

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

Held on Monday, 24 November 2025

At 6.05 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor R Smith (Chair)

Councillors:	R Crouch	G Doughty
	J Doughty	S Simpson
	T Ashby	G Meadows (In place of A Bailey)
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
	Thomas Davies	Deputy Venue & Events Officer
Others:	none.	

F675 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs J Aitman and A Bailey for whom Cllr G Meadows attended as a substitute.

F676 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or officers.

F677 MINUTES

The minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 22 September 2025 were received.

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 22 September 2025 be approved as correct records of the meetings and be signed by the Chair.

F678 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

F679 PUBLIC HALL BARS - MINIMUM HIRE CHARGE

With the permission of the Chair, this item was moved up the agenda.

The Committee received and considered the report and a verbal update from the Venue & Events Officer concerning a proposal to introduce a minimum hire charge for use of the bar in the Council's public halls.

Members thanked the Officer for presenting the proposal and acknowledged the potential to improve the profitability of the bars against the current level of social value.

Concerns were raised regarding how such a policy could be effectively enforced, and whether it would maintain affordability and accessibility for users, thereby deterring potential hirers. The Committee agreed that further work was required to address these matters and that, once implemented, the policy should be subject to appropriate monitoring, and a call-in process should issues arise.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, officers research the points above further and present an updated policy to the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting on 19 January 2026.

The Venue & Events Officer left the meeting at 6:32pm.

F680 THERMAL IMAGING CAMERA LOAN POLICY

The Committee received and considered the report of the Compliance & Environment Officer concerning a scheme and policy to loan the Council's thermal imaging camera to residents.

Members were pleased to see the scheme progressing and were encouraged by the level of interest generated through promotional activities at events throughout the year.

Regarding use by individuals outside Witney, Members agreed that, as the camera was purchased using precepted funds for the benefit of Witney residents, the loan scheme should remain free of charge for parish residents only. Those outside the parish should instead be signposted to the Carbon Zero Hub, which offered a similar service.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the thermal imaging loan scheme and policy free to Witney residents be approved and,
3. That, residents outside of Witney be directed to the Carbon Zero Hub.

F681 COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

The Committee received and considered an updated Communications Strategy for approval by the Council.

The policy had been recommended for approval by the Stronger Communities Committee at its meeting on 17 November.

Resolved:

That, the revised Communications Strategy be agreed and adopted by Witney Town Council.

F682 FLAG-FLYING POLICY

The Committee received and considered an updated flag flying policy for approval by the Council.

The policy had been recommended for approval by the Stronger Communities Committee at its meeting on 17 November.

Resolved:

That, the revised flag flying policy be agreed and adopted by Witney Town Council.

F683 COMPLAINTS POLICY REVIEW

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk along with an updated Complaints Policy for the Council.

Members were advised of the key changes from the previous version, including updates to the scope, complaint management responsibilities, categorisation, treatment of anonymous complaints, and monitoring arrangements. The Committee welcomed the increased clarity the revised document provided for both residents and staff.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the updated Complaints Policy, as presented, be adopted by Witney Town Council.

F684 PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Committee received the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) with the accompanying payment schedules, bank statements and reconciliations for August and September 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 August 2025	£266,160.45	General CB 1
Cheque 100061; DDs, BACs and Standing Orders August 2025	£8,878.42	Imprest CB 2
DDs, ELPs and Standing Orders September 2025	£208,688.54	General CB 1

Cheques 35183-35191 , DDs and Standing Orders September 2025	£13,538.92	Imprest CB 2
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F685 **GRANT MONITORING**

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

Members welcomed reports from Lowland Rescue Oxford, Witney 1st Rangers Girl Guides, Oxfordshire Play Association and Home Start-Oxford which outlined how grants provided by the Council had been expended.

The Committee noted that further updates had been provided for the Council's 50th anniversary grant scheme and also via other Committees of the Council including; Witney Music Festival, West Oxfordshire Community Transport, and The Station Detached Youth.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and accompanying information be noted and,
2. That, the reports and updates provided satisfy the Council's grants criteria and no further information was required.

F686 **MODEL PUBLICATION SCHEME REVIEW**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk along with an updated publication scheme for the Council.

Members were advised that the Council was required, under Freedom of Information legislation, to maintain a Publication Scheme based on a model approved by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). The scheme set out the Council's commitment to make specific categories of information publicly available and explained how this information could be accessed.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the updated Model Publication Scheme be adopted by Witney Town Council.

F687 **PRIVACY NOTICE REVIEW**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk along with an updated Privacy Notice for the Council.

Members were informed of the Council's obligations under data protection legislation to provide a Privacy Notice. The Notice sets out how the Council collected, stored and processed personal data, the legal basis for this processing, and the rights of individuals whose data was held.

The Committee was also reminded of individual Councillor responsibilities regarding data protection. Any new data-processing activities must be included in the Notice, and therefore it was an operational document which may need updating more frequently than on an annual basis.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the updated Privacy Notice be adopted by Witney Town Council and,
3. That, any further operational inclusions prior to the next annual review be added under delegation to the Deputy Town Clerk.

F688 **FINANCE REPORT: REVISED REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26 AND DRAFT BASE REVENUE BUDGET FOR 2026/27**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) detailing income and expenditure for the current and future years budgets.

The RFO reported that preparation of the 2026–27 budget was progressing, incorporating the requests made by Committees during the current cycle of meetings together with officer input. Members were also informed that an online budget survey had recently been conducted to gather views from Witney taxpayers on their spending priorities within each Committee's remit. Although the survey produced a small sample size, Members noted that the responses broadly aligned with the Council's existing priorities and ongoing projects, while recognising the need to treat the potentially unrepresentative findings with caution.

A summary was provided of key considerations from each Committee, alongside details of earmarked reserves, property and overhead costs, and the Council's obligation to maintain three months of net operating costs in its general reserve as recommended best practice. Members scrutinised individual budget lines to ensure they were fully informed ahead of making a recommendation to Full Council, where the final precept decision would be determined.

The report further outlined the overall budget parameters, projected income and expenditure, and highlighted that, based on a recent benchmarking survey of local councils' electricity costs, the Town Council would have ranked second on the list, although it was acknowledged that the data selected only applied to Borough and Unitary Councils.

Finally, Members received a summary of the projected revenue budget for each year. It was acknowledged that these figures represented the position as currently known and may be subject to change should additional information be received prior to the final decision.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the revised base revenue budget for 2025/26 and the estimated base revenue budget for 2026/27, as detailed in the draft estimates be acknowledged, subject to further work by officers ready for the Special meeting on 15 December 2025 and,
3. That, the list of earmarked reserves be expanded upon ahead of the above meeting.

F689 **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.

Cllr R Crouch left the meeting at 7:58pm.

F690 **REVENUE GROWTH ITEMS, SPECIAL REVENUE PROJECTS, AND CAPITAL PROJECTS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) concerning revenue growth items, special revenue projects and capital projects for 2026/27.

Members received a list of capital programme bids for 2026/27, comprising proposals from both Committees and officers. The report outlined which projects could be funded from existing reserves and which would require additional financial resources.

Following detailed scrutiny of each item, the Committee agreed that funding for improvements to the basketball facilities at King George's should be capped at £15,000. They further agreed that no direct allocation should be made at this stage for recreational site drainage, a water refill station at The Leys, or a contribution to Experience Oxfordshire. An annual provision of £1,250 should also be added to support potential future river de-silting work.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the revenue and capital growth items for 2026/27 be recommended for inclusion apart from the changes listed above to Full Council on 15 December 2025.

F691 **OUT OF HOURS SERVICE**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Compliance & Environment Officer.

Members welcomed the report which was connected to the Council's emergency plan and a request from Witney Flood group for a single point of contact out of hours.

The Committee acknowledged that an issue existed but considered the cost of an externally provided service to be disproportionate to the volume of enquiries received. Members also felt that a response from a local representative would be more beneficial and reassuring for callers. Consequently, the Committee agreed that the most appropriate course of action would be to review internal procedures with a view to reinstating an out-of-hours on-call system for staff.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, officers explore internal on-call options and management procedures to respond to out of hours emergencies and that these be reported back to a future meeting of the Personnel Sub-Committee.

F692 **ONLINE BOOKINGS SYSTEM**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning IT software upgrades for the Council, including an online bookings portal.

Members were given background on the project and informed of how its scope had evolved since 2024, following the approval earlier in the year of a more streamlined approach to sports pitch bookings. It was noted that transitioning to an online booking portal would still provide significant benefits to hall hirers and create operational efficiencies for the Council.

Members also received information about the Council's current software provider and the longer-term aim of migrating to cloud-based systems. Updating the software to this new platform would facilitate the introduction of the above online booking's portal at a substantially lower cost than previously anticipated.

The Committee welcomed the move toward improved technology and agreed that the proposal would deliver clear advantages for both the Council and its service users.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Council proceeds with the purchase of a cloud-based system for its software and,
3. That, the Council proceeds with the purchase of an online booking portal with its current provider.

F693 SCHEDULE OF PROPOSED FEES & CHARGES 2026/27

The Committee received and considered the proposed recreational, burial and public halls charges for 2026-27 as part of the budget setting process.

Officers advised these had already been recommended for approval by the Council's standing committees with some minor changes to the documents which had yet to be completed.

Resolved:

That, the proposed fees and charges for 2026-27 as presented, be agreed.

The RFO left the meeting at 8:25pm.

F694 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 were also informed of several recommendations relevant to budget setting for the 2026–27 financial year.

Updates were provided on items previously referred to the Committee for additional cost information. Several of these had already been considered earlier in the meeting as part of capital and revenue discussions, including the refurbishment of the King George's Field basketball court, the Parkrun hoggin path, and support for Experience Oxfordshire.

Further details were presented on the costs associated with installing a water refill station at The Leys, purchasing community litter-picking cabinets, providing a bus shelter at Woodgreen, advertising in a local doorstep magazine, and supporting APCAM mental health sessions and We Game Sessions in 2026.

Regarding the latter, Members agreed that the Council should allocate budget provision for school holiday mental health drop-in sessions, but not for the We Game Sessions at this stage, noting that these could instead be considered for support through the youth services grant scheme following a formal application.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the recommendations of the spending Committees as detailed be approved and,
3. That, the updates on the King George's Basketball court refurbishment, Parkrun hogging path, Leys water refill station, playing pitch drainage, community litter picking cabinets, a bus shelter at Woodgreen, Experience Oxfordshire, and external advertising be noted and,

4. That, the Council budgets £2,600 for APCAM mental health drop-in sessions during 2026 and,
5. That, a further report on bringing the Youth Services Grant Awards forward be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

The RFO returned to the meeting at 8:37pm.

F695 **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 two applications for subsidised lettings: one from Witney Food Revolution for use of the Corn Exchange for a fundraising event, and another for use of Burwell Hall to host a Seniors' Christmas Party.

The Committee agreed that both events would deliver clear social value and should therefore be supported. As the subsidised lettings budget had already been fully allocated, Members approved funding for both applications from the underspend within the discretionary grants budget.

Finally, Members discussed the appropriate budget allocations for 2026–27 to support the Witney Carnival and the Witney Christmas Lights Switch-On. Having reviewed the information provided in advance of the meeting, the Committee acknowledged the significant value both events bring to the community and agreed to set contributions at £2,500 and £2,600 respectively.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Witney Food Revolution be awarded subsidised letting of the Corn Exchange for the sum of £228.33 and,
3. That, the Burwell Senior's Christmas Party at Burwell Hall be awarded subsidised letting for the sum of £168 and,
4. That, this funding be allocated from the discretionary grants budget line of 4100/407 and,
5. That, £2,500 be added to the 2026-27 budget for Witney Carnival and,
6. That, £2,600 be added to the 2026-27 budget for the Witney Christmas Lights Switch on Event 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.

F696 **ANNUAL GRANTS**

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

Members welcomed the report detailing the organisations for which the Council held annual budgets and expressed their support for releasing funds where appropriate requests and supporting information were provided. The only exception was dementia support funding, as the group was not currently active in Witney and it had not been called upon in recent years.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,

2. That, the award of annual grants to Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire, Volunteer Link-Up, Witney & District Museum, and Witney Town Band be approved, subject to a written request and supporting documents where required and,
3. 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,
4. That, a budget for Witney Dementia Alliance be removed from the 2026-27 budget as the group has ceased.

F697 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME (LGPS) - 2025 VALUATION RESULTS AND FUNDING STRATEGY STATEMENT (FSS) EMPLOYER CONSULTATION**

The Committee received the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) valuation results and Funding Strategy Statement Employer Consultation.

Members thanked officers for providing the information and were pleased to hear contribution rates had lowered.

The Town Clerk highlighted that there were two required actions; one in respect of the Oxfordshire Pension Fund 2025 Valuation which required confirmation of receipt and understanding of the Council's results schedule – the deadline being 31 January 2026; and secondly a response to the Funding Strategy Statement Consultation, which would end on 19 December 2025. Due to time constraints the Committee deferred this item and suggested that Officers formulate a response if appropriate.

Resolved:

1. That, the LGPS 2025 valuation of the Oxfordshire Pension Fund, including the Council's draft 2025 valuation results be noted and,
2. That, delegation be provided to the Town Clerk/CEO in conjunction with the RFO to formulate a response to the Funding Strategy Statement Employer Consultation for oversight at Full Council on 8 December 2025, if appropriate.

F698 **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.

F699 **CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-29**

The Town Clerk/CEO advised that, due to time constraints, it had not been possible to progress this item in time for the meeting, but a revised draft would be presented to a future meeting.

Resolved:

That, the verbal update of the Town Clerk be noted.

F700 **PROPERTY, LEGAL & INSURANCE MATTERS**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk/CEO concerning matters relating to the Council's property portfolio and estate management.

Members received an update on ongoing rent and lease negotiations with Courtside Hubs CIC, as well as matters relating to the Witney Lawn Tennis Club at the West Witney tennis courts and the West Witney Sports & Social Club.

In relation to the projects at West Witney Sports Ground, the Committee received a verbal update on the RFO's due diligence of the appointed contractor, since the Extra Ordinary Council meeting held on 10 November 2025. While the company was trading profitably, the review highlighted some factors – such as the business's rapid growth and group structure – that suggested a performance bond could be considered.

A Performance Bond Risk Assessment had been carried out by the Head of Estates & Operations and the Projects Officer. This concluded that the contractor had a strong track record on similar projects and that requiring a bond at this stage could delay the programme and lead to significant additional costs.

Alternative financial safeguards would instead be put in place, including ongoing financial monitoring, independent project oversight, verified staged payments, and controls to secure ownership of materials.

On this basis, the Members agreed not to require a performance bond for the contract; but that the future use of assurance bonds should be considered within the Council's Financial Regulations and Procurement Policy.

The Town Clerk's confidential report also included an update from WODC on the planned improvements at Springfield Oval and agreed in principle that the Town Council should consider assuming responsibility for both the freehold transfer and the project management to ensure successful delivery of the Section 106-funded project.

Finally, Members were informed that the review of the in-house ground's maintenance service had been unavoidably delayed, and they noted the earlier updates provided on property budgets and green initiatives.

Resolved:

1. That, the confidential report be noted and,
2. That, the update on negotiations on the level of rent and insurance at the Leys Hub Development be approved and,
3. That, the request from Witney Lawn Tennis Club to offset the costs incurred for recent maintenance works undertaken by the Club against its rent invoice be agreed, and,
4. That, an in-principle agreement be given to managing the development of the Springfield Oval open space and accepting the freehold transfer, subject to a formal request from WODC and,
5. That, £50,000 should be included in the 2026/27 budget for green initiatives for the Council's property portfolio.

The RFO left the meeting at 9:18pm.

F701 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE - WITNEY BOUNDARY REVIEW

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

Members welcomed the report and reaffirmed the importance of progressing a Community Governance Review, particularly in light of the policies and strategies currently emerging from West Oxfordshire District Council. The Committee agreed to convene a Task and Finish Group meeting and to submit a further written request to the District Council in December.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Council makes a further formal request to West Oxfordshire District Council for a Community Governance Review and,
3. That, a meeting of the Community Governance Review task and finish group be held in December.

Cllr G Meadows left the meeting at 9:20pm as she was not a Member of the Personnel Sub-Committee.

F702 STAFFING MATTERS

The Committee received the minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee meeting held on 18 November 2025.

Resolved:

That, the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting held on 18 November 2025, and the recommendations contained therein be approved.

The meeting closed at: 9.22 pm

Chair