

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

Held on Monday, 23 June 2025

At 6.00 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
Others:	One member of the public.	

F338 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received however Cllr T Ashby had advised he would arrive late.

F339 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or officers.

F340 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The Committee received representations from the spokesperson of the Witney Flood Group concerning Agenda Item 9.

Members heard of the progress of the Witney Flood Group (WFG) in relation to their target to mitigate flood risk within the town. They had recently received a quote from a contractor in respect of the cost to improve the area from Langel Common to Farm Mill Lane which would include lowering the level of the footpath that crossed the common and acted as a dam, as well as the removal of trees and other riverbank obstructions. Additional work required to carry out desilting of the riverbed was projected to raise the entire costs to approx. £500,000.

WFG welcomed the assistance already provided by both West Oxfordshire District Council and Witney Town Council and asked that they continue to set a good example of maintenance in the areas where they were riparian owners which would hopefully be cascaded down to other landowners.

The Council was thanked for their offer of assistance to other residential groups looking to utilise the Oxfordshire County Council flood alleviation grant scheme. This was currently under consideration and the Town Council was asked if they would be happy to accept these grant awards and facilitate works using the specialised equipment, such as its winch for the removal of trees from the river.

The Spokesperson advised that the Flood Warden scheme was well established and that its volunteers were eager to engage and assist with the above works, however Officers advised that the group should clarify with OCC that flood wardens engagement in such work was covered by the insurance cover. Officers also recommended that WFG engaged with the Local Member for Parliament and other agencies to further advance the potential large funding gap needed to carry out the work they proposed.

The Committee reconvened.

Cllr T Ashby joined the meeting toward the end of the following agenda item at 6:25pm.

F341 BRIDGE STREET DESILTING

With the permission of the Chair, this item was moved up the agenda so the member of public could hear the discussion and outcome.

The Chair provided a summary of the current situation which had been discussed at the meeting of the Committee on 9 June 2025.

Officers provided a verbal update to the Committee on the costs received in relation to a road closure to carry out the desilting work at Bridge Street. Four companies had been approached however, only one had responded with a proposed cost for a three-day road closure of between £1,925 and £2,620. These quotes were dependent on whether automatic or manually operated traffic lights were used. It was noted that the cost would need to be taken from the £15,000 agreed budget if required, but other avenues should be sought by officers.

In response to a Members suggestion, it was unanimously agreed that Officers consider an amount to be put aside each year to build an earmarked reserve to repeat this work in the future. Once the work was completed it was felt the situation should be reviewed regularly to see when it required completing again.

Additionally, it was raised that Oxfordshire County Council could levy a fee for the closure of the road and although the amount was unknown, it was suggested that it be requested to be waived in light of the reasoning for the works.

The proposed desilting project was welcomed by the spokesperson of Witney Flood Group present who agreed the worth of carrying out the work and assessing its success.

Resolved:

1. That, the verbal update be noted and,
2. That, de-silting work at Bridge Street should proceed without further delay and,
3. That, Officers and Town Councillors who are also OCC members, engage with Oxfordshire County Council regarding the waiving of any road closure permit cost and,

4. That, Officers consider an amount to be budgeted each year to build an earmarked reserve for further de-silting work.

The spokesperson for WFG left the meeting at 6:30pm

F342 COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The committee considered the changes to the Committee Terms of Reference as deferred from the meeting of the Committee on 9 June 2025 (Minute F324 refers)

Members welcomed the changes and agreed unanimously.

Recommended:

That, the Terms of Reference as detailed be approved at the meeting of the Council to be held later the same evening.

F343 COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES & WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR

As the Committee with strategic oversight of the Council, Members considered the objectives and work programme of all the Council's Committees, this item having been deferred from the meeting of the Committee on 9 June 2025 (Minute F325 refers)

Members welcomed the changes and agreed unanimously to their acceptance.

Recommended:

That, the Council's objectives and work programme for the 2025/26 municipal year be approved.

F344 ACCOUNTS & AUDIT (ENGLAND) REGULATIONS 2015 - ANNUAL GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR) 2024-25

The Council received the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) concerning the Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR) 2024/25 under its obligations of the Accounts & Audit (England) Regulations 2015

The RFO gave a verbal explanation of each question comprising Section 1, Regarding Question 4 following debate a vote was taken on answering "yes" to the question as members believed that by the Council advertising the publication of the AGAR and Internal Audit information for one day longer than required by the legislation in both 2023 & 2024 it had indeed provided proper opportunity to the electorate. The result of the vote being seven in favour with one abstention.

It was therefore agreed that questions 1 to 8 be answered "yes" and question 9 answered "Not Applicable" in Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement and that the statement be agreed and recommended for signing at the meeting of the Council later that evening. All Members were in agreement.

It was further agreed that the Accounting Statement which formed section 2 be recommended to Full Council for agreement and adoption. All Members were in favour.

The RFO advised that the remainder of the report was for information; Section 3 would be submitted to the External Auditor with supporting information and would be an analytical review concentrating on variances year on year, or above a certain percentage. The general public would have the right to inspect the documents which would be published following adoption.

The Leader of the Council thanked officers, particularly the RFO for their diligence in presenting the information in such an understandable format.

Recommended:

1. That, the report and verbal updates be noted and,
2. That, the Annual Governance Statement at Section 1 of the Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2025 be approved, and formally adopted by the Council and,
3. That, the Statement of Accounts at Section 2 of the Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2025 be approved, and formally adopted by the Council and,
4. That, in light of the above the Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR) for 2024/25 be formally agreed and adopted by the Council.

F345 INTERNAL AUDIT 2024-25

The Council received the final report of the Council's independent Internal Auditor.

Members were advised this was the final report for the fiscal year 2024-25 and there were no issues to draw members attention to.

The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) explained the reasoning behind the auditor's responses to questions (m) & (n) in the Annual Internal Audit Report of the AGAR documents which arose due to the Council advertising the publication of the information for one day longer than required by the legislation in 2024. All Members were in agreement that this only increased the transparency of the Council's records.

The RFO assured members that the Notice of Public Rights and Publication once signed would be advertised for the regulatory 30 working days.

The Leader of the Council thanked Officers, particularly the RFO for their diligence in preparation of the Council's finances.

Recommended:

1. That, the internal Audit report for 2024/25 be approved and,
2. That, the draft notice advertising electors' rights for 2024/25 be noted.

F346 GRANTS & SUBSIDISED LETTINGS

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

Following its deferment from the meeting of the Committee on 9 June Members welcomed the additional information provided by Apollos Clothing in support of their discretionary grant application (Minute Ref: F333 refers).

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, a grant of £1,080 be awarded to Apollos Clothing be awarded under the General Power of Competence and that they be asked to acknowledge the Council's financial contribution in their promotional literature.

F347 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS & 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.

F348 **PROPERTY, INSURANCE & LEGAL MATTERS**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk/CEO.

Updates were provided on lease agreements with Courtside Hubs CIC, Witney Lawn Tennis Club, ICE Centre, Witney Allotment Association, Madley Park Hall, and West Witney Sports & Social Club along with Madley Park and Waterford Road Play Areas.

An issue concerning a piece of land under the town council's ownership was discussed, with the Council agreeing that further information was required from its solicitor to progress the matter.

Resolved:

1. That, the confidential report and updates be noted and,
2. That, further information on the historical designation of the land identified in the report be explored further by the Council's solicitor up to the value of £1,000.

The meeting closed at: 6.58 pm

Chair