WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the

Executive

Held in the Charlbury Community Centre, Spendlove Centre, Eynstone Road, Charlbury, OX7 3PQ at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 11 June 2025**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andy Graham, Duncan Enright, Lidia Arciszewska, Hugo Ashton, 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), Frank Wilson (Group Finance Director - Publica), Phil Martin (Director of Place), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Alison Borrett (Senior Performance Analyst), Lucy Empson, Mandy Fathers (Business Manager - Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service), Chris Hargraves (Head of Planning), Hannah Kenyon (Climate Change Manager), Heather McCulloch (Community Wellbeing Manager), Jasmine McWilliams (Assets Manager), Ana Prelici (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Sam Stronach (Economic Development Manager), Mathew Taylor (Democratic Services Officer), Andrew Thomson (Planning Policy Manager) and Andrew Turner (Business Manager - Assets and Council Priorities)

Other Councillors in attendance: Julian Cooper, Dan Levy, David Melvin and Rosie Pearson

336 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

337 Declarations of Interest

8. West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 - Preferred Policy Options Consultation.

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 8.

20. Options for Investment Property in Witney.

Councillor Duncan Enright, Declaration for Transparency, Councillor Duncan Enright declared that he was acquainted with the potential purchasers of the property and therefore abstained from voting on the item.

338 Minutes of Previous Meeting

There were no amendments to the minutes of the previous meeting held on

23 April 2025.

The minutes were proposed by Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council. Councillor Duncan Enright seconded the proposal.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the previous meetings held on 23 April 2025.

339 Receipt of Announcements

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, announced that there would be a presentation after the meeting of the Executive focussing on climate adaptation, and encouraged members of the public to stay for this.

Councillor Graham advised attendees that there were Exempt items on the agenda. Members of the press and public would therefore need to be excluded from the meeting for those items.

Councillor Graham provided an update on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). West Oxfordshire District Council was involved in developing a two unitary model for Oxfordshire. The model being developed would include West Oxfordshire District Council, Cherwell District Council and Oxford City Council as one unitary authority. A second unitary authority of South and Vale District Council and West Berkshire District Council would be formed. A survey seeking engagement from residents of the district on LGR had been launched and this had already received over one-thousand responses. Councillor Graham advised that there would also be nine face-to-face consultations on LGR, one of these would be held in Charlbury.

Councillor Rachel Crouch, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, announced there would be a West Oxfordshire Mental Health Summitt on 10 July 2025. All local organisations that delivered mental health services to residents had been invited to attend.

Councillor Duncan Enright announced that a recent survey, based on several different measures of where it is best to start and grow a business, had shown that West Oxfordshire was deemed the second-best district in England to start a business. This was a tribute to the entrepreneurial people of the district.

340 Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

341 Reports from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Andy Graham advised that the suggestions from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 4 June 2025 in relation to the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 – Preferred Policy Options Consultation would be dealt with at item 8.

There were no other recommendations on the other items taken to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4 June 2025 for Executive consideration.

342 Matters raised by Audit and Governance Committee

There were no matters raised by the Audit and Governance Committee.

343 West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 - Preferred Policy Options Consultation

Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning, introduced the item the purpose of which was to consider the Local Plan 2041 Preferred Policy Options Consultation Paper which was proposed to be published for consultation in accordance with Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 by the end of June and into July. Councillor Ashton noted that input was being sought from a broad section of the community including residents, developers and Members. The initial consultation would be supplemented by a further consultation on preferred sights for development. The draft Local Plan was expected to follow in Autumn.

Councillor Ashton noted that there had already been constructive comments received during the Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 4 June. In addition, further comments had been received from Members and Officers. Two tables summarising the comments received was made available at the meeting. Table one contained comments from the Overview and Scrutiny meeting. Table two contained comments from Officers and Members. It was intended that the Executive would agree that the suggestions provided in the tables would be included in the draft Consultation Paper.

Councillor Ashton drew attention to two material points from the tables:

- Page 30 – With regard to windfall development, tier three villages would be given the same status as towns and villages in Cotswolds National Landscape Area. Evidence of specific local housing need would be required, such as needs identified through a neighbourhood plan or affordable housing needs specific to a settlement.
- Page 31 - The suggestion that an annexe would be included summarising alternative policy options that had been considered would not be included in the consultation.

In discussion of the item the following points were made:

- The proposed Local Plan was intended to be more sustainable and focused on the long-term to steer away from speculative development which gave little regard to the character of areas.
- Officers were thanked for their work with reference made to the increased level of national policy that had been considered in producing the document.
- The impact of the policies was discussed with reference to housing in Charlbury. Officers noted that the draft policies had sought to balance the key issues for the settlement. Charlbury played a role as a rural service centre however it also had specific environmental and character considerations to balance against this role.
- Finally, it was noted that a comprehensive engagement plan was in place for the consultation process. The engagement plan included a mix of social media and in person events. This would be launched at the end of the month.

Councillor Hugo Ashton proposed accepting recommendations 1 and 2 of the report. To allow for the inclusion of the suggestions received, subject to the material changes noted above, Councillor Ashton then proposed that recommendation 3 be amended to read as follows:

"Authorise the Planning Policy Manager, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and the Head of Planning, to make amendments to the preferred options paper based on the feedback provided by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Members, and to make any other necessary minor amendments, prior to consultation taking place."

Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment, seconded the recommendations

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Noted the content of the report;
2. Agreed that the Local Plan Preferred Options paper attached at Annex A be published for the purposes of public consultation in accordance with Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulation 2012;
3. Authorised the Planning Policy Manager, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and the Head of Planning, to make amendments to the preferred options paper based on the feedback provided by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Members, and to make any other necessary minor amendments, prior to consultation taking place

344 2024/25 Quarterly Service Review Q4

Councillor Andy Graham introduced the item, the purpose of which was to provide details of the Council's operational performance at the end of 2024-25 Quarter Four (Q4). Councillor Graham drew attention to the following sections of the report:

- The Youth Development Officer began their role In February, and had worked with Parish Councils and Oxfordshire County Council to strengthen youth engagement in the district.
- The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule had been submitted in June, with the examination hearing having taken place on 10 June. If successful, the application would ensure the Council received funding for infrastructure from developers.
- The Council had resubmitted a revised Net Zero policy for the Salt Cross Area Action Plan to the Planning Inspectorate. This was important as the Council continued to push to net zero and wished this development to be an exemplar in this area.
- Round four of Westhive had concluded in March with fourteen projects fundraising. The Council was proud of the diversity of projects funded.

The Officer noted that service performance areas above target were: major planning applications determined within timescales; customer service satisfaction; missed bin collections and visits to leisure centres and memberships. Service performance areas noted as below target were: processing times for Council Tax support new claims and the number of affordable homes delivered. With regard to affordable homes delivered, it was explained that 122 affordable homes are expected in July 2025 giving the Council a strong start to the next period.

Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care, drew the meetings attention to an amendment required on page 359 of the published pack. Annex C of the report on this page should have read:

"The team remains dedicated to preventing homelessness, successfully averting it for 220 households in 2024-25, including 125 cases within the statutory 56-day period and 95 cases before statutory duties were triggered. These figures are approximations pending official confirmation".

Councillor Andy Graham proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Duncan Enright seconded the recommendations

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Noted the 2024/25 Q4 service performance report.

345 **Community Activity Grant scheme outline 2025/26**

Councillor Rachel Crouch introduced the item, the purpose of which was to consider the criteria for the latest round of the Community Activity Grant scheme (CAG) which would be launched in the summer.

Councillor Crouch advised that following the review of Westhive in March 2025, it was determined that CAG would be redesigned and relaunched. The CAG scheme would complement Westhive but operated separately. CAG would provide small grants to local groups with the aim of encouraging residents to work together, helping residents to feel less isolated and creating inclusive communities. Councillor Crouch advised that grants would be awarded for a minimum of £500 up to a maximum of £1,000. Groups that were able to apply included voluntary sector groups, constituted groups, charities and informal groups. Groups excluded from applying were Parish and Town Councils, Schools and Colleges and groups outside West Oxfordshire.

In the discussion it was highlighted that the Community Funding Officer was able to support applications and residents were encouraged to contact the Officer for details.

Councillor Rachel Crouch proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

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

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Approved the proposed criteria;
2. Instructed officers to launch the Community Activities grant scheme;
3. Agreed that the grant award decisions are delegated to the Director of Place in consultation with the Executive Member for Stronger Healthy Communities.

346 Publica Business Plan

Councillor Andy Graham introduced the item the purpose of which was to consider the Draft Publica Business Plan 2025-26, produced by the Publica Board in consultation with Directors and Shareholders, and to recommend that the Leader (as Shareholder Representative) approved the plan.

Councillor Graham informed the Executive that Publica was a shared-service Teckal company and thanked staff for their continued work, some of which was reflected in the Service Review Report already discussed.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed accepting the recommendations of the report

Councillor Duncan Enright seconded the recommendations.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Noted the 2025/26 Publica Business Plan; and
2. Noted that the Leader of the Council, as shareholder representative, would approve the Publica Business Plan 2025-2026 in due course.

347 Rural England Prosperity Fund 2025/26 Update

Councillor Duncan Enright introduced the item, the purpose of which was to provide a report to the Executive on allocation for the final year of Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF).

Councillor Enright noted that a great deal had been accomplished with the first tranche of REPF, and it was welcome that the Government had extended funding for a further year. The Councils intention for the use of the funding was to both build on what had worked well in the first round and introduce some new priorities. The total capital allocation would be £214,829 which was accompanied by Government guidelines on how this money could be spent. Councillor Enright suggested that the Council intended to use the funds to help small businesses grow and be more sustainable.

Councillor Duncan Enright proposed accepting the recommendations of the report

Councillor Andy Graham seconded the recommendations.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Noted the report.
2. Delegated the approval of the grants outlined in the report to the Director of Place in consultation with The Executive Member for Economic Development.

348 **Appointments to Outside Bodies**

Councillor Andy Graham introduced the item the purpose of which was to provide a list of appointments to Outside Bodies for the civic year 2025/26.

Councillor Graham announced the following additional appointments which were not included in the published Annex A to the report:

Councillor Lidia Arciszewska would be appointed to the Oxfordshire Resource and Waste Partnership.

Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt would be appointed to the Blue Plaques Group.

The following change to appointments listed in Annex A to the report was also noted by Councillor Graham:

Councillor Mike Brooker and Councillor Andrew Prosser would be appointed to the Witney Traffic Advisory Committee.

Councillor Graham proposed accepting the amended recommendations to reflect the changes as follows:

That the Executive resolves to:

1. Note the appointments to outside bodies as set out in Annex A as amended;
2. Recommend to Council to note the appointments to outside bodies as set out in Annex A as amended.

Councillor Duncan Enright seconded the recommendations.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Noted the appointments to outside bodies as set out in Annex A as amended;
2. Recommended to Council to note the appointments to outside bodies as set out in Annex A as amended.

349 Business Rates write off in excess of £5,000

Councillor Andy Graham advised that if the discussion on item 14 included details in the exempt annex at item 17 the meeting would need to resolve to exclude the press and public. The exempt annex was not discussed.

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the item the purpose of which was to seek approval to write off irrecoverable business rates in excess of £5,000.

Councillor Smith explained that the council had an approved Recovery Policy that stated the executive must approve irrecoverable debts in excess of £5,000 before they can be written off. The debts in the report related to four business rate accounts which were linked and were in respect of one owner. The report explained that the charges should not have been levied and therefore the only available option was to write off the debt. The debt totalled £37,097.19 of which £14,838.88 remained to West Oxfordshire.

Councillor Alaric Smith proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Duncan Enright seconded the recommendations.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Approved the write offs totalling £37,097.19 as detailed within this report

350 Rent Arrears write off in excess of £5,000

Councillor Andy Graham advised that if discussion on item 15 included details in the exempt annex at item 18 the meeting would need to resolve to exclude the press and public. The exempt annex was not discussed.

Councillor Alaric Smith introduced the item the purpose of which was to seek approval for the write off of rent arrears in excess of £5,000.

Councillor Smith advised that there were two rent arrear debts included in the report referred to as "Business A" and "Business B":

Business A was the occupational tenant of a Council owned freehold property. In September 2020 Business A entered a Company Voluntary Arrangement (CVA). The CVA included introducing a landlord break and writing off of any rent arrears at the time of the CVA. The council subsequently enacted the lease break and as such the debt was no longer recoverable.

Business B occupied a unit on which the Council owned the headlease from June 2020. Business B stopped paying rent in late 2021. Despite correspondence and visits to the site the balance remained outstanding. The legal team were unable to act as Business B abandoned the unit and ceased trading. This effectively meant that there was no business to pursue for the debt.

Councillor Smith noted that the total cost of the write offs was £70,265.58, and this would be charged against the bad debt provision within the budget set up specifically for this purpose.

Councillor Alaric Smith proposed accepting the recommendations of the report.

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

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Approved the two write offs in the sums of £59,004.58 and £11,261 as detailed within the report

351 Exclusion of Press and Public

Items 19 and 20 on the meeting agenda contained information that was fully exempt from publication. The Executive would therefore need to exclude the press and public to discuss these items.

It was proposed by Councillor Andy Graham that a resolution be passed to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the remaining exempt items of business.

This was seconded by Councillor Alaric Smith, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by the Executive.

The Executive **Resolved** in accordance with the provisions of Paragraph 4(2)(b) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 to:

Exclude the press and public from the meeting on the grounds that their presence could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, with the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighing the public interest in disclosing the exempt information.

352 Exempt Annex A for item 14

This was not discussed, as the item was dealt with in the open part of the meeting.

353 Exempt Annex A for item 15

This was not discussed, as the item was dealt with in the open part of the meeting.

354 Knights Court Business Case

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the item the purpose of which was to agree the next steps regarding a council owned asset that is under review.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Agreed to invest up to £100k if needed to secure outline residential planning permission, as set out in the paper, with the option to either, develop as residential housing with a delivery partner or dispose on the open market.
2. Delegated authority for approving the £100k funding and the final terms of disposal to the Director of Finance (S151) in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance.

355 Options for Investment Property in Witney

Councillor Alaric Smith introduced the item the purpose of which was to request the Executive considered the officer recommendation to dispose of the property in Witney on the open market for the reasons set out in the report.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Recommended to Council that the property should be disposed of on the open market;
2. Recommended to Council that delegated authority was granted to the Director of Finance in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance to approve the final terms of sale including the sale price.

The Meeting closed at 3.04 pm

CHAIR