

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

Held on Monday, 30 March 2026

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

Present:

Councillor J Aitman (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)

Councillors:	J Doughty	D Enright (In place of R Smith)
	T Ashby	G Meadows (In place of R Crouch)
	G Doughty	D Newcombe (In place of A Bailey)

Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer

Others: 2 members of the public.

F157 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs A Bailey, R Crouch, R Smith for whom Cllrs D Newcombe, G Meadows and D Enright attended as substitutes respectively. A further apology was received from Cllr S Simpson.

F158 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

A personal, non -prejudicial declaration was made by Cllr D Newcombe due to his residence being in an area to be considered under Agenda Item 14.

There were no further declarations of interests from Members or officers at this juncture.

F159 MINUTES

The minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 2 February 2026 were received.

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 2 February 2026 be approved as correct records of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

F160 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The Committee received representations from Hanborough Cricket Club and Friends of Witney Community Primary School under agenda item 12.

The Committee reconvened.

The two Members of the Public left the meeting following their participation.

F161 PROCUREMENT POLICY REVIEW

The Committee received and considered an updated Procurement Policy for approval by the Council from the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO).

Members heard that the Council had procured heavily in the previous two years due to the level of high value works being undertaken by the Council. This two-yearly review ensured it was reflective of standard statutory regulations and complimented the Council's Financial Regulations and Standing Orders.

The RFO suggested good practice would be to consolidate all procurement details into one document for clarity and ease of use for Council employees. It was suggested this could be presented at the September meeting of this Committee.

Members welcomed the review and were pleased to note a section on utilising local suppliers where possible and therefore welcomed the updated document and endorsed the creation of one procurement document.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the revised Procurement Policy, as presented be agreed and adopted by Witney Town Council and,
3. That, the RFO creates a consolidated Procurement document for review at the Committee meeting scheduled for 28 September 2026.

Cllr T Ashby left the meeting briefly between 6.32 – 6.35pm

F162 CORN EXCHANGE ART DISPLAY POLICY

The Committee received and considered a Corn Exchange Art Display Policy for approval by the Council.

Cllr J Aitman declared an interest in this item as she hoped to display her art in the facility.

The policy had been recommended for approval by the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee at its meeting on 16 March 2026, subject to changes.

Members agreed with a recommended change for a 10% +VAT commission charge and welcomed the policy.

Resolved:

That, the Corn Exchange Art Display Policy, with the above amendment, be agreed and adopted by Witney Town Council and reviewed after six months.

F163 PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Committee received the report of the Responsible Financial Officer with the accompanying payment schedules, bank statements and reconciliations for December 2025 and January 2026.

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 December 2025	£463,875.27	General CB 1
Cheques, DDs, BACs and Standing Orders December 2025	£13,257.24	Imprest CB 2
DDs, ELPs and Standing Orders January 2026	£596,706.83	General CB 1
Cheques, DDs and Standing Orders January 2026	£14,147.69	Imprest CB 2

F164 INTERIM AUDIT REPORT

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

Members were advised there were no issues to draw their attention to and the final year-end report would be received in June.

Resolved:

That, the internal Audit interim update for 2025/26 be welcomed and the whole team be thanked for their work and diligence.

F165 EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNAL CONTROL: CORPORATE & FINANCIAL RISK ASSESSMENT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) who provided a verbal update to explain the need for a robust corporate risk assessment to be in place.

In accordance with its responsibility for the Council's governance and financial oversight in line with the Accounts & Audit Regulations 2015, the Committee considered an updated Risk Management Policy and Risk Assessment, comprising nine sections. An action plan was included at the end of the documents and compiled various risks, including malicious representation.

The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) proposed that, in future, this process be undertaken earlier in the year, suggesting September 2026 as the most appropriate timing, in advance of the annual budget-setting process.

Recommended:

1. That the report be noted and,
2. That, the Risk Management Policy & Corporate Risk Assessment for the financial year 2025-26 be endorsed and signed by the Chair and,
3. That, a future corporate risk assessment be considered at the September meeting on this Committee.

F166 **FINANCE REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) detailing income and expenditure for budgets which were the responsibility of the committee.

Members were advised work had taken place on making the costs centres more accurate and accurately reflective, on property budgets and VAT. It was noticeable that income and expenditure were higher for the final economic quarter due to the West Witney projects and the loan and payments tied therein, the bulk of the loan having to be drawn down by the end of the fiscal year.

The Committee also welcomed news that the Council's green energy contract had been renewed, and the Council had been relatively protected from recent changes as officers had accepted a quote prior to energy price rises.

Finally, it was confirmed the Council had continued membership of the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils due to the support provided which would be especially useful with upcoming Local Government reorganisation.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the management accounts of the Committee's services to 31 December 2025 be approved and,
3. That, the endorsement of the actions of officers in agreeing the energy contract with 100 Green for the year commencing 1 April 2026 be noted and,
4. That, draw downs of two loans totalling £960,000 in relation to the West Witney Project borrowed from the Public Works Loan Board be noted and,
5. That, the endorsement of the renewal for the subscription to the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils for the year commencing 1 April 2026 for the sum of £4,508 be noted and,
6. That, the report on investments to the period to 28 February 2026 be approved.

F167 **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.

Members noted the recommendation of the Parks & Recreation Committee to release agreed funding to Courtside Hubs for the Leys redevelopment project via delegation. Senior officers were inputting into this issue, and the funds would be released on the completion of project milestones.

Resolved:

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

Due to a previous role held with one of the grant applicants the Responsible Financial Officer left the meeting at this point, returning after the conclusion of the item.

F168 GRANTS & SUBSIDISED LETTINGS

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

Members considered each application in turn and noted that any awards would fall within the new financial year, as the 2025–26 budget had been fully expended. It was further noted that a number of organisations applied annually and that, while this may create an expectation of funding, the position was clearly set out within the Council's Grants Criteria and Subsidised Lettings Policy.

In respect of subsidised lettings, the Committee recognised that the applicants delivered valuable arts and community services and therefore agreed to award these in full, including a reminder that an annual award could not be taken for granted. Full grant awards were also approved for Witney Shed and the annual grant to Witney Town Band in support of civic performances.

Applications from the Friends of Witney Community Primary School and Hanborough Cricket Club were initially deferred to the June meeting. The Committee considered that alternative funding sources may be available and that approving these requests at this stage could limit the Council's ability to allocate discretionary grants later in the year. Applicants would be provided with further guidance on potential funding options.

The Committee acknowledged the admirable project from Hanborough Cricket Club and the potential wider benefit of the proposed project to some Witney residents; however, it was ultimately concluded that the request could not be justified for funding by Witney Town Council.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Witney Photo Group (£266.67+VAT), Witney Food Revolution (£228.33+VAT), and Witney Town Training Band (£215.50+VAT) be awarded full subsidised letting of the Corn Exchange in the new fiscal year and,
3. That, Witney Shed be awarded a grant of £450 and,
4. That, Witney Town Band be awarded an annual grant of £750 and,
5. That, the grant application from the Friends of Witney Community Primary School be deferred until the June meeting of this Committee and,
6. That, no award be granted to Hanborough Cricket Club and,
7. That, these grants be awarded under the General Power of Competence and awardees be asked to acknowledge the Town Council in any promotional material.

F169 **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.

During the following item the Town Clerk left the meeting.

F170 **PROPERTY, LEGAL & INSURANCE MATTERS**

The Committee received and considered the confidential reports of the Town Clerk/C.E.O and Head of Estates & Operations.

The Committee firstly received an update from the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) on the Council's insurance procurement, including three quotations for the annual premium. The options presented were broadly comparable in cost. In response to a query regarding the ethical standing of the suppliers, Members were advised that, due to time constraints, a full assessment had not been undertaken however this could be considered in future, subject to the decision made. Members resolved to enter into a three-year agreement with Contractor C, as identified in the report.

The Committee also received an update from the Head of Estates & Operations regarding ongoing negotiations with West Witney Sports & Social Club, including a range of potential leasing options. It was agreed that a decision could not be made at this stage pending further financial and forward-planning information.

Heads of Terms for the transfer and project management of the Springfield Oval Play Area/Open Space were considered and approved and, the Committee further noted correspondence from West Oxfordshire District Council in relation to a planning enforcement matter.

Resolved:

1. That, the confidential reports and updates be noted and,
2. That, the insurance quote from Contractor C in the report be approved on a three-year deal for the sum of £42,574 per annum and,
3. That, further accounting and future business information is requested from West Witney Sports & Social Club and,
4. That, Witney Town Council approves the Heads of Terms and therefore, the transfer and project management of the Springfield Oval Play Area/Open Space, subject to final legal documentation.

F171 **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 5(W)**

Resolved:

That, Standing Order 5(w) be suspended to allow the meeting to continue as it had lasted for two hours.

F172 **THE STATION - DRAFT SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT 2026-2029**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk and accompanying draft Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Bright Futures Oxfordshire for a detached Youth Service, The Station in Witney.

The SLA incorporated amendments as previously agreed by the delegated Members and officers tasked with progressing the matter. At the time of the meeting, a response from Bright Futures had not yet been received.

The Committee approved the proposed amendments on behalf of the Council and reaffirmed the existing delegation to enable the matter to be concluded expediently.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Council amendments to the Service Level Agreement with Bright Futures Oxfordshire be approved and,
3. That, delegation to conclude the negotiations on this matter be re-affirmed to the Deputy Town Clerk, Cllr R Smith, Cllr T Ashby and Cllr R Crouch.

Cllrs D Enright & G Meadows left the meeting ahead of the next item as they were not members of the Personnel Sub-Committee.

F173 **STAFFING MATTERS**

The Committee received the minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee meeting held on 25th March 2026 and a verbal update from the Deputy Town Clerk. The minutes of the meeting held on 24th February had been circulated prior to this meeting.

Resolved:

That, the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meetings held on 24th February and 25th March 2026, and the recommendations contained therein be approved.

The meeting closed at: 8.17 pm

Chair