

To: Cabinet
Date: 15 April 2026
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To submit the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee for Cabinet's consideration.
Key decision:	No
Lead Member:	Councillor Alex Powell, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Corporate Priority:	A Well-Run Council
Policy Framework:	None

Recommendation(s): That the Cabinet:
1. Consider and respond to the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee as set out in the report.

Information Exempt from Publication	
N/A	N/A

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
N/A	N/A	N/A

Overview and Summary

- The Scrutiny Committee met on 7 April 2026 and reviewed the following items:
 - Watercourses and Ditches
 - Review of Ward Member Budget and Community Infrastructure Levy Councillor Applications
 - Urgent Key Decisions End of Year Update 2025-2026

2. Working Group meetings were also held to consider a range of reports:

Finance and Performance Working Group – 26 March 2026

- Integrated Performance for Q3 2025/26
- OX Place Financial Business Plan, Development Sites update and Period 9 Monitoring report [SJVG]

Housing and Homelessness Working Group – 31 March 2026

- Housing Performance 2025/26
- Selective Licensing Year 3 update

Climate and Environment Working Group – 1 April 2026

- Social Housing EPCC update
- Local Area Energy Planning update

3. Section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 grants the power to the Scrutiny Committee to make reports or recommendations to the Cabinet with respect to the discharge of any functions which are the responsibility of the Executive; and on matters which affect the authority's area or the inhabitants of that area.
4. Following the meetings, Cabinet Members, in consultation with the relevant Officers were asked to agree, agree in-part, or disagree with the recommendations.
5. The tables below detail the recommendations made by Scrutiny for each report, which Cabinet will consider at their meeting on 15 April 2026. Cabinet has provided commentaries to inform the Committee of the rationale behind its decision. No table was produced for items where no recommendations were suggested.
6. Scrutiny wish to put on record:
- The Committee considered the end of year report summarising all urgent key decisions that have been taken in the 2025/26 municipal year and noted a reduction in the use of this provision compared to the previous year.
 - The Finance and Performance Working Group reflected that delivery performance has not aligned with current optimism bias assumptions, and suggested a more realistic starting point may be needed, with scope to adjust as performance improves. There was also a clear view that recruitment and retention pressures currently reflected across multiple services should be recognised as a single corporate risk to better capture their scale and impact. In addition, concerns were raised that existing budget provision for damp, mould and retrofit works underestimates the likely ongoing demand. Members therefore emphasised the need for more realistic medium-term planning assumptions to avoid repeated in-year budget adjustments.
 - The Housing and Homelessness Working Group reflected on the positive progress made over the past year in relation to the Council's housing offer and performance against key targets. Members noted in particular the development of the tenant strategy and look forward to reviewing how this

is put into practice in future reporting. The Working Group also recognised the successes of the Selective Licensing scheme and was fully supportive of the ongoing work that the council is doing in this area including driving up standards in the private rented sector and ensuring tenants are better protected.

- The Climate and Environment Working Group noted the updates on Social Housing EPC particularly the work being undertaken to identify and replace gas boilers with air source heat pumps. Members supported this. They felt the council could be an exemplary authority and accelerate the rollout of the air source heat pumps in social housing properties to move away from fossil based technologies and make full use of newer, more sustainable technologies available.
7. Minutes of the Scrutiny meeting held on 7 April 2026 can be viewed [here](#).
 8. The Scrutiny Committee would like to thank Cabinet particularly Cllr Linda Smith (Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities) and Cllr Anna Railton (Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford). The Committee was also grateful to Nigel Kennedy (Group Finance Director), Alistair Rush (Interim Group Finance Director), Clare Paterson (Strategic Finance Manager), Jason Jones (Finance Business Partner), Richard Wood (Housing and Homelessness Strategy Manager), Bill Graves (Landlord Services Manager), Courtney Bennet (Regulatory Services Manager), Katherine Coney (Residential Regulation Team Area Manager), Vikki Robins (Environmental Sustainability Manager), Alice Jones (Carbon Reduction Project Manager), Jonathan Malton (Committee and Member Services Manager), Jane Winfield (Director of Property and Assets), Malcolm Peek (Property Services Manager) and Michael Woods (Major Works Project Manager) for the reports and for responding to questions.

Financial implications

9. Financial implications for the reports listed above were outlined within the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Group.
10. Where appropriate, any further financial implications were reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Legal issues

11. Legal implications for the reports listed above were outlined within the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Group.
12. Where appropriate, any further legal implications were reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Level of risk

13. Risk Registers, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.

14. Where appropriate, the risk register was reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Equalities impact

15. Equalities Impact Assessments, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.

16. Where appropriate, the Equalities Impact Assessments was reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

17. Consideration for Carbon and Environmental impacts, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.

18. Where appropriate, the Carbon and Environmental impacts were reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Implications of Local Government Reorganisation

19. Implications of Local Government Reorganisation for the reports listed above were outlined within the report when presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Group.

20. Where appropriate, any further implications were reviewed when considering the recommendations using the linked guidance from Government: [Financial decisions before local government reorganisation - GOV.UK](#)

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**Table 1 – Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee –
Watercourses and Ditches**

The table below sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee on 7 April 2026 concerning the Watercourses and Ditches report. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
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.	No	<p>Flood risk action plans are not a formal function, therefore the City Council does not have the power/remit, duty, funding or resource to develop or implement plans to manage flood risk throughout the City.</p> <p>We do have a remit to, and will continue to, formally investigate flood events and propose recommendations in accordance with Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act – as we have done for Lobelia Road and other locations. Recommendations made within these reports are for a number of stakeholders (residents, Thames Water, Highways etc.), and we have no power to compel others to take action.</p> <p>However, where appropriate, and opportunity exists; we will look for funding sources to help stakeholders implement recommendations from the formal reports, and further look to implement flood risk management measures where funding/opportunities arise – for example the SuDS Planters at New Hinksey School, and extensive water butt planter roll-out in Florence Park and the Lye Valley area, both of which have been implemented in the past 18 months.</p>

<p>2) That there is clear framework setting out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 		<p>Responsibility for waterways and ditches is shared across the Council, ODS (as contractor) and the Environment Agency. As such, any approach to matters such as routine and reactive maintenance, operational frameworks, equipment provision, and data collection will require appropriate coordination between all relevant agencies. Given there is need to engage with all partners, further work is required before a position can be confirmed.</p> <p>A full response addressing the recommendations will therefore be provided in due course.</p>
<p>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.</p>		<p>Responsibility for waterways and ditches is shared across the Council, ODS (as contractor) and the Environment Agency. As such, any approach to matters such as routine and reactive maintenance, operational frameworks, equipment provision, and data collection will require appropriate coordination between all relevant agencies. Given there is need to engage with all partners, further work is required before a position can be confirmed.</p> <p>A full response addressing the recommendations will therefore be provided in due course.</p>

**Table 2 – Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee –
Review of Ward Member Budget and Community Infrastructure Levy Councillor Applications**

The table below sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee on 7 April 2026 concerning the Review of Ward Member Budget and Community Infrastructure Levy Councillor Applications. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

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<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
<p>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.</p>		<p>A centralised list is not possible as this can depend on the location of works and size of the project. Members are advised to submit a request via the Members’ Enquiry Form for any projects intending to use Ward Member Budget or Community Infrastructure Levy for projects to install new infrastructure to establish if any permissions would be required and if the proposals are viable.</p> <p>The annual spend list referenced is a rough outline for Members as to what the expected costs of certain items, however these are advisory and are subject to change due to size and location of the project, but also external factors outside of the Council’s control (such as costs of materials). Members will also need to ensure there are no ongoing costs for a project, but if so, this would need to be reviewed with the relevant Officers, via the Members Enquiry Form, to discuss the ongoing revenue costs to maintain the new infrastructure and if it will be covered via service areas annual budgets. The items listed below are part of the annual list and include the relevant permissions:</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Permission would need to be sought from the land owner to place litter/dog bins depending on where these are being placed. If placed on highway/pavement, then permission would need to be sought from County Highways. The OCC Green Space team may also need to be involved if being placed within public parks.• Installation of additional benches/picnic tables, depending on where they are going, land owners consent or the OCC Green Space team if being placed in a public park.• Tree planting, to seek any permissions from the OCC Green Space team. May also be worth checking with the Tree officers in the Planning department, if any tree planting would affect any adjacent trees that may be protected <p>A comment at the Committee related to the use of Councillor CIL spend for lighting in parks, this would be out of the scope for using this funding and would need to form part of the centralised CIL spend, for which Members are required to raise these with the Director of Planning and Regulation, via the Members' Enquiry Form, so the service area is aware of the request.</p>
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**Table 3 – Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Finance and Performance Working Group –
Integrated Performance for Q3 2025/26**

The table below sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Finance and Performance Working Group on 26 March 2026 and endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee on 7 April 2026 concerning the Integrated Performance for Q3 2025/26. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

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Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) That Cabinet, in the light of experience, reviews whether the current optimism bias remains appropriate, including whether a higher starting point (such as 50%) should be considered, with scope to reduce this (back to 45% or 40%) where delivery performance improves.	Yes	We can consider this when we undertake the next iteration of the budget and MTFP.
2) That Cabinet considers whether recruitment and retention should be recognised and managed as a single corporate risk, rather than being reflected separately across individual service risk registers.		Whilst recruitment and retention are reflected in service risk registers, it is also the subject matter of Risk 3 in the Corporate Risk Register. This is “Workforce Sustainability” and concerns recruitment and retention challenges in key areas such as Legal, ICT and Environmental Health.
3) That Cabinet reviews whether current and future budget assumptions for damp, mould and retrofit works are sufficient, in light of emerging experience, including whether higher baseline provision should be built into the MTFP.	Yes	We included £0.8m in the 25/26 budget round for damp and mould and based on our experience during 2025/26 have increased this budget by a further £0.7m to £1.5m for 2026/27. We will continue to review the position over the 2026/27 year. For retrofit we have included as much capital resources as the HRA business plan will allow up to 2030 at which point we will review.

**Table 4 – Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Housing and Homelessness Working Group –
Housing Performance 2025/26**

The table below sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Housing and Homelessness Working Group on 31 March 2026 and endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee on 7 April 2026 concerning the Housing Performance 2025/26. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) Officers to provide the Working Group with data relating to the number of homeless people being housed in hotel accommodation and the length of time those people have occupied hotel accommodation.	Yes	Data on Temporary Accommodation to be provided by agreement with the Chair of the Working Group.

Table 5 – Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Climate and Environment Working Group – Social Housing EPC C Update

The table below sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Climate and Environment Working Group on 1 April 2026 and endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee on 7 April 2026 concerning the Social Housing EPC C Update. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
<p>1) That Cabinet adopts a policy that makes air source heat pumps as the default heating system for all social housing properties going forward. In recognition that in emergency situations a gas boiler may still be required, installation of gas boilers should only be permitted in those circumstances.</p>	<p>In-part</p>	<p>Air source heat pumps are not suitable in all instances (e.g. flats) and other technologies will need to be installed such as Ground Source Heat Pumps and other electrical forms of heating.</p> <p>Heat pumps require a new design and enabling works prior to replacing a gas boiler, this means that fast replacement is not always possible e.g. when heating systems break down so like for like replacement will be required in certain circumstances.</p> <p>A draft Energy and Sustainability strategy is currently under internal consultation and will subsequently be presented to cabinet. This proposes gas boilers should not be installed from 2036 in line with the governments original plan to phase out gas boilers (now scrapped). In the meantime, it is proposed that gas boiler replacements are gradually replaced with low carbon heating (where appropriate e.g. well insulated properties). This phased approach will allow a transition period in order to train and develop the industry and prove the technologies in Oxford's housing stock. The other factor is limited HRA funds available for low carbon heating installation and</p>

		additional funding requirements for the uplift in cost compared to a gas boiler replacement.
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Table 6 – Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Climate and Environment Working Group – Local Area Energy Planning Update

The table below sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Climate and Environment Working Group on 1 April 2026 and endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee on 7 April 2026 concerning the Local Area Energy Planning Update. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

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Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
<p>1) That Cabinet assess whether action areas identified through LAEP that are not currently in the draft Local Plan 2045, could be incorporated, including a gap analyses to identify where the Local Plan does not yet reflect LAEP priorities, as well as a feasibility check on whether they can be integrated at this stage.</p>		<p>The LAEP is being closely developed with planning input. The Local Plan 2045 has just completed the Regulation 19 consultation, with the next step being submission to the Secretary of State, which is likely to take place in June 2026. Whilst the Council can propose modifications for the Inspector to consider as part of the examination process, we do not currently envisage that these would be necessary to align the Local Plan with the emerging work of the LAEP. A gap analysis exercise can take place to check if there are any areas which do not reflect the LAEP's priorities in due course however.</p> <p>Whilst the detail of the city LAEP is still emerging, the work is expected to support the Local Plan objective of helping the city meet its net zero carbon targets and to complement various policies including ensuring new buildings are net zero carbon in operation and supporting retrofitting of existing buildings. Where particular infrastructure interventions are identified through the LAEP process, it may be appropriate to incorporate these into future updates of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan which supports the Local Plan and identifies key infrastructure</p>

		needs in the city (and is a live document). This will depend upon there being sufficient detail around these projects (e.g. timescales for delivery, costs etc) and we will keep this under review as the LAEP continues to be developed.
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