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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
1NB at 5.30 pm on **Wednesday, 3 June 2026**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chair), Genny Early (Vice-Chair), Adam Clements, Steve Cosier, Rachel Crouch, Liam Mackenzie, Stuart McCarroll, Paul Marsh, Hannah Massie, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Carl Rylett, Simon Watson and Alex Wilson

Officers: Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Georgina Dyer (Head of Finance), Phil Martin (Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service), Ana Prelici (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Lucy Empson, Heather McCulloch (Community Wellbeing Manager), Gemma Moreing (Business Information and Performance Lead), Ciaran Okane (Senior Business Partner – Procurement) and Jasmine McWilliams (Head of Assets)

Other Councillors in attendance: Sandra Coleman, Alaric Smith and Tim Sumner

127 Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments

Apologies for absence were noted from Councillor Sarah Evans.

128 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Hannah Massie had applied and gone through the west hive process in the past but was not taking any decision and did not have an interest to declare.

129 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2026. The approval of the minutes was proposed by Councillor Steve Cosier, seconded by Councillor Michele Mead, put to the vote and unanimously agreed by the Committee.

Resolved: To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2026 as an accurate record.

130 Chair's announcements

The Chair welcomed new members to Committee.

The Chair explained that the Executive had not met to consider the recommendations arising from the 26 March 2026 Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

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The Chair asked members to indicate whether they'd wish to discuss the exempt annex for the Investment Property Portfolio item or whether it could be considered in public session. No one indicated a wish to enter into private session for that item.

131 Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

132 Supporting Community Services - Crowdfunder UK Approach

Councillor Sandra Coleman, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, introduced the report to the Executive which was on the Committee's agenda for pre-decision scrutiny. The report proposed the application and assessment processes, criteria and eligibility of the new grants scheme which is expected to be hosted by Crowdfunder UK. The Executive Member highlighted the benefits of the proposed approach which included a more streamlined decision-making process.

The Committee asked questions and in discussion noted that:

- The scheme would extend comfortably beyond the expected lifespan of the Council.
- The removal of platform fees for not-for-profit groups was very welcome.
- The application process remained necessarily rigorous, but the Council could support applicants with the process.
- It would be feasible to provide financial support to groups with start-up costs but there was a need to understand to what extent this was a barrier and to be realistic about the work this would involve for the officers.
- Groups were encouraged to be realistic about the level of funding they were seeking and to break projects down into phases.
- It was proposed to delegate decisions to award funding to the Director of Place in consultation with the relevant Executive Members.
- Some members felt that the Ward Member should be involved in the application and/or decision process, perhaps by being invited to comment on applications for projects within their ward.

The Committee considered that thought should be given to the involvement of ward members in the application process and to whether there would be merit in creating a separate fund to support with start-up costs. The Committee resolved to submit two recommendations to the Executive on 10 June 2026:

1. That the Council explores establishing a separate fund to enable projects to pay for start-up costs e.g. feasibility studies, scoping, project management and/or other such professional costs.
2. That the Council notifies ward members when an application is submitted in their wards as part of the new grant process.

The Chair thanked the attendees for presenting the report and answering questions.

I33 Quarterly Financial Performance Report Q4

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the report on the financial performance of the Council in 2025/26. The Executive Member highlighted that the outturn position was better than had originally been budgeted for due to strong income performance and a high treasury returns. The Council could take the opportunity to strengthen its reserves. Some capital schemes had slipped into the following financial year and the Council continued to face significant financial challenges but the report showed that the Council had managed its finances effectively in 2025/26.

The Committee asked questions and in discussion with the Executive Member and the Head of Finance noted that:

- Income from Green Waste licenses was behind target. The Council did not see green waste licenses purely in terms of income as it had the cheapest fee in Oxfordshire which had been frozen in the budget.
- Offering part-year green waste licenses was not considered to be viable due to the high administrative burden. 95% of licenses were sold by July.
- A report on a County-wide partnership initiative to benefit from greater economies of scale in waste services was expected in the Autumn.
- The fly tipping of bulky waste was a concern and Oxford City Council offered households two free bulky waste collections per year. This could be looked at but could only address one form of fly tipping waste.
- High interest rates were good for short term investments and rates were now expected to remain higher for longer.

The Chair thanked the attendees and commended officers on the progress made in acquiring temporary accommodation.

I34 Quarterly Service Performance Report Q4

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the quarterly service performance report for quarter 4 of 2025/26, highlighting that:

- Salt Cross Garden Village had reached a major milestone with the Area Action Plan being agreed in February. An outline planning application was expected to come forward in the autumn.
- 14 projects were receiving funding through Westhive round 6.
- Overall performance was strong across many key services including planning application timescales and income, customer satisfaction, leisure participation, Council Tax collection, and affordable housing delivery.
- Missed bin performance was within target with 48.58 missed bins per 100,000.
- A small number of services had performed below target, such as the processing of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support changes.

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- An improvement plan was in place for the land charges service.
- There was a project to increase recycling rates which would include communications around food waste and awareness of what can be recycled.

The Committee asked questions and noted from the responses of the Executive Member and the Business Information, Performance & Improvement Manager that:

- The percentage of fixed penalty notices per fly tip was the lowest in the county. There was lots of preventative work but enforcement case work took a long time.
- The Council's leisure partner, GLL, could be asked to look at data capture and whether all visits were being recorded. There was a need to look again at benchmarking e.g. looking at South Oxfordshire and Vale of the White Horse. Usage per head data would also be useful.
- Customer satisfaction data concerning the elements of the Disabled Facilities Grants process that the Council can control would be useful.
- Some Land Charges functions had transferred to the Land Registry, meaning the workload of the Council's team tended to be more complex. A new member of staff recruited.
- Consideration could be given to improving the customer experience at the Woodgreen reception.
- The introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy was welcome and guidance was on the Council website.
- There was an issue with waste being dropped or falling from bins when collected.

The Business Information, Performance & Improvement Manager took away a number of actions and agreed to share the following with Committee Members:

- Why the fly tipping enforcement rate for quarter 4 appeared to be so low.
- Whether fly tipping instances had increased or whether the reporting had become more accurate.
- What work was being done with County to address fly tipping.
- What work was being done with the County Council to address issues associated with registered and unauthorised traveller sites.
- Why the Windrush in Witney project was off target.
- Why Community Infrastructure Levy was off target and what mitigation was in place.
- Whether there would be an annual report on youth engagement activity.
- What lessons could be learnt from the successful Nature Recovery Growth bid.

The Committee resolved to submit the following recommendation to the Executive on 10 June 2026:

- I. That the Council incorporates video clips in any future recycling campaign to maximise the impact and reach of the information. An example could feature senior councillors informing members of the public on how to correctly recycle. E.g. correctly rinsing pots and separating materials.

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Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, presented the report, the purpose of which was to present an updated draft Procurement and Contract Management Strategy. Councillor Smith stated that the procurement strategy had mainly been updated in response to the Procurement Act 2023 and recommendations of the Council's external auditors. The new Procurement and Contract Management Strategy would take the Council through to Local Government Reorganisation

The Senior Business Partner for Procurement took the Committee through the report, highlighting the role of the Commissioning and Procurement Board in reviewing contracts, ensuring detailed consideration and protection of WODC's interests. He confirmed Contract Procedure Rules were now fully aligned with the Procurement Act 2023, and emphasised commitments to sustainable procurement and supporting local small and medium enterprises (SMEs), including the ability to restrict certain opportunities to local suppliers where appropriate, as the new legislation allowed the Council to award some local contracts below a particular threshold to SMEs within Oxfordshire. There were also aspects related to strengthening the safeguarding against modern slavery and ensuring social value and sustainability within the procurement process.

Members discussed the report and noted that:

- There was an ongoing exercise within Oxfordshire to build shared knowledge of contracts, as part of preparing for Local Government Reorganisation.
- The Procurement Act 2023 only allowed closed procurement to be used for in-county procurement or open procurement which needed to be on a national level.

136 Annual Update on Investment Property Portfolio

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance introduced the item, the purpose of which was to inform members on the annual returns of properties owned by the council classified as investment properties.

The Head of Assets presented the item, making the following points, which also addressed questions that were asked by members under other agenda items:

- The council was in negotiation with interested parties over unit 10 at Marriotts Walk, but details of the prospective tenants could not be discussed in open session.
- Kilkenny Country Park was managed by Ubico, who undertook maintenance to the grass on instruction from the Biodiversity Team. The council was in the process of procuring new benches and concrete pads for the park.
- The Annual Report on Investment Property Performance was brought to the committee every year around the same time period; the report brought to the committee was the most recent, for the 25/26 financial year. The report dealt strictly with properties classified for investment; this excluded properties such as Marriotts Walk and Woolgate as they were not classified as investment properties.

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- The council originally had a capital strategy that had a targeted ratio of property assets to financial assets of 65:35. The council was slightly over the desired ratio on property assets, with the ratio of property assets to financial assets shown to be 67:33.
- The value of the council's investment portfolio was £42.44m. This was a reduction since last year's report which was explained by the sale of the Knight's Court property in the previous year.
- Rental incomes had reduced, accredited to commercial tenants and their want for more flexibility in their leases.

There was no further discussion on the report.

137 Report back on recommendations

The Committee noted the Head of Planning's response to the Committee's comments on the proposed changes to the national planning system.

The Chair thanked the officers for capturing and responding to the Committee's comments.

138 Committee Work Programme

The Chair asked members to suggest areas of focus for the Leisure Update item and requested the attendance of a representative from the Council's leisure partner, GLL. Members were encouraged to submit questions to Democratic Services in advance so that GLL can have the answers at the meeting.

Similarly, the Chair asked that Members submit questions in advance in future for quarterly service performance and financial reports.

The Chair also suggested that any task and finish groups established by the Committee should report back to the Committee with any recommendations before they are submitted to the Executive.

Committee Members suggested the following items for possible inclusion in the work plan or as possible task and finish groups:

- Section 106, including spend and the possibility of deeds of variance.
- The process for how licenses are granted.

The Committee agreed to review the business for the September meeting in July and consider whether any items need to slip. The Committee Work Programme was noted. The Committee also agreed to revisit the start time of meetings in July.

139 Executive Work Programme

The Executive Work Programme was noted without comment.

140 Exclusion of the Press and Public

The Committee did not resolve to enter into private session, having considered the Annual Update on Investment Property Portfolio in public session.

141 Exempt Annex A- Annual Update on Investment Property Portfolio

The exempt annex was taken as read as part of the Annual Update on Investment Property Portfolio, which was considered in public.

The Meeting closed at 8.07 pm

CHAIR

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Minute supplement:

Responses from officers to questions raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3 June 2026 on the Quarterly Service Performance Report 2025/26 Quarter 4.

1. Fly tipping - Why is the enforcement rate low for Q4?

In Q4, 2 FPNs were issued, one of which was supported by CCTV evidence. While the number of FPNs is relatively low, this reflects a broader shift towards prevention, intelligence-led enforcement and partnership working rather than a reduction in activity.

Targeted camera surveillance in hotspot areas such as Eynsham has delivered significant impact, contributing to a 96% reduction in fly-tipping in that location, with further cases progressing from CCTV evidence. Additional surveillance operations are ongoing across key locations, supported by increased signage and planned expansion.

The team has continued proactive multi-agency work, including planning further joint stop-and-search operations with Thames Valley Police, HMRC, Cherwell and the Environment Agency to tackle illegal waste carriers along main highways. Work is also underway with Police and OCC to address traveller-related waste issues and identify preventative approaches.

Enforcement activity remains strong across a range of offences, including formal warnings for duty of care breaches, FPNs issued for abandoned vehicles, littering and Duty of Care offences, and progression of more serious cases through interview under caution (IUC). This includes cases relating to waste offences and scrap metal dealing.

In parallel, officers are maintaining a visible presence in communities, delivering parish-level environmental crime presentations, working closely with housing associations and landowners to address nuisance waste, and collaborating with Thames Water to reduce incidents at key infrastructure sites.

Preparatory work continues for further enforcement tools, including a dog fouling PSPO, alongside ongoing monitoring of suspected illegal waste sites.

An additional officer joining the team will further strengthen capacity and support increased enforcement outcomes moving forward.

2. Fly tipping – What work is being done with Oxfordshire County Council to manage issues?

The work being done with OCC is closer communication between officers on dealing with traveller sites across the district. This includes both registered and unauthorised sites. Types of collaboration are assisting OCC with ongoing fly tipping issues at a registered traveller site and joint visits to illegal encampments that appear in the district where waste accumulates in significant amounts. The latter often includes linking in with TVP.

In addition the service is providing information to OCC during joint agency enforcement meetings, about issues with the new booking system at Dix Pitt. Potential links with cases of fly tipping are being examined, however to date the data doesn't clearly show a defined or significant increase in comparison to previous years.

3. Fly tipping – Has fly tipping increased or has reporting become more accurate?

The volume of fly tipping reports fluctuates during the year, normally in the winter months there is an increase in reports compared to spring months where there the number of reports reduce. A reduction in reports may result in less evidence of fly-tipping perpetrators, which directly impacts on the formal action that can be taken.

Recently it has been noticed less of the reported fly tips contain actionable evidence. More duplicate reporting of fly tipping has occurred since issues like Kidlington came into the news. The Alloy software system should resolve this issue with a change in reporting systems. The testing phase of the fly tipping reporting side process has identified there will be a positive effect on reporting and data quality.

4. Leisure visits - Could GLL be asked to look at data capture and whether all leisure centre visits are being recorded?

We are currently working with GLL to transition data collection from a spreadsheet based system onto a new PowerBi platform. Ultimately this will enable greater detail to be found when reviewing data and provide more insights for the management of the leisure service. Whilst this platform is being built we have a limited capacity to 'drill down' into data at a site by site level – although we can, and will, still receive total usage figures that can be reported and monitored. We are hoping to have the detailed data available soon – and will then recommence reporting on site by site usage details.

5. What lessons could be learnt from the successful Nature Recovery Growth bid?

There is a members' briefing on the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) on 4 June from 5:30pm.

Oxfordshire County Council are the Responsible Authority for the LNRS, and they have been given funding by Defra for this year to focus on the transition to delivery. Work is ongoing with this, but progress has been made on identifying strategic projects that could be supported by OCC and the funding they've received, plus TVERC are offering LNRS reports as part of their data services to various groups, including communities, and the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment have recently launched a new Species Recovery Fund to support LNRS species. WODC agreed funding for nature recovery as part of the budget for 2026-27, so me and my team are actively engaged in managing projects to implement the Council's Nature Recovery Plan and use this new funding towards key actions, including enhancing council-owned land, organising events and providing advice and support to schools and town/parish councils/meetings.

The ecology team are reviewing the Council's Nature Recovery Plan 2024-2030 to update and amend according to recent developments, including the publication of the LNRS and to improve the key performance indicators for monitoring success.

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