

Agenda

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Scrutiny Committee

This meeting will be held on:

Date: **Wednesday 5 June 2024**

Time: **6.00 pm**

Place: **Long Room - Oxford Town Hall**

For further information please contact:

Celeste Reyeslao, Committee and Member Services Officer

📞 07485 309899

✉ DemocraticServices@oxford.gov.uk

Members of the public can attend to observe this meeting and.

- may register in advance to speak to the committee in accordance with the [committee's rules](#)
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Committee Membership

Councillor Mohammed Altaf-Khan

Councillor Mike Rowley

Councillor Tiago Corais

Councillor David Henwood (*substitute for Cllr Anne Stares*)

Councillor Chris Jarvis

Councillor Dr Amar Latif

Councillor Sajjad Malik

Councillor Katherine Miles

Councillor Edward Mundy

Councillor Simon Ottino

Councillor Asima Qayyum

Councillor Dianne Regisford

Councillor Anne Stares (*apologies*)

Apologies and notification of substitutes received before the publication are shown under *Apologies for absence* in the agenda. Those sent after publication will be reported at the meeting. Substitutes for the Chair and Vice-chair do not take on these roles.

Agenda

	Pages
1 Election of Chair for the Council Year 2024/25	
The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee must be an opposition councillor (Constitution Part 13.6a).	
2 Election of Vice Chair for the Council Year 2024/25	
The Vice Chair can be from any political group.	
3 Apologies for absence	
<i>Cllr Anne Stares (substitute: Cllr David Henwood)</i>	
4 Declarations of interest	
5 Chair's Announcements	
6 Minutes	9 - 14
Minutes from 11 April 2024.	
<u>Recommendation:</u> That the minutes of the informal remote meeting held on 11 April 2024 be APPROVED as a true and accurate record.	
7 Scrutiny Operating Principles 2024/25	15 - 46
The Head of Law and Governance has submitted a report which seeks the Committee's agreement to the adoption of a set of Scrutiny Operating Principles for the 2024/25 Council year, the establishment of standing panels and review groups, the appointment of standing panel and review group chairs and a proposed work plan to September 2024. The recommendations are set out in the report.	

8 Report back on recommendations and from Scrutiny Panel meetings

47 - 50

At its meeting on 17 April 2024, Cabinet considered the following reports from Scrutiny and made responses to the recommendations:

- Oxford City Council Annual Business Plan 2024-2025 and Progress of the 2023/24 Priorities

Cabinet deferred consideration of the following reports to its meeting on 12 June 2024; responses to these recommendations will be reported back to the Scrutiny Committee at a future meeting:

- Adult Exploitation
- Implementation of Selective Licensing
- Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment
- Integrated Performance Report Q3 2023/24
- Biodiversity Net Gain
- Citywide Retrofit Strategy
- Energy Generation/Solar Potential on Council Buildings
- Tree Planting

There have been no Panel meetings since the Scrutiny Committee's previous informal remote meeting on 11 April 2024.

The Committee is asked to:

1. **Note** Cabinet's responses to its recommendations.

9 Dates of future meetings

Scrutiny Committee

- 02 July 2024
- 06 August 2024
- 03 September 2024
- 08 October 2024
- 04 November 2024

- 02 December 2024
- 14 January 2025
- 29 January 2025
- 03 March 2025
- 01 April 2025

Standing Panels

Housing & Homelessness: 03 July 2024; 07 August 2024; 10 October 2024; 07 November 2024; 06 March 2025

Finance & Performance: 04 September 2024; 04 December 2022; 15 January 2025; 07 April 2025

Climate & Environment: 11 June 2024; 05 September 2024; 20 November 2024; 26 February 2025; 27 March 2025

All meetings start at 6.00 pm.

Information for those attending

Recording and reporting on meetings held in public

Members of public and press can record, or report in other ways, the parts of the meeting open to the public. You are not required to indicate in advance but it helps if you notify the Committee Services Officer prior to the meeting so that they can inform the Chair and direct you to the best place to record.

The Council asks those recording the meeting:

- To follow the protocol which can be found on the Council's [website](#)
- Not to disturb or disrupt the meeting
- Not to edit the recording in a way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings. This includes not editing an image or views expressed in a way that may ridicule or show a lack of respect towards those being recorded.
- To avoid recording members of the public present, even inadvertently, unless they are addressing the meeting.

Please be aware that you may be recorded during your speech and any follow-up. If you are attending please be aware that recording may take place and that you may be inadvertently included in these.

The Chair of the meeting has absolute discretion to suspend or terminate any activities that in his or her opinion are disruptive.

Councillors declaring interests

General duty

You must declare any disclosable pecuniary interests when the meeting reaches the item on the agenda headed "Declarations of Interest" or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?

Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to your* employment; sponsorship (ie payment for expenses incurred by you in carrying out your duties as a councillor or towards your election expenses); contracts; land in the Council's area; licenses for land in the Council's area; corporate tenancies; and securities. These declarations must be recorded in each councillor's Register of Interests which is publicly available on the Council's website.

Declaring an interest

Where any matter disclosed in your Register of Interests is being considered at a meeting, you must declare that you have an interest. You should also disclose the nature as well as the existence of the interest. If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, after having declared it at the meeting you must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Members' Code of Conduct and public perception

Even if you do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter, the Members' Code of Conduct says that a member "must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself" and that "you must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned". The matter of interests must be viewed within the context of the Code as a whole and regard should continue to be paid to the perception of the public.

Members Code – Other Registrable Interests

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to the financial interest or wellbeing** of one of your Other Registrable Interests*** then you must declare an

interest. You must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and you must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Members Code – Non Registrable Interests

Where a matter arises at a meeting which **directly relates** to your financial interest or wellbeing (and does not fall under disclosable pecuniary interests), or the financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate, you must declare the interest.

Where a matter arises at a meeting which affects your own financial interest or wellbeing, a financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate or a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under Other Registrable Interests, then you must declare the interest.

You must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room, if you answer in the affirmative to this test:

“Where a matter affects the financial interest or well-being:

- a. to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
- b. a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting.”

Otherwise, you may stay in the room, take part in the discussion and vote.

*Disclosable pecuniary interests that must be declared are not only those of the member her or himself but also those member’s spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

** Wellbeing can be described as a condition of contentedness, healthiness and happiness; anything that could be said to affect a person’s quality of life, either positively or negatively, is likely to affect their wellbeing.

*** Other Registrable Interests: a) any unpaid directorships b) any Body of which you are a member or are in a position of general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority c) any Body (i) exercising functions of a public nature (ii) directed to charitable purposes or (iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union) of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management.

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Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Thursday 11 April 2024



Committee members present:

Councillor Pegg (Chair)	Councillor Altaf-Khan
Councillor Arshad	Councillor Corais
Councillor Douglas	Councillor Fry
Councillor Jarvis	Councillor Smowton

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy
Carolyn Ploszynski, Head of Regeneration and Economy
Richard Adams, Community Safety Service Manager
Nicola Bell, Anti-Slavery Coordinator Oxfordshire
Clare Keen, Policy and Partnerships Officer
Alice Courtney, Scrutiny Officer
Lucy Brown, Committee and Member Services Officer

Also present:

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council, Leader of the Labour Group, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships, Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships
Councillor Mark Lygo, Sheriff of Oxford & Cabinet Member for Inclusive and Safer Communities, Cabinet Member for Inclusive and Safer Communities

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Rowley, Diggins and Thomas sent apologies.

97. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

98. Chair's Announcements

None.

99. Minutes

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2024 as a true and accurate record.

The Committee agreed to consider items 7, 8 and 9 next on the agenda, followed by items 5, 6 and 10.

100. Adult Exploitation

Cllr Mark Lygo, Cabinet Member for Safer and Inclusive Communities introduced the report from the Anti-Slavery Coordinator Oxfordshire which provided an update on the prevalence of adult exploitation and modern slavery and the partnership work being undertaken to address this. He highlighted that in partnership with the other Oxfordshire councils and with funding through the Community Safety Fund from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, the new role of Anti-Slavery Coordinator Oxfordshire (ASCO) was introduced in January 2022, and that the Council was fortunate to have Nicola Bell, Anti-Slavery Coordinator Oxfordshire in post.

He drew the Committee's attention to the central recording system, developed for collection of relevant data that ensured a greater understanding of the prevalence of exploitation and modern slavery, which enabled a focused, targeted approach to support potential victims. He emphasised that the partnership included working with over 50 partners in the city, which included 80 multi-agency meetings and 30 multi-agency joint visits/operations, and the positive outcomes of these were detailed within the report.

Nicola Bell, Anti-Slavery Coordinator Oxfordshire and Richard Adams, Community Safety Service Manager, attended the meeting to speak to the item and answered the Committee's questions.

Cllr Mohammad Altaf-Khan joined the meeting.

During discussion, the Committee noted the following:

- Of the brothels issued with Closure Orders, those victims had been offered support and assistance. It was thought that they were now out of that exploitation as their names had not come up as part of the joint work taking place with agencies across Oxfordshire and the wider Thames Valley.
- There was a very low percentage of 'repeat victims'; those who were usually had very complex needs and support would be organised through a multi-agency approach.
- The Council worked with other agencies, such as St Mungo's, to support and engage with particular groups at risk of exploitation.
- The top three areas of exploitation in Oxfordshire, as outlined in the report: sexual, criminal and labour, were in line with the national picture as reported by the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). However, in the city, there was a prevalence of sexual exploitation which was not reflected in the national picture; a targeted piece of work to investigate sexual exploitation and brothels was currently taking place.
- Bespoke training to suit particular audiences, including councillors, was available and could be requested through the Anti-Slavery Coordinator Oxfordshire.
- Social media campaigns relating to adult exploitation and modern slavery took place over the year as a partnership approach to target specific topics.

Cllr Mark Lygo, Cabinet Member for Safer and Inclusive Communities highlighted the exemplary work taking place across the partnership and wished to personally thank the

Anti-Slavery Coordinator Oxfordshire and the team for their dedication. He suggested that a future report could be submitted to the Committee in twelve months' time to update on progress made; the Committee requested that the Scrutiny Officer include this on the longlist of suggestions for 2024/25 for consideration by the new Committee.

The Anti-Slavery Coordinator Oxfordshire advised all councillors to contact her in the first instance if they had any concerns over individuals in their constituencies or the city; alternatively councillors could contact saferoxford@oxford.gov.uk for the attention of Nicola Bell.

Cllr Tiago Corais joined the meeting.

The Committee resolved to make the following recommendations on the report to Cabinet:

1. That the Council develops and delivers training for all Members related to spotting the signs of adult exploitation and modern slavery and how to report it.
2. That the Council rolls out a social media campaign related to spotting the signs of adult exploitation and modern slavery and how to report it.

Cllr Mark Lygo, Cabinet Member for Safer and Inclusive Communities, Nicola Bell, Anti-Slavery Coordinator Oxfordshire and Richard Adams, Community Safety Service Manager left the meeting and did not return.

101. Tourism Review Group Update

Cllr Susan Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships introduced the report which updated the Scrutiny Committee on progress regarding Tourism Management since 2021. She highlighted the impact on tourism in the city since the COVID-19 pandemic and a previous report to the Scrutiny Committee on 08 September 2021 provided some narrative around this. Whilst the number of visits to the city was not back up to pre-pandemic levels, the numbers of domestic visitors to the city had increased, however there were no figures yet available for 2023.

Cllr Brown highlighted the progress made on tourism as part of the Oxfordshire Economic Recovery and Renewal Framework, Oxford Economic Strategy and City Centre Action Plan including work with key partners since the last update to the Scrutiny Committee and these were included in the report. She advised the Committee that the Council was no longer a Board Member of Experience Oxfordshire, following a decision made by Experience Oxfordshire.

Carolyn Ploszynski, Head of Regeneration & Economy advised of an error within Appendix 1 to the report; the 'agree?' column for recommendation 14 should state 'yes'. She added that, since 2019, the Council had been in the process of facilitating two additional hotels within the city, which had not been included within the report.

During discussion, the Committee noted the following:

- The Oxford Economic Strategy and City Centre Action Plan set out plans for further developing the city to make it more attractive to tourists, which included additional pedestrian areas and better signage.

- Plans within the Oxford Economic Strategy and City Centre Action Plan would be facilitated by a city centre delivery group made up of key stakeholders including businesses, street specific business groups and key property holders in the city centre.
- Direct city centre toilet provision was available through the Council at Market Street, Gloucester Green and the Town Hall. There were also facilities located at Westgate shopping centre; the owners of which had advised they were happy for these to be promoted with visitors. Carolyn Ploszynski said that she will ask whether an updated list of toilet provision available for public use could be provided to councillors to better direct visitors to the city.
- Whilst it was recognised that there was an issue with coaches travelling into the city, this was primarily the responsibility of Oxfordshire County Council; the City Council had raised the issue with the County Council previously and would continue to do so. The City Council have earmarked £20,000 for a Coach Study which will be commissioned with the county as part of the Central Oxfordshire and Movement Framework.
- Oxfordshire Movement and Place Framework, a joint project led by the County Council, had been set up to seek to create a blueprint for public realm improvements in the city, which included a coach parking strategy.
- The Council was actively exploring the implementation of a tourist tax for the city, which would be available for pre-scrutiny in the usual way.
- The Council would continue discussions with businesses, including tourism businesses, in the city to ensure that they were encouraged to pay and sign-up to the Oxford Living Wage. Over the last four years, the number of Oxford Living Wage employers had risen from approximately 20 to over 100 businesses, but it was recognised that more could be done, especially through the use of the Inclusive Economic Partnership in communicating the message.

The Committee requested that the Scrutiny Officer add tourism to the longlist of suggestions for 2024/25 for consideration by the new Committee.

The Committee noted the report; there were no recommendations.

Carolyn Ploszynski, Head of Regeneration & Economy left the meeting and did not return.

102. Oxford City Council Annual Business Plan 2024-2025

Cllr Susan Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships, introduced the report which sought Cabinet approval for Oxford City Council's Annual Business Plan Priorities 2024-2025 and provided an update on delivery of the 2023-2024 Business Plan. She highlighted the significant amount of cross-party engagement and consultation in relation to the Annual Business Plan 2024-2025 and the draft Corporate Strategy for 2024-2028 as set out in the report. She advised the Committee that the Annual Business Plan was not hugely different from previous iterations, but it sought to reduce the number of detailed priorities and actions and deliver more measurable objectives following feedback through the recent Local Government Association Peer Review.

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy added that a progress update on delivery of the 2023-2024 Annual Business Plan was included at Appendix 2.

Clare Keen, Policy and Partnerships Officer also attended the meeting to speak to the item and answer the Committee's questions.

Cllr Sandy Douglas arrived at the meeting.

During discussion, the Committee noted the following:

- Local grid capacity had constrained the deliverability of converting homes to electric and installing EV chargers; the Council continued to lobby Central Government to secure new provision to increase the capacity of the National Grid.
- Good progress had been made with Robotic Process Automation (RPA), which was in use across various Council service areas. It was noted that in some areas, the cost of implementing RPA would be too high in relation to the savings that could be realised (e.g. automation of post and scanning).
- The 'Good, Affordable Homes' priority in the 2024-2025 Annual Business Plan did not include any year one actions working specifically towards increasing the number of new homes for social rent because the report aimed to apply a flexibility of terms.
- The Integrated Performance Report would report on progress against the Annual Business Plan 2024-2025 throughout the year.

The Committee resolved to make the following recommendation on the report to Cabinet:

1. That the Council includes specific year one actions within the 'Good, Affordable Homes' priority related to driving forward the Council's aim to increase the number of new homes for social rent.

Cllr Susan Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships, Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy and Clare Keen, Policy and Partnerships Officer left the meeting and did not return.

103. Work Plan and Forward Plan

The Committee noted the Forward Plan.

The Committee reviewed the Work Plan set out in the agenda and confirmed its agreement to consider the following reports at the June meeting:

- Scrutiny Operating Principles 2024/25
- Thriving Communities Strategy Update
- Oxford City Council Corporate Strategy 2024/28

The Scrutiny Officer advised the Committee that any changes to the Forward Plan after this meeting but ahead of the June meeting may result in changes to the Work Plan, and if so, any changes would be agreed by the Scrutiny Officer in consultation with the Chair Elect of the Scrutiny Committee for 2024/25.

104. Report back on recommendations and from Scrutiny Panel meetings

The Chair presented the report on recommendations.

The Committee noted that on 13 March 2024, Cabinet considered recommendations related to four reports, responses to which were set out in the agenda pack:

- Oxfordshire Food Strategy Action Plan

- Request for Exceptional Circumstances Relief from the Community Infrastructure Levy
- Allocation of Preventing Homelessness Budget 2024/25
- Corporate Key Performance Indicator Review

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the Housing and Homelessness Panel had met on 7 March 2024 and considered four substantive items: Allocation of Preventing Homelessness Grant 2024/25; Implementation of Selective Licensing; Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment; and the Tenant Satisfaction (STAR) Survey. The Panel held wide-ranging discussion and formulated a number of recommendations to Cabinet on all reports apart from the Tenant Satisfaction (STAR) Survey.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the Climate and Environment Panel had met on 20 March 2024 and considered three substantive items: Tree Planting, Energy Generation/Solar Potential and Council Buildings and a 2023-24 Year in Review item which reflected on the Panel’s work to date. A number of recommendations were made which would be submitted to the Cabinet meeting in April 2024.

Cllr James Fry, Chair of the Finance and Performance Panel advised that the Panel had met on 26 March 2024 and considered the Integrated Performance Report Q3 2023/24. The Panel made two recommendations which would be submitted to the Cabinet meeting in April 2024.

105. Dates of future meetings

The Committee noted the dates of future meetings.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.20 pm

Chair

Date: Wednesday 5 June 2024

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.

To: Scrutiny Committee
Date: 05 June 2024
Report of: Head of Law and Governance
Title of Report: Scrutiny Operating Principles and Standing Panel and Review Group Arrangements

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To adopt a set of operating principles for the Scrutiny Committee for the 2024/25 municipal year, establish standing panels and review groups and appoint standing panel and review group membership and chairs.
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Chair of the Scrutiny Committee 2024/25
Corporate Priority:	All
Recommendations: That the Scrutiny Committee resolves to:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agree the proposed Committee Operating Principles for the 2024/25 municipal year, as set out at Appendix A. 2. Agree to establish the following standing panels for the 2024/25 municipal year with the following remits: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) Finance and Performance Panel – 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. ii) Housing and Homelessness Panel – strategic housing and landlord issues and decisions, homelessness, housing services performance and interaction with the Tenant’s Forum. iii) Climate and Environment Panel – climate and environmental issues and decisions, progress and performance monitoring, monitoring delivery of existing strategies, policies and projects. <p>or to agree to consider the establishment of alternative panels at a subsequent meeting.</p> 3. Agree the allocation of seats on standing panels to political groups for 2024/25 (Finance and Performance Panel: 4, Housing and Homelessness Panel: 6, Climate and Environment Panel: 4 are recommended). 4. Agree to appoint members and chairs of the Finance and Performance, Housing and 	

Homelessness and Climate and Environment Panels or any other panels as agreed by the Committee in accordance with nominations made by political groups.

Finance and Performance Panel: Cllr James Fry (Chair), Cllr Chris Jarvis, Cllr Christopher Smowton, Cllr Ian Yeatman
Housing and Homelessness Panel: Cllr Lizzy Diggins (Chair), Cllr Theo Jupp, Cllr Edward Mundy, Cllr Asima Qayyum, Cllr Rosie Rawle, Cllr Anne Stares
Climate and Environment Panel: Cllr Jemima Hunt (Chair), Cllr Judith Harley, Cllr Emily Kerr, Cllr Katherine Miles

5. **Agree** to establish a Budget Review Group, comprising the membership of the Finance and Performance Panel, noting that the proposed scope will be agreed at a future Scrutiny Committee meeting.
6. **Agree** that the Chair of the Finance and Performance Panel will Chair the Budget Review Group.
7. **Agree** the schedule of meetings as presented within the report.
8. **Agree:**
 - i) The preliminary Work Plan covering the period to September 2024 as detailed at **Appendix B**; and
 - ii) That Committee members will send additional ideas for topics for Scrutiny-commissioned reports to the Scrutiny Officer by e-mail for consideration at the Committee's 02 July meeting.
9. **Note** the Scrutiny Guide for Councillors at Appendix D.

Appendices

Appendix A	Draft Scrutiny Committee Operating Principles
Appendix B	Preliminary work plan to September 2024
Appendix C	List of suggestions for 2024/25 Scrutiny Work Plan
Appendix D	Scrutiny Guide for Councillors
Appendix E	List of Executive Decisions Reserved to the Shareholder
Appendix F	Shareholder Decisions 2023

Introduction and background

1. At the start of a new municipal year the Scrutiny Committee is asked to re-establish the key principles by which the Committee, and its standing panels and review groups, will operate. This provides clarity to Members, officers and the public about how Scrutiny will manage and organise its activities during the year.
2. The Committee is able to delegate responsibility for scrutiny of certain issues to specific standing panels, which report back to the Committee with recommendations (where time allows). The Committee should consider whether it wishes to re-establish the previous standing panel arrangements, or establish different panels. As standing panels are established, it is recommended that the number of seats, political composition and membership of panels is 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, before concluding their work with a report and recommendations, usually to Cabinet. As review groups are established, it is

recommended that the number of seats, political composition and membership of review groups is 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; and to act as a check and balance function to ensure that decisions are taken in the best interests of the people of Oxford. Scrutiny carries out research, reviews and hears from independent experts, as well as Council officers, making recommendations for service improvement where necessary. One focus of the Committee's work is to hold the Cabinet to account, but Scrutiny may also pursue its own agenda by commissioning reports from officers on priority issues, assisting the Council in developing policy. 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).
5. Members of the Committee are encouraged to read the Scrutiny Guide for Councillors (Appendix D) which provides a detailed review of how the Committee operates, how to be effective as a scrutiny councillor, and the support and development opportunities available to members.

Scrutiny Operating Principles

6. The Council's Constitution sets out the role (Part 8) and procedures (Part 13) of the Scrutiny Committee, but it is not prescriptive about how the Scrutiny function will be organised and managed. In previous years, the Committee has agreed a set of operating principles to govern key aspects of its work which are not covered by the Constitution. Key matters addressed in the document include resource expectations, membership guidelines for panels and meeting frequency.
7. The Operating Principles are designed as a reference document to guide the Committee's work; a draft set of principles for adoption are set out at Appendix A. The Committee may make revisions as it sees appropriate within the confines of the Constitution, relevant legislation and resource capacity. Members are asked to discuss any proposed changes to the Operating Principles in advance with the Scrutiny Officer or take advice at the meeting.
8. The Committee is recommended to adopt the draft Operating Principles as set out at Appendix A. These Operating Principles are broadly similar to those of previous years.

Scrutiny Standing Panels

9. In previous years, the Committee has established Finance and Performance, Housing and Homelessness, Climate and Environment and Companies Scrutiny Panels to undertake detailed scrutiny of decisions and issues relevant to their remit. The reason being that small groups of members with an interest in these priority areas can build up specialist knowledge and insights and use these to produce better scrutiny outcomes. These Panels have a degree of discretion to manage their own work plans, but remain accountable to the Scrutiny Committee for their work. Where time permits, the standing panels will report to the Scrutiny Committee before their recommendations are submitted to the Cabinet. This will not normally be possible where the standing panels are making recommendations on Cabinet reports.
10. The Committee is invited to agree the remits of standing panels for the year and is recommended to re-establish the Finance and Performance Panel (*with some proposed amendments to its remit compared to 2023/24 - see paragraphs 16 to 25*), Housing and Homelessness Panel and Climate and Environment Panel.
11. The draft Operating Principles at Appendix A set out that, in any given year, the organisation ordinarily has capacity to support either:
 - a. 2 Standing Panels and 3 Review Groups; or
 - b. 3 Standing Panels and 2 Review Groups

As set out in paragraph 10 above, it is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee re-establishes the Finance and Performance, Housing and Homelessness and Climate and Environment Panels. This amounts to the maximum of three standing panels which the organisation has capacity to support. It is also recommended that the annual Budget Review Group be re-established for 2024/25 (*see paragraph 27 below*). Assuming the Committee agrees to re-establish the recommended panels and review group, capacity within the Scrutiny function remains for approximately four meetings. The Committee is recommended to give consideration as to whether it wishes to establish an additional review group focused on a priority topic of the Committee's choosing, or alternatively the Committee could choose to allocate additional meetings to standing panels, should the panels require them. There is no requirement for the Committee to make an immediate decision as to how to allocate the remaining capacity, therefore it may decide to keep this issue under review.

12. After agreeing which standing panels to establish, the Committee is recommended to appoint Chairs of these Panels and agree their full membership. The proposed Operating Principles stipulate that four or six councillors should sit on these panels, and that panel membership will be cross-party as follows:
- 4 members (1 Labour, 1 Lib Dem, 1 Green and 1 Independent Oxford Alliance)
 - 6 members (2 Labour, 1 Lib Dem, 1 Green, 1 Independent Oxford Alliance and 1 Oxford Community Independents)
13. The quorum for standing panels is two members for panels of four and three for panels of six. If the quorum is not reached, some Cabinet reports may pass without formal cross-party scrutiny, and other items may need to be delayed.
14. Given that panel meetings are not formal committees of the Council, there is no legal requirement for them to be held in-person. In addition, it is now established Council practice that most officers may attend meetings virtually. The Committee is recommended to consider the additional resource that in-person and hybrid meetings place on the organisation and agree that meetings of standing panels will be held virtually, unless there is a compelling need to hold an in-person meeting. Due to capacity constraints, hybrid meetings will not be possible.
15. The Members Allowances Scheme allocates a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) equivalent to 25% of the Basic Allowance (£1,456.92 in 2024/25) to a maximum of two standing panel chairs, on the basis that panels meet at least five times a year. If there are more than two standing panels set up, then 50% of the Basic Allowance (£2,913.84 for 2024/25) will be divided between the total number of panel chairs. This SRA is to reflect the additional responsibility of standing panel chairs.

Companies Scrutiny Arrangements

16. In 2022/23, the Committee agreed revised arrangements for Companies Scrutiny Panel, whereby the Companies Scrutiny Panel joined Shareholder and Joint Venture Group (SJVG) meetings as non-voting members with speaking rights, which was intended to provide more effective and efficient Scrutiny oversight of the shareholder function. These arrangements have been reviewed by the Head of Law and Governance in consultation with the 2023/24 Chairs of the Scrutiny Committee, Companies Scrutiny Panel and Finance and Performance Panel in line with the best practice guidance produced by Local Partnerships on Local Authority Trading Companies¹.
17. The review of arrangements for companies scrutiny took place as part of a broader ongoing governance review in relation to Council companies from the point of view of the Council as shareholder, with a view to the Council ensuring best practice locally. The work related to companies scrutiny sought to review and align the shareholder and Scrutiny functions with best practice and the law.
18. The role of shareholder is an executive function; and scrutiny of executive decisions in respect of Council companies falls within the remit of the Scrutiny function (see *paragraph 4 above*). There is no legal basis on which scrutiny of the shareholder function should differ to scrutiny of any other executive decisions. As such, it is recommended that the arrangements for companies scrutiny are amended from

¹ <https://localpartnerships.gov.uk/resources/latco-guidance/> [Accessed 21 May 2024]

2024/25 to ensure alignment of the process with scrutiny of all other executive decisions, which in turn will ensure proper, robust and compliant Scrutiny arrangements for scrutiny of the shareholder function.

19. The proposal is that scrutiny of executive decisions made in relation to any companies wholly or partly owned by the Council be included within the remit of the Finance and Performance Panel from 2024/25. This would effectively replace the previous Companies Scrutiny Panel (*which has not met as a standalone Panel since 2022*) by merging its remit with that of the Finance and Performance Panel. The Finance and Performance Panel would have the opportunity to undertake pre-decision scrutiny of any executive decisions concerning shareholding, which in practical terms would relate to decisions which are reserved to the shareholder.
20. A list of decisions which are reserved to the shareholder is included at Appendix E. These decisions do not frequently arise. The majority of decisions of the shareholder have been mapped for the previous 12-month period at Appendix F, which shows that the vast majority of items were for noting only. There would be no call on Scrutiny to consider items which are for noting only; therefore it is not anticipated that there would be a significant amount of decisions for Scrutiny to consider during the course of a year. For the business plans of the companies, which require shareholder approval annually, officers will explore whether this can be worked into the budget-setting process to avoid over duplication.
21. Going forward, the intention is that all executive decisions due to be taken by the SJVG will be included on the Forward Plan. This will involve a change in practice for the companies and so it may take a little while to put in place proper arrangements. The Finance and Performance Panel would review the Forward Plan in the usual way and determine if it wished to undertake pre-decision scrutiny on any forthcoming executive shareholder decisions; the scrutiny process for Council companies would be identical to the process for all other Cabinet decisions and call in procedures would apply in the same way as to other Cabinet decisions (*see Part 17 of the Council's Constitution*).
22. The proposed arrangements for companies scrutiny would utilise existing resources and there would be no additional Special Responsibility Allowance due to the existence of fewer panels.
23. Given the requirement to better align the Council's companies scrutiny arrangements to best practice to ensure more robust scrutiny oversight of the shareholder function, it is recommended that:
 - a. The proposed arrangements be established for 2024/25; and
 - b. Members of the Finance and Performance Panel provide any feedback throughout the course of the municipal year via the Scrutiny Officer.
24. The Scrutiny Officer will work with the Panel Chair in the usual way to help manage agendas, with particular attention given to any mitigations during the busy period around budget-setting time.
25. Any feedback on the revised arrangements would be considered during 2024/25, with a view to understanding whether any further amendments to the revised arrangements are required in subsequent years.

Scrutiny Review Groups

26. 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.
27. It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee agrees to establish a Budget Review Group for the 2024/25 municipal year to examine the Council’s budget proposals for 2025/26 and that the proposed scope be presented at a future Scrutiny Committee meeting for agreement.
28. Given the Finance and Performance Panel’s involvement in scrutinising the Council’s finances, it is recommended that the membership of the Budget Review Group should comprise the membership of the Finance and Performance Panel (if re-established); including that the Chair of the Finance and Performance Panel should Chair the Budget Review Group:
 - *Cllr James Fry (Chair), Cllr Chris Jarvis, Cllr Christopher Smowton, Cllr Ian Yeatman*
29. 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

30. Members of the Committee are invited to take note of the schedule of meetings for the remainder of the municipal year and to diarise these where necessary:

Scrutiny	Finance and Performance	Housing and Homelessness	Climate and Environment
05 June 2024			11 June 2024
02 July 2024		03 July 2024	
06 Aug 2024		07 Aug 2024	
03 Sept 2024	04 Sept 2024		05 Sept 2024
08 Oct 2024		10 Oct 2024	
04 Nov 2024		07 Nov 2024	20 Nov 2024
02 Dec 2024	04 Dec 2024		
14 Jan 2025	15 Jan 2025		
29 Jan 2025			26 Feb 2025
03 Mar 2025		06 Mar 2025	27 Mar 2025
01 Apr 2025	07 Apr 2025		

Alternative options for Standing Panels

31. The Committee is not required to reappoint the recommended standing panels, and it may choose to appoint panels with different remits.

32. If the Committee decides to set up different standing panel arrangements, the Scrutiny Officer will liaise with the Scrutiny Committee Chair 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 standing panels.

Co-Option

33. 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

34. As referenced above, Scrutiny 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 draft Scrutiny Operating Principles recognise this, stating 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 Panels will provide as much notice as is possible when commissioning reports from Council officers (minimum 8 weeks).’ As a guideline, to allow time for consideration of reports in sufficient depth whilst maintaining timely meetings of Scrutiny and its standing panels, 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.

35. The decision for the report topics Scrutiny would like to commission during 2024/25 is expected to be made at the meeting on 02 July 2024. In preparation for that, the Committee is recommended to agree that ideas from Members will be sent to the Scrutiny Officer by e-mail for collation outside the meeting.

36. Attached to this report at Appendix B is a draft Work Plan to September 2024, which provides a recommended Work Plan until that date, enabling items to be considered until such point as the Committee has had time to organise its own priorities for the remainder of the municipal year.

37. Attached to this report at Appendix C is a list of suggestions already made; these are comprised of suggestions made by Members and senior officers to date, recurring Scrutiny-commissioned reports and Cabinet reports currently listed on the Forward Plan.

Report author	Alice Courtney
Job title	Scrutiny Officer
Service area or department	Law and Governance
Telephone	01865 529834
e-mail	acourtney@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers: None

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Scrutiny Committee Operating Principles 2024/25

Meeting Arrangements

1. At least 10 Committee meetings will be scheduled each year to match the Cabinet meeting cycle. This is to enable pre-decision scrutiny of decisions to be taken at the next Cabinet meeting.
2. All public addresses and councillor contributions will be directed through the Chair. Public addresses will be limited to five minutes each.
3. The Scrutiny Committee will hold the Cabinet and senior officers to account publicly at committee meetings.
4. The Chair will report regularly to Council on the work of the Scrutiny Committee. The Committee may also produce an annual report.

Standing Panels and Review Groups

5. The Scrutiny Committee will set Standing Panels and Review Groups each year to consider selected issues in more detail.
6. Standing Panels will hold meetings throughout the year, and consider quarterly performance reports, executive decisions and other issues within their remit.
7. Review Groups will be formed to undertake issue led and time bound 'task and finish' reviews of specific issues, before concluding their work with a report and recommendations, usually to the Cabinet.
8. Review Group and Standing Panel meetings will be held in public or private as the meeting business dictates. Review Group and Standing Panel meetings will be held virtually, unless there is a compelling need to hold an in-person meeting. Due to capacity constraints, hybrid meetings will not be possible.
9. Standing Panel and Review Group Chairs will be accountable to the Scrutiny Committee and can be from any political group. Panel Chairs will be elected at the first meeting of the Committee in the municipal year. Review Group Chairs will be elected by the Committee when the groups are established.
10. Standing Panels will meet approximately 5 times each year. Review Groups will meet as often as is required for them to conclude their work. The Scrutiny Committee will oversee the work of Review Groups to ensure they do not overrun unduly.
11. The Scrutiny Committee will commission and scope the work of Standing Panels and Review Groups and therefore has final agreement on their recommendations. There may be occasions where this is not possible and Standing Panel or Review Group reports will go directly to the Cabinet.
12. In any given year, the organisation ordinarily has capacity to support either:
 - a) 2 Standing Panels and 3 Review Groups; or
 - b) 3 Standing Panels and 2 Review Groups
13. No substitutions will be allowed on Standing Panels or Review Groups. This is to provide continuity of membership given the focused nature of their work.

14. Chairs of Standing Panels and Review Groups will report back to the Committee on progress and outcomes. They may also be invited to present their reports and recommendations to the Cabinet.
15. The quorum for standing panels and review groups shall be two councillors for panels of four, and three councillors for panels of six.

Political Balance

16. The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee must be a member of the opposition, and the Vice-Chair can be from any political group.
17. The membership of Standing Panels and Review Groups will be set by the Scrutiny Committee and drawn from all non-executive members. Political groups will be asked to nominate members to any such groups for agreement by the Committee.
18. Standing Panels and Review Groups are not required to reflect the Council's make up, but the Committee will use the following cross-party principle guide for appointment:

4 members: 1 Labour, 1 Lib Dem, 1 Green and 1 Independent Oxford Alliance
6 members: 2 Labour, 1 Lib Dem, 1 Green, 1 Independent Oxford Alliance and 1 Oxford Community Independents
19. Where a political group does not wish to take-up its allocation of a seat on a Standing Panel or Review Group, it will first be offered to political groups that would not normally have a seat allocation through the cross-party principle guide for appointment to Standing Panels and Review Groups – the seat will be offered to those political groups in priority order based on strongest entitlement to a seat as per political proportionality calculations. Should there be no take-up of the seat after offering to other political groups, the Committee will decide what to do.
20. Where two or more political groups have the same entitlement to a seat on a Standing Panel or Review Group as per political proportionality calculations, but where there are not enough available seats to allocate to all of those political groups, the Committee will decide what to do.

The Scrutiny Work Plan

21. The [Work Plan](#) will consist of a number of issues for consideration informed by consultation with all councillors and senior officers. Guidance criteria for prioritising work will be provided by the Scrutiny Officer, but the Committee is responsible for agreeing its Work Plan.
22. The Work Plan will be reviewed at every meeting and adjusted to reflect the wishes of the Committee and take account of changes to the [Forward Plan](#) of executive decisions.
23. 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 Panels will provide as much

notice as is possible when commissioning reports from council officers (minimum 8 weeks).

24. The management of the Work Plan will be with the whole Committee, with the Chair and Vice-Chair taking an organisational role between meetings.
25. Any councillor can put an item on the Scrutiny Committee agenda if they write to the Head of Law and Governance at least 10 working days before the meeting and the item is relevant to the Scrutiny Committee. All Councillor Calls for Action and Call-Ins will be considered at a public meeting of the Committee.
26. Members of the public can also suggest a topic for the Work Plan. Suggestions can be submitted in person or via email democraticservices@oxford.gov.uk.

Co-option

27. At the discretion of the Committee, residents and other specialists may be co-opted as non-voting members of the Committee, Standing Panels and Review Groups, as the subject matter dictates for a period ending no later than the day of the first meeting of the next council year. The Committee may discontinue an appointment at any time.

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Proposed Scrutiny Work Schedule

June 2024 to September 2024

June 2024 – confirmed reports

Committee/Panel	Meeting date	Reports
Scrutiny Committee	05 June	Scrutiny Operating Principles 2024/25
Finance and Performance	06 June	<i>Cancelled due to no business</i>
Climate and Environment	11 June	Net Zero Masterplan Tree Management Policy HRA Energy Efficiency Projects 2024/25 Framework for the installation of renewable technologies in Council owned properties

July 2024 – provisional reports

Committee/Panel	Meeting date	Reports
Scrutiny Committee	02 July	Oxford City Council Corporate Strategy 2024/2028 Update of Byelaws for Parks and Open Spaces
Housing and Homelessness	03 July	Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 Action Plan Temporary Accommodation Demand and Mitigations

August 2024 – provisional reports

Committee/Panel	Meeting date	Reports
Scrutiny Committee	06 August	Oxford City Council Safeguarding Report 2023/24 Thriving Communities Strategy Update Citizen Experience Strategy Progress Report
Housing and Homelessness	07 August	<i>Items TBC</i>

September 2024 – provisional reports

Committee/Panel	Meeting date	Reports
Scrutiny Committee	03 September	Budget Review Group Scope Council of Sanctuary Framework Joint Venture LLP for South Oxford Science Village
Finance and Performance	04 September	Scrutiny Performance Monitoring (Q1 2024/25) Treasury Management Annual Report 2023/24 Integrated Performance Report Q1 2024/25 Exempt Treasury Management Matters [discussion item]
Climate and Environment	05 September	Net Zero Masterplan Annual Air Quality Status Report Local Area Energy Planning and mitigation measures regarding local grid constraints ZCOP Expansion Plans

Current Suggestions for 2024/25 Scrutiny Work Plan

Councillor and senior officer suggestions received to date:

- Implementation of Refugee Resettlement in Oxford – evaluation, lessons learnt, improvements
- Alternative ‘innovative’ solutions to the housing crisis
- Housing and Carbon Reduction – impact of decarbonisation of Council homes on tenants (mid-way through the 2yr SHDF works, lessons learned from LAD1B) – EPCs of HRA Stock (inc timetable for full set etc)
- Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) annual reporting on progress against all agreed pledges and also full list of pledges to identify any further potential pledges to sign-up to (from July 2024)
- Annual review of Citizen Experience Strategy
- Waste/Waste Strategy
- Tree Maintenance
- Report back to Scrutiny Committee on arrangements from Leisure Services Contract Award (January 2024) – update on the arrangements established for the effective commissioning, delivery and management of the leisure services contract – including the arrangements established to ensure a smooth transition to the new provider.
- Landlord Services Transformation (Social Housing (Regulation) Act Compliance) [presentation]
- Fleet Decarbonisation Update
- Council-wide Data and Mapping
- Local Area Energy planning and mitigation measures regarding local grid constraints
- Heat Network & Zoning
- Oxford Climate Emergency Centre (progress following motion passed at Full Council on 02 October 2023)
- Loss and Damage to the Council as a result of climate change (e.g. costs incurred by the Council as a result of recent flooding) and how this could be addressed/funded
- Innovative longer-term partnership projects and funding initiatives that the Council could get involved in
- Internal Council governance – including ensuring there is a clear client, clear responsibility and clear documentation setting out policy/process
- Implementation of Selective Licensing (Year 2)
- Adult Exploitation and Modern Slavery
- Tourism
- Comparative analysis of current overall slippage of Capital Programme and how that aligns with 40% optimism bias assumptions in MTFP 2024/25 to 2027/28
- Biodiversity Net Gain – Biodiversity Units Feasibility Study (*see officer decision [here](#)*)

Regular/standard items:

Scrutiny Committee	Finance and Performance Panel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic Abuse Review Group Update • Child Poverty Review Group Update 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny-commissioned performance reports (June – Q4 2023/24; September – Q1 2024/25; December – Q2 2024/25; January – no report; March – Q3 2024/25) • Social Value/Impact in Procurement • Issues faced by the Local Government Sector and how Oxford City Council Compares (annual) • Exempt Treasury Management Matters [discussion item]
Housing and Homelessness Panel	Climate and Environment Panel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing performance (biannual - June/July and November meetings) • Building Safety & Compliance (biannual – June/July and November meetings) • Tenants’ Forum Update • Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Mini-review Update • Housing Complaint Handling Performance (biannual – Q1&2 Nov/Dec; Q3&4 & Annual Report June/July) • City of Sanctuary Accreditation – progress update (annual) • Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment (annual – March) • Tenant Satisfaction (STAR) Survey (annual – March) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate Emergency Review Group Update • Waterways Update • Annual Air Quality Status Report (and accompanying executive summary as recommended by Panel in 2023) – annual, September meeting • Net Zero Masterplan • Biodiversity strategy/action plan • Environment Act reporting • Citizens Assembly on Climate Change

Cabinet items on the Forward Plan (officer suggestions):

- Tree Management Policy (June)
- HRA Energy Efficiency Projects 2024/25 (June)
- Framework for the installation of renewable technologies in Council owned properties (June)
- Oxford City Council Corporate Strategy 2024/2028 (July)
- Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 Action Plan (July)
- Temporary Accommodation Demand and Mitigations (July)
- Integrated Performance Report Q4 2023/24 (July)
- Integrated Performance Report Q4 2022/23 (July)
- Oxford City Council Safeguarding Report 2023/24 (August)

- Thriving Communities Strategy Update (August)
- Citizen Experience Strategy Progress Report (August)
- Council of Sanctuary Framework (September)
- Joint Venture LLP for South Oxford Science Village (September)
- Treasury Management Annual Report 2023/24 (September)
- Integrated Performance Report Q1 2024/25 (September)

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Scrutiny:

A Practical Guide for Councillors

“Overview and scrutiny is potentially the most exciting and powerful element of the entire local government modernisation process... Overview and scrutiny is the mechanism by which councils can achieve active community leadership, good governance and by which councillors can become powerful and influential politicians.”

Officer of the Deputy Prime Minister – 2002

What is Scrutiny?

The Local Government Act 2000 brought about significant changes in the way that Local Authority decision making takes place; principally, it mandated the establishment of Cabinets and scrutiny committees. Previously, Local Authorities ran a committee system of decision making which delegated decisions to service specific committees.

However, a 1998 Audit Commission report concluded that these arrangements were inefficient, lacked leadership and public transparency. The 2000 Act directed that all first and second tier authorities move to an executive model of decision making. This required the separation of executive (Cabinet) and scrutiny functions, where decision making was centralised into cabinets and scrutiny committees were established to hold them to account.

What is the role of the Scrutiny Committee?

Oxford City Council's Scrutiny Committee is comprised of 12 cross-party councillors who are not members of the Cabinet. Their role is to carry out a 'check and balance' and 'critical friend' function to the Cabinet by reviewing policies, decisions and key issues affecting residents.

Scrutiny operates to provide public assurance that the Cabinet is carrying out its business effectively, and taking decisions in the best interests of the residents of Oxford. To provide this assurance, the Committee carries out research, reviews and hears from independent experts, making recommendations for service improvement where necessary.

The Committee does not have any decision making powers, but it can make recommendations to the Cabinet arguing for change and service improvement, and it can delay decisions for further scrutiny through the power of call-in (see call-in section). The expectation is that well-reasoned, evidence based and logical recommendations made in public will compel the Cabinet to reconsider its decisions. The Cabinet is required to provide a written response to Committee recommendations within two months, setting out whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations.

The role of the Scrutiny Committee is to:

Review and Develop Policy - Reviewing existing policy to ensure it remains fit for purpose, and contributing to the development of new policies before they are implemented. Monitoring policy implementation may also take place.

Scrutinise externally - Examining how external organisations contribute to the benefit of the City and recommend ways to improve their contributions. Notably, there are limitations to the level of influence over external organisations, and reputational and relationship risks.

Hold the Cabinet to account - Scrutinising decisions of the Cabinet either before or after they are implemented, to ensure that the right decisions are made at the right time, and in an open and transparent way.

Reflect the concerns of the public - Promoting the views of the public through scrutiny and engaging with a diverse range of issues and people. The Committee Work Plan should reflect the concerns and aspirations of local people.

Challenge performance - Reviewing the performance of council services to ensure they provide value for money and are meeting targets.

How does the Committee prioritise its work?

The fundamental role of scrutiny is to achieve positive outcomes for local people by undertaking a targeted and thorough examination of the Council's service to residents. However, it is not possible to examine every service in detail, so the Committee must prioritise and plan its work. The Committee agrees an annual schedule of work each June which is kept under review throughout the year, and officers and members are invited to put forward ideas. An effective work programme will:

- strictly prioritise key issues
- clearly outline the purpose of why items are being considered
- limit the number of update reports and reports for noting
- ensure that agendas are realistic and not 'too busy'
- deploy a combination of scrutiny types (pre / post scrutiny, external and internal)
- provide attendees with sufficient notice to prepare for meetings
- establish review groups or panels to undertake detailed work.

At Oxford City Council, the Committee is encouraged to use the 'TOPIC' scoring criteria as a guide for prioritising issues for the work plan:

Timely	Is the need for a review timely and not duplicated elsewhere?
Oxford Priority	Is the issue featured in the Council's Corporate Plan?
Public Interest	Is the issue of significant public interest?
Influence	Is the Committee realistically able to influence the issue?
Cost	Is the issue an area of high expenditure or savings?

What are Review Groups?

In some instances, the Scrutiny Committee may consider it more effective to establish a small group to carry out a review, where it would be impractical for the whole committee to be involved. The work of a review group should be focussed, time limited, and carry out in depth research and scrutiny in the interest of developing recommendation for service improvement. Often, review groups will seek the help of external experts to help inform their work. Members of these groups should have the interest and time to commit to undertake in-depth scrutiny. Review group meetings are not bound by the same rights of public access to meetings, but will usually be held in public. Chairs should be Scrutiny members, but the remaining membership can be from across the council.

What are the stages of a Scrutiny Review?

The 5 stages of a scrutiny review are outlined below:

Scoping: The scoping of a scrutiny review is fundamental to the effectiveness of the review process. This starts with identifying outputs and objectives, and clarifying what members hope to achieve. It also considers what evidence is needed, the timeframe for the review, who should be involved and any publicity.

Evidence gathering: Evidence is gathered in accordance with the review scope. This principally involves speaking with experts, but could also involve site visits, consultation exercises, examining performance, desktop research and holding public workshops.

Reviewing evidence: Once all of the evidence has been gathered, it then needs to be reviewed. This is where members take stock and assess the evidence, and decide if enough information is available to draw reasonable conclusions and recommendations.

Reporting and recommendations: The Scrutiny Officer, in consultation with the Chair, will produce a detailed report on the review group's work, outlining the rationale for its conclusions and recommendations. Following endorsement from the Scrutiny Committee, recommendations will be put to the Cabinet for a written response.

Monitoring and evaluation: Although responsibility for the implementation of any accepted recommendations rests with the Cabinet and officers, it is essential that the Scrutiny Committee monitors progress usually at 6 or 12 month intervals.

What are Scrutiny Panels?

In addition to carrying out time limited scrutiny reviews, the Scrutiny Committee can also establish yearly standing panels, to help manage its workload. In previous years, the Committee has opted to establish three Panels; Finance and Performance, Housing and Homelessness and Climate and Environment. Each Panel is tasked with scrutinising decisions related to their delegated area, and reporting back to the Scrutiny Committee with recommendations. The membership of these Panels is made up of between four and six members, and accountable to the Scrutiny Committee. Regular agenda items for these Panels include annual and quarterly performance reports. These meetings are also minuted and generally open to the public.

◆ How can Scrutiny add value?

Scrutiny is solution and improvement focussed. It provides the Council with an additional resource to help evaluate and develop policy, and provides assurance that decisions are taken in the best interest of residents. It involves the voices of the public, independent experts and stakeholders that might otherwise not be involved in the Council's strategy and policy development. It provides officers and the Cabinet with detailed feedback on proposed decisions and Council services, and operates as an early stage sounding board to confirm broader member buy-in to important decisions. The Committee will look to make evidence based recommendations in the interest of improving services.

◆ What do effective recommendations look like?

The [Centre for Governance and Scrutiny](#) advocates that recommendations must be evidence-based, specific and realistic enough to be implemented. They should have a clear focus on outcomes and advocate for a measurable change. Crucially, recommendations must be accompanied by a robust argument with evidence from a variety of sources to support them, to ensure they are compelling. Where possible, recommendations should be developed in partnership with other interested parties, and should take account of the Council's financial situation. Recommendations should avoid being open-ended and vague to ensure that their implementation can be objectively measured in the long term.

◆ Who is involved in Scrutiny?

The role of the Chair and Vice-Chair:

- the Chair leads the Scrutiny Committee and presides over its meetings
- the Vice-Chair supports the Chair and deputises in their absence
- the management of the Work Plan is with the whole Committee but the Chair and Vice-Chair take an "organisational role" between meetings
- the Chair updates Full Council about the work of the Committee.

The role of all Scrutiny Members:

- to contribute to the Work Plan and participate at Scrutiny Committee meetings
- to think strategically about City-wide issues, using local knowledge
- to be mindful of and actively seek community views
- to be questioning, deliberative and evidence based
- to be robust and constructive in challenging; not oppositional.

The role of the Scrutiny Officer:

- to support all the work of scrutiny and to co-ordinate its Work Plan,
- to provide policy advice and best practice guidance
- to prepare and support witnesses attending the Committee
- to draft reports and recommendations on behalf of the Committee
- to act as a champion for scrutiny within the organisation.

The role of the Committee and Member Services Officer:

- to clerk Scrutiny meetings
- to prepare the meeting agenda and minutes
- to provide advice on procedural and constitutional issues

- to provide other general support
- to act as champion for members within the organisation.

◆ What is Call-in?

Call-in is a formal process which allows councillors to query a Cabinet decision. Call-in provides an opportunity for the Scrutiny Committee to review a decision of the Cabinet, or a key decision taken by an officer, before it is implemented. A decision can be called in by any four members or the chair of the Scrutiny Committee. A special meeting will then be convened within 10 days to consider the decision, and the relevant Cabinet Member will be invited to explain the reasons for the decision. The Committee can choose to make recommendations back to the Cabinet, or it may be satisfied and accept the decision. Call-in is not used lightly, but may prove influential in ensuring that unheard concerns have been taken into account.

◆ What support is available to me?

The Scrutiny Officer is the lead officer responsible for ensuring that members of the Committee receive the support they need in order to be effective in their role. Should members have any specific questions about scrutiny and/or identify any development needs, they are encouraged to reach out to the Scrutiny Officer in the first instance. The Scrutiny Officer will be available year-round to support the Scrutiny Committee, Panels and Review Groups, and all council members, together with the wider Committee and Member Services Team.

There is also a variety of external training and development opportunities open to all members. These courses are particularly useful for networking with other local authorities, and understanding how others carry out scrutiny. Committee members may find courses run by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and the Local Government Association useful, and the Scrutiny Officer will send out prompts throughout the year for any relevant upcoming sessions. There is also a small budget for short courses, but approval is needed from your group leader.

Scrutiny: A Practical Guide for Councillors

Email: democraticservices@oxford.gov.uk

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Appendix E: List of Executive Decisions Reserved to the Shareholder

- Altering in any respect the New Articles or the rights attaching to any of the Shares in the Company.
- Permitting the registration of any person as a member of the Company other than the Council.
- Issuing or allotting any Shares.
- Borrowing any monies (other than from the Council).
- Changing the name of the Company or its registered office.
- Adopting a new Business Plan or materially amending the then-current Business Plan.
- Changing the nature of the Company's Business or commencing any new business by the Company or undertaking business which is materially inconsistent with the Business Plan and the Service Contract.
- Forming any subsidiary or acquiring shares in any other company or participating in any partnership or joint venture (incorporated or not) outside of the Business Plan.
- Amalgamating or merging with any other company or business undertaking.
- Creating or granting any Security Interest over the whole or any part of the Business, undertaking or assets of the Company or over any Shares in the Company or agreeing to do so.
- Making any loan (otherwise than by way of deposit with a bank or other institution the normal business of which includes the acceptance of deposits) or granting any credit (other than in the normal course of trading) or giving any guarantee or indemnity.
- Entering into or tendering for any work which would fall outside of the normal course of business as set out in the then-current Business Plan or permitted under the Company's Scheme of Delegation.
- Appointing or changing the auditors of the Company or its financial year end.
- Making or permitting to be made any change in the accounting policies and principles adopted by the Company in the preparation of its audited or management accounts except as may be required to ensure compliance with


relevant accounting standards under the Companies Act 2006 or any other generally accepted accounting principles in the United Kingdom.

- Declaring or paying any dividend outside the terms of the Dividend Policy.
- Appointing or dismissing any Director.
- Establishing or amending any profit-sharing, share option, bonus or other incentive scheme of any nature for Directors.
- Making any remuneration decision outside the terms of the Remuneration Policy.
- Making any amendment to the collective terms and conditions of employment of any members of staff.
- Purchasing, leasing or otherwise acquiring assets, or any interests in assets, or disposing of any assets, or entering into any contracts or transactions which would involve the Company in the payment of consideration having an aggregate value in excess of £250,000, where dealing with any such assets or entering into any such contracts or transactions would fall outside the normal course of business as set out in the then-current Business Plan or the Service Contract.

Appendix F: Shareholder Decisions 2023

Report	Date	Item that Scrutiny would consider? (Y / N / P)	Recommendation / Notes
Appointment of Auditors – Barton Oxford LLP	01 March 2023	P	Agree – it is agreement to the auditor appointment, but the final say is for the LLP itself. Therefore, it is more a recommendation by OCC.
Appointment of Auditors – OCH Group		Y / P	Agree – to appoint the auditors. Note this will be following a process (e.g. procurement) and therefore there is little scope to add to this / review the recommendation.
Barton Oxford LLP Quarterly Progress report		N	Note – This is not for decision therefore there is no decision of the SJVG to scrutinise.
OX Place – Chair’s introduction 43		N	Note – This is not for decision therefore there is no decision of the SJVG to scrutinise.
OX Place – Managing Director’s report		N	Note – This is not for decision therefore there is no decision of the SJVG to scrutinise.
OX Place – Propose for re-appointment of Non-exec Directors		Y / P	Agree – This is a decision though the appointments are generally following a process for recruitment against a “role specification” and is at the end of that process.
OX Place - Appointment of Additional Member of the Housing Companies' Audit, Risk and Governance Committee		Y / P	Agree – it seems it was asking if the SJVG wanted to be involved in the recruitment of an Independent Person. This is not the appointment of a Director and is not a matter that would need shareholder approval so didn't need to go to the SJVG.
OX Place – OXP development finance update December 22/23		N	Note – This is not for decision therefore there is no decision of the SJVG to scrutinise.
OX Place – OXP Place Proposal for a for-profit RP		Y	Note – the option for proceedings in respect of a possible formation of an RP.
OXWED – Stage 2-3 update	N	Note – This is not for decision therefore there is no decision of the SJVG to scrutinise.	

ODS / ODSTL – external auditor appointment	27 April 2023	Y / P	Agree – to appoint the auditors. Note this will be following a process (e.g. procurement) and therefore there is little scope to add to this / review the recommendation.
ODS/ODSTL – Group Performance Reports		Y / P	Agree – to make a payment of £500 to ODS staff in line with pay requirements – this is a shareholder decision (collective pay and conditions). In this case it is based on reflecting the OCC approach so may not be any merit in it as it is not really optional. In some instances, this type of decision may be one to consider however.
		N	Note – the remainder. They are not for decision therefore there is no decision of the SJVG to scrutinise.
Appointment to Boards / JVs	21 June 2023	Y / P	Agree – the appointment of two officers to two boards.as a director. There could be merit in this but there will always be a limited pool of officers capable of appointment and some will carry with a specific post within the Council.
Barton Oxford LLP Quarterly Progress Report 44		N	Note – This is not for decision therefore there is no decision of the SJVG to scrutinise.
OX Place – Managing Director’s report		N	Note – This is not for decision therefore there is no decision of the SJVG to scrutinise.
OX Place – Governance Action Plan		N	Note – This is not for decision therefore there is no decision of the SJVG to scrutinise.
OX Place – Risk Register		N	Note – This is not for decision therefore there is no decision of the SJVG to scrutinise.
OX Place – Estimated Group Finance Outturn position 22/23		N	Note – This is not for decision therefore there is no decision of the SJVG to scrutinise.
ODS Group Performance Report	27 July 2023	N	Note – This is not for decision therefore there is no decision of the SJVG to scrutinise.
OxWED LLP Stage 2-3 Update		N	Note – This is not for decision therefore there is no decision of the SJVG to scrutinise.

		Y / P	Agree – development of a proposed delivery strategy, which if agreed would come back to SJVG at a later date for final approval. Potential merit in Scrutiny consideration, but could also happen at the later stage when the document sought final SJVG approval.
Barton Oxford LLP Quarterly Progress Report	01 November 2023	N	Note – This is not for decision therefore there is no decision of the SJVG to scrutinise.
		Y / P	Agree – to appoint the auditors. Note this will be following a process (e.g. procurement) and therefore there is little scope to add to this / review the recommendation.
OX Place – Audit Risk and Governance Summary		N	Note – This is not for decision therefore there is no decision of the SJVG to scrutinise.
OXP 22/23 Statement of Accounts and declaration of Dividend		N	Note – <u>but</u> there was a declaration of a dividend.
OXP – MD report		N	Note – This is not for decision therefore there is no decision of the SJVG to scrutinise.
 OXP – Business Plan Refresh		N	Note – This is not for decision therefore there is no decision of the SJVG to scrutinise BUT note that ultimately business plans need SJVG approval so it would come back for approval at some point and may be worth Scrutiny considering.
OXP – for-profit RP		N	Note – This is not for decision therefore there is no decision of the SJVG to scrutinise.
OxWED LLP Stage 2-3 Update		N	Note – This is not for decision therefore there is no decision of the SJVG to scrutinise.
ODS Group Performance	07 December 2023	N	Agree – declaration of dividend (can only declare in line with the board's recommendation therefore no merit for Scrutiny).
		N	Note – the remainder. They are not for decision therefore there is no decision of the SJVG to scrutinise.

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To: Cabinet
Date: 17 April 2024
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Oxford City Council Annual Business Plan 2024-25

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Lucy Pegg, Scrutiny Committee Chair
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24
Recommendation: 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 recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee

Introduction and overview

1. The Scrutiny Committee met on 11 April 2024 to consider a report concerning the Oxford City Council Annual Business Plan 2024-25. The report, which is due for Cabinet consideration on 17 April 2024, recommends that Cabinet agrees the Annual Business Plan Priorities 2024-25 and notes progress made in delivery against the actions set out in the Annual Business Plan 2023-24.
2. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Susan Brown (Leader of the Council), Mish Tullar (Head of Corporate Strategy) and Clare Keen (Policy and Partnerships Officer) for attending the meeting to answer questions.

Summary and recommendations

3. Councillor Brown, Leader of the Council introduced the report. There had been a significant amount of engagement in relation to the Annual Business Plan 2024-25,

alongside consultation on the draft Corporate Strategy 2024-28, all of which had been cross-party. The Annual Business Plan was not hugely different from previous iterations, as the Council was still working towards the same broad aims; the list of actions was shorter, however, following feedback from the recent Peer Review.

4. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to local grid constraints and subsequent impact on the deliverability of zero carbon homes; robotic process automation; mid-year progress reporting against the action plan; and the absence of specific actions relating to social rent within the ‘Good, Affordable Homes’ priority.
5. In particular, the Committee was surprised that the overarching priority of ‘Good, Affordable Homes’ specifically mentioned an aim to ‘increase the number of new homes for social rent’, yet the year one actions did not contain any actions specifically working towards that aim.

Recommendation 1: That the Council includes specific year one actions within the ‘Good, Affordable Homes’ priority related to driving forward the Council’s aim to increase the number of new homes for social rent.

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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 11 April 2024 concerning the Oxford City Council Annual Business Plan 2024-25. 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 includes specific year one actions within the 'Good, Affordable Homes' priority related to driving forward the Council's aim to increase the number of new homes for social rent.	Yes	Wording in the Business Plan 2024/25 will be amended to highlight that the delivery of new housing for social rent is central to the actions under the Good, Affordable Homes priority.

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