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

Held on Monday, 22 June 2026

At 6.01 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor R Smith (Chair)

Councillors:	T Ashby	J Aitman
	S Simpson	J Doughty
	G Doughty	O Collins (In place of R Crouch)
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Mark Lewis	Head of Estates & Operations
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
Others:	None.	

F312 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R Crouch, Councillor O Collins attended as a substitute.

F313 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor T Ashby declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 15 as he was a Trustee of the Buttercross Scout Group who were an applicant for a Youth Services Grant.

There were no other declarations from Members.

F314 **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR**

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

It was proposed and seconded that Councillor 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 2026/27 municipal year.

The Responsible Financial Officer arrived at 6:03pm.

F315 **MINUTES**

That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meetings held on 30 March & 27 May 2026 were received.

F186 – Members heard that the deferred application from the Friends of Witney Community Primary School would be followed up by Officers.

Resolved:

1. That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meetings held on 30 March & 27 May 2026 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair and,
2. That, the deferred application for Friends of Witney Community Primary School be followed up.

F316 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

F317 **COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The committee considered whether any changes were needed to the current Terms of Reference.

Members heard from the Deputy Town Clerk that it had not been possible to review term (k) as resolved at the Annual Council Meeting (Minute No: 228 Refers). This review would be carried out and presented for consideration of the Committee at a future meeting.

No amendments were suggested to the other terms of reference to unanimous agreement.

Recommended:

1. That, the existing Terms of Reference be recommended for approval by the Full Council at the meeting of 13 July 2026 subject to term k and,
2. That, amendments to term (k) be presented for consideration at a future meeting of this Committee.

F318 **ANNUAL RESIDENT'S SURVEY 2026**

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk (DTC) concerning the outcomes of the Council's 2026 Annual Residents Survey.

As the Committee with overall governance responsibility, Members noted that matters relating to individual service areas had already been considered by the relevant Committees within the current cycle of meetings. This report therefore provided a summary position across all Committees.

It was noted, as observed by each Committee, that there had been a lower number of responses to the survey, alongside the demographic age profile of respondents, particularly those aged 18 and under. Discussion took place regarding the lower response rates, particularly from younger residents. Members were advised that the same methodology had been used as in previous years.

The Committee was advised that additional engagement work was being undertaken by Officers, including a resident survey activity planned for Witney Carnival, which was currently in development by Officers.

Members agreed that those matters raised by residents that fell under the remit of external bodies should be shared with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) and Thames Valley Police (TVP).

The potential introduction of a Council podcast was raised by a Member to enhance engagement, including ahead of future surveys. Members also considered the use of short videos, similar to those produced by grant recipients for the Annual Town Meeting which would be explored by the Stronger Communities Committee.

Members also highlighted the importance of reinforcing messages around personal responsibility, including encouraging residents to take litter home. In addition, it was suggested that the Council's Communications Team should do more to highlight the areas in which the Council had significant expenditure to improve transparency and public awareness.

In relation to the Witney Music Festival, it was unanimously agreed that a wash-up meeting should be held between Officers and the organisers with an update being provided to the Committee at its meeting on 28 September.

Resolved:
1. That, the report and verbal updates be noted and;
2. That, matters raised by residents falling under the remit of external agencies be shared with Oxfordshire County Council, West Oxfordshire District Council and Thames Valley Police and;
3. That, communications encouraging residents to take litter home be promoted and;
4. That, the introduction of a Council podcast (or similar digital engagement methods) be explored further by Officers and;
5. That, the Council's Communications Team be requested to highlight significant areas of Council expenditure to improve transparency.

F319 **LITTER PICKING POLICY**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer regarding the introduction of a Litter Picking Policy.

Members noted that the adoption of the policy would support the Council's application for Green Flag status for the Lake and Country Park, as well as provide clarity on expectations for volunteers, individuals and organisations undertaking litter picking activities.

Concerns were raised regarding the potential discovery of dangerous items. It was therefore agreed that the policy should include additional guidance on how to respond in such circumstances.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and;

2. That, the Litter Picking Policy be approved subject to inclusion of guidance on the handling of dangerous items and reporting procedures

F320 **PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

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

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 February 2026	£780,196.81	General CB 1
Cheques, DDs, BACs and Standing Orders February 2026	£14,404.70	Imprest CB 2
DDs, ELPs and Standing Orders March 2026	£702,934.72	General CB 1
Cheques, DDs and Standing Orders March 2026	£9,656.68	Imprest CB 2
DDs, ELPs and Standing Orders April 2026	£647,497.99	General CB 1
Cheques, DDs and Standing Orders April 2026	£10,796.51	Imprest CB 2

F321 **ACCOUNTS & AUDIT (ENGLAND) REGULATIONS 2015 - ANNUAL GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR) 2025-26**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) concerning the Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR) for 2025/26 under the Accounts & Audit (England) Regulations 2015.

Members were reminded of the statutory requirement to complete and submit the AGAR by 30 June 2026.

The RFO guided Members through each section of the AGAR submission, reinforcing the details outlined in the report, with particular reference to the responses to the ten assertions contained within Section 1, the Annual Governance Statement.

Members were advised of the reasoning for the restatement of the total fixed assets figure within Section 2, Accounting Statements 2025/26 and it was further noted that the External Auditor's report would be completed by 30 September 2026, at which point Section 3 the External Auditor Report and Certificate would be finalised.

Members were in agreement with all recommendations outlined in the report.

Recommended:

1. That, the Annual Internal Audit report be noted and;
2. That, the Annual Governance Statement at Section 1 of the Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2026 be approved and adopted with questions 1 to 8 and 10 answered "Yes" and question 9 marked as "Not Applicable" and,
3. That, the Statement of Accounts at Section 2 of the Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2026 be approved and adopted and,
4. That, the draft Notice of Public Rights and Publication for 2025/26 be noted

F322 **INTERNAL AUDIT 2026**

The Committee received the final report of the Council's Internal Auditor for the year 2025/26.

The Responsible Financial Officer provided a verbal update, advising that the audit reports produced throughout the year collectively form the final annual audit position.

Members were pleased to note that no issues of concern had been identified across the audit process and congratulated Officers and staff on the high standard of financial management demonstrated.

Resolved:

1. That, the Internal Audit report for 2025/26 be noted.

F323 **FINANCE REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) detailing income and expenditure for budgets across all Committees, providing a final position for the 2025/26 financial year.

Members heard that the principal change during the year had been the movement of Green Spaces budget lines, mainly from the Stronger Communities Committee to the Climate & Biodiversity Committee. In addition, property budgets had been consolidated into a new cost centre to improve transparency of income and expenditure of these key assets.

The RFO advised that the year-end overall surplus position, along with the status of earmarked reserves, would be presented to the meeting of the Council on 13 July. Members acknowledged that the Council's overall financial position remained healthy.

The Committee also noted a summary of investment activity, with a more detailed report to follow to the 28 September meeting of the Committee.

In respect of the West Witney Sports & Social Club project, Members received an update on variations in project expenditure. It was noted that these were modest in the context of the overall project cost and not unexpected as part of project delivery where unforeseen matters arise. A further update would be provided to the meeting of the Council on 13 July.

The Committee considered and unanimously approved capital expenditure requests for the purchase of a new mower for fine turf areas (£8,000) and a replacement vehicle for use by the Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer (£25,000). It was noted that both purchases would be funded from existing earmarked reserves established for such purposes.

Members also noted the external bar stocktake and the current situation with the Internal Audit function of the Council.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted, and,
2. That, the management accounts of the Council to 31 March 2026 be approved and,
3. That, the report on investments to the period to 31 May 2026 be approved and,
4. That, the report on investment activity during 2025-26 be approved and,
5. That, the external bar stocktake report for the period to 9 April 2026 be noted and,
6. That, the financial update in relation to the West Witney Project be noted and,
7. That, the capital expenditure for a replacement mower and vehicle be approved with funding to be met from the respective Outside Services Contingency and Renewals fund earmarked reserves and,
8. That, the appointment of Auditing Solutions as Internal Auditor for the financial year 2026-27 be approved and,
9. That, the re-tendering for the Internal Audit function be delegated to officers or the five-year period from 1 April 2027.

Cllrs A Bailey & A Mubin joined the meeting at 6:56pm.

F324 **FINANCIAL MATTERS REFERRED FROM SPENDING COMMITTEES**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Council outlining financial matters arising from the recent cycle of Committee meetings.

Attention was drawn to the some of the requests such as that of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee regarding the introduction of wedding packages for the Public Halls, additional funds for the hearing loop project across the Councils premises as well as details of amendments to the Public Halls terms and conditions, which whilst not a financial recommendation was included for completeness.

Additionally, the Climate & Biodiversity Committees request regarding wildflower planting at Curbridge Road and the subsidised use of the Corn Exchange for the 2026 Eco fair.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the financial recommendations arising from the spending Committees be approved including the additional costs presented in the report for Curbridge Road roundabout and,
3. That, the revised Public Halls terms and conditions and wedding packages be agreed.

Cllr G Meadows joined the meeting at 6:59pm

F325 **SKATE PARK FENCING**

The Committee received the additional detail following a request from the Parks & Recreation Committee that the costs of additional fencing between the skatepark and the Courtside site be considered. (Minute PR273 - Parks & Recreations Committee 1 June 2026 Refers)

Members were presented with a written report alongside a verbal explanation from the Head of Estates & Operations outlining the available options.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously agreed that Option C be selected, providing for the installation of height extended 358 anti-climb mesh fencing to both the rear and courtside areas.

Members noted that costs would be monitored in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations and that the expenditure would be met from the Outside Services budget to provide the most cost-effective solution to the problems encountered at the facility by the town council and its tenant.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, Option C for the installation of 358 anti-climb mesh fencing be approved and,
3. That, the cost be funded from the Outside Services budget and monitored in line with Financial Regulations.

F326 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Resolved

That in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admissions 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.

F327 **GRANTS & SUBSIDISED LETTINGS - YOUTH SERVICES GRANTS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk regarding Youth Services Grant applications which outlined the recommendations of the evaluation panel, which had been delegated this responsibility by the Stronger Communities Committee

Members noted the comments of the Chair of the Stronger Communities Committee, who expressed surprise at the number and overall quality of the applications received. However, it was considered that some applicants should be invited to submit applications to the Council's Discretionary Grants budget

The Committee further considered applications from ARCh, Clear Sky Children's Charity, Bright Futures (The Station) and YES Futures and agreed that these requests should be refused.

The Committee gave further detailed consideration to the application from Witney Buttercross Scouts. Members noted that grant funding was typically awarded to support sustainable or new opportunities; however, additional information had been sought from the applicant. Members were advised that the proposal was to install modular toilet facilities at the newly acquired Scout site. It was noted that this would enable the site to be brought into use earlier than planned and provide a facility that would benefit a significant number of young people from Witney. Following consideration, it was proposed and agreed that a contribution of £5,000 be made towards the total project costs.

Members considered the remaining applications recommended for support from the Youth Services Grant budget (4169/408). Members were unanimous in agreement, with the exception of Cllr T Ashby who abstained on the vote for the award to Witney Buttercross Scouts owing to his earlier declaration.

Resolved:

1. That, Ducklington Sports Club, West Oxon Levellers, Witney Mills Cricket Club and Witney Wolves Basketball Club be invited to apply to the Discretionary Grants budget (407/4100) and,
2. That, the applications from ARCh, Clear Sky Children's Charity, Bright Futures (The Station) and YES Futures be declined and,
3. That, the following Youth Services Grants be awarded under the General Power of Competence and recipients be asked to acknowledge the Council's financial contribution in their promotional literature:
    - Aspire – £2,500
    - Be Free Young Carers – £2,000
    - Benefice of Witney – £2,000
    - Courtside – £2,000
    - Hope After Harm – £1,000
    - 1st North Leigh Guides – £500
    - Buttercross Scouts – £5,000
    - Yellow Submarine – £1,500
4. That, Home Start Oxford be awarded £12,000 for early years preventative services from the budget set aside for this.
5. That the remaining £3,500 of the youth services grant budget be ringfenced for future youth-related applications during the municipal year

Cllr A Mubin left the meeting at 7:18pm.

F328 **PROPERTY, LEGAL & INSURANCE MATTERS**

The Committee considered a confidential report relating to one of the Council's properties.

The Chair highlighted the need for confidentiality due to the ongoing commercial sensitivity of the matter. Members discussed the options available and agreed that further work was required before any formal decision could be taken.

It was therefore agreed that Officers be authorised to continue engagement and commission a full report setting out strategic options for consideration by the Council.

Members noted that this work was expected to take approximately 4–6 weeks to complete.

Resolved:

1. That, the confidential report be noted and,
2. That, Officers be authorised to undertake further work and engagement to develop strategic options for consideration by the Council.

F329 **STAFFING MATTERS**

The Committee received the minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee meetings held on 8th and 20th April 2026 which had been circulated prior to this meeting.

Resolved:

That, the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meetings held on 8th & 20th April 2026, and the recommendations contained therein be approved.

The meeting closed at: 7.26 pm

Chair