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, 20 May 2026**

PRESENT

Councillors: , , Carl Rylett, Joy Aitman, Thomas Ashby, Andrew Beaney, Adam Clements, Sandra Coleman, Andrew Coles, Sandra Cosier, Steve Cosier, Rachel Crouch, Jane Doughty, Sarah Evans, Roger Faulkner, Nick Field-Johnson, Phil Godfrey, Andy Goodwin, Andy Graham, David Jackson, Edward James, Liz Leffman, Dan Levy, Andrew Lyon, Jan Lund, Liam Mackenzie, Stuart McCarroll, Hannah Massie, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Toby Morris, Rosie Pearson, Elizabeth Poskitt, Andrew Prosser, Nigel Ridpath, James Robertshaw, Geoff Saul, Sandra Simpson, Alaric Smith, Tim Sumner, Jack Treloar, Sarah Veasey, Liam Walker, Mark Walker, Simon Watson, Alex Wilson and Alistair Wray

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive Officer), Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance and Regulatory Services), Phil Martin (Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service), Frank Wilson (Managing Director - Publica), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer), Maria Harper (Democratic Services Assistant), Ana Prelici (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and Mathew Taylor (Democratic Services Officer)

Other Councillors in attendance:

CL.101 Election of Chair 2026/27

The retiring Chair, Councillor Andrew Coles, opened the meeting to preside over the election of the new Chair for 2026/27. Before doing so, the Chair welcomed the new members to the chamber and reminded all members that the Council's committees would also be meeting immediately after the full Council meeting.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed that Cllr Carl Rylett be elected Chair for 2026/27.

Councillor Joy Aitman seconded the proposal, which was put to the vote and agreed by Council.

The Council resolved to:

1. Elect Councillor Carl Rylett as Chair for 2026/27

Voting record – For 44, Against 0, Abstentions 0

Councillor Carl Rylett took the Chair, signed his declaration of acceptance of office and presided over the remaining business of the meeting.

CL.102 Appointment of Vice Chair 2026/27

The Chair invited nominations for the position of Vice-Chair of Council for 2026/27. Councillor Andy Graham proposed that Councillor Joy Aitman be appointed Vice-Chair. This was seconded by Councillor Carl Rylett, put to the vote and agreed by Council.

The Council resolved to:

1. Appoint Councillor Joy Aitman as Vice-Chair for 2026/27

Voting record – For 44, Against 0, Abstentions 0

The Chair congratulated the Vice-Chair on the appointment. The Vice-Chair signed their declaration of acceptance of office.

CL.103 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Cllr Tammy Abarno
- Cllr Duncan Enright

Cllr Paul Marsh

CL.104 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

The Chair reminded Members that there was a dispensation in place for all members under Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011, to allow members to participate in the consideration of member allowances.

CL.105 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Council considered the minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2026.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed accepting the minutes, this was seconded by Councillor Alaric Smith.

This proposal was voted on and agreed.

Council

20/May2026

Voting record – For 35, Abstentions 9, Against 0

The Council Resolved to:

1. Approve the minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2026.

CL.106 Vote of thanks for Chair and Vice-Chair 2025/26

Councillor Rylett, the incoming Chair, thanked Councillor Andrew Coles, the outgoing Chair, for his work, and asked him to speak on his year as Chair.

The outgoing Chair reflected on his term of office, describing it as a great honour and highlighting his extensive community engagement, support for local charities and fundraising efforts, which raised almost £8,000 over two years. He thanked Members and officers, in particular the Executive support team, Mandy Smith and Ella Gray.

Members paid tribute to Councillor Coles' leadership, commending his fairness, integrity, inclusivity, good humour and commitment to the community. Particular reference was made to his charitable fundraising, civic events and positive representation of the Council. Councillor Coles also thanked Councillor Carl Rylett for his support as Vice-Chair during the year and wished him well in his new role as Chair. The Chair presented Councillor Coles with a Past Chair's medal in recognition of his service.

Councillor Coles thanked Cllr Rylett for his support as Vice-Chair, wished him the best as Chair and affirmed his confidence in Councillor Rylett's election as Chair

CL.107 Report of the Leader

The Leader of the Council presented his annual report, highlighting progress against the Council Plan priorities, including service delivery, housing provision, leisure services, environmental initiatives, climate action, support for local businesses and partnership working. He outlined future priorities, including adoption of the Local Plan, delivery of the Carterton Area Strategy, investment in leisure facilities, affordable housing projects, environmental improvements and preparations for local government reorganisation. The Leader also announced the Executive appointments and portfolio responsibilities for 2025/26, thanked outgoing Executive Members for their contributions, and confirmed appointments to the Oxfordshire Leaders Joint Committee.

Upon being proposed by Councillor Graham and seconded by Councillor Aitman, Council resolved to note the report.

Voting record - For 35, Against 2, Abstentions 0.

Council resolved to:

1. Note the report of the Leader.

CL.108 Report on Special Urgency Key Decisions

Council noted that no key decisions had been taken under the special urgency provisions during the previous municipal year.

CL.109 Return of the Returning Officer

The Returning Officer's report on the recent elections was received and noted. Thanks were recorded to the Elections Team and officers involved in the administration of the elections for their work in delivering the electoral process.

Council resolved to:

1. Note the return of the Returning Officer.

Voting record – For 40, Against 0, Abstentions 0, Did not vote 4

CL.110 Establishment and Appointment of Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Groups, including Substitute Members

Council considered a report on the establishment of committees and the appointment of members for the 2026/27 municipal year. The Leader introduced the report and proposed the recommendations as set out in the agenda papers. Following consideration, Council approved the committee structure and appointments as recommended.

Councillor Coles, seconded the recommendations, which were put to a vote.

Voting record - For 44, Against 0, Abstentions 0

Council resolved to:

1. Agree to establish the Council's Committees as defined in Part 3 of the Council's Constitution (version 2.18), for the Civic Year 2026/27;
2. Determine that, in accordance with Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 ("the Act"), the Council shall apply the political balance provisions under the Act to committees as shown in Annex A;

3. Agree to re-establish the Constitution Working Group (with 7 Members), agree the Terms of Reference (Annex B) and in doing so agree to apply the principles of political proportionality.
4. Agree to re-establish the Carterton Area Strategy Working Group (with 6 Members plus the Executive Member with responsibility for Carterton Area Strategy as ex officio Chair), agree the Terms of Reference (Annex C) and in doing so agree to apply the principles of political proportionality, subject to all political groups being represented on the working group.
5. Appoint councillors to serve on the Council's committees, working groups and external committees, as set out in Annex D for a term of office expiring at the next Annual Meeting of the Council;
6. Note the arrangements for substitute members set out in part 5 of the report.

CL.111 Adoption of the Council's Constitution

Council considered a report on the adoption of the Constitution, including the Scheme of Delegation for non-executive functions and revised Financial Procedure Rules. The Executive Member for Finance advised that the revised Financial Procedure Rules had been updated to reflect organisational changes, including the Publica transition, and had been considered by both the Constitution Working Group and the Audit and Governance Committee. Council was also asked to approve a change to exclude Strategic Planning Committee and Development Management Sub-Committee meetings from the constitutional rule limiting meeting duration at 3 hours, following the move to a single district-wide planning committee structure. During debate, comments were made regarding the implementation of the planning committee arrangements and the potential impact of removing meeting time limits. It was noted that the Constitution Working Group could review the arrangements if required.

Councillor Field-Johnson let the chamber midway through the debate and therefore did not vote.

Upon being proposed and seconded the recommendations were put to the vote and agreed by Council.

Voting record – For 44, Against 0, Abstentions 0, Not eligible to vote 1

Council resolved 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. Approve the updated Financial Procedure Rules attached as Annex A.
3. Agree to exclude the Strategic Planning Committee and Development Management Sub-Committee from the duration of meeting rule, as shown in Annex B.

CL.112 Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel

Council considered the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel, which had reviewed the implications of the revised planning committee structure on Members' Special Responsibility Allowances. The Panel concluded that the impact of the new arrangements should be reviewed after they had been in operation for a period and once proposed national planning reforms were clearer. In the interim, it recommended that the Vice-Chair of the Development Management Sub-Committee receive a Special Responsibility Allowance equivalent to 0.25 of the basic allowance, reflecting the increased responsibilities associated with the new committee structure. The Panel also noted that Members' allowances were now pensionable, and that members could opt into this.

Voting record - For 44, Against 0, Abstentions 1,

Council resolved to:

1. Agree to introduce a 0.25x Special Responsibility Allowance for the Vice-Chair of the Development Management Sub-Committee;
2. Note that the Special Responsibility Allowances for the Chairs of Strategic Planning Committee and Development Management Sub-Committee will be reviewed in the autumn as part of the full review of allowances;
3. Note that the amount paid as the Vice-Chair's Special Responsibility Allowances will be reviewed in the autumn as part of the full review of allowances, in respect to the amount.
4. Note that following changes at national level, from the 11 May 2026, Councillors have been able to opt into the Local Government Pensions Scheme, and that pensions may be payable on a member's basic and/or special responsibility allowance. The members allowances scheme will be updated accordingly.

CL.113 Strategic Partnerships Update

The Leader presented an update on the Council's strategic partnerships and external representation. He highlighted the Council's continued engagement with national and regional bodies, including the Local Council Network (formerly the Local Government Association for district councils) and South East Councils, emphasising the importance of ensuring West Oxfordshire is represented in national discussions and decision-making. An update was provided on ongoing local government reorganisation work, the Oxford Growth Commission, and the Council's involvement with Ubico in delivering waste and recycling services. The Leader noted the value of these partnerships in promoting the interests of West Oxfordshire and influencing policy and investment opportunities. Council noted the report.

Voting record – For 41, Against 0, Abstentions 0Council resolved to:

1. Note the contents of the Strategic Partnerships Report

CL.114 Audit and Governance Committee Annual Council Report

Councillor Nigel Ridpath, as prospective Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee, presented the Committee's annual report, highlighting its work during the year in maintaining high standards of governance, overseeing internal and external audit activity, monitoring risk management, treasury management, counter-fraud arrangements and value for money. He noted that the Committee had undertaken a substantial programme of work and concluded that the Council was well managed, whilst continuing to identify opportunities for improvement. Thanks were expressed to officers, Committee members, independent persons and the Finance Team for their support and contributions throughout the year.

Voting record – For 41, Against 0, Abstentions 1

Council resolved to:

1. Note the report.

CL.115 Director of Place appointment

Council considered a report seeking approval of the appointment of Daniel Taylor as Director of Place. The Leader outlined Mr Taylor's experience in housing, regeneration, development and community services, including his recent role as Acting Managing Director of Essex Housing. It was noted that Council approval was required as the post attracted a salary in excess of £100,000. A member who had participated in the recruitment process expressed confidence in Mr Taylor's suitability for the role and welcomed his appointment.

The appointment was seconded by Councillor Andrew Coles, put to the vote and approved.

Voting record – For 43, Against 0, Abstentions 1

Council Resolved to:

1. Confirm the salary for the Director of Place as £104,722 per annum, plus the applicable pending pay award.

CL.116 Appointment of Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer

Council considered a report on the appointment of the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer. The Leader propose the recommendations and advised that, following consideration by the Performance and Appointments Committee, it was recommended that Andrea McCaskie, Director of Governance and Regulatory Services, be appointed to both statutory roles with effect from 1 June 2026.

Andrea McCaskie left the room at this point.

The Leader proposed and Councillor Coles seconded the appointment, noting that the Director of Governance and Regulatory Service's attention to detail which would be an asset to the role.

Voting record – For 43, Against 0, Abstentions 0

Council resolved to:

1. Appoint the Director of Governance and Regulatory Services, Andrea McCaskie, as Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer, with effect from 1 June 2026.

CL.117 Motion to hold an Extraordinary meeting to Confer an Honorary Title

Council considered a motion proposing that an Extraordinary Meeting of Council be convened on 22 July 2026 to consider conferring the title of Honorary Alderman on former Councillor Julian Cooper, in recognition of his outstanding and long-standing service to West Oxfordshire District Council and the residents of Woodstock. During debate, a query was raised as to whether Julian Cooper had been consulted regarding the proposed honour. In response, it was noted that any conferment would be subject to his willingness to accept the title. Members spoke in support of the proposal, recognising Julian Cooper's significant contribution to the Council over many years.

Voting record – For 35, Against 2, Abstentions 6

Council resolved to:

1. Convene an extraordinary meeting of the Council to take place at 2pm on 22nd July 2026 for the purpose of considering conferring on Mr Julian Cooper the title of Honorary Alderman, as allowed by s249 of the Local Government Act 1972; and
2. Note that the ordinary meeting of the Council scheduled for that date shall commence at 2.15pm, or at the conclusion of the extraordinary meeting, whichever is the later.

CL.118 Dates of Future Meetings

The Chair noted that the dates of future meetings were set out in the agenda and advised that the next meeting of Council would be held on 22 July 2026. Following the earlier decision of Council, an Extraordinary Meeting would take place at 2.00pm to consider conferring the title of Honorary Alderman, followed by the Ordinary Meeting of Council at 2.15pm, or at the conclusion of the Extraordinary Meeting if later. The Chair then closed the meeting before the commencement of the remaining committee meetings.

CL.119 Receipt of Announcements

The Chair of the Council explained that this would be Giles Hughes's last meeting as Chief Executive and thanked him before asking the Leader to comment.

The Leader of the Council paid tribute to the Chief Executive, Giles Hughes, thanking him for his outstanding service, strategic leadership, integrity, dedication and support to the Council. Group Leaders on behalf of the Labour, Conservative and Green Groups also expressed their appreciation for his calm leadership, guidance and contribution to the Council over many years, particularly during significant challenges including Covid-19, Publica disaggregation and local government reorganisation, and wished him well for the future.

The Chair also made the following announcements;

- Members could now opt into the Local Government Pension Scheme
- There were a number of forthcoming training sessions, including mandatory planning training and cyber security and data protection training.
- Members were reminded to update their Register of Interests before the end of June where applicable and advised of changes relating to the publication of home addresses on the Register of Interests.

No announcements were made by the Chief Executive, Director of Finance or Director of Governance and Regulatory Services.

The Meeting closed at Time Not Specified

CHAIR