

**MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 16 December 2024

At 7.02 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor O Collins (Chair)

Councillors:	A Bailey	G Doughty
	G Meadows	J Doughty
	J Aitman	D Edwards-Hughes
	T Ashby	D Newcombe
	D Enright	J Robertshaw
	R Smith	S Simpson
	D Temple	J Treloar
	R Crouch	A Mubin
Officers:	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
Others:	No members of the public.	

718 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

Cllrs A Mubin & D Temple had advised they would arrive late.

719 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair advised Members that as the meeting would be discussing the Budget it was possible that declarations may need to be made if particular organisations became a topic of discussion. Therefore, there were no declarations of interest from members or officers at this point of the meeting.

During discussion of Item 5 the subject of the Langdale Hall arose. Councillors T Ashby, D Temple, G Doughty, J Doughty, D Edwards Hughes, J Robertshaw, J Treloar and A Mubin declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest by virtue of the CEO of the ICE centre, the tenant of Langdale Hall being known to them as a fellow member of the West Oxfordshire Conservatives Association.

There were no other declarations from Members or Officers

720 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

Cllr D Temple joined the meeting at 7:08pm

721 **COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

The Council considered the membership of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee which had 7 of the 8 places filled.

Members discussed the appointment of a replacement which resulted in a proposal being made by Cllr G Doughty, seconded by Cllr D Edwards Hughes that Cllr T Ashby fill the place.

A vote was then called for. The proposal was carried, with voting as follows:

In Favour	15
Against	0
Abstentions	1

Resolved:

That, Cllr T Ashby be elected to the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee.

During the discussion of Item 5 the following occurred.

Cllr A Mubin joined the meeting at 7:14pm

Cllr G Meadows left the meeting at 7:37pm and rejoined at 7:40pm

Cllr J Treloar left the meeting at 7:50pm and rejoined at 7:52pm

722 **COUNCIL BUDGET: REVISED BUDGET 2024/25 AND ESTIMATES 2025/26, INCLUDING REVENUE GROWTH ITEMS AND CAPITAL PROJECTS/SPECIAL REVENUE PROGRAMME FOR 2025/26**

The Council received and considered the presentation from the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) along with a verbal explanation, summarising the budget-setting process of the Council so far.

The RFO thanked members for the questions they had submitted ahead of the meeting following the issue of the draft papers and explained most of these would be answered during his presentation. The presentation covered a summary of the current financial outlook for the Council and provided a set of four draft proposals on funding the budget for 2025/26 for consideration.

Members heard of the factors that were outside of the Council's control such as increases to Employers National Insurance, geopolitical events and national and international policy changes.

One such policy change had resulted in the Levelling Up Grant Scheme being withdrawn; the Council had been looking to utilise the scheme to provide a significant amount of funding for the West Witney Sports & Social Club, the result of which would mean the Council would have to consider a loan to finance the project along with an additional loan to fund the new works depot.

The Council also heard of the diligent work of Officers to trim and reduce costs where possible as well as the receiving an explanation of the ear marked reserve accounts.

The Chair thanked the RFO for his presentation a sentiment that was echoed by other Members.

A lengthy discussion was had with all Members who wished to speak being able to do so. It was clear the majority of Members favoured either option two or three of the presented budget calculations and it was mutually agreed that as these two options differed by approximately £4 over the whole year for a Band D Property, that the guidance to the RFO should be directed around those calculations.

A proposal was made by Cllr A Bailey for an increase of 14.9%, the proposal was seconded by Cllr D Edwards Hughes and supported by both Cllr S Simpson and Cllr R Smith. A Vote was then called for and the proposal was carried, with voting being unanimously in favour.

In closing, Cllr S Simpson made a suggestion that in future budget setting periods, that the Council consults with residents as West Oxfordshire District Council have.

Resolved:

1. That, the Responsible Financial Officer refine the budget calculations to reflect a 14.9% increase of Council Tax for the town from its precept for the financial year 2025/26. This would result in an increase of £26.37 to £203.37 for a Band Property and
2. That, a final decision on the level of Precept to be set at the Extra Ordinary Council Meeting scheduled for 6 January 2025.

The meeting closed at: 8.52 pm

Chair