

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the

**Executive**

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB  
at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 11 February 2026**

PRESENT

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

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive Officer), Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance and Regulatory Services), Frank Wilson (Group Finance Director - Publica), Phil Martin (Director of Place), Claire Locke (Executive Director), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer), Maria Harper (Democratic Services Assistant), Mathew Taylor (Democratic Services Officer), Georgina Dyer (Head of Finance), Mandy Fathers (Business Manager - Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service), Si Pocock-Cluley (Environmental Services and Waste Transformation Lead) and Chris Hargraves (Head of Planning)

Other Councillors in attendance: Julian Cooper and David Melvin

**453 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment.

**454 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**455 Minutes of Previous Meeting**

There were no amendments to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 January 2026.

The approval of the minutes was 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:

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 January 2026.

**456 Receipt of Announcements**

Councillor Rachel Crouch, Executive Member for Stronger Healthy Communities, advised that thirty-four Parish, Town and District Councillors had undertaken the Mental Health Training

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provided by Mind. Councillor Crouch stated that there were three dates still available for the training and encouraged Councillors to attend.

**457 Participation of the Public**

There was no participation of the public.

**458 Reports from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Executive noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had met on 4 February 2026. The responses of the Executive to the recommendations made by the Committee had been circulated and published prior to the meeting. Full details of the response could be viewed on the website.

With regards to the Nature Recovery Plan the Executive had agreed to both recommendations.

In the area of Mental Health initiatives, the Committee had made three recommendations. Rachel Crouch, Executive Member for Stronger Healthy Communities, addressed the responses to recommendations one and two. Councillor Crouch advised that recommendation one would be considered following the outcome of the Marmot Place Health research. The second recommendation would be agreed once the funding need had been identified and the current budget had been used in a targeted manner.

Councillor Andy Graham, the Leader of the Council, addressed the third recommendation on Mental Health on reviewing the reception arrangements at Woodgreen. Councillor Graham noted that this recommendation would be considered, however Welch Way was the Council's primary reception. Councillor Graham informed the Executive that visits in the month to Welch Way had been 778 with Woodgreen having received under 100 visits.

**459 Matters raised by Audit and Governance Committee**

The Audit and Governance Committee had met on 22 January 2026 and there had been no matters raised for the Executive to consider.

**460 Budget 2026/27 & medium term financial strategy**

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

1. The Draft Base Budget for 2026/27
2. The Council's Capital Programme for 2026/27 to 2030/31

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3. The level of Council Tax for 2026/27
4. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)
5. The Capital Strategy 2026/27
6. The Investment Strategy 2026/27
7. The Treasury management Strategy 2026/27
8. The Responses from the Statutory Budget Consultation 2026/27
9. The Pay Policy Statement 2026/27

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

- Full Council would consider the budget for 2026/27 on 25 February 2026.
- The final draft had been updated with the provisional government funding settlement announced on 17 December 2025, and for updated Publica and Ubico contract sums, investment property information and Retained Business Rates.
- The strategy papers for Capital, Investment and Treasury Management had been reviewed by the Audit and Governance Committee on 22 January 2026 and were included in the report.
- The final Local Government Finance Settlement was published on 9 February 2026, and a supplementary briefing note had been published to address this. Councillor Smith advised that the government's methodology for the calculation of Business Rates pooling in the Funding Floor baseline had been adjusted, with the result that there was a reduction in funding of £2.318m over the three-year funding period, when compared to the provisional settlement. The Business Rates pooling gain was still included in Core Spending Power, but the methodology had changed, giving 50% to Counties and 50% to the districts. This had meant that there was a reduction in funding in years two and three. However, a new Adjustment Support grant introduced for 2026/27 ensured that no Council received less Core Spending Power than had been announced in the provisional settlement.
- The final draft budget resulted in a contribution to general fund reserves of £683,814 before growth requests and was balanced after growth requests.
- The table at section 2 of the report showed key movements in the budget from that proposed to the Executive in January. Changes had included: the reduction in the Ubico contract; the Publica contract in which a re-based cost model had been adopted; additional movements to earmarked reserves for the Waste and Environmental Services Project and the next phase of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR); the removal of cost of interest on external borrowing from the base budget.
- The Council proposed to invest in areas such as: management of the property portfolio; shared positions in Pollution Services, Tenancy Relations and Private Water Supplies; habitat improvements on Council land, species recovery projects; projects to prevent violence against women and girls; Environmental Officer and Field Worker posts; and a Planning Services Transformation Lead.
- Councillor Smith paid tribute to the Officers responsible for the budget, which he considered to be good in the circumstances faced by the Council.

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- Councillor Smith proposed the Executive accepted the recommendations shown in the report.

In the discussion Executive members noted and welcomed the budget and highlighted the inclusion of growth requests in their portfolios.

Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning, drew the attention of the Executive to three areas in his portfolio: Increased capacity in project management for the Local Plan; increased capacity to manage infrastructure funds; and the extension to the Planning Transformation Lead role. Councillor Ashton also welcomed the capital funding allocated for improvements to lighting for parking in Burford.

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, highlighted the work across local authorities towards the Nature Recovery Strategy. Councillor Prosser noted that the budget allowed delivery on the Strategy across the District including investment in officers to enable engagement with communities. Projects such as Coronation Orchards were examples of this work and had provided nature rich community assets.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, seconded the proposal and stated that the budget was a result of the diligent and detailed work of the Council's officers. Investments and improvement work on Council owned assets, such as at Elmfield, had ensured financial returns that had enabled the Council to continue to provide services to residents. In some other authorities Government funding shortfalls had meant cuts to services to manage deficits, however the Council had made no such cuts to services provided.

This was voted on and agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Noted the Parish Precepts and Tax Levels set out in Annex G.

Recommend to Council to:

1. Approve the General Fund Revenue Budget as Summarised in Annex A.
2. Approve the Updated Medium Term Financial Strategy in Annex B.
3. Approve the Capital Programme for 2026/27 to 2030/31 as set out in Annex C.
4. Approve the Council's Pay Policy Statement as set out in Annex I
5. Approve the Level of District Council Tax for 2026/27 for a Band D property of £134.38 as shown in Annexes D-G.

**461 Salt Cross Area Action Plan (AAP)**

Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning, introduced the item, the purpose of which was to consider the formal adoption of the Salt Cross Area Action Plan (AAP).

In his presentation Councillor Ashton made the following points:

- Councillor Ashton expressed his gratitude to all of those that had been involved in this important milestone project. Councillor Ashton specifically mentioned: the community of Eynsham; those involved in the High Court Case and the Planning Team.
- The Salt Cross development was expected to anchor the current and Emerging Local Plans.
- The approval of the recommendations would allow a promotor to submit an outline planning application to progress the project to the next stage.
- Councillor Ashton gave background to the process from the initial work on the Area Action Plan (AAP) in 2018 through to publication of the Inspector's Report in January 2026 which had outlined her overall conclusions and the main modifications needed to make the policy sound.
- Main modifications could be seen in Annex A of the report and those modifications specific to Policy 2 could be seen in Annex B.
- The Council had discretion to make minor changes to the policy that did not materially effect the content, these could be seen in Annex C.
- Annex D was a composite version of the AAP and incorporated all modifications from Annexes A, B and C.
- It was important to note that the recommendations were binding on the Council and must either be accepted in whole or not at all.
- Councillor Ashton proposed accepting the recommendations included in the report.

The alternative options that were contained in the report were:

- The District Council could choose not to formally adopt the Salt Cross Area Action Plan (AAP) but this would mean there would be no detailed planning policy framework in place against which to consider any current or future planning applications pertaining to Salt Cross Garden Village. This would create a significant degree of uncertainty and lead to further delays with delivery.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, seconded the proposal and stated that the Salt Cross project had taken many years to come to fruition, through several administrations. It would deliver over 2,000 high quality homes at net-zero and would set a template for the

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whole of the UK for such developments. The development would benefit people's lives in many ways including energy use.

Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council, commented that it was welcome that the Salt Cross development would be a mixed development of housing and employment areas.

Councillor Andrew Prosser suggested that Salt Cross would be a nationally important exemplar project and it was therefore important to ensure that the project continued to be developed in the correct manner.

A non-Executive Member in attendance queried how quickly the properties at Salt Cross would contribute towards the Council's housing supply in terms of the Council's planning obligations. It was noted that the properties would contribute to the plan in the longer term, however the exact date was hard to quantify.

This was voted on and agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive recommended to Council to:

1. Accept the Inspectors' recommendations regarding the Main Modifications required to make the AAP sound as set out at Annex A and Annex B;
2. Agree the incorporation of the additional modifications as set out at Annex C;
3. Adopt the Salt Cross Area Action Plan (AAP) attached at Annex D as a development plan document, incorporating all of the Main Modifications recommended by the Inspectors at Annex A and Annex B, together with the additional modifications at Annex C, in accordance with Regulation 26 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) Regulations 2012;
4. Authorise the Head of Planning in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning, prior to the publication of the adopted Salt Cross AAP, to correct any minor spelling, grammatical or typographical errors together with any improvements from a presentational perspective including paragraph and policy numbering;
5. Note that the adoption of the Salt Cross AAP will supersede certain aspects of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 insofar as they relate to Salt Cross with immediate effect, specifically; Figure 3.2 of the AAP updates Figure 9.5e of the Local Plan, AAP Policy 16 supersedes Local Plan Policy T4 in respect of car parking standards and AAP Policy 25 supersedes Local Plan Policy H5 in respect of custom and self-build housing.

## 462 Street Cleansing Vehicle Procurement

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, introduced the item the purpose of which was to seek approval to procure vehicles for the Street Cleansing service.

In his presentation Councillor Prosser made the following points:

- The report had included the alternative options for vehicle procurement, and these were:
  - Retain Existing Vehicles
    - Advantages: Avoided immediate capital expenditure.
    - Disadvantages: This option significantly increased the risk of service failure due to mechanical breakdowns. Maintenance costs for aging sweepers were increasing, and downtime impacted operational efficiency and resident satisfaction.
  - Procure two Fossil Fuel-Powered Sweepers
    - Advantages: Fossil fuel-powered vehicles were widely available and had lower upfront costs compared to electric alternatives.
    - Disadvantages: This option did not support the Council's commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2030. Continuing with this technology would lock in higher emissions for the lifespan of the vehicles.
  - Explore Hydrogen or Other Emerging Technologies
    - Advantages: Hydrogen-powered vehicles offered zero tailpipe emissions and could align with long-term sustainability goals.
    - Disadvantages: Hydrogen sweepers were not readily available in the current market, and infrastructure requirements would be significantly more complex and costly than electric charging solutions. This option was therefore not viable at present.
- After evaluating these alternatives, the proposed approach, to replace the smaller electric sweeper on a like-for-like basis now and delegate the decision on the larger sweeper pending schedule reviews and depot capacity identification, represented the most practical and strategic choice. This approach continued the delivery of environmental benefits, aligned with the Council's climate commitments, and maintained
- The small electric-powered vehicle-mounted road sweeper was a replacement vehicle.
- Procurement of the larger electric vehicle would be delegated to the Director of Place in consultation with the relevant Executive Members as further trials were required. The trials would include exploration of the schedules and distances required to be covered by the vehicle.

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Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, seconded the proposal and stated that it was important to progress the replacement of the fleet where necessary in line with the Council's green objectives.

This was voted on and agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Approved the use of capital funding of £260,000 to procure one small (~3.5t) electric-powered vehicle-mounted road sweeper on a like-for-like basis.
2. Delegated authority to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Environmental Services, the Executive Member for Finance, and the Director of Finance, to:
  - a) Review the sweeping re-scheduling report and assess depot capacity following a further electric vehicle trial.
  - b) Approve the use of capital funding of £235,000 - £435,000 to procure one large (~16t) vehicle-mounted road sweeper, based on the outcome of the review and trial.
  - c) Approve the use of capital funding of £15,000 to procure any necessary charging infrastructure if an electric option is selected for the larger sweeper.

#### **463 Investment in Public Conveniences**

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the item, the purpose of which was to seek funding for the renovation, redesign and repair of the Public Conveniences to be retained within the district to ensure a high-quality service for the customer.

In his presentation Councillor Smith made the following points:

- Following consultation, the Town or Parish Councils had not taken the option to take on facilities.
- Seven public conveniences would remain open. Those that would remain open were located where they were most needed and would be improved.
- The remainder facilities would be closed on 31 March 2026, and signage would be displayed to advise of the closures.
- The focus of renovation, redesign and repair works would be on the remaining well used facilities. The improvements would be on a direct access design which was less likely to attract anti-social behaviour, were more capable of being easily cleaned, were gender-neutral and more accessible.
- Cashless payment would also be introduced as part of the work.
- The current cost to the Council of providing public conveniences was £269,747. This cost was reduced by £114,7545 by the closures proposed. The closures also would

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avoid repair costs on closed facilities estimated to be £87,700 over the next three years.

The alternative option was that the Executive could have decided not to invest in the retained facilities but unless repairs were carried out the condition would deteriorate further.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, seconded the proposal and advised that a further report would be brought to the Executive on the proposals for disposal of the closed assets. Councillor Graham noted that this process was an example of the Council making assessment of the use of its assets and the use did change over time.

Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning, highlighted the importance of the upgrades for the visitor economy and welcomed the addition of cashless payment which would improve access. Councillor Ashton suggested that it would be appropriate for the Council to consider increasing charges in the future.

A non-Executive Member present requested that officers reconsider the detail of the facilities at Kilkenny Country Park. The Member also requested that the returns from the sales of the assets being disposed of be earmarked to improvements works at the remaining public conveniences.

This was voted on and agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Allocated funding of £532,140 within the capital programme for 2026/27 to enable the delivery of Option 2 - redesign, renovation and repair of public conveniences at Langdale Gate in Witney, Guildenford and High Street in Burford, Bampton Town Hall, New Street in Chipping Norton, Hensington Road in Woodstock and Kilkenny Country Park, and to introduce cashless payment at these sites.
2. Delegated authority to the Executive Director – Corporate Services in consultation with the Director of Finance and the Executive Members for Finance and for Environment, to agree the detailed design and improvements and to award the contract.

#### **464 Long Term Council Tax Empty Property Premium Exemption of Proposed Demolition Properties**

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the item, the purpose of which was to consider the removal of the Long-Term Empty Property Premium for Cottsway owned properties that were due to be demolished.

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In his presentation Councillor Smith made the following points:

- Government had delegated powers to local authorities to incentivise property owners to bring empty properties back into use by introducing high premiums for Council Tax when they remain empty after two years. The maximum permitted increases to Council Tax premiums in such cases could be seen at section 2.3 of the report.
- Cottsway Housing were undergoing a programme of redevelopment with some of their housing stock at Evenlode Close, Charlbury, Shakenoak, North Leigh and Spareacre Lane and Mill Street in Eynsham. These three sites were formerly sheltered accommodation which would be demolished and redeveloped.
- It had seemed inappropriate to penalise the social housing landlord who had advanced plans to redevelop these aging sites and it was proposed to exempt them from the premium.
- Despite the exemption the sites would be kept under review by officers and an annual update report would be submitted to the Director of Finance.

The alternative option considered in the report was that the Executive could decide not to remove the long-term empty premiums already applied for 2025/26 or those due in 2026/27 from the properties of the three sites.

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care, seconded the item and noted that Cottsway had already redeveloped such sites in Chipping Norton and Witney and it did not make sense to penalise them for taking older properties out of use with the aim of redeveloping them for better use. In addition, Councillor Saul suggested that the money from the exemption could be used for such a redevelopment.

This was voted and approved unanimously.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Executive:

1. Delegated responsibility to the Director of Finance in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and Executive Member for Housing and Social Care to remove, where it can be shown this will expedite the delivery of new social and affordable rent homes, the Long Term Empty Property Premiums for the properties set out in the report and other properties for registered providers that meet the same criteria; and,
2. Noted that any removal of the Empty Property Premium is reviewed at least every twelve months to ensure that progress on redevelopment is being made.

The Meeting closed at 3.04 pm

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CHAIR