

To: Cabinet
Date: 22 January 2025
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Council of Sanctuary Framework

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present the Scrutiny Committee recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Katherine Miles, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Lead Member:	Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities
Corporate Priority:	Supporting Thriving Communities
Policy Framework:	Thriving Communities Strategy
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee

Introduction and overview

1. The Scrutiny Committee met on 14 January 2025 to consider a Cabinet report on Council of Sanctuary Framework. The report, which is due for consideration on 22 January 2025, recommends that Cabinet approve and adopt the draft Council of Sanctuary Framework document, including the Action Plan; agree that an annual progress update should be produced for Cabinet; delegate power to the Executive Director (Corporate Resources), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, to amend the design of the framework document without changing the content, and to make changes to the action plan to keep it updated to developments and changes.
2. The Committee was grateful to Councillor Linda Smith (Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities) for attending to present the report as well as to Nerys Parry (Head of Housing Services), Richard Wood (Housing Strategy and Needs

Manager) and Stephen Cohen (Refugee and Resettlement Manager) for attending the meeting and answering questions from the Committee.

Summary and recommendations

3. Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, introduced the report. She noted that the document proposes a three-year action plan supporting Oxford's Council of Sanctuary accreditation. This accreditation underscores the city's commitment to welcoming refugees and asylum seekers while fostering an inclusive environment.
4. The Committee acknowledged the significant work of officers in developing a bold vision for addressing key issues faced by individuals seeking sanctuary in Oxford. They discussed several key measures and objectives outlined in the document, and raised questions about enhanced data collections, partnership development, and language and education support.
5. Members raised queries about the adequacy of data on the number of people the action plan aims to support. They asked how data collection could be refined to include precise metrics and identify specific community needs, with Officers confirming work ongoing to enhance data tracking in the form of Key Performance Indicators which will be reported on a yearly basis. With this, the Committee suggested that this reporting is formally established and that annual updates are brought to the Committee for progress monitoring.

Recommendation 1: That the Council establishes and reports on clear Key Performance Indicators for its action plan, providing annual updates to the Scrutiny Committee to monitor its progress and ensure accountability.

6. Further questions centred on the challenges in accessing English language education, with some members noting gaps in provision and barriers such as the lack of qualified tutors and digital access. The Committee noted the ongoing efforts to map current resources and address these gaps are in place through strategic partnerships and face-to-face outreach, including visits to accommodations and partnerships with County programmes to improve digital accessibility and the availability of English language tuition across the county.
7. Focusing more on the details of the document, concerns were raised about the absence of measures addressing anti-migrant violence within the report. The Committee suggested including this as a key challenge and setting out responses to prevent such violence. In addition, the Committee discussed how national policy changes impact local initiatives, urging adaptability in the action plan.

Recommendation 2: That the Council updates the document's text on National Policy Challenges to include contextual information that recognises the evolving policy environment and anticipates potential changes to national policy.

Recommendation 3: That the Council acknowledges the prevalence of anti-migrant violence by adding to the Key Challenges section of the document a list of specific responses and preventative measures addressing this key issue.

8. The Committee also noted the work the Council has commissioned to fully understand the level of need in Oxford. Noting that this key document could help foster better understanding of people seeking sanctuary and what could be done to improve their experience, the Committee recommended that the needs assessment report is made publicly available, ensuring confidential data is safeguarded where required.

Recommendation 4: That the Council releases the Needs Assessment report to the public to foster better understanding of the experiences of people seeking sanctuary, ensuring that any confidential data it contains is appropriately safeguarded.

Report author	Celeste Reyeslao
Job title	Scrutiny and Governance Advisor
Service area or department	Law and Governance
Telephone	01865 252946
e-mail	creyeslao@oxford.gov.uk

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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 14 January 2025 concerning the Council of Sanctuary Framework. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

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Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) That the Council establishes and reports on clear Key Performance Indicators for its action plan, providing annual updates to the Scrutiny Committee to monitor its progress and ensure accountability.	Yes	The Council acknowledge the need for clear Key Performance Indicators (KPI) to sit behind the action plan and officers are in the process of developing these and agree to incorporating the KPI's and updates into an annual report to the Scrutiny Committee and cabinet to monitor progress and ensure accountability. Officers have developed the action plan embedded within the framework document, in conjunction with internal and external sanctuary partnership groups and the Council will continue to work in partnership to develop and monitor the KPI's.
2) That the Council updates the document's text on National Policy Challenges to include contextual information that recognises the evolving policy environment and anticipates potential changes to national policy.	No	The Council of Sanctuary Framework acknowledges the challenges of national policy changes as detailed within the <i>Key Challenges</i> section. As a member of the City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network, Oxford City gains access to range of resources, updates and training network which focus on key policy changes. Action 3.2 focuses on ensuring that Officers are able to update and learn relevant policy changes through the Network and be able to respond accordingly on what the impact will be on the local sanctuary seeking and wider population and what solutions may need to be implemented as well as acting a leader to influence central government policy changes.

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		<p>Within the recommendation to cabinet, within the Council of Sanctuary Cabinet Report, Officers have requested delegated power to make changes to the action to keep it updates to developments and changes. This will ensure that Officers are able to be dynamically respond to changing circumstances which includes governmental policy changes.</p> <p>There is an understanding that Council staff need to keep up to date on relevant policy changes and also best practice in working with people seeking sanctuary. This is reflected in actions 2.2 and 2.3 which are focused on increasing staff training to increase knowledge and skills to be able to improve how Officers can work holistically with people seeking sanctuary.</p>
3) That the Council acknowledges the prevalence of anti-migrant violence by adding to the Key Challenges section of the document a list of specific responses and preventative measures addressing this key issue.	No	<p>The Council has shown leadership by becoming an accredited Local Authority of Sanctuary and met key criteria to show how the Council is embedding principles of welcome and inclusion in Council business and policy. The Council wants to go further than business as usual and this is represented in the Council of Sanctuary Framework and action plan.</p> <p>A key focus of the Council of Sanctuary action plan is to set out how the Council intends on working with people with lived experience and the local community. The framework is aligned to existing Council strategies which aim to foster positive inclusivity amongst all residents including the <i>Thriving Communities and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy</i> and the <i>Anti-Racism Charter</i>.</p>

		<p>The Council acknowledges the anti-migrant violence is a significant concern. As stated in answer to point 3, the council has made a recommendation to cabinet within the Council of Sanctuary Cabinet Report for Officers to have requested delegated power to make changes to the action to keep it updates to developments and changes.</p> <p>Whilst the Council does not agree to make immediate changes to the framework document and action plan, the Council can commit to ensuring that the issue of anti-migrant sentiment and violence is reviewed over the next 6 months and if necessary the actions are amended accordingly in line with the delegated responsibility. This is to ensure that the issue is properly considered and any relevant actions are put in place and to avoid duplication with existing Council strategies as listed above.</p> <p>The Council acknowledges the safety of people seeking safety and local residents is of the utmost importance and existing actions are embedded within the current action plan to reflect this. For example action point 1.3 focuses on improve the rights and safeguarding risks of migrants with a specific focus on modern day slavery. Action point 3.1 commits to working in partnership and promoting other institutions to become organisations of sanctuary further embedding the principles of inclusion into service delivery and action point 5.6. which commits to producing a joint calendar of events which promote integration and support sanctuary events such as during Refugee week</p>
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<p>4) That the Council releases the Needs Assessment report to the public to foster better understanding of the experiences of people seeking sanctuary, ensuring that any confidential data it contains is appropriately safeguarded.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The Council agrees to release the needs assessment report to the public to foster better understanding of the evidence basis for the development of the action plan embedded within the framework.</p> <p>Officers propose for the Needs Assessment to be added as an appendix onto the cabinet report (Appendix 4) and to add in a reference into the Council of Sanctuary cabinet report to highlight this.</p>
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To: Cabinet
Date: 22 January 2025
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: HRA Rent Setting for 2025/26

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present the Scrutiny Committee recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Katherine Miles, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Lead Member:	Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	All
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee

Introduction and overview

1. The Scrutiny Committee met on 14 January 2025 to consider a Cabinet report on the HRA Rent Setting for 2025/26. The report, which is due for consideration on 22 January 2025, recommends that Council approve an increase of 2.7% for 2025/26 (subject to any subsequent cap on increases imposed by central government) in social dwelling rents from 1st April 2025 giving an average weekly increase of £3.51 per week, and a revised weekly average social rent of £133.68 as set out in the Financial Implications section of the Cabinet report; approve an increase to rents for shared ownership dwellings as outlined in paragraph 21 of the Financial Implications of the Cabinet report; approve an increase to service charges by 2.7% (CPI + 1%) to enable the HRA to recover the associated cost of supply; and approve an increase to the charge for a garage of 4.1%, equating to an increase of

£0.78 per week for a standard garage within a curtilage with a revised charge of £20.00 per week

2. The Committee was grateful to Councillor Linda Smith (Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities) for attending to present the report as well as to Nerys Parry (Head of Housing Services) and Jason Jones (Finance Business Partner) for attending the meeting and answering questions from the Committee.

Summary and recommendations

3. Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, introduced the report which proposed the rent setting and garage charge increases for the 2025/26. She noted that the report recommends a 2.7% increase in rent charges, in line with the maximum allowable rate of CPI + 1%, bringing the average weekly rent to £133.63, which remains to be very good value for money within the Oxford housing market.
4. The Committee asked a number of questions, including queries on the application of percentage increases in charges, particularly those relating to garages. Members questioned the rationale behind exceeding the CPI +1 threshold for garage charges, with officers pointing to the importance of maintaining consistency of the charge for garages within the HRA and those in the General Fund. Suggestions were made to include exploring a more dynamic pricing modelling the impact of limiting garage charge increases to CPI + 1 in the final report that is going to be presented to Cabinet.

Recommendation 1: That Officers includes a modelling of the impact of limiting garage charge increases to CPI + 1% in the final report presented to Cabinet.

5. The Committee also raised concerns on the potential ripple effect of increased council rents on the private rental market, particularly the feasibility of tracking its long-term impacts. Officers noted ethical and methodological difficulty in tracking this relationship due to the market complexities, however the idea of building vision for understanding market interdependencies was noted. It was suggested that a reflection on trends within the private rental market, including broader market observations for the year ahead, is included in the report and any future iterations.

Recommendation 2: That the report, and any future annual iterations, includes a section reflecting on trends in the private rental market, with any relevant anticipated changes for the year ahead.

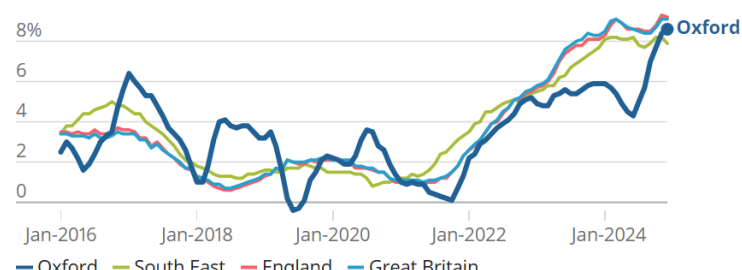
Report author	Celeste Reyeslao
Job title	Scrutiny and Governance Advisor
Service area or department	Law and Governance
Telephone	01865 252946
e-mail	creyeslao@oxford.gov.uk

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 14 January 2025 concerning the HRA Rent Setting for 2025/26. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

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Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) That Officers include a modelling of the impact of limiting garage charge increases to CPI + 1% in the final report presented to Cabinet.	Yes	The proposed increase in the charge for garages equates to £0.78 per week at 4.1% and will generate an additional £8,274 per annum for the HRA. For comparison purposes, if the garage charge was increased by 2.7% this would increase the weekly charge by £0.54 and generate an additional £5,516 per annum for the HRA, a difference of £2,772.
2) That the report, and any future iterations, includes a section reflecting on trends in the private rental market, with any relevant anticipated changes for the year ahead.	Yes	<p>According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) data, in the 12 months to December 2024 private sector rents in Oxford rose by an average 8.6% meaning the average rent increased from £1,648 to £1,789 per month (£412.85 per week). See Chart Below.</p> <p>Annual change in rents in Oxford</p> <p>Private rental price annual inflation, Oxford, January 2016 to December 2024</p>  <p>Source: Price Index of Private Rents from the Office for National Statistics</p>

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To: Cabinet
Date: 22 January 2025
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Flood Management

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present the Scrutiny Committee recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Katherine Miles, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Lead Member:	Councillor Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford Councillor Nigel Chapman, Lead Member for Flood Relief
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	All
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee

Introduction and overview

1. The Scrutiny Committee met on 14 January 2025 to consider a scrutiny-commissioned report on the current flood management in Oxford. It was recommended that the Committee receive the presentation followed by an opportunity for discussion, and agree any recommendations.
2. The Committee was grateful to Richard Adams (Community Safety Service Manager) for attending to present the item as well as to Councillor Anna Railton (Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford), Councillor Nigel Chapman (Lead Member for Flood Relief), James Barlow (Principal Flood Mitigation and Environmental Quality Team Leader), and Andy Brett (Senior Resilience Officer,

Oxfordshire County Council) for answering questions from the Committee.

Summary and recommendations

3. Richard Adams, Community Safety Service Manager gave a presentation explaining the current flood response and protocols within the city.
4. The Committee's discussion centred around inter-agency coordination between the City Council, the County Council and the Environment Agency, including how resources like pumps, barriers, and manpower are deployed. The discussion also touched on exploring ways to coordinate volunteers within communities.
5. Members of the Committee raised questions about the adequacy of existing flood mitigation equipment, noting that ODS typically deploys its one pump to Botley Road and its one flood barrier to Hinksey Lake. Officers explained the collaborative nature of pump usage amongst agencies, stating that additional pumps may need to be sourced from outside the county in severe cases of flooding. They drew attention to the logistical challenges of pump deployment, giving emphasis to the risks associated with improper discharge of water that could potentially exacerbate flooding in adjacent areas. In addition, the manpower required to set up and operate pumps was explained, with the Committee noting the working relationship between ODS and the Environment Agency in managing these resources.
6. Another key concern that the Committee raised was the unclear agency responsibilities for maintaining ditches, waterways and other infrastructure critical to flood prevention, with members highlighting resident perception that some areas are neglected due to the ambiguity around accountability. The Committee was reassured that efforts were underway to map responsibilities more clearly, including close collaboration with the county council to address gaps. The Committee commented on the importance of keeping Councillors well-informed about ongoing investigations specific to their wards and suggested that clear communication channels are maintained between agencies.

Recommendation 1: That Cabinet ensures Members are informed whenever flood investigations occur within their areas; sharing findings promptly will enable Councillors to respond effectively to residents' concerns and advocate for necessary measures.

7. Members of the Committee highlighted the impact of flooding on residents, including disruptions to education and daily life, stating the need for improved community support. They discussed measures to increase transparency about flood risks and supporting residents with practical guidance to help make their homes more resilient.

Recommendation 2: That Cabinet develops clear contact information for Members and distributes guidance leaflets to residents at risk of flooding, explaining proper reporting of flood incidents and actionable advice on mitigating flood risks, and support available for vulnerable residents.

8. The discussion also focused on the financial implications of frequent flooding events, noting the strain on emergency planning reserves depleted by

unpredictable costs of emergency responses. The Committee agreed that a comprehensive review of the reserves is essential to ensure sufficient funding for future incidents, emphasising the Council's duty to protect its residents by maintaining preparedness and resilience in the face of worsening flooding risks.

Recommendation 3: That Cabinet commits to long-term flood resilience and preparedness in the context of the need for climate adaptation measures, by reviewing and reassessing the adequacy of emergency planning funding reserves, recognising the growing frequency and severity of flooding in Oxford.

Report author	Celeste Reyeslao
Job title	Scrutiny and Governance Advisor
Service area or department	Law and Governance
Telephone	01865 252946
e-mail	creyeslao@oxford.gov.uk

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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 14 January 2025 concerning Flood Management in the City. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) That Cabinet ensures Members are informed whenever flood investigations occur within their areas; sharing findings promptly will enable Councillors to respond effectively to residents' concerns and advocate for necessary measures.	Partially	Agreed, subject to a slight amendment to ensure that members are notified when flood investigations are <i>published</i> . The work can take some time, so this is most relevant time to notify members.
2) That Cabinet develops clear contact information for Members and distributes guidance leaflets to residents at risk of flooding, explaining proper reporting of flood incidents and actionable advice on mitigating flood risks, and support available for vulnerable residents.	Partially	<p>Communication with Members will be reviewed, relating to their community engagement role during a flood event. Reporting of flooded properties and other emergency situations during a flood event should be through established mechanisms set out in the Oxfordshire Flood Toolkit and on the Council website.</p> <p>Leaflets and information on flood mitigation are available through the website and Oxfordshire Flood Toolkit.</p> <p>For general flooding queries, members should submit using the 'members query' form. To escalate more urgent issues, members should do so via the Portfolio holder (Cllr. Railton), who can then escalate in regular fortnightly briefings.</p>

3) That Cabinet commits to long-term flood resilience and preparedness in the context of the need for climate adaptation measures, by reviewing and reassessing the adequacy of emergency planning funding reserves, recognising the growing frequency and severity of flooding in Oxford.	Yes	The reserve is reviewed quarterly and an application for additional funding, when needed, will be based upon the predicted severity and frequency of flooding and other emergency events in Oxford.
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To: Cabinet

Date: 22 January 2025

Report of: Scrutiny Committee

Title of Report: Governance changes to address the increase in Urgent Key Decisions

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present the 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 Susan Brown, Leader of the Council
Corporate Priority:	A well-run council
Policy Framework:	n/a
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee

Introduction and overview

1. The Scrutiny Committee met on 14 January 2025 to consider the Governance changes to address the increase in Urgent Key Decisions. The report recommends that the Committee notes the progress made to date and plans being taken forward in 2025, and agree any recommendations.
2. The Committee was grateful to Emma Jackman, Head of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer) for attending to present the report and answer questions from the Committee.

Summary and recommendations

3. Emma Jackman, Head of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer) introduced the report, updating the Committee on progress made and ongoing plans to address

the increase in Urgent Key Decisions taken in 2024. She presented a series of measures aimed at improving and strengthening governance across the Council.

4. The Committee looked at and noted the various measures outlined in the report, which included clarifying the definition of a Key Decision in the Council’s constitution, revising the Forward Plan and report templates to include clearer guidance for users, delivery of training sessions for senior management and staff across various services, and the introduction of mandatory e-learning modules for all staff. The Committee also noted efforts being made to align the governance practices of Council-owned companies through training arrangements tailored to them.
5. Members of the Committee asked questions relating to the specifics of staff training and how continued compliance could be maintained. Questions were also raised about the gaps in governance practices between the Council and its companies, as well as trends that might explain the increase in urgent key decisions.
6. The Committee sought clarification on timelines and the implementation of mandatory training, asking whether a two-year refresh cycle was the right approach. Members wondered if more frequent monitoring mechanisms could be introduced to ensure consistent compliance across the board.
7. Another area of focus was the transition involving the appointment of a new Company Secretary in the Council-owned companies. The Committee noted the need to avoid governance gaps during such transitions and highlighted the importance of aligned governance standards between the Council and its companies.
8. Lastly, the Committee discussed the importance of analysing trends that result in urgent key decisions being taken, highlighting the need to distinguish between unavoidable circumstances and capacity-related challenges. The Committee suggested implementing better data collection and reporting would help provide a clear picture for ongoing scrutiny.

Recommendation 1: That Cabinet supports the continued implementation and embedding of the actions proposed to mitigate the increased number of Urgent Key Decisions taken.

Recommendation 2: That Officers ensure an end-of-year report is submitted to the Scrutiny Committee, reporting the number and nature of urgent key decisions taken, including data to track trends and evaluate distinctions between capacity-related and unavoidable issues.

Report author	Celeste Reyeslao
Job title	Scrutiny and Governance Advisor
Service area or department	Law and Governance
Telephone	01865 252946
e-mail	creyeslao@oxford.gov.uk

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 14 January 2025 concerning the Governance changes to address the increase in Urgent Key Decisions. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) That Cabinet supports the continued implementation and embedding of the actions proposed to mitigate the increased number of Urgent Key Decisions taken.	Yes	The Scrutiny Committees consideration and recommendations concerning the report on governance is welcome. This recommendation is to support the paper which obviously we will do.
2) That Officers ensure an end-of-year report is submitted to the Scrutiny Committee, reporting the number and nature of urgent key decisions taken, including data to track trends and evaluate distinctions between capacity-related and unavoidable issues.	Yes	The report on urgent key decisions will be reported on at the end of each municipal year (Scrutiny Committee in April) and the Head of Law and Governance will continue to ensure that only those unavoidable urgent key decisions are brought forward. The proposals in the paper will be implemented as set out and a progress will be provided in the Annual Governance Statement to Audit and Governance in the next municipal year. In addition, we will continue to keep it under review and adapt and add to the proposals as needed to ensure that we are continually strengthening our governance arrangements concerning the use of Urgent Key decisions.

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