

AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Wednesday, 11 March 2026 commencing at 1.05 pm and finishing at 2.40 pm.

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Roz Smith – in the Chair

Councillor Ron Batstone
Councillor James Fry
Councillor David Hingley
Councillor Gavin McLauchlan
Councillor Leigh Rawlins

Non-voting Members: Kate Cartwright
Paul McGinn

Other Members: Councillor David Henwood for Councillor Ted Fenton

Officers/others in attendance:

Whole of meeting: Sarah Cox, Chief Internal Auditor
Jack Nicholson, Democratic Services Officer
Ella Stevens, Chief Accountant
Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance

Part of meeting:

Agenda Item

6 Declan Brolly, Counter Fraud Team Managers
9 Kalthiemah Abrahams, Ernst and Young (EY) LLP
Simon Mathers, EY LLP

The Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and decided as set out below. Except as insofar as otherwise specified, the reasons for the decisions are contained in the agenda and reports, copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes.

11/26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

Councillors Andrew Crichton, Ted Fenton, and John Shiri sent their apologies for absence.

Councillor Ted Fenton was represented by Councillor David Henwood.

The Deputy Chief Executive (and Section 151 Officer) and Strategic Financing and Investment Manager also sent their apologies for absence. The Head of Corporate Finance was present on their behalf.

12/26 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

(Agenda No. 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

13/26 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

Members asked for reference to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) expenditure with respect to 'future balances in the county fund in March 2028' (p. 12).

Subject to making the one amendment, RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2026 as an accurate record of proceedings.

14/26 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda No. 4)

There were none.

15/26 ANNUAL REPORT OF AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

(Agenda No. 5)

The Chief Internal Auditor introduced the report.

Members noted that the Chief Internal Auditor would add in the Code of Corporate Governance to the table outlining the key activities of the Committee.

In response to a question, officers clarified that the audit backlog was originally caused by national issues with the valuation of infrastructure assets; the on-going effect meant that the Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 was disclaimed by EY LLP.

RESOLVED to approve the report for presentation to Council by the Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee.

16/26 COUNTER FRAUD UPDATE

(Agenda No. 6)

The Chief Internal Auditor introduced the report.

Members noted that the Audit Working Group would have a Counter Fraud Update.

Members also noted that the Counter Fraud Annual Activity Report would give data pertaining to activity over the last few years for comparison with that year's figures. They asked for data pertaining to the number of applications for Blue Badges in Oxford City since the introduction of the congestion charge.

Members asked about the enforcement exercises with respect to Blue Badges. The Counter Fraud Team Manager said that his team covered the entire County, especially busy areas, and responded to people identifying their potential misuse.

RESOLVED to note the summary of activity against the Counter Fraud Plan for 2025/26.

17/26 TREASURY MANAGEMENT Q3 PERFORMANCE REPORT 2025/26

(Agenda No. 7)

The Head of Corporate Finance introduced the report and recommended that members also read the Treasury Management Q3 Performance Report 2025-26 that was due to be considered by Cabinet on 17 March.

Members asked about Annex 4 - Fixed term deposits held at 31 December 2025 and noted that balances were small where funding was not required.

ACTION

The Head of Corporate Finance said that she would get the Strategic Financing and Investment Manager to answer a question as to precise returns and variation in interest rates on fixed term deposits outlined in Annex 4.

RESOLVED to note the council's treasury management activity for the first three quarters of 2025/26

18/26 ACCOUNTING POLICIES 2025/26

(Agenda No. 8)

The Chief Accountant introduced the report.

Members noted the implications of His Majesty's Treasury Thematic Review of Non-investment Asset Valuation for Financial Reporting Purposes for local authorities revaluating over a period of five years; the Council would continue revaluating every three years for 2025/26

RESOLVED to:

- a) **endorse the proposed timetable for the production of the draft Statement of Accounts for 2025/26 and**
- b) **ratify the accounting policies for 2025/26 as approved by the Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer).**

19/26 ERNST & YOUNG UPDATE (VERBAL UPDATE)

(Agenda No. 9)

The external auditors updated members as follows.

- The statutory backstop for completion of local government audits had moved from the end of February to the end of January in 2026.
- They would likely prioritise the Council in 2026-27 to move to an unqualified opinion on the accounts
- More work would be required on transactions in the 2022-23 financial year.

Members asked about the cost of work on transactions from 2022-23 and noted that:

- The amount of work required would be kept to a minimum and determined through the risk assessment process.
- The objective would be to get the necessary assurance of the split between the usable and unusable reserves of the Council.

RESOLVED to note Ernst & Young's verbal update.

20/26 OFFICERS' CODE OF CONDUCT (CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT)

(Agenda No. 10)

The Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer introduced the report.

Members asked whether the Code of Conduct applied to officers who left the Council to work for a contractor and noted that there were no restrictive covenants as such but that former officers were barred from using knowledge and data acquired in the course of their duties with any future employer.

Members asked if there would be consequences for officers expressing reprehensible views at any time and noted that they were forbidden from expressing views that were either contrary to Council policies or were not in keeping with its values.

Members also asked about the Code insofar as it applied to agency workers and contractors working for or on behalf of the Council and noted that third party companies would have their own policies but that the Council would expect them to be in keeping with the Council's own values too.

Members asked for the Nolan Principles of Standards in Public Life to be referred to in the Code of Conduct before its submission to Council.

RESOLVED to:

- a) approve the revised Officers' Code of Conduct and**
- b) recommend to Council to amend the Constitution to include the revised Officers' Code of Conduct in Part 9.6.**

21/26 UPDATES ON THE CONSTITUTION WORKING GROUP

(Agenda No. 11)

The Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer introduced the report and corrected the date in paragraph 4; the Constitution Working Group met on 2 February, whereas the meeting on 26 February was for officers only.

RESOLVED to note progress with the changes to the Council's constitution, which will be reported to Council on 30 June 2026.

22/26 CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

(Agenda No. 12)

Members asked about the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 and noted that it was available on the government website.

Members thanked Senior Governance Officer Sarah Smith specifically for the report.

Members asked about areas for improvement and noted that this would feature in the Annual Governance Statement Action Plan.

Members recommended that the Code of Corporate Governance be circulated to all members of the Council.

RESOLVED to approve the Oxfordshire Code of Corporate Governance.

23/26 ELECTORAL FEES AND CHARGES APRIL 2026/27

(Agenda No. 13)

The Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer introduced the report.

Members asked about the additional payments officers received for work either as Returning or Deputy Returning Officers. The Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer declared an interest because she had received such payment. However, members noted that in accordance with the Council's Pay Policy, duties carried out during an election were not part of any contract of employment within the Council, which was why payment was made.

RESOLVED to note the Scale of Election Expenses for the financial year 2026/27, as shown in Annex 1, in the event of the election of County Councillors or any other poll associated with the County Council during the 2026/27 financial year.

24/26 AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

(Agenda No. 14)

Members noted the following changes:

- The Internal Audit Charter would be brought forward to 20 May 2026
- Risk Management would be considered on 20 May and 16 September only

Members reiterated that they would like to see review of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) as it progressed. The Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer agreed to consider the best way to take this forward to avoid duplication and to comply with the Committee's Terms of Reference.

Members noted review of future balances in the county fund in March 2028, especially with respect to SEND, would be considered by the Cabinet

RESOLVED to note the Committee Work Programme to November 2026

..... in the Chair

Date of signing