

Supplement for

Cabinet

On **Wednesday 13 November 2024 At 6.00 pm**

Agenda Item 7 - Scrutiny Reports

Contents

7. **Scrutiny Reports**

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The Scrutiny Committee met on 4 November 2024, and the Housing and Homelessness Panel met on 7 November 2024. The following reports and recommendations have been published as supplement:

- Leisure Update
- Update on the development of Oxford River Charter (and Council's engagement with Thames Water)
- Furnished Tenancy Scheme

The agenda, reports and any additional supplements can be found together with this supplement on the [committee meeting webpage](#).

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To: Cabinet
Date: 13 November 2024
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Leisure Update

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Katherine Miles, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Chewe Munkonge, Cabinet Member for A Healthy Oxford
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2024-28
Recommendation(s): That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report	

Appendices	
Appendix A	Draft Cabinet response to Scrutiny recommendations

Introduction and overview

1. The Scrutiny Committee met on 4 November 2024 to consider a report on Leisure Update. It was recommended that the Committee note the update on the leisure investment programme and leisure contract clienting arrangements in line with the recommendations from Scrutiny Committee that were approved at Cabinet on 24 January 2024, followed by an opportunity for discussion, and agree any recommendations.
2. The Committee is grateful to Councillor Chewe Munkonge (Cabinet Member for A Healthy Oxford), Hagan Lewisman (Active Communities Manage), James Baughan (Leisure and Active Wellbeing Manager) and Nigel Kennedy (Head of Finance Services) for attending the meeting to answer questions.

Summary and recommendations

3. Councillor Chewe Munkonge, Cabinet Member for A Healthy Oxford introduced the report.
4. The Committee asked wide ranging questions, including questions about the progress and reassurance of improvements made by the new leisure supplier, as well as the level of accountability held by the supplier for facility conditions. Discussions based on these questions covered various aspects such as the sufficiency of ongoing renovations, particularly at the Ferry Leisure Centre and Oxford Ice Rink, and whether sufficient steps were being taken to address issues inherited from the previous supplier.
5. The Committee sought clarity on specific actions demonstrating the new supplier's commitment to improved standards, noted efforts made on recruitment for essential roles, and commented on the state of some facilities, particularly the changing rooms at Barton, which were noted to appear less than satisfactory since the transition to the new provider.
6. Recognising that the transition process requires time to fully address inherited issues, the Committee acknowledged and welcomed the new practice of a dedicated officer responsible for overseeing facility conditions and ensuring issues are picked up on a more timely manner.
7. Further key points were noted by the Committee in relation to facility enhancement and resource planning, including an 18-month improvement roadmap which prioritises essential upgrades to facilities in Barton Leisure Centre, including the installation of improved ventilation and retrofitting of changing rooms.
8. In particular, the Committee proposed exploring a business case for year-round access to the lido, leveraging the existing water source heat pump to support eco-friendly operations, and prioritisation for enhanced ventilation in changing rooms to ensure air quality and safe environment for all facility users, aligning with health and safety standards.

Recommendation 1: That the Council requests Officers to explore a business case for the availability and year-round access to the lido, utilising the existing water source heat pump to support sustainable operations.

Recommendation 2: That the Council ensures enhanced ventilation is included in any retrofitting or renovations of the leisure centre changing facilities, with a specific focus on health and safety.

9. In reflection on past experiences and lessons learned, the Committee identified that regular, structured financial reviews would enable the Council to monitor the supplier's financial health and address any emerging concerns early on.

Recommendation 3: That the Council establishes a process for a six-monthly review of the leisure supplier's finances, with update reports provided to the Finance and Performance Panel for ongoing review and oversight.

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Appendix A

Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee

The document sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee on 4 November 2024 concerning the Leisure Update. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) That the Council requests Officers to explore a business case for the availability and year-round access to the lido, utilising the existing water source heat pump to support sustainable operations.	Yes	We are already working with our new leisure partner to explore whether there is a viable business case for expanding the season and offer at Hinksey Pool.
2) That the Council ensures enhanced ventilation is included in any retrofitting or renovations of the leisure centre changing facilities, with a specific focus on health and safety.	No	There are works planned as part of the dilapidations works that will look to address the air handling unit issues that have been mentioned.
3) That the Council establishes a process for a biannual review of the leisure supplier's finances, with update reports provided to the Finance and Performance Panel for ongoing review and oversight.	Yes	We support this proposal, however would recommend annual reviews.

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To: Cabinet

Date: 13 November 2024

Report of: Scrutiny Committee

Title of Report: Update on the development of the Oxford River Charter (and Council engagement with Thames Water)

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Katherine Miles, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford
Corporate Priority:	A well-run council
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2024-28
Recommendation(s): That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report	

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Introduction and overview

1. The Scrutiny Committee met on 4 November 2024 to consider an update briefing on Thames Water for Oxford City Council's Scrutiny Committee. It was recommended that the Committee note the update report followed by an opportunity for discussion, and agree any recommendations.
2. The Committee is grateful to Councillor Anna Railton (Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford) and Mish Tullar (Head of Corporate Strategy) for attending the meeting to answer questions.

Summary and recommendations

3. The Head of Corporate Strategy introduced the report providing an update on the Council's engagement with Thames Water, noting two consecutive years of poor

water quality and the Council's intent to conduct a detailed investigation into pollution sources.

4. The Committee asked questions to clarify Council and Environment Agency responsibilities, particularly in relation to gaps in oversight of local waterways and flooding risks. Queries were also raised about the status of water quality initiatives, road runoff management, and the council's role in regulating domestic water misconnection issues.
5. The Committee sought updates on the Council's ongoing communication with Thames Water and discussed ways to strengthen stakeholder engagement to address resident concerns more effectively.
6. The Committee noted the need for clearer boundaries in responsibility between the Council and other agencies, as well as legislative gaps in water management and environmental protection. The Committee highlighted the importance of maintaining regular and meaningful engagement with Thames Water, particularly regarding water quality and sewage flooding. The Committee also discussed the impact of deregulation on water companies and raised concerns about road runoff as a pollution source, suggesting areas for Council action to support overall water quality improvements.
7. While the Committee acknowledged that ongoing discussions with Thames Water have been useful, they suggested a more structured forum where Council Members could present resident issues directly, setting clear meeting terms to ensure productive, goal-oriented conversations with Thames Water.

Recommendation 1: That the Council formally requests a structured meeting with Thames Water, for Council Members to put forward resident concerns about water issues in the city, and for officers to provide support in proposing the structuring of the meeting.

8. The Committee also acknowledged legislative challenges surrounding water quality and flood management, noting that deregulation may hinder the Council's ability to enforce standards. Concerns were raised regarding the extent of Council's investments in storm water management and runoff and gutter clearances in cases of flash flooding. It was noted that Council needs to consider a focus on this with a degree of urgency, in the context of the climate emergency and disaster planning, as demonstrated by the recent flash flooding in Spain. It was recommended that the Council invite MPs to a focused meeting, framed around the Council's River Action Plan, to bring attention to legislative gaps, promote coordinated efforts to safeguard Oxford's water resources, and advocate for policy changes to improve water company accountability.

Recommendation 2: That Officers develop a proposal for council to convene multi-stakeholder dialogue event between Members, local Members of Parliament, industry and other water quality stakeholders to inform the content of a future Oxford City River Action Plan, to identify coordinated efforts to safeguard Oxford's water resources for the future.

9. In addition, the Committee discussed issues of river pollution due to misconnected properties, emphasising the Council's environmental health team enforcement

responsibilities including within its own housing stock and those that it regulates such as in HMOs and selective licensed properties, as well as in housing association properties. Reviewing and clarifying the Council's role in this area, and learning from good practices elsewhere in the country, would better position it to prevent future misconnections, establish proactive measures to identify and take action to reduce domestic pollution sources, to safeguard local water quality.

Recommendation 3: That the Council commissions a review by Officers to clarify its powers, obligations and the potential actions based on good practice to: identify and enforce existing domestic misconnections in residential properties that the council has control or influence over; and to prevent future misconnections, in order to safeguard against water contamination.

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Appendix A

Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee

The document sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee on 4 November 2024 concerning the Update on the development of Oxford River Charter (and Council’s engagement with Thames Water). The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

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Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) That the Council formally requests a structured meeting with Thames Water, for Council Members to put forward resident concerns about water issues in the city, and for officers to provide support in proposing the structuring of the meeting.	Yes	While officers should seek to set up a further structured meeting for Council Members to raise concerns with a senior Thames Water representative, this should wait until after there is clarity on proposed investment in the Thames Water Sewage Treatment Works and on the results of the Environment Agency analysis of sources of pollution in the river Thames. Both elements are central to informing the issues we may want to raise with Thames Water and its ability to offer responses.
2) That Officers develop a proposal for a council to convene multi-stakeholder dialogue event between Members, local Members of Parliament, industry and other water quality stakeholders to inform the content of a future Oxford City River Action Plan, to identify coordinated efforts to safeguard Oxford’s water resources for the future.	In part	While a Council motion supports the creation of an Oxford City River Action Plan, it would be premature to consider its content ahead of the position becoming clearer in respect of investment plans for the Oxford Sewage Treatment Works and results of the EA analysis of river pollution. Both will be vital in establishing what additional actions will be required to safeguard Oxford’s water resources. Other Risk Management Authorities (such as District councils, Oxfordshire County Council, and the Environment Agency) also have statutory responsibilities in respect of water courses and the River Thames flows through West Oxfordshire prior to reaching the city. All organisations

		have held multi-stakeholder events linked to waterways over the past 12 months and so it is not yet clear whether Oxford City Council or a partner organisation might be best placed to convene a further dialogue event.
3) That the Council commissions a review by Officers to clarify its powers, obligations and the potential actions based on good practice to: identify and enforce existing domestic misconnections in residential properties that the Council has control or influence over; and to prevent future misconnections, in order to safeguard against water contamination.	No	A review is not required. The Council's only enforcement powers in respect of domestic water misconnections sit with Building Control, which looks at water connections as part of its work.

To: Cabinet
Date: 13 November 2024
Report of: Housing and Homelessness Panel
Title of Report: Furnished Tenancy Scheme

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Housing and Homelessness Panel recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Lizzy Diggins, Chair of the Housing and Homelessness Panel
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities
Corporate Priority:	Good, Affordable Homes, Thriving Communities
Policy Framework:	Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028
Recommendation(s): That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report	

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Appendix A	Draft Cabinet response to Scrutiny recommendations

Introduction and overview

1. The Housing and Homelessness Panel met on 7 November 2024 to consider a report on Furnished Tenancy Scheme. The report, which is due for Cabinet consideration on 13 November 2024, recommends that Cabinet approve the procurement of a contract at a value of £4,300,000 over a 5-year period for a supplier or suppliers to provide household furniture, white goods, and carpets as part of a Furnished Tenancy Scheme; and to delegate to the Interim Executive Director for Communities and People in consultation with the Section 151 Officer, authority to award a Furnished Tenancy Scheme contract to a supplier or suppliers, selected by an evaluation panel, following a fully compliant procurement process.
2. The Committee is grateful to Cllr Linda Smith (Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities), Kieran Edmunds (Rapid Rehousing Manager), Carolyn Devenney (Senior Furnished Tenancy Officer) and Richard Wood (Housing Strategy and

Needs Manager) for attending the meeting to present the report and answer questions.

Summary and recommendations

3. Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities introduced the report. The report sought authority to procure and delegation to award a contract to deliver the Council's Furnished Tenancy Scheme.
4. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the scheme's uptake within Oxford compared to national averages, the flexibility of the contract in accommodating growing demand, and how well it meets the needs of local tenants. Questions also focused on the extent to which the Council could support tenants without placing undue financial pressure on them, particularly given rising costs of living and inflationary pressures on service charges.
5. The Committee sought clarity on items like carpets, which are unique to Oxford's scheme, and on the process for repairs, replacements, and storage of furnished items across tenancies.
6. In discussion, the Committee noted the benefits for tenants and the Council, including the scheme's flexibility to allow tenants to choose from various furnishings, thus promoting a sense of ownership and belonging. Financial advantages for tenants were also noted, particularly that the scheme's service charges are covered by housing benefits, effectively eliminating out-of-pocket expenses for eligible tenants. This set up was noted as being mutually beneficial, given that the scheme operated on a cost-neutral basis funded by the HRA, avoiding additional pressure on the Council's resources. The Committee also noted the economic challenges, which has emphasised the scheme's role in preventing tenants from resorting to high-interest credit sources to furnish their homes.
7. The Committee discussed the disposal and potential wastage of furniture under the scheme, noting that whilst some furniture are recycled or stored for future use such as emergency housing, there are opportunities for local organisations to repurpose those furniture. The Committee emphasised the value of collaborating with external organisations such as charities to minimise waste through creative reuse and recycling channels.

Recommendation 1: That the Council further explores opportunities to establish more formalised relationships with local charities and organisations to enhance the reuse and recycling of used furniture under the Furnished Tenancy Scheme, with the goal of reducing waste by extending life of furniture items that may still hold value for temporary housing or community projects.

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Appendix A
Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of
the Housing and Homelessness Panel of the Scrutiny Committee

The document sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Housing and Homelessness Panel on 7 November 2024 concerning the Furnished Tenancy Scheme. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) That the Council further explores opportunities to establish more formalised relationships with local charities and organisations to enhance the reuse and recycling of used furniture under the Furnished Tenancy Scheme, with the goal of reducing waste by extending life of furniture items that may still hold value for temporary housing or community projects.	Agree	The team already makes every effort to reuse and recycle furniture, but we agree formalised and better established relationships with local charities and organisations in the City could further increase this. The team will take this forward in the coming weeks and seek to have these enhanced relationships in place for when the new FT contract comes into place.

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