

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

Held on Monday, 21 July 2025

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

Present:

Councillor R Smith (Chair)

Councillors:	J Aitman	G Doughty
	A Bailey	S Simpson
	J Doughty	O Collins (In place of R Crouch)
	T Ashby	
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
Others:	None	

F421 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Cllr R Crouch with Cllr O Collins attending as a substitute.

F422 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr A Bailey declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda item 13 as there was a request for subsidised hire to fundraise for his mayoral charities in the year, which Cllr J Doughty concurred with as Deputy Mayor.

Cllrs R Smith and T Ashby declared a personal, non-prejudicial interests in agenda item 13 as they were personally linked to Bright Futures and Buttercross Scouts respectively.

The Responsible Financial Officer also declared an interest due to his direct involvement with Witney Food Revolution.

There were no further declarations from either Councillors or Officers.

F423 MINUTES

The minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 9 June 2025 and the Special Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 23 June 2025 were received.

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 9 June 2025 and the Special Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 23 June 2025 be approved as correct records of the meetings and be signed by the Chair.

F424 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

F425 ANNUAL RESIDENTS SURVEY RESULTS

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the results of the resident's annual satisfaction survey which was held at the beginning of the year.

Members were advised the report represented the survey results for the services under the remit of this committee and showed the combined satisfactory and above percentages against poor ones. Previous years data was also included to help benchmark the results. The report also contained all unedited comments on the services.

The Committee welcomed the number of positive comments that were made about its services, and it was agreed that Member cohesion and transparency were paramount to raise the professional profile of the Council and the work being undertaken. It was proposed by Cllr J Doughty and seconded by Cllr S Simpson that consideration be given and officers provide a report on the broadcasting of the Council's meetings. All Members were in agreement.

The negative comments were noted and several of these were linked to those being addressed under the auspices of the Parks & Recreation Committee. However not all areas were under the control of the Town Council and so those would need to be passed onto the relevant landowners.

It was also agreed that the issues raised which impacted those with mobility problems be referred to the town council's Community Voices Task & Finish Group.

Finally, it was agreed that the comments relating to other issues not under the control, or responsibility of the Town Council should be forwarded to those organisations so that they may review and take steps to address the resident's concern.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the comments in relation to Witney Town Council services be noted and,
3. That, the Council promotes You said, we did items where appropriate to better inform residents on comments made and,
4. That, the Council writes to West Oxfordshire District Council, Oxfordshire County Council, Thames Valley Police, and the Woolgate Centre to lobby and/or highlight the comments in relation to their services and facilities and,
5. That, officers prepare a report on broadcasting Council meetings to be presented to this Committee on 22 September 2025.

F426 SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY REVIEW

The Committee received a draft social media policy which had been recommended for approval by the Stronger Communities Committee on 14 July. At the meeting a Member had raised that there were some items in the original policy which had not been included so a review had taken place by officers and this version included amendments.

Members welcomed the review and asked for a change to section 3, incorporating 'groups and forums' into the final amended paragraph and points on officer and mayoral pages. In addition, it was agreed there should also be wording on Councillors administering and/or moderating social media pages and that in section 6, Officers 'should' report incidents to the Senior Management Team of the Council instead of having just one named individual.

Resolved:

That, the social media policy, as presented be adopted by Witney Town Council with the above amendments.

F427 COUNCILLOR TRAINING POLICY REVIEW

The Committee received and considered the report and accompanying Councillor training policy from the Deputy Town Clerk.

The policy was based on a training statement agreed by the Council in 2024 and suggested that new Councillors should undertake a Council induction, code of conduct, and data protection training. A list of upcoming training opportunities for Councillors was also provided.

Resolved:

That, the Councillor Training Policy, as presented, be adopted by Witney Town Council.

F428 PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

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

Members were pleased to note that no cheques were issued in May as a result of moving to electronic payments and this had a monetary benefit to the Council.

Resolved:

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
DDs, ELPs 42-63 ;65- 68 (electronic payments) and Standing Orders April 2025	£245,991.45	General CB 1
Cheques 35161-35179, cancelled cheques 34988 & 35064; DDs, BACs and Standing Orders April 2025	£20,389.67	Imprest CB 2

DDs, ELPs 64 & 69 to 96 and Standing Orders May 2025	£338,626.58	General CB 1
Cancelled cheques 351589, DDs and Standing Orders May 2025	£9,112.47	Imprest CB 2

F429 MODEL PUBLICATION SCHEME

Members were advised that, due to time constraints, this item would now be presented to the meeting of 22nd September, to be ratified at Full Council on 6th October.

Resolved:

That, the update be noted.

F430 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 provided with the Council's management accounts, a statement of earmarked reserves, investment statements to June, investment activity for the previous fiscal year and the external bar stocktake reports for March and June quarters.

The Chair welcomed the report and financial detail which was supplemented by a summary prepared by the R.F.O at the meeting. Finances were looking healthy as were investment returns which were received along with notification of changes to the investment manager of the Churches, Charities, and Local Authorities (CCLA) funds which the RFO advised was a positive move.

A vote was necessary on the approval of the report recommendations with the result being for each.

For	Seven
Against	Nil
Abstention	One

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the management accounts of the Committee's services to 31 March 2025 be approved and,
3. That, the statement of Council reserves as at 31 March 2025 be approved and,
4. That, the report on investments to the period to 30 June 2025 be approved and,
5. That, the report on investment activity during 2024-25 be approved and,
6. That, the external bar stocktake report for the quarters to 31 March and 30 June 2025 be noted.

F431 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.

Resolved:

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

F432 GRANTS & SUBSIDISED LETTINGS

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning grant activity to local organisations.

Members debated the requests and considered that Witney Flood Group were providing a worthwhile service, they attended and lobbied on residents' behalf and should receive the full amount requested.

With respect to the subsidised letting requests, there was concern the budget for the current year was almost expunged, therefore, the Committee had to scrutinise applications unless they could be covered internally from existing budgets, such as the Climate Fair and Mayor requests.

Members agreed Witney Jazz and Aspire should both be granted their requests, although noted the commercial operation of the former. A shortfall in the budget could be made up from the discretionary fund.

Resolved:

1. That, Witney Flood Group be awarded a grant of £800 and,
2. That, subsidised letting requests for use of the Corn Exchange be approved for Witney Jazz (£160), and Aspire (£70) and,
3. That, any an additional sum over and above the subsidised letting budget for the year be allocated from the discretionary grants cost centre and,
4. That, these grants be awarded under the General Power of Competence and awardees be asked to acknowledge the Town Council in any promotional material and,
5. That, the use of the Corn Exchange for up to three Mayor events be approved at a cost of £480 to be funded from cost centre 401/4150 and,
6. That, the use of the Corn Exchange for a Climate Fayre in October be funded from the Council's Climate & Biodiversity earmarked reserve and,
7. That, the correspondence from Apollos Clothing and Lowland Rescue Oxford be noted and,
8. That, a policy specifically for subsidised lettings be drafted by officers ahead of the next meeting.

F433 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.

F434 YOUTH SERVICES GRANTS

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

Members were advised that due to the overwhelming submission of applications, that the Stronger Communities Committee had delegated allocations to a small group of Members to score the submissions and make recommendations of the level of awards.

Applications had been grouped with the majority being awarded from the Youth Grant budget, however some had been recommended to be paid from the discretionary grant budget due to them not holistically aligning with the terms of the Youth Grant in order that it retained its integrity.

Two applications were unsuccessful, and the applicants would be advised of the reasoning as well as being directed towards other potential sources of funding.

Members thanked those involved in the decision making in what was a tight and restrictive timeframe.

Recommended:

1. That, the confidential report be noted and,
2. That, the following youth service grants should be awarded from cost centre 408/4169:

a) Buttercross Scouts	£3,500
b) Friends of Springfield School	£2,850
c) 4 th Girl Guides	£1,000
d) Parish of Witney	£2,500
e) Bright Futures	£3,648
f) West Oxfordshire Levellers	£1,000
g) Witney Food Revolution	£2,150
h) Yellow Submarine	£2,000
3. That, in addition, the Committee agreed with the following recommendation on awards to be allocated from the discretionary grants fund, cost centre 407/4100:

a) Ducklington Sports Club	£1,700
b) Tower Hill FC	£1,000
c) Witney Town Band (Juniors)	£1,500
4. That, Home Start Oxford be awarded £11,000 from cost centre 418/4173 for their ongoing preventative work with young children in Witney and,
5. That, these grants be awarded under the General Power of Competence and awardees be asked to acknowledge the Town Council in any promotional material and,
6. That, youth services grants are not awarded to Apollos Clothing and the Community Loft at West Oxon Boxing & Fitness Club as they did not align with the purpose and/or criteria of the scheme.

F435 **IT PROVISION**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the Council's future IT provision.

Members were satisfied with the due diligence conducted by officers in line with Council policies and recommended approval of Contractor 3 in the report.

Resolved:

1. That, the confidential report be noted and,
2. That, Contractor 3 be awarded the Council's IT provision contract.

F436 **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 5(W)**

Resolved:

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

F437 **DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2025-2031**

The Committee received and considered the confidential joint report of the Town Clerk/C.E.O and the R.F.O concerning a medium-term financial strategy (MTFS).

The Town Clerk advised the strategy would provide a robust three-year financial framework and would align with the Council's developing corporate strategic plan; this was a draft document which was currently in progress.

The Chair thanked officers for their work on the strategy, which would re-introduce a written plan for the Council as a model framework. This as well as the first version, provided at the last meeting was setting the parameters for the Council to work towards.

Resolved:

1. That, the confidential report be noted and,
2. That, the principle of adopting a medium-term financial strategy to support the Council's financial planning and management be endorsed and,
3. That, the updated MTFS as presented, providing an updated financial projection based on current assumptions be noted and,
4. That, the R.F.O continues to refine the MTFS to ensure it was fully aligned with the Council's emerging Corporate Strategic Plan and can support informed budgeting and decision-making over the medium term.

F438 **DRAFT CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2029**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report and draft Corporate Strategic Plan 2025-29 from the Town Clerk/C.E.O.

Members heard that the plan was a first draft and as such feedback was welcomed in order to refine it further as the Council continued to incorporate the changes to the WODC Local Plan and the changes to local government restructuring.

The Committee discussed the seven identified priorities with Members agreeing that Community Empowerment was key.

It was agreed the Committee take time to absorb the full documents and that it be reviewed again at the next meeting of the Committee ahead of the budget setting period that would commence in October 2025 with an action plan of works.

The Council was currently compiling its response to the West Oxfordshire District Council Local Plan 2041, Members agreed that the Town Councils strategic priorities be included in that response.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Members consider the full document and provide feedback to the Town Clerk and,
3. That, the seven strategic principles be included in the Councils response to the WODC Local Plan 2041 consultation.

Cllr T Ashby left the meeting during the following item briefly between 8:19 and 8:21pm

F439 PROPERTY, LEGAL & INSURANCE MATTERS

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk/C.E.O.

Updates were provided on the Courtside Hub development, Windrush Place Pitches and Pavillion and Little Green.

There were also updates on the progress of Witney Lawn Tennis Club's lease agreement, two ongoing insurance claims and the request from Oxfordshire County Council on the designation of a byway at The Leys.

A report was also tabled regarding the issues being experienced with the historical paving of the Buttercross.

Resolved:

1. That, the confidential report be noted and,
2. That, no response be submitted in respect of the Byway request and,
3. That, additional information be provided for the consideration of Buttercross paving works in the 2026/27 budget setting.

F440 STAFFING MATTERS

The Committee received the minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee meeting held on 9 July 2025.

Resolved:

That, the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting held on 9 July 2025, and the recommendations contained therein be approved.

The meeting closed at: 8.22 pm

Chair