



To: **Members of the Audit & Governance Committee**

***Notice of a Meeting of the Audit & Governance
Committee***

Wednesday, 11 March 2026 at 1.00 pm

Room 2&3 - County Hall, New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND

If you wish to view proceedings, please click on this [Live Stream Link](#)
Please note, that will not allow you to participate in the meeting.

Martin Reeves
Chief Executive

Committee Officers: Committee Services
Email: committees.democraticservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Membership

Chair – Councillor Roz Smith
Deputy Chair - Councillor John Shiri

Councillors

Ron Batstone
Andrew Crichton
Ted Fenton

James Fry
David Hingley
Gavin McLauchlan

Leigh Rawlins

Co-optee

Kate Cartwright
Paul McGinn

Notes:

- ***Date of next meeting: 20 May 2026***

AGENDA

- 1. Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments**
- 2. Declaration of Interests - see guidance note**
- 3. Minutes (Pages 11 - 14)**

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2026 and to receive information arising from them.

4. Petitions and Public Address

Members of the public who wish to speak on an item on the agenda at this meeting, or present a petition, can attend the meeting in person or 'virtually' through an online connection.

Requests to present a petition must be submitted no later than 9am ten working days before the meeting.

Requests to speak must be submitted no later than 9am three working days before the meeting.

Requests should be submitted to committeesdemocraticservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk

If you are speaking 'virtually', you may submit a written statement of your presentation to ensure that if the technology fails, then your views can still be taken into account. A written copy of your statement can be provided no later than 9am on the day of the meeting. Written submissions should be no longer than 1 A4 sheet.

5. Annual Report of Audit & Governance Committee (Pages 15 - 26)

Report by Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer)

In accordance with CIPFA (The Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy) Audit Committee Guidelines for Local Authorities 2022, it is recommended practice for an annual public report to be produced and reported to Council demonstrating how the committee has discharged its responsibilities.

The Audit & Governance Committee is RECOMMENDED to review the draft report, agree any amendments and finalise in preparation for presentation to Council by the Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee.

6. Counter Fraud Update (Pages 27 - 36)

Report by Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer)

This report presents a summary of activity against the Counter Fraud Plan for 2025/26, presented to the July 2025 Audit & Governance committee meeting. The Counter Fraud plan supports the Council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy by ensuring that the Council has proportionate and effective resources and controls in place to prevent and detect fraud as well as investigate those matters that do arise.

The Committee is RECOMMENDED to note the summary of activity against the Counter Fraud Plan for 2025/26.

7. Treasury Management Q3 Performance Report 2025/26 (Pages 37 - 50)

Report by Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer)

Treasury management is defined as: "The management of the organisation's borrowing, investments and cash flows, including its banking, money market and capital market transactions, the effective control of the risks associated with those activities, and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks."

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA's) 'Code of Practice on Treasury Management 2021' requires that committee to which some treasury management responsibilities are delegated, will receive regular monitoring reports on treasury management activities and risks. This report is the second for the 2025/26 financial year and sets out the position at 31 December 2025.

Throughout this report, the performance for the first three quarters of the year to December 2025 is measured against the budget agreed by Council in February 2025.

As at 31 December 2025, the council's outstanding debt totalled £265m and the average rate of interest paid on long-term debt during the 6 months was 4.41%. No new external borrowing was raised during the first half of the year, whilst £2m of maturing Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) and £5m of LOBO loans, were repaid. The council's forecast debt financing position for 2025/26 is shown in Annex 1.

The [Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26](#) agreed in February 2025 assumed an average base rate of 4.00%.

The average daily balance of temporary surplus cash invested in-house was expected to be £303m in 2025/26, with an average in-house return on new and existing deposits of 3.25%.

During the nine months to 31 December 2025 the council achieved an average in-house return of 4.51% on average cash balances of £419.276m, producing gross interest receivable of £14.248m. In relation to external funds, the return for the nine months was £3.108m, bringing total investment income to £17.356m. This compares to budgeted investment income of £10.351m, giving a net overachievement of £7.215m.

At 31 December 2025, the council's investment portfolio totalled £427.726m. This comprised £298.500m of fixed term deposits, £39.028m at short term notice in money market funds and £90.198m in pooled funds with a variable net asset value. Annex 4 provides an analysis of the investment portfolio at 31 December 2025.

The Committee is RECOMMENDED to note the council's treasury management activity for the first three quarters of 2025/26.

8. Accounting Policies 2025/26 (Pages 51 - 74)

Report by the Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)

This report sets out the approach taken to the preparation of the 2025/26 Statement of Accounts including:

- The proposed timetable for the publication and public inspection of the Statement of Accounts for 2025/26.
- Changes to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom (the Code) for 2025/26.
- The approved Significant Accounting Policies which describe how the Council has interpreted and applied the Code and form the basis of preparation of the accounts.

The Committee is RECOMMENDED 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) and included as an annex to this report.**

9. Ernst & Young Update (Verbal Update)

To receive a verbal update from external auditors at Ernst & Young LLP, prior to submission of written reports for year ending 31 March 2026 at the next meeting.

10. Officers' Code of Conduct (Constitutional Amendment) (Pages 75 - 98)

Report by Director of Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer

To strengthen internal governance and effectively manage risk, standards and employer-employee expectations, it is good practice for local authorities to maintain an up-to-date Officers' Code of Conduct (Code). The purpose of the Code is to establish clear standards of ethical and professional behaviour, promote integrity and accountability, maintain public confidence, and provide guidance to those working for or on behalf of the council in the discharge of their duties.

A comprehensive review of the Code was undertaken by the Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer, taking into consideration best practice, and benchmarking against other authorities. The review identified and recommended substantial amendments to ensure the Code reflects current council values, working practices and organisational requirements.

The Committee is RECOMMENDED 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.**

11. Updates on the Constitution Working Group (Pages 99 - 102)

Report by Director of Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer

Following the re-establishment of the Constitution Working Group (CWG), two sessions have been held to discuss changes and potential changes to the Constitution. Meetings of CWG were held on 2 February and 6 March 2026, respectively. This report provides an update with progress.

The Committee is RECOMMENDED to:

- a) Note progress with the changes to the Council's constitution, which will be reported to Council on 30 June 2026 and**
- b) Comment as it sees fit.**

12. Code of Corporate Governance (Pages 103 - 120)

Report by Director of Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer

In 2016 CIPFA & SOLACE produced guidance and framework with the identified principles that should underpin the governance of each local authority, and a structured approach to assist individual authorities to achieve good governance, "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework 2016 Edition."

The latest guidance issued by CIPFA and Solace in May 2025 addresses the annual evaluation of governance and internal controls, as well as the production of an annual governance statement (AGS). Serving as an addendum to "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework," this guidance is applicable to UK local government statements from 2025/26 onwards.

The addendum also supports the development of a local code of governance, ensuring that authorities establish all the essential arrangements necessary to uphold the principles of good governance. It emphasises the importance of conducting a comprehensive review, underpinned by a range of assurances, as this is vital for forming a robust overall assessment. Authorities must evaluate whether their governance arrangements remain fit for purpose and identify any significant areas in need of improvement.

In addition, the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) should adopt a forward looking approach, setting out how governance structures may need to adapt to meet the authority's future requirements.

The Council's Code of Corporate Governance has been shaped in accordance with this guidance.

The Framework encourages local authorities to assess their governance structures against seven core principles by:

- a) Reviewing their existing governance arrangements in the context of the Framework;
- b) Developing and maintaining a current local code of governance, including mechanisms to ensure its ongoing application and effectiveness; and
- c) Preparing an Annual Governance Statement to publicly report on the extent of their compliance with their own code, how the effectiveness of their governance arrangements has been monitored during the year, and any intended changes for the upcoming period.

The Officer Corporate Governance Assurance Group has reviewed and updated Oxfordshire County Council's Code of Corporate Governance, which is subject to an annual review; the next review date is March 2027.

The Committee is RECOMMENDED to approve the Oxfordshire Code of Corporate Governance.

13. Electoral Fees and Charges April 2026/27 (Pages 121 - 136)

Report by Director of Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer

The County Council's Returning Officer, Martin Reeves, is responsible for the conduct of the County Council elections and by-elections. The expenditure properly incurred by the Returning Officer is paid by the Council and, as such, a scale of expenses is set as a guide for such expenditure. The scale of expenses set at Annex 1 will be applicable for any polls associated with the County Council during the 2026/27 financial year.

In accordance with the Council's practice, a review has been undertaken in consultation with the City and District Council elections officers in Oxfordshire, who assist the Returning Officer in running elections associated with the County Council.

The scale of election expenses is brought to the Audit and Governance Committee in the interests of transparency in this area of election governance.

The Committee is RECOMMENDED 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.

14. Audit & Governance Committee Work Programme (Pages 137 - 138)

The Committee is invited to note and comment on the work programme.

Close of meeting

An explanation of abbreviations and acronyms is available on request from the Chief Internal Auditor.

Councillors declaring interests

General duty

You must declare any disclosable pecuniary interests when the meeting reaches the item on the agenda headed 'Declarations of Interest' or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?

Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to your employment; sponsorship (i.e. payment for expenses incurred by you in carrying out your duties as a councillor or towards your election expenses); contracts; land in the Council's area; licenses for land in the Council's area; corporate tenancies; and securities. These declarations must be recorded in each councillor's Register of Interests which is publicly available on the Council's website.

Disclosable pecuniary interests that must be declared are not only those of the member her or himself but also those member's spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

Declaring an interest

Where any matter disclosed in your Register of Interests is being considered at a meeting, you must declare that you have an interest. You should also disclose the nature as well as the existence of the interest. If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, after having declared it at the meeting you must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Members' Code of Conduct and public perception

Even if you do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter, the Members' Code of Conduct says that a member 'must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself' and that 'you must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned'.

Members Code – Other registrable interests

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to the financial interest or wellbeing of one of your other registerable interests then you must declare an interest. You must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and you must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Wellbeing can be described as a condition of contentedness, healthiness and happiness; anything that could be said to affect a person's quality of life, either positively or negatively, is likely to affect their wellbeing.

Other registrable interests include:

- a) Any unpaid directorships

- b) Any body of which you are a member or are in a position of general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority.
- c) Any body (i) exercising functions of a public nature (ii) directed to charitable purposes or (iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union) of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management.

Members Code – Non-registrable interests

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to your financial interest or wellbeing (and does not fall under disclosable pecuniary interests), or the financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate, you must declare the interest.

Where a matter arises at a meeting which affects your own financial interest or wellbeing, a financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate or a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under other registrable interests, then you must declare the interest.

In order to determine whether you can remain in the meeting after disclosing your interest the following test should be applied:

Where a matter affects the financial interest or well-being:

- a) to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
- b) a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest.

You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation.