

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 **Wednesday, 2 July 2025**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chair), Genny Early (Vice-Chair), Steve Cosier, Nick Leverton, Paul Marsh, Stuart McCarroll, Michele Mead, Ruth Smith, Alex Wilson, Alistair Wray, Elizabeth Poskitt and Julian Cooper

Officers: Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Georgina Dyer (Head of Finance), Ana Prelici (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Louise Croot (Climate Change Officer), Susan Hughes (Business Manager for Support and Advice), Hannah Kenyon (Climate Change Manager), Claire Locke (Interim Executive Director), Maria Wheatley (Shared Parking Manager) and Katie Fenton (Climate Change Officer)

Other Councillors in attendance: Lidia Arciszewska, Andrew Prosser, Alaric Smith and Tim Sumner

20 Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments

Apologies were received by Councillors Liz Lefman, Dan Levy, Natalie King and Adam Clements.

Councillor Liz Leffman was substituted by Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt and Councillor Dan Levy was substituted by Councillor Julian Cooper.

21 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

22 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Councillor Alex Wilson proposed accepting the minutes, and Councillor Paul Marsh seconded this.

The minutes were voted on and unanimously agreed.

23 Chair's announcements

The Chair stated that there would be two upcoming training dates for the Committee on the 15th and 24th July and encouraged all members of the Committee to attend.

24 Report back on recommendations

The Head of Democratic and Electoral Services stated that the Committee's suggestions in relation to the Local Plan had been responded to by the Executive, as set out in an annex to the minutes of the previous meeting.

25 Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

26 Car Parking Strategy

Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for the Environment, introduced the item and was supported by the Business Manager for Support and Advice and the Publica Interim Executive Director. The Executive Member highlighted the following points;

- That a comprehensive review of the parking strategy had been carried out.
- The report was reflective of local parking demand, and it was clear that free parking was valued by businesses and residents.
- In terms of demand, there was a surplus of parking in areas of Witney but an unmet demand for parking in Woodstock and Charlbury.
- The strategy's aim was to provide a framework for challenges and options for increasing capacity.
- The Executive Member thanked Councillor Tim Sumner, Executive Member for Leisure and Carterton Area Strategy, who had previously held the parking portfolio, for their prior work on the area.

The Committee made a number of recommendations to the Executive, which are included as an annex to these minutes.

The Executive Member and the Officers thanked the Committee for their questions and suggestions.

Resolved: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the report and recommend that the Executive accept the suggestions in the annex to these minutes.

27 Climate Change Strategy

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, introduced the item and the Climate Change Team and made the following points;

- The strategy outlined actions over five years to achieve district-wide net zero by 2050.
- The new strategy built on the previous strategy (2021–2025), aligned with the Council Plan 2023–2027, and supported the Nature Recovery Plan to 2030.

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- The strategy was guided by national and Oxfordshire-level frameworks, including the Path to Zero Carbon and the Adaptation Route Map.
- West Oxfordshire had declared a climate emergency in 2019 and had committed to carbon neutrality by 2030.
- Definitions of carbon neutral, embodied carbon, and net zero were clarified.
- Achievements included: ranking as the top rural district for climate action, the launch of the Cap Zero retrofit project, the emissions reductions, EV infrastructure rollout, food strategy development, and planning tools.
- Challenges remained such as behaviour change, funding constraints, and the need for collaboration.
- Priority actions included local energy planning, expanding Cap Zero, retrofitting buildings, green skills training, enforcing energy standards for landlords, implementing the food action plan, improving waste services, enhancing active travel and EV infrastructure (including freight and taxis), progressing Salt Cross and the Local Plan and developing a carbon market, climate adaptation planning, and air quality management.
- The strategy was guided by principles of community empowerment, partnership working, support for vulnerable groups, and maximising co-benefits.

The Committee made a number of recommendations to the Executive, which are included as an annex to these minutes. In response to Members' request, the Climate Change Manger also stated that they would organise a Q&A with members.

Councillor Cooper left the room at 18:49 and came back shortly after at 18:50.

The Executive Member and the Officers thanked the Committee for their questions and suggestions.

Resolved: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the report, and recommend that the Executive accept the suggestions in the annex to these minutes.

28

2024/25 Quarterly Finance Review Q4

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the item. Councillor Smith highlighted the following key points;

- The original budget forecasted a contribution of £5,107 to the general fund.
- An overspend of £247,000 occurred, primarily due to:
 - Increased costs of temporary emergency accommodation.
 - Loss of housing benefit subsidy (approx. £490,000).

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- Treasury management investment income was higher than budgeted, due to sustained higher interest rates.
- Despite pressures, the Council ended the year with a £6,345 contribution to the general fund.
- The Council was actively acquiring property to reduce reliance on temporary accommodation, supported by a £50 million capital programme.
- Overspends also resulted from delays in refurbishing and re-letting Council-owned properties (Elmfield and Marriotts).
- Marriotts still delivered a net contribution to the Council of £465,000.
- Elmfield was expected to yield a return on investment exceeding 20%.
- A £200,000 leisure contract contingency was not required due to recovery in memberships and attendance.
- Proposed transfers to the budget deficit reserve:
 - £426,000 from a refund.
 - £852,000 from Section 31 grant, in anticipation of future business rates changes.
- Capital projects delayed due to tendering and scheduling:
 - Waste Vehicle Fleet Replacement Programme to be incorporated into a county-wide transformation.
 - Investment property repairs and Witney Leisure Centre decarbonisation scheme deferred.
- A total of £4.9 million was proposed to be carried forward to the capital programme budget for 2025–26.

In discussion, members raised the following points;

- The rising costs and demand for temporary accommodation, with 82 households currently supported. The Executive Member stated that the Council was actively acquiring properties, including family-suitable housing, to reduce reliance on temporary solutions.
- The importance of supporting families, not just individuals, through housing provision.
- The £35,000 cost for dog warden services. Officers clarified that this was an outsourced statutory service, with costs mainly for kennelling and transport.
- The transfer of funds to the budget deficit reserve. Officers confirmed £426,000 from a refund and £852,000 from the Section 31 grant were allocated to address a projected funding gap of £6–6.5 million.
- Raised concerns about the opportunity cost of internal borrowing for the Marriotts acquisition. Officers acknowledged the loss of interest income but noted the regeneration benefits and rental income outweighed the foregone interest.
- Welcomed the inclusion of CCTV within budget and confirmed it was progressing.

Resolved: That the Committee note the report.

29 Committee Work Programme

Councillors Michelle Mead and Nick Leverton left the meeting at this point.

The Chair invited Councillor Stuart McCarroll to introduce the Terms of Reference for the Leisure Task and Finish Group, which had been circulated prior to the meeting. Councillor McCarroll stated that the Committee may wish to receive an update on the output of the leisure work on 3 September 2025.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer explained that a number of items the Committee had requested when setting its work plan had now been scheduled.

Resolved: That the Committee accept the work plan.

30 Executive Work Programme

The Committee noted that the Executive Member for the Car Parking Strategy item should now be Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment, rather than Councillor Sumner, Executive Member for Leisure and Carterton Area Strategy.

The Chair thanked attendees and closed the meeting.

The Meeting closed at 8.05 pm

CHAIR