

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

Held on Monday, 2 February 2026

At 7.10 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor R Smith (Chair)

Councillors:	J Aitman	T Ashby
	R Crouch	G Doughty
	A Bailey	S Simpson
	J Doughty	
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
	Caitlin Head	Finance Apprentice
Others:	6 members of the public.	
	Councillor Georgia Meadows	
	Councillor James Robertshaw	

F70 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

F71 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or officers.

F72 MINUTES

The minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 24 November 2025 were received.

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 24 November 2025 be approved as correct records of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

F73 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The Committee received representations from Windrush Community Choir, Oxfordshire Foster Care Association (OFCA) and West Oxfordshire Performing Arts Foundation (WOXPAF) in support of their grant applications under agenda item 13.

The Committee reconvened.

*During the following Agenda Item
Three members of the public left at 7:24pm
A Member of the public left at 7:42pm
A Member of the public left at 7:57pm
A new Member of the public joined the meeting at 7:59pm*

Cllr J Robertshaw left the meeting briefly between 7:42pm and 7:44pm

F74 **GRANTS & SUBSIDISED LETTINGS**

The Committee received the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) and Deputy Town Clerk concerning grant activity to local organisations.

Members considered each application in turn and welcomed the high level of engagement from groups providing services to the community. As it was not possible to fully fund all applications, Members undertook further scrutiny and discussion, including whether alternative grant funding might be available and whether some requests met the agreed criteria. In some cases, applications did not clearly demonstrate the community benefit of the proposed purpose.

The Committee showed particular interest in an application to establish a community arts festival and, while unable to offer the full amount requested, agreed that support could be provided as subsidised use of the Corn Exchange as an alternative.

Members also noted the application from the Oxfordshire Play Association and that funding for this had been agreed through a separate budget line.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Witney Woodland Volunteers be awarded a grant of £653 and,
3. That, Windrush Church of England Primary School be awarded a grant of £250 and,
4. That, Be Free Young Carers be awarded a grant of £2,000 and,
5. That, Oxfordshire Foster Care Association be awarded a grant of £400 and,
6. That, Windrush Community Choir be awarded a grant of £2,350 and,
7. That, West Oxfordshire Performing Arts Foundation be awarded a grant of £1,000 towards the bursary part of their application and subsidised hire of the Corn Exchange for an inaugural Festival of Speech, Drama & Musical Theatre and,
8. That, this subsidised hire fee be taken from budget line 4111/408 and,
9. That, Oasis Family Church is not awarded a grant on this occasion and,
10. That, the grant application from Oxfordshire Play Association for £1,000 towards a 2026 Play Day as previously agreed in principle, be noted and approved and,
11. That, any underspend in the grants budget for 2025/26 be rolled forward to the budget for 2026/27 and,
12. That, these grants be awarded under the General Power of Competence and awardees be asked to acknowledge the Town Council in any promotional material.

F75 **TREE POLICY**

The Committee received and considered an updated Tree Policy for approval by the Council.

The policy had been recommended for approval by the Climate & Biodiversity Committee at its meeting on 13 January 2026.

Members agreed that the planting of trees on Council land should be addressed in the policy, including clarification that the Council would be remove them where prior permission had not been granted.

Members expressed concern that the policy may be too restrictive for vulnerable residents. Officers advised this had been considered when the policy was recommended for approval and assurances had been provided on the issue.

Resolved:

That, the revised Tree Policy, with the above amendment on planting without permission, be agreed and adopted by Witney Town Council.

F76 **MEMORIAL TREE POLICY**

The Committee received and considered an updated Memorial Tree Policy for approval by the Council.

The policy had been recommended for approval by the Climate & Biodiversity Committee at its meeting on 13 January 2026.

Resolved:

That, the revised Memorial Tree Policy be agreed and adopted by Witney Town Council.

F77 **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY POLICY**

The Committee received and considered an updated Information Technology Policy for approval by the Council.

Although the Council already had IT policies, they were in need of review and, in line with changes to the annual governance and accountability return, it was timely to review them in line with these requirements based on sector guidance with technological advice from the Council's IT provider.

Members welcomed the policy, noting that it covered both Councillors and employees and was very robust in nature.

Resolved:

That, the revised Information Technology Policy be agreed and adopted by Witney Town Council and reviewed after twelve months.

F78 PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Committee received the report of the Responsible Financial Officer with the accompanying payment schedules, bank statements and reconciliations for October and November 2025.

Resolved:

That, the report, bank statements and reconciliations be noted, and the following schedule of payments be approved:

Payment reference	In the sum of:	Account
DDs, ELPs (electronic payments) and Standing Orders October 2025	£194,579.95	General CB 1
Cheques 35192-35195, DDs, BACs and Standing Orders October 2025	£11,257.12	Imprest CB 2
DDs, ELPs and Standing Orders November 2025	£246,605.10	General CB 1
Cheques 35196-35201, DDs and Standing Orders November 2025	£15,007.92	Imprest CB 2

F79 INTERIM INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2025-26

The Council received the final interim report of the Council's independent Internal Auditor for the 2025-26 fiscal year.

Members were advised there were no issues to draw members attention to. The Leader of the Council thanked Officers for their diligence in achieving the positive report.

Resolved:

That, the internal Audit interim report for 2025/26 be welcomed.

F80 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2026

The Committee received and considered the report of the Senior Administrative Officer/Committee Clerk concerning the Annual Town Meeting which would be held on Wednesday 18th March 2026.

Members were presented with outline proposals for the meeting, including options for its layout, format, and management.

It was agreed that the current format utilising round tables and part of the retractable seating had been successful and did not require changes. Operational arrangements for the evening, as set out in the report should be managed by officers.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the former layout and format for the meeting be agreed as presented in the report and,
3. That, all other operational arrangements for the meeting be delegated to officers.

F81 COMMITTEE CALENDAR 2026/27

The Committee received a draft calendar of Meetings for the 2026/27 council year.

The Deputy Town Clerk highlighted a significant proposed change for the coming year. The period between mid-May and July, which traditionally included two Committee cycles, had been particularly compressed, often placing pressure on both Council business and day-to-day operations. It was therefore proposed that the number of Committee cycles be reduced from six to five.

Members acknowledged the issue and noted the high volume of meetings currently held by the Council and the benefits a reduction could bring. While there was some concern that reducing the number of cycles could result in longer meetings, it was agreed that this approach should be trialled and reviewed after one year to determine whether further changes were required.

Recommended:

That, the calendar of meetings for 2026/27, as presented be recommended for approval.

F82 FINANCIAL MATTERS REFERRED FROM SPENDING COMMITTEES

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk outlining the financial decisions taken by spending committees during the last meeting cycle.

An update was provided on a raised planter request from the Witney Allotment Association, previously considered by the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee. A revised cost breakdown reduced the requested amount to £2,000. Members were supportive, acknowledging some reservations about the number of plots this would return, but agreed that supporting retirees and those with reduced mobility was important.

A further verbal update was provided on the spring newsletter printing and distribution. Three comparative quotes had been obtained as requested by the Stronger Communities Committee. Taking into account previous issues with Royal Mail delivery, the Committee agreed to proceed with Provider A.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the recommendations of the spending Committees as detailed be approved and,
3. That, the request and funding of raised planters at Lakeside Allotments for the sum of £2,000 be approved, subject to these being reserved for use by older persons and or those with reduced mobility and,
4. That, the quote of Supplier A be approved for the printing and distribution of the Spring newsletter for the sum of £2,818.

F83 **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.

The member of the public left the meeting at 8.01pm

F84 **EXTERNAL STOCKTAKE UPDATE**

The Committee received and considered the external stock takers report for the bar operations of the Council.

Members welcomed the positive report and low surplus and congratulated the Bar Manager and her team on their excellent work.

Resolved:

That, the external stocktake report be noted.

F85 **PROPERTY, LEGAL & INSURANCE MATTERS**

The Town Clerk/C.E.O provided a confidential verbal update on matters relating to the Council's property and legal matters.

Members were advised that Heads of Terms had been agreed for the lease of the Courtside Hub and facilities at The Leys. The terms provided long-term stability for the tenant, guaranteed income for the Council, and included regular reporting requirements.

The Committee also heard that progress had been made on draft Heads of Terms for a new lease to West Witney Sports & Social Club, which were currently under negotiation for implementation following the completion of the ongoing refurbishment. During the build, the cost of utilities and services was being covered by the Council.

Members noted that a full building survey, including the roof at Langdale Hall had recently been carried out, with a report to follow in due course.

Finally, Members were advised that officers were exploring the creation of the Community Trust, to manage the day-to-day running of Windrush Place Pavilion and its pitches in line with the model previously adopted at Madley Park Hall. Initial legal and start-up costs would be met by the Council to support good governance and long-term sustainability.

Resolved:

That, the Town Clerk's confidential verbal report be noted.

The meeting closed at: 9.04 pm

Chair