

To: **Scrutiny Committee**

Date: 9 June 2026

Report of: Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer)

Title of Report: Establishment of the Scrutiny Standing Working Groups and Review Group

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To establish Working Groups and Review Groups for the 2026/27 municipal year and appoint standing Working Group and Review Group membership and chairs.
Key decision:	No
Lead Member:	Chair of the Scrutiny Committee 2026/2027
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	All

Recommendation(s): That the Scrutiny Committee resolves to:	
1.	<p>Agree to establish the following working groups for the 2026/27 municipal year with the following remits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Finance and Performance Working Group – finance and budgetary issues and decisions, annual review of the Council’s budget, quarterly monitoring of finance and performance (including performance of the Council’s companies), executive decisions made in relation to any companies wholly or partly owned by the Council. b) Housing and Homelessness Working Group – strategic housing and landlord issues and decisions, homelessness, housing services performance and interaction with the Tenant’s Forum. c) Climate and Environment Working Group – climate and environmental issues and decisions, progress and performance monitoring, monitoring delivery of existing strategies, policies and projects.
2.	<p>Agree the Terms of Reference for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Climate and Environment Working Group at Appendix 1 b) Finance and Performance Working Group at Appendix 2

- c) Housing and Homelessness Working Group at Appendix 3
3. **Agree** to appoint members and chairs of the Finance and Performance, Housing and Homelessness, and Climate and Environment Working Groups or any other working groups as agreed by the Committee in accordance with nominations made by political groups.
 - **Finance and Performance:** Cllrs James Fry, James Thorniley, Chris Snowton, Ian Yeatman
 - **Housing and Homelessness:** Cllrs Lizzy Diggins, Rosie Rawle, Roz Smith, Anne Stares
 - **Climate and Environment:** Cllrs Louise Upton, Chris Jarvis, Katherine Miles, Judith Harley
 4. **Agree** to establish a Budget Review Group, comprising the membership of the Finance and Performance Working Group and **note** that the proposed scope and Terms of Reference will be agreed at a future Scrutiny Committee meeting.
 5. **Agree** the schedule of meetings as presented within the report;

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
Appendix 1	Terms of Reference for the Climate and Environment Working Group	No
Appendix 2	Terms of Reference for the Finance and Performance Working Group	No
Appendix 3	Terms of Reference for the Housing and Homelessness Working Group	No
Appendix 4	A Guide for Scrutiny Committee Members	No

Introduction and background

1. The Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the key principles by which the Committee, its working groups, and review groups, will operate in order to provide Members, officers, and the public clarity about how Scrutiny will manage and organise its activities during the 2026/27 municipal year.
2. The Committee has the power to delegate responsibility for the scrutiny of certain issues to specific Working Groups, which report back to the Committee with recommendations (where time allows). It should consider whether it wishes to reconstitute the previous standing arrangements or establish new working groups and define its remits. As Working Groups are established, it is recommended that the number of seats, political composition, and membership are agreed, and Chairs appointed.
3. The Committee may also establish Review Groups to undertake issue-led and time-bound 'task and finish' reviews of specific issues. It is recommended that Review Groups conclude their work with a report setting out its findings and recommendations. As Review Groups are established, it is recommended that the

number of seats, political composition, and membership are agreed, and Chairs appointed.

Role of the Scrutiny Committee

4. Scrutiny operates to provide democratic oversight and public assurance that the Council is carrying out its business effectively. It acts as a check and balance to ensure that decisions are taken in the best interests of the people of Oxford. The Scrutiny Committee carries out research, reviews, and hears from independent experts, as well as Council officers. It then makes recommendations for improvement where necessary.
5. The primary focus of the Scrutiny Committee's work is to hold the Cabinet to account on decisions being taken. Alongside this, it may also pursue its own programme by commissioning reports from officers on priority issues and assisting the Council in developing future policies or strategies. As outlined in the Council's Constitution Part 8.3, the Committee can:
 - a. Develop and review policy:
 - Help Council and the Cabinet to develop policy by studying issues in detail;
 - Carry out research and consultation on policy;
 - Consider and introduce schemes to involve the public in developing policy;
 - Work with national, regional and local organisations to promote the interest of local people.
 - b. Hold the Cabinet to account:
 - Review the performance and decisions of the Cabinet, and Council officers (but not decisions on individual planning or licensing applications);
 - Review the Council's progress in achieving its policy aims and performance targets;
 - Review the performance of individual services;
 - Review executive decisions in respect of any companies wholly or partly owned by the Council and hold the shareholder to account for the performance of those companies (*the decisions of Council-owned companies do not fall within the remit of the Scrutiny Committee*);
 - Ask Cabinet members and senior officers questions about their decisions and performance – these may be questions about general performance or about particular decisions and projects.
 - c. Require senior officers and Cabinet Members to attend meetings and answer questions.
 - d. Hold other public service providers to account (though there is no legal requirement for them to engage).
6. Members of the Committee are encouraged to read the relevant guidance supplied as Appendix 3 which sets out an overview of how the Committee operates, how to be effective as a scrutiny councillor, and the support and development opportunities available to members. Similar guides and training are available from the Local Government Association (LGA), Local Government Information Unit (LGIU), and the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS). There are opportunities to organise training for Members later in the municipal year.

Establishment of Working Groups

7. In previous years, the Committee has established three standing working groups focusing on Finance and Performance, Housing and Homelessness, and Climate and Environment matters. They each undertake detailed scrutiny of decisions and issues relevant to their remit. They are made up of a small group of members with interest in these priority areas, building up specialist knowledge to help produce more effective scrutiny outcomes. The working groups have a degree of discretion to manage their own work plan but remain accountable to the Scrutiny Committee for their work.
8. Working groups must report their recommendations to the Committee before they are submitted to the Executive. However, for recommendations to the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group, the Scrutiny and Governance Advisor has delegated authority to forward the recommendations directly to the SJVG, in consultation with the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee; this is reported back to the Scrutiny Committee at its next meeting.
9. The Committee is recommended to re-establish the Finance and Performance, Housing and Homelessness, and Climate and Environment Working Groups for the 2026/27 council year and agree their remits. This amounts to the maximum of three working groups which the Council has capacity to support. It is also recommended that the Budget Review Group be re-established to examine the annual budget proposals for 2027/2028.
10. Assuming the Committee agrees to re-establish the recommended working and review groups, capacity within the Scrutiny function remains for approximately five meetings each, with six meetings for the Finance and Performance Working Group to align with the Shareholder and Joint Venture Groups.
11. On agreeing the establishment of working groups, the Committee is recommended to agree their full membership, appoint Chairs, and agree their terms of reference. In 2025/2026, the Committee recommended that that each working group should comprise four councillors, with cross-party representation across each of the political groups of the Council. This year, it is recommended that all working groups be established with four members to ensure the wide-ranging views from across the Council are reflected within the Scrutiny function; this should be one member from each of the four largest groups, which will support more efficient scheduling and ensure consistent attendance.
12. The quorum for all working groups with 4 members is two. It should be noted that if this quorum is not met, reports may proceed without formal cross-party scrutiny, and consideration of other items may need to be delayed.
13. Given that working group meetings are not formal committees of the Council, there is no legal requirement for them to be held in-person. It is also established Council practice that non-committee members (i.e. officers, cabinet members, external guests) may attend meetings virtually to broaden scrutiny's engagement and offer flexibility. To mitigate any potential governance risks, the working groups will continue to not be livestreamed in accordance with the access to meetings rules within the Local Government Act 1972. The Committee is recommended to consider the additional resource that in-person and hybrid meetings place on the organisation and agree that meetings of working groups be held virtually. Due to resource constraints, hybrid or in-person meetings will not be possible.

14. The Members Allowances Scheme allocates a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) equivalent to 25% of the Basic Allowance (£1,552.92 in 2026/2027) to a maximum of two standing working group chairs, on the basis that panels meet at least five times a year. If there are more than two working groups set up, then 50% of the Basic Allowance (£3,105.84 for 2026/2027) will be divided between the total number of working group chairs. This SRA is to reflect the additional responsibility of standing working group chairs.

Scrutiny Review Groups

15. Each year, the Scrutiny Committee ordinarily establishes a Budget Review Group to examine the Council’s budget proposals for the next financial year, which helps ensure good financial governance practices.

16. It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee agrees to establish a Budget Review Group for the 2026/27 municipal year to examine the Council’s budget proposals for 2027/28 and that the proposed scope be presented at a future Scrutiny Committee meeting for agreement.

17. Given the Finance and Performance Working Group’s involvement in scrutinising the Council’s finances, it is recommended that the membership of the Budget Review Group align with that of the Finance and Performance Working Group (should it be re-established). Additionally, the Chair of the Finance and Performance Working Group should also serve as the Chair of the Budget Review Group.

- Cllrs James Fry, James Thorniley, Chris Smowton, Ian Yeatman

18. Due to the busy time of year during which the Budget Review Group takes place, and the absence of a legal requirement for the review group to meet in-person, it is recommended that meetings of the Budget Review Group take place virtually.

Schedule of meetings

19. Members of the Committee are invited to agree the schedule of meetings for the remainder of the municipal year and to diarise these where necessary. The table below shows the working groups and which meetings of the Committee the recommendations will be discussed and endorsed.

Table 1: Schedule of Committees and Working Groups for the 2026-2027 municipal year

Finance and Performance	Housing and Homelessness	Climate and Environment	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet Meeting and Month
-	-	-	9 June 2026	17 June 2026
16 June 2026	24 June 2026	-	30 June 2026	8 July 2026
15 July 2026	-	6 July 2026	11 August 2026	19 August 2026
-	2 September 2026	-	8 September 2026	16 September 2026

-	-	17 September 2026	13 October 2026	21 October 2026
28 October 2026	3 November 2026	20 October 2026	10 November 2026	18 November 2026
25 November 2026	-	-	1 December 2026	9 December 2026
-	-	-	12 January 2027	20 January 2027
-	-	-	2 February 2027	10 February 2027
-	24 February 2027	-	9 March 2027	17 March 2027
24 March 2027	30 March 2027	16 March 2027	6 April 2027	14 April 2027
13 April 2027	-	21 April 2027	8 June 2027*	16 June 2027*

20. Meeting dates with an asterisk in the table above are those provisionally scheduled for 2027-2028 municipal year and are subject to approval by full Council.

Alternative options for Working Groups

21. The Committee is not required to reappoint the recommended working groups, and it may choose to appoint panels with different remits.
22. If the Committee decides to set up different standing working group arrangements, Committee and Member Services will liaise with the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee and return to a future meeting with a revised proposal for agreement. Consideration would need to be given to the organisation's capacity to support the number and remits of working groups.

Co-Option

23. The Scrutiny Committee has the right to co-opt members as non-voting members under the Local Government Act 2000 (section 9FA(4)). Part 13.3 of the Council's Constitution allows the Scrutiny Committee to 'appoint non-voting co-opted members to serve for a specific policy review or until the next annual Council.'

Scrutiny-Commissioned Reports

24. The Scrutiny Committee has the power to commission its own reports. However, it should be recognised that doing so is significantly more resource-intensive for officers than presenting a report which is already being written for Cabinet. The Constitution state that 'items will be taken forward as resources allow, and the Committee must provide officers with sufficient notice and guidance on what they are requesting to consider, mindful of the impact on resources and the constraints of the organisation. The Scrutiny Committee and its working groups will provide as much notice as is possible when commissioning reports from Council officers (minimum 8 weeks).'
25. As a guideline, to allow time for consideration of reports in sufficient depth whilst maintaining timely meetings of Scrutiny and its working groups, each meeting will aim to have three reports for consideration. It is recommended that the Committee is

mindful of resource implications of Scrutiny-commissioned reports and seeks to average no more than one Scrutiny-commissioned report per meeting over the municipal year.

26. The Committee is recommended to agree that ideas from Members will be sent to Committee and Member Services by e-mail for consideration outside the meeting.

Alternative Options Considered

27. Any additional or replacement working groups would need to be reviewed by the Scrutiny and Governance Advisor before being set-up by the committee, which could delay the impact of the scrutiny function. It is recommended that any changes to the working groups are discussed in advance to ensure capacity and scope is outlined.

Financial implications

28. No financial implications arise from this report, however ensuring the Council's financial position, and that of the Council's Companies, is critical for the Scrutiny function of the authority.
29. Any additional reviews set up by the Scrutiny Committee need to consider the capacity of the Scrutiny and Governance Advisor; any additional Working Groups, Review Groups or additional Scrutiny Committees would require additional staffing resources.

Legal issues

30. No legal implication arises from this report, however failing to have an effective Scrutiny Committee could lead to the authority receiving legal challenges in the future.
31. Section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 grants 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.

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Background Papers:	
1	Local Government Act 2000, Section 9FA

- 2 [Oxford City Council Constitution Part 8 – Role of the Scrutiny Committee](#)
- 3 [Oxford City Council Constitution Part 13 – Scrutiny Committee Procedures](#)