

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the

### **Executive**

Held in the Village Hall (Bampton) - Bampton Village Hall, Market Square, Bampton, OX18 2JH  
at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 12 March 2025.**

### PRESENT

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

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive Officer), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance), Phil Martin (Director of Place), Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer), Ana Prelici (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Mathew Taylor (Democratic Services Officer), Mark Pritchard (Business Manager for Communications and Marketing), Andrew Thomson (Lead Planning Policy & Implementation), Alison Borrett (Senior Performance Analyst), Caroline Clissold (Housing Manager), Mandy Fathers (Business Manager - Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service), Gemma Moreing (Business Information and Performance Lead) and Cheryl Sloan (Business Manager - Business Continuity, Governance and Risk)

Other Councillors in attendance: Alistair Wray and David Melvin

### **301 Apologies for Absence**

Before proceeding onto the receipt of apologies, Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, welcomed members of the public and introduced the Executive and function of the meeting. Each Executive member was invited to introduce themselves and portfolio responsibilities to the public.

There were no apologies for absence.

### **302 Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Duncan Enright (Deputy Leader) declared that he has undertaken work with The Community Communication Partnership. He noted that this group did not do work in Oxfordshire. This interest was raised with reference to Item sixteen on the agenda, West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 – Regulation 18 Pre-Submission Draft Consultation.

### **303 Minutes of Previous Meeting**

There were no amendments to the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 12 February 2025.

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

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They were voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the previous meeting, held 12 February 2025.

#### **304 Receipt of Announcements**

Councillor Andy Graham, the Leader of the Council, announced that members of the Planning Team were present at the meeting to give an introductory presentation to the Local Plan and Preferred Options Consultation. Councillor Graham stated that the session was intended to provide insights into the content and progress of the plan and all members of the public were encouraged to remain after the meeting to ask questions of Executive Members and Officers.

Councillor Rachel Crouch, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, announced the appointment of a new Youth Development Officer. The appointment was made three weeks before the meeting and was a full-time post for an initial period of two years. Councillor Crouch hoped that this role would improve provision for young people in the district and address some of the barriers they may face to engagement. Councillor Crouch announced that two groups, Stonesfield Scouts and Witney Mills Cricket Club, had successfully reached the fundraising targets through the Westhive Scheme. It was noted that this was a great success for them and the community.

Councillor Tim Sumner, Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects, announced that the weekend of the 15/16 March would see a celebration of fifty years of the Windrush Leisure Centre. Councillor Sumner explained that this was an achievement for the centre which formed a cornerstone of the community and a facility which the Council was proud to maintain. The celebrations would include free gym introductions, taster swimming lessons and a roller disco.

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care, announced that he, along with Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, had visited the Milestone Drive housing development to speak to residents. Many residents reported that their lives were transformed by the affordable housing and shared ownership opportunities offered by the development.

Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning, announced that the CIL Draft Charging Scheme had been submitted for examination. This scheme would bring funds that could be spent partly by the Council and partly by the community. The Executive would be informed of the timetable and implementation details.

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, announced that the CapZero project run by the Low Carbon Hub would be holding a Big Home Energy Day at Eynsham Village Hall on 22 March 2025.

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Councillor Prosser also announced that the Coronation Living Heritage Fund would be extending grants until March 2026 and encouraged interested parties to look on the website for further information.

**305 Participation of the Public**

There was no public participation.

**306 Reports from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 5 March 2025 and made no recommendations to Executive.

**307 Matters raised by Audit and Governance Committee**

There were no matters raised by the Audit and Governance Committee.

**308 Publica Phase Two Transition Plan**

Councillor Andy Graham, the Leader of the Council, introduced the item stating that the purpose of the item was to consider the Transition Plan, to note its contents and to approve the recommendations therein. Councillor Graham explained that some of the services formerly provided through Publica had already been brought back under the Council, and that this was phase two of that process. Services under phase two would be brought back on 1 July 2025. Councillor Graham noted that the staff involved in these services were relied on, gave a professional service to the Council, worked cohesively with the Executive and did a fantastic job and it was therefore important that this was recognised. Areas to be brought back under this phase were Property & Estates, Waste, Leisure and Project Management.

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, commented that it was fortunate that the Council had embarked on such changes prior to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) as this would put the Council in a position to make transition into the new authority easier and as such it was a welcome step.

Councillor Andy Graham, the Leader of the Council, proposed accepting the recommendations.

Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader, seconded the recommendations

**RESOLVED:**

That the Executive recommend to Full Council to:

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1. Approve the implementation of Phase 2 of the Publica Transition on the basis of the Phase 2 Transition Plan.
2. Delegate to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council the decision to deal with any final detailed matters arising from the Phase 2 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 2 of the Publica Transition.
4. Agree carry out a budget re-basing for the 2026/7 financial year so that the funding provided to Publica is proportionate to the services received.

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### **Homeless Prevention Strategy 2025-2028**

The purpose of the item was to present a new Preventing Homelessness Strategy to support the Council's statutory duties towards those households facing homelessness.

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care, introduced the proposal, stating this was a new strategy to tackle homelessness at its root and reduce reliance on temporary accommodation. Councillor Saul stated that at the time of the meeting rough sleeping in West Oxfordshire was recorded as at zero, however just one-person rough sleeping was too many. The strategy intended to step in early with the right support and offer stable housing to tackle the issue. It was proposed that this would lead to a stronger more sustainable community. The strategy also aligned with the Council's statutory duties in this area. In 2023/24 over 250 people were prevented from becoming homeless, with 95 households going into emergency accommodation. The Strategy looked to expand housing options to offer long term stable solutions.

In discussing the item, other members of the Executive thanked officers and Cllr Saul for their work on the strategy and said that it would help tackle the issues faced by residents at risk of homelessness.

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care, proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, seconded the recommendations.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Executive:

1. Approve the implementation of the Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2025-2028.

**310 Update on Funding for Homelessness and Rough Sleeping**

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care, introduced the item, the purpose of which was to update Members on the allocation of funding to address Homelessness and Rough Sleeping. Councillor Saul advised that the MHCLG Homeless Prevention Grant received by West Oxfordshire was £645,730. The stipulations of the grant meant that it was ringfenced for use to prevent single homelessness and rough sleeping, reduce the number of families in temporary accommodation and reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families. Councillor Saul noted that 49% of the grant was ringfenced to be used on prevention. The Council had seen increasing costs of providing accommodation with a 40-50% increase to numbers of households provided emergency accommodation, and as such the non-ringfenced allocation would be spent on such items. Councillor Saul noted that it was therefore welcome that the prevention amount was ringfenced.

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care, proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, seconded the recommendation.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Note the ring-fenced grant conditions laid out in the MHCLG letter dated December 2024.
2. Note the content of the report relating to the planned spending of this grant funding.

**311 Provision of an Empty Property Lending Scheme**

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the item. The purpose of the item was to consider a loan provider for owners of long-term empty properties who needed financial support to bring their properties back into use. Councillor Smith noted that at the end of March 2024, 1,128 properties were registered as long-term empty. Councillor Smith stated that empty properties were a wasted resource and a source of complaints. The Scheme encouraged owners of such properties to carry out essential works to bring these properties back into use. Lendology would provide loans to owners to enable such works to be carried out. Lendology would manage the scheme on behalf of the Council. The Council would set the interest rates for the duration.

Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning, noted that in the context of the Council's planning targets it was important that existing stock was brought back into use.

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Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care, seconded the recommendations.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Agree to partner with Lendology for the administration of loans subject to legal agreements being implemented for an initial period of one year.
2. Agree that loans are for the sole purpose of bringing empty properties back into use.
3. Delegate authority to the Director of Finance to approve the level at which interest is to be set on a loan repayment.

That the Executive recommend to Full Council to:

4. Approve a capital investment of £300,000 to create a lending pot.
5. Approve an initial set up fee of £30,125.

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### **Oxfordshire Leaders' Joint Committee Terms of Reference**

Councillor Andy Graham, the Leader of the Council, introduced the item, the purpose of which was to reset and change the name of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and make corresponding amendments to the Terms of Reference. The changes were necessary in light of the new focus on devolution and the winding down of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. Following approval, the changes would take effect for all six of the Oxfordshire authorities involved.

In discussion it was noted that this item was an interim measure ahead of LGR and that the Council could call in and scrutinise key decisions.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

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Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader, seconded the recommendations and noted that it remained vital that neighbouring authorities continued to work together and at present the Council was pleased with its relationships with its neighbours. The Future Oxfordshire Partnership had looked at strategic issues and should continue albeit with a new model after LGR.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

- I. Approve the revised FOP Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding. These will take effect following approval by each of the six Oxfordshire Authorities.

**313**

### **Community Grants - Westhive Review**

Councillor Rachel Crouch, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, introduced the item the purpose of which was to present the review of the Westhive Crowdfunding scheme to date and consider the outcomes as detailed in the report. Councillor Crouch introduced background and context of the Westhive scheme and explained that this review had been recommended to take place by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6 November 2024. The review had now taken place and been presented to the Committee in March. The conclusions of the report were:

- The Westhive scheme should continue to operate for the remainder of the contract.
- To consider the benefits and implications of CIF finding being made available on the platform on 2025/26
- To consider changing the Council's pledge level
- To activate the Community Activities Grant

In discussing the report, Executive Members noted that the scheme not only helped communities raise funds but also encouraged communities to take ownership due to the Council topping up community funds. It was stated that the scheme helped small projects who may not have knowledge of how to get on platforms and fundraise. The benefits of the scheme were highlighted, including more money being available and the greater diversity of the organisations that could take part. The Witney Mills Cricket Club was given as an example.

Councillor Rachel Crouch, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment, seconded the recommendations stating that the scheme had been a great success with funds being awarded

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to a wide range of projects benefiting communities and the environment. Councillor Arciszewska thanked the officers involved for their work on the scheme.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

- I. Note the findings of the review on the Westhive Civic Crowdfunding scheme to date and introduce the following enhancements to the Council's approach to grant giving:
  - i. Continue with the 3rd year of the Spacehive contract
  - ii. Consider the benefits and implications of CIF funding being made available on the platform in 2025/2026
  - iii. Increase the maximum Council pledge to £12,000 or 75% of the project total, whichever is less.
  - iv. Launch a small grant scheme to complement the Westhive programme in consultation with Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities.

#### **314 Financial Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter Three**

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the item, the purpose of which was to detail the Council's financial performance for Quarter Three 2024-2025. Councillor Smith summarised the report highlighting the following items:

- There was an overall overspend of £34,344, an improvement from quarter two where the position was £96,821 overspent.
- Green waste was currently £64,000 below budget.
- A new contract for Dry Mixed Recycling started on 1 October 2024. In the first four months of the contract the average monthly cost has dropped by £23,000. The budget for 2025/26 included a saving of £300,000 for the processing of recycling.
- Development Management was difficult to forecast with no discernible pattern. At the end of quarter three the income sat at £240,000 below target. Although the income position had improved, the Council would only reach its target if it received a major application. The year end forecast was £145,000 behind target. The situation had been reflected in the budget for the next year.
- Bank and credit charges were reported as overspent for the previous two financial years. A new contract for processing had brought cost back within original budget for 2024/25. The forecast for quarter four was an underspend of £70,000.
- With regards to investment property, Councillor Smith advised that Between Towns Road in Cowley remained empty and was overspent as the Council was liable for Business Rates and Security costs. Officers were undertaking an asset review to consider alternative use for the site.



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- Talisman Business centre showed a forecast underspend of £80,000 in quarter four.
- The income contingency of £200,00 put against the large Leisure Contract did not appear like it will be needed.
- The Council had identified risks in the Budget for 2025/26 relating to the Leisure Contract and Business Rates reset. It was recommended that any surplus in revenue outrun be transferred to budget deficit reserve to mitigate these risks.
- It was recommended that an earmarked reserve be set up to cover the extensive costs of exploring and scoping the optimal unitary solution.
- Councillor Smith noted that the agile working programme had been completed at Elmfield. There were some urgent works required to Woodgreen. The Solar PV replacement at Elmfield had also been completed. An Investment Grade Proposal for the decarbonisation of Windrush Leisure Centre in Witney was expected and the business case would go forward to the Executive in June 2025.
- Four new waste vehicles had been delivered.
- Councillor Smith concluded that the revenue outturn position was forecast to be £58,762 underspent. However, this position included elements which would not be known until year end. Therefore, although the position at the end of quarter three remained encouraging, there were still risks.

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance. proposed accepting the recommendations as detailed in the report.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, seconded the recommendations.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Note the Council's Financial Performance for Quarter Three 2024-2025
2. Delegate authority to the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance, to review earmarked reserves to mitigate against the financial risks identified in this report.

### **315 Service Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter Three**

Councillor Andy Graham, the Leader of the Council, introduced the item, the purpose of which was to provide details of the Council's operational performance at the end of 2024-25 Quarter Three (Q3). Councillor Graham highlighted the following:

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- The purchase of three electric vans and an ultra-narrow van for the Council's green fleet.
- The installation of Solar PV at Elmfield. Councillor Graham noted that Elmfield was now let, with the main offices now at Woodgreen. Elmfield would be a business and social hub with a new café opening soon. The Elmfield conversion had been completed in a cost effective and environmentally friendly way.
- Service performance areas above target were highlighted in Customer satisfaction, planning applications determined within agreed timescales, missed bin collections and gym memberships.
- Councillor Graham noted that Land charge searches and visits to leisure centres were not on target, but that this was in part due to seasonal delays.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, proposed accepting the recommendations, and thanked Council staff, Officers and Senior Management for their work in this area.

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, seconded the recommendations.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Note the 2024/25 Q3 service performance report.

### **316 West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 – Regulation 18 Pre-Submission Draft Consultation**

Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning, introduced the item, the purpose of which was to provide an update on the emerging draft West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041, including the Regulation 18 'preferred options' public consultation which was scheduled to begin in May 2025. Councillor Ashton reiterated that this item was an update and not a draft Local Plan, which would be completed in October. However, it was noted that the emerging plan had a much stronger focus than the Local Plan 2031 (adopted in 2018) on the following areas: mitigating climate change, tackling the ecological emergency, investment in infrastructure, focus on community health and wellbeing, water environment, reducing reliance on the private car, increasing the use of public transport and a provision for a Carterton to Oxford railway line. The next step would be the presentation of the preferred options consultation paper to the Executive on 14 May 2025. The consultation period would begin in late May and last through June. It was explained that there would be a presentation on this with the opportunity to ask questions following the meeting.

Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning, proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

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Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, seconded the recommendations

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Note the content of the report including the implications of the updated NPPF published in December 2024 and the intention to defer consideration of the Local Plan preferred option consultation paper until May 2025.
2. Agree that a minor addendum to the Council's published Local Development Scheme (LDS) – November 2024 be published to reflect the fact that the Local Plan 2041 preferred options consultation paper will now be considered by the Council's Executive in May 2025 with public consultation to begin in late May 2025.

The Meeting closed at 3.02 pm

CHAIR