

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

Held on Monday, 28 September 2026

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

Present:

Councillor R Smith (Chair)

Councillors:	T Ashby G Doughty J Aitman	J Doughty R Crouch
Officers:	Sharon Groth Nigel Warner Adam Cook Thomas Davies	Town Clerk Responsible Financial Officer Project Officer Deputy Venue & Events Officer
Others:	Two members of the public.	

F468 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received.

F469 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

F470 MINUTES

The minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 22 June 2026 were received.

F317 – Members were advised an outstanding matter relating to the Terms of Reference would be brought forward in due course.

F321 – Members were advised that the External Auditor's Report and Certificate for 2025/26 had been received since publication of the agenda and no matters had been raised affecting the auditor's opinion.

Resolved:

1. That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 22 June 2026 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

F471 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The Committee received representations from Witney Music Festival under agenda item 15.

Members received thanks and a presentation on the success of the festival, including its positive contribution to the local economy, support for local artists and community organisations, and the challenges currently facing the events sector. Members discussed opportunities for future development, including sponsorship and audience growth and addressed concerns relating to noise.

The Chair thanked the representatives for their presentation.

The Committee reconvened.

F472 GRANTS & SUBSIDISED LETTINGS (D)

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

Members considered the report and supporting update as part of the Council's ongoing review of the festival's operation, funding arrangements and wider impact. In undertaking its due diligence, the Committee noted the information provided in relation to financial performance, community engagement, business benefits and the contribution the festival makes to visitor footfall and the local economy.

Members discussed the festival's role in supporting the cultural life of the town and considered a request for an increase in annual funding, together with the potential for a longer-term funding commitment.

In considering the proposal, Members reviewed the implications of entering into a multi-year funding agreement, including the Council's financial commitments, value for money considerations and the potential for similar events to be delivered by alternative organisers in the future.

Recommended:

1. That, the report provided by Witney Music Festival be noted and,
2. That, Witney Music Festival be awarded £12,500 annually from 2027, for a three-year term.

The Venue & Events Officer and both members of the public left the meeting at 6:37pm

F473 CEMETERY REGULATIONS

The Committee received revised Cemetery Regulations as recommended for approval by the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee at its meeting on 14 September 2026.

Members welcomed the work undertaken in reviewing and updating the regulations.

Resolved:

That, the revised Cemetery Regulations, as presented, be readopted by the Town Council.

F474 COMMUNITY ASSET ACQUISITION & MANAGEMENT POLICY

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk/C.E.O with an accompanying Community Asset Acquisition & Management Policy.

Members welcomed the framework provided by the policy and proposed a minor amendment to broaden its scope to include changes to the management arrangements of existing Council assets that are leased to third parties and subsequently returned to the Council during or at the end of the lease term. The Town Clerk clarified that the termination of leases would be governed by the relevant legal framework, but that she could incorporate a separate section into the policy to address the management of assets returned to the Council.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Community Asset Acquisition and Management Policy, together with the supporting Decision Framework, be recommended to Council for approval, subject to minor amendments and,
3. That, delegated authority be granted to the Town Clerk to implement the agreed amendments and,
4. That, the updated Policy and Decision Framework be adopted by Council at its meeting on 12 October 2026.

F475 PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

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

Members noted the reports and thanked officers for the quality of the information provided. It was further requested that a timetable be prepared by the RFO and circulated to Members wishing to submit alternative budget proposals as part of the forthcoming budget-setting process.

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 May 2026	£529,879.87	General CB 1
Cheques, DDs, BACs and Standing Orders May 2026	£14,968.82	Imprest CB 2
DDs, ELPs and Standing Orders June 2026	£255,617.41	General CB 1
Cheques, DDs and Standing Orders June 2026	£11,354.12	Imprest CB 2

DDs, ELPs and Standing Orders July 2026	£285,197.73	General CB 1
Cheques, DDs and Standing Orders July 2026	£16,351.36	Imprest CB 2
DDs, ELPs and Standing Orders August 2026	£210,319.73	General CB 1
Cheques, DDs and Standing Orders August 2026	£11,353.00	Imprest CB 2

F476 GRANT MONITORING - YOUTH SERVICES AWARDS 2025

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk, highlighting the work of those awarded youth services grants in 2025, with accompanying documents.

The monitoring highlighted the Council's internal financial controls and Members were pleased to see the results of the funding and how it had made a positive impact on young people in the community.

As part of the due diligence governing the awarding of the grants, Members were satisfied that the majority of organisations had appropriately accounted for the use of grant funding received. Concern was expressed regarding the absence of a monitoring report from Witney Food Revolution.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and accompanying documents be noted and,
2. That, Witney Food Revolution be requested to provide the outstanding information in accordance with the Council's Grant Aid Policy.

Cllr J Aitman left the meeting at 6:50pm to attend another meeting.

F477 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the decision taken by West Oxfordshire District Council to undertake a Community Governance Review.

Members welcomed the decision and the opportunity to consider future parish boundaries, agreeing that the Community Governance working party should be convened to lead the Council's response.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,

2. That, Cllr G Doughty be co-opted onto the Community Governance Working Party at the next Full Council meeting, ensuring representation from each town council ward and,
3. That, a meeting of the Community Governance Working Party be arranged at the earliest opportunity and,
4. That, authority be delegated to the Working Party to formulate and submit responses on behalf of the Council as required.

F478 NALC LOCAL COUNCIL AWARD SCHEME - GOLD AWARD

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the Council's aspiration to seek gold status in the National Association of Local Council's Award Scheme.

Members welcomed the progress made to date and noted that work would continue towards submission of an application in early 2027.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

F479 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 noted the Council's current financial position and welcomed the additional information provided on operational income and expenditure. The Committee also reviewed the performance of the Council's investments and noted the positive returns being achieved.

The bar stock reports were received and noted by the Committee. A Member congratulated the Bar Manager and her staff on the efficient running of the Council's bars, as evidenced by the reports.

The Committee considered the potential project and growth items for the 2027/28 budget appended to the RFO's report. The Project Officer advised that there was insufficient space within the existing skate park to safely accommodate an additional rail. A Member highlighted that the S1A bus service now served Range Road and requested that provision be made in the budget to replace the two old and damaged bus shelters.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the report and the management accounts of the Policy, Governance and Finance Committee for the period 1st April to 31st July 2026 be approved and,
3. That, the investment statement for August 2026 be noted and,
4. That, the bar stocktake report for the period to 8th July 2026 be noted and,
5. That, the updates relating to business risk assessments and procurement policy & procedures be noted and,
6. That, the 2027-28 budget request for funding towards a Skate Park Rail be removed as there was no room for it and,
7. That, a budget be added for replacement bus shelters (two) at Range Road.

F480 BUDGET PARAMETERS 2027-28

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (R.F.O) outlining suggested parameters for the 2027-28 budget.

Members discussed a range of emerging budget pressures and project proposals and reviewed potential additions to future budgets. Particular consideration was given to community infrastructure projects, previously identified Council priorities, and the proposed use of online consultation to help inform future community spending priorities.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the report and the budget parameters contained therein be approved and,
3. That, the budget consultation for 2027-28 be noted.

F481 FINANCIAL MATTERS REFERRED FROM SPENDING COMMITTEES

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

Members noted the budget implications for the current and future financial years and reviewed a request for £1,500 to fund noticeboards within the Council's parks from the Stronger Communities Committee. Following consideration, Members agreed that the proposal should not be taken forward.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the financial recommendations arising from the spending Committees be approved.

F482 GRANTS & SUBSIDISED LETTINGS

The Committee received and considered the joint report of the Deputy Town Clerk and R.F.O concerning the allocation of grant funding by the Council.

Members reviewed each application against the Council's grant criteria and considered the extent to which the proposed activities would benefit residents of Witney. It was noted that no discretionary grants had been awarded in June; consequently, this represented the second round of grant funding allocations in the current financial year.

With regard to subsidised lettings, Members noted that awards to The Station, Witney Sports & Social Club and WOXPAP had previously been approved. Members were advised that the Burwell Seniors Christmas Party would no longer be taking place. A request for additional subsidised sessions at the Corn Exchange for The Station was not approved; however, Members agreed to award subsidised lettings to OCVA.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, subsidised letting request be approved for OCVA (£147) and,

3. That, the subsidised letting for the sum of £441 to Bright Futures be noted but a request for a further six-week session be declined and,
4. That, subsidised lettings to WOXPAP (£1,648) and Witney Sports & Social Club (£129) be noted, having already been agreed earlier in the year and,
5. That, the following discretionary grants be awarded under the General Power of Competence and recipients be asked to acknowledge the Council's financial contribution in their promotional literature:
 - Cotswold Rivers Trust - £740
 - Ducklington Sports Club - £1,000
 - Witney Mills Cricket Club - £1,700
 - Witney Congregational Church - £500
 - Little Oak Preschool - £500
 - Parent SENSE Witney - £200
 - Clean Slate - £200
6. That, a grant request from Sounds of Support be declined as the application did not clearly demonstrate the benefit for Witney residents and the event was supporting a national charity.

F483 SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 5(W)

Resolved:

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

F484 IT PROVISION

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

Members discussed the ongoing provision of IT support services, cyber security arrangements, future hardware requirements and the further development of online systems. Consideration was also given to the potential replacement of the committee management system and future arrangements for councillor devices; however, it was noted that further work and evaluation would be required before any recommendations could be brought forward.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the existing IT support contract be extended for a further year and,
3. That, officers progress Cyber Essentials accreditation and associated cyber security measures and,
4. That, further work be undertaken regarding future committee management software and councillor device provision before final decisions are made with a report to the next meeting.

F485 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Resolved:

That in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admissions 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.

F486 **WEST WITNEY PROJECTS UPDATE**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report and accompanying verbal update of the Project Officer concerning this project.

Members noted the updates provided by officers regarding the project, including the current position in relation to the contract and the completion of the Clubhouse. The Committee discussed electricity supply arrangements and the next steps to be considered with the Council's Contract Administrator ahead of a Council resolution. Members also considered communication arrangements and how best to provide updates on the current situation, including the use of external professional advice and support where appropriate.

Resolved:

1. That, the confidential report and verbal updates be noted and,
2. That, project status communications are considered by officers.

F487 **PROPERTY, LEGAL & INSURANCE MATTERS**

Members received and noted the confidential report and updates on current property, legal and insurance matters.

In relation to Springfield Oval, Members noted that WODC had completed the public consultation, with no representations received, and had instructed its solicitors to progress the freehold transfer. The Project Officer would liaise with residents and Ward Members to develop the proposed play area and open space improvements, mindful of the Section 106 funding deadline of 3 July 2027.

Members noted that the proposed transfer of the former public conveniences at The Leys remained subject to clarification of the registered title by WODC's legal team. Potential future uses and indicative costings would be explored once the legal position was clear and officer capacity allowed. Updates were also received on the future governance and lease arrangements for West Witney Sports & Social Club and a verge at Thorney Leys.

The Project Officer provided a verbal update on parking restrictions at The Leys, highlighting difficulties in engaging with OCC Officers to progress the application for a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO). A Member offered to raise the matter with the relevant Director at OCC.

Members also received updates on current insurance matters and were advised that the insurance claim settlement would fund the majority of the cost of replacing the damaged bus shelter at Valence Crescent.

Resolved:

1. That, the confidential report be noted and
2. That, additional funds of £1,600 to upgrade the replacement bus shelter at Valence Crescent to a sedum roof shelter be taken from an infrastructure earmarked reserve.

F488 STAFFING MATTERS

The Committee received the minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee meetings held on 1 July, 29 July, 20 August and 17 September which had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Resolved:

That, the confidential minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meetings held on 1 July, 29 July, 20 August and 17 September, and the recommendations contained therein be approved.

F489 LITTER BIN POLICY

The Committee received an updated Litter Bin Policy as recommended for approval by the Stronger Communities Committee at its meeting on 21 September 2026.

Resolved:

That, the Litter Bin Policy, as presented, be readopted by the Town Council.

The meeting closed at: 8.45 pm

Chair