

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Council

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB
at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 21 May 2025**

PRESENT

Councillors: Elizabeth Poskitt (Chair), Andrew Coles (Vice-Chair), Joy Aitman, Lidia Arciszewska, Thomas Ashby, Hugo Ashton, Mike Baggaley, Andrew Beaney, Michael Brooker, Adam Clements, Julian Cooper, Steve Cosier, Rachel Crouch, Jane Doughty, Genny Early, Roger Faulkner, Phil Godfrey, Andy Goodwin, Andy Graham, David Jackson, Edward James, Natalie King, Liz Leffman, Nick Leverton, Dan Levy, Andrew Lyon, Paul Marsh, Martin McBride, Stuart McCarroll, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Rosie Pearson, Andrew Prosser, Nigel Ridpath, Carl Rylett, Geoff Saul, Sandra Simpson, Alaric Smith, Ruth Smith, Tim Sumner, Sarah Veasey, Alex Wilson and Alistair Wray

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive Officer), Frank Wilson (Group Finance Director - Publica), Jon Dearing (Interim Executive Director), Phil Martin (Director of Place), Bill Oddy (Assistant Director for Commercial Development) and Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer)

CL.I Election of Chair for 2025/26

Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt, the Chair of the Council for 2024/25 civic year, opened the meeting. Before beginning the official business of the meeting, the Council held a minute's silence for firefighters Jennie Logan and Martyn Sadler, and Dave Chester, who were killed in a fire that took place at the Bicester Motion site the previous Thursday evening.

The purpose of the item was to elect a Councillor, other than a Member of the Executive, to be the Chair of Council.

Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt proposed that Councillor Andrew Coles be elected Chair.

Councillor Joy Aitman seconded the proposal. There were no other nominations.

The proposal was put to a vote and unanimously agreed.

Resolved That Council:

- I. Elect Councillor Andrew Coles as Chair of the Council for a term of office extending to the start of the Annual Council meeting in May 2026.

Councillor Poskitt handed the Chains of Office to Councillor Coles and congratulated him on his appointment. Councillor Poskitt thanked Councillor Coles for his support, being the outgoing chair for the previous year. Councillor Pokitt stated that Cllr Coles was a thoughtful, sensible, organised person.

Council

21/May2025

Councillor Coles read aloud and signed the declaration of acceptance of office.

CL.2 Appointment of Vice-Chair for 2025/26

The purpose of the item was to appoint a Councillor, other than a Member of the Executive or the Chair of the Council, to be the Vice-Chair of Council.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed that Councillor Carl Rylett be appointed Chair.

Councillor Joy Aitman seconded the proposal. There were no other nominations.

Resolved that Council:

- I. Appoint Councillor Carl Rylett as Vice-Chair of the Council for a term of office extending to the start of the Annual Council meeting in May 2026.

Councillor Coles presented Councillor Carl Rylett with the chains of office. Councillor Rylett read aloud and signed the declaration of acceptance of office.

CL.3 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Sandra Cosier, Duncan Enright, Liam Walker, Mark Walker, Adrian Walsh and David Cooper

CL.4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

CL.5 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 March were considered.

Councillor Cosier queried whether his attendance had been marked incorrectly at the last Council meeting.

There were no further comments on the minutes.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed accepting the minutes and Councillor Alaric Smith seconded this.

Resolved that Council:

Approve the minutes of the meeting held on 19 March as an accurate record of the meeting.

CL.6 Receipt of Announcements

The Chair made the following announcements;

- Members would be asked to review and update their register of interest and were asked to look out for an email from Democratic Services.
- Data protection training would be rolled out to Councillors; all Councillors were encouraged to complete this.
- Planning Training would take place later that afternoon after the full Council and Committee meetings. All members were encouraged to attend.
- The Chair welcomed Councillor Martin McBride, who had experienced a period of ill health, back to the Chamber.
- Charlie Maynard had resigned his seat as Councillor for Standlake, Aston & Stanton Harcourt following his election as MP for Witney. A by-election had been held and Councillor Sandra Cosier had been elected.
- The agenda would be re-ordered so that item 11 would be taken before item 10.
- The Chair announced that he would be supporting Dementia Oxfordshire, part of Age UK Oxfordshire, and Oxfordshire Wildlife Rescue during his term of office.

The Leader made the following announcements;

- He joined the Chair in welcoming Councillor Sandra Cosier as the new member for Standlake Aston & Stanton Harcourt.
- The Council would be establishing two new working groups; the Carterton Area Strategy Working Group and the Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution Working Group.

There were no further announcements.

CL.7 Vote of thanks to the Chair and Vice-Chair 2024/25

The Chair paid tribute to Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt, who had served as Chair for the 2024/25 civic year, and presented her with a medal for her service.

Councillor Poskitt reflected on her year as Chair highlighting the diverse experiences that came with the role. She expressed gratitude for the support received from colleagues, officers, and volunteers, especially in fundraising efforts for her chosen charities. She also thanked officers Ella Gray and Mandy Smith for their support and Cllr Coles for his support as Vice-Chair.

Council

21/May2025

Andrew Coles thanked Cllr Poskitt for her chairing, highlighting a calm nature, steely determination and great work on fundraising for charities, with a passion demonstrated for causes she supported.

Councillors Andy Graham, Joy Aitman, Michelle Mead, Rosie Pearson and Liz Leffman all also thanked Councillor Poskitt.

CL.8 Report of the Leader

The purpose of the item was to receive a verbal report from the Leader covering:

- The appointment of the Deputy Leader;
- The appointment of Executive Members and the allocation of portfolio responsibilities;
- The appointment of an Executive Member to the Oxfordshire Leaders Joint Committee;
- The appointment of a substitute member to the Oxfordshire Leaders Joint Committee;
- Confirmation that the Executive Scheme of Delegation is as set out in Parts 3D and 4 of the Constitution.

In introducing the item, Councillor Andy Graham thanked the Liberal Democrat, Labour and Green Party alliance, describing it as a collaborative and resilient partnership.

The Leader announced;

- The appointment of the Deputy Leader (Cllr Duncan Enright);
- The appointment of Executive Members and the allocation of portfolio responsibilities, which were contained in full in the supplement to the agenda pack and are included as an Annex to these minutes. Cllr Graham highlighted that arts had been added to Cllr Rachel Crouch's portfolio, and that Cllr Tim Sumner had kept their Leisure portfolio, but had also had the Carterton Area strategy added to it.
 - Duncan Enright - Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economic Development
 - Alaric Smith - Executive Member for Finance
 - Hugo Ashton - Executive Member for Planning
 - Rachel Crouch - Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities
 - Geoff Saul - Executive Member for Housing and Social Care
 - Lidia Arciszewska - Executive Member for Environment
 - Andrew Prosser - Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery
 - Tim Sumner - Executive Member for Leisure and Carterton Area Strategy
 - The appointment of an Executive Member to the Oxfordshire Leaders Joint Committee (Cllr Graham);

Council

21/May2025

- The appointment of a substitute member to the Oxfordshire Leaders Joint Committee, which could be a named Executive Member or any Executive Members (Cllr Enright);
- Confirmation that the Executive Scheme of Delegation is as set out in Parts 3D and 4 of the Constitution;

Councillor Graham proposed accepting the recommendations.

These were seconded by Councillor Saul.

The recommendation to note the report was voted on and agreed unanimously.

Council resolved to: Note the report

CL.9 Report on special urgency key decisions

The purpose of the item was to receive a report from the Leader on key decisions taken under special urgency rules within the last year.

The Leader presented the report and explained that in exceptional circumstances the Council is required to take decisions without advertising it for the required statutory period. One such decision had been taken which related to a grant from Sports England funding for Carterton Leisure Centre.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed accepting the recommendation, and Councillor Tim Sumner seconded this.

The recommendation to note the urgent decision was voted on and agreed unanimously.

Council resolved to:

- I. Note the report

CL.10 Appointment of Members to the Council's Committees, including Substitute Members

The purpose of the report was to establish the Council's committees for the 2025/26 Civic Year and appoint members to committees and working groups:

- To establish the Council's committees as defined in Part 3C of the Council's Constitution, for the Civic Year 2025/26;
- To establish the allocation of seats to political groups based on political proportionality;
- To appoint members to the Council's committees, working groups and external committees for the Civic Year 2025/26.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the report and stated that a Local Government Reorganisation working group would be established to support and oversee the work in this area.

The full list of appointments considered by the Council are included as an Annex to these minutes.

The following additional nominations to Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish groups were put forward by the respective group leaders.

- Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Liberal Democrats Group nominated Councillors David Melvin and Elizabeth Poskitt to the Public Conveniences Task and Finish Group, Councillors Andy Goodwin and Mike Baggaley to the Leisure Task and Finish group and Councillors Sandra Cosier and Alistair Wray to the Waste Transformation Task and Finish Group
- Councillor Michele Mead, Leader of the Conservative Group, nominated Councillor Jane Doughty to the Leisure Task and Finish Group.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed accepting the recommendations. Councillor Joy Aitman seconded the recommendations.

The recommendations were voted on and agreed unanimously.

Council Resolved to:

1. Agree to establish the Council's Committees as defined in Part 3 of the Council's Constitution, for the Civic Year 2025/26;
2. Determine that, in accordance with Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 ("the Act"), the Council shall continue to apply the political balance provisions under the Act to committees as shown in Annex A;
3. Appoint councillors to serve on the Council's committees, working groups and external committees, as set out in the annex to these minutes for a term of office expiring at the next Annual Meeting of the Council;
4. Note the arrangements for substitute members set out in part 5 of the report;
5. Agree the terms of reference for the Carterton Area Strategy Working Group;
6. Agree the terms of reference for the Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution Working Group;
7. Agree the updated terms of reference for the Local Plan Cross Party Working Group.

CL.II Constitution Working Group Recommendations

The purpose of the item was to present the Council with recommendations arising from a meeting of the Constitution Working Group held on 26 March 2025 and to also agree the Scheme of Officer Delegations, other than those relating to Executive functions and to adopt the Council's Constitution, as amended, as is required at the Annual Council meeting.

Councillor Alaric Smith introduced the report.

In response to a question, officers explained that the purpose of removing the telephone contact from the public speaking rules on the Council website was because the telephone lines closed at 2pm. Members asked that this be kept in but clarified.

It was asked that the heading be amended to "All other Committees (Except Planning)".

The Community Governance Review (CGR) Policy was discussed, and whether a policy should be put in place regardless of Local Government Reorganisation. The Head of Democratic and Electoral Services explained that the advice of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England was to take forward any CGRs at this point or after Local Government Reorganisation. The Constitution Working Group had agreed that it was therefore not a good use of Officer time to look at a policy, as any parishes or towns would still have a mechanism to request CGRs without a policy in place and the Council would consider any such requests on a case by case basis.

In summing up, Councillor Alaric Smith stated that the matter could be referred back to the Constitution Working Group for further consideration.

Councillor Joy Aitman seconded the recommendations.

The recommendations were voted on and agreed unanimously.

That Council resolves to:

1. Adopt the Council's Constitution and agree the Scheme of Officer Delegations, other than those relating to Executive functions, as set out in Part 4 of the Constitution.
2. Note that the Director of Governance adopted the Council's Contract Procedure Rules in consultation with the Chair of the Constitution Working Group, following the delegation agreed at the 19 March 2025 Council meeting.
3. Agree to amend the number of seats on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee within Part 3C of the Constitution to 15 members (from 24) and the quorum to 4 members (from 6).

4. Note that the Constitution Working Group endorsed the Officer recommendation for further Overview and Scrutiny training for Members.
5. Agree with the Constitution Working Group that the 'full transparency' electronic voting option will be used at meetings of Full Council (with immediate effect), and (from 22 May 2025) Development Control Committee and planning sub-committees.
6. Agree that the Council will not develop a policy for community governance reviews at the current time in view of local government reorganisation.
7. Agree the revised public speaking rules at Annex A, which seek to align the public speaking rules for different meetings, as far as practicable.

CL.12 Partnerships report

The purpose of the report was to enable the Leader to provide an update to Council on his portfolio responsibility for Strategic Partnerships.

Councillor Andy Graham introduced the report and proposed accepting the recommendations. Councillor Graham provided an update on the Council's key strategic partnerships. He highlighted the following;

- The Future Oxfordshire Partnership was now called the Oxfordshire Leaders Joint Committee.
- The Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor would be replacing the Oxfordshire to Cambridgeshire Pan-Regional Partnership.
- The Oxfordshire Migration Partnership, led by Phil Martin, continued to do vital work, particularly in supporting Afghan refugees.
- The Oxfordshire Waste and Environment Services Transformation Programme was a major initiative involving Cherwell, Oxford City, and the County Council. It aimed to transform how waste and recycling services are delivered.
- The Publica transition programme was now in its second phase, and a further update was expected in the summer.

It was asked what a silver group of officers meant, as this was mentioned in the report. The Chief Executive explained that in regard to the Council's emergency planning responsibilities, this was the tactical tier of command and control through which the response to an emergency was managed.

Councillor Geoff Saul seconded the recommendations and commended efforts of the Leader and officers in enabling work.

Council Resolved to:

- I. Note the contents of the Strategic Partnership Update.

Council

21/May2025

The recommendations were voted on and agreed unanimously.

CL.13 Dates of Future Meetings

The next meeting would be on 16 July at 2pm.

The Meeting closed at 3.15 pm

CHAIR