

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Held in the Committee Room 1, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28  
INB at 5.30 pm on **Tuesday, 11 November 2025**

#### PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chair), Genny Early (Vice-Chair), Steve Cosier, Natalie King, Nick Levertton, Dan Levy, Paul Marsh, Stuart McCarroll, Liam Walker, Ruth Smith, Alex Wilson and Alistair Wray

Officers: Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Giles Hughes (Chief Executive Officer), Phil Martin (Director of Place), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance and Regulatory Services), Ana Prelici (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Astrid Harvey (Strategic Policy and Partnerships Officer) and Mark Pritchard (Head of Communications and Corporate Strategy)

Other Councillors in attendance: Andy Graham, Rachel Crouch and Geoff Saul

#### **54 Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs: Clements, Leffman, Mead and Walker

#### **55 Declarations of Interest**

Declarations of interest were received from Cllr Smith in respect of minute number 59 in her capacity of the Leader of the Town Council, and from Cllr Levy due to his membership of the Cabinet.

#### **56 Minutes of Previous Meeting**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 October be confirmed as an accurate record, subject to the inclusion of Cllr Marsh in the list of those present.

#### **57 Chair's announcements**

The Chair stated that Officers had suggested considering the meeting's start time and asked members to stay after the meeting to discuss this. No further announcements were received from the Chair.

#### **58 Participation of the Public**

There was no participation of the public.

#### **59 Report back on recommendations**

The Chair requested any comments in relation to the recommendations which had been received from the Executive.

A Member expressed the view that Members should provide input into the Local Plan, as doing so would ensure that the needs of communities and localities within the area could be better fulfilled. This was particularly relevant in the absence of a policy on Community Governance Reviews due to the impending Local Government Review.

**RESOLVED:** That the recommendations be noted.

## **60 Updates from Task and Finish Groups**

It was confirmed that the Leisure Task and Finish Group, had now been concluded and that the Waste Transformation Task Group and the Public Conveniences groups were still ongoing

A brief update was provided on the Public Conveniences Task and Finish Group.

Members were informed that whilst none of the Town and Parish Councils had as yet responded to the question as to whether they wished to take on public conveniences in their areas, much useful information had been provided regards usage and maintenance costs.

In terms of the Waste Transformation Group, it was highlighted that the intention was to create an Oxfordshire wide waste transformation strategy in partnership with all the councils in Oxfordshire, which would examine 8 potential areas of business including, grounds maintenance and recycling. It was envisaged that recycling rates would also receive some consideration as part of the terms of reference.

**RESOLVED:** That the updates be noted

## **61 Local Government Reorganisation**

The Director of Place and the Head of Communications/Strategy conducted a joint presentation which summarised the key criteria areas for the three proposals for Local Government Reorganisation. Extensive detailed information regards the 3 proposals were contained within the document previously circulated. These options included:

- (i) A single County unitary,
- (ii) two unitaries, covering Oxfordshire and West Berkshire
- (iii) Three unitaries covering Oxfordshire and West Berkshire

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The two unitary model for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire proposed in the report considered by Members, outlined a clear, evidence-based plan to deliver better, more efficient and more locally accountable public services. It proposed to create two new councils that offered the right balance between efficiency and local identity, each servicing around 450,000 – 500,000 people, meeting the Government's criteria and being large enough to be efficient and stable, but small enough to stay connected to communities.

The full proposal developed by Cherwell District Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council, West Berkshire Council and West Oxfordshire District Council was attached as Appendix 3 of the agenda pack.

Members considered the information presented and debated the pros and cons of the options, but acknowledged that ultimately the decision was one that would be taken by the Government.

Amongst the concerns raised was the lack of clarity regards investment in the rural economy and the future of farming, along with a review of mental health services. Concern was also expressed regards the likelihood of a changing profile for local Councillors, and the skill set that would be necessary in view of the expanded range of services and needs of the community following reorganisation. Other matters of concern related to the diminishing role of town and parish councils, which provided an invaluable service in terms of accessible local government to residents. Members were informed that it was of vital importance that consideration was given to the gap between the unitary council and the town and parishes, and how best to ensure those linkages remained strong in the future model. Moreover, it was necessary to ensure that the structure of the unitary facilitated this.

Based on the discussion, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee made a number of recommendations to the Executive.

**RESOLVED:** That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. Noted that since the statutory invitation to all councils in two tier areas, significant work has been undertaken by all Oxfordshire Councils and that West Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Councils' officers have engaged with officers across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.
2. Considered the submission of a proposal for a two unitary model based on one new unitary council covering the entire existing boundaries of West Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Councils and Oxford City Council, with the working title of 'Oxford & Shires' and a second new unitary covering the entire existing boundaries of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils and West Berkshire Council, with the working title of 'Ridgeway'.
3. Noted that two other proposals will be submitted, one proposed by Oxfordshire County Council covering the Oxfordshire area and one from Oxford City Council covering the Oxfordshire and West Berkshire area.
4. Noted that should the Executive agree to submit the full proposal for the two unitary model, Cherwell District Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White

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Horse District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council will jointly submit it directly to Government in line with the Oxfordshire invitation letter.

5. Recommended that the Executive strengthen the focus on addressing the specific challenges faced in rural areas (e.g. mental health, agriculture) within the Two Unitary Authority proposal.
6. Recommended that the Executive strengthen the mentions of the equality aspects (e.g. Housing, Social Care, SEND) within the Two Unitary Authority proposal.
7. Recommended Continue to engage with Town and Parish Councils to clarify the role they will have in the context of LGR and reflect this within the model and strengthen the mention of this within the Two Unitary Authority proposals.

The Meeting closed at 7.38 pm

CHAIR