

## **Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 7 April 2026**

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### **Committee members present:**

Councillor Powell (Chair)

Councillor Rowley (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Azad

Councillor Corais

Councillor Jarvis

Councillor Ottino

Councillor Stares

### **Officers present for all or part of the meeting:**

Celeste Reyeslao, Scrutiny and Governance Advisor

Hannah Carmody-Brown, Committee and Member Services Officer

Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager

Malcolm Peek, Property Services Manager

Michael Woods, Major Works Project Manager

### **Apologies:**

Councillor(s) Latif, Miles, Qayyum and Taylor sent apologies.

### **118. Declarations of interest**

None.

### **119. Chair's Announcements**

The Chair reminded the Committee that this would be the final meeting of the municipal year; he thanked Committee members and officers for their work.

### **120. Minutes of the previous meeting**

The Committee resolved to **approve** the minutes of the meetings held on 10 March 2026 as a true and accurate record.

### **121. Addresses by members of the public**

None.

### **122. Councillor addresses on any item for discussion on the Scrutiny agenda**

None.

### **123. Watercourses and Ditches**

At the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 1 July 2025, the Committee requested a report setting out the Council responsibilities in relation to managing and maintaining watercourses, ditches, streams and brooks that run alongside or through land owned by the City Council.

Councillor Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford, Malcolm Peek, Property Services Manager and Michael Woods, Major Works Project Manager were present to respond to questions.

Councillor Railton introduced the report and welcomed the ongoing work of officers.

The Major Works Project Manager outlined the contents of the report, noting that it included content from across Council services.

The Chair invited questions from the Committee.

Councillor Ottino requested maps outlining the rivers and streams that the Council is responsible for and noted concern relating to the lack of progress with flood action plans for specific areas of the city.

The Major Works Project Manager committed to sharing a map in the future and, in relation to the flood action plans, explained that due to feasibility issues, alternative options are now being assessed by the environmental sustainability team on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council. The Committee understood that actions arising from this should be apparent in due course. Councillor Railton seconded these comments.

Councillor Ottino queried when the relevant reports would be received and emphasised the need for more urgency to ensure residents' homes are not flooded.

Councillor Jarvis queried what is involved with ditches surveys and what the resulting actions are, specifically whether there is a threshold for taking action on anything discovered. Councillor Jarvis also asked, in relation to brooks with blockages, what is the best route residents can you use to flag such issues and whether there is a clear plan for addressing these flood risks.

The Property Services Manager outline the ongoing work to assess and plan future preventive maintenance, of which Oxford Direct Services already deliver most. Difficulties relating to waterway ownership were also explained; the Council does not have control over many areas which are privately owned.

The Committee understood that ongoing close working with the County Council continues where funding is available. In relation to signposting the public, the Property Services Manager noting ongoing work to display information ore clearly online in relation to waterways ownership.

Councillor Rowley, following from comments from Thames Water regarding the inadequacy of drains, asked what the Council does to identify issues and works when formulating a preventative maintenance plan. Councillor Rowley also asked what would happen if a ditch in the Council's ownership was no longer adequate for drainage.

The Chair noted that currently, work has often been delivered on an ad hoc or repair basis and asked how many ad hoc repairs have been completed since the Environment Agency pulled back.

The Property Services Manager responded that these are not captured as a standalone work type by ODS. However, this would be raised with ODS to see if they would be able to provide this information going forward.

In response to the Chair's question, the Major Works Project Manager explained that it would be hard to quantify the number of ad hoc repairs given that the Environment Agency did not pull back on a defined date, but rather over a phased period of time.

Councillor Ottino queried what the expectations for ODS are in relation to litter in water areas.

The Chair also queried how the Council can be sure of the quality and nature of reactive repairs completed by ODS.

The Property Services Manager explained that ODS carry out planned maintenance, and any ad hoc tasks tend to be more reactive in nature, such as overgrowth clearance around plant works to ensure blockages are avoided. The Committee heard that this report focuses on how a more robust programme of planned preventative work can be implemented and the checks which are currently carried out by ODS; confidence was noted in the delivery of these. For any larger projects that require civil engineering, the Property Services Manager explained that ODS would facilitate these but not self-deliver them.

Councillor Ottino noted his lack of confidence that ODS are adequately removing litter from ditches or streams.

The Chair, in relation to the previous meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, also requested more clarity about when ODS would and would not retrieve litter from waterways

The Property Services Manager committed to picking this up with ODS colleagues and reporting back.

The Chair invited the Committee to consider possible recommendations.

*Councillor Corais joined the meeting during discussion of recommendations.*

**The Committee resolved to recommend to Cabinet:**

- 1. That there is greater urgency in drawing up local flood risk action plans for the identified areas, specifically but not limited to Lobelia Road and Campbell Road, as well as other high flood risk areas.**
- 2. That there is clear framework setting out:**
  - the undertaking of routine clearances and ad hoc collection**
  - relevant timelines and circumstances, including when litter can safely be removed from watercourses**
  - a list of current equipment available to complete the clearance, together with any additional equipment that would be required to enable greater levels of removal.**
- 3. That Council work with ODS to start keeping records of the number of reactive repairs being undertaken to better inform any needs for maintenance plans.**

The Chair thanked Councillor Railton, the Property Services Manager, and the Major Works Project Manager.

*Councillor Railton, the Property Services Manager, and the Major Works Project Manager left the meeting and did not return.*

**124. Review of Ward Member Budget and Community Infrastructure Levy Councillor Applications**

Cabinet, at its meeting on 15 April 2026, will consider a report to approve the decision-making route for Councillor applications for Ward Member Budget and Community Infrastructure Levy spend and approve amendments to with part 4 of the Council Constitution to reflect those arrangements.

Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager, was present to respond to questions.

The Committee and Member Services Manager introduced the report, noting that it provides an update on the decision-making route for ward member budgets and community infrastructure levy (CIL) applications. The Committee heard that the process has been formalised, and it ensures delegation is made to appropriate officers. Members were also informed that the report summarises the ongoing work of reviewing the applications process to ensure it is fit for purpose and aligned with relevant legislation.

The Chair invited questions from the Committee.

The Chair asked how decision regarding central CIL spend are reached and also requested an explanation of the process for adding to the central CIL list.

The Committee and Member Services Manager explained that, although outside the scope of this report, strategic CIL (i.e. that not allocated to member CIL budgets /parish /Neighbourhood forums or on CIL administration) is agreed as part of the wider budget process. CIL projects are discussed through the Development Board process with the Director of Planning & Regulation and the Group Finance Director agreeing on both the appropriateness of the item, and the capacity of the CIL budget to incorporate any new nominations. In response to the Chair's second question, The Committee and Member Services Manager relayed a response from officers which explained that additional requests come forward via the Development Board process where the proposal is for the strategic CIL budget, with ultimate approval via the budget process.

Councillor Stares welcomed the changes listed in the report and noted that they have been effective in streamlining the processes.

Councillor Ottino also welcomed the changes and requested clarity on when planning permission is required for ward member budget and CIL requests.

The Committee and Member Services Manager explained that the relevant form has been updated to include questions relating to the need for planning permission and location; this will ensure necessary permissions are in place before CIL is spent. The Committee were minded that due to the number of stakeholders across the city, it is not possible to give a one-size-fits-all response. In relation to ongoing costs, the Committee and Member Services Manager also explained that ward member spend cannot be used for projects which involve ongoing costs; examples were discussed. Councillor Ottino requested additional clarification of what would be classified as an ongoing spend.

The Chair also welcomed the changes set out in the report. The Chair queried the response times for applications and requested a description of the background processes involved.

In response to Councillor Ottino, the Committee and Member Services Manager outlined that anything not accounted for in an annual ongoing budget cannot be accepted, this included examples of waste bins with ongoing staffing and material costs.

In response to the Chair, the Committee and Member Services Manager explained that following the introduction of the new form, Councillors would be asked not to use the Member Enquiry Form to request quotations from ODS. The Committee heard that this is now the responsibility of officers; when the member budget form is completed, it will be passed to the relevant officers for completion on the councillors' behalf. In terms of timings, the Committee and Member Services Manager explained that an understanding of this will be developed once the form is rolled out in May, but it is hoped that the new triage process will prevent any cases from being missed.

Councillor Ottino queried whether there is a mechanism for Members to add suggestions to the strategic CIL spend plans; the Chair also queried whether this could be facilitated.

The Committee and Member Services Manager recommended that the request be placed via the Member Enquiry Form to ensure a response from the relevant officer can be obtained.

To avoid several submissions of the same query, the Chair requested that this action be taken away by the Scrutiny and Governance Advisor to follow up on behalf of the Committee.

Councillor Ottino queried how often spend requests are refused or called in.

The Committee and Member Services Manager noted that rejections are very rare and assured the Committee that officers work hard to liaise with any councillors who have made applications which are not clear or feasible. The Committee also heard that it is very rare for applications to be called in; there was no recent example. The Committee and Member Services Manager explained that there is provision within the constitution for call in of applications, and if this occurred, the application would be brought to the Committee for consideration.

The Chair requested information on what is being spent across the various wards.

The Committee and Member Services Manager explained that spend over the past 12 months are normally published after May each year. However, due to the pre-election period, the information will not be shared during this meeting; instead, Members can review their own balance in real time via their QL page.

The Chair invited the Committee to consider possible recommendations.

**The Committee resolved to recommend to Cabinet:**

- 1. That the annual pricing list of regular work also itemises the permissions required for each work in order to provide members with all, if not most, information needed to submit a complete application.**

**125. Urgent Key Decisions End of Year Update 2025-2026**

The Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 14 January 2025, requested a report summarising all urgent key decisions that have been taken in the 2025/26 municipal year.

Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager, was present to respond to questions.

The Committee and Member Services Manager introduced the report, noting that six urgent decisions had been taken over the last 12 months. The Committee were also reminded of an addendum published last week containing details of a further urgent decision taken most recently. The Committee were assured that each urgent decision is taken with the permission of the Chair in line with the urgency functions as listed in the constitution.

The Chair invited questions from the Committee.

Councillor Ottino asked the Chair if sufficient information and notice had been provided on each occasion.

The Chair confirmed that sufficient information had been provided on each occasion, and whilst haste had often been required, this was due to factors out of the Councils' control, such as government action and pressures. The Chair also noted that the current process has improved in comparison to the previous year.

Councillor Stares noted a typed error in the report; this was acknowledged.

The Chair invited the Committee to consider possible recommendations.

### **The Committee made no recommendations.**

The Chair thanked the Committee and Member Services Manager.

### **126. Scrutiny Work Plan**

The Chair noted that due to the upcoming election it would be hard to determine scheduling for future meetings but welcome suggestions from Members.

The Scrutiny and Governance Advisor noted that the next meeting of the Committee would take place in June in the new municipal year and outlined suggested topics currently recorded on the long list, including two new topic suggestions from the Chair:

- Review of the impact of museum charging
- Park Trees audit, specifically, on the volume and health of trees in parks across the city including planting, removal and ill health patterns.

Councillor Ottino suggested that a report on the state and use of disused garage sites be requested, as well as report on HRA land in relation to attraction of anti-social behaviour.

The Scrutiny and Governance Advisor recorded the suggestions.

The Committee **noted** the workplan.

### **127. Cabinet responses to Scrutiny recommendations**

The Chair provided a summary of Cabinet's 14 responses to the Committee's previous recommendations, as set out in the report, and noted that an addendum to this agenda also contained an updated recommendation from the previous meeting in relation to the nighttime economy, as requested by Councillor Jarvis.

The Committee **noted** Cabinet's responses to its recommendations.

### **128. Endorsement of Working Group recommendations**

The Scrutiny and Governance Advisor detailed the recommendations made by the working groups since the Committee last met, as set out in the report.

The Committee **endorsed** the recommendation.

### **129. Dates of future meetings**

Noting that the next meeting would be in the new municipal year following the election, the Chair thanked Members for their work and recommendations across the year.

The Committee thanked the Chair for his work throughout the last year.

The Committee **noted** the dates of future meetings.

**The meeting started at 6.03 pm and ended at 7.05 pm**

**Chair .....**

**Date: Tuesday 9 June 2026**

*When decisions take effect:*

*Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired*

*Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal decision notice is issued*

*All other committees: immediately.*

*Details are in the Council's Constitution.*

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