

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Council.

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB,
at 2.00pm on **Wednesday 24 July 2024.**

PRESENT

Councillors: Elizabeth Poskitt (Chair), Andrew Coles (Vice-Chair), Joy Aitman, Thomas Ashby, Hugo Ashton, Andrew Beaney, Michael Brooker, Adam Clements, David Cooper, Julian Cooper, Steve Cosier, Rachel Crouch, Jane Doughty, Genny Early, Duncan Enright, Roger Faulkner, Phil Godfrey, Andy Goodwin, Andy Graham, David Jackson, Nick Leverton, Dan Levy, Paul Marsh, Martin McBride, David Melvin, Rosie Pearson, Rizvana Poole, Andrew Prosser, Nigel Ridpath, Carl Rylett, Geoff Saul, Sandra Simpson, Ruth Smith, Tim Sumner, Sarah Veasey, Mark Walker, Adrian Walsh, Alex Wilson and Alistair Wray.

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive), Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance), Andrew Brown (Business Manager, Democratic Services), Anne Learmonth (Strategic Support Officer), Max Thompson (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Barry Clack (Communications Officer) and Maria Harper (Democratic Services Assistant).

CL.172 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lidia Arciszewska, Natalie King, Liz Leffman, Andrew Lyon, Stuart McCarroll, Michele Mead, Ed James, Liam Walker, Rizvana Poole and Charlie Maynard.

CL.173 Declarations of Interest

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

The Chair advised that the Council had taken legal advice regarding agenda item 7 (Recommendations from the Executive, Resolutions 7 to 10 (Publica Transition Plan)), as to whether officers who were present at the meeting and employed by Publica, who were in scope for Phase I of the transition, would need to declare an interest and/or leave the room whilst the Executive considered the agenda item.

The Chair advised Council that Publica employees did not have an interest in the context of public law decision making, as they were not the decision maker, however there was a need to avoid the appearance of bias. The Chair stated that Publica employees, who were in scope for Phase I of the transition, would leave the room whilst Council considered the agenda item. Officers employed by Publica who would advise members in relation to the Publica transition, were permitted to remain in the room, as, in accordance with the viewpoint of the Council's Director of Governance, the need for members to receive answers to questions outweighed the appearance of bias.

CL.174 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Chair asked for the previous minutes to be amended with the following corrections;

I. Receipt of Announcements;

The Chair also announced and gave a brief overview of their chosen charities for the 2024/25 municipal year, which were:

- The Friends of Oxfordshire Museum;

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2. Appendix A, Local Plan Working Group:

- Councillor Julian Cooper would replace Councillor Poskitt on the Local Plan working Group, the Annex would be updated to reflect this change.

The amendments were noted by Democratic Services.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, proposed that the minutes of the previous meeting of Council, held on Wednesday 22 May 2024, be agreed by Council as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chair of the Council. This was seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by Council.

Council **Resolved** to:

1. Agree the minutes of the previous meeting, held on Wednesday 22 May 2024 as a true and accurate record.

CL.175 Receipt of Announcements

The Chair announced the sad news of the passing of Democratic Services Officer Michelle Ouzman at the end of June 2024. The Chair and the Council's Democratic Services Team attended Michelle's memorial service. Michelle was not only a valued member of the Democratic Services team at West Oxfordshire District Council, but Michelle had also served in the Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF). Michelle had been involved with various projects including working on the statutes for D-Day remembrance service. A statue had been commissioned in remembrance for Michelle and would be placed at the WRAF headquarters. A moment of silence was observed by Council to remember Michelle.

The Chair congratulated Councillor Charlie Maynard on his election as Member of Parliament for Witney. The Chair thanked Robert Courts for his service and all his work as the previous Member of Parliament for Witney.

The Chair gave feedback on her visit to the Council at Woodstock, Ontario, Canada. The Chair gave an explanation of the structure of the Council and the city of Woodstock. The Chair had visited the old Town Hall which was built in the same style as the Town Hall in Woodstock, Oxfordshire.

The Chair thanked the Elections Team for all their hard work over the past months covering the Local District Elections, The Police and Crime Commissioner Elections and the Parliamentary General Election.

Councillor Andy Graham, The Leader of the Council announced that there were now 3 Members of Parliament covering the West Oxfordshire District Council area. The Leader would be meeting with the MPs and future quarterly meetings were planned to ensure issues would be passed up to Parliament.

The Leader confirmed that Councillor Hugo Ashton had taken the place of Councillor Charlie Maynard as the Executive Member for Planning.

Councillor Duncan Enright reported back on the successful completion of the first phase of the capital grants from the Shared Prosperity Fund to small businesses across West Oxfordshire. 77 grants had been awarded after due diligence. This would support local businesses and provide jobs locally. The grants were across all sectors and geographically were spread broadly across the district. In the coming weeks visits were planned to discuss what the grants were being used for, to talk with small businesses and local members would be

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involved with these visits. Councillor Enright asked members to respond to these invites when received.

Councillor Enright announced that a skills initiative has been launched with Abingdon and Witney College. Places would be available on courses for areas such as hospitality, tourism and social care. Places would be available to local residents who wish to gain skills and accreditation in these areas which would benefit the local economy.

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, reported that the first meeting had been held for the Cap-zero Project which the Council was co-funding. In future a shift would be made from use of fossil fuels to electricity. The communities of Eynsham and surrounding villages had been involved and members would be able to get involved as well. The purpose was to find ways for energy and renewable energy to be balanced and West Oxfordshire District Council would be the first in the country to take on this project and Councillor Prosser would report back on the project's process over the coming months.

CL.176 Participation of the Public

There was no public participation at the meeting.

CL.177 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.178 Recommendations from the Executive

The Chair advised that the recommendations numbering 1 to 10 would be taken one by one and voted on individually.

1: Approve the addition of the capital programme for the landlord's fitout works (letting of unit at Marriot's Walk).

Councillor Andy Graham, The Leader of the Council referred to Councillor Enright, Executive Member for Economic Development, to present the recommendation. Councillor Enright confirmed the fitout for Marriott's Walk. Capital Works would continue to improve Marriott's walk as well as the whole of the town centre. One unit that had been unoccupied since the opening of Marriott's Walk would shortly be coming into use by a local business. Every unit was in use or subject to negotiation for a business to move in.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed that Council approve the addition of the capital programme for the landlord's fitout works (letting of unit at Marriot's Walk).

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

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Council **Resolved** to:

1. Approve the addition of the capital programme for the landlord's fitout works (letting of unit at Marriot's Walk).

2: Delegate authority to the Planning Policy Manager to submit the CIL charging schedule for independent examination in accordance with the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended) including any minor modifications, subject to there being no significant issues raised during the six-week consultation period (Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Draft Charging Schedule).

The Leader presented the recommendation reminding Members that the item had been long standing and dated back to 2015. The full proposal would go out to consultation in early autumn. The consultation period had been extended from four weeks to six weeks and would start mid-August and finish at the end of September to enable everyone to have an opportunity to put forward views. The proposal would result in parish councils having more of a say regarding infrastructure. Section 106 agreements would not be affected. Other councils had been consulted.

In the debate it was clarified that the portfolio holder would review the consultation responses with the Planning Policy Manager and would decide whether any issues raised were considered to be significant.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the consultation would be an opportunity to reflect community views. The funding gap analysis would be important when the proposal goes to examination and the Inspector would need to take a view on that, and the justification for imposing the CIL. The funding gap analysis would not affect the consultation and was a separate exercise.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed that Council delegate authority to the Planning Policy Manager to submit the CIL charging schedule for independent examination in accordance with the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended) including any minor modifications, subject to there being no significant issues raised during the six-week consultation period (Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Draft Charging Schedule).

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

Council **Resolved** to:

1. Delegate authority to the Planning Policy Manager to submit the CIL charging schedule for independent examination in accordance with the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended) including any minor modifications, subject to there being no significant issues raised during the six-week consultation period (Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Draft Charging Schedule).

3 and 4: Carry forward the capital budget of £4,086,328 (Finance Performance Report 2023-24 Quarter Four) and approve the transfers to and between the Earmarked Reserves as detailed in the report (Financial Performance Report 2023-24 Quarter Four).

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, presented the report for the Finance Performance Report 2023-24 Quarter Four. The majority of the underspend was related to the investment recovery programme where no suitable viability projects were identified or compliant with the investment strategy. Other underspend was Carterton SPS project, replacement of waste vehicles and the end of agile working. There was a need to bring

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forward the capital budget. Councillor Alaric Smith presented the report for Earmarked Reserves and listed the reserves as set out in the report.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed that Council:

1. Carry forward the capital budget of £4,086,328 (Finance Performance Report 2023-24 Quarter Four);
2. Approve the transfers to and between the Earmarked Reserves as detailed in the report (Financial Performance Report 2023-24 Quarter Four).

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

Council **Resolved** to:

1. Carry forward the capital budget of £4,086,328 (Finance Performance Report 2023-24 Quarter Four);
2. Approve the transfers to and between the Earmarked Reserves as detailed in the report (Financial Performance Report 2023-24 Quarter Four).

5: Agree to utilise Housing Reserves as set out in section 4 of the report (Our House Project Funding Extension 2024-26).

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care, presented the report and confirmed that the housing reserves would enable the extension of the Our House Project for another 2 years. The project supported homeless young people helping with education, employment and training and providing supported accommodation. There would be 3 shared houses with accommodation support for 11 young people. The Our House Project was launched in 2018 with Cottsway Housing Association and has been hugely successful. Since 2022 the project has been funded by housing reserves. The current reserves were available due to previous underspends.

Councillor Geoff Saul proposed that Council agree to utilise Housing Reserves as set out in section 4 of the report (Our House Project Funding Extension 2024-26).

This was seconded by Councillor Andy Graham, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by Council.

Council **Resolved** to:

1. Agree to utilise Housing Reserves as set out in section 4 of the report (Our House Project Funding Extension 2024-26).

6: Note the appointments to outside bodies, as set out in Annex B (Outside Body Appointments).

The Leader, Councillor Andy Graham, asked the Members to note the appointments to outside bodies, as set out in Annex B (Outside Body Appointments). Councillor Graham gave thanks to all involved across the Chamber as well as Officers, who worked on numbers of representation for the appointments. This would enable a good working partnership with Outside Bodies. The Annex had been updated and was for noting by Council.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed that Council agree to note the Members the appointments to outside bodies, as set out in Annex B (Outside Body Appointments).

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

Council **Resolved** to:

1. Agree to note the Members the appointments to outside bodies, as set out in Annex B (Outside Body Appointments).

There was a pause in proceedings to allow Publica staff to leave the Chamber.

7, 8, 9 and 10: The Publica Transition Plan Phase 1.

The Leader, Councillor Andy Graham, presented 7, 8, 9 and 10 of the recommendations which covered the Publica Transition Plan, Phase 1. Councillor Graham thanked all officers for their hard work bringing together a phased approach to the Publica transition. The Plan had been presented through staff briefings, Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Executive and now was before Council. All three Councils had worked together on the plan. Phase 1 covered the teams that would be brought back into West Oxfordshire District Council from 1 November 2024, including up to 87 staff. Phase 2 would follow later and was not detailed in the report.

Members asked what services and staff roles would look like from 1 November as there was not a detailed structure plan. There would be staff consultations happening to enable staff to engage with the transition. This would give the opportunity for staff to be part of the structure process. Sensitivity had to be observed to give all staff support where needed. Clarification was given on the role Director of Place, to provide senior leadership for locally based services in West Oxfordshire.

Members asked whether Publica would provide the services as needed and would third parties be brought in to cover work if not. The roles of shared services with Publica would be part of Phase 2 of the transition and as issues arose, they would be dealt with.

The Leader of the Council gave reassurance that staff were being supported to enable a seamless transition and avoid any problems in the future.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed that Council;

1. Approve the implementation of Phase 1 of the Publica Transition on the basis of the Detailed Transition Plan (Publica Transition Plan).

This was seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright, was put to a vote, and was agreed by Council. 31 votes for, 0 against and 7 Abstentions.

Councillor Andy Graham then proposed that Council;

2. Delegate to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council the decision to deal with any final detail matters arising from the Detailed Transition Plan (Publica Transition Plan).
3. Delegate authority to the Director of Governance in liaison with the Leader to update the constitution by making any consequential changes required as a result of Phase 1 of the Detailed Transition Plan (Publica Transition Plan).
4. Carry out a budget re-basing for the 2026/27 financial year so that the funding provided to Publica is proportionate to the services received Plan (Publica Transition Plan).

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

Council **Resolved** to:

1. Approve the implementation of Phase I of the Publica Transition on the basis of the Detailed Transition Plan (Publica Transition Plan).
2. Delegate to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council the decision to deal with any final detail matters arising from the Detailed Transition Plan (Publica Transition Plan).
3. Delegate authority to the Director of Governance in liaison with the Leader to update the constitution by making any consequential changes required as a result of Phase I of the Detailed Transition Plan (Publica Transition Plan).
4. Carry out a budget re-basing for the 2026/27 financial year so that the funding provided to Publica is proportionate to the services received Plan (Publica Transition Plan).

There was a pause in proceedings to allow Publica staff to return to the Chamber.

CL.179 Recommendations from the Council's Committees

Councillor Mark Walker, Chair of the Licensing Committee, presented the Pavement Licensing Policy. The policy was introduced in 2020 to enable local businesses to continue trading safely during Covid. As part of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 the licensing policy would become permanent. The policy would ensure safe provision for use of pavement spaces. The costs of administering the policy would be covered by fees of £185 for new applications and £150 for renewal of existing licenses. The licence would be valid for 2 years. Approval of the policy would encourage more trade and support for businesses in the district. Councillor Walker recommended the policy for approval.

Councillor Mark Walker proposed that Council:

1. Approve the draft Pavement Licencing Policy, subject to any further amendments;
2. Approve the new fees as detailed in paragraph 3.3 of the original report (Annex A).

This was seconded by Councillor Dave Jackson, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by Council.

Council **Resolved** to:

1. Approve the draft Pavement Licencing Policy, subject to any further amendments;
2. Approve the new fees as detailed in paragraph 3.3 of the original report (Annex A).

CL.180 Results of Member Survey on Council Start Times

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, presented the report on the survey for Council meeting start times. The responses had produced varied views and highlighted issues such as work commitments and covering childcare. The Leader proposed the next Council meeting start at 4.00pm on 25 September 2024.

The 4.00pm start would be on a trial basis. The Leader recommended the report be noted and the Council meeting on 25 September start at 4.00pm.

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The debate followed and raised the following points. There would always be views on start times due to personal commitments however timings for Council meeting could be reviewed as the proposed time was a trial time. A later start time for meeting would give officers and staff a longer prep time. Staff views had not been included in the survey as the decision was for Councillors to make.

The Leader proposed that Council note the content of the report, and agree the Council meeting on 25 September start at 4.00pm on a trial basis. This was seconded by Councillor Alaric Smith, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by Council.

Council **Resolved** to:

1. Note the content of the report;
2. Agree the Council meeting on 25 September start at 4pm as a trial.

CL.181 Motion A: Council of Sanctuary - Proposed by Councillor Rachel Crouch

Councillor Rachel Crouch introduced the motion which sought the Council's commitment to join the Council of Sanctuary. Councillor Crouch gave a brief overview of the Council of Sanctuary and how joining would benefit the work done in the district for asylum seekers and refugees in the area. Councillor Crouch also thanked the officers for all their hard work supporting those seeking asylum and refuge within the local communities.

The debate followed and raised the following points. The Members complimented staff for all their hard work over many years supporting the community and to be part of the Council of Sanctuary would enable a wider network of support. It would also promote a welcome culture within the district.

Members asked that any documents included with future motions be circulated as the electronic links did not work.

Members commented on how the local residents had made positive contributions to refugees with the aim of making sure newcomers were welcomed and are integrated into the community.

Councillor Rachel Crouch proposed the motion be adopted by Council. Councillor Crouch stated her gratitude to all Members for their support of the Motion and the importance of working together on a vital issue. This was seconded by Councillor Jane Doughty, was put to a vote, 33 votes for, 3 abstentions and was agreed by Council.

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

This council acknowledges the dedication and achievements of the officer team in fulfilling the council's obligations towards people seeking sanctuary in West Oxfordshire. The Council has acted promptly and efficiently to deliver support and housing for those seeking sanctuary (asylum seekers, refugees, guests), including using the main funding rounds for:

- 6 families via the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme since 2015;
- The Afghan resettlement scheme since 2021;
- Support for people from Ukraine, including the Homes for Ukraine scheme since 2022;
- The Local Authority Housing Fund to provide follow-on housing for Afghan and Ukrainian residents, since 2023.

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In many cases, particularly surrounding work with the Home Office and the residents of the Witney Four Pillars Hotel, council officers have worked in diligent new ways to ensure people seeking sanctuary receive the best welcome to Witney that could be offered.

This council pledges to learn from these experiences, from the local volunteers who work with our sanctuary seekers, and from sanctuary seekers themselves; and from organizations with even more experience, to develop into a district with a joined-up strategy and framework for welcoming people who seek sanctuary.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WeT7xRyDnqGr27As0BUEg6Aghw9wsVLg/edit>

To do this, the Council resolves to:

1. Request that the Executive considers proposals to follow the Awards Process for becoming a Council of Sanctuary and to:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WeT7xRyDnqGr27As0BUEg6Aghw9wsVLg/edit>
 1.
 - Commit to joining the City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network, and to work towards recognition as a 'Council of Sanctuary'. (Steps 1-2 and Criteria 1-2 of the Process).
 - Prepare and submit an application for recognition as a Council of Sanctuary, and to deliver its Strategy over the ensuing 3 years, working towards the next accreditation cycle. (Steps 6-9 and Criteria 3-7).
 2. Develop a Strategy for People Seeking Sanctuary. This will be achieved through discussion with local groups and local people seeking sanctuary; via a Steering Group of councillors, local groups and officers; to identify what WODC can do better to facilitate a well-thought-through level of welcome and service for those seeking sanctuary within the community. (Steps 3-5 and Criteria 3-7).

CL.182 Motion B: Community Governance Reviews - Proposed by Councillor Ruth Smith

Councillor Ruth Smith introduced the motion which sought the Council's commitment to adopt a policy for Community Governance Reviews. Councillor Smith asked for a minor change to the motion wording to "by the end of 2024/25". Councillor Smith gave a brief overview of the Community Governance Review and how adopting this review would benefit the districts towns and parishes. The review would ensure community involvement and a possible redrawing of boundaries.

The debate followed and raised the following points. Members felt that the district had experienced a large change due to new housing estates and a "bottom up" approach would form the basis of a review for towns and parishes.

The review should be approached in an evolving way and not a catch up way.

The review with the minor amendment 2024/25 would work with the ongoing District Boundary Review, Local Plan and the Publica Transition Plan.

Councillor Ruth Smith proposed the motion be adopted by Council. Councillor Smith thanked all Members for their support of the Motion and the importance of going forwards with the review. This was seconded by Councillor Andy Graham, The Leader, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by Council.

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

New developments on the boundaries between towns and villages and between larger and smaller villages bring with them the question of what structure of town and parish governance would best reflect the identities and interests of the new residents and the newly-shaped communities.

A Community Governance Review gathers evidence and viewpoints from the communities involved and may result in 're-parishing'; the redrawing of parish boundaries; changes to the number of councillors, changes to ward boundaries, changes to the name or type/style of 'Parish' council, grouping or ungrouping parishes and even the creation of new councils.

West Oxfordshire District Council has not routinely conducted such reviews since the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

Council resolves to adopt, by the end of 2024, a policy for Community Governance Reviews, based on recommendations to be brought to the Executive when officers have considered it, to include: -

- The expected interval between reviews, per parish and as a whole district;
- The size of proposed developments that should trigger a CGR for parishes;
- Other considerations in line with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the joint guidance on community governance reviews published by the Communities and Local Government Department and LGBC [Local Government Boundary Commission].

Links:

The webpage for the Vale of White Horse Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee

<https://democratic.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=542>

Examples of recent local CGRs and evidence of a policy for regular reviews (Vale says every 4 years);

- Vale: <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/community-governance-review/>
- Cherwell: <https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/info/11/elections/315/communitygovernance-review>
- Vale and South working together every 4 years: <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/democracy/have-your-say-on-proposedchanges-for-parishes-in-south-oxfordshire-and-the-vale-of-white-horse/>

A 2011 NALC roundup of lessons from CGRs.

<https://www.nalc.gov.uk/library/ourwork/create-a-council-resources/1357-community-governance-reviews-some-lessonsfrom-recent-practice/file>

Government Guidance on Community Governance Reviews (2010)

<https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/community-governance-reviewguidance.pdf>

- I. To adopt, by the end of 2024/25, a policy for Community Governance Reviews, based on recommendations to be brought to the Executive when officers have considered it, to include: -

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- The expected interval between reviews, per parish and as a whole district.
- The size of proposed developments that should trigger a CGR for parishes.
- Other considerations in line with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the joint guidance on community governance reviews published by the Communities and Local Government Department and LGBC [Local Government Boundary Commission].

The meeting closed at 3.57pm.

CHAIR