

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Executive

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB
at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 17 December 2025**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andy Graham, Duncan Enright, Lidia Arciszewska, 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 and Regulatory Services), Phil Martin (Director of Place), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Maria Harper (Democratic Services Assistant), Mathew Taylor (Democratic Services Officer), Alison Borrett (Senior Performance Analyst), Georgina Dyer (Head of Finance), Heather McCulloch (Community Wellbeing Manager), Philip Measures (Service Leader), Si Pocock-Cluley (Environmental Services and Waste Transformation Lead) and Andrew Thomson (Planning Policy Manager)

Other Councillors in attendance: Julian Cooper, Rosie Pearson and Liam Walker

425 Apologies for Absence

Prior to the meeting, Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, requested that those present observed a two-minute silence in recognition of the repatriation of Lance Corporal George Hooley at RAF Brize Norton that afternoon.

Apologies were received from: Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning.

426 Declarations of Interest

13. Local Plan Annual Monitoring 2024/25.

Councillor Duncan Enright, Declaration for Transparency, Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader, declared that he had undertaken work with The Community Communication Partnership (CCP). In this role Councillor Enright noted that he did not undertake any work in Oxfordshire and therefore this interest did not preclude him from taking part on the vote or discussion. The interest was declared in relation to item 13.

427 Minutes of Previous Meeting

There were no amendments to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 November 2025.

The minutes were proposed by Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council. Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council, seconded the proposal. The proposal was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

- I. To approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 November 2025.

428

Receipt of Announcements

Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment, announced that all services in the Waste and Recycling portfolio had been reviewed in the year, and improvements in services had been seen in areas such as street cleaning and ground maintenance. Examples of improvements in operational services were given, such as a reduction in missed bin collections and container delivery wait times. Councillor Arciszewska also advised that there was a presentation for the public on Waste and Recycling following the meeting of the Executive.

Councillor Tim Sumner, Executive Member for Leisure and Carterton Area Strategy, noted that £3.5 of investment had been made in this area in the year and attendances at the Council's facilities had increased.

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care, advised that a property in Witney had recently been acquired by the Council for use as additional temporary accommodation for residents at risk of homelessness. This was the first step on a wider programme of acquisitions by the Council to meet this need. In addition, Councillor Saul noted progress had been made in provision of affordable housing and social rent housing in the year.

Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economic Development, highlighted important work that had taken place in his portfolio in accordance with statements in the Council Plan. Councillor Enright advised that the grants from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund had enabled great strides in economic development and a report would be brought on this in the new year. Councillor Enright listed work that had been undertaken on reviving town centres and villages, providing new employment sites and street market regeneration which had resulted in both increased footfall in those markets and the surrounding businesses. Marriotts Walk was now at near full occupation and had hosted specialist events with more improvement works planned for the new year. Finally, Councillor Enright stated that new mixed-use developments that were proposed in the Local Plan would ensure much needed sustainable homes in the centre of towns.

Councillor Rachel Crouch, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, advised that, following the National Youth Strategy, there would be additional Government funding in the coming year which would enable the Council to continue the work that had already taken place in improving and delivering youth services.

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, recognised the work of Officers on Climate Action and Nature Recovery and the ongoing collaborative with other Local Authorities and noted that the Council had achieved the top score for rural districts in Climate Action and Policy.

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Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, reflected that the movement of the Assets Team back in-house had led to a strategic review of the Council's assets. This review had meant that the Council was able to identify suitable assets for disposal which had delivered additional funding for other projects, such as the purchase of emergency temporary accommodation. Councillor Smith returned to the subject of Marriots Walk and advised that this asset had contributed nearly £500k to the provision of services.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, delivered an update on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The Council had received an acknowledgement from the Minister to its proposal. The public consultation, led by the Government, would begin in early February and Councillor Graham encouraged all residents to participate.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, advised that item 16 on the agenda – Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) to prohibit pony and trap racing on a section of the A40 – would be addressed as the first report. This was agreed by the Executive.

429

Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

430

Reports from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Waste Transformation Task and Finish Group had met on 9 December 2025 to carry out pre-decision scrutiny of the Waste and Environmental Services Programme (WESP) report – item 9 on the agenda. The group had made the following comments:

1. The task and finish group welcomed the programme and commended the innovation that was being presented. They also stated that the Council being involved with the programme from the start would be an advantage.
2. The task and finish group stated that through the set-up of the programme, the Council should highlight its experience with Publica and Ubico – other Teckal companies. This mean that the Council brings expertise in operating these sorts of companies, which would be a benefit to other partner councils and the programme overall.
3. While it was appreciated that existing staff would be transferred across through TUPE and therefore have the terms of their pensions protected, the task and finish group raised concerns about the business model around not providing the Local Government Pension Scheme.
4. That the full, exempt business model should be made available as an exempt supplement to the Executive pack

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Councillor Arciszewska noted the comments of the Task and Finish Group had all received a written response that would be published as a supplement following agreement of the Executive. Comment number four had been actioned prior to the meeting.

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Matters raised by Audit and Governance Committee

The Audit and Governance Committee had met on 27 November 2025 and raised no matters for the Executive.

432

Proposals for Devolution to a Mayoral Strategic Authority

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the item, the purpose of which was for the Executive to consider and present views on the proposed Expression of Interest (EOI) to Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) who would submit an EOI to Government. This was in response to the Government's devolution policy and sought to position the region in the next round of devolution for the purpose of creating a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA).

In his presentation Councillor Graham stated that this item had also been taken to Full Council in the format presented in the Executive report. Twelve district councils in Oxfordshire and Berkshire had agreed to put forward the EOI to the Government. This was a proactive step to position Oxfordshire in the best possible way to progress quickly to an MSA.

Councillor Graham proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council, seconded the proposal.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Noted the benefits from the proposed devolution of powers and functions, and agreed to continue building on the collaborative approach across the region to date;
2. Agreed to present views on the proposed Expression of Interest (EOI) to Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) as the upper-tier authority to Government, and noted that the EOI is designed to proactively position our region for early consideration in the next wave of the Devolution Programme;
3. Acknowledged the EOI as an initial invitation to Government, opening further dialogue and engagement, and not a decision to establish a Strategic Authority;
4. Agreed that a further report will be brought to Executive prior to any final decision on the creation of a Strategic Authority;

5. Noted the informal Devolution Board would oversee discussions with Government, ensuring robust governance and stakeholder engagement by elected members throughout this process; and
6. Delegated authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to propose any final amendments to the EOI prior to submission to Government by OCC.

433 Waste and Environmental Services Programme

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, advised that if Executive Members intended to reference the exempt annex (item 18) as part of the discussion then this would necessitate that the press and public be excluded. No Executive members indicated that this would be required.

Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment, introduced the item, the purpose of which was to seek Executive approval for West Oxfordshire District Council to invest and participate in the Oxfordshire Waste and Environmental Services Partnership (WESP).

In her presentation Councillor Arciszewska made the following points:

- The Council had initiated and led on a programme to partner with other Oxfordshire District Councils on aspects of waste services such as collection, disposal, recycling, street cleaning and ground maintenance.
- Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council had committed to carry on this programme.
- The benefits of the collaboration were: economies of scale and shared procurement on items such as waste fleet vehicles; simplified services which made it clear to residents on responsibilities for areas of service provision; coordination of service provision and increased positive environmental impacts such as increased recycling rates.
- WESP would save £100m over ten years with the Council realising £17.4m of savings.
- The investment required from the Council was £1.7m over the ten years of the project and as such this was a cost-effective project.
- The oversight of the programme's implementation would enable the Council to monitor progress of the project, validate operational decisions and confirm Government frameworks were being applied.

Councillor Arciszewska proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

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Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, seconded the proposal and noted that this was a promising joint project covering many key areas, in particular the circular economy and joint procurement.

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, spoke further on the compelling financial case for WESP and noted that financial savings would enable investment in other areas of need.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, suggested that such a model was a useful template for partnership working to take into the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Approved WESP participation in principle for an initial five-year term.
2. Delegated authority to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment, the Executive Member for Finance and the Director of Finance to:
 - i. Approve the WESP business case.
 - ii. Oversee programme implementation.
 - iii. Ensure governance, risk management, and benefits tracking are in place

434

Draft Budget 2026/27 version I

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the item, the purpose of which was to provide an update on the developing budget for 2026/27.

In his presentation Councillor Smith made the following points:

- The Council would approve the budget for 2026/27 on 25 February 2026. A second draft version would be brought to the Executive meeting in January.
- The draft presented had been completed in advance of the announcement of the government funding settlement which was imminent and therefore the draft was subject to change.
- The focussed work of the draft had been done on the revenue part of the budget.

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- The Council had not received the guarantee from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) that funding would not fall and therefore the Council would be subject to a cash cut of 5% in 2026/27.
- Financial modelling had indicated a £943,000 loss of income over the three-year period to 2028/29.
- Various surplus funds had been moved into earmarked reserves to fund any gap in the revenue budget over the life of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).
- The MTFS would be updated following publication of the government funding settlement.
- Councillor Smith detailed the changes to funding and income that were shown in the report.

Councillor Smith proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, seconded the proposal and noted that this was the early stage of the budget process.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Noted the update on the developing budget for 2026/27.

435 Quarterly Finance Review Q2

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the item, the purpose of which was to detail the Council's financial performance for Quarter Two 2025-2026.

In his presentation Councillor Smith made the following points:

- There was an overall cost of service underspend of £272,063 in quarter two, which was driven by additional income from Trade Waste and Development Management.
- There were no significant overspends to report.
- Investment income was performing significantly above budget due in the main to interest rates falling more slowly than anticipated.
- The purchase of Marriots Walk had shown significant benefits.
- The Witney PSDS project was now in the construction phase with an estimated completion of the end of February 2026. The Council had received significant grant funding toward the project with the Council's own contribution estimated to be

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£565,549. The project must have been completed by the end of March 20226 to ensure grant funding was maintained and the project was therefore being closely and actively monitored to ensure that this was the case.

- It was expected that the Council would complete on more properties to provide emergency accommodation in the coming year. This enabled the Council to provide this service at less expense.

Councillor Smith proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

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

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

- I. Noted the Council's Financial Performance for Quarter Two 2025- 2026.

436 Quarterly Service Review Q2

Councillor Andy Graham, 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 2025-26 Quarter Two (Q2).

In his presentation Councillor Graham made the following points:

- The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) had been adopted by the Council in October and would take effect from 31 January 2026.
- The Executive on Tour event held in Carterton, including an engagement session on the Carterton Area Strategy, had been attended by at least thirty-five people and the discussions at the session had been very successful.
- The Council had been the first district council in Oxfordshire to endorse the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).
- Service performance areas above target included: percentage of Council Tax collected; percentage of Non-Domestic Rates collected; processing times for Council Tax support new claims; Customer satisfaction and Building Control satisfaction among others.
- Areas of performance below target included: processing times for Council Tax support change events and Housing Benefit change of circumstances and percentage of official Land Charge searches completed within ten days. The explanation for the performance

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and subsequent remedial action in these areas was given by the Officer present and could be seen in the report at section 3.3.

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care, noted that the numbers of people in temporary housing had steadied and the increase of stock of housing owned by the Council going forward would assist this further.

Councillor Graham proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader of the Council, seconded the proposal.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

that the Executive:

- I. Noted the 2025/26 Q2 service performance report.

437

Local Plan Annual Monitoring 2024/25

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the report, the purpose of which was to consider the Council's Local Plan Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

Councillor Graham advised that following consideration by the Overviews and Scrutiny Committee, a second recommendation was now included in the report as follows:

- I. Delegate authority to the Planning Policy Manager, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning, to make minor amendments to the Annual Monitoring Report 2024/25 and finalise it for publication on the Council website.

Councillor Graham invited the Officer to present the key points of the report to the Executive, and the following points were made:

- The Council was required to publish an AMR each year and it detailed progress against the Council's adopted Local Plan 2031.
- The report looked back over the previous year to consider decisions that had been made and how these compared to targets in the Local Plan.

- The AMR provided updates on the progress of key planning documents such as the emerging Local Plan 2043, Salt Cross Area Action Plan and Community Infrastructure Levy.
- The AMR mirrored the five main sections of the current Local Plan 2031: Overall Strategy; Housing delivery; Economic growth and Environmental and Heritage assets. The AMR provided indicators under each of these headings. The key points under each of these headings was summarised by the Officer and could be seen in the Executive report under sections 2.10 to 2.37.

Councillor Graham asked the Officer to explain the reason for the housing completion figures that were lower than expected. The Officer advised that this was primarily as a result of strategic scale housing allocations being delayed in coming forward for development. Developments such as Salt Cross and North Witney had been expected, and the Officer explained the reasons for the delay in these sites coming forward.

A Member commented that proposed changes to the planning system were regrettable. It was clarified that there were no proposals to eliminate committees though reforms were proposed.

Councillor Graham proposed accepting the recommendations of the report with the additional recommendation stated above.

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, seconded the proposal.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

that the Executive:

1. Noted the content of the report.
2. Delegated authority to the Planning Policy Manager, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning, to make minor amendments to the Annual Monitoring Report 2024/25 and finalise it for publication on the Council website.

438

Westhive - future hosting options

Councillor Rachel Crouch, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, presented the item, the purpose of which was to provide an update on the progress of the Westhive scheme to date and to set out the options for future delivery.

In her presentation Councillor Crouch made the following points:

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- The value of projects supported through Westhive to date totalled £948,172 over four rounds of funding. The fifth round of funding had recently been concluded with a further ten projects and totalled £124,649.
- The contract with the current provider, Spacehive, was due to end in April 2026.
- Alternative fund distribution options had been considered in the report.
- The annual fee payable by the Council to Spacehive was £30,000 and this had increased. The Spacehive business model also included a 7.5% fee paid by project creators.
- Four alternative options for future delivery had been considered in the report, and the favoured option was through Crowdfunder UK. This was due to the fee to the Council being less and there being no fee payable by project creators, which was a key consideration.
- Crowdfunder UK was one of the leading fundraising platforms in the UK and was already active in Oxfordshire with many successful partnerships.

Councillor Crouch proposed accepting the recommendations of the report and noted that this would lead to increased community engagement.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, seconded the proposal and noted that half of the funds raised to date were from the communities themselves. The remodelling of the provision would further enhance the value to communities due to the removal of the charge on the project creators.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

that the Executive:

1. Enter into an agreement with Crowdfunder UK for a 3-year period to provide a funding platform.
2. Agreed as part of the 2026/27 budget setting process making provision for platform hosting fees of £27,600 per year for a 3- year period.
3. Delegated the responsibility of working through the procurement of a new multi-year contract to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and the Executive Member for Stronger Healthy Communities.

439

Asbestos Management Policy

Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, presented the report, the purpose of which was to approve the Asbestos Management Policy.

In his presentation Councillor Graham made the following points:

- There had not been a policy review in this area since 2015.
- The Health and Safety Executive had audited the Council and had no concerns.
- In order to ensure the Council was fully compliant each property with asbestos would need to be registered and have a plan to deal with asbestos present.

The Chief Executive noted that Officers had identified the need to go beyond the guidance that existed to comply with the Council's statutory responsibility in this area. The Policy ensured best practice was being followed. Members of the public were advised that risks around asbestos normally only arose when changes or works were being undertaken on buildings. The policy would ensure the health and safety of Council employees and visitors to properties.

Councillor Graham proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, seconded the proposal and noted the need for such robust policies to be in place.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Approved the implementation of the Asbestos Management Policy.

440

Public Spaces Protection Order; A40 between Witney and Burford

Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment, introduced the report, the purpose of which was to approve the proposed Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) as detailed in the report. Councillor Arciszewska advised that the PSPO would be implemented and delivered by Thames Valley Police and asked the Officer to introduce the report to the Executive. The Officer made the following points:

- The PSPO was intended to address ongoing anti-social behaviour which had included repeated local disruption.
- The PSPO would prohibit the activity for a period of three years.
- The PSPO would give police powers that included issuing penalties and prosecution.
- The public consultation had been in support of the PSPO.

Inspector Chris Ball of Thames Valley Police addressed the Executive and made the following further points:

- At present there was no effective legislation to deal with this anti-social behaviour.
- The activities that were proposed to be prohibited by the PSPO were dangerous and had taken place on a major road in the district.
- The power to issue fines was useful, however the key power that the PSPO enabled would be obtaining details from perpetrators which would enable civil and legal proceedings.

A Member of the opposition spoke in favour of the PSPO and made the following points:

- The PSPO was not about restricting traditional pursuits but about keeping the wider community safe and protecting quality of life for residents, road users and the animals.
- Policing data showed a recurring pattern of unregulated pony and trap racing taking place.
- The road in question was not suitable for the activities to be prohibited and was a busy route.
- The robust consultation undertaken by the Council showed 97% of respondents had supported the PSPO and it was the Council's duty to weigh the needs of all residents.
- The three-year term for the PSPO would allow the Council to monitor and re-assess the position.

Councillor Arciszewska proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

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

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

- I. Approved the Public Spaces Protection Order, Annex A, which prohibited the use of pony and trap carriage(s) for racing and time trials, as delineated on the plan of the Order in Annex A.

441 Exclusion of Press and Public

The item was not considered at the meeting.

442 Exempt Annex A for Item 9 - Waste and Environmental Services Programme

The item was not considered at the meeting.

The Meeting closed at 3.15 pm

CHAIR