

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
1NB at 5.30 pm on **Thursday, 26 March 2026.**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chair), Genny Early (Vice-Chair), Adam Clements, Steve Cosier, Nick Leverton, Dan Levy, Paul Marsh, Ruth Smith, Alistair Wray, Liam Walker, David Jackson and Michael Brooker

Officers: Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Phil Martin (Director of Place) and Heather McCulloch (Community Wellbeing Manager)

Other Councillors in attendance: Geoff Saul

110 Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments

Apologies were noted from Councillors Michele Mead, Stuart McCarroll, Liz Leffman and Alex Wilson..

Councillor Liam Walker substituted for Councillor Mead.

Councillor Michael Brooker substituted for Councillor McCarroll.

Councillor David Jackson substituted for Councillor Leffman.

Councillor Alistair Wray arrived at 17:51.

111 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

112 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2026.

The approval of the minutes was proposed by Councillor Steve Cosier and seconded by Councillor Paul Marsh. This proposal was put to the vote and agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2026.

113 Chair's announcements

Andrew Beaney, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, proposed that agenda item 8, Community Safety Partnership, be considered by the Committee prior to agenda item 7, Woodford Way Update. This was agreed by the Committee.

114 Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

115 Report back on recommendations

There were no recommendations to be reported back to the Committee.

116 Woodford Way Update

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care, introduced the Woodford Way report and made the following points:

- The site, which was currently a car park, had long been allocated for housing in the Local Plan.
- The development proposed would deliver housing for local people, particularly secure and affordable homes.
- There were currently 2,300 households on the Council's housing waiting list. There was a particular demand for one and two bed homes.
- The site was owned by the Council. The site could therefore deliver 100% homes for social rent housing, without the need to have factored in developer profit.
- The scheme was expected to be supported through a combination of national funding and partnership investment.
- The work to refine the design of the site was ongoing. The current iteration of the designs had incorporated 55 homes, with a mix of flats and maisonettes, and included under-croft parking. Parking provision was for 84 spaces to be provided on site with separate underground parking for residents.
- As part of the project, the Council had reviewed the wider parking provision across Witney. At present there were over 1,600 free public parking spaces. Analysis had shown that Marriotts Walk had remained underused, with 230 spaces typically having been available on average. Work had been undertaken to explore other options for parking for residents and workers.
- Pre-application discussions were intended to take place imminently and a planning application was to be submitted for the development in the summer. Public engagement would take place in summer 2026.
- The plans were still being refined to strike the balance between the need for parking, housing and those of the wider town. Genuinely affordable housing was a key consideration.

In the discussion that followed the following questions were raised and comments made:

- The Committee queried if Thames Valley Police (TVP) had been consulted on the safety of the underground parking aspect of the plan. Officers confirmed that TVP would be a consultee.
- The Committee suggested that officers would need to ensure that vans could access the parking provision.
- The Committee considered the methodology of the parking survey that had taken place. It was noted that Witney Chamber of Commerce (WCC) had requested ANPR data and the report showed CCTV data. Members sought clarity on the difference. Officers advised that they were considering the WCC request. At present CCTV cameras were not available in all locations and this would be needed to ensure consistent data. Parking provision was being considered in the round, and it was noted that it was beneficial that Witney's car parks were all central.
- The Committee suggested that a trial period that simulated the impact of the changes to parking proposed should take place. It was noted that, as the Council owned the parking site, there was no reason that this trial should be delayed. The trial would allow residents time to get used to the potential changes.
- Members recognised that it was important and beneficial that the site was in the Council's ownership. However, it was suggested that there should be demonstrable community benefit from the scheme. Suggestions from members included high quality housing and community benefits such as a community room. The Executive member noted that these were aspects that were being considered as part of the viability and feasibility investigations. Provision was being explored for key worker housing and making the development as environmentally friendly as possible. The Chair added that he hoped the key workers were provided for included education staff, not only teachers. It was noted that it was important that the homes available for key workers were in the centre of town close to employment sites. Other Members queried if it would be possible to legislate for the housing to be allocated to key workers if the intention was to provide 100% social housing on the site.
- The Committee highlighted the difference between "homes for social rent" and "affordable housing" and queried the use of these terms in the report. Some Members suggested incorrect use of the terms could be misleading and, as this was a key element in considering the scheme, suggested that this should be made clearer in the report and press releases.
- The Committee queried if consideration had been given to building a higher density of homes given the identified housing need. Officers advised that there had been exploration of different housing density options. However, RPs were nervous of the development being a high-density build, and within the local plan the allocation was only for 50 dwellings on the site. Although this number was not fixed, consideration had to be given to what would fit well with the area and not breach the skyline. The aim was to develop a site that would be sustainable and meet local need, not just to maximise numbers.
- Members noted that the EV charging spaces proposed were for the private spaces.
- The Committee explored the potential for a funding gap which the Council would have to meet. Officers advised that the Council had corresponded with a number of RPs and

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Homes England on the project. On completion of the final design, a more detailed assessment would be made, however at present no RP had suggested that they were unhappy with the plans, the level of borrowing and build costs. Officers clarified that references to public subsidy in the report was the Homes England grant which would be essential for all three of the proposed options. Members requested more detail on the total cost and funding options.

- Members queried if there were alternative options for a mixed development including market housing should grants not become available. Officers reiterated that the Council continued to work closely with the RPs and Homes England. Homes England were indicating that they were more generous with 100% affordable schemes.
- Members clarified the labelling on option 3 plans which officers confirmed was an admin error.
- Regarding EV charging points, Members questioned if the 16 bays were time restricted and asked if data was available on their usage at present. Officers advised that this data was available and could be provided.
- Members questioned if parking data had been collected in the period when a proportion of the site had been used for a Covid testing site. Officers were not aware of such data but commented that due to the effect of Covid on the ability to shop, any such data may have been misleading.
- The data that had been provided in the report in relation to Marriotts Walk was discussed. The report suggested that occupancy was at 62% which had left 224 available spaces on average. It was suggested that the differing stay times between Marriotts Walk and Woodford Way had made this data incomparable. Some Members stated that they felt it was difficult to scrutinise the plans without the required accurate empirical parking data.
- Members requested further detail on the development net zero approach. It was noted that the plans showed tree removal which was contrary to this.
- Members queried the evidence base that had suggested that displaced parking could be supported elsewhere in the town and the impact on the residents of the streets surrounding the site that may be used by displaced cars. Members noted that this was the responsibility of the Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) however it was hoped that the Council had engaged with OCC on this point already. Officers recognised the potential impact on residents of displaced parking and would explore potential remedies such as permits and would promote active travel. It was also noted that OCC would place requirements on the number of parking spaces allowed per dwelling and the plans had allowed for 10 visitor spaces in addition to these.
- Members explored the relationship between the proposed mix of units on the site and the mix of need on the housing waiting list. Some Members questioned if these aligned. It was noted that the plans were only for one and two bedroom properties, and therefore these would not be suitable for families on the waiting list. The Executive Member noted that there was a large need for one and two bedroom homes which this scheme could address.
- Members were pleased to note the increased public parking provision in response to public opinion and questioned what other changes were to follow in response to public opinion. Members requested more detail on the public consultation process and

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questioned how this could be meaningful if the plans were intended to be finalised prior to the consultation taking place. Officers suggested that the timeline for public consultation that had been given was overly ambitious and would be revisited.

- Members queried if alternative commercial opportunities had been explored for the site given that it was in a prime town centre location. Officers reminded Members that the plans were at a block stage and had intended to demonstrate what was possible for the site and therefore were not finalised.
- The parking data was noted to be from 2022/23 and did not include Christmas Markets or any Saturdays which could impact the given occupancy rate. Officers noted that obtaining occupancy data was a challenge and this was why ANPR requests were being considered. Officers were looking to build on the current data and had also undertaken spot checks to establish worse-case scenarios at peak times.
- Members noted that the increased housing in the district would bring additional cars to the town centre which would impact parking need.
- Members commented that it was not possible for some traders to park in Marriotts Walk due to height restrictions.
- Members made the following specific design points on the plans: for options 1 and 2 there did not seem to be any accessible parking bays in the plans while they were present in option 3; blue badge bays that were provided in option 3 appeared to be the same size as a regular spaces; the pedestrian routes were not clear on the plans; officers needed to ensure residential parking bays were not used by others or rented out; enough space was needed for cars turning and manoeuvring. The Executive Member acknowledged these points, some of which had already been raised with designers, and noted that the plans were indicative at this stage and would go through a proper design evaluation.
- Members queried why mixed distribution of housing types had not been considered given the report had acknowledged that clustering, as seen in option 3, could reinforce social division. Members suggested that the design could lead to a social stigma attached to the development and reduced social interaction. It was noted that the community space in option 3 was very small, despite the acknowledgement of the importance of such spaces. The Executive Member disagreed with the potential for this stigma and noted that it was the intention that the block was a statement building and the dwellings would face Woodford Way and Welch Way. It was also explained that the inclusion of maisonettes was intended to mitigate the clustering effect.
- The Chair noted that the item, and more detailed plans, was likely to return to the Committee at a future date for further scrutiny.

Following the discussion the Committee made the following recommendations:

1. That officers bring up to date parking data forward to the Committee, including ANPR data over a representative two-week period, with the next report.
2. That the Council undertakes a two-week trial partial closure of the number of spaces proposed to be lost at Woodford Way under the proposals to better understand the impact on parking across Witney.

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3. That officers work up an “option 4” design which preserves more car parking at the south of the site.
4. That a separate full report on displaced parking and the impact on wider area be brought to the Committee.
5. That additional parent and toddler parking spaces be incorporated into plans for the site.
6. That the Council updates the timings for parking in the Marriotts Walk multistorey car park to an all-day provision prior to commencement of the development.
7. That officers bring a further update report to the Committee prior to the planning application for the site.

117 Community Safety Partnership

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care, introduced the report on the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and made the following points:

- The CSP was a statutory requirement of the Council that had resulted from the Crime and Disorder Act 1988.
- The requirement placed responsibility on principle authorities to formulate and implement a strategy and plan that reduced crime and disorder (including antisocial behaviour), combated the misuse of drugs, reduced reoffending, and prevented involvement in and instances of serious violence.
- The CSP comprised the Council, Police, Fire and Rescue, health partners and probation services.
- A rolling plan had been running from 2024-27 and actions were refreshed annually to address priorities.
- Priorities in the rolling plan were: serious violence; drugs and alcohol; domestic abuse and violence against women and girls; rural acquisitive crime; antisocial behaviour; fraud; modern slavery; counter terrorism.
- Within the eight priorities particular attention was to be paid to domestic abuse and violence against women and girls as well as antisocial behaviour.
- The previous focus on rural acquisitive crime had helped to reduce this crime by approximately 20%. This was therefore considered to be less of a priority in the upcoming plan.
- The report presented a list of the activities that had been undertaken by the CSP.
- Councillor Saul highlighted the theatre-based violence against women and girls project which was in collaboration with the Council’s Youth Development Officer.
- Section 8.1 of the report showed the county wide projects that were being supported.
- The Police Funding Settlement had shown the Home Office grant was reduced by £9m. This would lead to a likely reduction of 40% to CSP funding which would mean a need to review the programme.

In the discussion that followed the following questions were raised and comments made:

- The recorded decline in most serious crime, other than hate crime, was not matched by the public perception. The Committee queried what the Council's role was to address such an incorrect public perception. It was noted that the CSP was required to be vigilant and ensure that clear messaging was being disseminated. If well briefed with accurate information, councillors also had a role to play to communicate with their constituents. The Executive Member noted that there was a public dialogue with TVP, who had attended parish meetings. In general, the district was considered a safe place to live.
- Surges in vehicular crime had been noted in specific areas of the district which had contradicted the reported fall in rural acquisitive crime. The Committee queried if there was further granular detail to the figures provided for this crime as well as fly-tipping and machine theft. In the discussion it was suggested that public reporting of this crime was not always happening and this may impact figures presented from TVP. The importance of reporting crime to ensure action and recognition by the TVP was reiterated. Officers reminded the Committee that rural acquisitive crime had remained on the CSP priority list despite it being less of a focus to other priorities. The Rural Crime Taskforce had been very active which had meant there was less of a need to focus on this by the CSP.
- The Committee noted that it was regrettable that the funding was being cut. The reduction in funding likely meant a cut in roles which could mean a lack of coordination of meaningful actions.
- The impact of the proposed funding cuts was explored with regard to the officer roles that facilitated the work of the CSP. Members encouraged officers to keep them, as well as town and parish councils, up to date with the specific impact of the cuts to funding and implications. Officers explained that the funding settlement came to Oxfordshire and was then distributed to CSPs. When the impact of cuts to the programme had been assessed further communication would be arranged to members.
- The position on the CSP priority list of work and actions to tackle domestic abuse and violence against women and girls, which was a long standing and worsening issue in society, was addressed. Officers advised that this was one of the main focusses on the priority list in the coming year. The Council had contributed £24.5k to the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service. The trend and statistics specific to domestic abuse in rural areas was explored. In rural areas it had been shown that cases lasted 25% longer. GP surgeries and religious spaces were very important safe spaces for victims of this crime. Sessions had taken place to help communities recognise cases of domestic abuse to enable reporting. Members queried where there were gaps in support for those in rural areas. Officers noted that there was a good countywide service however in rural areas there was a danger that the available services were in the district service centres and were therefore less accessible to those who could not drive or leave their area. Members were advised that free ongoing training on the area of domestic abuse was available on OSCB or OSAB websites.

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- Members questioned if there should be an education programme put in place to address the rise in hate crime and racial hate crime. Officers suggested that time should be taken to see what actions were being undertaken elsewhere as these could be used in the district before the Council commenced its own programmes.
- Members congratulated officers on the Safe Places Scheme and asked if the numbers of these would be increased or remain following Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). It was suggested that within Oxfordshire other authorities had used this scheme and therefore it was hoped that this would be retained. It was a low-cost scheme and therefore could easily be expanded in location and time-frame terms.
- More information on the opportunities being created for young people were requested. Officers noted that the introduction of the Youth Development Officer had enabled additional work to get into communities which had a positive impact and had created an improved youth offering. However, better infrastructure was needed for young people. Some funding was available from OCC for this work in addition to the Council's own grant funding. The Action Plan for the CSP for the coming year would have more detail on the specifics of the work for young people.
- The Committee queried when the Police and Crime Commissioner role was to be abolished and who would take over the work and responsibilities that this position was currently responsible for. The exact end date for the abolition was not known, and it was not clear where the powers would be established.
- Given the unexpected reduction in funding the Committee queried if the Council had the ability to find funding from discretionary funds to safeguard important projects. The Executive Member advised that there would need to be a strong case for this and that the Council was not in a position to cover the whole shortfall. However, a recommendation could be considered if made by the Committee. Members suggested that any funding should be allocated for specific officer roles.
- The Committee explored the potential for partnerships with others to mitigate the impact of the upcoming funding cut. Options discussed included the potential to partner with the Cottsway Housing Domestic Abuse Safety Officer and health professionals. Officers would explore the effectiveness of the partnerships and return to the Committee on this suggestion. It was noted that the social housing providers had created a group to deal with antisocial behaviours in their associations which was positive.
- The Committee queried what the CSP was doing to boost confidence in reporting antisocial behaviour and what enforcement action was being taken in addition to PSPOs. Officers noted that boosting engagement was a priority for TVP and there had been a move to visiting properties which it was thought had helped reporting. Engagement with communities, such as attendance at parish meetings, was also considered important to boost confidence.
- The Committee queried what involvement the Council had in Counter Terrorism. Officers advised that this was largely around Prevent and the use of appropriate reporting mechanisms. The Council also had a duty to engage with the Channel Panel.
- The work and effectiveness of the City Council's Problem Solving Officer was explored. Officers gave examples of the Officer's work in the district which they felt was effective and had contributed to increasing the feeling of safety. Examples given

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included lighting and the antisocial behaviour review process. Officers considered that the work had been very valuable and intended to make more use of the officer.

- The Committee requested more information on the work of the Community Safety Officer. The role was currently out for recruitment and would take a strategic view on the CSP as opposed to an operational one.
- The Committee queried how the CSP would operate in the light of LGR. Officers advised that, while structures may change, the Council had a legal duty on the CSP and the partnership working that had been established was commonplace and would continue.
- The Committee explored the potential connection of the CSPs identified priorities and the increase of housing in the district and questioned if an audit was appropriate to explore the potential for the existing trends identified to be exacerbated by the additional housing. Officers advised that within housing plans the Council had advocated for healthy place making and connectivity. TVP had also looked at aspects of developments to “design out crime”. However, financial viability did limit such aspects. Councillors suggested that deeds of variance could be used to ensure S106 and CIL funding was allocated to deal with these issues by, for example, paying for PSPOs. It was noted that this was a planning issue and that some policy wording did attempt to address this.

Following the discussion the Committee made the following recommendations:

1. That officers assess which priority projects would be affected by the budget reduction from the Police and Crime Commissioner, and the Executive consider whether any of these priority projects can be funded by the Council’s own discretionary resources.
2. That officers’ assessment of the impacts of the cuts to funding on priority projects details the impact in terms of the loss of officer roles rather than just cash values.
3. That the Council writes to Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner to request that they reinstate funding being cut from the CSP.

118 Updates from Task and Finish Groups

There were no reports from the Task and Finish Groups.

119 Executive Work Programme

There were no comments on the Executive Work Programme.

120 Committee Work Programme

The Chair proposed that the Local Plan item on the Committee Work Programme be taken to a separate meeting on 2 June 2026 ahead of consideration by the Executive the following week. This was agreed by the Committee.

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The Chair thanked Members and wished those retiring well.

Councillor Nick Leverton thanked the Chair and stated that he felt the Chair had been the most effective manager of a Committee he had seen in his time.

The Meeting closed at 7.44 pm

CHAIR