
Agenda Item:	Terms of Reference
Meeting Date:	Monday, 22 nd June 2026
Contact Officer:	Deputy Town Clerk

The purpose of this report is for Members to review and recommend terms of reference for the Committee for the forthcoming municipal year.

Background

At the Annual Council Meeting (ACM) held on 6th May 2026, it was resolved that terms of reference for each Committee would be reviewed at each meeting in the current meeting cycle.

Current Situation

The current terms of reference for this Committee are:

Overall Purpose

To ensure that the Council's finances, staffing, statutory obligations, and governance are managed effectively and in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements, while supporting the strategic direction and service delivery of the Council.

1. Policy

- a) To consider, keep under review and make recommendations to the Council as appropriate:
 - The Council's strategic objectives and priorities.
 - All major issues of national and local policy affecting the town, including new government legislation.
 - Council policies.
 - The development of existing and introduction of new services, including grounds maintenance.
 - Relationships with West Oxfordshire District Council, Oxfordshire County Council, other public bodies, and outside organisations.
- b) To consider the resources available to meet the Council's objectives in terms of land, property, finance, and manpower and to advise other committees and the Council as required.
- c) Within all decision-making, ensure that the green environment and biodiversity of public open spaces is protected and enhanced in line with the Council's Climate Emergency aspirations.
- d) To oversee and ensure social value outcomes are considered in policy development.

2. Governance

- e) Oversee Council administration, legal compliance, and be responsible to the Council for reviewing the effectiveness and efficiency of all services.
- f) Review and monitor:
 - Council corporate and financial risk register, insurance, and legal matters.
 - Data protection, FOI, and related statutory duties.
 - Committee structures and delegated responsibilities.
 - Banking arrangements
- g) To consider community governance matters including elections and electoral arrangements, town boundaries, and the impact of future changes to Local Government structure and devolution.
- h) Overall management of Council assets (including land), records, and operational premises (including those under other committees).
- i) To oversee and approve tendering and purchasing arrangements ensuring compliance with the Council's Financial Regulations and Procurement Act 2023.
- j) Provide oversight of contracts, major capital projects and investment properties including those leased to the Council.
- k) Hold overall responsibility for employment matters via the personnel sub-committee.
- l) Consider matters affecting Members, including Member allowances (if appropriate) and the annual calendar of meetings.
- m) To receive reports from the internal and external auditors, review actions required and ensure effective internal controls.
- n) To appoint the Council's independent Internal Auditor.

3. Finance

- o) Oversee the Council's finances (including investments), ensuring legal and regulatory compliance
- p) Prepare and recommend the annual budget and precept for approval by Council.
- q) Review and approve:
 - Estimates of income and expenditure from all committees.
 - Fees, charges, and funding levels.
 - Annual Governance & Accountability Return, and financial statements.
- r) To consider and approve grant applications in accordance with adopted policy, and to recommend larger or exceptional grants to Full Council
- s) To act as the Council's Audit Committee and to
 - Review and authorise Council payments in accordance with Financial Regulations.
 - Monitor budgeted vs actual income/expenditure.
 - Act as a financial scrutiny panel.
- t) Approve or recommend additional expenditure beyond approved limits.
- u) Maintain oversight of financial systems, controls, and reporting.
- v) To develop and monitor the Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan and Capital Programme

Committee Membership & Quorum

- 6 Councillors (made up of the Chairs of the standing Committees) plus the Leader and Town Mayor (ex officio).
- Quorum: 4 Members.
- The Committee may make recommendations to Full Council on any matter within its remit.

It was further agreed at the Annual Council Meeting that the Terms of Reference of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee, Personnel Sub-Committee, and the Disciplinary & Grievance Panel should be reviewed to ensure consistency and alignment in relation to staffing and human resources matters (Minute No. 228 refers).

Due to time constraints, it has not been possible to complete a review of term (k) prior to this meeting. The Committee is therefore requested to consider whether it wishes to make any amendments to the remaining Terms of Reference for the current municipal year and defer consideration of term (k) to a future meeting to allow sufficient time for the review.

Corporate Strategy

The Council's Strategic Plan 2025–29 sets out the Council's long-term priorities and direction, supporting its mission to 'make Witney a great place to live, work and visit.' This report contributes to the delivery of the following strategic pillar of the plan:

1. A Forward Looking Town Council

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality – As the Committee with oversight on policy and employment matters, the Committee are reminded that Council decisions are subject to relevant legislation.
- b) Biodiversity – no direct implications.
- c) Crime & Disorder - no direct implications.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – no direct implications

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability. Without clear terms of reference, Council committees risk role confusion, weak accountability, legal challenges, inefficient decision-making, and poor alignment with Council objectives. Clear and regularly reviewed terms of reference are essential for accountable, transparent, and effective committee operations.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

Financial implications

- The work of the Committee is funded from pre-defined budgets.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and;

1. Review the terms of reference; and
2. Consider any changes to the terms of reference; and recommend such changes be made to Full Council on 13th July 2026.