<u>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</u>

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, 3 June 2026**

<u>PRESENT</u>

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chair), Genny Early (Vice-Chair), Adam Clements, Steve Cosier, Rachel Crouch, Liam Mackenzie, Stuart McCarroll, Paul Marsh, Hannah Massie, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Carl Rylett, Simon Watson and Alex Wilson

Officers: Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Georgina Dyer (Head of Finance), Phil Martin (Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service), Ana Prelici (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Lucy Empson, Heather McCulloch (Community Wellbeing Manager), Gemma Moreing (Business Information and Performance Lead), Ciaran Okane (Senior Business Partner – Procurement) and Jasmine McWilliams (Head of Assets)

Other Councillors in attendance: Sandra Coleman, Alaric Smith and Tim Sumner

127 Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments

Apologies for absence were noted from Councillor Sarah Evans.

128 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Hannah Massie had applied and gone through the west hive process in the past but was not taking any decision and did not have an interest to declare.

129 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2026. The approval of the minutes was proposed by Councillor Steve Cosier, seconded by Councillor Michele Mead, put to the vote and unanimously agreed by the Committee.

Resolved: To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2026 as an accurate record.

130 Chair's announcements

The Chair welcomed new members to Committee.

The Chair explained that the Executive had not met to consider the recommendations arising from the 26 March 2026 Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

The Chair asked members to indicate whether they'd wish to discuss the exempt annex for the Investment Property Portfolio item or whether it could be considered in public session. No one indicated a wish to enter into private session for that item.

131 Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

132 Supporting Community Services - Crowdfunder UK Approach

Councillor Sandra Coleman, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, introduced the report to the Executive which was on the Committee's agenda for pre-decision scrutiny. The report proposed the application and assessment processes, criteria and eligibility of the new grants scheme which is expected to be hosted by Crowdfunder UK. The Executive Member highlighted the benefits of the proposed approach which included a more streamlined decision-making process.

The Committee asked questions and in discussion noted that:

- The scheme would extend comfortably beyond the expected lifespan of the Council.
- The removal of platform fees for not-for-profit groups was very welcome.
- The application process remained necessarily rigorous, but the Council could support applicants with the process.
- It would be feasible to provide financial support to groups with start-up costs but there was a need to understand to what extent this was a barrier and to be realistic about the work this would involve for the officers.
- Groups were encouraged to be realistic about the level of funding they were seeking and to break projects down into phases.
- It was proposed to delegate decisions to award funding to the Director of Place in consultation with the relevant Executive Members.
- Some members felt that the Ward Member should be involved in the application and/or decision process, perhaps by being invited to comment on applications for projects within their ward.

The Committee considered that thought should be given to the involvement of ward members in the application process and to whether there would be merit in creating a separate fund to support with start-up costs. The Committee resolved to submit two recommendations to the Executive on 10 June 2026:

1. That the Council explores establishing a separate fund to enable projects to pay for start-up costs e.g. feasibility studies, scoping, project management and/or other such professional costs.
2. That the Council notifies ward members when an application is submitted in their wards as part of the new grant process.

The Chair thanked the attendees for presenting the report and answering questions.

133 Quarterly Financial Performance Report Q4

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the report on the the financial performance of the Council in 2025/26. The Executive Member highlighted that the outturn position was better than had originally been budgeted for due to strong income performance and a high treasury returns. The Council could take the opportunity to strengthen its reserves. Some capital schemes had slipped into the following financial year and the Council continued to face significant financial challenges but the report showed that the Council had managed its finances effectively in 2025/26.

The Committee asked questions and in discussion with the Executive Member and the Head of Finance noted that:

- Income from Green Waste licenses was behind target. The Council did not see green waste licenses purely in terms of income as it had the cheapest fee in Oxfordshire which had been frozen in the budget.
- Offering part-year green waste licenses was not considered to be viable due to the high administrative burden. 95% of licenses were sold by July.
- A report on a County-wide partnership initiative to benefit from greater economies of scale in waste services was expected in the Autumn.
- The fly tipping of bulky waste was a concern and Oxford City Council offered households two free bulky waste collections per year. This could be looked at but could only address one form of fly tipping waste.
- High interest rates were good for short term investments and rates were now expected to remain higher for longer.

The Chair thanked the attendees and commended officers on the progress made in acquiring temporary accommodation.

134 Quarterly Service Performance Report Q4

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, introduced the quarterly service performance report for quarter 4 of 2025/26, highlighting that:

- Salt Cross Garden Village had reached a major milestone with the Area Action Plan being agreed in February. An outline planning application was expected to come forward in the autumn.
- 14 projects were receiving funding through Westhive round 6.
- Overall performance was strong across many key servicesm including planning application timescales and income, customer satisfaction, leisure participation, Council Tax collection, and affordable housing delivery.
- Missed bin performance was within target with 48.58 missed bins per 100,000.
- A small number of services had performed below target, such as the processing of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support changes.

- An improvement plan was in place for the land charges service.
- There was a project to increase recycling rates which would include communications around food waste and awareness of what can be recycled.

The Committee asked questions and noted from the responses of the Executive Member and the Business Information, Performance & Improvement Manager that:

- The percentage of fixed penalty notices per fly tip was the lowest in the county. There was lots of preventative work but enforcement case work took a long time.
- The Council's leisure partner, GLL, could be asked to look at data capture and whether all visits were being recorded. There was a need to look again at benchmarking e.g. looking at South Oxfordshire and Vale of the White Horse. Usage per head data would also be useful.
- Customer satisfaction data concerning the elements of the Disabled Facilities Grants process that the Council can control would be useful.
- Some Land Charges functions had transferred to the Land Registry, meaning the workload of the Council's team tended to be more complex. A new member of staff recruited.
- Consideration could be given to improving the customer experience at the Woodgreen reception.
- The introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy was welcome and guidance was on the Council website.
- There was an issue with waste being dropped or falling from bins when collected.

The Business Information, Performance & Improvement Manager took away a number of actions and agreed to share the following with Committee Members:

- Why the fly tipping enforcement rate for quarter 4 appeared to be so low.
- Whether fly tipping instances had increased or whether the reporting had become more accurate.
- What work was being done with County to address fly tipping.
- What work was being done with the County Council to address issues associated with registered and unauthorised traveller sites.
- Why the Windrush in Witney project was off target.
- Why Community Infrastructure Levy was off target and what mitigation was in place.
- Whether there would be an annual report on youth engagement activity.
- What lessons could be learnt from the successful Nature Recovery Growth bid.

The Committee resolved to submit the following recommendation to the Executive on 10 June 2026:

1. That the Council incorporates video clips in any future recycling campaign to maximise the impact and reach of the information. An example could feature senior councillors informing members of the public on how to correctly recycle. E.g. correctly rinsing pots and separating materials.

135 Procurement and Contract Management Strategy

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, presented the report, the purpose of which was to present an updated draft Procurement and Contract Management Strategy. Councillor Smith stated that the procurement strategy had mainly been updated in response to the Procurement Act 2023 and recommendations of the Council's external auditors. The new Procurement and Contract Management Strategy would take the Council through to Local Government Reorganisation

The Senior Business Partner for Procurement took the Committee through the report, highlighting the role of the Commissioning and Procurement Board in reviewing contracts, ensuring detailed consideration and protection of WODC's interests. He confirmed Contract Procedure Rules were now fully aligned with the Procurement Act 2023, and emphasised commitments to sustainable procurement and supporting local small and medium enterprises (SMEs), including the ability to restrict certain opportunities to local suppliers where appropriate, as the new legislation allowed the Council to award some local contracts below a particular threshold to SMEs within Oxfordshire. There were also aspects related to strengthening the safeguarding against modern slavery and ensuring social value and sustainability within the procurement process.

Members discussed the report and noted that:

- There was an ongoing exercise within Oxfordshire to build shared knowledge of contracts, as part of preparing for Local Government Reorganisation.
- The Procurement Act 2023 only allowed closed procurement to be used for in-county procurement or open procurement which needed to be on a national level.

136 Annual Update on Investment Property Portfolio

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance introduced the item, the purpose of which was to inform members on the annual returns of properties owned by the council classified as investment properties.

The Head of Assets presented the item, making the following points, which also addressed questions that were asked by members under other agenda items:

- The council was in negotiation with interested parties over unit 10 at Marriotts Walk, but details of the prospective tenants could not be discussed in open session.
- Kilkenny Country Park was managed by Ubico, who undertook maintenance to the grass on instruction from the Biodiversity Team. The council was in the process of procuring new benches and concrete pads for the park.
- The Annual Report on Investment Property Performance was brought to the committee every year around the same time period; the report brought to the committee was the most recent, for the 25/26 financial year. The report dealt strictly with properties classified for investment; this excluded properties such as Marriotts Walk and Woolgate as they were not classified as investment properties.

- The council originally had a capital strategy that had a targeted ratio of property assets to financial assets of 65:35. The council was slightly over the desired ratio on property assets, with the ratio of property assets to financial assets shown to be 67:33.
- The value of the council's investment portfolio was £42.44m. This was a reduction since last year's report which was explained by the sale of the Knight's Court property in the previous year.
- Rental incomes had reduced, accredited to commercial tenants and their want for more flexibility in their leases.

There was no further discussion on the report.

137 Report back on recommendations

The Committee noted the Head of Planning's response to the Committee's comments on the proposed changes to the national planning system.

The Chair thanked the officers for capturing and responding to the Committee's comments.

138 Committee Work Programme

The Chair asked members to suggest areas of focus for the Leisure Update item and requested the attendance of a representative from the Council's leisure partner, GLL. Members were encouraged to submit questions to Democratic Services in advance so that GLL can have the answers at the meeting.

Similarly, the Chair asked that Members submit questions in advance in future for quarterly service performance and financial reports.

The Chair also suggested that any task and finish groups established by the Committee should report back to the Committee with any recommendations before they are submitted to the Executive.

Committee Members suggested the following items for possible inclusion in the work plan or as possible task and finish groups:

- Section 106, including spend and the possibility of deeds of variance.
- The process for how licenses are granted.

The Committee agreed to review the business for the September meeting in July and consider whether any items need to slip. The Committee Work Programme was noted. The Committee also agreed to revisit the start time of meetings in July.

139 **Executive Work Programme**

The Executive Work Programme was noted without comment.

140 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

The Committee did not resolve to enter into private session, having considered the Annual Update on Investment Property Portfolio in public session.

141 **Exempt Annex A- Annual Update on Investment Property Portfolio**

The exempt annex was taken as read as part of the Annual Update on Investment Property Portfolio, which was considered in public.

The Meeting closed at 8.07 pm

CHAIR