

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the

Executive

Held in the Warwick Hall, Church Lane, Burford, OX18 4RY at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 15 January 2025**

PRESENT

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

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive Officer), Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance), Bill Oddy (Assistant Director for Commercial Development), Phil Martin (Director of Place), Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer), Michael David (Housing Delivery Programme Manager), Mandy Fathers (Business Manager - Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service), Chris Jackson (Shared Tourism Services Manager), Ana Prelici (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Sam Stronach (Economic Development Manager) and Maria Wheatley (Shared Parking Manager)

Other Councillors in attendance: Councillor Julian Cooper

270 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

271 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

272 Minutes of Previous Meeting

There were no amendments to the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 11 December 2024.

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

They were taken to a vote and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 11 December 2024.

273 Receipt of Announcements

Councillor Andy Graham, the Leader of the Council explained the work that was being carried out to respond to the local government reform proposals which had been announced by the government. Councillor Graham explained that the implication of these was that district councils would cease to exist by 2028. Councillor Graham stated that West Oxfordshire District Council was well run, had great staff and would continue to provide services until then.

Councillor Graham stated that a discussion on the Rural Economy would be taking place after the meeting and invited members of the public in attendance to remain for this.

Councillor Hugo Ashton, the Executive Member for Planning, explained that there was a 27 February deadline for the Council to respond to the Botley West Solar Farm application and that a meeting of the Development Control Committee would take place in later February.

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Councillor Tim Sumner, the Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects, stated that recent infrastructure works had been completed in the Council's leisure centres, which provided great facilities for residents.

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Participation of the Public

Councillor Peter Higgs, who was the Mayor of Burford and a public participant to the meeting asked the following question of Councillors Lidia Arciszewska and Tim Sumner:

What are the latest plans of WODC to mitigate the frequent flooding in Burford car park, which has happened a number of times again this winter, with raw sewage released from Bourton-on-the-Water sewage works by Thames Water flooding the car park on Monday 6 January this year when the sewage was discharged into the Windrush for over 72 hours. Flooding limits parking availability in the town. It is already very difficult for visitors to find spaces to park as can be seen from your survey, and this limits the Town's ability to support tourists who wish to visit our historic town and to support our economy.

The recent use of a small sump pump to pump flood water away has been completely ineffective, and prior to that, Burford Town Council had requested detailed improvements in the drainage system that were rejected by WODC, which we are sending again, so after the recent frequent flooding, will the Council now please now reconsider Burford Town Council's proposals?

Councillor Tim Sumner, the Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects responded:

The District Council recognises that Burford deserves and needs the best parking facilities it is possible to offer and we will work together with the Town Council and local businesses to improve the situation for residents, businesses and tourists. To date we have spent significant time looking at alternative options to meet the future parking needs of the town and will continue to do so.

Councillor Lidia Arcieszweska, the Executive Member for Environment responded:

The District Council has been in constant dialogue with Thames Water over the past 2 years, continually challenging them in regard to their record of ongoing sewage discharges into local waterways and rivers. The Council has hosted two Waterways Day events where Thames Water and other agencies were invited to present their plans to reduce discharges by increasing the capacity of both their treatment works and underlining infrastructure along with hosting meetings with senior Thames Water managers and technical experts to push for improvements across the district.

A meeting is currently being arranged, which the MP will be chairing, with representatives with Thames Water, where local issues will be discussed.

In regard to the effectiveness of the sump pump that was installed, it is important to point out that pumping can only be carried out when the river flooding has stopped due to the volume that floods into the carpark. The sump is only a small independent chamber installed to simply

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aid the pumping operation due to the need to submerge pump heads under water or to sit submersible pumps in. This is NOT part of a drainage system.

We are not aware that there has been any pumping carried out this Winter by Ubico, so will look to set up a more effective line of communication between the Burford TC, the District Council and Ubico to ensure a prompt reactive pumping service can be activated along with revisiting the proposals submitted by the Town Council.

Since the flooding, Ubico have inspected the car park and felt that it was in a satisfactory condition and the District Council have arranged for a sweeper to clean the car park early tomorrow.

275 Reports from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had made the following recommendations on item 11, the Affordable Housing Update item at its meeting on 8 January 2025:

“That the Council’s target on providing a minimum of 30 temporary accommodation bed spaces is amended to clarify that the target is for the current financial year and to emphasise that the Council’s priority is to keep families together and in the District.”

Councillor Geoff Saul proposed accepting the recommendation, explaining that the target would be amended to read;

“The Council will deliver an additional 30 bedspaces during the 2025-26 financial year, where possible within the district.”

Councillor Andy Graham seconded accepting the recommendation.

The proposal was taken to a vote and agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED: To agree the Executive’s response to the recommendation put forward by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

276 Matters raised by Audit and Governance Committee

There were no matters raised by Audit and Governance Committee.

277 Draft Budget 2025 – 2026, Version Two

The purpose of the report was to provide an update on the developing budget for 2025/26 following the provisional government funding settlement on 18 December 2024.

The Leader explained that Annex F was exempt and the Executive would need to resolve to go into a private session if they wished to discuss this. An additional recommendation, which was not in the report, had been put forward by officers;

That the Executive:

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- Delegate authority to the S.151 Officer, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and the Executive Member for Environment, to amend the Trade Waste Fees in Annex F, to ensure the service remains competitive and delivers value for money to local businesses.

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, proposed accepting the recommendations in the report and as amended. Councillor Smith explained that the Council would approve the final budget for 2025/26 on 26 February 2025. The first draft of the revenue budget for 2025/26 was presented to the Executive on 11 December 2024, this second draft had been updated for the provisional government funding settlement announced on 18 December 2024, draft fees and charges, for approval and the final Council Taxbase.

Councillor Smith highlighted changes in expenditure on staff training which was related to the Publica transition and the Extended Producer Waste payment.

The recommendations were seconded by Councillor Andy Graham, taken to a vote and unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED: That the Executive:

1. Approved the draft fees and charges for 2025/26, as detailed in Annex E and F and;
2. Delegated authority to the S.151 Officer, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and The Executive Member for Environment, to amend the Trade Waste Fees in Annex F, to ensure the service remains competitive and delivers value for money to local businesses.

And that the Executive recommended that Full Council;

3. Approve the Council Tax Base shown in Annex D, calculated as £48,742.33 for the year 2025/26.
4. Authorise the Director of Finance to submit the National Non-Domestic Rates Return 1 (NNDRI) to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government by the submission date of 31 January 2025.

278 Business Rates Relief 2025/206. Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Scheme

The purpose of the item was to consider a scheme of rate relief for retail premises as outlined by Government in the Autumn Statement 2024.

Councillor Alaric Smith, the Executive Member for Finance, introduced the item, explaining that the business rate relief scheme was in line with eligibility criteria as in Annex A of the report. Councillor Smith proposed accepting the recommendations.

Councillor Duncan Enright seconded the recommendations, highlighting the importance of supporting businesses to the district, using Burford as an example.

The recommendations were taken to a vote and unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED: That the Executive recommended to Council to:

1. Approve the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure scheme as set out in Annex A for 2025/2026;

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2. Delegate authority to the Interim Executive Director for Resident Services for the award of such reliefs.

279 Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme Phase 4: Chipping Norton Leisure Centre

The purpose of the item was to delegate authority for the acceptance of Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme Phase 4 funding for Chipping Norton Leisure Centre.

Councillor Andrew Prosser, the Executive Member for Climate Change and Nature Recovery, introduced the item, proposing the recommendations be accepted. Councillor Prosser highlighted the need for the work, given the increase in global temperatures and the threat of climate change. Councillor Prosser stated that the heating of leisure centres was one of the Council's largest areas of emissions.

Councillor Prosser also clarified that 155 tCO₂e in the report was only for natural gas emissions in 23/24 and did not include emissions from electricity.

It was asked whether a similar scheme could be installed in Woodstock by a non-Executive Member in attendance at the meeting. The Member was asked to write to the Executive so that the proposal could be considered.

Councillor Tim Sumner seconded the recommendations, these were taken to a vote and unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED: That the Executive:

- I. Delegated authority to the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Director of Finance and the Executive Members for Finance, Climate Change, and Leisure and Major Projects to:
 - a) Accept the grant funding, if awarded to the Council.
 - b) Earmark the required client contribution of £317,326 in the 2025/26 capital budget.

Note that project risks have been identified and that project gateways will be used where any decision relates to capital spend.

280 Affordable Housing Delivery Update

The purpose of the report was to provide an update on delivery against the corporate priority of delivering more affordable homes across the district, particularly social rented homes. The report set out key information on the delivery of affordable housing to date and plans to intervene in the market in order to boost the supply of social rented accommodation.

Councillor Geoff Saul, the Executive Member for Housing and Social Care introduced the item, proposing the recommendations be accepted. Councillor Saul highlighted the pressure that many families faced in finding secure housing within district. He explained that 240 affordable homes had been built within the current financial year and that 162 units were within pipeline for completion. Councillor Saul also highlighted that the Council had been working with partners such as housing associations and community-led organisations in order to carry out these aims.

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Councillor Alaric Smith seconded the recommendations, stating that this remained a vital aspect of the Council's work.

The recommendations were taken to a vote and unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED: That the Executive noted the report.

281 Housing Staffing Resources

The purpose of the item was to;

- Brief members on the continuing pressures facing the Housing Service,
- Outline the risk should the Housing Team be unable to deliver statutory duties due to increased volumes of residents contacting the service and,
- Seek approval to recruit additional staff resources to assist with the complex and increasing volumes of homelessness presentation.

Councillor Geoff Saul, the Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare introduced the item, proposing the recommendations be accepted Councillor Saul explained that the additional permanent staff recommended would help prevent homelessness in the district and reduce reliance on expensive temporary staff.

Councillor Alaric Smith seconded the recommendations.

The recommendations were taken to a vote and unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED: That the Executive:

1. Approved the creation of up to two additional Housing Officer Posts;
2. Delegated the allocation of additional resources from Housing Project Reserves (or any additional ring-fenced short-term grants) to the Business Manager - Housing in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing & Social Welfare and the Chief Finance Officer subject to compliance with the ring-fenced grant conditions

282 Home Improvement Agency Contract

The Leader stated that himself and Councillors Enright and Saul were members of Oxfordshire County Council but did not sit on the County Council's Cabinet or have any pecuniary interest on this item.

The purpose of the item was to seek the Executive's approval to extend the Home Improvement Agency Funding Agreement with Oxfordshire County Council for a further 2 years and continue to provide the service for residents in our communities from 1st April 2025.

Councillor Rachel Crouch introduced the item the Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities and proposed accepting the recommendations. Councillor Crouch explained that Home Improvement Projects were commissioned in order to enable Oxfordshire Residents in need of support such as repair and mobility aids to maintain their independence, health and well-being at home for the foreseeable future.

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Councillor Alaric Smith seconded the recommendations, stating that the funding was very important in allowing people to have the ability to make these accessibility improvements.

The recommendations were taken to a vote and unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED: That the Executive:

1. Agreed to extend the existing Home Improvement Agency Funding; Agreement with Oxfordshire County Council for a further 2 years
2. Agreed to request a 2% increase in funds to cover increased costs.

283 Waste and Environmental Services Review

The purpose of the item was to update the Executive on the review of the waste and environmental services contract and to outline the proposed Oxfordshire Waste and Environmental Services Transformation Programme.

Councillor Lidia Arciszewska introduced the item and proposed accepting the recommendations. Councillor Arciszewska explained that;

- The contract for waste and recycling collection with Ubico was due to expire in March 2026 and the Council was seeking to extend it to 2027.
- In partnership with Cherwell District Council and Oxford City Council, The Council had commissioned Activist to undertake a review of options for these services. Having already worked together to complete a dry mixed recycling procurement project, the three councils had common goals and could work together to achieve this at scale.
- What was proposed was an extensive transformation project which would achieve economies of scale.

Councillor Alaric Smith seconded the recommendations stating that it was in line with the Council's goals.

In response to a question from another Executive Member, Councillor Arciszewska stated that the Council would seek to involve Town and Parish Councils where it made sense to do so.

The recommendations were taken to a vote and unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED:

The Executive recommended that Full Council:

1. Note the content of the report and the Activist service review report, attached as Annex A; and
2. Agree to extend the waste and environmental services contract with Ubico to March 2027 (circa £9m per annum); and
3. Agree to undertake a detailed review of all waste and environmental services provided by Ubico; and
4. Agree to inform Ubico of the potential to vary the contract from April 2026 or earlier by mutual consent; and

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5. Delegate Authority to the Council's Director of Finance, in consultation with the Assistant Director Commercial Development, to extend the contract with Ubico and to negotiate any variations to the contract; and

That the Executive:

6. Endorsed and support the principle of 'Working Collaboratively' in the future with other local authorities in Oxfordshire on environmental and waste services; and
7. Agreed to support the creation of The Oxfordshire Waste and Environmental Services Transformation Programme and delegate authority to Assistant Director Commercial Development, in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment, to negotiate and agree the governance framework for the programme, and the associated programme plan; and
8. Appointed the Executive Member for Environment to be the Council's lead Member for the Oxfordshire Waste and Environmental Services Transformation Programme and the Assistant Director Commercial Development to be the Council's Lead Officer; and 9. Allocate £150,000 from the Council Priority Fund to support The Oxfordshire Waste and Environmental Services Transformation Programme in 2025/26; and 10. Request that Officers report back to the Executive Transformation Group and the Executive Member for Environment periodically on progress with the Waste and Environmental Services Transformation Programme.

284 Contract Award for the Parking ICT system

The purpose of the item was to agree the contract award for the Parking ICT system.

Councillor Tim Sumner, the Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects, introduced the item and proposed the accepting the recommendations. Councillor Sumner stated that the Council had a shared parking team with Forest of Dean and Cotswold District Councils which allowed costs to be shared and economies of scale to be achieved. Councillor Sumner explained that failure to award the contract would mean the Council would be unable to enforce any of the car parks nor issue any permits, when the current contract was due to end on 31 March 2025.

Councillor Alaric Smith seconded the recommendations.

The recommendations were taken to a vote and unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED: That the Executive

1. Approved the recommendation by officers to award the contract for the Parking ICT system to the preferred contractor as outlined in the Exempt Annex B.

285 Exclusion of Press and Public

The Executive did not resolve to exclude to exclude the press and public.

286 Draft Budget 2025/26 - Version Two - Exempt Annex F

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The exempt annex was taken as read and was not discussed.

287 Waste and Environmental Service Review - Exempt Annex A

The exempt annex was taken as read and was not discussed.

288 Contract Award for the Parking ICT system - Exempt Annex B

The exempt annex was taken as read and was not discussed.

The Meeting closed at 3.07 pm

CHAIR