

Tuesday, 8 September 2026

Tel: 01993 861000

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

COUNCIL

You are summoned to a meeting of the Council which will be held in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB on **Wednesday, 16 September 2026 at 2.00 pm.**



Phil Martin
Chief Executive

To: Members of the Council

Councillors: Carl Rylett (Chair), Joy Aitman (Vice-Chair), Tammy Abarno, Thomas Ashby, Andrew Beaney, Adam Clements, Sandra Coleman, Andrew Coles, Sandra Cosier, Steve Cosier, Rachel Crouch, Jane Doughty, Genny Early, Duncan Enright, Sarah Evans, Roger Faulkner, Nick Field-Johnson, Phil Godfrey, Andy Goodwin, Andy Graham, David Jackson, Edward James, Liz Leffman, Dan Levy, Jan Lund, Andrew Lyon, Liam Mackenzie, Stuart McCarroll, Paul Marsh, Hannah Massie, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Toby Morris, Rosie Pearson, Elizabeth Poskitt, Andrew Prosser, Nigel Ridpath, James Robertshaw, Geoff Saul, Sandra Simpson, Alaric Smith, Tim Sumner, Jack Treloar, Sarah Veasey, Liam Walker, Mark Walker, Simon Watson, Alex Wilson and Alistair Wray

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.
2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting (Pages 9 - 26)**
To approve the minutes of the meetings held on 22 July 2026.
3. **Declarations of Interest**
To receive any declarations from Members of Council on any items to be considered at the meeting.
4. **Receipt of Announcements**
To receive any announcements from The Chair, Leader, Members of the Executive, Head of Paid Service, Director of Finance or Director of Governance.
5. **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 submission is 2.00pm, two clear working days before the meeting.

6. **Questions by Members**
The following questions have been submitted by Members of Council to Members of the Executive, in accordance with the Council Procedure Rules (Constitution Part 5A, Rule 12).

Written responses will be circulated to Members and published on the Council's website at least one working day prior to the meeting. A Member submitting a question is entitled to ask one supplementary question at the meeting which must arise directly from the question or the response to it.

The supplementary questions and answers will be detailed in the minutes of the meeting.

Question 1: From Councillor Thomas Ashby to Councillor Tim Sumner, Executive Member for Arts, Culture and Sports

Please can the Executive Member provide a detailed update on the following West Witney Projects:

- Witney 3G at West Witney Sports Ground
- Adventure Play Area (Windrush Place S106 Funding)
- Raleigh Crescent MUGA

The lack of serious progression is a serious concern amongst residents, therefore a detailed update on all three will be greatly appreciated.

Question 2: From Councillor Thomas Ashby to Councillor Cllr Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance

For several years I have been working to secure the sensible and sustainable estate maintenance Deer Park requires. While we made progress initially, the last few years have seen a significant decline in substantial works.

On 14 January this year, I was informed that substantial works would commence in Deer Park this autumn. However, I was recently informed that due to some trees failing because of the hot weather, some of these works may now be delayed until the start of the next financial year. This is unacceptable. The start of the financial year is April which is well within the nesting season and would therefore mean the works could not commence until this time next year.

Please can the Executive Member ensure, by working with the Chief Executive and Tree Officer, that Deer Park is prioritised for the estate maintenance it requires. Hundreds of thousands of pounds have been spent on subsidence claims over the years, and residents are rightly concerned that largely, tree pruning has not been undertaken significantly in 30 years.

Question 3: From Councillor Thomas Ashby to Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council

Please can the Executive Member outline, in detail, what discussions/engagement has been held with Town and Parish Councils regarding 'Asset Transfer' ahead of Local Government Reform. Many councils are suffering from anxiety by not knowing what assets and services may be heading their way, therefore, any direction the Executive Member can outline would be greatly appreciated

Reports from Officers

7. Members' Allowances Scheme for 2027/28 (Pages 27 - 30)

That Council resolves to:

- I. Request that the Independent Remuneration Panel reports to Council in early 2027 to make recommendations about a Members' Allowances Scheme for 2027/28 and up to three subsequent years.

8. Community Governance Review proposal (Pages 31 - 48)

Purpose

To present proposals for undertaking a Community Governance Review focused on the civic boundaries of Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney, in response to full Council on 28 January 2026 agreeing an amended motion titled "Local Governance Review: Parish and Town Boundary Review for West Oxfordshire".

Recommendations

That Council resolves to:

- I. Note that, subject to the government's review of local government

reorganisation, delivering local government reorganisation while supporting business as usual activities will be the Council's immediate and overriding governance priority and will be resource intensive over the coming period.

2. Note that, given the time a CGR will take to complete and the uncertain timeline for local government reorganisation, any decisions resulting from a CGR undertaken by West Oxfordshire District Council may be taken by a successor unitary authority following Vesting Day (previously 1 April 2028, now TBC), in accordance with the Local Government (Structural Changes) (Transitional Arrangements) Regulations 2008.
3. Agree to begin a Community Governance Review (CGR) prior to local government reorganisation focused specifically on reviewing the civic boundaries of Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney where development has taken place or is taking place outside of town council boundaries.
4. Agree the terms of reference for the CGR attached at Annex A.
5. Delegate authority to the Director of Governance and Regulatory Services, in consultation with the Chair of the Constitution Working Group, to make minor amendments to the Terms of Reference to reflect any changes agreed at Full Council.
6. Authorise officers to advise Oxfordshire County Council of the Community Governance Review in accordance with Section 79 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.
7. Agree to invite proposals from Carterton Town Council and its surrounding parishes, Chipping Norton Town Council and its surrounding parishes and Witney Town Council and its surrounding parishes, for changes to civic parish boundaries.
8. Agree that the Constitution Working Group will oversee the review, engage with ward members and report back to Council with initial proposals for public consultation, and subsequently final recommendations following public consultation to put forward to full Council or a successor unitary authority.
9. Note that if a successor unitary council is the ultimate decision maker then it will decide whether or not to give effect to any recommendation put to it and may wish to undertake further work on this CGR and/or a wider community governance review post-reorganisation, once the role of town and parish councils within future unitary structures is clearer.

9. **National Scheme of Delegation of Planning Functions (Pages 49 - 56)**

Purpose

To put arrangements in place to amend the Constitution when national changes to the functioning of Planning Committees in England come into effect (on 31 October 2026).

Recommendations

That Council resolves to:

1. Agree that a 12-Member Planning Committee will replace the Strategic Planning Committee and Development Management Sub-Committee following the October meeting cycle and that the Planning Committee will meet on the dates currently scheduled for the Development Management Sub-Committee.

2. Delegate authority to the Director of Governance and Regulatory Services to appoint Members to the Planning Committee in accordance with political proportionality and the nominations made by political groups.
3. Agree that the Chair of the Planning Committee will be the “nominated member” under the Regulations with the Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee as substitute, and that the Head of Planning will be the “nominated officer”, with the Development Management Manager the substitute.
4. Agree that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee will be paid the Special Responsibility Allowances payable to the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Development Management Sub-Committee under the Members Allowances Scheme 2023/24 to 2026/27.
5. Agree that all own-interest applications will be considered by the nominated member and nominated officer for referral to the Planning Committee, meaning that no own-interest applications will automatically be delegated to officers.
6. Delegate authority to the Director of Governance and Regulatory Services, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee and the Chair of the Constitution Working Group, to update the Constitution (including parts 3C, 4F and 6Q) to put the new arrangements in place to ensure compliance with The Town and Country Planning (Discharge of Local Planning Authority Functions) (England) Regulations 2026, following consideration by the Constitution Working Group.

Motions on Notice

10. Motion A: Strengthening Food Security and Resilience, proposed by Councillor Steve Cosier, seconded by Councillor Tim Sumner

The UK is one of the least food self-sufficient countries in Europe. With its historic reliance on food imports from other countries.

Prof Lang of the University of London stated the “UK produced less food than it needed to feed itself, and as a small island that relied on a few large companies to feed its giant population, it is particularly vulnerable to climate shocks”.

Increased digitisation along the supply chain makes the UK’s food system more vulnerable to cyber breakdowns, including critical infrastructure failures and malicious activity.

As climate change drives more extreme weather both in the summer and the winter, the adoption of more climate resilient farming practices will become increasingly important. The changes in our climate are accelerating the spread and intensity of insect and plant diseases. Without a living breathing biosphere there is no stable economy and no food security. The future food security of our nation depends on the living systems that sustain us.

The UK remains reliant on imports for 40% of its food. We need to strengthen our diversify supply chains, invest in sustainable domestic production, and develop a climate-adapted national food security strategy. Taken together, this evidence demonstrates that the UK’s biosecurity and food production is on life support; fighting the accelerating risks posed by geopolitics, emerging diseases, global supply chain instability, climate change and biodiversity decline.

Council Notes:

- The UK is one of Europe's least food self-sufficient countries; relying on imports for approximately 40% of it from countries increasingly affected by climate change and geopolitical instability.
- The UK's "just-in-time" food supply chain makes it vulnerable to extreme weather, cyber-attacks, animal and plant diseases, and failures in critical infrastructure.
- Food insecurity and food price inflation continue to affect households across the UK, while climate change, biodiversity loss and global instability are increasing risks to long-term food security.
- UK's biosecurity and food production is on life support; fighting the accelerating risks posed by geopolitics, emerging diseases, global supply chain instability, climate change and biodiversity decline.

Council Resolves:

1. To request that the Leader writes to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and West Oxfordshire's Members of Parliament calling for a comprehensive National Food Security Strategy including:
2. Stronger statutory duties on Government to safeguard food security, protect its citizens from cost-of-living crisis, and safeguard national biosecurity; and
3. Greater investment in climate-resilient farming, domestic food production and environmental recovery.
4. To request that the Leader writes to the Cabinet Office and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology urging enhanced cyber resilience for the UK's food distribution and cold-chain networks, including consideration of their designation as Critical National Infrastructure where appropriate.
5. To ask the Executive to work with local farmers, businesses and community organisations to identify opportunities to strengthen local food resilience and support sustainable food production across West Oxfordshire.

11. **Motion B: Empty MOD Homes in Long Hanborough Proposed by Cllr Roger Faulkner, Seconded by Councillor Toby Morris**

West Oxfordshire District Council notes with concern that a number of Ministry of Defence-owned homes in Marlborough Crescent and Becketts Close, Long Hanborough have remained empty for many years.

At a time when there is significant pressure on housing across West Oxfordshire, residents are understandably frustrated to see existing homes sitting vacant and deteriorating for such a prolonged period. They are also increasingly concerned at the anti-social behaviour (drug and alcohol use) which has involved the police in recent weeks.

The Council recognises that these properties are owned by the Ministry of Defence and that decisions regarding their future ultimately rest with the Government. However, the continued uncertainty surrounding the site is unacceptable for the local community, particularly those living close to the properties.

This Council believes that homes should not be left empty for years without a clear plan

for their future.

This Council therefore resolves to request that the Leader of West Oxfordshire District Council writes to the Minister for Veterans and People and to Calum Miller MP to:

1. Raise the Council's concerns about the length of time these MOD-owned homes have remained empty.
2. Request a clear update on the Ministry of Defence's plans and timescale for the site.
3. Seek confirmation as to whether the homes will be brought back into occupation, renovated for future use, or demolished and replaced with new homes.
4. Request greater certainty for Long Hanborough residents and assurances that the properties will not be allowed to remain vacant and deteriorating indefinitely.

(END)

This page is intentionally left blank

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Council

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB
at 2.15 pm on **Wednesday, 22 July 2026**

PRESENT

Councillors: Carl Rylett (Chair), Joy Aitman (Vice-Chair), Tammy Abarno, Thomas Ashby, Andrew Beaney, Adam Clements, Sandra Coleman, Andrew Coles, Rachel Crouch, Duncan Enright, Sarah Evans, Roger Faulkner, Nick Field-Johnson, Phil Godfrey, Andy Graham, David Jackson, Edward James, Liz Leffman, Dan Levy, Jan Lund, Andrew Lyon, Liam Mackenzie, Stuart McCarroll, Paul Marsh, Hannah Massie, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Rosie Pearson, Elizabeth Poskitt, Andrew Prosser, Nigel Ridpath, Geoff Saul, Sandra Simpson, Alaric Smith, Tim Sumner, Jack Treloar, Sarah Veasey, Liam Walker, Mark Walker, Simon Watson, Alex Wilson and Alistair Wray

Officers: Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance and Regulatory Services), Phil Martin (Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service), Frank Wilson (Managing Director - Publica), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer), Maria Harper (Democratic Services Assistant), Ana Prelici (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and Chris Hargraves (Head of Planning)

Other Councillors in attendance:

CL.124 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors:

Sandra Cosier
Steve Cosier
Jane Doughty
Genny Early
Phil Godfrey
Andrew Lyon
Toby Morris
James Robertshaw

CL.125 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

The Chair explained that Motion C was related to management fees at privately managed estates and explained that any members who were subject to such fees may wish to declare that for transparency.

Councillors Liam Walker and Stuart McCarroll both declared that they live on new estates but that they were approaching the debate with an open mind.

CL.126 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 May were considered.

Councillor Liam Walker raised a correction regarding page 10 explaining that there were 2 votes against which had been omitted from the minutes.

The amended minutes were proposed by Councillor Andy Graham and seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright.

CL.127 Receipt of Announcements

The Chair made the following announcements;

- The Chair's civic year would focus on supporting young people, particularly those facing additional challenges. His chosen charities were Against the Grain and APCAM, both of which worked to support young people and families affected by special educational and mental health needs.
- Members were invited to attend an event organised by the Eynsham Nature Recovery Network on 5 September 2026, highlighting its work to restore biodiversity and recreate ancient floodplain meadows along the River Thames.
- Members were asked to complete training surveys and review their Register of Interests forms, returning any updates to Democratic Services.

The Leader made the following announcements;

- Council was updated on the Government's decision regarding local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire. The Leader stated that, while this was not the Council's preferred outcome, the Council would work constructively through the transition, continuing to deliver services, support staff, and seek governance arrangements that reflected the needs of West Oxfordshire's communities. Members were also reminded of the upcoming Local Government Reorganisation briefing.
- Councils in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire had received the Structural Change Order letter, which set out details relating to the new authorities, councillor numbers, implementation arrangements and the timetable for formal legislation.

22/July2026

- Council was informed of the death of Lawrence King, Lead Shared Flood Risk Manager, who had died after a short illness. Council paid tribute to his significant contribution to flood risk management and his service to the Council. Council observed a minute's silence in his memory.

The Executive Member for Climate Action announced that the Climate Team had produced two new guidance documents on climate adaptation and staying safe during hot weather. The guides had been shared with town and parish councils and made available on the Council's website.

CL.128 Participation of the Public

Adrian Bullock, the Chair of the Witney and District Chamber of Commerce had submitted a public statement. As he was unable to attend the meeting, the statement was read out by the Senior Democratic Services Officer. The statement was;

“Since March we have called for anonymised ANPR cameras in all three of the town's main car parks. The data published for the Woodford Way development was years old, incomplete, and gave no reliable picture of how Woodford Way or Marriotts car parks are actually used. The project team and several councillors supported our call at the time. ANPR records entry and exit times anonymously. It tells us exactly how long people stay, and how full each car park is, by day and hour. No guesswork. That data matters well beyond Woodford Way. Combined with footfall monitoring, it shows who uses the town centre, when, and how – exactly what we need to plan parking provision and to target our "Welcome to Witney" marketing. It also answers the key capacity question: is our mix of short, medium and long-stay spaces right? Without ANPR, every parking decision is guesswork. Guesswork costs the town - and thus the council - money. We fully support the motion for ANPR assessment of Woodford Way and Witan Way car park usage.”

CL.129 Questions by Members

Questions by Members, as listed on the agenda, and the responses to those questions, which were circulated in advance, were taken as read.

The Chair invited the questioners to ask a supplementary question if they wished and then invited the relevant Executive Members to respond.

The Written Questions, Written Answers, Verbal Supplementary Questions and Verbal Supplementary Answers are detailed in a separate document appended to the Minutes of the Meeting.

CL.130 2025/26 Quarterly Finance Review Q4

Council

22/July2026

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the report. The purpose of the item was to report the financial performance of the Council in 2025/26.

Councillor Smith included the following in his introduction;

- That the Council had a positive year-end position with a £203,000 surplus, an improvement on the budgeted forecast. Cllr Smith attributed this to strong income performance, higher-than-expected investment returns, and reduced costs in several areas.
- The surplus had enabled the Council to strengthen its financial resilience through contributions to earmarked reserves, including funding for local government reorganisation, waste and environmental services improvements, asset maintenance, hardship support schemes, and affordable housing initiatives.
- There had been progress in delivering the capital programme, including investment in temporary accommodation, while it was acknowledged that some projects had been reprofiled into the following financial year.
- Although the outturn was positive, significant medium-term financial challenges remained and continued financial discipline would be required. The Council was in a strong position to support residents' interests during the local government reorganisation process.

The Executive Member commended the report to Council.

Another member of the Executive highlighted the success of the Council's investment in town centres, noting increased usage and positive performance of the Witney and Chipping Norton markets under the new operator. They also reported continued strong performance at Marriotts Walk, which had generated a significant financial contribution to support Council services and increased footfall in Witney town centre.

Councillor Andy Graham seconded the recommendations within the report, which were put to a vote and agreed.

Council resolved to:

1. Agree to carry forward the capital budget of £4,395,180. (Paragraph 5.2);
2. Approve the transfers to and between Earmarked Reserves as detailed in the report (Section 4);
3. Approve the necessary budget virements related to Publica Phase 2. (Paragraph 2.27).

For 38, Abstention 1, Against 0

Council

22/July2026

CL.131 Appointments to Outside Bodies 2026-27

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the report and advised that it set out the annual appointments to outside bodies for 2026/27.

He noted that the appointments followed the Council's established annual process and moved the recommendation to note the appointments listed in Annex A.

No further comments were made by Members.

The recommendation was seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright.

Council resolved to:

- I. Note the appointments to outside bodies as set out in Annex A.

Voting record - For 40 , 0 against, 0 abstentions

CL.132 Allocation of Capital Funding For Lift Replacement at Marriotts Walk

The purpose of the item was to request approval of the allocation of part of the building maintenance earmarked reserves for the replacement of the lifts at Marriotts Walk, Witney.

Council considered a report seeking approval to use funding from the Building Maintenance Earmarked Reserve to replace the lifts at Marriotts Walk, Witney. Members agreed to consider the item in public session as there was no need to refer to the exempt annex.

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the report and explained that the lifts, installed when the centre was built in 2009, were approaching the end of their operational life. Specialist advice and a condition survey had concluded that replacement was the most cost-effective option, as the lifts were becoming obsolete and upgrades or partial repairs would not provide good value for money.

Members discussed the report, noting the following points:

- As the Council was the Landlord to Marriott's Walk, it was responsible for maintaining the centre, including meeting health and safety requirements. The proposed works would support the continued regeneration and success of the shopping centre.
- The expenditure was an unavoidable but necessary investment in maintaining Council assets.
- The investment was welcome and Members cited feedback from residents regarding the lifts and the importance of ensuring accessibility as use of the area increased.

Council

22/July2026

In summing up, Councillor Smith reiterated the Council's responsibility to maintain the centre and ensure facilities remained safe, efficient and attractive to visitors.

Councillor Andy Graham seconded the proposal and it was put to a vote and agreed by Council.

Council Resolved to:

- I. Agree to allocate funding from earmarked reserves to replace the lifts at Marriotts Walk.

For 40, 0 against 0 abstentions

CL.133 Approval of Regulation 19 Draft Submission Local Plan for Public Consultation

Cllr Enright declared an interest as he worked in the planning and development industry and left the room for the remainder of the item.

Councillor Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the report and proposed the recommendations, explaining that Council was not being asked to adopt the Local Plan but to approve the Regulation 19 draft for statutory public consultation prior to submission for independent examination.

Councillor Leffman, Executive Member for Planning and Infrastructure, seconded the recommendations and outlined the purpose of the Local Plan, noting that it would guide development in West Oxfordshire to 2043, including housing, employment, infrastructure, environmental protection, transport, healthcare, education and community facilities. The Executive Member emphasised that the plan was evidence-based, infrastructure-led, supported by extensive technical studies and had been shaped through significant public engagement over several years.

In debate, Members raised the following points;

- The Regulation 19 consultation would focus on the legal compliance and soundness of the plan before it was submitted for examination by the Planning Inspectorate.
- The work undertaken on the plan was welcome.
- There were concerns that the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) had not been published at this stage. Concerns were expressed regarding the ability of Members and the public to scrutinise infrastructure requirements before the consultation commenced.
- The IDP was a supporting technical document that would be published as part of the Regulation 19 consultation package. The Leader confirmed that it would be reviewed by the Executive Member for Planning and Infrastructure, and by the Executive, before

Council

22/July2026

publication. He also stated that concerns relating to infrastructure could be raised through the consultation process and considered as part of the independent examination.

- Additional concerns were raised regarding the consultation timetable and the potential impact of the summer holiday period on responses from parish and town councils.

In summing up, Councillor Graham thanked members for their comments and concluded by emphasising that the decision related to progressing to the next statutory stage of the plan-making process and would enable residents, businesses and stakeholders to submit representations before examination by an independent Planning Inspector.

The recommendations were put to the vote and agreed by Council.

Council resolved to:

1. Approve the pre-submission draft Local Plan attached at Annex A for the purposes of formal publication for a statutory period of at least 6-weeks in accordance with Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.
2. Delegate authority to the Head of Planning, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Infrastructure, to make any necessary minor textual and presentational amendments, and any amendments necessary to reflect any agreed Overview and Scrutiny recommendations, to the pre-submission draft Local Plan, prior to formal publication.

For 25 against 3 abstain 11

CL.134 Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2025/26

The item was proposed by Councillor Andrew Beaney and seconded by Councillor.

The report was moved without debate and put to a vote.

Council resolved to:

1. Note the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2025/26.

For 35, Against 0, Abstentions 0

CL.135 National Scheme of Delegation of Planning Functions

Council

22/July2026

Councillor Liz Leffman, Executive Member for Planning and Infrastructure, proposed the report, which was seconded by Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council.

The report was discussed, during which a member suggested that the proposals also be taken to the Strategic Planning Committee. Both the proposer and seconder agreed to this and that the recommendation was amended to read “Request that the Constitution Working Group and the **Strategic Planning Committee** further consider the implications of the new Regulations and how they need to be reflected in any changes to the Council’s Constitution, prior to the Regulations coming into effect on 31 October 2026.”

The recommendations were put to the vote and agreed by Council.

Council resolved to:

1. Note the report;
2. Request that the Constitution Working Group further consider the implications of the new Regulations and how they need to be reflected in any changes to the Council’s Constitution, prior to the Regulations coming into effect on 31 October 2026.

Voting record- For 39, Abstentions 1, Against 0

CL.136 Motion A: Protecting precious habitats in West Oxfordshire; Proposed by Cllr Alistair Wray, seconded by Cllr Rosie Pearson

Councillor Alistair Wray introduced the motion, and read it out as follows;

“This Council notes:

- The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world; with only about 50% of its biodiversity remaining, it ranks in the bottom 10% globally. It is therefore of utmost importance that the remaining areas of high ecological value are preserved, as they may serve as nucleation sites for the wider nature recovery.
- This is also a matter of urgency. The new Planning and Infrastructure Bill has been created to fast-track the delivery of the government’s ambition to build 1.5 million homes by the end of this parliament. This bill allows developers to meet their environmental obligations by making payments to the Nature Restoration Fund to promote nature restoration elsewhere.
- Scientists, wildlife trusts and ecologists are deeply concerned that this new strategy will encourage developers to damage the environment locally and simply ‘make up for it miles away’. According to legal analysis of the legislation, more than 5,000 of England’s most sensitive and rare natural habitats are at high risk.

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are areas of exceptional ecological or geological value that have legal protection. Their designation is one of the most important tools available for protecting the UK's most valuable habitats and species. Designation and management of SSSIs is one of Natural England's key statutory duties, which the Agency seems to be failing to fulfil. The rate of SSSI designations has slowed dramatically in recent years; the average time it takes to designate sites is getting longer. According to experts familiar with the matter, it takes up to 10 years to obtain an SSSI status. Moreover, it now appears that the Agency has suspended processing further designations altogether.
- We have some sites with extraordinary habitats, such as floodplain meadows and ancient woodlands in West Oxfordshire. Our SSSIs include: Alvescot Meadows, Cassington Meadows, Ditchley Road Quarry, Glyme Valley and Middle Barton Fen. They require legal protection. The Council has a legal duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity, and one of our priorities is to "create a better environment for people and wildlife".
- Given the rapid pace of housing development and the current shortcomings of the Natural England watchdog, the Council should stand up for the local environment and demand answers and actions from the Agency.

The council resolves to:

1. Ask the Leader of the Council to write to Tony Juniper, the head of Natural England, to ask:

- a) Why the SSSI designation process has been suspended
 - b) When the SSSI designation will be reinstated
 - c) Request that Natural England adopt a temporary approach to commenting on planning applications, which takes into account available local environmental evidence to protect the sites that would otherwise have been designated as SSSIs if the designation process worked as intended.
 - d) Request that Natural England use this approach until the backlog in the SSSI designation is cleared.
3. Send a copy of the letter to Emma Reynolds MP, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)."

Members debated the motion, raising the following points;

- The motion should be amended to reflect that since the motion had been published with the agenda, the Secretary of State had changed and was now The Rt Hon Dame Angela Eagle, DBE MP
- It was important to balance environmental protection with the need for housing development. It was noted that SSSIs play a vital role in protecting important wildlife and geological sites, while the need to meet local housing needs was also recognised.

Council

22/July2026

- Members expressed support for seeking clarification from Natural England regarding the designation process for new SSSIs and the ongoing monitoring and protection of existing sites.
- Environmental protection and development should not be viewed as competing objectives, and sustainable growth should be delivered alongside the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Rosie Pearson who stated that SSSIs were crucial to protect and underlined the importance of the motion.

The motion was put to a vote, as amended regarding the change of the Secretary of State.

Voting record: For 40, Against, Abstentions 0

Council resolved to:

1. Ask the Leader of the Council to write to Tony Juniper, the head of Natural England, to ask:
 - a) Why the SSSI designation process has been suspended
 - b) When the SSSI designation will be reinstated
 - c) Request that Natural England adopt a temporary approach to commenting on planning applications, which takes into account available local environmental evidence to protect the sites that would otherwise have been designated as SSSIs if the designation process worked as intended.
 - d) Request that Natural England use this approach until the backlog in the SSSI designation is cleared.
2. Send a copy of the letter to The Rt Hon Dame Angela Eagle DBE MP, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

CL.137 Motion B: ANPR Assessment of Woodford Way and Witan Way Car Park Usage; Proposed by Cllr Liam Walker, seconded by Cllr Jack Treloar

Stuart McCarroll left the meeting at this point.

Cllr Liam Walker introduced the motion, which was as follows;

“Council notes that:

22/July2026

1. West Oxfordshire District Council is progressing proposals that could result in the redevelopment of part of the Woodford Way car park in Witney.
2. Woodford Way and Witan Way are two of the town's principal public car parks and play an important role in supporting local businesses, visitors, commuters and the town centre economy.
3. Decisions regarding the future of public parking should be based on robust, comprehensive and up-to-date evidence rather than limited occupancy surveys undertaken over a small number of days or at specific times.
4. Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) technology is widely used by local authorities to provide detailed information on vehicle movements, duration of stay, occupancy levels and peak demand over an extended period.
5. Collecting data over a minimum five-week period would ensure weekday, weekend, school holiday and event-related parking patterns are properly understood before any irreversible decisions are taken.
6. Residents, businesses, and town centre stakeholders rightly expect major planning decisions affecting public infrastructure to be supported by transparent and reliable evidence.

Council believes that:

1. Any proposal that could reduce public parking capacity should only proceed once there is a clear and independently verifiable understanding of existing demand.
2. A minimum five-week ANPR survey would provide a far more accurate picture of parking usage than short-term manual surveys and would improve confidence in any subsequent planning application.
3. Better evidence will lead to better decision-making and help ensure that the economic vitality of Witney town centre is not inadvertently harmed.

Council therefore resolves to:

1. Request that the Executive Member for Environment commissions the installation of temporary ANPR cameras at both the Woodford Way and Witan Way public car parks.
2. Ensure that the monitoring is undertaken continuously for a minimum period of five weeks before any planning application relating to the redevelopment of Woodford Way car park is submitted.
3. Publish the resulting occupancy, including existing data from Marriott's Walk car park, turnover and parking duration data for the three car parks in full, together with an accompanying analysis, so that councillors, residents, and businesses can properly scrutinise the evidence."

In introducing the motion, Councillor Walker stated that a previous proposal for a trial had not been accepted by the Executive. Cllr Walker stated that parking was difficult to replace

Council

22/July2026

once removed and explained that the purpose of the motion was to improve evidence available to improve the decision-making in this regard.

Cllr Jack Treloar seconded the motion, welcoming the public participation statement which had been submitted by Adrian Bullock and was in support of the motion in an earlier part of the meeting. Cllr Treloar called parking in the town one of the most vital pieces of strategic infrastructure and urged members to support the motion.

Members debated the motion, raising the following points;

- The Executive member advised that a five-week survey would not provide sufficiently representative data due to seasonal variations, school holidays and temporary changes affecting parking patterns. He also noted that detailed data was already available for Marriotts Walk car park and would be reported to Members.
- Several Members supported the principle of gathering evidence but questioned whether the proposed survey would provide meaningful additional information, particularly given ongoing town centre works and existing parking data. Concerns were also raised that the motion could delay proposals to deliver affordable housing on Council-owned land at Woodford Way.
- Other Members spoke in support of the motion, arguing that residents and businesses expected decisions of this scale to be supported by robust and up-to-date parking data.

In summing up, Councillor Walker maintained that further evidence was required before progressing development proposals and argued that decisions should be based on comprehensive parking usage data.

The motion was voted on, and fell.

Voting record- for 14, against 24, abstention 1

CL.138 Motion C: Ending the "Double Taxation" of Managed Housing Estates; Proposed by Cllr Thomas Ashby, seconded by Cllr Liam MacKenzie

Councillor Thomas Ashby introduced a motion addressing concerns that residents on newer housing estates were paying both council tax and private estate management charges. The motion was as follows;

“The Council Notes That:

- Many residents across West Oxfordshire, including those in newer developments in my area, are subject to a system of ‘double taxation’

Council

22/July2026

- These residents are legally required to pay their full council tax to local authorities, whilst simultaneously paying mandatory, escalating estate management fees to private companies to maintain public green spaces
- This creates an unfair, two-tier system where residents on unadopted estates pay significantly more for the same or lesser council services than those living on traditionally adopted council-maintained estates
- The current model of leaving public open spaces in perpetuity under private management companies leads to poor accountability, high administration charges, and a lack of democratic oversight

The Council Believes That:

- Public spaces on new housing developments should be viewed as community assets for all residents, and their maintenance should be the democratically accountable to local authorities
- It is fundamentally unjust to charge residents full Council Tax if a local authority is not adopting or maintaining the immediate public open space surrounding their homes"

The Council Resolves To:

Adopt a Default Adoption Policy:

1. Ask the Executive and Planning Department to review local planning frameworks, including the Local Plan, to ensure that, moving forward, all new housing estates in the district are adopted by the local authority as a matter of default, provided they meet the standard adoption criteria

Explorer Adoption of Existing Facilities:

2. Set up a cross-party working group to investigate the financial and legal mechanisms required for the Council to adopt existing managed estates, freeing residents from private maintenance contracts

Lobby for Council Tax Relief

3. Ask the Leader of the Council to write to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and local Members of Parliament, calling for a change in national policy to allow local authorities to legally offer a Council Tax discount or rebate to residents who are forced to pay private estate management fees for unadopted public infrastructure.

Investigate Interim Discretionary Relief:

4. Ask the Executive to request that officers to produce a report on whether any temporary, local discretionary Council Tax relief or hardship schemes can be applied under existing legislation to mitigate the financial burden on affected residents in the interim."

Council

22/July2026

Councillor Graham expressed support for the principle of the motion but proposed that it be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He advised that the issues raised were complex, involving financial, legal and policy considerations, and would benefit from detailed examination with officer and legal support.

Councillor Enright supported referring the motion to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, noting that concerns about estate management charges had been raised previously and that a task and finish group was expected to consider the issue alongside relevant Local Plan and national legislative developments.

The proposer and seconder agreed to the amendment to refer the matter for further investigation, and this was put to a vote and agreed by Council.

Council resolved to:

- I. Refer the motion to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for detailed consideration and review.

38 votes for, 0 against, 0 abstentions

The Chair closed meeting at 16:37

CL.139 Exclusion of Public and Press

Exempt Annex A for item 9: Allocation of Capital Funding for Lift Replacement at Marriotts Walk was not discussed, therefore the Council did not have a need to exclude the press and public from the meeting.

CL.140 Exempt Annex A for item 9: Allocation of Capital Funding for Lift Replacement at Marriotts Walk

This exempt annex was taken as read in the public part of the meeting and was not discussed.

The Meeting closed at Time Not Specified

CHAIR

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the
Council

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB
at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 22 July 2026**

PRESENT

Councillors: Carl Rylett (Chair), Joy Aitman (Vice-Chair), Tammy Abarno, Thomas Ashby, Andrew Beaney, Adam Clements, Sandra Coleman, Andrew Coles, Rachel Crouch, Duncan Enright, Sarah Evans, Roger Faulkner, Nick Field-Johnson, Andy Graham, David Jackson, Edward James, Liz Leffman, Dan Levy, Jan Lund, Liam Mackenzie, Stuart McCarroll, Paul Marsh, Hannah Massie, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Rosie Pearson, Elizabeth Poskitt, Andrew Prosser, Nigel Ridpath, Geoff Saul, Sandra Simpson, Alaric Smith, Tim Sumner, Jack Treloar, Sarah Veasey, Liam Walker, Mark Walker, Simon Watson, Alex Wilson and Alistair Wray

Officers: Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance and Regulatory Services), Phil Martin (Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service), Frank Wilson (Managing Director - Publica), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer), Maria Harper (Democratic Services Assistant), Ana Prelici (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Georgina Dyer (Head of Finance), Phil Shaw (Planning Services Transformation Lead), Emma Tarry and Andrew Thomson (Planning Policy Manager)

Guests: Julian Cooper

CL.120 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors:

Sandra Cosier

Steve Cosier

Genny Early

Phil Godfrey

Andrew Lyon

James Robertsahw

Jane Doughty

Toby Morris

CL.121 Declarations of Interest

The Chair explained that there was a general dispensation to allow the awarding of honorary titles to former members.

There were no declarations of interest received.

Council

22/July2026

CL.122 Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

CL.123 Award of Honorary Title to Julian Cooper

The purpose of the item was to consider conferring the title of Honorary Alderman on former councillor Julian Cooper for eminent services to the Council.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed the recommendation, highlighting Julian Cooper's many years of dedicated public service, referencing qualities of integrity, leadership, extensive knowledge of local government and commitment to the communities of West Oxfordshire.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor Andrew Coles, who paid tribute to Mr Cooper's long-standing service, commitment to residents, passion for local government and acts of personal kindness towards colleagues and constituents.

Members spoke in support of the nomination, raising the following points;

- Recognising Mr Cooper's exceptional service to the Council and the wider community.
- Paying tribute to his “encyclopaedic” knowledge of the Council's constitution and history, his dedication to representing residents, his support and mentorship of fellow councillors, and his longstanding commitment to public service.
- Members also noted his kindness, diligence and significant contribution to local government over several decades.

In summing up, Councillor Graham noted that Councillor Cooper had previously played a leading role in securing the same honour for Sir Barry Norton and emphasised that the award recognised distinguished service rather than political affiliation. The proposal was put to a vote, with the Chair noting that the Council’s constitution required a 2/3 majority for an honorary title to be conferred.

Council Resolved to:

- I. Confer the title of Honorary Aldermen on former Councillor Julian Cooper for eminent services to the Council.

Voting record: For 32, Against 1, Abstain 6

The Meeting closed at 2.15 pm

CHAIR

This page is intentionally left blank

 WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	COUNCIL – 16 SEPTEMBER 2026
Subject	MEMBER ALLOWANCES SCHEME FOR 2027/28
Wards affected	None
Accountable member	Councillor Andy Graham - Leader of the Council Email: Andy.Graham@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Andrea McCaskie, Director of Governance and Regulatory Services Email: Andrea.McCaskie@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Andrew Brown, Head of Democratic and Electoral Services Email: Andrew.Brown@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To begin the process of formulating a Members' Allowances Scheme for 2027/28 and up to three subsequent years.
Annexes	None
Recommendations	That Council resolves to: I. Request that the Independent Remuneration Panel reports to Council in early 2027 to make recommendations about a Members' Allowances Scheme for 2027/28 and up to three subsequent years.
Corporate priorities	Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees	None

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** The Council is required to adopt a new Members' Allowances Scheme prior to the start of the 2027/28 financial year. In doing so it must have regards to recommendations made by an Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP). This report seeks approval to commence that process.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The Council is required by regulations to make a scheme for the allowances to be paid to members before the beginning of each financial year. A scheme must include provisions for paying a basic allowance, special responsibility allowances, dependants' carers' allowance, travelling and subsistence allowance and co-optees' allowance. A scheme may make provision for an annual adjustment of allowances by reference to such index but may not rely on an index for a period of more than four years.
- 2.2** The Council's current scheme for the period 2023-27, which forms Part 7 of the Constitution, is due to expire on 1 April 2027 and has relied on indexation for the maximum period of 4 years. As such the Council will need to agree a new allowances scheme for the period 1 April 2027 to 31 March 2028 and up to three subsequent years. 2027/28 was expected to be the last year of West Oxfordshire District Council before it is abolished and replaced by a new North Oxfordshire unitary council from 1 April 2028. However, the government announced on 7 September 2026 that it will review its local government reorganisation decisions across England. As such, the timeline for local government reorganisation is currently uncertain.
- 2.3** Prior to making or amending an allowances scheme, the Council must have regard to recommendations made to it by its Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP). The IRP comprises at least three persons who are suitably skilled members of the public who are independent of the District Council.

3. MEMBERSHIP OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

- 3.1** The Council currently has a 5-Member IRP made up of suitably qualified individuals who are independent of the District Council. Council last appointed IRP members in January 2023 and in doing so agreed to delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer to make one or more further appointments to the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel, subject to the Panel comprising no more than 5 people. This delegation has been used to appoint new members when vacancies have arisen.
- 3.2** A summary of the current IRP membership is provided below:
Janet Eustace – a former civil servant and experienced parish clerk who lives in a neighbouring district. Appointed by Council in January 2023.

Graham Russell – a registrar and former head of democratic services who serves on a number of IRPs and is based in the South West region. Appointed by the Monitoring Officer in February 2024.

Ben Russell – a human resources and payroll technology specialist who lives within the district. Appointed by the Monitoring Officer in February 2024.

Robert Gray – a human resources and pay specialist working in the aerospace industry who lives within the district. Appointed by the Monitoring Officer in July 2026.

Kathryn Taylor – a former finance professional and Independent Monitoring Board (prisons) volunteer who lives within the district. Appointed by the Monitoring Officer in July 2026.

4. FORMULATION OF A MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME FOR 2027/28

4.1 In considering its recommendations the IRP will consider the current Members' Allowances Scheme 2023-27 together with a range of information and any representations that members wish to make to the IRP directly. This information will include but not be limited to:

- a) An officer report
- b) Members' Allowances Scheme 2023-27
- c) The previous IRP report which informed the current scheme
- d) Benchmarking data with a focus on the Council's "statistical neighbours"
- e) Written or verbal representations by members

4.2 Having conducted its review, the IRP would report back to Council in early 2027 to make recommendations about the Members' Allowances Scheme 2027/28 and up to three subsequent years (if applicable).

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

5.1 There are no alternative options proposed since the Council is required to agree a new allowances scheme prior to the 2027/28 financial year, having regard to recommendations from the IRP.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. Any financial implications arising from the IRP's recommendations will be set out in a future report to full Council in early 2027.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The legal implications including the need to make a scheme before the start of a financial year and the need to have regard to IRP recommendations are set out in the body of the report.

8. RISK ASSESSMENT

8.1 There would be risks associated with not agreeing a new Members' Allowances Scheme prior to 1 April 2028.

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT

9.1 There are no equalities impacts arising from this report.

10. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no climate or ecological emergency implications arising directly from this report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 None.

(END)

 WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	COUNCIL – 16 SEPTEMBER 2026
Subject	COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Andy Graham - Leader of the Council Email: andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Andrea.McCaskie@westoxon.gov.uk Email: Andrea.Mccaskie@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Mathew Taylor, Democratic Services Officer Email: Mathew.Taylor@westoxon.gov.uk Andrew Brown, Head of Democratic and Electoral Services Email: Andrew.Brown@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To present proposals for undertaking a Community Governance Review focused on the civic boundaries of Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney, in response to full Council on 28 January 2026 agreeing an amended motion titled “Local Governance Review: Parish and Town Boundary Review for West Oxfordshire”.
Annexes	Annex A – Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney Community Governance Review 2026/27: Draft Terms of Reference
Recommendations	That Council resolves to: 1. Note that, subject to the government’s review of local government reorganisation, delivering local government reorganisation while supporting business as usual activities will be the Council’s immediate and overriding governance priority and will be resource intensive over the coming period. 2. Note that, given the time a CGR will take to complete and the uncertain timeline for local government reorganisation, any decisions resulting from a CGR undertaken by West Oxfordshire District Council may be taken by a successor unitary authority

	following Vesting Day (previously 1 April 2028, now TBC), in accordance with the Local Government (Structural Changes) (Transitional Arrangements) Regulations 2008. 3. Agree to begin a Community Governance Review (CGR) prior to local government reorganisation focused specifically on reviewing the civic boundaries of Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney where development has taken place or is taking place outside of town council boundaries. 4. Agree the terms of reference for the CGR attached at Annex A. 5. Delegate authority to the Director of Governance and Regulatory Services, in consultation with the Chair of the Constitution Working Group, to make minor amendments to the Terms of Reference to reflect any changes agreed at Full Council. 6. Authorise officers to advise Oxfordshire County Council of the Community Governance Review in accordance with Section 79 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. 7. Agree to invite proposals from Carterton Town Council and its surrounding parishes, Chipping Norton Town Council and its surrounding parishes and Witney Town Council and its surrounding parishes, for changes to civic parish boundaries. 8. Agree that the Constitution Working Group will oversee the review, engage with ward members and report back to Council with initial proposals for public consultation, and subsequently final recommendations following public consultation to put forward to full Council or a successor unitary authority. 9. Note that if a successor unitary council is the ultimate decision maker then it will decide whether or not to give effect to any recommendation put to it and may wish to undertake further work on this CGR and/or a wider community governance review post-reorganisation, once the role of town and parish councils within future unitary structures is clearer.
Corporate priorities	• Putting Residents First • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Executive Members Senior Leadership Team Publica Managing Director Head of Communications and Corporate Strategy Communications Manager

	Head of Legal Services Electoral Services Manager Chief Technology Officer Senior Address Management and GIS Officer Head of Planning Planning Policy Manager Infrastructure Delivery Lead Regeneration Lead for Carterton Area Strategy
--	--

The government announced on 7 September 2026 that it will review its local government reorganisation decisions across England. This report was written prior to that announcement and has been reviewed and updated in light of it prior to publication on 8 September. The announcement does not substantially change the proposed approach or timeline as set out in the report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- I.1 Council on 28 January 2026 passed an amended motion instructing officers to consider undertake a Community Governance Review (CGR) to review civic boundaries and to bring forward proposals once the Government's decision on local government reorganisation (LGR) in Oxfordshire is known.
- I.2 Witney Town Council has also requested that the Council undertakes a CGR in relation to the parish of Witney to realign boundaries specific to that area and has previously submitted proposals for boundary changes.
- I.3 The purpose of this report is to present members with further details of the scope, timetable, process and implications of undertaking a CGR following consideration by officers, so that Council can take an informed decision about whether or not to proceed with a CGR and if so, on what basis.
- I.4 While delivering local government reorganisation (LGR) is likely to be the overriding priority, officers consider that a phased approach to reviewing community governance would be appropriate (and achievable). The boundaries of the three principal settlements are proposed to be considered in advance of LGR and recommendations made to full Council or a successor unitary authority (depending on which body will be the ultimate decision maker), with remaining issues considered by the successor unitary authority post-LGR.
- I.5 The draft Terms of Reference for the first CGR are included at Annex A to the report. The terms of reference propose that the Council undertakes a CGR focused on:
 - a) The boundaries of Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney only.
 - b) Any consequential impacts on Town Council warding within Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney.
 - c) Any consequential impacts on councillor numbers at these town and parish councils.
- I.6 A full CGR for the whole of the district is not recommended at this stage due to the complexity of undertaking such a significant exercise, the need to deliver LGR and the uncertainty around future structures and the longer-term role of town and parishes within a unitary council area.
- I.7 Given what is involved in a CGR, on the original LGR timetable it would not have been possible to complete a review and implement any agreed changes prior to the start of the transition period to a successor unitary authority i.e. by the time the Structural Changes

Order (SCO) to reorganise local government structures in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, comes into effect. As such, the Council would not be the ultimate decision maker on recommendations arising from a CGR, this would be a matter for the successor unitary authority, post-Vesting Day. However, in view of the government announcement on 7 September 2026 it may be that the Council would be able to complete a view and be the decision maker prior to any SCO taking effect.

- 1.8** If Council decides to proceed with a CGR prior to LGR then the first stage would be to invite proposals from the specific town and parish councils detailed in the Terms of Reference (Annex A). A further report in early 2027 would then recommend proceeding with a public consultation to take place soon after the May 2027 local elections. Council would then consider the outcome of the consultation and decide on the recommendations resulting from the CGR to put forward to the successor unitary authority for consideration post-Vesting Day.

2. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEWS

- 2.1** West Oxfordshire District Council (“The Council”) has responsibility for conducting Community Governance Reviews (CGRs) in West Oxfordshire when such exercises are deemed necessary. CGRs are the means by which a principal council can review town and parish council arrangements:
- Changing parish boundaries
 - Creating/abolishing parishes
 - Creating/abolishing parish councils
 - Merging or splitting parishes
 - Grouping and de-grouping parishes
 - Town/parish councillor numbers
 - Town/parish warding
 - Changing parish names/styles
- 2.2** A principal council can undertake a CGR at any time. Guidance on CGRs states that it is good practice for a principal council to consider conducting a review every 10-15 years as well as in circumstances where there has been significant new housing development.
- 2.3** A CGR can also be conducted as/when requests for change are received in the form of valid petitions and applications. Where a Council is required to undertake a CGR by a valid petition, it would need to be completed within 12 months of the Terms of Reference being agreed.
- 2.4** The rationale for conducting a CGR focused on town and parish boundaries is to consider whether it is necessary to re-align boundaries to better reflect the geography of local communities and their sense of place and identity, whether rural, suburban or urban, and facilitate effective and convenient local government. A CGR may be considered especially relevant where developments have been built around existing towns but outside of town

council boundaries impacting community identity and effective and convenient community governance.

- 2.5 It is not always the case that a review is required for an entire area. Small scale reviews are considered appropriate for certain areas. In many cases making changes to existing boundaries and parishes will be sufficient to redress perceived or actual imbalances while also retaining local identity and effective and convenient governance and representation without the need for creation of entirely new parishes.
- 2.6 Guidance on CGRs states that a review may need to be carried out, for example, following a major change in the population of a community or to re-draw boundaries which have become anomalous, for example following new housing developments being built across existing boundaries.
- 2.7 When considering a CGR the Council is required to consider the impact of community governance arrangements/changes on community cohesion, and the size, population and boundaries of a local community or parish.
- 2.8 Any decision taken by a Council on changes to parishes should take account of the recommendations put forward as part of an appropriate CGR. Such a review would take account of the views of local people through appropriate consultation.
- 2.9 Councils considering CGRs must carefully consider the consequential impacts of changes on other tiers of government as these may provide the building blocks for future structures (such as unitary authorities).
- 2.10 Guidance on CGRs expands on the broad legislative principles and considerations stated in LGPIHA 2007. Within the guidance, identities and interests of a community are considered to be key to establishing sustainable communities that exhibit community cohesion. The importance of parish councils to community representation and local administration is highlighted throughout the guidance and it is suggested that “for both of these purposes a parish should reflect a distinctive and recognisable community of place, with its own sense of identity”. Great weight is therefore to be placed on parishes being reflective of how people perceive where they live and that they should reflect their own distinctive and recognisable communities and identity in considering administrative boundaries. Such communities and identities are suggested to lead to community cohesion. Effective and convenient local government should give users of services a democratic voice, and these communities should be viable in providing at least some local services, easily reached and accessible to local people. It is recognised that not all parish councils are in a position to take on provision of services.
- 2.11 Notwithstanding the core considerations detailed above, changes resulting from a CGR could affect:
 - Where future Community Infrastructure Levy (“CIL”) funding goes,
 - The levels of Council Tax paid by the affected properties (as precepts will generally be higher in towns than in parishes),
 - The tax base and incomes of precepting parish and town councils, and

- Electoral arrangements for the towns, parishes and future unitary authority.

- 2.12** Clearly, given these factors, administrative boundary changes resulting from a CGR may benefit some local councils financially while negatively affecting others. In addition, some residents may experience changes to their Council Tax resulting from a boundary change. However, CIL and Council Tax precepts are not considered to be valid reasons for considering administrative boundary changes in a CGR. The justification for any change would need to be based on residents' sense of place and how and where they access local services as part of the wider concept of community and ensuring convenient community governance. It should be noted that CIL and S106 fund allocation is framed in planning legislation and not in LGPIHA 2007 and subsequent guidance which define the considerations to be taken into account in CGRs.
- 2.13** Notwithstanding the above points, as financial impacts may be present for parishes and individuals, any proposed changes are likely to be contested locally as there will be competing communities of interest.
- 2.14** In two-tier locations, district councils are required to notify county councils of the intention to undertake a review as county councils provide a strategic role in the provision of services and their views should be sought.
- 2.15** Decision making on community governance reviews at principal councils subject to LGR is governed by the Local Government (Structural Changes) (Transitional Arrangements) Regulations 2008. The Council could decide to start and carry out the process of a CGR but would not be able to agree to make a Reorganisation of Community Governance Order (ROCG) to give effect to recommendations arising from a CGR once the first transition period has started (i.e. when the SCO comes into force). The successor unitary council when in shadow form would also be unable to make an ROGC. As such, it would be for the successor unitary council to agree to make an ROGC after Vesting Day (previously 1 April 2028, now TBC). In this scenario the unitary council would receive the recommendations arising from a CGR undertaken by West Oxfordshire District Council but would not be bound to accept them and would have all potential options open to it (e.g. accept, disregard, re-consult, start again).

3. BACKGROUND TO THE REQUEST FOR A COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

- 3.1** Council passed a motion on 28 January 2026 which requested officers to consider the Council undertaking a CGR focused specifically on parish and town boundary arrangements across West Oxfordshire and to bring forward proposals for conducting a CGR once the decision on LGR in Oxfordshire is known. The motion suggested that the review should:
- Assess whether existing boundaries remain appropriate considering housing growth, demographic change, and community identity.
 - Consider requests or representations from parish and town councils and residents.
 - Seek to ensure boundaries promote effective governance, community cohesion, and clarity for residents.

- 3.2 Although the motion referred to officers considering undertaking a CGR in general, in the subsequent debate on the amended motion, specific reference was made to Carterton and Witney as the areas where such a review would be appropriate.
- 3.3 Witney Town Council has twice requested a CGR specific to the parishes of Witney and surrounding areas.
- 3.4 Similarly, officers understand that Chipping Norton is seeking to make some amendments to its boundaries to take in specific parcels of land from Over Norton parish.

4. PROPOSED SCOPE OF THE CGR PRIOR TO LGR

- 4.1 Officers propose a phased approach to reviewing community governance in the area, with some specific boundary issues considered prior to LGR and a fuller community governance review post-LGR to be undertaken by a successor unitary authority, appreciating that reviewing community governance is unlikely to be an immediate priority for a newly formed authority.
- 4.2 This report brings forward proposals for the first CGR focused specifically on the boundaries of Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney. The rationale being that these towns have relatively constrained boundaries and/or development has taken place adjoining existing settlements but outside of town council boundaries. It is therefore considered appropriate to review the boundaries of these towns and the surrounding parishes in governance terms, framed in the core considerations of interests and identities of the communities and their effective and convenient governance.
- 4.3 Guidance suggests that civil parish boundaries should follow natural boundaries wherever possible e.g. rivers, roads, railway lines.
- 4.4 Any changes to boundaries resulting from a CGR may have consequential implications for the number of councillors that the affected town and parish councils wish to have and to the warding arrangements within the town council areas. These issues would need to be considered and addressed as part of this CGR with reference to forecast electorate figures (5-years from start of the CGR).
- 4.5 It is not proposed that this review considers the governance arrangements for unbuilt planned settlements e.g. Salt Cross. The creation of new civil parishes should be considered at a time when there will be sufficient residents living in the new settlement for a new parish council to be viable and a sense of community to have been established. It is recognised that this is a longer-term issue which will need to be considered in a future CGR (post LGR).
- 4.6 There are allocated sites in the vicinities of Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney and the surrounding parishes within the Draft Local Plan 2043. Where these are only broad allocations at this stage it would be premature to consider them within this CGR, given the timescales involved in planning and building out new developments. The length of time it may take to obtain outline permission and begin construction will likely extend beyond the horizon of a CGR undertaken over the coming period. Furthermore, in such cases, officers consider that there are risks associated with adjusting parish boundaries without having been able to consult the communities that will eventually occupy them. Such changes prior

to occupation could result in a need to reverse changes should residents feel that the community cohesion and effective governance would better align with another parish. Again, these are longer-term issues that should be considered as part of a fuller CGR undertaken by the successor unitary council post-LGR. Developments sites could be considered within this CGR where the planning process is sufficiently advanced and there is a high degree of confidence that developments will be occupied in under 5 years.

- 4.7** It is not recommended that the CGR proposed in this report is expanded to include issues such as replacing parish meetings with parish councils, parish boundaries in areas other than Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney, nor the number of councillors that town and parish councils have in areas other than Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney. This would add complexity to the review and put the timetable at risk given the need for resources to be focused on successfully delivering LGR (subject to the government's review) as well as business as usual activities. It would be more appropriate for these issues to be considered in a separate CGR (post-LGR).

5. TIMETABLE

- 5.1** Full details of the proposed stages and an indicative timetable for the CGR can be found in the proposed Terms of Reference at Annex A.
- 5.2** If Council approves the recommendation to undertake a CGR for Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney, the town and parish councils in the affected areas would be invited to put forward any proposals for boundary changes. Following consideration of any such proposals by the Constitution Working Group, Council would be recommended to agree a public consultation on boundary changes to be held in summer 2027 (following the local elections). If at the end of the review following the public consultation, changes to boundaries are deemed appropriate, recommendations would be made to either full Council if prior to the first LGR transition period, or the successor unitary council for a decision post-Vesting Day.
- 5.3** Any agreed recommendations would be given effect through a Reorganisation Order.
- 5.4** Subject to the government's review of LGR, local elections in May 2027 are expected to be district elections by thirds held on existing boundaries. Currently there is uncertainty about the timing of elections to a shadow successor unitary authority. Any boundary changes resulting from this CGR would be taken into account in an electoral review of the successor unitary council undertaken by the LGBCE. This review would determine unitary ward boundaries effective from the following set of scheduled local elections.
- 5.5** The motion as amended requested that officers consider the CGR in light of the timeline for LGR. Following the announcement on 7 September 2026 that the government will review LGR decisions across England, there is uncertainty around the timeline for LGR. The original timeline that the Council was working on for LGR was as follows:
- August/September 2026 – Draft Local Plan Regulation 19 public consultation.

- Autumn 2026 – SCO and clarity about electoral arrangements for North Oxfordshire Council.
- Late 2026/early 2027 SCO comes into force and the Council loses the ability to make an ROGC.
- December 2026 – publication of electoral register, reflecting electoral arrangements for whole-council shadow unitary elections in May 2027 on existing boundaries.
- May 2027 – elections to scheduled town, parish and shadow unitary councils.
- 1 April 2028 – Vesting Day: transfer of functions to North Oxfordshire Council and abolition of West Oxfordshire District Council.
- After 1 April 2028 – North Oxfordshire Council considers recommendations arising from the CGR.
- After April 2028 – Electoral review of North Oxfordshire Council undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

5.6 Advice was sought from the LGBCE on the appropriateness of embarking on a CGR at the current time. LGBCE advised that in such circumstances officers should contact Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for further comment. The comment given by MHCLG was understandably general. However, MHCLG reiterated the timeframes given above that include unitary councils “going live” in April 2028. A Structural Order was expected to be put forward in late 2026 and to come into force ahead of the elections in May 2027. The SCO would have established electoral arrangements for the unitary councils’ inaugural elections (based on existing boundaries).

5.7 The LGBCE were also unable to provide clarity about the timing of the electoral review of the successor unitary authority, other than that this would take place sometime between 2028 and 2032 ahead of the unitary council elections in May 2032. It was unclear therefore whether or not the successor unitary authority would have time to undertake a CGR prior to its electoral review by the LGBCE.

6. APPROACH

- 6.1** In making its recommendations, the CGR would consider and have due regard to the information it had received in the form of expressions of local opinion on the matters considered, representations made by local people and other interested persons. Such consultation to gather opinion was also expressed as essential in the motion as amended to Council.
- 6.2** Given the importance of public consultation, the Council will allow appropriate time for consultation with local electors and other stakeholders and for analysis of the submissions received.
- 6.3** Initially the Council would invite proposals from affected parish and town councils, a full list of which can be found in the Terms of Reference. This exercise would commence following the agreement of Council to undertake the CGR for a period of 3 months.

- 6.4 The Constitution Working Group, in consultation with Ward Members, would consider the proposals put forward by town and parish councils and make initial recommendations to the Council to put to public consultation.
- 6.5 A public consultation would then take place to seek views of the local electorate on proposed changes put forwards, in addition to representations from any other person or body who appears to have an interest in the review. This is in accordance with the duties the principal council must comply with as detailed in Part 4, Chapter 3 s.93 (3) of LGPIHA 2007. This consultation period would be envisaged to take place for a period of 2 months following the May 2027 local elections, avoiding peak holiday periods (suggested September to October 2027).
- 6.6 Should recommendations put forward following completion of the CGR not be accepted, and instead be amended, a further period of consultation would be required to take place on new proposals. Post-Vesting Day, the successor unitary authority would have the ability to conduct a further CGR should it wish to do so and as part of that could (re)consider any matters covered in a CGR undertaken by the District Council.
- 6.7 To help to ensure that the final recommendations would be acceptable, it is proposed that the review is overseen by the Constitution Working Group (CWG), which will engage with Ward Members at each stage. The CWG will be supported by a cross-service Officer Working Group.

7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 7.1. Council could decide to undertake a CGR for the whole of the district prior to LGR. This is not recommended due to the significant complexity involved in undertaking a district-wide CGR, LGR, and the longer-term nature of many community governance issues (e.g. site allocations, Salt Cross, the future role of town and parish councils in a unitary area) that would be better considered post-LGR. Additional resources may be required to manage the expanded process, consultation feedback, meetings and recommendations would be required as set out in the Financial Implications.
- 7.2. Council could decide not to conduct the CGR. However, the CGR is the only process available for altering parish boundaries. If the Council decides not to undertake a CGR at this time then there is a risk that there will be no opportunity to make changes to town and parish boundaries prior to the electoral review of the successor unitary authority, meaning that future warding arrangements for the unitary council would be based on current parish boundaries, which may not align with the geography of local communities and provide for effective and convenient governance.

8. CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1. Council is recommended to undertake a CGR focused specifically on the boundaries of Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney due to the potential impact of recent development on community cohesion and effective and convenient governance in those parishes, the case put forward in the recent Council motion, and the request from Witney Town Council.

- 8.2. Officers do not consider that it is appropriate to extend a review of boundaries to other areas of West Oxfordshire at this stage or to consider other issues that may be addressed through a CGR e.g. the abolition of parish meetings. Instead, these issues should be addressed in a future CGR (post-LGR) although it is appreciated that this is unlikely to be an immediate priority for a newly formed authority.
- 8.3. It is intended that a final report and recommendations of the CGR would be brought to Council in by no later than March 2028.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Following the motion brought to Council in January 2026, £50,000 has been allocated in the budget for the work to be undertaken to consider undertaking a CGR. It is considered that a limited CGR focused on the boundaries of Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney and could be resourced within this budget envelope. A wider review looking at all civil parish boundaries and/or other issues such as the abolition of parish meetings would be more complex and challenging to undertake within existing resources.
- 9.2 If Council was minded to prioritise resourcing a broader and more comprehensive CGR, notwithstanding the timeline and capacity issues identified above and the likely priority of delivering LGR, it would require additional resources and a further report would need to be brought back to the Executive and Council. This would add delay and risk a CGR not being completed in good time.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (LGPIHA 2007) provides the legal framework for considering and undertaking CGRs. In addition, Section 100 (4) of LGPIHA 2007, instructs principal councils to have regard to the 2010 Guidance issued by the Secretary of State and Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) in such matters.
- 10.2. LGPIHA 2007 Part 4, Chapter 3, devolves the power to take decisions about the creation, abolition or alteration of parishes, and their electoral arrangements, to district councils, London Boroughs or unitaries whichever is appropriate (Principal Councils).
- 10.3. Section 100(4) of LGPIHA 2007 requires principal councils to have regard to the guidance issued by the Secretary of State under s100(1) and (3) and the LGBC England under s100(2).
- 10.4. Other pieces of legislation also need to be complied with, such as the Local Government Act 1972 - in relation to parish meetings and councils, the constitution of the parish councils and requirements relating to parish councillors - and the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, in relation to reviews and recommendations about electoral areas by the Boundary Commission.
- 10.5. The decision to undertake a CGR is specified in the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 as a non-Executive function. Therefore, Council rather than the Executive is the decision-making body required to approve a CGR.

10.6. Regulation 7 of The Local Government (Structural Changes) (Transitional Arrangements) Regulations 2008 provides that where a CGR is undertaken by a council that is subject to LGR, the predecessor council must exercise its power to give effect to the recommendations before the start of the transition period (i.e. before the Structural Changes Order comes into force), otherwise the successor council becomes the decision maker.

11. RISK ASSESSMENT

11.1. A CGR is a significant exercise which may result in tangible changes to communities. There is a risk that a CGR could not be delivered at the same time as LGR which is likely to be the overriding priority, hence quite a focused review is proposed which would aim to consider and address specific issues that have been raised by members and Witney Town Council. Nevertheless, there is a risk that the review may not be completed.

11.2. There is a risk that the decision maker (whether full Council or a successor unitary authority) would choose not to give effect to any recommendations arising from a CGR undertaken by West Oxfordshire District Council. This risk can be mitigated to some extent by the Constitution Working Group overseeing the review and engaging with Ward Members on specific proposals.

12. EQUALITIES IMPACT

12.1. There are no equalities impacts associated with the recommendations in this report.

13. SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no sustainability implications associated with the recommendations in this report.

14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

14.1 None.

(END)

This page is intentionally left blank

Annex A - Community Governance Review 2026/27:

Draft Terms of Reference

Introduction

West Oxfordshire District Council (“The Council”) is carrying out a Community Governance Review (CGR) in accordance with Part 4, Chapter 3 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (LGPIHA 2007) to consider parish boundaries, parish ward boundaries and councillor representation in the areas Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney.

As well as legislation, the Council is also required to have regard for the Guidance on CGRs issued by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. Both the legislation and the guidance have been considered in drawing up these terms of reference.

Why is the West Oxfordshire District Council undertaking the review?

A CGR provides an opportunity for a district council to review and make changes to community governance for the parishes within their area.

The Council is undertaking a CGR in response to a Council motion passed in January 2026 and a specific request from Witney Town Council. This review is taking place prior to local government reorganisation to ensure that any changes to civil parish boundaries can be agreed prior to an electoral review of the successor unitary council.

Scope of the review

The focus of this CGR is solely on the administrative boundaries and electoral arrangements for the parishes and town councils in the Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney areas of the district only, as well as councillor numbers in all parishes within those areas. No other parish or town councils are being considered for administrative boundary changes as part of this review.

Given the scope outlined above, the CGR will initially involve an invitation to Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney Town Councils and those parishes directly bordering the towns of Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney to submit any proposals for boundary changes and councillor numbers.

The following town and parish councils will be notified of the review and invited to submit proposals:

Carterton Town Council and neighbouring parishes: Alvescot Parish Council, Black Bourton Parish Council, Brize Norton Parish Council, and Shilton Parish Council.

Chipping Norton Town Council and neighbouring parishes: Chadlington Parish Council, Churchill and Sarsden Parish Council, Cornwell Parish Meeting, Enstone Parish Council, Heythrop Parish Meeting, Over Norton Parish Council, Salford Parish Council, and Spelsbury Parish Council.

Witney Town Council and neighbouring parishes: Curbridge Parish Council, Ducklington Parish Council, Hailey Parish Council, and South Leigh Parish Council.

Process

Following the invitation to submit proposals, options will be drawn up based on the proposals received in consultation with the Constitution Working Group and Ward Members. Full Council will be recommended to agree to consult on the options. Upon approval of the options for consultation, in accordance with the Council's statutory duties under Section 93 of LGPIHA 2007, the Council will undertake a public consultation with the electors for the areas effected and any other persons or bodies appearing to have an interest in the review.

In considering the responses to the consultation, the Council will have regard to Section 93 LGPIHA 2007 and will ensure that community governance within the areas under review reflect the identities and interests of the community in that area and is effective and convenient.

Any changes will follow the decision-making process in the indicative timetable below.

The Council has a statutory duty under Section 79 LGPIHA 2007 to notify Oxfordshire County Council ("OCC") of its intention to undertake a review and of the contents of these Terms of Reference.

It is also good practice to contact the Local Government Boundary Commission for England ("LGBCE") prior to undertaking a review, officers have corresponded with this body in advance of the agreement of the Terms of Reference.

Indicative Timetable

<u>Indicative dates</u>	<u>Action</u>
16 September 2026	Full Council considers whether to undertake a CGR
October 2026 – 31 December 2026 (3 months)	Invitation to submit proposals (3 Months) Invite proposals from affected town and parish councils for changes to boundaries of Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney and seek responses from them on changes to councillor numbers
January 2027 – March 2027	Officers review responses and work up options, in consultation with the Constitution Working Group and Ward Members
<i>Pre-election period, local elections, annual council meeting</i>	
July 2027	Council considers options and agrees to proceed to public consultation
September - October 2027 (two months)	Public consultation (2 months) Public consultation on options
November - January 2028	Officers review responses and work up final recommendations in consultation with Constitution Working Group and Ward Members

Latest March 2028	Recommendations published and considered/agreed
By October 2028	Reorganisation Order made
1 April 2029	Commencement date

(END)

This page is intentionally left blank

 WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	COUNCIL – 16 SEPTEMBER 2026
Subject	NATIONAL SCHEME OF DELEGATION OF PLANNING FUNCTIONS
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Liz Leffman - Executive Member for Planning and Infrastructure Email: liz.leffman@westoxon.gov.uk Councillor Alaric Smith – Chair of the Constitution Working Group Email: alaric.smith@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Andrea McCaskie - Director for Governance and Regulatory Services Email: Andrea.McCaskie@ewestoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Andrew Brown, Head of Democratic and Electoral Services Email: andrew.brown@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To put arrangements in place to amend the Constitution when national changes to the functioning of Planning Committees in England come into effect (on 31 October 2026).
Annexes	N/A
Recommendation(s)	That Council resolves to: 1. Agree that a 12-Member Planning Committee will replace the Strategic Planning Committee and Development Management Sub-Committee following the October meeting cycle and that the Planning Committee will meet on the dates currently scheduled for the Development Management Sub-Committee. 2. Delegate authority to the Director of Governance and Regulatory Services to appoint Members to the Planning Committee in accordance with political proportionality and the nominations made by political groups. 3. Agree that the Chair of the Planning Committee will be the

	“nominated member” under the Regulations with the Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee as substitute, and that the Head of Planning will be the “nominated officer”, with the Development Management Manager the substitute. 4. Agree that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee will be paid the Special Responsibility Allowances payable to the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Development Management Sub-Committee under the Members Allowances Scheme 2023/24 to 2026/27. 5. Agree that all own-interest applications will be considered by the nominated member and nominated officer for referral to the Planning Committee, meaning that no own-interest applications will automatically be delegated to officers. 6. Delegate authority to the Director of Governance and Regulatory Services, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee and the Chair of the Constitution Working Group, to update the Constitution (including parts 3C, 4F and 6Q) to put the new arrangements in place to ensure compliance with The Town and Country Planning (Discharge of Local Planning Authority Functions) (England) Regulations 2026, following consideration by the Constitution Working Group.
Corporate priorities	• Putting Residents First • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	A briefing for the Strategic Planning Committee is scheduled for 7 September 2026. The Constitution Working Group met on 29 July 2026 and will consider proposed changes to the Constitution before they are implemented.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 From 31 October 2026, new Regulations will introduce a national scheme of delegation for planning functions together with a maximum size for local authority planning committees. These changes represent the most significant reform to local planning decision-making in many years and will require the Council to amend its Constitution and associated governance arrangements.
- 1.2 This report seeks some Council decisions and delegations to ensure that the Council's planning arrangements and Constitution are compliant with the national changes when they take effect on 31 October 2026.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 introduced measures to reform planning committees in England. This includes a national scheme of delegation for planning functions and a cap on the size of planning committees at a maximum of 13 Members, the details of which are set out in The Town and Country Planning (Discharge of Local Planning Authority Functions) (England) Regulations 2026 ("the Regulations"). The Regulations come into force on 31 October 2026.
- 2.2 A previous report to Council on 22 July 2026 provided more detail and context on these national planning changes. Council resolved to:
 - 1. *Note the report;*
 - 2. *Request that the Constitution Working Group further consider the implications of the new Regulations and how they need to be reflected in any changes to the Council's Constitution, prior to the Regulations coming into effect on 31st October 2026.*

3. OVERVIEW OF THE WORK TO DATE

- 3.1 Officers have considered the Regulations and associated guidance together with a number of documents and templates issued by bodies such as the Planning Officers Society (POS) and the Planning Advisory Service (PAS).
- 3.2 The Constitution Working Group met on 29 July 2026 to consider the July Council report. The Working Group considered that:
 - 1. A briefing workshop should be held for the Strategic Planning Committee (as requested at full Council). This was scheduled for 7 September 2026.
 - 2. Terms of reference for a new Planning Committee will need to be produced to replace those for the Strategic Planning Committee and the Development Management Sub-Committee (Part 3C of the Constitution).
 - 3. The scheme of delegation for planning functions (Part 4F of the Constitution) will need to be updated to reflect the national scheme of delegation.
 - 4. The Members Planning Code of Good Practice will need to be reviewed and updated (Part 6Q of the Constitution).

5. The “nominated member” would have a key role in being consulted on which applications may be determined by committee. This may require training.
6. A flow chart would be useful for showing the decision-making routes for planning applications.
7. There is a need to communicate with town and parish councils, including potentially through Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils. Officers are producing FAQs and an online briefing for town and parish councils.
8. The Council would wish to maximise member decision making where appropriate and possible within the new national framework.
9. The Council may wish to write to the government about the Regulations, potentially with partner authorities.

3.3 Some aspects of the Council’s response to the Regulations can be undertaken at an operational level whereas other aspects will require amendments to the Constitution. The latter are discussed in the following paragraphs. It is proposed that changes are made to the Constitution under delegated authority, with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee and the Chair of the Constitution Working Group acting as key consultees. This is because the next scheduled full Council meeting is not until 18 November 2026, after the Regulations take effect.

4. PLANNING COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

- 4.1 The Council currently operates a 24-Member Strategic Planning Committee and a 12-Member Development Management Sub-Committee, with the sub-committee determining the majority of applications that come before members. With planning committees being capped at a size of 13-Members, a “parent and sub-committee” model is no longer considered to be viable.
- 4.2 The Constitution Working Group propose replacing the two committees with a single 12-Member “Planning Committee”. This committee would be responsible for determining applications that are referred to it under the Regulations.
- 4.3 The rationale for a 12-member Planning Committee is to allow for a degree of continuity, including continuity of membership, through a period of significant change. The Planning Committee would effectively replace the role of the Development Management Sub-Committee and meet on the existing sub-committee dates, when there is business for the Committee to consider. The Planning Committee would also be responsible for considering the Council’s response to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects within the district, which is currently a function of the Strategic Planning Committee.
- 4.4 It is proposed that Part 3C of the Constitution is updated under delegated authority to reflect the changes to the structure and responsibilities of planning committees.
- 4.5 It is recommended that delegated authority is granted to the Director of Governance and Regulatory Services to appoint 12 members to the Planning Committee in accordance with political proportionality and the wishes of political groups (as expressed by Group Leaders).

These may or may not be the same 12 members who currently sit on the Development Management Sub-Committee.

5. NOMINATED MEMBER AND NOMINATED OFFICER

- 5.1 The Regulations invite the Council to identify a “nominated member” and a “nominated officer” for the purposes of deciding which applications that may be determined by a committee (“Schedule 2 applications”) will be referred to committee for determination.
- 5.2 The nominated member and nominated officer may agree to refer a Schedule 2 application to a committee if in their view it raises:
 - a) one or more issues of economic, social or environmental significance to the local area, or
 - b) one or more significant planning matters having regard to the development plan and any other material considerations.
- 5.3 In considering whether to refer an application to committee the nominated member and nominated officer must have regard to any relevant guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 5.4 It is recommended that the Council nominates the Chair of the Planning Committee as the nominated member, with the Vice Chair of the Planning Committee as the substitute, and that Council nominates the Head of Planning as the nominated officer, with the Development Management Manager as the substitute.
- 5.5 It is recommended that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee are paid the special responsibility allowances that are currently payable to the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Development Management Sub-Committee under the Members’ Allowances Scheme 2023/24 to 2026/27. These are set at 1.25x basic allowance for the Chair and 0.25x basic allowance for the Vice-Chair. A separate report on the Council agenda invites Council to begin the process of formulating a new members’ allowances scheme. In anticipation of the national changes and their impact on these members roles, Council has previously noted, on 20 May 2026, that the allowances paid to planning committee chairs and vice-chairs will be reviewed as part of that work.

6. PLANNING SCHEME OF DELEGATION

- 6.1. The introduction of the national scheme of delegation will require the Council to update its own scheme of delegation to reflect which applications may be determined by committee under the Regulations (schedule 2 applications) and which applications must be delegated to officers (schedule 1 applications).
- 6.2. The national scheme is very restrictive in defining the schedule 2 applications which may be determined by committee, limiting potential committee consideration to major applications in most cases. For schedule 2 applications there is a “gateway test” whereby a nominated member and nominated officer may agree to refer a schedule 2 application to committee in certain circumstances (see para 5.2).

- 6.3. It is proposed that, following consideration by the Constitution Working Group in October, Part 4F of the Constitution is updated under delegated authority to reflect the new national scheme of delegation for planning functions.
- 6.4. The Regulations require that any “own interest” application must be subject to the same gateway test. These are applications made by or on behalf of the authority, a member or an officer, or in which the authority, a member or an officer have an interest.
- 6.5. The national guidance states that it is not a requirement for the nominated officer and nominated member to consider all Schedule 2 applications or all own-interest applications. The Council may, through its Constitution, decide which Schedule 2 or own-interest applications need to be considered for referral to committee, and which ones are automatically delegated to officers.
- 6.6. Given the relatively small size of the district council and the wish to avoid perceptions of bias and to promote transparency, the Council has an existing convention whereby all own-interest applications are determined by committee. Council is therefore recommended to agree that all own-interest applications will be considered for referral to committee by the nominated officer and nominated member.

7. MEMBERS' PLANNING CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE

- 7.1 Officers will be reviewing the Members' Planning Code of Good Practice in order to ensure that it will remain fit for purpose and reflect good practice, including in view of the new nominated member and nominated officer roles in deciding which schedule 2 and own-interest applications will be determined by committee.
- 7.2 It is proposed that Part 6Q of the Constitution is updated under delegated authority if amendments are deemed to be necessary following consideration by the Constitution Working Group in October.

8. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1. Officers consider that no changes are required to the Members' Code of Conduct, which forms Part 6A of the Constitution as it is an Oxfordshire-wide document.
- 8.2 Similarly, officers do not see a need to update the substance of the public participation rules, which were reviewed recently by the Constitution Working Group in response to recommendations made to the Council by the PAS.
- 8.3 Officers have reviewed the Council's policies and arrangements for dealing with persistent complainants and unreasonable behaviour in light of POS guidance.
- 8.4 Officers will also be reviewing internal processes and procedures, including:
 - a) Reviewing what steps should be taken at the validation stage of the application process to ensure that schedule 2 applications are identified, with checking in place.
 - b) Developing a clear process for schedule 2 applications, including reporting arrangements.

- c) Reviewing the templates for planning reports and update (additional representations) reports.

9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 9.1 Council could decide to create a single planning committee of a different size to the 12-Member committee that is proposed (e.g. 11 or 13 members). This would slightly alter the apportionment of seats to groups from the current allocations on the Development Management Sub-Committee. A size of less than 11 members is not recommended as that would be considered to be too small.
- 9.2 Council could decide to hold an extraordinary meeting to consider proposed changes to the Constitution, and the appointment of members to the Planning Committee, rather than grant delegated authority to an officer in consultation with key members. This approach would require a full Council meeting to be held in w/c 26 October 2026 e.g. Wednesday 28 October 2026, which is during half term week.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. The reduction in the number of planning committees will result in a small saving on the Special Responsibility Allowances paid to committee chairs in the short-term. There are no other financial implications arising from this report.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. The Regulations introduce a statutory framework governing the allocation of planning decision-making responsibilities between officers and planning committees.
- 11.2. The Council must ensure that it complies with the Regulations, which come into force on 31 October 2026 by reviewing governance arrangements, member training and officer procedures.
- 11.3. Failure to adopt the National Scheme of Delegation will result in risk of challenge. If the committee were to make decisions on any applications falling under Schedule 1 of the Regulations which must be delegated to officers, those decisions may be subject to judicial review by anyone aggrieved by the decision. This may lead to the quashing of the decision.

12. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 12.1 There are no differential impacts on groups with protected characteristics arising from the recommendations in this report.

13. SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 These upcoming changes are mandated by the government which has undertaken its own assessment.

14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 14.1 None.

(END)