

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **Audit and Governance Committee**

Held in the Committee Room 1, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28
INB at 6.00 pm on **Thursday, 27 November 2025**

PRESENT

Councillors: Carl Rylett (Chair), Ruth Smith (Vice-Chair), Andrew Beaney, Elizabeth Poskitt, Nigel Ridpath, Sandra Simpson, Alex Wilson, Julian Cooper and Dan Levy

Officers: Lucy Cater (Assistant Director SWAP), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance and Regulatory Services), Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Mathew Taylor (Democratic Services Officer) and Georgina Dyer (Head of Finance)

Other Councillors in attendance: Alaric Smith

89 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Jackson, Edward James and David Melvin.

Apologies were also received from Independent Member of the Committee Richard Deuttenburg.

Councillor Julian Cooper substituted for Councillor David Jackson

Councillor Dan Levy substituted for Councillor David Melvin.

90 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

91 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Democratic Services Officer advised that the minutes of the previous meeting on 25 September 2025 that were to be considered were the public minutes only, and these excluded the restricted minute on item 10 of that agenda – Cyber Security Update. The restricted minute would be added to the agenda for the meeting of the Committee on 22 January 2026. Members were therefore asked to consider the public minutes for approval.

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2025. Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt proposed that the minutes be agreed. This was seconded by Councillor Carl Rylett, Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee, was put to the vote and agreed by the Committee.

Resolved:

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2025.

92 Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

93 Auditor's Annual Report on West Oxfordshire District Council (Value for Money Arrangements and Recommendations)

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with the Auditor's Annual Report on Value for Money Arrangements and Recommendations 2024/25.

Charlie Martin, Key Audit Partner from Bishop Fleming, introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- The Auditors Annual Report focussed on reporting on the arrangements in place at the Council to achieve value for money.
- There had been three reporting criteria: financial sustainability; Governance; Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- The document was published alongside the accounts when these were signed.
- There were no significant weaknesses noted in the report.
- The Auditor explained the red, amber and green ratings in the report and noted that red ratings would be more serious or significant issues of which there were none for the Council.
- Recommendations to management could be seen at section eight of the report along with management responses. The Auditor confirmed that he was comfortable with the responses received. Action and updates on prior year recommendations were included on page 35 of the pack, all of which had been followed up with management.

In the discussion the following points were raised:

- A Member requested an explanation of what would be involved in a peer review. It was explained that it was good practice for such a review to be undertaken once every five years. The Auditor was comfortable with the decision by the Council, considering the Publica reorganisation and imminent Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), not to undertake the review at this stage. However, it was noted that discussions would be ongoing about the right time to undertake the review. In general terms it was explained that a peer review would be facilitated by the Local Government Association (LGA) who would feedback any relevant Governance issues that were found.

Resolved: The Audit and Governance Committee noted the contents of the report and annex.

94 Final 2024/25 Audit Findings Report (ISA260) and Statements of Account for West Oxfordshire District Council

The purpose of the report was to present the Audit Findings Report and Audited Statement of Accounts for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

Charlie Martin, Key Audit Partner from Bishop Fleming, introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- The Auditor expressed his thanks to the Management Team for their work and cooperation.
- The Audit Completion Report summarised the work of the External Auditor of the Council's Accounts.
- The Council had demonstrated that a good partnership existed and established processes were in place, this was denoted by the "green" ratings achieved in the report.
- The Pension Fund Assurance letter had been outstanding at the point of publication of the Committee agenda but had now been received and presented no significant issues.
- The confirmed opinion on the accounts was one of "unqualified".
- In summary the main consideration that had arisen was an adjustment that had been required to the valuation of Chipping Norton Leisure Centre, which had been corrected by management.
- Additional observations from the audit were given in section six of the report, none of these were considered significant and had been discussed with management.
- The Letter of Representation was provided in Appendix A and contained no unusual terms. This was signed by the Chair of the Committee.

There were no questions or comments from Members of the Committee.

Councillor Carl Rylett, Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee, proposed that the Committee agree the recommendations as set out in the report. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Julian Cooper, was put to the vote and agreed unanimously.

Resolved: That the Audit and Governance Committee

1. Noted the contents of the report and annexes.
2. Approved the Statement of Accounts 2024/25, including the Annual Governance Statement; and
3. Authorised the Chief Finance Officer and the Chair of the Committee to write a Letter of Representation on behalf of the Committee and Council to Bishop Fleming to enable the opinion to be issued.

95 Treasury Management Mid-Term Report

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with an update on Treasury Management activity, the performance of internal and external funds and prudential indicators for the period 1 April 2025 – 30 Sept 2025.

Georgina Dyer, Head of Finance, introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- Members were asked to note that the recommendation incorrectly referred to the Executive, in fact the Audit and Governance Committee was recommended to note the report.
- Long-term investment performance had continued the same trajectory as previously presented, with significant revenue returns and capital values that continued to recover.
- The Council was above budget in revenue terms, with interest receipts having provided more income to fund front line services of the Council.
- There was still some volatility in the market, particularly due to events in the US. Such volatility could impact the Council's long-term investments but were outside of the Council's control.
- The remainder of the report showed the position of the cash reserves.
- Treasury management prudential indicators were all compliant. The exception to this was interest rate exposure. Interest rates continued to be higher than forecast however, there was anticipation of a further interest rate cut by the Bank of England in the coming year.

In the discussion the following points were raised:

- A Member queried if the unrealised Capital Gain of £318,000 shown at 5.7 could be crystallised. In her response the Officer advised that it could not be realised until the asset was sold and noted that it was considered a long-term investment. The potential for unrealised gains to be crystallised when LGR took place was explored by the Committee, with Officers advising that this would be a matter for the new Shadow Authority and eventually the new Unitary Authority to consider. It was suggested that unrealised losses would only become an issue for finances if the Government withdrew the statutory override which was in place until 31 March 2028.
- The Committee discussed the interest rate exposure noted at 8.6 in the report. Further clarity was sought as to why this was noted as non-compliant. Officers informed the Committee that the indicator was set during the budget setting process and was in fact a measure and not to be viewed in terms of a "good" or "bad" result. Non-compliance in this case would be more of a concern if the Council had external debt and borrowing which it did not.
- The Committee queried whether consideration had been given in the Treasury Management Strategy to a move towards ethical social investments. Officers noted that

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this had been considered and would be included in future. Furthermore, an ethical fund had been opened recently. More detail would be available in the Treasury Management Strategy which would be presented to the Committee in January.

- The Council's exposure to the recent central government budget announcement and subsequent market reaction was discussed. Officers suggested that at present there had been no noticeable market reaction but acknowledged that the Council was exposed to this.
- The Committee queried the proposed levy to be introduced on properties over £2m reported in the budget. Officers noted that any additional valuation requirements as a result of this government announcement would be a matter for the Valuation Office Agency, with the Council being the billing authority only. No guidance had yet been issued on collection of the levy. The Committee discussed the potential mechanisms for collection of the levy, given that the Council could not remit Council Tax to the Treasury. It could be the case that central government would reduce funding to the Council to reflect the collection of the levy.

Resolved: The Audit and Governance Committee noted the contents of the report.

96 Internal Audit Progress Report

The purpose of the report was to present a summary of the audit work concluded since the last meeting of this Committee.

Lucy Cater, Head of Internal Audit, Assistant Director SWAP Internal Audit Services introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- The report showed the work undertaken by Internal Audit since the last report to the Committee.
- A final report had been included on audit work that had taken place with the ICT team on disaster recovery in the revenues and benefits system.
- All agreed actions were followed up; however the Committee was asked to note that there was an error on the dashboard in the report that showed eight open actions which should be changed to six.

There were no questions or comments from Members of the Committee.

Resolved: The Audit and Governance Committee noted the Internal Audit Plan Progress report.

97 SWAP Internal Audit External Quality Assessment (EQA)

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The purpose of the report was to present a report of SWAP's External Quality Assessment (EQA) 2025.

Lucy Cater, Head of Internal Audit, Assistant Director SWAP Internal Audit Services introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- The report had been requested by the Council's Monitoring Officer as it was a query regularly raised by Members of the Committee.
- The report presented the outcome of the audit of SWAP by peers at The Devon Assurance Partnership.
- SWAP had received an assessment of "generally conforms" which was the highest accreditation that could be awarded.

There were no questions or comments from Members of the Committee.

Resolved: The Audit and Governance Committee noted the SWAP External Quality Assessment Report.

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Audit and Governance Committee Work Programme

The purpose of the item was to provide the Audit and Governance Committee with a schedule of the Committee's work programme for the year.

The Democratic Services Officer advised that a report on Financial Procedure Rules had been added to the meeting on 19 March 2026 since the publication of the work programme.

A Member requested that Arlingclose be asked to address the Committee at a further meeting. Officers advised that this request could be made.

A Member queried if more information could be provided to the Committee on the Council's property assets, their management and the income generated. Officers noted that information was given in categories in the Statement of Accounts and that further detail could be commercially sensitive. Members were informed that regular meetings took place between relevant Officers and the Executive Member for Finance and as required, with the Leader of the Council. It was concluded that this information may be best provided through a Member Briefing which Officers would consider.

A Member raised a question regarding the Council's obligations following the recent Government announcement requiring a return to be made on short term holiday accommodation. Officers advised that they believed that this was intended to close a loophole

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in Business Rates but that such requirements had not been looked at in detail in the short time since the announcement.

The Meeting closed at 6.38 pm

CHAIR