

**POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 9 June 2025

At 6.00 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor R Smith (Chair)

Councillors:	J Aitman	D Edwards-Hughes (In place of T Ashby)
	R Crouch	D Temple (In place of J Doughty)
	A Bailey	J Treloar (In place of G Doughty)
	S Simpson	
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
	Mark Lewis	Head of Estates & Operations
	Angus Whitburn	Operations Manager
Others:	None.	

F319 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs G Doughty, J Doughty, and T Ashby. They were substituted by Cllrs J Treloar, D Temple and D Edwards-Hughes respectively.

F320 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers at this point of the meeting.

Cllr R Crouch later made a *personal, non-prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 14*

F321 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

The Chair called for nominations for the position of Vice-Chair of the Committee.

It was proposed by Cllr A Bailey and seconded by Cllr R Crouch that Cllr J Aitman be elected. There being no other nominations it was:

Resolved:

That, Councillor Joy Aitman be elected Vice-Chair of the Committee for the 2025/26 municipal year.

F322 MINUTES

The minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 31 March 2025 and the Special Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 14 April 2025 were received.

F195 Property, Legal & Insurance Matters – The Chair advised the Pavilion task and finish group should be a Working Party due to the ongoing nature of its work. All were in agreement.

In response to a Member, the Town Clerk advised Cllr J Aitman had been added to the Pavilion Working Party at the Annual Council meeting and that Cllr D Newcombe had retained membership.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 31 March 2025 and the Special Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 14 April 2025 be approved as correct records of the meetings and be signed by the Chair.

F323 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

F324 COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee received the report from the Deputy Town Clerk, which included proposed amendments to the current terms.

A verbal update was also provided, recommending that the terms and committee objectives be reviewed further to ensure they remained aligned.

Resolved:

That, agreement of the Committee terms of reference be deferred to the Special meeting of the Committee scheduled for 23 June 2025.

F325 COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES & WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR

The Committee received the report of the Town Clerk/CEO.

Like the terms of reference, a verbal update was also provided, recommending that the terms and committee objectives be reviewed further to ensure they remained aligned with policy, properties and finances.

Resolved:

That, agreement of the Committee objectives and works programme for the municipal year be deferred to the Special meeting of the Committee scheduled for 23 June 2025.

F326 **BRIDGE STREET DESILTING**

The Committee received and considered the report from the Operations Manager.

Members were informed that this item had been agreed by the Council in 2024 as part of a broader report on riparian watercourse works for which it held responsibility in Witney. Although the area in question fell outside the Council's formal remit, it was agreed that the Council should set a positive example in riparian management by carrying out desilting work near the bridge, in the interest of the wider community.

Persistent high-water levels throughout 2024 had delayed the project, and the method of desilting now proposed differed from the original plan. Further information was still required, but current thinking suggested the revised approach would involve a road closure and incur higher costs than initially anticipated.

The Committee welcomed the renewed momentum behind the project and remained fully supportive of the scheme. It was agreed that all opportunities to secure funding for both the project itself and the potential road closure should be thoroughly explored by officers.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, further information is sought on costs and presented to the next meeting of the Committee and;
3. That, the budget be increased to a maximum of £15,000 if required but;
4. That, funding opportunities be sought for the project and possible road closure from other sources wherever possible.

F327 **MEMORIAL BENCH POLICY**

The Committee received the current memorial bench policy and agreed the process had expediated requests and therefore should be re-adopted and reviewed every two years.

Recommended:

That, the Memorial Bench Policy be re-adopted by the town council and reviewed every two years.

The Operations Manager left the meeting at 6.24pm

F328 **FINANCIAL REGULATIONS ADOPTION**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (R.F.O) along with the proposed new Financial Regulations approved on 31 March 2025.

The RFO confirmed the regulations complied with audit legislation and the updated sector Practitioner's Guide. Based on the NALC model, they had been adapted to reflect the Council's diverse services. Minor changes since March were noted, and Members were invited to adopt the final version.

The Chair thanked officers for their work. In response to a query, officers explained that risk management was addressed separately to ensure effective controls.

Key amendments proposed were updates to sections 7.1 (electronic payment authorisation) and 7.2 (insertion of “on request”). Regarding section 11, the Town Clerk/CEO clarified that while Councillors did not currently claim allowances, the clause should remain for flexibility. It was agreed the document would be reviewed annually or sooner if legislation changed.

Recommended:

That, the updated Financial Regulations, subject to the above amendments, be adopted by the town council and reviewed annually or when legislation dictated.

F329 PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Committee received the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (R.F.O) with the accompanying payment schedules, bank statements and reconciliations.

In response to a Member’s query it was confirmed that an issue with direct debits was in hand and that Members would notice an increase in electronic payments moving forward due to the time and cost of processing cheque transactions.

In addition, the RFO tabled an addendum to the report at the meeting concerning the banking mandate for the Council’s CCLA investments. A correspondent for the investments was required along with Councillor signatories for payments.

Recommended:

1. That, Sharon Groth (Town Clerk/CEO) and the Members of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee, Cllrs Ruth Smith, Joy Aitman, Rachel Crouch, Andy Bailey, Jane Doughty, Thomas Ashby, Geoff Doughty, and Sandra Simpson, be appointed as signatories for the Council’s Public Sector Deposit Fund and the Local Authorities Property Fund and,
2. That, Nigel Warner, RFO, act as correspondent for the Local Authorities Property Fund and main contact for the Public Sector Deposit Fund and,
3. That, the report, bank statements and reconciliations be noted, and the following schedule of payments be approved:

Payment reference/ Cheque Numbers	In the sum of:	Account
Cheque 101277, DDs, ELPs 14 to 29 (electronic payments) and Standing Orders February 2025	£204,277.60	General CB 1
Cheques 35116-35119; DDs, BACs and Standing Orders February 2025	£16,883.13	Imprest CB 2
DDs, ELPs 30 to 41 and Standing Orders March 2025	£153,723.16	General CB 1
Cheques 35120-35158, cancelled cheques 34935 & 35115, DDs and Standing Orders March 2025	£28,302.47	Imprest CB 2

The Responsible Financial Office left the meeting at 6.49pm

Cllr J Treloar left the meeting briefly at 6.52pm during the following item.

F330 **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

The Committee received a Community Engagement Strategy, recommended for approval by the Stronger Communities Committee on 2 June.

Members thanked the Communications & Community Engagement Officer for producing the document, which outlined the Council's approach to community engagement, how it was currently being achieved, and how its success would be measured moving forward.

Recommended:

That, the Community Engagement Policy be adopted by the town council and reviewed every two years.

Cllr D Edwards-Hughes left the meeting briefly at 6.59pm during the following item.

F331 **VOLUNTEER POLICY**

The Committee received a draft Volunteer Policy from the Council's Operations team and heard the Council currently had approximately eight interested parties.

The policy would apply to all volunteers, not just those supporting the Lake & Country Park. It outlined roles, responsibilities, and health and safety provisions. It did not cover volunteers involved in activities outside the Council's remit or individuals under the age of 16. A tailored induction would be provided, and reimbursement would be limited to minimal refreshments.

Recommended:

That, the Volunteer Policy be adopted by the town council and reviewed every two years or when any relevant legislation was changed.

F332 **FINANCIAL MATTERS REFERRED FROM SPENDING COMMITTEES**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk. Members noted the financial implications from decisions taken by the Council's standing Committees during the last meetings cycle.

PR273 – Members commended the Committee for resolving to engage professional services to deal with the issue of tax for the West Witney renovations.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, recommendations of the spending Committees as detailed be approved.

Cllr R Crouch declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in the following item.

F333 GRANTS & SUBSIDISED LETTINGS

The Committee considered the Deputy Town Clerk's report on local grant activity.

Members welcomed the new round of applications and approved subsidised use of the Corn Exchange for Witney in Pink, OCVA, and a centenarian birthday party. They also approved free use and a £500 budget to support hosting the Le Touquet Youth Council in July.

The discretionary grant application from Apollos Clothing was deferred to the next meeting pending clarification.

Members also noted grant monitoring updates on the £50 for 50 grants scheme, West Oxfordshire Community Transport, and thanked the Witney Town Hall Charity for its contribution toward Leys play equipment.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, a grant request from Apollos Clothing be deferred to the meeting of 23 June to allow further information to be submitted and;
3. That, Witney in Pink be awarded a subsidised let of the Corn Exchange for the sum of £287 and;
4. That, subsidised letting of the Corn Exchange for the Oxfordshire Community & Voluntary Action Group (OCVA) to host a public awareness event for the sum of £140 be approved and;
5. That, the use of the Main Hall at the Corn Exchange for a centenarian birthday party be approved and;
6. That, subsidised hire for the sum of £70 and a budget of £500 be approved an event to welcome the Le Touquet Youth Council to Witney in July and;
7. That, a grant of £1,236.24 from Witney Town Hall Charity for replacement play equipment at The Leys be welcomed and;
8. That, the usage figures from West Oxfordshire Community Transport for the previous six months be welcomed and;
9. That, the update on grant monitoring for the Council's £50 for 50 scheme be noted.

F334 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved:

That in accordance with section (1(2) of the Public Bodies (admission to Meetings) Act 1960, and as extended by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public, including the press, be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the following business to be transacted.

F335 PROPERTY, LEGAL & INSURANCE MATTERS

The Town Clerk/CEO advised that instead of providing a verbal update at the meeting she would provide a report for the newly scheduled Special Committee meeting on 23 June.

Resolved:

That, a report of these matters be deferred to the Special meeting of the Committee scheduled for 23 June 2025.

F336 **WITNEY SWIFTS LICENCE AGREEMENT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Estates & Operations.

Members welcomed the report which included a draft copy of the final licence agreement between the Council and Witney Swifts Cricket Club for use of the cricket pitch at West Witney Sports Ground.

Members were advised the agreement offered security of tenure to the Club and covered any concerns of the Council so was therefore agreeable to both parties.

The Committee thanked officers and representatives for their positivity in negotiations and agreed to approve the licence.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, the licence agreement between Witney Town Council and Witney Swifts Cricket Club for use of the cricket pitch at West Witney Sports Ground be approved and signed.

The Responsible Financial Officer rejoined the meeting at 7.20pm during the following item.

F337 **WEST WITNEY CONSULTATION & PROJECT UPDATE**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Project Officer concerning funding for proposed West Witney Sports Ground projects.

Members were pleased with the positive public response to the consultation on the projects and the Council's decision to take out a loan to achieve their delivery. The comprehensive details provided in communications, including historical context and rationale, reflected the professionalism of the officers involved.

The Committee was unanimous in recommending to the Council that public works loan should be applied for to complete these projects.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, based on the approval ratings noted in the report, the Council proceeds to apply for a public works loan, not exceeding £1,250,516, to fund both parts of the West Witney Project.

The meeting closed at: 7.25 pm

Chair