

**MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 5 January 2026

At 7.00 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor A Bailey (Chair)

Councillors:	O Collins	R Crouch
	G Meadows	D Edwards-Hughes
	J Aitman	J Robertshaw
	D Enright	S Simpson
	R Smith	J Treloar
	A Mubin	
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
	Caitlin Head	Finance Apprentice
Others:	None	

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Newcombe, G Doughty, J Doughty, T Ashby & D Temple.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

As Members would discuss the Council's Budget, the Mayor highlighted the possibility of subjects or organisations becoming a topic of discussion. Therefore, Cllr O Collins declared a non-pecuniary interest as he was a non-paid Director of West Oxfordshire Community Transport who were currently a recipient of an annual grant awarded by the Council.

There were no other declarations from Members or Officers.

3 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

4 OCC CONSULTATION - PROPOSALS TO IMPROVE OXFORDSHIRE'S FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

The Council considered the draft response to the proposals to improve Oxfordshire's Fire & Rescue Service.

Members welcomed the draft which had been prepared based on the outcome of their discussions on 8 December 2025. It was agreed that a figure be included in the response to signify the estimated number of properties being considered in the proposed large-scale housing developments.

Additionally, it was agreed that the support the Fire & Rescue Service provided to the town in respect non-fire activities be acknowledged, particularly the support in times of flooding.

These amendments were unanimously agreed.

Resolved:

That, the draft response be submitted with the inclusion of the additional amendments.

5 **COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS & REPRESENTATION ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS**

The Council considered the appointments to “The Community Trust” to be created for the management of the Windrush Place Pavillion & Pitches.

Three appointments were required based on a set criterion previously agreed.

- A West Witney Ward Member - It was proposed Cllr G Doughty be appointed.
- A Member of the Parks & Recreation Committee – It was proposed that Cllr J Aitman be appointed.
- A Member of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee – It was proposed that Cllr R Crouch be appointed.

There being no other nominations the proposed appointments were unanimously agreed.

Resolved:

That, Cllrs Geoff Doughty, Joy Aitman & Rachel Crouch be appointed as the Councils representative trustees on the “The Community Trust”.

6 **COUNCIL BUDGET: REVISED BUDGET 2025/26 AND ESTIMATES 2026/27**

The Council received and considered a presentation from the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), together with his verbal explanation, which summarised the budget-setting process of the Council to date.

The presentation provided a summary of the current financial outlook for the Council and set out three draft proposals for funding the budget for 2026/27. These proposals were based on the outcomes of discussions from the previous cycle of Committee meetings, during which each Committee had outlined its anticipated requirements.

Members were advised of several factors outside of the Council’s control which could impact future financial planning, including increases to the Council’s insurance long term agreement, geopolitical events, and changes to national and international policy.

Members received an update on the progress of the West Witney Projects and were informed of the potential options available should the overall project come in under the initial budget. The

Council was pleased to hear of the work being undertaken by Officers to monitor expenditure closely and to identify and deliver cost savings.

The Council also heard of the continued diligent work of Officers to trim and reduce costs where possible across all other areas of the Council's spending. An explanation was provided on the purpose of earmarked reserve accounts, details of which were provided at the meeting, and the options available for their utilisation to enable spending in other priority areas. The RFO emphasised that decisions to remove or amend budget lines were matters for the Council, rather than for the RFO.

The Chair thanked the RFO for his presentation, a sentiment echoed by other Members. A lengthy discussion followed with all Members who wished to speak being given the opportunity to do so.

Members discussed the potential impact of different levels of increase to the precept. It was noted that while some Members expressed a desire for a 0% rise above inflation, there was also concern that failing to increase the precept at this stage could result in compounded and more significant increases in later years.

Members were informed that Café 1863 turnover had increased by approximately 18%; however, it was recognised that future increases were likely to be more modest as daytime trade in particular, was nearing capacity. Reference was made to the business plan, including potential ideas to protect and grow alcohol sales.

During the discussion, a request was made by a Member for further information to enable fuller consideration prior to a final decision being taken. The Mayor highlighted the significant work and achievements delivered by the Council during 2025 and suggested that the budget-setting process presented an opportunity to promote these successes to residents.

In concluding the discussion, the RFO summarised that he had taken the overall steer from Members that a Council Tax increase should sit between inflation (using the most appropriate measure) and 5%.

It became clear that the majority of Members favoured either option two or three of the presented budget proposals. It was therefore agreed that these two options, which differed by £2.20 over the course of the year for a Band D property, be explored further by the RFO.

The Council agreed that the decision to formally set the level of increase to the precept would be made at an Extraordinary Council Meeting to be held on 2 February 2026.

Resolved:

1. That the Responsible Financial Officer refine the budget calculations to reflect an increase in the Council's precept for the financial year 2026/27, resulting in an increase of approximately £8 to £10 for a Band D property; and,
2. That a final decision on the level of precept be made at the Extraordinary Council Meeting scheduled for 2 February 2026.

The meeting closed at: 8.48 pm

Chair