In his presentation Councillor Smith focussed on the following areas of the report:

- The Council would approve the final budget, along with strategy papers for Treasury Management, Capital and Investments on 25 February 2026.
- The second draft presented to the meeting had been updated with the provisional government funding settlement which had been announced on 17 December 2025, draft fees and charges and the final Council Tax Base.
- The second draft showed a contribution to general fund reserves of £650,884 before growth requests. This position was significantly more optimistic than that initially presented following publication of the funding formula review in June 2025.
- The change in estimated funding in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) presented to Executive in December was a result of the Income Protection Floor. The expected cash-cut and cash-flat were not realised and subsequently there were material changes to the MTFS assumptions that had been made in June 2025. The table in the report at section 2.7 showed the changes in the funding position between June and those confirmed in December.
- The surplus from the Business Rates Pool, which the Council had chosen not to budget for, had been moved to earmarked reserves over recent years and would fund future gaps in revenue for the period of the MTFS and until the future Unitary Authority took over the Council's functions.
- Assumptions were set out in the report at section three.
- Improvements in the revenue position related to: the expected disposal of a property at Between Towns Road which would provide a budget saving in terms of future costs; bringing employees back to the Council from Publica and potential changes in the Council's public convenience provision.
- Increases in the income portfolio included: Investment property; development management and trade waste.
- Growth requests could be seen at section 4.2 of the report. These were required to deliver services at the Council. Councillor Smith suggested members of the Executive would report on the growth requests in their respective portfolios later in the meeting.
- Further items were to be reported to the Executive in February and would include the Capital Programme, Minimum Revenue Position and External Borrowing.

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- The Fees and Charges that were set out in the paper at section seven were in three categories: Those which were set centrally; those set on a cost recovery basis and those which were discretionary to the Council.
- The Capital Programme would be updated for February.
- The detailed analysis of the results of the Council's budget consultation which had ran to 19 December 2025 would be presented to the Executive and Council in February.

In the discussion Executive members noted and welcomed growth requests included in the budget in their respective portfolio areas (shown in section 4.2 of the report):

Councillor Rachel Crouch, Executive Member for Stronger Healthy Communities, stated that she was pleased that the budget had recognised funding needed for additional officer hours to work on preventing violence against women and girls in rural areas and to address health inequalities.

Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning, welcomed the inclusion of sufficient resources to support the local plan process. Councillor Ashton was also pleased to note that the infrastructure development team had been strengthened to ensure that the correct contributions and funding was obtained from developers.

Referencing her portfolio of Environment, Councillor Lidia Arciszewska recognised growth provided by the budget in two areas. Firstly the appointment of an Environmental Crime Officer and secondly a statutory duties post that would support work around the Renters Rights Bill and pollution services.

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, elaborated on the intention to extend the officer role in nature recovery as the original grant funding had ended. This was an important role that had included work such as connecting children to nature and the work had brought in more funding than it had cost to resource.

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care, gave the meeting background on the surge in residents presenting as homeless and the increase cost to the Council of providing temporary accommodation. Councillor Saul detailed the Council's intention to increase the Council owned temporary housing supply to ten properties.

A Member queried the figures for the increase in the tax base for Woodstock between 2025/26 and 2026/27 and suggested that the increase presented in the report appeared small. The Executive invited the Head of Finance to respond who advised that this figure could appear small due to a number of factors which were taken into account in arriving at the figure. The Officer reminded Members that the figure was an estimate of the number of additional band D equivalent properties made fifteen months in advance of the known figure.

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Councillor Smith proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, seconded the proposal and reiterated that the Council needed to ensure that it kept services functioning irrespective of LGR. It was essential to continue to invest in the improvement of assets to ensure that they would continue to provide the return necessary to fund services. The Council now had a Property Asset Plan which facilitated such work.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Approved the Fees and Charges for 2026/27, as detailed in Annex D.

That the Executive recommended to Full Council to:

2. Approve the Council Tax Base shown in Annex C, calculated as 49,561.59 for the year 2026/27.
3. Authorise the Director of Finance to submit the National Non-Domestic Rates Return 1 (NNDRI) to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government by the submission date of 31 January 2026.

451

Enforcement Agent Commissioning

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the item, the purpose of which was to seek approval to initiate a procurement process to tender for the provision of Enforcement Agent services.

In his presentation Councillor Smith made the following points:

- The current contract was due to expire on 2 October 2026, and a new contract was required to ensure continuity of service.
- The Enforcement Agent service was a critical function supporting recovery of outstanding debts to the Council.
- Enforcement and debt collection agencies were a last resort however they remained an essential resource.
- The open tender process would be undertaken via a Dynamic Purchasing System in partnership with five other councils.
- The contract would be awarded for three years with an option to extend for a further two, subject to performance.

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- A contract would be created for each Local Authority. This meant West Oxfordshire would not be impacted by LGR.

Councillor Smith proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council, seconded the proposal.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That Executive:

1. Approved the process to undertake a procurement exercise to appoint Enforcement Agent services for the Council; and,
2. Noted, that the procurement exercise will be undertaken via a Dynamic Purchasing System; and in partnership Cheltenham Borough, Stroud District, Tewkesbury Borough, Cotswold District and the Forest of Dean District councils.

452 **Woodford Way**

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care, introduced the item, the purpose of which was to provide an update on the Woodford Way project, engagement with Registered Providers and a proposed way forward in regard to parking.

In his presentation Councillor Saul made the following points:

- The scheme provided seventy affordable homes consisting of one and two bed properties for social rent. Social rent was at 50% of the market rate.
- At present the district had 2,300 residents on the waiting list for housing, with 90 needing emergency accommodation, therefore this need was urgent.
- The Council was the landowner of the site and so this project had presented an opportunity to make the development 100% affordable.
- The central location of the site in Witney had made it ideal in terms of access to amenities and transport. Residents living in such close proximity to the town centre would also increase footfall in the town's shops.
- The Executive did recognise that there was an impact of developing the site on the parking provision in the town. Councillor Saul acknowledged that this could displace people in the day and residents who used the car park at night. However, the Council was actively working on solutions that could include the use of the available capacity at Marriots Walk or a key fob scheme for workers and residents.

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- A revised set of architect's designs had been produced since the publication of the report. These plans included additional public parking bays.
- The Executive had listened to public comment and were working to increase the parking and prioritise key workers.

The Director of Place expanded on the new architects plans and advised that these would be fully costed and viability checked before moving to the planning process.

Councillor Saul proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, reiterated that this was a core policy of the Council. The Council owned the land which would mean the project could be delivered with lower cost and the scheme matched the parameters of Homes England who were supportive.

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, queried the potential for multi-storey or underground parking on the site. The Director of Place responded and referenced the revised architects drawing that had picked up aspects of this approach in its design but noted such approaches could increase cost.

Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council, praised the movement from the original proposal that properties would be sold on the open market to 100% affordable and reiterated the benefits of the housing being in Witney town centre for businesses. Councillor Enright sought more clarity on the plans for key worker accommodation and the balance of the parking requirements of shoppers and residents of the area. Councillor Saul responded by stating that the Council was mindful of these considerations and how important this was to local Members. The detail of the scheme was still being developed. The proximity of the three blue light services was a key consideration, and the available capacity of Marriots Walk was being looked at as a solution. Councillor Saul reminded the meeting that parking in Witney was still free. In expanding the discussion, Councillor Arciszewska reminded the meeting that the district was rural, and so cars were needed. This need for car use was required to be balanced against the use of land for parking when land was of limited availability in the district.

A Member of the opposition requested more detail of the under-croft aspect of the new architects' plans referenced by the Executive Member and Director of Place. The Director of Place explained that the latest set of drawings did not provide a multi-storey car park but included an under-croft. This feature would enable residents parking to be provided under one of the proposed blocks and would free up an additional fifty spaces for public parking. This would increase the total public parking spaces to seventy-seven on the site.

A Non-Executive Member noted that she had seen alternative low-cost methods of building in Bicester that could be considered. Additionally, the point was made that some residents did not feel secure in a multi-storey car park and that this should be considered.

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Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, seconded the proposal and noted that there were two further opportunities for public engagement on this proposal. The first would be when the plans were completed and then a second consultation would form part of the planning application process. Details of these consultations would be communicated by the Council.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Noted the update on progress with the Woodford Way project.
2. Endorsed the proposed approach to the residential development of the Woodford Way site and car parking (subject to planning permission).

The Meeting closed at 3.00 pm

CHAIR