

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Council.

Held in the Council Chamber, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB, at 2.00pm on
Wednesday 13 March 2024.

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Coles (Chair), Elizabeth Poskitt (Vice-Chair), Joy Aitman, Lidia Arciszewska, Thomas Ashby, Hugo Ashton, Andrew Beaney, Michael Brooker, David Cooper, Julian Cooper, Rachel Crouch, Duncan Enright, Phil Godfrey, Andy Goodwin, Andy Graham, Jeff Haine, David Jackson, Edward James, Natalie King, Andrew Lyon, Charlie Maynard, Martin McBride, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Mathew Parkinson, Rosie Pearson, Rizvana Poole, Andrew Prosser, Carl Rylett, Geoff Saul, Sandra Simpson, Alaric Smith, Ruth Smith, Harry St. John, Tim Sumner, Dean Temple, Liam Walker, Alex Wilson and Alistair Wray.

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance), Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Bill Oddy (Assistant Director – Commercial Development), Phil Martin (Assistant Director – Business Services), Andrew Brown (Business Manager – Democratic Services), Max Thompson (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer), Maria Harper (Democratic Services Assistant), Sharon Ellison (Electoral Services Manager), Janice Bamsey (Principal Planning Policy Officer), Chris Hargraves (Planning Policy Manager), Astrid Harvey (Strategic Policy and Partnerships Officer), and Heather McCulloch (Community Wellbeing Manager).

Other Councillors in attendance: Nil.

CL.147 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from the following Members:

Councillors Dan Levy, Liz Leffman, Lysette Nicholls, Mark Walker, Nick Leverton, Alaa Al-Yousuf, Colin Dingwall, Mark Johnson, David Cooper and Jane Doughty.

Councillor Adrian Walsh was absent from the meeting.

CL.148 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made by Members of the Council.

CL.149 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Councillor Liam Walker stated that although under the previous meeting minutes relating to the Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024/2025 made correct reference to Rule 23.2, Part 5A of the Council's Constitution, they had originally been advised during the meeting that he would be unable to speak on that agenda item, as a result of leaving the room during the debate.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, proposed that the minutes of the previous meeting, held on Wednesday 28 February 2024, be agreed by Council as a true and accurate record, and signed by the Chair.

This was seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright, was put to a vote, and was agreed unanimously by Council.

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Council **Resolved** to:

1. Agree the minutes of the previous meeting, held on Wednesday 28 February 2024, as a true and accurate record.

CL.150 Receipt of Announcements

Councillor Andrew Coles, Chair of the Council, welcomed all attendees to the meeting, and thanked members of the public for their attendance.

The Chair advised that due to a technical difficulty experienced with the webcasting platform in the Council Chamber, the meeting would not be live streamed to the Council's website. The Chair further advised that the meeting was being recorded and would subsequently be uploaded to the website at the earliest opportunity.

The Chair stated that all members had received an e-mail from the Executive Assistant to the Chief Executive, in which clarification was given that the Chair's Fundraising Quiz would take place on Friday 17 May 2024. Members were reminded of their invitation to the quiz night, which would be in support of the Chair's chosen charities.

The Chair paid tribute to the work of Reverend Canon Toby Wright, who would leave the West Oxfordshire district in pursuit of a role as Dean of Wells Cathedral. The Chair stated that Canon Wright had been a stalwart in his services to the district, and that they would leave West Oxfordshire with the wishes of the whole council, the district and its residents.

The Chair also paid tribute to the work of Janice Bamsey. Janice Bamsey was a member of the Council's Planning Policy team and would retire from the Council after 38 years' service. The Chair gave an overview of Janice Bamsey's career within the Council, and expressed gratitude for their work, stating it was only fitting that formal recognition of their work was given by Council and its Members. The Chair invited Janice Bamsey to the front of the Chamber where they were presented with a bouquet of flowers in recognition for their service. A photograph was taken of the Chair presenting Janice Bamsey with the flower bouquet, and the Chair wished them a very long and happy retirement.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, reminded all members of the importance of online training regarding cyber security. The Leader encouraged members to complete the online training if they had not already done so, adding that it was vital for all forms of ICT, not just for Councillor email accounts. The Leader reminded members to liaise with officers if they were experiencing any difficulties whilst undertaking the training.

Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economic Development, gave an update regarding the West Oxfordshire Small Business Grant Scheme. The Deputy Leader stated that 41 applications had been received from different organisations around the local economy, with 36 applications successfully passing Counter Fraud checks thus far. The Deputy Leader further highlighted that all applicants had been invited to a session with the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP), with 34 successful applicants being awarded a grant of £5,000, to help further grow their businesses and employ further staffing resources.

Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for the Environment, announced that on Thursday 21 March 2024 at 6.00pm in the Council Chamber, a session would be hosted by the Council's Climate Team, along with colleagues from local Town and Parish Councils, and delivered by Wild Oxfordshire, to launch the updated Oxfordshire Community Town and

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Parish Council Nature Recovery Guide. The Executive Member stated that funding for the guide had been received from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Councillor Joy Aitman, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, reminded Council that an online briefing on Health and Well-Being would take place on Thursday 14 March 2024 at 6.00pm, with the Council's Community Wellbeing Manager, Heather McCulloch. The Executive Member encouraged members to join the virtual briefing if they were able to do so.

Councillor Tim Sumner, Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects, provided Council with updates regarding regeneration work being undertaken at leisure locations in Chipping Norton, including refurbishment work at Chipping Norton Leisure Centre. The Executive Member stated that sign off on the works was imminent and that staff were very happy with works nearing completion.

The Executive Member also shared updates regarding the Open-Air Swimming Pool in Woodstock, giving an overview of the wide range of activities that were available and confirmed that the venue would be open throughout the summer months between May and September 2024.

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare, provided Council with an update on the Homelessness Prevention Grant. The Executive Member stated that the fund would allow local authorities to make further provisions for the prevention of homelessness, as well as funding for the provision of temporary accommodation. The Executive Member gave an overview of funding received from Central Government which included an additional £215,177 towards prevention measures in West Oxfordshire.

CL.151 Participation of the Public

There was no public participation at the meeting.

CL.152 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.153 Recommendations from the Executive

There were no recommendations from the Executive to Council.

CL.154 Polling District and Places Review

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the report, which updated members on the requirement to conduct a review of the Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places within West Oxfordshire, to put in hand the necessary initial steps, and note the suggested timetable for the review.

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Councillor Andy Graham proposed that Council agree the recommendations as listed on the report. This was seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by Council.

Council Resolved to:

1. Carry out the statutorily required review of the Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places within West Oxfordshire;
2. Agree that, in accordance with the statute, the Acting Returning Officer for the Parliamentary Constituency of Witney; be requested to submit his representations on the review, to include information as to the location of polling stations (both existing and proposed) within Polling Places (both existing and proposed);
3. Agree that the information in this report as to the processes and the timetable for the review be noted;
4. Agree that consultation responses and representations be considered at the meeting of Council to be held 25 September 2024 /or 27 November 2024.

CL.155 Recommendations of the Constitution Working Group

Councillor Mathew Parkinson, Chair of the Constitution Working Group, introduced the report, which presented recommendations from the Constitution Working Group arising from a meeting held on 13 February 2024.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, rose to propose an amendment to recommendation 1 as listed on the original report, whereby additional wording would be added to the resolution, to reflect an increase in the membership of the Constitution Working Group from 7 to 9 Members, owing to its extensive work programme, allowing the group to formulate draft recommendations to Council in relation to work of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. This was seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright, and agreed to by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Constitution Working Group

The Leader of the Council paid tribute to the work of the Constitution Work Group, highlighting both the importance of the group's work, and the resolve to ensure that the Council's constitution was as tidy as it possibly could be.

In debate, Members queried proposed amendments to Public Participation Rules to clarify the rules for speaking at Development Control Committee and Area Planning Sub-Committee meetings, and if there was a potential duplication in the routine order of business at ordinary meetings of Council.

Officers confirmed that amendments were proposed from the rules as they were laid out, and that Chair's of the Development Control and Area Planning Sub-Committees could exercise their discretion if and when appropriate. Officers further confirmed that Member Questions would come immediately after of Public Participation in the order of business at ordinary Council meetings.

Councillor Mathew Parkinson proposed that Council agree the recommendations as listed on the report, inclusive of the additional wording proposed by Councillor Andy Graham and seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright. This was seconded by Councillor Michele Mead, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by Council.

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Council **Resolved** to:

1. Approve the changes to the Constitution Working Group Terms of Reference to include responsibility for oversight of electoral matters (Annex A) and:
 - a. Increase the size of the Constitution Working Group to 9 members.
 - b. Amend the second paragraph in 3.0 in the Terms of Reference to read “The Constitution Working Group will also formulate draft recommendations *in relation to* the Local Government Boundary Commission for England *review* for consideration by the Council including...”.
2. Adopt the Draft Webcasting Protocol for inclusion in the Constitution as the new Part 6N (Annex B);
3. Agree an amendment to Article 5 of the Constitution to include at 2E.2 that committees will appoint a Vice-Chair at their first meeting following Annual Council (Annex C);
4. Agree an amendment to Part 5A Rule 17.2 to remove the requirement for the Chair to have cast a deliberative vote in order to use a casting vote (Annex D);
5. Agree to amend Part 5A Rule 3.2 to add Member questions to the business for ordinary Council meetings (after public questions) (Annex E);
6. Agree to amend the Public Participation Rules to clarify the rules for speaking at Development Control Committee and Area Planning Sub-Committee meetings (Annex F);
7. Note the progress the Constitution Working Group has made in during 2023/24 and the items to be carried forward into next year, as set out in Annex G.

CL.156 Motion A: Supporting Our Farmers in West Oxfordshire - Proposed by Councillor Liam Walker, Seconded by Councillor Alex Wilson

Councillor Liam Walker introduced the motion, which sought the Council’s commitment to support local farmers and food producers across the West Oxfordshire district. The Motion also sought to promote the engagement and emphasise partnership working between poultry and arable and livestock farmers, to ensure they could continue to enhance the countryside and contribute to UK food security.

Councillor Rosie Pearson rose to propose and introduce an amendment to the motion, which had been circulated in advance. The amendment sought to continue to engage and work in partnership with poultry, arable and livestock farmers, and with horticulturalists and agroecologists, to ensure they could continue to enhance the countryside, contribute to the nation's food security, protect and enhance biodiversity and improve soils.

Councillor Pearson thanked Councillor Liam Walker for proposing the original Motion to Council, and for their work in bringing attention to the subject matter. Councillor Rosie Pearson further highlighted that the amendment would make the Motion stronger, helping to further enhance sustainable levels of food production, soil enrichment and overall carbon reduction, as well as increasing overall income for farmers.

The amendment was not accepted by Councillor Liam Walker, who stated that they felt that the amendment negated the original motion. Councillor Walker also highlighted that the simplicity of the motion had been taken away by the amendment.

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Councillor Liam Walker sought clarity from the Director of Governance as to whether the amended motion negated the original motion by means of an additional resolution, and amendments to the original resolutions. The Director of Governance stated that in their view, the amended motion did not negate the original motion.

In seconding the amended motion, Councillor Lidia Arciszewska highlighted that the amended motion would emphasise the existing partnership work was ongoing between local farmers, food producers and the Council. Councillor Arciszewska stated the importance of collaborative, partnership working with FarmED, the NorthEast Cotswold Farming Cluster, and Cotswold National Landscape. Councillor Arciszewska gave an overview of the work, which had taken place in conjunction with Oxfordshire County Council and the Environment Agency since the West Oxfordshire Alliance took office in 2022, highlighting that external and national pressures, such as the UK's exit from the European Union, inflation and the energy crisis, were also within the reasons why an amendment to the motion was necessary, and urged members to support the amendment.

In the debate on the amended motion, members were keen to emphasise that the original motion as put, aimed to focus on local issues affecting West Oxfordshire rather than issues on a national scale. Members also stated that there seemed to be some confusion as to the point of the original motion, and highlighted that the original motion had been tabled to assist local farmers and their work.

Members also stated that there was a lack of evidence of the work undertaken to work constructively with farmers across the district, and that no reference to this had been made at any Executive or Cabinet meeting since the change of control within the Council in 2022, except for the adoption of the West Oxfordshire Food Action Plan in March 2023. Members urged the Executive to highlight work carried out so that it could be publicised more widely.

Members highlighted the work of the West Oxfordshire Food Action Plan that had recently been discussed and adopted by the Executive, and a number of members further highlighted the work of FarmED and other local partnerships, adding that the work of the UK Shared Prosperity and Rural England Prosperity funds would also go some way to helping local farmers.

Members also highlighted a rise in the amount of bureaucracy created on a national scale that was affecting both local farmers and farmers more generally, which had in turn prevented them from doing their work to the highest possible standard. Members made reference to Brexit, checks on goods at land borders, access to European Union markets, access to labour resources and seasonal farming staff, European competition, and policy hangover from the European Union. Members stated that farmers would get a much better deal if the UK were still inside the customs union.

Members also raised the importance of local food groups, local food banks and local charities, which had all played their part in ensuring that surplus food from supermarkets and other food outlets had found their way to those people who needed it the most. Members made particular reference to the 'Chippy Larder', adding that the ongoing Cost of Living Crisis had only escalated demand over recent months. Members also stated that the extra demand was driven by a lack of general support from central government, adding that there was a substantial increase in the number of families who were struggling to put food on the table.

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A number of Members stated that they would support the amendment to the motion, as it added depth to the motion and strived to allow actions to be carried out and enhanced work to get underway.

Members also made reference to work ongoing across the County of Oxfordshire, adding that grant funding had been received to drive down levels of rural crime, which was having a severe impact on farmers being able to carry out their work in an efficient and timely fashion.

Members also highlighted health implications that were associated with the motion, adding that a reduction in general consumption of salts and sugars would be far more beneficial to the human diet than 30% reduction in the consumption of meat. Members also stated that the focus more generally should be on encouraging farmers to produce cost effective good quality foodstuffs. Members agreed that there would be both health and environmental benefits to proposals made in the amendments, but that these would be on an individual basis.

Members also highlighted that whilst the current membership of the Council did not include any farmers, previous members of the Council had undertaken work within the farming sector and members highlighted that their contribution to the Council overall was of great significance adding that it should not go forgotten.

A number of members also made reference to the 'Get Fair About Farming' campaign, which sought to make further progress in highlighting the work of local farmers, given the increasing monopoly that supermarkets had on food supply chains. Members also indicated that wherever possible, food should be acquired from good quality local producers which in turn would go a long way to supporting the work of local farmers within not only West Oxfordshire but across the country.

In summing up the debate on the amended motion, Councillor Rosie Pearson thanked Members for their contributions to the debate on the amended motion, and stated her disappointment in the attitude of opposition members in relation to the wider context of the amendment. Councillor Pearson highlighted the improvements made to the motion by the amendment, stating that an original resolution would set up a battle ground between those who did and did not eat meat as part of their diets. Councillor Pearson also described her surprise in that the word soil was not mentioned in the original motion, which was found to have a vital role enhancing biodiversity. Councillor Pearson summed up by stating that the Alliance were not dismissing the original motion, emphasising that the amendments to the motion which strengthen it in the round.

Having been proposed, seconded and debated, and the amendment was put to a vote. There were 28 votes in favour, 8 votes against, and 2 abstentions. The amendment was carried.

Councillor Andrew Beaney rose to state that at the time of the next General Election, West Oxfordshire would have 3 MPs rather than 1, and subsequently proposed an amendment to resolution 5 of the substantive motion, whereby the wording would state "**Call on all West Oxfordshire District's MPs to support**", rather than "**Call on our MP to support**". This was seconded by Councillor Liam Walker, who accepted the amendment proposed by Councillor Beaney as the proposer of the substantive motion.

Councillor Alex Wilson, seconder of the substantive motion thanked members for their contributions to the debate, and expressed disappointment at the amendment, urging that going forward, amendments to the wording of future motions could be agreed in advance with the proposer and seconder.

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The substantive motion, inclusive of the amendment to resolution 5, was put to a vote. There were 37 votes in favour, 0 votes against and 1 abstention. The vote was carried.

Council **Resolved** to pass the following Motion:

West Oxfordshire District Council is committed to supporting local farmers and food producers across our district. WODC will continue to engage and work in partnership with poultry, arable and livestock farmers, and with horticulturalists and agroecologists, to ensure they can continue to enhance our countryside, contribute to our nation's food security, protect and enhance biodiversity and improve our soils.

Council Resolves to:

1. Continue to work to support local farmers by developing policies, including planning policies, which are sympathetic to diversification opportunities, including market gardens and medium-scale agroecological growing, and by promoting local produce during the Back British Farming campaign week;
2. Be a well-informed voice of reason in the national conversation around diet, recognising that the National Food Strategy recommends a 30% reduction in meat consumption, but also recognising the role that non-intensive livestock can play in restoring soils and providing part of a balanced diet;
3. Provide food at Council events, where practical, which is sourced from local suppliers, including a selection of food for those who have chosen a plant-based diet, as well as good quality plant-based food as well as good quality meat, fish, dairy, fruit, and vegetables;
4. Continue to work with Good Food Oxfordshire, and implement our West Oxfordshire Food Action Plan, working with farm shops and local food businesses to shorten supply chains and look at food hubs so that local food is affordable to all, reducing the food miles on our plate and supporting our producers;
5. Call on all West Oxfordshire District MPs to support the Get Fair about Farming campaign, which demands regulations ensuring supermarkets stick to fair buying agreements, and call on the government to end the uncertainty over the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) which will replace Basic Payments, and to support farmers in the transition to more sustainable forms of agriculture.

CL.157 Motion B: Local Authority Mental Health Challenge - Proposed by Councillor Alex Wilson, Seconded by Councillor Michele Mead

Councillor Alex Wilson introduced the motion, which sought to highlight challenges that people experience with mental health and challenge the Council and Oxfordshire County Council to do more to tackle the stigma attached to challenges people across the district and county faced regarding mental health. Councillor Wilson further highlighted the importance of ensuring that the challenges faced by those suffering from mental health stigmas was better, more widely understood, adding that the appointment of a Council 'Mental Health Champion' (MHC) would be pivotal in providing such support.

In debate, members stated the importance of the work a MHC would provide to both Council and residents of the district. Members also alluded to external training, including mental health first aid training, that had been received on the matter, highlighting the connection between a

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greater understanding of mental health challenges and member casework. Members also made reference to challenges faced by themselves in the past, highlighting the importance of the motion and how much it was welcomed.

Members also referred to ongoing work surrounding mental health, including the work of a Youth Needs Assessment which highlighted challenges faced amongst younger people in the community. Members also stated the importance of remembering that it was not always clear what individuals went through, and that the motion would help to lead to a better understanding.

Members also cited the importance of the work of the Council's Community Wellbeing Team, and highlighted the ongoing importance of their work in relation to tackling mental health challenges in the district, would link brilliantly to the work and awareness generated by a Member MHC.

Members also referred to potential, future work of championing resolutions and addressing mental health challenges, whereby Group Leaders would discuss the issue in more detail at a later date, adding resilience and strength to tackling mental health problems head on. Members also referred to challenges faced as a result of professional endeavours outside of the Council, stating that challenges faced by individuals would only grow if action was not taken to highlight the issues at hand.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Michele Mead welcomed the unanimous support for the motion and that it was warming to hear the keenness of members to help to highlight the challenges faced surrounding mental health. Councillor Mead also stated her gratitude to members for coming together in a united fashion to support the motion, and that politics had no part to play in addressing the subject matter.

Councillor Alex Wilson thanked members for their overall contributions and for their understanding as to the importance of the motion, and supporting those affected by the subject matter.

Councillor Alex Wilson proposed that the motion as set out on the agenda paper, be adopted by Council. This was seconded by Councillor Michele Mead, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by Council.

Council **Resolved** to pass the following Motion:

One in four people experience a mental health problem of some kind each year. One in six report experiencing common mental health problems in any given week in England. To put this into context, on the last census in 2021 there was a population of 114,200 in West Oxfordshire, meaning that 19,033 people are going through this on a weekly basis. What is being done here and at County isn't enough.

We can play a crucial role in improving the mental health of every member of our community, and to tackle some of the widest and most entrenched inequalities in health, as well as the misconceptions that are applied with these. This administration and others must make this a priority across all local authority areas of responsibility, as the current level of support locally is not good enough for those who are in need.

We ask the administration to appoint a Member as "Mental Health Champion" (MHC).

The MHC will advocate for mental health issues in council meetings and policy development, will reach out to the local community to raise awareness of mental

health issues and challenge stigma, and will listen to people with personal experience of mental health and get their perspective on local needs and priorities.

The MHC will scrutinise areas that have an impact on people's mental health such as Housing needs, developments, and other areas, will look at fostering local partnerships between agencies to support people with mental health problems more effectively, and will identify at least one priority each year for focused work.

The MHC will respond to occasional requests from the challenge coordinator for updates on activities undertaken in the role of member champion, and will have access to advice and support from the mental health challenge national partners, to resources on the challenge website, and an annual meeting with other member champions to share information, experience, and ideas.

We also ask the Council to Identify an existing officer to function as lead officer for mental health.

The officer would:

- Advise the member Champion on current issues and priorities;
- Support strategies initiated by the member champion;
- Raise awareness among council staff about mental health issues;
- Seek external support for activities led by the council to promote mental health and wellbeing;
- Provide information to the member champion to support their work;
- Liaise with mental health challenge national partners to secure information and advice.

The lead officer will also have access to the benefits described above for member champion, will support positive mental health in all areas of our community, work with local partners to offer effective support for people with mental health needs, tackle discrimination on the grounds of mental health in our local community, and proactively listen to people of all ages and backgrounds about their needs for better mental health.

Council Resolves to request the Leader of the Council to:

1. Sign the Local Authority Mental Health Challenge;
2. Appoint a member as "Mental Health Champion" (MHC);
3. Identify an existing officer to function as lead officer for mental health.

The Chair drew the meeting to a close by thanking Members for their attendance and for their contributions during the meeting. The Chair also highlighted that the meeting was the last meeting of Council during the current municipal year, and took the opportunity to wish those members who would seek re-election to the Council at the next round of local elections well with their campaigning.

The Chair also paid tribute to those Members who were standing down at the next round of local elections, and thanked them for their service to West Oxfordshire District Council.

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Councillor Harry St. John rose to thank the residents of North Leigh for their support during their term of office, and thanked the work of officers for their continuing hard work, adding that their support was invaluable and should not go unnoticed by others.

Councillor St. John also paid tribute to the work of Windrush Against Sewage Pollution (WASP), adding the impact of their work had been keenly felt by many across the district, and also on a national level.

Councillor St. John summed up by thanking Members of the Council, both past and present, for their resolve in striving to do what was right by residents and thanked them for their support over the time they were a Councillor.

The Meeting closed at 3.40pm.

CHAIR